



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

OPPONENT'S REPORT
M.A. THESIS
AMERICAN LITERATURE SPECIALISATION
Turn Their Lights Out, Change the Channel: Depiction of Media in British Dystopian Fiction
Bc. Pavel Bakič

In the opening pages, we learn that the thesis “follows the motif of media in chosen primary texts” (6), namely *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Brave New World*, and *When the Sleeper Wakes*. A more central preoccupation of Mr. Bakič, however, seems to be history, as media in these dystopias are analysed primarily in relation to historicity (or rather its suppression). This is not a criticism because the relationship of utopian and dystopian fiction to history has fascinated many critics, and the thesis seriously and systematically engages with the subject via discussing media.

From my perspective, this is an excellent thesis. Some ideas could have been more unwrapped; for example, on p. 7, Mr. Bakič speaks about a “negative manifestation of ‘utopian impulse’ that Ernst Bloch sees in remotest human actions lead by the ‘principle of hope’” (7). What is a “negative manifestation” of the utopian impulse? And if there is a utopian impulse, is there a dystopian impulse?

In the introduction, the thesis indirectly proposes that the genre of dystopia was not formed until the infamous trinity of dystopias by Zamyatin, Orwell, Huxley provided the foundation stone. This is not a polemical issue; although the word “dystopia” had existed at least since the eighteenth century, it was customary to consider both “better” and “worse” places as “utopias.” Why then did the twentieth century establish two separate genres?

Minor objections: I am not convinced that the “visitor plot” vs. the “conflict-centred plot” is a useful criterion for distinguishing utopias from dystopias (p. 9). It derives from the truism that “utopias have no conflict,” which is not only a misleading description (the plot of many works, like Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, is driven by conflict), but also a damaging prescription; i.e. if there is conflict, the text does not qualify as a utopia, which results in the genre’s stale nature.

And I am equally hesitant to accept a line between British and American dystopias on the basis of their different treatment of the media (p. 12), but rather than presenting a counterargument, I would like to ask why could or should there be such a difference?

That said, however, it needs to be repeated that the thesis of Mr. Bakič is an ambitious text which successfully combines abstract theories with close reading of primary works. It illustrates how these dystopias seek to “establish an ‘endless present’, in which hope for change is undesirable” (p. 19); how they neutralize “any empowering aspects of new electronic media and relapse into earlier, less democratic forms of communication” (p. 58); and how their inhabitants ultimately “function as propaganda-broadcasting media” (p. 58). It deserves an excellent grade.

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
27th January 2013

Proposed Grade: Výborně (Excellent)