

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

University of Exeter

Report

This thesis should first of all be commended for its evidence of detailed research, and its excellent overview of the scholarly field related to its topic. There is a fine understanding at work here not just of the primary materials studied and their cultural and political significance, but also of the critical history of the study of imperial literature. It is really useful to draw attention to the way that poetry is often excluded from consideration in historical discussions of culture, sometimes even by literary critics. This is evident in the material on the Porter-Mackenzie debate but also elsewhere in the thesis. Indeed, the critical neglect of nineteenth-century poetry in comparison to fiction is still a significant issue which belies the importance that Victorians attached to the form.

There is also a distinct element of class bias at work, in that poetry was accessible to, and in newspapers at least, written by working-class subjects. This thesis admirably reiterates the truth that poetry which is not radical, resistant or aesthetically adventurous can and should still be deeply worthy of study.

There are multiple examples where this work exhibits real intellectual authority in its reading of secondary and primary sources, but also in its treatment of literary and historical theory. For

example, the choice to use the term 'imperial' rather than 'imperialistic' in order to not only focus on jingoistic verse is well justified, but importantly, also explained brilliantly. This kind of scholarly awareness is evident throughout the work, and a great strength. The reading of the poetry also balances literary analysis well with historical context and historiography. Notwithstanding the limitations of time and space, the reader is given a good sense of what cultural productions were created, to what extent they have been neglected, and often, why this is the case. This sense of recovery, and indeed discovery in some cases, is palpable through the work, and the calls for further study in a variety of fields is fully justified.

The introduction's breakdown of the thesis's topics is very effective, but occasionally the expository material is a little excessive and too detailed. This may be a stylistic or cultural-pedagogical effect but to this reader it appeared too mechanical. This issue relates to a tendency to explain what is going to be discussed, but not quite summarising the critical conclusions of these discussions at the ends of sections or chapters. This is not a major issue because the critical work has been done, but the reader (and arguably the writer) requires succinct explanations of the intellectual achievements of each section. For example, Chapter Two ends with a summary of its last discussed poem rather than a summary of the chapter's critical conclusions. This is the space to showcase what has been achieved critically in the whole chapter, rather than ending with a local point about a single poetic sample. My recommendation is that this kind of summary is included at the end of each of the chapters. It would only require the addition of a few sentences, but it would allow the reader to build a clearer critical narrative through the progression of the thesis.

In a similarly structural vein, around eighty pages pass before any real close analysis of poetry occurs. Some examples of this could be brought forward into the introductory material, which would foreshadow later discussion but also integrate the introductory material more effectively into the whole thesis. At present, these substantial sections of the thesis are a little too distinct from each other. Some of the critical points made in the excellent reading of the scholarly field might be illustrated with analytical examples, for instance.

It should be stated that I consider these suggestions to represent minor amendments to an excellent piece of work, which contributes significantly to its chosen field.

Here I detail some minor corrections in relation to style, typography, or language use.

21 – 'zoom in' is quite vernacular. Try 'focus on'.

22 – Is the term 'disciples' a tad derogatory for independent-minded scholars who happen to agree with an intellectual approach?

23 – Not sure why these footnote observations could not be included in the main text.

33 – Thomson's 'Weddah and Om-El Bonain' might be noted also, given that it post-dates the capture of Aden.

35 – misspelled Raskin as Ruskin

47 – 'unintended' should be 'not intended'.

48 – I'm not sure if the 'versification of imperial themes' (used elsewhere as well) is a useful phrase. 'Versification' particularly in Victorian literary criticism, was a pejorative term.

52 – word missing from first sentence of second paragraph.

55 – surely 'hero-worshippism' should just be 'hero-worship'?

71 – 'pacific'?

72 – 'precocious' is usually used in a positive, or at least developmental, sense. 'Precocious demise' therefore sounds odd.

77 – 1987 should be 1887

77 – 'well exemplified' is a tautology

78 – 'uncurious' should be 'incurious'

- 82 – the ‘highly’ in ‘highly uncharted’ is redundant
- 98 – ‘authored’ and ‘penned’ are not required in the same sentence.
- 113 – it feels like there should be some kind of linking material between the first and second sentences of the new chapter.
- 115 – it is not clear why these reflections might be ‘poignant’, which is usually taken to mean ‘sentimental’ or ‘nostalgic’. This should be unpacked a little.
- 121 – in the Tupper quotation presumably ‘bad for a visitor’ should be ‘had for a visitor’.
- 140 – Surely Phillips’s book is Sir Lewis Morris, not Sir William Morris!
- 158 – second paragraph first sentence – ‘much’ should be ‘many’. The penultimate sentence on this page is also ungrammatical.
- 180 – in the Wedmore quotation, is ‘a passion love’ a typo?
- 204- ‘vents’ should be ‘events’.

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

Given that my recommendations are minor in nature, and that my overall view of this work very positive, I have no real confidential opinions to report. This is very assured and authoritative work.

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: 8/14/2025

Reviewer: Rennie Simon