

Posudek na diplomovou práci Teaty Binarové “Heritage and Innovation: Polynesian Literature in English”

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Names matter and the supposed impartiality of the map is a fiction. A position at the bottom rather than at the top of the earth depends on the perspective from which names are given and maps are drawn. Thus, for example, the Dutch who named Nieuw Zeeland, or New Zealand, followed a logic that was located on a centre elsewhere, thereby promoting the supremacy of a particular worldview dependent on a relational logic. But when Maoris refer to their country as Aotearoa (land of the long white cloud), they are not insisting upon the priority of their own names, but refusing to be positioned on the world map as secondary in a European analogy. But what happens when an invented Western term like Polynesia, the Pacific, Australasia or Oceania becomes the source of one’s identity? An identity that functions and is articulated within a given geo-politico-cultural reality and a language acquired through colonial domination? Or, to use the poetic language of the thesis, how can “new nets go fishing” that are actually made of two discordant kinds of string – indigenous mythical heritage and imported modern language and form? Or, how can the two conflicting moments cooperate - past heritage becoming actually the dynamic process for future change? Such paradoxes of post-colonial literature are examined precisely in the given thesis.

The text itself is divided into three sections, well balanced in their treatment of the defined topic. Section I first defines the idea of Polynesian literature in English (for brevity’s sake, further referred to in my report as PLE), locates it geographically and culturally (especially in relation to such terms as Pacific literature in English), outlines its major features and preoccupations. In the process PLE is compared to other “new” literatures, especially fascinating is the quite original approach to what has become now a staple feature of postcolonial studies – diaspora as an originating moment, and the way migrancy, the “passage” and the sea are connected to myths of the land and of place (ancestry).

Section II very usefully outlines the history of PLE. This is necessarily not an exhaustive or detailed survey, but actually an intelligent selection that stays mainly in touch with the thesis’ overall theme – the focus on texts that deal with the chosen aspect of PLE.

Reworking of oral tradition, folk lore and myth then becomes the starting point of what is the entirely original contribution of this thesis – careful analysis from a postcolonial perspective of three major texts in Section III: Witi Ihimaera’s novel *Tangi*, Alistair Te Ariki Campbell’s poetry collection *The Dark Lord of Savaiki*, and Albert Wendt’s novel *Sons for the Return Home*. What may seem like an imbalanced choice (two novels and one poetry collection), is easily explained away by the predominant focus on themes and the texts’ connection to oral tradition. The discussion of the texts is moreover wittily organized in a way to replicate a chronology of Polynesian creation mythology.

Ultimately, the whole analysis is usefully completed by an appendix which includes informative maps and original extracts from Polynesian mythical lore.

I appreciate the thesis as an absolutely original contribution to postcolonial studies of anglophone literatures. To my knowledge, nobody has yet, in this kind of Czech academic context, written on the history of PLE and critically evaluated literary texts from a clear postcolonial perspective. Teata has used her theoretical background well – not slavishly adopting terms that have been invented to apply and explain away situations vastly different from the Polynesian, but she applies them thoughtfully, reformulating established views about the meaning of such concepts as diasporic identities, migration etc. Her usage of Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is well-informed and truly original.

A beautiful poetic image concludes the thesis – a canoe setting out on a voyage of exploration (page 105). I want to use this image to thank Teata for proving to me again how worthwhile it can be to keep setting out on such voyages into the unknown, not only because of the new regions that can be found on the way, but also for the sake of an exciting voyage itself. Supervising Teata has been such an exciting voyage indeed. And I would like to encourage Teata to continue working on this project. Indeed, this is a work in progress, opening up new horizons, inspiring.

Most of my reservations and questions have been voiced during numerous discussions with Teata, which she took into account and responded to. Therefore, the questions and comments below mostly refer to broader, contextualizing issues. They are certainly not meant to be taken as criticisms:

Taking into account the fact that Teata herself is aware that she has stayed mainly within the early stages of Polynesian identity articulation, I would like to know which thrust she feels as now more perceptible or stronger – a search for an overarching identity (be it Pacific, Oceanian as Sonia Lacabanne would wish, see page 19, or even Polynesian) or is there now a stronger drive towards island itemization (smaller, regional identities) as we can see e.g. in the UK with the switch from the overarching Black to a nuanced cultural or ethnic identification, or in Central and Eastern Europe.

Has Teata given some thought to other aspect of the “heritage” issue – 1/an alternative literacy, for example, when “reading” stars matters, or 2/ the whakapapa, or lineage, - identity of blood lines establishing links with the elements and with each other in a form of relational identity. But what gender was this line drawn upon? Does that influence the role of originating parents in any way?

As Teata is fluent in French too, what is the relation of PLE to francophone Polynesian literature?

And a question relating to textual analysis: Some of the mythical moments seem to create “nets” (to again utilize the immensely beautiful set of images at the end on the thesis’ conclusion, page 105) in which the writers are caught. The idea is also insinuated by the title of *The DARK Lord of Savaiki*, the overwhelming mother figures in the two novels etc. In

what manner is myth made to function as capturing (or engulfing) and how can/does it become an enabling one in the selected texts?

Marred by only a few language errors (most of which are no doubt interferences from Teata's knowledge of French), the thesis displays great erudition, painstaking research into the subject (and its Czech reception too) as the extensive list of bibliography testifies to.

I strongly recommend the thesis for defence and propose the grade **e x c e l l e n t**
(v ý b o r n ě).

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