



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Supervisor's Report on B. A. Thesis

SWANS AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE POETRY OF W. B. YEATS

by Lukáš Červený

W. B. Yeats is one the best-known Anglophone poets of the last hundred and fifty years. As such, he is both a convenient and tricky subject matter for a thesis. The wealth of critical literature on the author means that secondary material is ready at hand but also difficult to navigate, and it is hard to come up with an original approach. This thoroughly researched and intelligent thesis takes as its focus the moment of contradiction which is widely accepted to be one of the driving forces behind Yeats's work, and combines it with the recurrent image of the swan, especially in his later poetry. The student uses this critical framework to show how contradiction was for Yeats part of his poetic inheritance (Blake) as well as his creative disposition. He further address issues concerning Yeats's problematic periodization and his poetic development.

Paradox and notional conflict as one of the acknowledged sources of the poet's creative energy is a familiar critical premise. The same applies to Yeats's dissenting views of current poetic trends and recent traditions, notably modernism and romanticism. It might thus seem unwise to explore this well-trodden territory through the prism of one of Yeats's – and poetry's – most common images. The accenting of the recurrent but variable figure of the swan, however, provides a suitable point of reference for the discussion of the theme. If the thesis does not bring anything new to the existing critical debate, it testifies to the student's ability to skilfully apply relevant secondary sources. The central argument that relentlessly, and often purposefully, observed contrast and opposition is a mark of consistency and continuity is, in my opinion, a valid one.

The scope of research behind this project is remarkable and so is the engagement with the work of the poet. The thesis appropriately combines biographical and formalist approach and has some fine moments, mostly when paying attention to individual poems. If the almost stubborn insistence on reading texts independently could be frustrating in the initial stages of the thesis, I ultimately had to admire the genuine interest in the subject matter and the willingness to get lost in a poem and theoretical thought. Unless they prevent a clear line of reasoning, these are, after all, some of the basic preconditions for successful literary criticism.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it "excellent" (výborně).

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