

Bachelor Dissertation Evaluation

Author: Karolína Šimková

Title: *Memory and Storytelling in Selected Works of Joy Harjo*

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Pavla Veselá, PhD.

External Assessor: Mgr. Klára Kolinská, M.A., PhD.

External Assessor's Evaluation:

Karolína Šimková's Bachelor Dissertation addresses a productive, complex, and truly relevant topic, which in the context of Czech academia still remains rather underrepresented: the relation between the functioning of memory and the practice of storytelling in contemporary North American Indigenous literature, namely in selected works of poet Joy Harjo.

The argument of the dissertation is based on an appropriate choice of both primary and secondary sources, and on good knowledge of the cultural and historical context which informs them. The author manages to identify some of the important moments pertaining the current literary, as well as public debate in Indigenous North America, and analyse them with consistent focus and reasoning.

What deserves appreciation is the fact that the author does not choose her topic mechanically, but establishes a meaningful juxtaposition of two independent, but mutually related concepts, while explaining her choice clearly. As correctly noted early in the text: "Remembering and reimagining stories and myths lead to a reconnection with the parts of indigenous peoples' identities that had been suppressed, while enabling a reconnection with their land as well." (p. 17).

In my opinion, the most valuable part of the argumentation is the discussion of the role of language in both the practice of storytelling and of re-representing events of the past, both real and imagined, in memory. For this purpose, the choice of Joy Harjo's poetry, as well as of her public statements, appears especially fitting. The author aptly observes that: "Harjo seems to hold conflicting views on written language, admitting that in native cultures "there's a basic mistrust of the written word, as our experience with it has been writing as a colonizing tool", Still, she acknowledges writing helped her give her voice and is a powerful tool to keep her culture from vanishing." (p. 17-18) This shows that the author is able to read her material sensitively, and acknowledge its complex, culturally and ideologically loaded implications.

The chosen approach mostly leads to reasonable, sufficiently convincing conclusions, ie.:
“Language and storytelling are used as tools for preserving and sharing that knowledge, and also to reimagine history from the indigenous peoples’ view and alter the mindset of a victim.” (p. 34)

As far as the analytical part itself is concerned, the close reading and interpretation of Joy Harjo’s poetry appears mostly accurate and relevant. It might be argued, however, that this part is occasionally more descriptive than necessary, that the author could have taken the analyses further and deeper, and focus more on the language and stylistic aspects of Harjo’s poetry. Admittedly, this could become a focus of a further, more detailed study in the future. From the formal point of view, the text of the dissertation is written generally in solid academic English; occasional language and stylistic mistakes and inaccuracies occur, but in principle they do not affect the foundations of the argumentation.

In view of the comments made above I recommend Karolína Šimková’s Bachelor Dissertation for defence with suggested evaluation of EXCELLENT.

Prague, August 21st, 2022

Mgr. Klára Kolinská, M.A., PhD.