

Report on a BA Thesis by Alena Kopečná “The Development of Lord Byron's Satire”

The thesis focuses on three major Byron's satirical works from different periods of the poet's creative development and representing different contexts, styles and poetic forms. Kopečná's hard and diligent work is reflected in the width of studied secondary sources (and also in the overall word count which greatly exceeds the range recommended for BA theses).

The most important positive feature of the thesis is the theoretical and historical analysis of the changes in the genre of satire connected with the birth of literature as social institution exercising both political and aesthetic power. Whereas the first part dedicated to *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* develops the Jerome Christensen's approach and justifies Byron's affinities to and transformations of Alexander Pope's satire, other chapters discussing *Beppo* and *The Vision of Judgement* should be more detailed about the changes of Byron's approach to authorship and contemporary British society and pay more attention to his cataclysmic visions of post-Napoleonic Europe developed in the middle cantos of *Don Juan*. Nonetheless, the discussion of some important aspects of *Don Juan* and *Cain* in relation to *The Vision of Judgement* is definitely a step in the right direction.

In the course of its writing, the thesis has developed from a rather descriptive survey of three Byron's works, to an attempt to grasp some important tendencies of Byron's oeuvre, especially the poet's critical relationship to Wordsworth and Southey and his growing ontological and historical scepticism. At the same time, it must be admitted that the descriptive aspects of Kopečná's approach – especially the division into sub-chapters discussing separately individual thematic and formal features, as well as some aspects of historical and literary contexts – have prevented the formation of a more synthetic interpretive approach to Byron's satire showing the dissolution of the traditional features of the genre and its transformation into either historical-metaphysical drama (Venetian plays and the “mysteries”) or a modern comic epic (*Don Juan* heralded by *Beppo*). The role of visionary poetry in this process (the Spanish Baroque context of *The Vision of Judgement*) should prompt the comparison between Blake's apocalyptic poetry and Byron's overcoming and transformation of Baroque apocalypticism.

To conclude, Kopečná's thesis can be praised for its tendencies to move towards a more profound interpretation of Byron's poetry, namely of its transformative role (both in thematic and formal terms) unparalleled in English Romanticism. Her ability to work with a great number of secondary sources is unusual in terms of our BA theses. It partially balances the above mentioned shortcomings and establishes a solid ground for further research. As a result, I recommend the thesis to defence and propose to grade it either “excellent” (výborně) or “very good” (velmi dobře) depending on Kopečná's performance during the defence.

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supervisor