

Alona Yavtushenko

‘A Variety of Perspectives: The Role of the Narrator in Selected British Dystopian Novels’
BA thesis

Opponent’s Report

The BA thesis sets out to compare the narrative situations in three classic “British dystopian novels” and to determine “how the specific narrative strategies contribute to the texts’ efficiency.” The selected texts, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, represent a standard, indeed a “canonical” choice for dystopian studies, forming a well-trodden topic, and the thesis uses “Gérard Genette’s theory of narrative and his concept of focalization”, a well-established theoretical framework.

The thesis embarks on a promising line of enquiry into the narrative techniques and various types of focalisation, and the findings of each chapter are summarised in the conclusion which in effect repeats the basic premise of the abstract and the introduction. The individual logical steps form a convincing argument overall. On a scope limited by the format of the thesis, the candidate’s analysis is somewhat repetitive on occasion, and tending towards a pragmatic and/or moral, rather than an aesthetic reading, but the argument is well-informed and well-organised into coherent subsections. The conclusion, relatively short, just over two pages long, repeats the main points of the thesis. The strength of the thesis lies in its engagement with Genette’s theoretical framework and keen close reading of the selected novels and their narrators, clearly showing the differences between them and their varying effects on the reader. The candidate’s choice of secondary material is varied and relevant, her employment of theoretical lines of enquiry into the chosen literary texts often illuminating. Despite a certain inclination to appraise works of fiction in terms of their “efficiency”, “viability”, “successful relatability” and “cautionary” potential, which are all problematic terms, the thesis shows promise and testifies to the candidate’s knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking.

As to formal aspects, when it comes to language, there is a small inflection error in the Czech abstract (“s teorií vyprávění Gérarda Genetteho”), as well as an awkward translated phrase, preceded by a typo – “roman zdůrazňuje nemravnost klonování lidí” – where the English original is “immorality”; perhaps “unethical” or “amoral” rather than “immoral” would have been a better word choice. Otherwise, the thesis is written in a clear and confident style

and follows a good standard of academic English. Referencing is done meticulously and the bibliography is well-organised.

I have a couple of questions for the candidate to respond to during her viva voce examination, on some of the points that could have been discussed in more detail in the thesis:

- 1) Given that the first two novels are classics of the genre, are there any discernible echoes of either in Ishiguro's 2005 novel?
- 2) In your opinion, what connects these three novels most strongly in terms of their aesthetic and ethical concerns?

To conclude, I am very happy to recommend the thesis for defence and propose a preliminary mark of 'excellent' (výborně), pending the candidate's performance during the viva voce examination.

30 August 2021

Mgr. Miroslava Horová, PhD.