



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, Faculty of Arts,
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24 May 2017

Reviewer's Report on B. A. Thesis
SWANS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS
by Lukáš Červený

This is an excellent thesis and I recommend the grade of **1/výborně**. The student has taken on a challenging poet about whom there is much secondary literature. Throughout the thesis the student works judiciously with these materials, adroitly adducing them in perceptive and sophisticated readings of the poems. Apart from a few occasional errors, the prose style is clear and clean. I say all this at the beginning because what follows will be mainly critical.

The thesis aim is to reconsider Yeats in relation to his romantic inheritance and contemporaneous modernism. This is an unoriginal approach, which has been taken by many critics from Frank Kermode, C. K. Stead, to Paul de Man, among, I estimate, hundreds of others. I read the thesis for indications of how the student moved beyond this previous debate, but could find none. That he quotes many of these critics without raising any resistance to his argument suggests, on the one hand, that he has correctly grasped their standpoint, but, on the other, that he brings nothing new to it. Yeats as a poet of contradictions, contraries, and theses and antitheses is all too familiar.

Second, I was unconvinced of his characterizations of Romanticism and Modernism throughout. These seem to be reduced in order to generate an argument. For example, the tension that the student sees between subjective Romanticism and objective Modernism, could easily be figured as internal to Romanticism itself. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, for instance, there are many poems of subjective feeling, but there are also others that draw on the ballad tradition where deindividuated generations speak through the poems, with no reference to the emotions of the poet. Other critics would see the same duality in different critical frameworks, for instance that of the neobaroque. All this suggests that the terms Romanticism and Modernism are in fact obscuring the main subject of the thesis from the student himself.

Third, the final chapter, although it continues with the swan motif, seems to be taken from another thesis altogether, especially at the moment when it introduces Jacques Derrida. The lexicon and mode of argument has not been prepared in the preceding chapters, and it perplexes more than it illuminates. Moreover, chapter 3 has little or no reference to the ideas of Romanticism and Modernism, thus confirming the second point above.



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It may appear that I am being unduly harsh on a bachelor thesis, however it is in response to the high expectation that the thesis itself raises – the work itself asks to be held to a higher standard than that of BA level. Such criticism is, thus, at base, a compliment to the intelligence and critical acuity the student displays throughout.

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