



FACULTY OF ARTS
OF CHARLES UNIVERSITY
IN PRAGUE



Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**OPPONENT'S REPORT
BA THESIS**

**After the Future Went Away: The Dystopian and Current Trends in Modern Speculative
British Fiction**

Barbora Šedivá

Barbora Šedivá's "After the Future Went Away: The Dystopian and Current Trends in Modern Speculative British Fiction" is an interesting text which in three chapters discusses science fiction from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to more recent works by Iain Banks, Ken MacLeod, Adam Roberts, Charles Stross and Chris Beckett. My overall impression is that the thesis is ambitious regarding the amount of primary and secondary material it hopes to examine, which is praiseworthy but ultimately problematic because in such a short text it leads to superficial analysis and generalizations. The former is evident primarily in the third chapter, which attempts to cover five novels by the above-mentioned contemporary authors. Some thematic continuities are highlighted here, but a more in-depth discussion of these works and their differences would have been good (even at the expense of reducing their number).

Generalizations appear already in the Abstract, where five novels by Banks, MacLeod, Roberts, Stross and Beckett are taken to "represent the contemporary British speculative fiction in all of its diversity, providing a spectrum of different alternative societies located all over the universe" (v). Does not this rather reflect Ms. Šedivá's choice? Is there no science fiction by female and non-white authors? Likewise, concerning her list of "the most prominent and recurring themes in dystopian literature" (iv), which apparently include "the manipulation through language and media, the loss of individual freedom and privacy, and the abuse of power by elites" (iv), what about environmental destruction? Religious fundamentalism? Abuse of technology? Control of women and racial minorities? Aren't these common concerns of contemporary dystopian fiction, including the fiction of the authors she addresses?

In addition, Ms. Šedivá does not always accurately introduce her secondary sources; e.g. Darko Suvin's discussion of science fiction and utopia is misrepresented (9). Or, to stay in the same paragraph, where in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* is it stated that the difference between utopia and science fiction is the reliance of the former on political revolutions and of the latter on technological revolutions? There is no reference to this on page 222, which the thesis identifies as the source. The subsequent discussion of utopia and *Utopia* is also misleading. (Is More's *Utopia* a "novel"?) In fact, several times in the thesis Ms. Šedivá uses the words "utopia" and "dystopia" interchangeably; for example in the Introduction she claims that the last chapter "attempts to investigate the themes of utopian literature at the turn of the twenty-first century" (17) but elsewhere she refers to the novels by Banks, MacLeod, Roberts, Stross and Beckett as dystopias. What, then, is her view of each of these texts?

Pavla Veselá, PhD.
June 13, 2016

Proposed grade: Very good (2).