

Thesis Abstract

The political aspect of literature, specifically fiction, has always provoked passionate discussions, both in academia and in mainstream media. Avoiding politics might rob literary works of their context and power, while reducing them to mere political manifestos denies these works their aesthetic qualities and underestimates the role of fiction. One has to take into consideration the important fact that politics in works of fiction is crucially shaped by the historical context and is thus beyond the author's control.

The thesis examines how the political aspect of literature functions, and the focus is narrowed down to two dystopic novels which critically deal with life in a neoconservative community; namely Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives*. The analysis of how the atavistic communities in the novels are constructed to appear illiberal, undemocratic or even fascist requires research not only in the field of literary theory (or aesthetics), but also in philosophy.

The thesis involves two streams of inquiry – the first one is centred on the community itself and on its totalitarian tendencies, where the works of Roberto Esposito and Hannah Arendt are of great importance, as they determine the dynamics of a community. Furthermore, they explain the reasons for the emergence of a community that tries to overturn the seemingly irreversible progress in the field of human rights. This research is applied in the analysis of the communities appearing in the mentioned novels.

The second stream of inquiry focuses specifically on the politics of literature and gains its relevance mostly from Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. There are various issues which have to be consulted and resolved, for example the possibility that the development of the historical context will alter the political aspect of the novel or completely bury it, as future readers will not understand it. As a result, it is crucial that this theoretical background is applied not only to the novels themselves, but also to the TV and film adaptations of them. Those adaptations reveal a great deal about the way in which the original "political message" of these novels has been re-told, misinterpreted or appropriated to fit its own era or a certain agenda.

The result of my thesis should determine how the political aspect of the chosen novels operates not only in the context of literary criticism, but also in the social and political atmosphere in the United States (incidentally, I am aware that Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author, yet the fictitious Gilead regime in *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the United States and the novel accordingly reacts to various tendencies in this country). The conclusion might allude to a few thoughts on the desirability and the role of the political aspect of literature in general.