

Record

of Mgr. Miroslava Horová's PhD. dissertation defence
held on 5th June 2014.

Candidate's Ph.D.

dissertation theme: *History and Play in Lord Byron's Dramas*

Committee members: prof. PhDr. Bohuslav Mánek, CSc.
 prof. PhDr. Martin Procházka, CSc.
 Erik Sherman Roraback, D. Phil. (Oxon.)
 PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.

- Professor Mánek, the committee chair, opened the dissertation defence and briefly introduced the candidate to the assembled.
- Professor Procházka, the supervisor of Mgr. Horová, gave details of candidate's research experience and excellence in her field of research and briefly introduced her dissertation, praising its qualities and claiming it to be one of the most revelatory and accomplished dissertations submitted under the English and American literature Ph.D. programme.
- The candidate then gave a short presentation of her thesis, summing up its key themes:
 - seven Byron's dramas written between 1820 and 1822 are approached from a point of view of a "sustained dramatic project"
 - what ties Byron's dramas together is experimentation with dramatic form, from neo-classical tragedies to representations of history matching Wolfgang Iser's concept of "free play"
 - the analysis of Byron's historical dramas allows to trace the poet's treatment of "fact" and "fiction"
 - Byron's most famous drama *Manfred* is omitted for not falling into the category of dramas dealing with history
 - the thesis seeks to fill a gap in Byron Studies by shedding light on the heretofore neglected theme of Byron's representation of "history" while applying a special methodology, Iser's theory of play, on the dramas
- The opponents, PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D., and Dr. Stephen Minta (by proxy), then presented the conclusions of their reports and both wholeheartedly recommended the thesis for defence.
- The candidate, M. Horová, then responded to the questions raised in opponent's reports.
 - to Dr. Beran's question, whether it would be worthwhile to include in the overview of drama history also the phenomenological game theory of Eugen Fink, M. Horová replied that Fink's approach is to a certain degree similar to Iser's concept of free play and mentioned her being acquainted with Fink's essay in the 1968 special issue of Yale French Studies dedicated to play theory, describing the play as a cosmic symbol and a symbol of the world. M. Horová also mentioned it would be worthwhile in future to discuss Mihai Spărosu's *Dionysus Reborn* in relation to *Manfred*.

- Dr. Minta's report raised four questions:
 1. Why have the last twenty years revalued Byron's dramas and romantic dramas in general?

Candidate's answer:

- Romantic drama is revalued through the focus on the great actors of the Romantic Era
- women Romantic dramatists (E. Inchbald, J. Baillie) increased critical interest in marginalised figures
- as Byron's dramas constitute the largest group of under-researched texts in the Byronic canon, they naturally invite revaluation and new approaches

2. In what ways were Byron's dramas largely undervalued until the 1980s?

M. Horová's answer:

- Byron's dramas were treated as works of very little or no value at all, as failed experiments

3. In what way is M. Horová's approach better than the previous theoretical approaches?

Candidate's reply:

- in her focus on in-depth close-reading
- in her thesis being a sustained study of the larger development of Byron's dramatic project

4. What are the benefits of the ludic approach to Byron's dramas?

Candidate's answer:


- Byron's plays never meant to be staged (be it because of Byron's temperament or the poor state of the British theatre at that time) though the various inter-textual links M. Horová's thesis has traced may lead to new dramatic approaches to the texts and prove them as stage-worthy
- Byron's dramas are defined by tension apparent between the regulatory impulse (Iser's "instrumental play") and "free play" which especially in the Venetian dramas pushes against the constraints of the genre

- The present opponent, Dr. Beran, was satisfied with the answers given by M. Horová.
- During the general discussion, two questions were asked by doc. Soňa Nováková a Dr. Erik Roraback:
 - Soňa Nováková remarked that Byron's plays remind of closet dramas women were writing in that they were never intended for public performance.
 - M. Horová then briefly discussed Byron's dramas in relation to his female characters and attitude to women.
 - To that M. Procházka remarked that Byron indeed strived to avoid the field of public visibility.
 - E. Roraback asked about the problem of memory and history and textual endeavour of the present moment, and whether Byron's dramas saw revolution as a positive phenomenon.
 - M. Horová replied that the impulse that the world keeps reinventing itself (last play staging the Sack of Rome, was pessimistic about revolution and history as such.

Prof. Procházka remarked that the play as a symbol, the play as an agency, may stand opposite to the idea of revolution – all is about agency.

- The committee then announced the result of the secret vote: four members of the committee (all present) unanimously nominated the candidate M. Horová for a Ph.D. title.

Recorded by: Mgr. Klára Petříková



Chair's signature: