

Posudek vedoucího diplomové práce

David Nitsche – “The Arab Peoples of T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in the Light of Post-Colonial Theory” (Pohled T.E. Lawrence v *Sedmi sloupech moudrosti* na arabskou populaci ve světle postkoloniální teorie)

Although the figure of Lawrence of Arabia is well-known to all students of British history, not many have actually read anything that T. E. Lawrence wrote. Recent commentators on the work of T.E. Lawrence have read it as a part of the discourse of Orientalism. In his thesis David Nitsche bravely embarks on a debate with Said’s interpretation of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as typical of orientalist generalizing tendencies and sees the text as more complex, even enigmatic in its heterogeneity and ambiguity. Providing a critique, while acknowledging the usefulness of orientalist discourse analysis, and utilising several alternatives to Said’s evaluation of T.E. Lawrence in *Orientalism* (e.g. Dennis Porter as a starting point), David Nitsche begins his own account employing several other texts and concepts (nomadism, noble savage, mimicry, hybridity etc.). Only rarely is there some minor confusion of method, e.g. when we move from thorough and scrupulously argued discourse analysis and close reading to practical political activism (top of page 73).

The MA thesis is, I believe, a very useful, innovative piece of writing. Not only a critical debate with a seminal text of theory, but an original application of post-colonialism in a textual interpretation. David Nitsche’s readings are always text-based, conclusions emerge from a reading, not vice versa. The study displays a scholarly scope, demonstrated by e.g. the compiled list of T.E. Lawrence’s works and the knowledge of secondary sources dealing with alternative approaches to T.E. Lawrence. I also believe that the focus selected for analysis is reasonable. The thesis deals with issues of representation not of place (e.g. landscape) but of the Arab peoples: inconsistencies and ambiguities in typology resulting from the ambiguous position of the observer. Although the first three chapters are largely introductory, the fourth one only dealing with the portrayal in question, the structure is not unbalanced.

I have a few comments and minor questions for the defence:

1. There are several awkward misspellings (e.g. several versions of the Odyssey on p.17), Sharif Ali alternates with Sherif Ali, jumbled up quotations and references on pp.41 and 42 etc. Bill Ashcroft did not publish his first edition of *The Empire Writes Back* as late as 2002 (p.23) but much earlier. The Czech summary could also have been proofread more carefully.
2. I realize that it is the whole point of the thesis that in T.E. Lawrence’s book we get rather than a monolithic, unified naming, codification, a place and people with a slippery identity, but would it be possible for David to expand on his own usage of the term Arab?
3. Similarly, for obvious reasons the context of *Seven Pillars* as a modernist text (p.37) remains largely unexplained. However, the argument (the book is modernist because it displays simultaneous validity of multiple views, seeming opposites) may need some explanation. Is not modernism (unlike post-modernism) also striving for overarching unity, meaning, e.g. the structuring element of Big Ben chimes in *Mrs Dalloway*?
4. Several issues complicate any simple understanding of orientalist discourse in T.E. Lawrence’s text, incl. a recognizable tension between narrative structure/emplotting. Said identifies himself the disruptive influence upon orientalist writing, which prefers the forms of encyclopedia, dictionary or monumental history: “Narrative, in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision” = if Orientalism is a set of repetitive images, the temporal consumption of narrative is different from the spatial consumption of image (E.Said, *Orientalism*, p.120). Necessarily T.E. Lawrence’s “collection” opens up shifts, difference, otherness serves many roles etc. David Nitsche mentions in passing the rich variety of

narrative strategies in *Seven Pillars* (e.g. 60), how narration and self-narration play a significant role (e.g. Auda). Could he comment also on the whole “plotting” and/narrative structure of T.E. Lawrence’s book and whether that indeed has an impact of the book’s enigmatic orientalism?

5. And a final observation rather than a question. The comments made in passing about Lean’s film make it sound like a piece of romantic mythmaking (only or primarily). Its role in the public image of Lawrence of Arabia is undeniable, but I also feel that David Lean’s film (1962) possibly more subtly demonstrates the typical British struggle between repression and romanticism (as actually a theme that runs through most of Lean’s films, from *Brief Encounter* to *A Passage to India*).

The thesis more than fulfills all the requirements and I recommend it for defence with the preliminary grade of excellent (VÝBORNĚ).

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Vedoucí práce