

English resumé

The basic question behind my thesis *Towards the Poetics of Ceremony* is: How shall one treat contemporary Indian literature in the context of European culture? In a broad sense I deal with the question of reading and interpreting exotic ethnic literature in general. What is specific about Indian literature is the fact that Czech and other central European readers have usually had the opportunity to come in touch (however indirectly) with the Indian subject since childhood, both in the form of adventurous stories from Karl May and their successful film adaptations.

And that is the problem: our concepts are twisted and biased, they are cultural stereotypes. In the Foreword to my thesis I call the process “stereotyping practice”. One of the aims of my thesis is to show that for a fruitful interpretation of a work like *Ceremony* written by L.M. Silko it is necessary to look away from the stereotypes and deep-rooted concepts, to understand Indian authors in the context of the whole American literature and not seek any special categories or methods which would reveal “the Indianess” of the text. The American-versus-Indian question is dealt with in the Introduction.

The solution I gradually offer in my work is based on a simple idea: the more points of view, the lesser danger of stereotyping practice and over-interpretation. My starting point for the interpretation of *Ceremony* is Roman Jakobson’s communication act scheme followed by the theory of Prague structuralism. Through this theoretical basis I move towards the questions connected exclusively with Silko’s work: the performative elements of the text, the use of reader-oriented criticism as well as cultural studies or deconstruction theory. Working on the presumption that the work itself should require relevant means or instruments for its interpretation I answer the polyphony of Silko’s text with the polyphony of theoretical and critical approaches. The unifying element which ties the chapters that follow is the concept of “poetics” of the work that is something which, in the form of semantic gesture, manifests itself on different levels of the text giving rise to the construction of the final meaning. In case of Silko this repeated sign is transformation, mixing and merging of the two basic discourses mentioned above: American and traditionally Indian.

The first chapter is concerned with the level of language and narrative form, introducing the reader to the basic characteristics of the Indian understanding of language, words and stories. As opposed to the European tradition which (since the invention of the printing press) started to distinguish between literature as written language and spoken language, the Indians refuse such distinction. Therefore, even in their contemporary works we find performative elements typical for the traditional Indian “storyteller”. The chapter further analyses the features of the two discourses and their interaction, dialogue and interdependence. Only in this way it is possible to interpret different events in the story. I also prove that (despite some critics, e.g. Paula Gunn Allen) the mythical level of the narrative is not at all irrelevant to the interpretation of the story - quite the opposite.

In the second part of the thesis I deal with the level of narrative symbols, motives and characters. The chapter opens with a brief introduction to Indian mythology relevant to the text. The main focus is on the analysis of the female symbolic characters which play crucial role in the *C/ceremony*. I further analyse the most important motives and symbols that occur in the narrative (the distinction between a motive and a symbol is crucial: where as motives only function as parts for building up the narrative structure, symbols overlap into the mythical frame of the story). Again, the overlapping is the basis for the emergence of meaning.

The third chapter of the work brings me close to the highest level - the level of meaning and signification. At this point I briefly discuss the meaning of Indian ceremonies today. As opposed to popular ceremonies watched by hundreds of visitors from around the world, for Silko the meaning of *C/ceremony* lies elsewhere: in concordance with the poetics of the work it is once more the adaptation of old traditions to contemporary situation, it is the dialogue of the old with the new, the transformation of old forms in order to save their precious contents. Tayo’s symbolic ritual also works as a cure. It cures his confused mind, soul and lost identity. Identity in the narrative can be understood on different levels: it is a personal issue, a generation issue and last but not least also an ethnic issue or the question of belonging to certain social group.

The last chapter deals with *Ceremony*’s ending and its interpretation. The solution offered by Silko in her work is also the climax of the concept that I call “the poetics” of *Ceremony*. It is based on the deconstruction of the Indian X American oppositions offering a new point of view that sees both discourses as parts of one whole, as inter-linked and interacting entities, one necessary for the existence of the other.

In Conclusion I try to spread this message by applying it on the whole field of American studies whose aim - similarly to Silko’s novel - has always been to find a pattern which would explain the history as well as present of the American continent. Among scholars who have tried to find one belong F. J. Turner or H. N. Smith. Each approached it from a little different point of view, however, what is common to both remains as inspiration even today: the importance of the context. What Silko has said with her novel one can

also see in the broader context of American society: today, as well as five hundred years ago, there is a two-sided process, a ceremony whose success is only possible through adaptability, flexibility and mutual respect and tolerance.