Mokomokai and Cannibalism - A Case Study on Jules Verne’s Representation of the Maori in his Literary Work

The novels of Jules Verne have been translated in many languages, being him one of the most famous authors of the world. One of the main topics in the scientific dispute about Verne’s literary work are his obvious racist tendencies in the description of native people. In particular his descriptions of indigenous people from Africa and Australia are more or less problematic. It was also stated, that his image of the Maori is a racist and malicious misinterpretation of the reality. This contribution will shed light on the image of the Maori, as it is drawn by Verne. It will be shown, that a more refined look on Verne’s statements about the Maori is necessary for a balanced assessment of his presentation of the indigenous people of New Zealand. This study deals with Verne’s statements about the mokomokai (dried heads) and cannibalism among the Maori. These two cultural traits were decisive for the accusation of showing racist attitudes towards the Maori.