

Supervisor's report

The ambition of the thesis is to examine all the major characters of Jane Austen's six novels in terms of their "fallibility" and "exemplarity", using thus the perspective in which Marilyn Butler distinguishes between two opposite types of Austen's heroines. Due to this, the "portrayal" is in fact reduced to an attempt to "answer the question whether [or not] it is possible to divide the heroines [...] strictly into two groups..." Focusing on this particular problem, the author structures her thesis to several distinct parts: first she deals, in short "portrayals", with the character of each heroine's fallibility, followed by a discussion of how they come to realizing their errors; then she devotes a few pages to two exemplary figures, Fanny from *Mansfield Park* and Anne from *Persuasion*, and concludes that the division into two categories is "beneficial" even though fallibility in the erring characters often meets with more positive features.

What may be taken as a revealing outcome of the author's reading of Austen is her assertion that these texts are based on a certain fixed structural pattern which is conditioned by the character of society Austen portrays. At the same time, to be true to this tenet, this question should be elaborated in greater detail. On the other hand, what I find as arguable is the narrowness of the author's tackling the problem of fallibility and exemplarity, with which she avoids much that conditions the heroines' behaviour, not in terms of the whole society but rather the situation in which they are placed. Many examples could be listed here, such as the death of Mr. Dashwood (with which *Sense and Sensibility* opens) suggesting a sudden disruption of the stable family pattern and lack of masculine authority, or Emma's assumptions not only concerning her domestic role but also her role in the village community. Without going into further details, it can be stated that what we get is a tendency to present the scenes at their face value without an attempt to involve the meanings given by a broader context. As such, the account often tends to be reproductive rather than analytical, depending much on quotations and resulting in sketchy presentations, as. e.g. in the case of Marianne Dashwood. Apparently, Butler's approach seems limiting in this sense and it would be advisable to confront it more critically with other approaches. This need is perhaps most obvious in the author's treatment of Fanny Price: the dichotomy of a "place of chaos" and a "house of order" is merely stated and not seen as a structural principle at moral level; the absence of patriarchal authority motif, closely linked with the mentioned dichotomy, can be contrasted with that in *Sense and Sensibility*; the role of performance and role-playing should

be applied in a broader sense to the whole novel as a dominant metaphor (the apparent contradiction between “open expression of feelings in the play”, 41, and Fanny’s rejection to “pretend to be someone she is not”, 42, calls here for explanation); and, finally, Fanny’s winning Edmund, who prepares himself for the career of a clergyman, makes her a symbol of Christian stability of principles which are eventually revealed to him, an equivalent of Virgin Mary, ironically contrasted with another “Mary”, the flirtatious Maria Crawford.

Conclusion: to pay the proper due to the topic, the thesis should broaden the scope in which it is perceived and allow for more than a purely realistic register of representation of human relations; to do this, it should take into account more variegated range of critical views.

Nevertheless, I recommend it to the defence and suggest a 2 mark (“velmi dobře”) as preliminary classification.

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