

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., thesis opponent

Petra Nováková

Feminist Science Fiction: Cherie Priest's *The Clockwork Century*

M.A. thesis evaluation

Thesis Supervisor: Mgr. Pavla Veselá, PhD

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Charles University

Ms. Nováková's thesis focuses quite narrowly on Cherie Priest's *The Clockwork Century* series--*Boneshaker* (2009), *Dreadnought* (2010), *Clementine* (2010), *Ganymede* (2011), and *Fiddlehead* (2013) as a central and characteristic contribution to the so-called "steampunk" genre of feminist science fiction. Steampunk's principal thrust comprises, in the words of Marleen S. Barr, whom Ms. Nováková describes as "one of the pioneers [1981-2003] of feminist science fiction criticism" (5, l. 2), "metafiction about patriarchal fiction" (5, l. 5), a pro-active approach to the "re-defining of gendered space" through which writers [can] "reconceive narrative space" in order "to unmask the fictionality of patriarchy" (105, l. 14-16). In the process, posits Ms. Nováková, the genre undertakes to subvert dualism, particularly of gender, but also of race, regionalism, and culture, in favor of the nominalism characteristic of much modernist and postmodernist analysis and discourse; to "trouble the epistemological boundaries between history and fiction, between realism and speculative fiction, and between reality and representation" (53, l. 2-3); and to expose the "narrative-making processes at work in any representation of history" (53, l. 17-18).

Steampunk, treated as competently as it is by Ms. Nováková in relation to contemporary feminist gender and literary theory, is nonetheless also treated by her, in this reader's judgment, too much in problematical and unhelpful isolation from its important and influential literary predecessors, context, and other valuable contemporary criticism, *inter alia*:

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974)

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976)

Doris Lessing, *Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta* (1979), first book in her five-book Canopus in Argos series

Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993)

Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (New York: Routledge, 1991)

Chris Ferns, *Narrating Utopia: Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999)

Katerina Kounovska, *A Dream Shared: Community and Politics in Selected 19th and 20th Century American Utopias* (M.A. Thesis, Charles University, Prague, 2009)

Along these same lines, the connective implications of certain of Ms. Nováková's characterizations of steampunk fiction remain unexamined. For example, if the insertion of a character of modernist or postmodernist sensibilities into a previous historical era (whether altered or not) be a principal characteristic of the steampunk genre, then might not Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and the American romance species of speculative/utopian fiction in general to which it belongs, be instructively considered as direct antecedents of and contributors to steampunk sensibility and problematic?

Despite these failures of contextual awareness (which would be much less troubling in a B.A. thesis than in the current M.A. undertaking), Ms. Nováková's treatment, in the previously noted troubling isolation, of the steampunk genre, Cherie Priest's place within it, and her characters'

exemplification, embodiment, and manifestation of what Ms. Nováková identifies as many of the principal preoccupations of the genre, is handled comprehensively (one might even say exhaustively) and well.

Finally, and unaccountably, Ms. Nováková's in-depth consideration of *The Clock Century* series entirely omits *The Inexplicables* (2012).

Overall, based on a balance of effective inclusions and impoverishing omissions, I would evaluate Ms. Nováková's thesis as worthy of a grade of "2, velmi dobre."

Thesis evaluation: "2, velmi dobre."

Signed:

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D.
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures
January 14, 2017

If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz.