Louis Armand, PhD
SUPERVISOR’S REPORT:

re “COPY, IMITATION, FORGERY AS AN ARTISTIC PRINCIPLE IN THE NOVEL CHATTERTON BY PETER ACKROYD” by Johana Labanczová (BA dissertation, 2010)

Ms Labanczová ably traces the function of imitation, in its various modes, from the classics to contemporary theory, and relates the key paradigms of imitation to Ackroyd’s fictional portrayal of Chatterton. Her research is impressive. The critical apparatus, however, at times moves rather too rapidly between ideas: taken at random, on page 30 we have quotations from each of H.F. Platt, J.T. Jones, J. Hillis Miller, David Cowart, and Michael Riffaterre, along with a précis of Ackroyd’s text—the effect of this is to diminish the coherence of the overall argument by reducing it (in places) to a collage of quotations, each of which properly requires further elaboration or substantiation—such as the assertion that “all types of intertext rely on the recognition of relationship between ... ‘host’ and ‘guest’ texts.” This is in fact contestable and is not, for example, the definition of intertextuality as it originates in the work of Julia Kristeva, whose name is notably absent from the bibliography.

Overall, however, the thesis is well written and well organised, and while Ms Labanczová does not yet demonstrate a thorough grasp of all of the theoretical precepts she makes use of, nevertheless she does demonstrate an ability to conceive of critical problems both in specific and in broadly genealogical terms, and to articulate these clearly with respect to the characteristics of the text under consideration. Indeed, Ms Labanczová displays a particular faculty for identifying and elaborating upon thematic nuances in the text; nuances which not only appear to validate her particular approach, but also to underwrite it. In particular those aspects of Ackroyd’s text which pertain to the theme of copy and forgery, and those aspects of the texts bound up with quotation.

I have no specific questions related to the thesis. I would be interested to see how Ms Labanczová might further develop her ideas about copy, imitation and forgery in light of some further “poststructuralist” critiques, particularly those of Derrida (his essay on Van Gogh’s shoes is apposite), and in light of other works of recent and contemporary fiction (Iain Sinclair’s Lights out for the Territory, for example—a documentary inquiry into the psychogeography of London, in which Acroyd’s Chatterton is in fact discussed, along with Wallis’ “portrait” of Chatterton). But if I were to ask a question, it would be this, simply for the purpose of discussion. How CAN we relate imitation, copy, forgery to the concept of poetic license? Forgery in particular. Is there a point at which all of these concepts intersect? And if so, can we also speak of a poetics of forgery, or of imitation, etc.?

Whilst my observations may appear in places to be somewhat critical, it should be noted that Ms Labanczová’s thesis exceeds ordinary expectations concerning BA theses. My unreserved proposal for a grade is: excellent.

[Signature]

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