

**Bc. Pavla Zídková**  
**The Presence of Absence: Voice as a Narrative Element in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred***  
**MA Thesis**  
**Supervisor's Report**

On the background of a comprehensive introduction to the (neo)slave narrative genre, the thesis focuses on Octavia E. Butler's novel *Kindred*. In Pavla Zídková's words, "[t]he topic is based on the assumption that the whole novel emerges from, and therefore transcends, silence; voice becomes the central focal point for critical discussion" (6). In five rigorously researched chapters, the thesis accomplishes to illustrate how Butler's novel contributes to the genre of neo-slave narratives by articulating the struggle with lingering effects of slavery.

Chapters one and two consider the literary and cultural contexts in which *Kindred* was written and to which the novel contributed; specifically, the genre of the neo-slave narrative in relation to the slave narrative, and the cultural environment of the 1960s/70s. Although these chapters are thoroughly researched, they could be elaborated during the defense, both in their discussion of the relationship of the neo-slave narrative with the slave narrative, and in delineating the range of stimuli behind the emergence of the neo-slave narrative genre in general and Butler's novel in particular. Concerning the former, for example, the contrast is formulated in terms of the historical predecessor's deficiency (12-14); i.e. in terms of elements that are missing from, or not yet fully pronounced in, slave narratives. Is it possible to find missing elements also in neo-slave narratives? As for the stimulus behind the emergence of neo-slave narratives and *Kindred*, much emphasis is laid on the role of the Black Arts and Black Power movements, which are considered "an impetus for the inception of *Kindred*" (23). Could the defense widen the spectrum by elaborating, for example, on the conservative backlash against the 1960s, the persistence of racism and racial discrimination, gender inequality, sexual exploitation and other problems to which neo-slave narratives critically respond?

The reading of Butler's novel in the subsequent three chapters is detailed, complex and attentive to the chosen theme of voice and silence within the brutality of slavery and racial discrimination. The thesis illustrates the proposed argument that *Kindred* "demonstrates a need for constant re-evaluation of the present moment by treating it inclusively within the historical context" (6). Rather than delving into the aptly presented analysis, my question therefore concerns the genre of Butler's novel. Although the thesis dismisses the link to science fiction, as Bc. Zídková knows, it has also been argued that "Butler's engagement with the fantastic has as much to do with the neo-slave narrative tradition and its concern with the limitations of realism as it has to do with her engagement with sf conventions, here and in her other fiction" (Sherryl Vint, "'Only by Experience': Embodiment and the Limitations of Realism in Neo-Slave Narratives"). Could the defense address this issue?

Notwithstanding these questions, to repeat, Bc. Zídková raises a significant topic, focuses on an important novel, and discusses both clearly and systematically. I recommend the thesis for defense and propose a preliminary grade "výborně" (1).



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