



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

OPPONENT'S REPORT

M.A. THESIS

AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION

Emerson's Influence on Women in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne

Tereza Teršová

Ms. Teršová eloquently argues for the importance of Emerson's presence in Hawthorne's writing, as manifested in the latter author's four romances: *The Scarlet Letter*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*. Her focus is on Hawthorne's female heroines, who apparently "illustrate Hawthorne's, and many women's, undecided stance on the Woman Question" (90). As a whole, the thesis is an accomplished text that may be graded **excellent** – (výborně –), although several questions could have been elaborated.

First, the thesis could have clarified the connection between Emerson and Hawthorne, and it could have drawn clearer conclusions from establishing such a connection. It is argued for example that "[l]ike many of his colleagues, Hawthorne too was attracted to—or at least challenged and unsettled by—the groundbreaking thoughts and concepts brought up by Emerson's work" (17), but the only evidence that the thesis provides consists in identifying some concerns that the two authors shared. Is there any other evidence that would illustrate Emerson's "influence on Hawthorne" (17)? And what is achieved by highlighting their connection? (The same question could be asked about the centrality of Emerson for the formation of the African-American and Women's Rights Movements.)

Second, feminism could have been defined (or complicated) in the thesis in order to clarify what is understood by Hawthorne's feminist and anti-feminist tendencies. The text implies that feminism consists in seeking self-reliance, self-expression and independence, but I think that many feminists, rather than focusing solely on the affirmation of the self, have sought as their objectives equality and the end of exploitation based on sexual difference. And I do not see how that could be automatically achieved as a consequence of self-reliance. In fact, could the notion of self-reliance function in anti-feminist discourse?

Also, since Ms. Teršová repeatedly highlights the liberating aspects of "acknowledging one's nature and inner guidance" as opposed to the "morally derelict" favoring of nurture (27), I wonder if she could address potential problems inherent in such an enterprise. How is one to "distinguish between nature and nurture" (26) in the first place?

Finally, moving on to the interpretation of Hawthorne's novels—which I consider the most satisfying parts of the thesis, disregarding the consistently conflated distance between Hawthorne and his narrators—I wonder, for example, if Hester indeed "remains true to her own inner rules, the ones she has enacted by herself" (22). At the start of the novel, she submits to her husband's demand not to reveal his identity, and her motherhood (which the



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thesis sees as the reason for the conventional strain in Hester's character) does not require her to accept her punishment nor to return to America from Europe at the end. Also, I'm confused by what is argued about Zenobia on pages 72-73. If "her self-reliance in fact leads her to affirm her 'femininity'" (72), why is the notion of self-reliance in the novel "described as inherently masculine and therefore problematic for 'womanhood'"? (73)

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