

Posudek vedoucí na bakalářskou práci Terezy Měkotové “Orientalism and the Orient: Representing the East in H. Rider Haggard’s Novel *She*”

Powerful, intense and visually magnificent, *She* was written in a feverish six weeks in 1886. In the figure of the main female character Rider Haggard creates an unforgettable, archetypal woman, “*the femme fatale*”, as Henry Miller called her. The novel takes us to the deepest interior of “Africa”, searching not for treasure but for what is presented as the ultimate mystery: the secret of a woman’s love.

Similar texts such as this one by Haggard celebrate the opportunities that the Empire offered for deeds of manly heroism. These “imperial romances”, or adventure tales, were the energizing myth of British imperialism. In many ways *She* is typical of such romances. However, it can also be argued that most of such tales present adventure in the expanding Victorian Empire as providing opportunities for what could be called a flight from domesticity and romantic love on the part of newly created versions of British manhood. As Allan Quatermain puts it in another, even more famous adventure tale by Rider Haggard, *King Solomon’s Mines*, “there is not a petticoat in the whole story”. In *She*, however, encounters with femininity play the utmost role. The quest (as a major characteristic of romance tales of adventure, identified as such already by Northrop Frye) is here presented as the hero’s encounter with such versions of feminine sexual temptation that are explicitly juxtaposed (structurally or symbolically) to domestic femininity and that test his correct manhood just as surely as does armed combat.

Indeed, much of this is mentioned in passing (although not as main points of interpretation, although the title of the thesis may have implied this) in the BA thesis at hand. Overall, I very much appreciate the sincere endeavour to connect sophisticated theory of reading colonial texts of popular culture and to connect them to current ideological readings of politics.

However, I have several points that I feel the need to bring up in this assessment:

1) The Czech abstract contains many errors and stylistic imperfections: in Czech we write “okcident”. “Orientu byl přidělen ... ženský rod” is very awkward, etc.

2) The thesis would have only benefited from a closer proofreading (and editing). Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* came out first already in 1949 and was translated into English in 1961 (on page 14 of the thesis it says 1972). In the chapter title in the table of contents and also in the body of the thesis: the title *She* is not in italics. On page 30 Horace Holly is misnamed (surname comes first). Etc.

3) The structure of the thesis is logical and well organized. My problem is with the proportions: The introductory chapters 1 and 2 are long and there is some repetition. Despite the length, I still miss a quite clear and simple (in a couple of sentences) presentation of the difference between colonial discourse theory, postcolonial theory and orientalism itself. Chapter 4 could have been tied to the rest more clearly. The concluding passage on postcolonial feminism reads as redundant to the analysis of *She*. Is it relevant? How? And, of course, the entire genre of "imperial romance" could have received more explanation.

4) It is stated several times that Ayesha stands for "us", i.e. Western civilization, white supremacy. Yes, she is not the prototypical oriental woman. Yet, she is also an example of cultural/natural otherness. Can you address this question of how this can exist as both simultaneously?

5) What is left entirely unaddressed is the issue that there are many discourses circulating within colonial texts and it is not a simple question of Said's monolithic Othering of Orientalism. Each colonial relation develops (adopts and adapts) narrative and descriptive techniques particular to its setting and history. So, it should not be forgotten that Said's *Orientalism* deals mainly with the representation of the Muslim world: the Maghreb and the Middle East. *She* takes place in a phantasy Africa and as such was also shaped by accounts of exploration of this continent. This is mentioned in relation to the biography of Haggard but only briefly. Is it possible to get more information on this?

6) Last, but not least: what exactly is the place of Rider Haggard's fiction in the development of the genre the thesis identifies as imperial romance?

The submitted BA thesis meets the requirements for academic work of this level.
Therefore, I recommend it for defence with the preliminary mark of **very good (velmi dobře)**.

V Praze dne 16.6.2021

.....

PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc. M.A.