



FACULTY OF ARTS  
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
IN PRAGUE



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Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

David Robbins, thesis director

Thesis evaluation

Jakub Kaspárek

Puritans and Indians – Cultural Conflict in 17<sup>th</sup> Century New England

This thesis presents a detailed and complex overview of the so-called "Pequot War" of 1636-37 as a case study to illustrate the opacity to "larger" historical or cultural interpretation even of such a chronologically and geographically restricted interaction between several New England "religious" colonies and several of their neighboring Native American "tribes."

Mr. Kaspárek effectively deploys in his thesis the "anti-theoretical" techniques and approaches primarily associated with the strategies of sociological, anthropological, historical, and cultural "thick description" championed by Clifford Geertz, Dominick LaCapra, Michael Walzer, and Richard Rorty.

In this undertaking, Mr. Kaspárek appropriately (according to the technical paradigms of the "thick description" mode) confines himself primarily to presentation of primary source materials (which are, inevitably, sometimes embedded in secondary sources) from the immediate period and events under investigation that address, as much as is feasible, the particular and even unique circumstances surrounding the "event" in question. Throughout, Mr. Kaspárek retains the "modesty" of the describer: he does not try to resolve the issues of "causes" or "responsibility" (which are, in this case, probably unresolvable), but simply to represent the historical complexity of a particularly revealing episode and, to a secondary extent, of the contemporary (that is, 17<sup>th</sup> century) interpretation of that episode.

The thesis itself, written in an excellent (if occasionally convoluted) English, effectively presents us, in its juxtaposition of empirical, cultural, and ideological detail, with the complex ambiguity and multivalence of the "Pequot War." Mr. Kaspárek confines himself primarily to description and juxtaposition, eschewing grand narrative, large theoretical conclusions, and theoretical pyrotechnics. He does this partly on a programmatic basis and partly on the basis of the necessarily limited expertise in the subject of a writer in his position.

In general--at my suggestion and, I think, salutarily--Mr. Kasparek avoids anything more than the most passing and preliminary suggestion of any tie between the juxtapositions and interactions described and larger ideological trends and "isms" that have subsequently been characterized as principal constituents in U.S. history and culture. It is for this reason that he does not undertake to develop his suggestive and occasional allusions to "manifest destiny," "American exceptionalism," "the melting pot," the "American dream," or the like, since they have few identifiable roots, and little or no place, in the events or the period described in his thesis.

In short, Mr. Kasparek offers us a comprehensive, but modest, overview of the chronologically and geographically limited "event" he sets out "thickly" to describe, making only occasional and restrained (but generally constructive) references to the differing interactive assumptions and styles of early New England "religious" colonists (Pilgrims, Puritans, Roger Williams, but not the Quakers, who had, at this period, little significant foothold in New England) and of relevant New England Native American "tribes."

Challenged for access to the specialized works required to undertake his chosen approach to his topic, Mr. Kasparek has made, under those constraints, good choice and use of available specialized printed primary and secondary sources, and of numerous sources available only on the internet.

Overall, Mr. Kasparek has provided us here with a wide-ranging, empirical, and episodic narrative which, conforming to its methodology, generally avoids being distracted from its descriptive project by allowing itself to be drawn into either 17<sup>th</sup>-century or subsequent theoretical controversies. The results are, I believe, illuminatingly both illustrative and representative.

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne"

Signed: 

Prof. David L. Robbins, Ph.D.

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [drobbins@suffolk.edu](mailto:d Robbins@suffolk.edu).