

**Anna Hupcejová, *The Romantic Prometheus: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, P. B. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Lord Byron's *Manfred****

**BA thesis**

**Opponent's Review**

The present BA thesis attempts to explain what role one of the central symbolic figures, Prometheus, played in major texts of the second Romantic generation writers and poets. Two poems in dramatic form and one novel are selected for analysis. The analytical part is preceded by a brief introductory chapter, in which a critical method is stated and a broader context is introduced, with a special emphasis on Blake's and Coleridge's use of the Promethean myth. Here the student sees a certain affinity between Coleridge's essay and the second generation texts ("Considering all these different characteristics of and associations with Prometheus, it is understandable that Byron and the Shelleys work with a selection and unique combination of these...", 6); putting apart the fact that Coleridge's essay was written later than the analysed texts, it is necessary to admit that even the Shaftesburian idea of the poet as second Maker, "a just Prometheus under Jove," was relevant especially for P. B. Shelley.

Methodologically, A. Hupcejová's treatment consists of two focuses: one on literary influences that conditioned the Promethean image in the respective works, the other on how the defining terms such as fire, creativity, rebellion, vision or sacrifice/selflessness are applied in the texts. This allows a broad discussion, supported by arguments taken from a representative selection of secondary sources, yet it also shows certain limitations resulting in not fully convincing and satisfying conclusions. Hence my occasional reservations and questions:

First, I think that what should be more expounded in the *Manfred* chapter is the fundamental distinction between Manfred's situation – in fact an emotional crisis as a result of crime and guilt on a purely intimate level (in AH's reading) – and Prometheus's – an ontological crisis stemming from transgression of a hierarchically structured order of being (basically in social terms).

Second, the influence of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* on the conception of *Frankenstein* seems to be overstated. The episodic parallelism mentioned on p. 23 is no doubt a partial motivic influence, but the following statement ("One can also say that both Frankenstein and the Mariner are intrigued by knowledge [...] they are fascinated by knowledge", 24) is hardly tenable. In what way is the Mariner 'fascinated by knowledge'? His crime of killing an albatross is presented as being committed on the spur of the moment rather than on some premeditation – in this scene the Mariner cannot be viewed as a Promethean figure, I'm afraid.

In the last chapter I see several partial problems. PBS's *Prometheus Unbound* is indeed conceived as an attempt to complete and revise Aeschylus's tragedy but at the same time it is the poet's attempt to revise and reconsider his previous revolutionary epic, *The Revolt of Islam*, which was more directly based on the events of the French Revolution, though presented indirectly. This is clearly apparent in the preservation of the key revolutionists as a

couple (Laon-Cythna, Prometheus-Asia); and here we can also see how Shelley transforms the gender binarism present in Aeschylus: while in *Prometheus Bound* the Titan and Io are linked by the same injustice inflicted on them by Prometheus (exemplifying in a parallel way that both male and female principles, rationality and emotionality or sexuality, are subject to Zeus's tyranny), in Shelley's lyrical drama the male and female principles are not connected by structural strategies only but as necessary collaborators in the revolutionary process (a synthesis of ratio and emotionality preparing the rise of a new, harmonious human being). This is the point the student omits as it does not fit her model of basic characteristic features of Prometheus, and as such it proves that she is occasionally unable to emancipate herself from the stiff methodological models she has set for her work at the beginning.

My last reservation concerns the Czech abstract. It is clearly a translation of the English version but its Czech is poor, which is the more regrettable that the student is a native Czech, an editor and writer. What 'modernizace' is meant at the end of the first paragraph? Why are not English (non-Czech) constructions eliminated from sentences such as: "to je bezesporu dalším důvodem, proč ho Romantici vnímali relevantní v jejich době" or "Prométheus byl tak tematický pro vybrané spisovatele"? Moreover, Shelley's poem is known in Czech as *Odpoutaný Prométheus* (both in Vrchlický and Valja's translations), not as *Nespoutaný* (which is inaccurate).

On the other hand, I would like to stress that the thesis brings useful insights into the three analysed texts, that it makes a very good use of critical sources and that it is well structured. Where the student fails is in the ability to distinguish what is more relevant and what less and what thus deserves to be developed in a more thorough way. This, however, does not disqualify her thesis at this stage. My reservations are thus only partial.

Conclusion: I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the preliminary mark to be a "very good".

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