

**Posudek na diplomovou práci PETRY HOLUBOVÉ *THE PURITAN VIEW OF DEATH: ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH AND DYING IN PURITAN NEW ENGLAND***

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This is a successful treatment of the key problem area of the Puritan culture (and Baroque sensibility in general). The thesis combines a close reading of literary and theological texts with the New Historicist approach to historical and literary texts as discourses shaping society and culture. The basic thesis of the ambivalence of Puritan attitudes towards death is amply documented by analyses of different documents and practices (e.g. theological interpretations of death, accounts of dying of Puritan “saints” and leaders, the role of death in the life of children, and the burial rituals).

Although Puritan attitudes to death seem to be shaped chiefly by biblical texts (among which the Epistles and the Revelation of St. John are the most prominent), they definitely point to two significant predicaments of modern mind and civilization (the existential anxiety expressed for instance in Heidegger’s thought of individuation connected with “Being-toward-death”) and the relation of the individual to the chief concepts of modern economy, namely labor, capital and exchange. The ethical importance of the basic Puritan dilemmas is paramount and shows the closeness of the early modern and post-modern conditions.

As a supervisor, I was greatly satisfied with the candidate’s independent work and also with her prompt and articulate response to my comments. Therefore I have almost nothing to criticize in this report. Nonetheless, a few points that are still problematic can be mentioned:

1. Although there is no doubt that the accounts of death and dying were used for the political control of individuals, the Foucauldian notion of “pastoral power” which explains it, is not only connected with fear and anxiety but chiefly with “the deployment of sexuality”: its internalization as self-knowledge. It would be worth exploring to what extent the Puritan fear of death was connected with the “deployment of sexuality”. Hawthorne’s representation of Puritanism in *The Scarlet Letter*, “Young Goodman Brown,” or “The Minister’s Black Veil” certainly point in this direction.
2. I miss a more detailed discussion of Puritan autobiography, especially in view of the internal dialogue of the self. To what extent Puritan autobiography (and biography) could shape their notions of time, temporality and death (for an account of biography and autobiography, see for instance Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination* (chapter Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel, part III p. 130ff)?
3. Finally, I would be happy to see a more detailed account of the specificity of American Apocalypticism, especially the shift of the emphasis from The Day of Doom to the utopian millennialism in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (the Americans will be saved without the horrors of the Apocalypse) and the secularization of this doctrine at the time of the Revolution. Does this development affect the emphasis on the split of personality in early American Gothic? Can we see also other influences here, e.g. the Quaker attitudes to death and afterlife?

Rather than criticisms, these comments and questions are suggestions for further research. I am happy to recommend the thesis to the defence. Doporučuji k obhajobě a navrhuji hodnotit známkou “výborně”.

V Praze, 1. února 2011

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vedoucí diplomové práce