

La Sapienza

Valutazione esterna tesi di dottorato Studi germanici e slavi 36° ciclo

CALVANI EMILIO

Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

Reading the Post-migrant: Reinterpreting Migrant Literature in Scandinavia

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Report

Emilio Calvani's *Reading the Post-migrant: Reinterpreting Migrant Literature in Scandinavia* is a very solid and well-written dissertation thesis. It includes a considerable body of critical sources in the fields of sociology and history, which give a proper definition of the post-migrant condition and perspective. The critical sources in the fields of literary studies and cultural studies are also very rich and cover the different aspects that each and every studied work of primary literature elicits. Calvani is able to use his sources in an appropriate and sensitive manner, so that the literary works that he has chosen to focus on as case studies can be better understood and appreciated by the readers. This effort accounts for the originality and creativity of the thesis, and for its solid contribution to the advancement of the studies of what we can still call migration or post-migration literature. Only sometimes, in fact, the international critical sources deal directly with the Scandinavian literary works Calvani focuses on, but he is able to find illuminating connections between general observations from the field of literary studies as well as from cultural studies, sociology and history, and his primary literary sources, so that the 'general' sources indirectly shed light upon the specific ones.

By the way, I do have an objection about the title of the thesis: why *Migrant Literature* and not *Migration Literature in Scandinavia*? Søren Frank and other scholars, whom Calvani knows well and uses properly, have explained why migration literature is a wider and more feasible concept, as a less compellingly autobiographical one; besides, one of the writers Calvani studies is ethnically Norwegian and several others have mixed origins, as he also points out. They have not migrated at all, they are not migrants, but the memory or indirect experience of migration has affected them deeply.

All the close readings in chapters 2, 3 and 4 are excellent, sensitive and intelligent; they really help readers who are interested in these literary expressions to find new meaning. This

applies to all the considered writers: Swedish Jonas Hassen Khemiri (p. 68-88); Danish Yahya Hassan (p. 88-106); Norwegian Veronica Salinas (p. 114-130) and Aasne Linnestå (130-150); Swedish Johannes Anyuru (p. 152-171); and finally, Norwegian Maria Navarro Skaranger (p. 171-186). In spite of the wide scope of the work and the different authorial strategies that are presented and analysed, Calvani's argument is well-knit and consistent.

The thesis is on the whole very well written (I enclose a list of the misprints and the minor mistakes).

What I find is the major (but fully improvable) fault of the thesis, is that it does not sufficiently stress the importance of the Italian scholars who have contributed to the same field of studies in recent years, especially Calvani's peers Luca Gendolavigna and Edoardo Checcucci, but also a scholar of an older generation, Massimo Ciaravolo. It is not a matter of biographical or regional detail, I argue. The fact that a body of research has been growing for at least one decade is also the result of a network. In this sense, it would be highly appreciated if this dissertation thesis could state more clearly, at the beginning, in what respect it shares tools, methods, perspectives and ideas with the other dissertation theses (Gendolavigna's was published this year; Checcucci's will be discussed only few months later than Calvani's, but we know that it will contain a reworking of his recently published articles in book form), and, above all, in what respects it is, on the other hand, unique and fully original. One aspect, that has already been mentioned here, should be pointed out: Gendolavigna works with Swedish literature only (and I think that Calvani's part on Khemiri's novel *Montecore* should interact more strictly with Gendolavigna's chapter about Khemiri's debut novel *Ett öga rött*); and Checcucci works with Norwegian literature only (again, his article about Navarro Skaranger should be considered more carefully, as well as his translation of Khalid Hussain's *Pakkis* with a rich introduction). Calvani is however the first one to approach the subject of migration and post-migration literature from a Scandinavian perspective, and rightly so, given the similar (but not identical) historical and cultural contexts. I think he should stress it more clearly, because it is a considerable merit. As to Ciaravolo, he has edited a new history of Scandinavian literature in Italian (2019), devoting a large section to the literature of these new voices of migration and post-migration, the three sections being written by Ciaravolo (general part and Swedish part), Sara Culeddu (Norwegian part) and Bruno Berni (Danish part): why not use and mention it? It is not included in the Bibliography. Finally, Ciaravolo's article about Khemiri's *Montecore* (2021) is not included in the Bibliography although it is mentioned a couple of times in the notes, not fully correctly as I detail in the attached file. Calvani's analyses is innovative and richer with respect to Ciaravolo's, but Ciaravolo's observations about the stratification of Swedish which Kadir / Abbas' Arabic-Frenchified language use reveals are rather detailed in that article, as well as Abbas' legacy to the son through language, and the power of language to imagine a different order of things. More punctual references should therefore be given.

The distinguishing quality of this dissertation thesis deals of course also with the central arguments that are developed in the central chapters, and the key-concepts and methods that support them: the post-monolingual condition, the concept of cosmopolitanism and the detection of innovative tendencies within this kind of literary production. To sum up, Calvani should present and declare his perspectives more thoroughly in the Introduction (p. 1-10), because the presentation of the research questions is rather scanty there, whereas these questions become fully as the chapters develop. A little more anticipation would not damage, I argue. This is simply an argumentative and rhetorical problem. As well as this, more detailed and precise introductory facts should be given in the same Introduction about the chosen body of primary literary works to be studied (the language and the issue year of the work, the nationality of the writer, possibly the birth year of the writer, and in one case, unfortunately, of death).

If I can put the whole question in another way, with other words: I do think that the theory displayed in this dissertation thesis ‘arrives at’ the targeted literary works in a fruitful way (it is not always the case), but it is difficult to see the connections and have the right expectations after reading the Introduction.

Finally, I make a modest proposal, since Calvani contextualises migration and post-migration properly from the sociological and historical point of view. Since we are literary scholars, we must ask ourselves what our added value consists of. Well, I think that Tzvetan Todorov has given us important answers in a booklet that is also an autobiography: *La Littérature en péril – Literature in danger*. When Calvani writes (133) that literary works help “constructing new worlds”, he is close to Todorov’s reflections about the importance of telling stories, which amplify our experience of the the real world, through fiction. Sociologists and historians may know anything about migration and post-migrations, but authors write stories and make all of us (historians and sociologists included) see from the inside of the individual perspective. Some reflections in Todorov’s booklet may therefore offer an additional ‘glue’ or leitmotiv to this excellent work by Calvani.

PROPOSED SPECIFIC IMPROVEMENTS WITH REFERENCE TO SOURCES AND IDEAS

p. 40, note 90: the scandal of Eugenics and the Swedish sterilization policy has been the object of much more recent historical scrutiny. The study of the Swedish historian Mattias Tydén (2000) is seminal, and even the Italian historian Luca Dotti has written a valuable work (2004).

p. 57, note 8: a very central and still usable handbook of history of Swedish language is Gösta Bergman, *Kortfattad svensk språkhistoria*, latest edition 2013. It gives examples of the different phases of influence of other languages upon Swedish through the centuries, Queen Christina’s highly Frenchified Swedish use among them.

p. 84 and other pages: dealing with the use of Jonas’ suburb slang or multiethnolect, it can be pointed out, as a link, that this kind of rebellion, a phase in Jonas’ detachment from his father, is similar / comparable to what Halim’s diary shows in *Ett öga rött*.

p. 114, 116, 120: the fact that Salina’s book is intentionally easy to read, and reflects the initial process of learning the new language, possibly shows a peculiarly Norwegian pattern of “pedagogical reflection” in the production of migration literature, which is to be found in *Pakkis*, the novel for young adults written by a very young writer, Khalid Hussain, in 1986, the very start of migration literature in Norway. A link to that novel would be possible here and, I think, illuminating. See Checcucci’s valuable notes in his Introduction to the Italian translation of *Pakkis*, Paki (2022).

p. 131-132: dealing with Linnestå, it would be appropriate and illuminating to at least mention Tove Nilsen’s best novel, *Øyets sult* (1993), where a female, ethnically Norwegian writer writes a ‘migrant novel’. It is certainly different from Linnestå’s work, as Linnestå still refers to a personal experience and to autobiographical contents, whereas TN imagines to be a first-person narrator and protagonist as the Indian immigrant Shabaz in Norway. It is however a seminal novel in the Norwegian ‘migration literature’, and I see that Tove Nilsen is mentioned even later (one of her articles, p. 173). Her authority in the subject matter would be better understandable if a mention to *Øyets sult* is included.

p. 162: with reference to the connection between Anyuru’s novel and Harry Martinson’s epic poem *Aniara*, I see that the intertextual dialogue is properly described in note 37, but it

should be probably added that Aniara too is both a dystopian tale and a piece of science fiction. It seems a further important connection and it should be made explicit.

Confidential report (it will not be shown to the candidate)

No additional remarks are needed.

Evaluation file (optional)

Presentation and clarity

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The reviewer should be able to read the text without difficulty. This implies that the dissertation is clear and 'user friendly', without duplications or repetitions.

Integration and coherence

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The manuscript should present logical and rational links between different parts of the thesis.

Introduction to scientific background

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The text should contain a satisfactory introduction to the scientific background which is relevant to the research, preparing the reader to the exposition of the problem.

Review of relevant literature

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must have a detailed knowledge of original sources, have a thorough knowledge of the field, and understand the main theoretical and methodological issues.

Statement of research problem

None Poor Average Good Excellent

A clear statement of the research problem should be made, together with specific hypotheses, predictions, or questions which the research is designed to address.

Originality

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The research must be the candidate's own work. The degree of independence may vary according to the research topic.

Contribution to knowledge and scientific relevance

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The dissertation should be substantial enough to be able to form the basis of two articles on refereed journal, a book or research monograph.

Mastery of the English language

None Poor Average Good Excellent

The candidate must be proficient in written English and show mastery of appropriate scientific/technical language.

A major goal of the review process is to evaluate if the present version of the thesis is:

- 1) adequate as is
- 2) require minor revision

3) require major revision

for admission of the candidate to the defense of the work in front of a national evaluation board.

Accept as is Minor revision Major revision

Date: 12/3/2023

Reviewer: ciaravolo massimo