Anna Krýsová, *Speech and Character in Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley and The Heart of the Midlothian*

**Supervisor’s Report**

This BA thesis is an interesting and partially innovative attempt to use Bakhtin’s concept of “heteroglossia” in the analysis of two major novels by Walter Scott, which represent different aspects of his historical fiction. Since the Bakhtinian approach has often been used for interpreting Robert Burns’s poetry, it is attractive to test it also in the study of another set of texts, which are foundational of Scottish national identity.

The results of this testing were not so positive, as expected. This is partially due to the very demanding nature of the task itself: any use of Bakhtin’s theory is difficult because of its complexity and foundations in Classical and Romance scholarship. Moreover, as the author quite persuasively shows in *Waverley*, the unintentional dialogism may often be regulated by the explicit ideological tendencies of Scott’s writing. In addition, the very notions of “dialogue” and “heteroglossia,” as the main features of the novel are difficult to use for the analysis of characters, which are consistent thematic units contrasting with the “polyphony” of style.

Despite these difficulties, the author managed to demonstrate the effectivity and usefulness of Bakhtinian approach even in her interpretations of a number of characters in the selected novels. The major problem of her analysis was the assumption of authorial intention, which evidently clashes with Bakhtin’s concept of intentionality, which is structural and derives from the style. It is a pity that the differences of the style-based “heteroglossia” in Burns and character-oriented “dialogism” in selected Scott’s were not studied in depth and compared.

Another problematic aspect of the use of the Bakhtinian approach is the rather narrow scope of the thesis. Although it can be argued that the author has focused on the most representative novels, it would be worthwhile considering whether the selection should not take into account also other criteria, for instance those of genre differences (between the picaresque in *Waverley*, the pastoral and the gothic in *The Heart of the Midlothian*, the ballad in *The Bride of Lammermoor* or the romance in *Ivanhoe*, to name just a few examples).

“Heteroglossia” in Bakhtin is often linked to specific spatiotemporal patterns called “chronotopes” and seen as constitutive of literary genres (cf. Bakhtin’s essay “Time and Chronotope in the Novel”).

On the whole, reading of the thesis produces a mixed feeling of the power and weakness of the author’s use of Bakhtin. The analysis of characters often slips into pedestrian approach to their representation, treating them as if they were actual humans. Moreover, the style is often too clumsy and the structure of the thesis should be more systematic.

In spite of these problems, the thesis can be valued as an attempt to apply a difficult theoretical approach to literary texts, for whose interpretation it has not yet been used. Because of this rather demanding aspect, I recommend the thesis for the defence and propose to classify it either “výborně” or “velmi dobře,” depending on the result of the defence.

Prague, 29 August 2014

prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.