

Lucie Jiráňková, **‘I am no bird; and no net ensnares me’**: Female Independence in the English Novel 1795-1820

BA thesis

Opponent’s Report

The BA thesis sets out ‘to exemplify the beginnings of feminist awakening present in the novels of three women writers: Mary Hays, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Jane Austen. The aim of this thesis is to explore different attitudes towards attaining emotional, intellectual, social, and economic independence, while simultaneously discussing the period’s construction of femininity, the discourse of natural rights, the issue of education, romantic love, and sensibility’ (‘Abstract’, p. iv). The thesis is factually well-informed and well-researched and meets the formal requirements of its academic genre.

The strength of Jiráňková’s thesis is mainly in its ambition to provide a core of socio-historical, cultural and literary contexts for the particular constructions of femininity fuelling the beginnings of feminist discourse in British literature, an organised approach to close-reading throughout to support her thesis with ample textual evidence, and also in its scale (which surpasses that of its formal requirements). I also commend the use of secondary literature.

I have a few questions for the candidate to respond to during her viva voce examination, on some of the points that might have been raised by the thesis:

- 1) What is the gist of Austen’s subversion of traditional femininity?
- 2) Are the novelists’ constructions of masculinity an inherent aspect of their feminist discourse?
- 3) What are the major ways in which these women writers transgress the traditional concepts of femininity set up by the English novel as it emerged at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and do these then influence the development of the genre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

To conclude, I am happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary grade of ‘excellent’ (výborně) if the candidate performs well on the day.

30 August 2015

Mirka Horová, PhD