

POSUDEK BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Jméno a příjmení studenta: Martin Vaclík
Název bakalářské práce: Comparison of the *Memoirs* of Ulysses S. Grant with Recent Biographies
Vedoucí bakalářské práce: PhDr. Christopher Koy, M.A., Ph.D.
Opponentka bakalářské práce: Mgr. Renata Janktová, M.A., Ph.D.

- I. Cíl práce a jeho naplnění: 1. Cíl práce byl stanoven a naplněn v souladu s tématem
- II. Struktura práce: 1. Logická, jasná a přehledná
- III. Práce s literaturou: 2. Velmi dobrá práce s adekvátními prameny v patřičném rozsahu
- IV. Formální stránka: 1. Odpovídá všem stanoveným požadavkům
- VI. Jazyková úroveň práce: 1. Výborná
- VII. Náročnost zpracování tématu: 1. Velmi vysoká

Vyjádření vedoucího bakalářské práce:

The introduction to Mr. Vaclík's bachelor thesis, basically a biographical study, is succinctly written, emphasizing in the grand picture the ups and downs in Grant's life, most of which are recorded in his *Memoirs*. From his humble background to the struggle with cancer as he worked on his book (to support his family financially after failed business ventures) – along with the Mexican-American and Civil War experiences plus his presidency – his biography is fascinating. With a focus on Grant's Civil War experience as reflected in the *Memoirs*, Mr. Vaclík's analysis compares how modern biographical scholars describe his military leadership with his own recollections, focusing on accuracy as well as an interpretive justification for the differences. Thus, this work required Mr. Vaclík to be steeped in quite a few number of historical details regarding the Civil War, a war which has continued to be the subject of considerable research. Both Southern and Northern scholars debate even basic questions about what motivated the cause of the war, even though it is clear that the election of Lincoln, recognized as an anti-slavery candidate, quickly resulted in Southern Secession.

Grant's humble start as the son of an Ohio tanner to his congressional appointment to West Point where he met (still just a teenager) fellow Ohioan William Tecumseh Sherman, a life-long friend and military colleague. After combat experience in the Mexican-American War and a total of eleven years as an officer, Grant retired due to the separation from his family, and basically became a common farmer. Mr. Vaclík's overview of Grant's Civil War experiences, his victories and a few losses, his ambition and the common rivalries inherent in powerful positions as well as difficulties regarding his wife's pro-slavery attitude, his undercounting of Union losses and some adding to Confederate casualties, his utter silence regarding his alcohol problems, are presented in view of recent scholarship.

Mr. Vaclík's note regarding Mrs Grant's memoirs, whereby she articulates what may only be regarded as distain for the slave Jule, is not critically assessed as I might have expected. The conflict between husband and wife on this issue is cursorily presented even though it was not exactly private: "the people around Grant disliked the image of the general's wife being followed by a slave while their soldiers fought to free those enslaved" (p. 20) might be critically pursued further – not just presenting the history, but offering a critical assessment. The sensitive topic, less felicitously presented in memoirs of both marriage partners is a matter of conflict of interests which existed in many families throughout the nation: Mary Todd Lincoln's own brother fought and died for the Confederates, yet she forbade anyone to offer condolences, saying that her brother was a traitor to his country. That the President's brother-in-law died and the First Lady's reaction was accordingly correct was not true in the Grant family, and it should have been addressed more vigorously, especially since Mrs. Grant wrote her, we may say "pro-slavery" memoir, well after the Civil War had ended.

Mr. Vaclík assesses differences between the Grant memoirs and recent biographical scholarship to be 1) dates; 2) numbers of soldiers involved; 3) downplaying or even silence pertaining to some achievements of rival Union commanders; to these assessments I would like to add 4) minor lapses of Grant's memory near the end of his life, which I'd think the nitpicking about one day sooner or later being off in Grant's memoirs might be more generously forgiven. Occasionally, Mr. Vaclík brilliantly shows how uncertain some specific facts are, to the point that even modern historians cannot reach a consensus on particular issues. I think that Shiloh is one of the most famous battles which Mr. Vaclík treats leadership and strategy well, though the particular gruesomeness of the combat there is not conveyed.

Grant's ambition might have been elaborated on. More specifics regarding his alcoholism (of which he mentions nothing) and attacks by his rivals to achieve Grant's forced retirement, if not a court-marshalling for inebriation, especially when he suffers losses, might have been Mr. Vaclík's way of making up for this silence on Grant's part. Mr. Vaclík's presentation of Grant's omission of his anti-Jewish order, the downplaying of military accomplishments by General William S. Rosecrans or Admiral David D. Porter while emphasizing Grant's own successes is wonderfully rendered (pp. 29-31). Still, Grant did not boast of his own moments of bravery. Grant's great risky successes in Vicksburg, Mississippi and later in Chattanooga, Tennessee were followed by promotion and orders to manage all Union Army forces

in the eastern theater of Union efforts. The overview of Grant's huge losses of infantry and his nonetheless relentless push on Lee's diminishing forces eventually led to the Confederate's complete defeat in April 1865, and in performing his relentless aggression on Robert E. Lee's forces, Grant was strategically doing what the Commander-in-Chief Lincoln had long wished all from his previous military commanders to do: follow the enemy with constant full force efforts.

Ulysses S. Grant then implemented post-war Reconstruction policies enacted by Congress until he was elected president in November 1868; the end of his presidency eight years later marked the end of Reconstruction. After world-wide travel followed by horrific investment and business failures, Grant was once again heading downward as he contracted cancer. Managing the writing of his *Memoirs* before dying, he nevertheless ends life on another high point as his book becomes a best-seller in the United States.

I enjoy how Mr. Vaclík shows how Grant misunderstood Lee "throughout his life" (p. 38) regarding the Battle of Wilderness. In some aspects Grant never learned about his enemies. Mr. Vaclík's conclusion sums up very well the whole work; he distinguishes much of the truth from inaccuracies and silences presented in Grant's *Memoirs* brilliantly, and I might suggest, thoroughly, for a thesis of this level, and for that reason I feel it earns the mark of EXCELLENT.

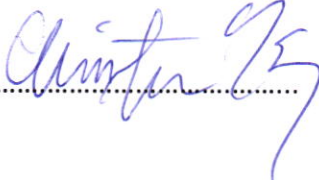
Práce splňuje základní požadavky kladené na tento typ prací, a proto ji doporučuji/nedoporučuji* k ústní obhajobě.

Navrhovaná známka: výborně*

Otázky k obhajobě:

1.Can the former First Lady be properly critiqued for fundamentally supporting slavery and ignoring the destiny of former victims of unrequited laboring for her and her family? What parts of her biography bothers you the most on this topic?

2.Explain what motivated General Grant's anti-Semitic military order.

Podpis vedoucího bakalářské práce: 

Datum: 17. 5. 2023

*nehodící se škrtněte