

Martin Šinal', **Analysis of Political Dystopia in George Orwell and His Successors**
BA thesis
Supervisor's report

The present BA thesis focuses on the genre of (political) dystopia as it appears mostly in English-written 20th-century fiction. The texts M. Šinal' deals with are Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, assumably the most representative books of Anglophone literatures written after World War II. This modern period is introduced by a brief account of the long history of utopian writings, whose roots Šinal' sees, inspired mostly by a recent book by L. T. Sargent, in ancient Greek poetry, drama and mythology. An important change in the character of the utopian/dystopian visions is identified in the late 19th century, due to "increasing effectiveness of the Industrial Revolution, globalization and geographical discoveries around the world"; it is to be regretted that these conditions are not examined in more detail and that the turn from utopianism to more pessimistic political and social visions is left more or less unexplained.

The major argument on which Šinal's comments are built in the chapters dedicated to the three novels is a distinction between the anti-utopia and dystopia. Though a rather narrow conception, it allowed him to include many valuable views of how the genre develops from Orwell to Atwood (and briefly taking also into account the fact that there are important predecessors such as Forster, Zamyatin or Huxley). Detailed commenting on the character of the analysed novels proves Šinal's ability to read the texts critically and to see them in their respective historical contexts (from the postwar political instability to the rise of radical feminism in later decades).

The last part of the thesis is the section addressing four specific issues. Its inclusion seems to be only partly justified, though. While the chapter discussing the use of sex motifs in dystopia brings a new perspective, the other chapters scarcely go beyond general statements of facts, without any deeper insight. To illustrate this, let me quote the concluding paragraph of the chapter on "Language and Propaganda": "In *This Perfect Day* there is no need for a complicated and careful propaganda because the members believe anything they are told by their advisors. An alteration has been made though, namely the erasure of 'free' islands from all maps of The Family in order to hide the fact that there are still incurables living outside of The Family." (49) Yet the strategy of the power is more sophisticated: the 'free' islands were erased imperfectly, perhaps to let the rebels discover them and create an illusion of the possibility to escape the absolute control of The Family. *This Perfect Day* is thus more ambiguous as far as the issue of manipulation is concerned and the mechanisms of power simply deserve more attention.

To conclude: I consider M. Šinal's thesis to be a good attempt to deal with the genre which is not as often a subject of critical scrutiny as other genres and believe that especially his comments on what constitutes a specific character of the three analysed novels are valuable. I **recommend** the thesis for defence, to be marked either **excellent** or **very good** (depending on the character of the defence).

18 June, 2012

PhDr. Zdeněk Beran