

Adéla Chvátalová, *Dystopia in Two 1950s American Science Fiction Novels*

BA thesis

Opponent's Review

The aim of this BA thesis was to discuss dystopic motifs in two American 1950s novels, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Frederick Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants*. A larger part of the thesis presents a more general topic of the definition and history of science fiction and dystopias, prevalingly of those written in the Anglophone world, where the student finally identifies the aspects she would apply in the analytical part.

In her overview of the two concepts she uses a number of relevant critical sources, which she tends to explore, and usually quote, at times rather too fastidiously, as if wishing not to lose anything that can be said about the topic. Which results in occasional lack of clarity and focus, especially when the reader has to tackle almost endless references to the compiled sources (a tedious repetition of sentences like "As This and This says in his essay 'XY'"). A more selective approach would make, I believe, the student's arguments more transparent and convincing. On the other hand, her dependence on the information excerpted from her critical sources leaves aside, for example, such notorious texts of space travel as Cyrano's *Voyage dans la Lune* (1957) and *Les États et Empires du Soleil* (1662) or a good number of Utopian texts, not to speak about the 1950s US scene of SF writings.

There are several questions inspired by both the theoretical and analytical parts:

First of all, is it useful to understand dystopia as part of the SF genre or is it more practicable to treat the two genres separately, given the longer history of the texts presenting alternative social structures and systems? And what is the principal difference between science fiction and dys/eu-topia, if there is any?

The student uses the terms utopia and anti-utopia on p. 24., claiming that dystopia is a genre between these two. How does she define anti-utopia?

She characterizes *The Space Merchants* as a satirical novel (49). What is the difference between satirical and non-satirical dystopias, as far as their motivation and execution is concerned? Is there a history of satirical dystopias in Anglophone literatures which might have inspired the authors?

Why does the student see the hero's escape to Venus as a "source of hope" (56) when Venus is known to be inhospitable and inhabitable?

On p. 31, the student says, in relation to *Fahrenheit 451*, that critical thinking creates unrest and disorder or psychological and social instability which is then "perfect for the spread of the propaganda". Could she explain what she means? Her reading of the novel does not seem to support this.

In the quote on p. 38 we read that Winston and Julia (in Orwell's novel) act as catalysts "to bring the latent dissatisfaction of the protagonist to the surface". Who is meant by this protagonist?

The assertion that “during the 1950s, some texts were heavily oriented towards antiutopian pessimism such as the works of George Orwell” (27) is inaccurate. George Orwell died in January 1950.

Linguistically, the thesis would benefit from one more revision. There are words dropped, there are occasional grammar mistakes (e.g. “Bould and Vint says” 10, “way how”, “typical for”) or minor formal drawbacks (unitalicized title).

On the other hand, the student’s comments on the two novels are relevant. It’s a pity she did not reserve more space to the analytical section and did not say more about the two texts.

I recommend Adéla Chvátalová’s BA thesis for defence and suggest the preliminary mark to be “very good” (2).

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran, Ph.D.

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