

Supervisor's Report on the M.A. Thesis **Sign, Symbol and Allegory in Hawthorne's Stories and *The Scarlet Letter*** by **Slávka Strouhalová**

The thesis provides valuable insights into the problem of allegorical and symbolic interpretation of some chief works by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the stories "The Minister's Black Veil" and "The Artist of the Beautiful" and the romance *The Scarlet Letter*. The writer has dedicated considerable effort to the interpretation of Saussurean and deconstructionist theories of sign (de Man, Hillis Miller) and has also made a foray into a complicated terrain of Deleuze's theory of sign. In addition, she has given some attention to the problems of representational and expressive aesthetics. Her theoretical and methodological reflections in the first chapter give tenor and structure to the interpretation of the above-mentioned texts which represents a refreshing alternative to the historicizing approaches, although it is well-informed about some of them, especially Colacurcio's tome *In the Province of Piety*.

My comments are rather suggestions for further work on the theme than serious criticism:

1. The author should also consider other semiotic theories, especially, the theory of ternary sign developed by Charles Morris and elaborated by C.S. Peirce. Especially their attempts to distinguish between "icons", "indexes" and "symbols" are relevant for understanding Hawthorne's allegory and symbolism.
2. It is well known that the Puritan thought was informed by the theories of rhetoric and logic of Peter Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée). It would be interesting to find out how Ramus's emphasis on the logical process of *inventio* – formulating an argument and using specific *topoi* (comparison – similarity and difference). Hawthorne's writing should be seen as undermining the formal logical basis of Puritan allegory.
3. Discussing Hawthorne's allegory, the author should give more attention to de Man's theory of language as allegory developed in *Allegories of Reading* and relate it to Hillis Miller's performative understanding of "tropes" and "parables".
4. Discussing Hawthorne's aesthetics, the writer should more clearly distinguish between "mechanism" (the steam engine in "The Celestial Railroad") and "machine" using Deleuze's theory of sign and structure. Moreover, she should examine other examples of "machines" in Hawthorne, for instance the puppet show in the "Main-Street" as a representation of Salem colonial history. She should also pay attention to Deleuze's notion of "assemblage" useful in discussing other allegories, especially "Feathertop".
5. "The Minister's Black Veil" should be read in a wider context of Hawthorne's tales of the alienation and crisis of individual subjectivity, especially "Wakefield", "Ethan Brand" or "Rappacini's Daughter".
6. The problem of otherness in *The Scarlet Letter* should be discussed more systematically, contrasting the symbolic functions of Hester and Pearl (other ethics/ethics of the other, and nature as the other. This could be done in contrasting Deleuzean and Derridean interpretations of sign (the focus on *explication*, and *apprentisage* on the one hand, and *difference*, on the other).

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it "výborně".

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