

Opponent's Report on the MA Thesis *Puritans and Indians – Cultural Conflict in the 17th Century New England* by Jakub Kašpárek

The thesis presents a detailed analysis of the causes, events and outcomes of the early armed conflict between the English Colonists and Native Americans known as the Pequot War. Its main strength is a detailed discussion of chief economic and ideological issues reflected in the conflict; its weakness is the lack of a wider cultural perspective (e.g., comparison with other conflicts between the colonists and the first people of America) and especially of adequate methodologies which have been developed in the previous research of the so-called “encounter of cultures” (Marshall Sahlins, Stephen Greenblatt, Tzvetan Todorov). Due to these and other deficiencies mentioned below, the thesis can hardly be called a study of “cultural conflict”. Another problem of general nature seems a reductive, homogenizing view of the New Englanders as “Puritans” (the only exception is Roger Williams). There is no mention of Thomas Morton, Anne Hutchinson or the Quakers and their relation to Native Americans.

The Introduction characteristically lacks methodological considerations. The bipolar division of approaches into “revisionist” and “apologist” in Chapter 2 appears arbitrary and reductive being based on two books which are also the major sources of most of the thesis. The chapter also does not seem to reflect on the specific features of Puritan understanding of history, especially a typological character of their writing. The author does not seem to have read major works of Sacvan Bercovitch, nor does he refer to literary aspects of historiography discussed by Hayden White or Stephen Greenblatt.

Chapter 3 does not demonstrate knowledge of the phenomenon called “the encounter cultures” discussed by Stephen Greenblatt and his followers using the reports of Spanish colonists and conquistadors. The “misunderstandings” between the cultures are not only based on mutual “misconceptions” analyzed by the author but result from more complex cultural patterns linking different spheres of Native American life. The author notices at least some interesting details of these patterns, especially the use of wampum and its economic and moral implications (in the latter part of the thesis).

It is a pity that the author does not notice the previous approaches, for instance the MA thesis by Petra Doležalová *Otherness in the Writings of the First Puritans* (1998) available from the Department library and synthesizing a theoretical approach with historical research.

My further critical remarks relate to individual passages of the thesis:

“Anglo-Indian community” (p. 30) the use of the term “community” is highly suspect (Was there ever any “community” of the Native Americans and the Colonists beyond different forms of trade and some Christianizing initiatives?). This assumption also contradicts the assertion that the first colonies in New England were established in areas virtually depopulated by epidemics.

“Manifest Destiny” (p. 33) is a term first used in 1845 by John O’Sullivan in relation to the U.S. expansionist policy which led to the first Mexican War. In the seventeenth-century context this term is an anachronism (some understanding of this problem is demonstrated only much later, on p. 95).

Quoting John Smith (p. 44) is an example of the author’s reductive view of the colonists as “the Puritans”. Smith was an admirer of Cortés and had hardly anything in common with the Puritan religious approach to colonization.

“The concept of melting pot” (p. 47) - another and perhaps even more blatant anachronism than “the Manifest Destiny”. This notion is mostly traced to Crèvecoeur.

Jefferson transformed “the pursuit of individual gain...into the famous pursuit of happiness” (p. 63). The author evidently does not know the philosophical (ethical) roots of Jefferson’s notion discussed for instance by Gary Wills in *Inventing America*.

“Practical demands of commerce” and “increase of land speculation” (pp. 103-104). It is unclear how these factors had been affected by the warfare.

“Extensive scholarly discussion” (p. 112) is not documented at all, since the thesis mostly depends on two to three secondary sources. This (together with the above mentioned anachronisms and other problems) undermines the credibility of what mostly appears like a detailed analysis of “facts”. The main problem is the lack of the reflection of Vaughan’s and Case’s approaches to the available primary sources.

As a result, the thesis is neither a reliable analysis of historical “facts” nor does it sufficiently reflect on the general literary and cultural aspects of the first conflicts of the colonists with the Native Americans. It is a pity that one has to arrive at this frustrating conclusion after reading almost a double number of pages than the standard length of MA thesis.

In spite of this, I recommend the thesis for the defence and propose the grade “very good” with respect to the difficulty and wide-ranging, interdisciplinary nature of the topic. Doporučuji k obhajobě a navrhuji hodnotit známkou **velmi dobře**.

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