

La Sapienza

Revisione esterna tesi PAOLO D'INDINOSANTE (37° ciclo)

D'INDINOSANTE PAOLO

Evaluation form for PhD dissertation

Evaluation form

Title of the thesis

British Voices of Empire: Poetry and Imperial Patriotism in the Long Nineteenth Century

Affiliation of the reviewer

Université Paris Est Créteil (UPEC), France

Report

Report on the Thesis of Paolo D'Indinosante
By Fabienne Moine (Professor of British/Victorian Studies, UPEC, France)

Paolo D'Indinosante's thesis is a well-presented work of 268 pages, comprising 205 pages of text and 56 pages of bibliography. The purpose of the thesis is clearly laid out in the introduction. It is meant to address the question of the imperial voice/s and does so through the combination of literary studies (and close readings) and British imperial history (as poems are examined in their cultural, historical and ideological context). The literature review in the introduction covers all the required fields and is very consistent. The introduction also methodically underlines all the analytical layers of the thesis and makes a clear presentation of the 4 chapters. The thesis explores the ideological significance of the interrelated themes of space, time, war and peace in the various corpora. Doing so, it aims to make up for the academic marginalisation of poets who engaged with imperial themes, therefore contributing to the recent critical discussion and re-evaluation of both minor/popular 19th-century poets and topical or referential poetry.

I would like to emphasize the main qualities that distinguish this research:

*Choice of corpus: the thesis pays attention to largely understudied non-canonical poems (jubilee poems in particular) and poets. The long list of poetical references in bibliography proves both the relevance of such a study and the author's extensive knowledge. In spite of a large poetic production (well-identified here through a thorough research), the subgenre of imperial poetry as well as the intersections of the British Empire and poetry have remained largely unexplored. The thesis clearly addresses this academic blind spot. Moreover the selection of both Romantic and Victorian imperial poetry serves to create a dialogue between the two groups of poems that have too often been artificially kept apart for reasons of classification and historical periodization. One can add too that the confrontation of low-brow and high-brow poetry offers a large overview of what most Victorians really experienced. The author has managed to reveal many "imperial voices" as there is "no monolithic 'imperial poet'": the thesis highlights different strata of imperial ideologies, showing that patriotism and empire could generate a spectrum of responses. Finally, choosing the poetic form over other literary formats offers a novel angle to explore patriotic and imperial history.

*Methodology: these poems being topical and referential allow for an analysis that harmoniously associate history, sociology and literary studies (close reading and sociohistorical contextualisation). Historicising the social life of poetry and exploring the conditions of poetic emergence form a very convincing analytical method of analysis for this type of poems. It should be added that this method requires a genuine knowledge of imperial history from the author.

*Analysis: taking the Porter/MacKenzie debate as a starting point is a very convincing way of addressing the issue of the role and importance of imperial poetry in popular culture. Micro-readings are often excellent (for example, those related with climatology or with the parodies of Tennyson's poetry). The thesis also takes into account the paratext in the chapter on anthologies, which helps explore a larger poetic economy. The analyses are always clear, well-argued and well-illustrated.

*Mastery of the English language: this thesis displays an outstanding linguistic quality: not only is English absolutely fluent, but the text is easy and pleasant to read and even particularly when the author engages in complex demonstrations.

I have also identified a certain number of weak areas that could be dealt with quickly; others should be addressed in a more thorough manner:

>Points of detail

*Mackenzie's maximalist view is not examined, unlike Porter's minimalist one; while it seems that the author sides with the former's views.

*References should be organised in the bibliography: primary/secondary sources; books/articles...; and titles could also be organised following different themes so as to make the thesis even more reader-friendly and useful.

* The word "popular" in "popular culture" or in "popular poets and poetry" should be defined more precisely: indeed, does this adjective mean "widely favoured or admired" or "prevailing among the people"? Could it also mean that it was produced by and for the people? I suggest

looking into Kirstie Blair's work, particularly her introductions in the anthology *Poets of the People's Journal* (2016) and in *Working Verse in Victorian Scotland: Poetry, Press, Community* (2019)

*The limitation to jubilee poems is not clearly expressed; apart from the fact that they have been overlooked so far, it is necessary to explain, from the very beginning of the thesis, why the focus is placed on jubilee poems in particular (and not, say, other patriotic poetry like royal births, weddings, anniversaries, royal visits, durbars...)? What are their specificities? How different are they from other patriotic poems?

*Why exclude Kipling a priori while Tennyson or Swinburne are included in the selection? Particularly when Kipling's voice is complex and non-monolithic regarding the Empire while Tennyson, as poet laureate, is best placed to be "his master's voice".

*Some poetry reviews in papers and periodicals are (very well) discussed in the last section; yet, it would be welcomed to identify their political orientations and their subsequent views on imperial poems.

*Some quotes are particularly long. Without overlooking the fact that the thesis makes visible little-explored poems that deserve more academic attention, one cannot but notice that some quotes could be shortened; another possibility is to put in bold or italics the most significant parts.

*While the development within each chapter is very well-organised, concluding remarks and transitions should be added so that one better follows the evolution of the whole argument. Indeed it's important to better highlight the co-dependence of all the chapters.

>Points to be monitored more carefully

*While one of the main objectives of the thesis is to highlight diverging "imperial voices" which nevertheless coalesce into a general support of imperialism, forms of resistance – from more radical milieus – were also very likely to emerge in the British domestic poetical culture. Some examples of less consensual poems should be added, at least as points of comparison. It is also important to focus on the poets' use of deference verging on flattery. Indeed not all voices may be authentic!

* It's clear that the text cannot be expanded too much but the reference to even more "marginal" poems and poets from other geographical and social backgrounds would be beneficial to the analysis. Therefore these diverging voices may be heard in other circles: 1) a widened corpus including poetry from the empire would certainly help bring to the fore diverging opinions about the jubilees and the imperial ideology. 2) Most poets under scrutiny belong to the middle class. A look at lower-class poets, apart from William Longstaff, like early radicals and mid-Victorian Chartists (see for example Mike Sanders's work on Chartist poetry) would be interesting as it would help assess whether class did or did not change popular views on the monarchs and the British Empire. 3) Only a single woman is mentioned in the thesis – Eliza Cook. Although patriotic or imperial poetry was certainly a male preoccupation, some women poets were also concerned by patriotism and empire; with their own views on femininity, gender roles, particularly in the context of a female rule! See for example: Agnes Maule Machar's "Canada to the Laureate. In

Response to Tennyson's Lines" (1902) and "Our Lads to the Front! Embarkation of the Canadian Contingent for South Africa; - Quebec, October 31, 1899" (1902) 4) The only reference to non-English poets is Robert Buchanan: some other poets from different regions of the UK should be targeted too so as to identify local nuances of the imperial ideology (see the British press on BNA). For all these points, it seems necessary to take a few examples (maybe counter-examples) and to better justify the reasons why some social groups were excluded from the selection. I also suggest to consult the special issue of *Global Nineteenth-Century Studies* (3.1, 2024) I edited on "Institutional poetry": the volume deals with the connections between institutions (be they concrete or non-physical ones like the empire) and the poems in/thanks to which they emerge.

*While the choice of poetry has been underlined above, one may wonder as to why poems – unlike essays or fictional pieces for example – are more appropriate for the emergence of popular voices. While the author criticizes the position of Porter who overlooks the significance of popular poetry, it is important to explain why it was in the end a major medium for imperialistic ideologies.

*The paratext and the reproduction and circulation of poetic texts of imperial poetry are explored in detail so as to highlight a wider poetical system. But what about concrete poetical practices? Poems were often read or recited in public meetings or social gatherings; some were set to music in order to encourage collective participation. How could these practices reinforce (or maybe undermine) the imperial ideology?

*While the relevance of the method of analysis (i.e. the focus on the ideological significance of the thematic interconnections of space, time, war and peace within the different primary texts of the last three chapters) is not to be called into question, mainly because it offered a constant point of comparison, one may still regret that other approaches were not chosen to support the analysis. I am not suggesting that other analytical tools should be introduced at that stage, but that at least other themes should be mentioned at times (if not, at least in conclusion) to analyse other dimensions of imperial poems (for example the notion of the people/s of the empire)

*The 2-page conclusion should be reinforced. The current version presents the main results of the thesis but rather as a summary of each chapter. On the contrary, it should also identify further questions, grounded in the limitations (for reasons of space or strategic choices) of this thesis. Some issues exposed in the previous section could also be addressed in the conclusion, if not elsewhere: other social groups; poetical practices; forms of resistance...

Misspellings:

- Page 2 line 11: "Perhaps" misspelled
 - Page 77 line 4: "chapter four" > "chapter three"
 - Page 80 line 20: there is an extra "the"
 - Page 129 line 15 "Christianism" > Christianity
 - Page 192 line 3: "Play up! play up! and play up the game!" > the third "up" must be deleted (not present in 'Vitaī Lampada')
 - Page 198 line 4 : "anthologised under examination" > "anthologies"
 - Presentation on the poems:
- > stanzas and indents should be made visible in each poem (poems are almost never left-aligned in

Victorian publications)
>the text of poems should be single-spaced

In conclusion, Paolo D'Indinosante's thesis is a solid piece of work, which both analyses lesser known poets and opens new perspectives on long-neglected imperial verse. In view of the scholarly quality of the thesis, I recommend that minor revision be made for admission of the candidate to the defence of his work. I have no doubt that the revisions will improve the thesis which could then be considered for a 'cum laude' award.

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

As mentioned in the report, Paolo D'Indinosante's thesis could be considered for a "cum laude" award after minor revision. I believe that revision is necessary as I have identified a certain number of weaknesses (that can be addressed easily and should not be too time-consuming). This is a very promising thesis.

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.

The thesis can be considered for a 'cum laude' award

☐ Yes ☒ No

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: 7/22/2025

Reviewer: Moine Fabienne