

OPPONENT'S REPORT

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., Opponent

Marie Hamsikova

M.A. thesis evaluation

Other Places: Visions of Utopia in Selected African-American Novels

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

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Ms. Hamsikova has undertaken to discuss three novels by African-American writers, which have sometimes been classed as "utopian" or "dystopian," from the perspective of Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia."

The result is some very good, occasionally outstanding, textual and contextual analysis and interpretation of Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936-37), and Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997).

In her thesis, Ms. Hamsikova clearly demonstrates herself to be a good reader, an articulate and fluent explicator, and, in many places, a good analyst.

The problems that do arise have mainly to do with her attempts to deploy and utilize the concept of heterotopia. "Heterotopia" was an undeveloped concept tentatively, experimentally, and exploratorily introduced by Foucault in one lecture in 1967, the only source for which is a version unauthorized by Foucault himself. Unlike many of his innovative concepts, Foucault seems to have done little with this one to flesh out its contours, structure, implications, virtues, and defects.

This leaves Ms. Hamsikova in a somewhat problematic situation as she attempts to deploy and explore the relation of this concept to African-American writing in general, and to these three novels in particular. She suggests, at one point, that we might regard DuBois's "double consciousness" as a species of the heterotopian discourse. This is interesting, and her point that heterotopias are neither utopias *nor* dystopias—and thus powerfully ambiguous analytic tools—is potentially useful; but it raises issues of, for example, whether *all* African-American relations (literary and otherwise) are heterotopian, whether *only* African-American ones are, or whether *all* relations (African-American and otherwise) are. One suspects, at times, that she might have clarified things, for herself and her reader, had she juxtaposed "imagined communities" discourse in places with heterotopia.

One wonders, in addition, about Ms. Hamsikova's characterization (pp. 20-21) of *Imperium in Imperio* (and, implicitly, the other two novels under consideration) as "science fiction" or "romance," in the distinctly American Renaissance-derived usage of the latter term. And about her conclusion that "Emmanuel Goldstein," as it is deployed in *Black Empire*, is intended to be a representative "white" name (p. 36).

Despite these problems, this is, in my view, an interesting and generally competent master's thesis, on which Ms. Hamsikova is to be congratulated.

Thesis evaluation: Between "1, vyborne" and "2, velmi dobre"

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.