



## POSUDEK OPONENTA DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

---

Studijní obor: **Anglická a americká literatura (jednooborové navazující studium)**

Název práce: **Quest for Perfection in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse***

Autorka práce: **Bc. Ráchel Bubíková, Dis.**

Vedoucí diplomové práce: **PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.**

Oponent diplomové práce: **Mgr. Tomáš Jajtner, Ph.D. et Th.D.**

---

### Stručná charakteristika práce

Ráchel Bubíková's diploma thesis analyses 6 selected short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne ("The Birth-mark", "Rappacini's Daughter", "Mrs. Bullfrog", "Feathertop", "Drowne's Wooden Image" and "The Artist of the Beautiful") focusing on the different ways in which their characters seek perfection. The thesis starts with a historical introduction ("Perfection as Heritage"), contrasting the Puritan and Transcendentalist view of the desirability of perfection and ways of attaining it. Ráchel bases her discussion of this topic on the central texts of the early Puritan tradition (esp. Winthrop, Robinson and John Cotton) and the classical authors of American Transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller). Her main theoretical thesis seems to be the dichotomy between the dilemma of the early Puritans seeking perfection with the knowledge of their total depravity and inability to achieve anything without God's saving grace on the one hand and the positive view of perfecting the self in the Transcendentalist optimism about the creative powers of liberated humanity on the other. This duality of the vision of perfection is then confronted with the world of Hawthorne's short stories and the ways their characters strive for perfection in science (Chapter 3), relationships (Chapter 4) and art (Chapter 5). The final conclusion stresses the predominance of the Puritan view of perfection in Hawthorne's stories with the only exception of the stories dealing with art, where the Transcendentalist position seems to be gaining more prominence.

### Celkové zhodnocení

Overall, the thesis makes the impression of an organised piece of work with a lucid structure and a disciplined analysis, focusing on the close-reading of the actual literary texts. The latter point is perhaps the single most important asset of the whole work. The topic of the thesis is both interesting and relevant, since it clearly touches the core of Hawthorne's reflection about "Americannes" and the dilemmas of the "American tradition". Ráchel's narrative is interspersed with relevant references to secondary texts and the thesis complies with the requirements about format and style.

Arguably, the weakest part of the thesis is the theoretical introduction. Although one cannot expect a student of literature to be (well) versed in some subtle theological arguments about grace and works, about the concept of the covenant, about sacramentality and Biblical hermeneutics or about the historical development of the concept of perfection in the early "New England Mind", one needs to distinguish between the different *readings* and *interpretations* of the Bible defining the different religious groupings in early America. However vague and unclear the boundaries between them might have been, they were well aware of the differences between one another and the historical development of 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritanism shows this more than abundantly (cf. the Merry Mount community, the discussions about the Half-Way Covenant, the witch



trials in Salem etc.). In that sense, one cannot simply say that "Puritans were deeply religious people, who predominantly understood perfection according to the Bible and its teachings" (p. 7). Indeed, so did the other groupings and yet they fought and anathematised one another. The Puritan characters in much of Hawthorne's work are not only deeply conflicted about their identity *coram Deo* as individual Christians, they are driven by the religious zeal of uniqueness, newness and exceptionality of the early American experience. In that sense, they are not "ordinary Christians" of the type described in some classical apologetic works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like Lewis's *Mere Christianity* as Ráchel would make us believe. Their perfection is the measure of the "city upon a hill" (by the way, this term is regularly misspelled in the thesis); of the light that will shine from America upon the rest of the world. The problems of this social dimension of perfection (indeed, a central theme in *The Scarlet Letter*) add to the excruciating dilemmas of some of Hawthorne's characters.

The discussion of Transcendentalism is based predominantly on secondary sources and it is not altogether clear, how to link the leading ideas: on the one hand, the perfection of nature as the ideal to be emulated (since nature reflects the divine idea according to Emerson) and the equally important concept of the "self" who seems to be the only truly dynamic element ("the creative mind") seeking perfection. This perfection, however, seems unattainable by its very definition, because – presumably – one cannot replace the dynamic process of seeking it with a mechanical process of imitating the ideal. In fact, what Ráchel omits is precisely the link between the Puritan mind and the Transcendentalist one: namely, the introspection of the self and the conflicting concepts of seeking perfection on the one hand, and the vertigo of the "Over" (whether personal God or Emerson's famous "Over-Soul"). The darkness of the sinful self desperately seeking the "signs of election" meets the Transcendentalist "genius" whose fundamental rule of life is self-discipline, since the individual self seems to be the only source of creative energy. The link between the founders of American literature (esp. Emerson and Thoreau) and the Puritan tradition has been the subject of numerous influential treatises whose absence in Ráchel's treatise somewhat weakens the central argument, e.g. Bercovitch's *Puritan Origins of the American Self* or Perry Miller's *New England Mind*.

The final conclusion seems too short and too straightforward. The reader would definitely benefit from a further and broader discussion of the individual issues.

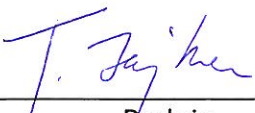
The level of Ráchel's English is generally acceptable, but the text suffers from poor editing. First of all, the thesis contains a great number of both grammatical and spelling errors, some of which are of rather elementary nature: Ráchel keeps omitting articles or uses them incorrectly, preposition "according to" often appears without the final particle, verb "let" is used in a wrong verb pattern etc. This grammatical and editorial recklessness somewhat mars the good impression one has from the thesis.

Nevertheless, I **do** recommend the thesis for defence and suggest the following grade:

**very good (velmi dobře).**

1. 6. 2016

Datum

  
Podpis