

**SUPERVISOR'S REPORT**  
**MA THESIS**  
**Feminist Science Fiction: Cherie Priest's *The Clockwork Century***  
**Bc. Petra Nováková**

The commendable impulse behind Bc. Nováková's thesis to discuss feminism in a relatively unknown steampunk series *The Clockwork Century* by Cherie Priest is weakened by an uncritical treatment of the novels. The first two chapters, which take up approximately a half of the entire thesis, are stronger in that they pay attention to gender in science fiction (sf). Even here, however, the discussion could have been more careful. Marlene S. Barr is cited frequently but other critics of sf are only briefly referenced. Some generalizations thus remain unquestioned, e.g. the very first sentence where it is claimed that sf “is in its nature a subversive genre” (12)—why is sf in its nature subversive? And is *The Clockwork Century* even sf?

The discussion of feminism is undeveloped as well; I have stressed to Bc. Nováková that her understanding of feminism as “actively embracing any and all opportunities” (14) leads her to argue later on in the thesis that women's liberation consists in obtaining a gun and becoming a law enforcer like Briar Wilkes or an opportunistic spy like Maria Isabella Boyd (who sees working for the Confederacy and working for the Union in terms of “career options” [86]). Even Maria's single-handed decision to kill Katherine Haymes is ultimately judged positively as “the only way to ensure peace” (92).

On a related note, although Bc. Nováková has reflected to some extent on her treatment of war and weaponry in the thesis, war in general and the Civil War in particular are considered here as a “vehicle for technological progress” (16), “vehicle for innovation” (29), a “unique option for gender equality” (45), and so on. To view war in such terms is misguided (I've recommended Bc. Nováková to read for example Herbert Marcuse's *Technology, War and Fascism* as well as *Negations*, neither of which is mentioned in the thesis). The fascination with various weapons in *The Clockwork Century* series is preposterous and should have been criticized. How can Bc. Nováková claim that “the perspective Priest adopts is [...] one that assesses violence as inherently evil and war as unethical” (30) when she admits elsewhere that “the image of women wielding guns is not depicted as something negative, quite the contrary” (33)?

Last but not least, I have requested Bc. Nováková to seriously think about Priest's approach to history and asked her, for example, to consider the consequences of the author's making a Confederate officer Sally Louisa Tompkins into a “heroine.” *The Clockwork Century* series is underwritten by a careless attitude to history, which is evident also in various interviews Priest has given. To her, it seems, American history is not a story of violence and injustice but excitement and fun; the Civil War is a chance to fly in gleaming dirigibles, an Indian burial ground a thrilling home of zombies. What are the ethical and political consequences of Priest's fictional revisionism? Whose ideological purpose does it serve? These questions remain unreflected in the thesis.

For the reasons outlined above I suggest that the thesis be graded at best “dobře” (good), depending on the defense and the views of the opponent as well as the committee.

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