



FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Posudek vedoucí na diplomovou práci Magdaleny Císlerové “Blurring the Lines between Reality and Fiction: Peter Carey’s Engagement with Australian History and Identity”

The submitted MA dissertation studies the Australian writer Peter Carey and several of his novels with regard to two huge aspects: their destabilization of traditional concepts of history and those of national identity. It establishes from the outset rigorous theoretical frameworks ranging from postcolonial theory, transnationalism and the poetics of postmodernism. It must be said at the beginning that these are very logically and comprehensively laid out and worked through in relation to enlightening readings of the selected novels. What emerges is the idea of the author’s subversive potential, challenging social and cultural norms.

The dissertation focuses on *Illywhacker* (1985), *My Life as a Fake* (2003), *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988) and *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2012). In the conclusion, Ms Císlerová also takes into account the most recent novel, *A Long Way from Home* (2017). I feel the selection of texts is fully substantiated by their sharing of similar themes – the relevance of lies and lying as a major topic in the work of Peter Carey is clearly outlined. In this context, however, I would like to phrase my first question: Could it be in any way appropriate to assume an intention by Carey to draw a connection between his theme of lies (in relation to history, the unreliability of sources etc.) and the Australian literary tradition of the yarn?

I very much appreciate the careful contextualization: contemporary reception in Australia and the Czech Republic, the significance of Australian historical novels, and especially current events in Australia, such as the 2017 ANZAC Day and the even more recent riots during the 26 January Australia Day (plus the personal touch in the introduction, when Magda reflects her own Australian experience and which significantly locates her in relation to her studied material).

Another major asset of the dissertation is the way it is written. The structure is logical and clear, arguments always articulated judiciously, and most of all – the entire dissertation is written in flawless academic English (and still remains immensely readable). The only errors I could find (and I tried hard) would amount to a maximum of half a dozen typos, coming off (and not of, as would be correct) age in the abstract, and Mundrooroo (instead of Mudrooroo) on page 29.

Consequently, I have no major critical comments to make but only a few questions to ask for the sake of debate during the defence:

1. Rather than the non-existence of firm “roots” of the national story of identity (as presented in chapter 2, esp. the passage on the Australian Values Debate) is it also not a question of re-evaluating the Australian Legend, which seems to be THE foundation national myth for the conservatives (together with the ANZAC Gallipoli myth, as mentioned)?
2. On page 42 you yourself opt for the word “discovery” rather than “invasion” of Australia. Does this testify to certain unease with the new radical terminology? Or, how do you posit yourself within such debates – as a Central European – Czech – etc..... (I must leave the rest of further identifiers up to you.)

3. I very much appreciate your mentioning of that peculiar being called the Bunyip (page 42), which I remember as a child reading about in British magazines for children, but never having the opportunity to read more about later.
4. On page 43 you claim that the population of Australia was formed almost entirely by convicts. Can you locate some clearer statistic? And how did e.g. the Gold Rush change this?
5. On page 47 your quote from the Jerilderie Letter seems to imply Ned's Irish identification. The novel makes a major point of his Irish Australianness: using Irish folk memory, legend etc. How would you see the role of such appropriation of Irishness for the construction of Australian identity? I have in mind especially how you would posit your ideas vis a vis the reading of Graham Huggan in his book on *Australian Literature* (especially his idea that "the superimposition of Irish folk memory onto recent Australian colonial history produces a double effect in which the fear of renewed betrayal lurks beneath the sanctioned pride of violent dissent", page 62).
6. Other intertexts for *Oscar and Lucinda* could be a) the spate of Australian white explorer narratives/novels (such as Patrick White's *Voss*) and b) the popular outlaw/bushranger romance of the 19th century. How does Carey develop (or debunk) this tradition, so constitutive of the Australian Legend?
7. And, last but not least, thank you for alerting me to the bizarre incident regarding Egon Erwin Kisch and his Scottish Gaelic dictation test. And how even more bizarre is the fact that what saved him was a ruling stating that Scottish Gaelic was NOT a European language!

Nuanced readings of primary texts, sophisticated application of theory, and a dedicated commitment to the exploration of a difficult area - all these ought to be sufficient grounds to substantiate my suggestion for the grade of excellent (**výborně**).

V Praze dne 7.6.2018

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PhDr. Soňa Nováková, CSc., M.A.

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