

POSUDEK: DIPLOMOVE PRÁCE

Title: "Portraits of Puritans in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Prose Works and Arthur Miller's Drama (Text and Film)"

Author: Marketa Hůnová

Zadavající katedra: Katedra anglického jazyka.

Supervisor: Christopher Koy, M.A.

Opponent: Linda Kocmichová

Summary

The author has attempted a literary analysis of concerning Puritans, particularly as they have been represented by two central writers in the canon of the 19th and 20th century American literature, Hawthorne and Miller.

1. The goals

The goals of this thesis are stated only generally (in the abstract). It is not clear if the main goal was to do a comparative analysis, as presented in Chapter 6, or to provide a portrait of transition by Jewish immigrants in America, or something else. I cannot therefore clearly state whether the goals have been fulfilled or not.

2. Structure

The thesis thematically presents and analyzes stories and novels of Hawthorne and the single drama and screenplay by Miller, synthesizing the representations of the various issues of Puritanism in the fiction of Hawthorne as well as Miller, rather than taking a story-by-story, novel-by-novel approach. Ordinarily with an undergrad, this approach leads to a confusing text, but the clarity displayed in keeping the focus on the particular issue at hand is handled masterfully, with an occasional regrettable but often understandable repetition.

3. Literature

Ms. Hůnová treats two Hawthorne novels and two stories, and it is here that I see the greatest weakness. The title of her work is "Portraits of Puritans in Nathaniel Hawthorne's Prose Works..." which would appear to include significant works focusing overtly on Puritans, but such stories as "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" contrasting pagan celebrations with the gloom and doom of Puritanism and the ensuing violent raid led by John Endicott should have been treated. "Endicott and the Red Cross" deals with a historical figure in search of sin and the shaming of the sinner (a nice potential to contrast with *The Scarlet Letter*) is significant. Likewise "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" shows the psychology behind Puritan public scrutiny, and few other stories might have been treated as well. While her diploma work well surpasses the 60 page minimum and so further treatment of these other stories put the length well past what is regarded as the 'norm', a pertinent overview of ALL Puritan fiction Hawthorne wrote, from his earliest work "Alice Doane's Appeal" written in his twenties in 1830 to the mature work would have addressed this concern. The drama and the screenplay by A. Miller were appropriately discussed and some use of secondary literature was used, both for the historical overview and for the respective criticism and analysis.

4. Presentation and interpretation of data

I raise what I consider to be relatively minor issues. Ms. Hůnová never addresses in her diploma work why he wrote about the Puritans except that he was descended from them. There is ample knowledge that among his Salem lady friends he discovered that the story of persecuting witches and pointing out where they were hanged caused his companions to cry. Likewise the great Puritan preacher Cotton Mather stands triumphant. The victory of those prosecuting the witches should have been emphasized on the one hand, and the implications for Hawthorne's contemporary America on the other. This is left unmentioned by Ms. Hůnová. It is his rendering of history in his fiction through the artifact of the actual scarlet letter found in the Custom House that is left out. I also wish she might have attended to Chillingworth. Was Chillingworth a Puritan? Certainly he did not belong to the elite ministers in town, yet it is this almost Catholic alchemist who pursues and punishes a Puritan minister for his sin. Hůnová keeps this Hawthornian irony out of her paper which heavily discusses *The Scarlet Letter*.

5. Formal presentation

The presentation and formatting appears in my opinion to be done well. Attention to detail was not lacking here.

6. Language

As a rule, one must always applaud the option taken by those very few students who write their diploma work in English rather than in their Czech mother tongue. The language is quite above the standard required for this undergraduate degree program and is indeed quite excellent.

7. Level of difficulty

I would estimate the level of difficulty to be quite high, as Hawthorne and Miller both concern themselves with a historical past we today are ethically isolated from, with our contemporary mindset. The language written by both Hawthorne and Miller is often archaic, reflecting the language of the 17th century.

8. Contribution

Well above average. As already stated, I would have preferred to see a few more Hawthorne stories attended to since they deal with the historical Puritans and are certainly relevant.

Supervisor's final assessment:

Overall, this work not only fulfills the requirements laid down for this type of academic work, but stands well above it, and I suggested the grade: 1

Question:

1. Discuss Chillingworth – an alchemist, scientist (as you referred to him, comparing him to Rappaccini and the husband in “The Birthmark”) – as he fits into your theme of the representation of Puritans. Is Dimmesdale, a consummate Puritan, a victim of a non-Puritan? If so, how does he fit into your thesis concerning Hawthorne's representation of Puritans as victims?

