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Report by Thomas Acton on the PhD thesis of Karolina Ryvolva.

This is an interesting thesis, which illustrates the methods and debates of Czech Romani Studies, and provides much interesting detail about them. The analysis of the texts chose for analysis is often insightful, and will be thought provoking for those who have read these texts.

The level of analysis is at PhD level, and although this commentator has always found the analysis of few texts at great length by academic students of literature rather strange – although reading books was a very difficult practice, and merits the creation of a range of experts whose expertise is just in reading books – I accept that it is common practice in the academic literature on literature. There are some welcome elements of reflexivity in this text.

I would therefore suggest, that with revision, this work merits the award of a PhD.

The places where I would suggest revision are marked on the accompanying version, saved in “Track Changes” (except the changes in page numbering – I don’t know why these occurred!) . The suggestions vary from the rather tentative to the rather insistent, and I hope it will be obvious which is which.

Sometimes the problems are caused by a reliance on secondary rather than primary sources, as for example in looking at the work of borrow, where reliance on Deborah Nord puts Ryvolva at some distance from the original text.


I would also suggest that perhaps the East-West distinction is rather dependant on Ryvolva’s choice of texts. The English texts are by uneducated writers who know little beyond their own experience, and substantially misunderstand Romani history and groups other than their own – they are illustrative of the writers’ own personality and the genre of autodidact autobiography rather any coherent phenomenon of Romani writing. The Romani texts are by more educated individuals. There is a tendency in the text to equate lack of education with authenticity.

If the texts chosen had been PhD theses – say those of Kochanowski, Hancock, Marsh, Baker, Olah, Demeter (father and daughter) or Belton – a rather different picture might have emerged of Romani writing. Romani writing is also Romani writing even if it’s not ABOUT Roma!! (Like most of Brian Belton’s work. ) Equally if a range of poets had been chosen, one could have come up with a very different picture. I would suggest, that rather than purporting to offer illumination about a vague concept of Romani literature as a whole, it should rather focus on the task of illuminating the debates in Czech and Slovak Romani Studies by contrasting presentation of Romani identity by

Romani writers under the influence of Czechoslovak paradigms by presentation by two writers in English who are shaped by the Gypsyologist paradigm. The problem is that the Gypsyologist paradigm has been challenged by the Romani Studies paradigm since the 1960s and the Constructivist paradigms since the 1990s (I guess some of the followers of Jakoubek would paint Hubschmannova as nearer to Gypsyologist than Romani Studies. And it is possible to find Romani writers who are aware of all these paradigms. So analysis of such a small range of texts rather unnecessarily limits the categories of analysis.

I do think, therefore, that an opportunity for revision should be given to the author before a final decision to award a PhD is made.

(signed)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T.A. Acton', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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