

David Robbins, thesis opponent

Thesis evaluation

Slavka Strouhalova

Sign, Symbol and Allegory in Hawthorne's Stories and *The Scarlet Letter*

This thesis examines the nature and use of signs (signifier, signified, cultural coding), symbols, and allegory/irony in three of Nathaniel Hawthorne's works: "The Minister's Black Veil," "The Artist of the Beautiful," and *The Scarlet Letter*.

Through detailed, insightful, and revealing textual analysis of these devices in the respective works, Ms. Strouhalova indicates the fragmentation, contradiction, conflict, ambiguity, and inconsistency that characterize their deployment in these works. Thereby, she suggests is "clear" meaning regularly subverted, questioned, or taken away, and unity, integrity, and wholeness of interpretation (or "grand narrative") undermined and disrupted.

In the process, Ms. Strouhalova also highlights the ambiguity, polyvalence, and "vagueness" (whether intentional or not) not only of Hawthorne's symbolic apparatus, but also of his characters and of their moral and existential situations—repeatedly forcing his readers out of traditional codes and systems of interpretation and into the formulation of new (and generally less binary) modes and paradigms of construction, understanding, and problematization. Hawthorne's liberating explosion of established meaning-determining conventions, Ms. Strouhalova recognizes as implementation of a power implicit in the "romance" form articulated by Hawthorne and in Emerson's metaphor of consciousness as an unending series of ever-widening, self-generated circles of comprehension.

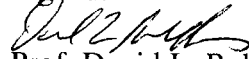
In all of the above, Ms. Strouhalova discovers Hawthorne to be a very "modern," or even postmodern, writer and sensibility.

The exceptional analysis and insight of the thesis are reinforced by the exemplary fluency and stylistic grace with which they are presented. One particularly revealing example is provided by her exposition of Sacvan Bercovitch's dilemma of the Puritan self, and her discussion of its potential utility in explicating (at least part of) Hawthorne's symbolic apparatus. Her discussion of how this conception of the self, in various ways, continued to influence the formulations and articulations of nineteenth-century Transcendentalism—and even of Hawthorne himself—provides a further instance.

Still another is to be found in her subtle handling of the interrelationship between allegory and irony, the former of which she affirms to be "an ironic tropological disposition of discourse itself" (p. 80), and the latter, "the subversive trope par excellence" (p. 52)

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne"

Signed:



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