

Jiří Chytrý, *Memento Amori: Transformations of the Imagery and Associations of the God Eros in English Renaissance Poetry*

BA thesis

Opponent's Review

The thesis maps the development of the motifs of Eros (mostly in connection with Thanatos) from Greek antiquity to the European Renaissance to prepare the ground for the discussion of this legacy in English Elizabethan poetry, or more specifically, in Elizabethan sonnets. The focus is principally on the works of Hesiod, Sappho, Ovid, Cavalcanti and Petrarch, representing the transformation of these motifs from the acknowledgement of the roles of antique deities to their allegorical use in monotheistic Christianity. The student's arguments are further supported by comments on selected works of art (vases, frescoes, paintings and such).

These parts are very well researched and the tendencies suggested seem convincing. Detailed reading of selected passages shows how especially the connection between love and death was changing across centuries and how the most dramatic changes came in the Middle Ages, around the 12th century, when the conception of death shifted in favour of damnation rather than salvation and love became distanced from death in Christian discourse. The student uses relevant critical literature and is able to apply it in a way appropriate to the subject discussed.

Unfortunately, this can hardly be said about the final part, the part which should have made the interpretive body of the thesis. Here the student depends wholly on several poems selected from the Elizabethan sonneting tradition, usually quoting them fully and providing brief comments. Almost no secondary sources are used and one cannot help suspecting that the sonnets themselves were selected only randomly, on no clearly defined criteria. I am afraid a different set of texts would provide a different story, and perhaps a richer one. If we stick just to the most famous texts of the period, we find it quite easy to demonstrate the above reservation. Thus Sidney's sonnet 31, for instance, projects the malady of love to the universe where also "That busy archer his sharp arrows tries!", which is definitely a new perspective, with its ironic overtone. On the other hand, Daniel revives the Hesiodian concept of the kinship between sleep and death, appealing in no. 45: "Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night, / Brother to Death, in silent darkness born: / Relieve my languish [of love]" and taking death-like sleep as a liberator from love's throes. It also sounds simplistic to claim that Shakespeare "does not contribute significantly to the tradition of associating love with death" (48). The poet concludes his notorious sonnet 66 famously: "Tir'd with all these, from these would I be gone, / Save that, to die, I leave my love alone." Isn't this a radical humanistic departure from the allegorical understanding of Eros to showing a concrete individual situation of the lover trapped in a hostile social and political context? A similar central position of an individual is then presented in Drayton's sonnet 61 when the beloved is believed to be able to resuscitate the dying Love ("From death to life thou might'st him yet recover!"). This all is to say that the Elizabethan literary arena provided a very complex transformation of the motifs this thesis attempted to discuss and that a more detailed study should have been necessitated in this part.

There are some formal drawbacks too. The Conclusion does not differ noticeably from the Introduction. The Czech abstract teems with linguistic errors or typos (Práce se zabývá motiv, Sapphó místo Sapphó, Petrarchy místo Petrarky, Alžbětinskou dobu místo alžbětinskou, skrz

renesanci). There are more than occasional typos throughout the thesis too. Differentiating the Renaissance and the Elizabethan era seems unfortunate: the Elizabethan period is part of the Renaissance; I would recommend to speak about the European Renaissance when discussing Cavalcanti and Petrarch.

To conclude: I recommend the BA thesis for defence with the preliminary mark “very good to good” (2-3). The final result will depend on the quality of the student’s defence.

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