



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

OPPONENT'S REPORT

B.A. THESIS

AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION

The Idealized Portrayal of Indians in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and René Chateaubriand's *Les Natchez*

Tereza Brožová

The thesis convincingly illustrates that Cooper and Chateaubriand appropriated Native American cultures for the purpose of advancing their own literary endeavors and agendas. Cooper is dealt with in a satisfactory way: he is placed in the literary context (captivity narratives, English historical novel) and the analysis of *The Last of the Mohicans* includes a nice discussion of the novel's stereotypes as well as female characters. Likewise, Chateaubriand's sources and literary ties are enumerated, and his massive text is succinctly overviewed (if not analyzed in much detail). The bibliography is impressive. However, for the reasons specified below, I propose that the thesis be graded **very good (velmi dobře)**.

The prose is straightforward but there are some mistakes, misplaced commas and occasional awkward expressions that could generate misunderstanding. For example, does the candidate want to say that "the Native Americans were *incapable* of assimilation [...] into the *civilized* society" (p. 5, my emphasis), which implies their lack of ability as well as civilization? Or does she believe that Chateaubriand's "female characters did not have *a combative attitude so much inherent in Indian nature*" (p. 54, my emphasis)? Also, the discussion of the term "Indian" on p. 17 could have appeared elsewhere in the thesis and it should have brought attention to the views that some Native Americans have had regarding this term. And certainly, it is unacceptable to use the expression "the red man" (p. 61) to represent Native American cultures—which should not be treated (as they are throughout the thesis) as a unified body with one set of manners, habits and an "Indian language" (p. 31).

In fact, while trying to confront one myth, the thesis perpetuates several others. The opening paragraph (p. 10), for example, should have been more specific. Who compared the American continent to "a huge melting pot"? How relevant was this concept at the end of 18th century? Is it true that by now "people of different nationalities have learnt to live together" (p. 10)? Or, we read that "those who decided to settle in the 'virgin land' had to be individualistic. Settlers coming to the New World needed to rely entirely on themselves" (p. 15). Was not the "settlement" of the American continent a communal struggle that involved slaves, armies, extended families and religious groups? Also, the story of Jane McCrea's death implicitly replicates the most mythical account of what happened, even though it refers to an article that complicates the event.

However, to conclude by focusing on one of the many accomplished parts of the thesis, for example on the argument that the aforementioned texts of Cooper and Chateaubriand disapprove of miscegenation. Could this be discussed further? I.e., how can the rejection of



FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
UNIVERZITY KARLOVY
V PRAZE



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interracial marriage be reconciled with the authors' idealization of Native Americans as "noble savages"? Why, notwithstanding their critique of Western society, did they stop at this point?

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
June 11, 2012