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American Consumerism of the 1950s in The Space Merchants
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ANNOTATION

The thesis is focused on analyzing the book *The Space Merchants*, written in 1953 by Kornbluth and Pohl, in terms of American consumerism. Apart from that, it compares the American and British culture and consumerism mainly of the 1950s. Lastly, it examines the genre of the analyzed book which is science-fiction and introduces the most prominent writers for this genre.

KEYWORDS

consumerism, consumption, 1950s, science-fiction, *The Space Merchants*, America

ANOTACE

Cíl této práce je zaměřen na zkoumání konzumistických znaků v díle *Obchodníci s Vesmírem* napsaném v roce 1953 dvěma americkými spisovateli Kornbluthem a Pohlem. Kromě toho také prozkoumává padesátá léta dvacátého století jak v America, tak Británii. Dále porovnává Americký a Britský konzumerismus, a to převážně v padesátých letech dvacátého století, a v neposlední řadě zkoumá žánr analyzované knihy a literaturu jako takovou v tomto období.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

konzumerismus, spotřeba, padesátá léta, science-fiction, *Obchodníci s Vesmírem*, Amerika

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“The world is our oyster. We have made it come true. But we have eaten that oyster.”
Frederik Pohl, *The Space Merchants*

INTRODUCTION

There have always been social and political problems but the key to overcome them is usually challenging to find. One of such effective solutions may be consumerism as it fulfils the void caused, for instance, by terrible political events. The obsession with shopping helps to avert the attention from unpleasant situations. Hence, consumerism in the fifties was booming and it truly functioned as a safety anchor after the Second World War. However, the authors Pohl and Kornbluth had seen a possible threat in the way it was developing. Therefore, they created a literary work which shows the drawbacks of extreme buying and its consequences in the future.

This paper's main goal is then to find symbols of consumerism in their collaboration in the form of the science fiction book *The Space Merchants*. Firstly, the misconception of consumption and consumerism will be studied. Additionally, there are other terms related to this topic such as, public relations, advertisement and capitalism introduced in the first chapter. In the second chapter, the topic consumerism remains but is analysed in the historical context of the United States and Britain. The development and principally manifestation of it in the 1950s is subsequently compared. Nevertheless, apart from studying consumerism in these two countries, there are also included historical events that lead to the emergence of it.

The third chapter deals with the studied book's genres and subgenres. As a result, the reader discovers that *The Space Merchants* is a dystopian science fiction novel but at the same time a satire. These genres are introduced closer and their typical features are described. Moreover, the most prominent writers of science fiction are mentioned and compared with Pohl and Kornbluth. All this is followed by the concluding chapter in which gained knowledge from the previous parts is applied while analysing citations from the book. The analysis consists of finding consumerist features as well as projection of historical events of the twentieth century and lastly, looking for a justification for the book's genres.

1 CONSUMERISM AND CONSUMPTION

For the sake of further analysis, we firstly need to clarify technical terms, which might be confusing for those who are not involved in the topic, since the topic is quite complex. Especially, the understanding of consumerism and consumption may be in various occasions perplexing. Despite the fact that people use these words to refer to the same thing, there is a slight difference between them. There is a number of definitions and technical terms, which help us to come to better comprehension of the whole concept of the consumer society – a society that buys products that does not necessarily need.¹ Consumerism and consumption can be found in various books on different topics and due to this, the misconception of the previously mentioned two terms still increases. Except for this misunderstanding, the term consumer movement might be misleading, too. Therefore, we should bear in mind that it is not equivalent with consumerism as one could think. Although one might incorrectly use the terms interchangeably, consumer movement indicates a situation in which there is an effort to avoid malpractices on consumers from organizations and, basically, it is the protection of the consumer's rights.² For these reasons, this chapter will primarily focus on differences between consumerism and consumption, but also on other terms which may occur while comparing and studying the terms.

To start with, the word consumerism is believed to have appeared for the first time in the American magazine *The New Republic* in 1944. However, it did not refer to the consumerism as we know it nowadays. At that time, it denoted a cooperative movement which is an action that includes principles of cooperation and that are applied in business. It seems to be impossible to precisely track back in which year exactly the word was used as it is understood nowadays – to describe the philosophy of acquiring amounts of goods and services.³ The word itself has various definitions and the above mentioned is one of them. This particular one is by The Oxford English Dictionary. Another can be derived from the structure of the word and particularly from the suffix -ism. This suffix has multiple meanings but one of them says that

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures. Theory, Culture & Society* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 18.

² Roger Swagler, "Evolution and Applications of the Term Consumerism: Theme and Variations." *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1994): 47–53.

³ Swagler, "Evolution and Applications of the Term Consumerism: Theme and Variations.", 54–60.

words containing it refer to a doctrine, a system of principles or a theory.⁴ It has social and economic impact and therefore these definitions will be the most important for this analysis.

Firstly, it may be understood by some sociologists as an ideology about a phenomenon which occurs when people are acquiring great amounts of goods and services in order to satisfy their inner self and because they have resources for purchasing them.⁵ This is narrowly connected with the term *materialism* – a philosophical belief only in material objects, which has been an inseparable part of consumerism and consumption.⁶ There has been a persuasion among some people that money and possession of things are the most important factors for living a satisfactory life. At this point a question ‘Why do they think so?’ may be asked. According to the professor of sociology Zygmunt Bauman, there was a so-called ‘bulk is power’, ‘big is beautiful’ era, in other words, a time period when there were mass factories which produced products that helped people to deal with present armies, conformity to be ruled and panoptical strategies of domination. As a result of these factors, people were looking for a comfort and stability in material things. Interestingly enough, these possessions were not supposed to be consumed immediately but they were protected and kept as reminders of safe existence.⁷ Based on that, the society can be called consumerist as for such society, the main social and economic goal is buying and selling.

Another explanation of consumerism is economic which claims that consumerism refers to economic policies which encourage extreme acquiring. Nevertheless, these two are only examples out of many other definitions. These paradoxically may not be related and sometimes they are also confusing. It depends on a point of view we are preferring when analyzing the meanings.⁸

In comparison with consumerism, consumption is characterized as an action and a personal trait. Consumption starts when a customer can afford buying and actually does so. It is a natural act for the human kind which has its roots as ancient as living organisms. Moreover, consumption is also an inevitable aspect of life which we have in common with all the living

⁴ Pavol Štekauer and Rochelle Lieber, *Handbook of Word-Formation* (The Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 436.

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 24.

⁶ Jane Listers, “Consumerism.” In *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Politics and Governance*, ed. Philipp H. Pattberg, and Fariborz Zelli (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2015), 9–16.

⁷ Buman, *Consuming Life*, 25–30.

⁸ Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures. Theory, Culture & Society*, 13.

organisms in purpose to survive. The only difference between us is the fact that we have to use money as a means for obtaining vital things, such as food and a shelter. Whereas animals and plants depend only on themselves and their natural ability to survive.⁹

Advertising is therefore a perfect means for making consumption happen. Using mass media such as, television, radio or any other type of it contributes significantly to the rise of interest in a presented product. Nevertheless, even before these inventions, consumption was encouraged through adverts in magazines, banners, and newspapers. These are labelled as traditional media and besides them, there are also used social media and internet for promoting products and services nowadays.¹⁰

Public relations, usually referred to by its abbreviation PR, are also a type of communication with consumers with the aim to ensure that a company has a good reputation among people. Based on good relations, they want to acquire products or services by the company and even might recommend them to others – which is the best way of promotion.¹¹ Nonetheless, PR differentiates from advertising mainly in terms of the length of focus, control and invested money. For adverts, an organization has to pay not a small amount of money but has a complete control over it. Moreover, they are mainly propagated through mass media and are usually only for a short period of time when the managers need to sell their products. On the other hand, public relations are meant to study the long way approach of successful selling. In contrast with advertising, PR is also about feedback from consumers and its aim is to preserve good relationships with targeted groups of clients and opinions about the firm. The founder of public relations was Edward Bernays who was an American with Austrian ancestors.¹² This indicates that advertising, and with it connected consumption and consumerism, has its roots particularly in the United States.

Public relations and advertising are intended for the consumer society for which there is a value rooted in quantity of material things and services which are acquired by people, who actually do not need it. To put it differently, this society lives for ever-increasing purchasing just to

⁹ Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 31–51.

¹⁰ Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 125.

¹¹ Robert L. Heath, *Handbook of Public Relations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 11–20.

¹² "Edward Bernays, 'Father of Public Relations' And Leader in Opinion Making, Dies at 103". *The New York Times*. March 10, 1995. <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/08/16/specials/bernays-obit.html>

satisfy themselves for a short period of time until they exchange their purchases for something else.¹³

The system that is primarily aimed at the profit, therefore public relations and advertising are essential, and that is based on private ownership rather than business controlled by the state is *capitalism*. This system is highly dependent on the consumer society as it determines if the system has a chance to be successful.¹⁴ In the analyzed book by Pohl and Kornbluth, advertising companies have the power over the world not political parties and authorities as one might think.

The economist and philosopher of the 18th century Adam Smith is considered to be the godfather of capitalism. In his publication *The Wealth of Nations and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* he mentions that one of the features of capitalism is a perfect competition. In the *Space Merchants*, there are two competitive advertising agencies. Taunton's Associates and Schocken's Associates between which there is a rivalry. Nevertheless, the competition goes to such extents that even lives of the employees are in danger. Everything centers around a profit from the consumer society. For instance, there is an organized shooting at the head of the Venus project and later on the competition wants to torture him. All that only to have the project for themselves and to be the number one in the business world as an advertising company.¹⁵

The belief that the main economic goal is when the consumers are provided with exactly what they want and need, is called *consumer sovereignty*. It is therefore the consumer who determines if the economy is successful or not.¹⁶ This is perfectly seen in *The Space Merchants* where the protagonist Michel Courtenay is a copywriter who takes care of advertisements which make people long for products that the company that he works for propagates. In the following example, there can be found the consumer sovereignty and Courtenay's methods for making people want the products. This will be also studied thoroughly in the last chapter of the thesis, which will analyze the book itself.

"First, words. We want words that are about Venus, words that'll tickle people. Make them sit up. Make them muse about change, and space, and other worlds. Words to make them a little discontented with what they are and a little hopeful about what they might

¹³ Bauman, *Consuming Life*, 114–124.

¹⁴ James Fulcher, *Capitalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: University Press, 2015), 2.

¹⁵ Frederick Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (London: Gollancz / Orion, 2003), 34–35.

¹⁶ Adrian Kuenzler, *Restoring Consumer Sovereignty: How Markets Manipulate Us and What the Law Can Do About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 176–177.

be. Words to make them feel noble about feeling the way they do and make them happy about the existence of Industries and Starrzelius Verily and Fowler Schocken Associates. Words that will do all these things and also make them feel unhappy about the existence of Universal Products and Taunton Associates."¹⁷

As a consequence of this belief in costumer's needs, there are three essential types of production. Firstly, mass production concentrates on making huge amounts of products but it has its pro and cons. The biggest advantages are that less workers are needed for satisfying consumeristic society and also the fact that it is a fast way of production. On the other hand, there are also disadvantages such as environmental issues – wasting of food and that the demand always changes as consumers change their aspirations over the time. If this happens, products are made in bigger amounts than it is desired and therefore the value of it decreases. This is known as overproduction and the opposite of it is underproduction. Having less merchandise than is needed may be caused by various factors but mostly by poor management or a tough political situation in a country. In this case, a product gains a value and is more expensive and requested. In America, the problem was rather overproduction, as a result of successful economy after the victory in the Second World War, and in Britain it was underproduction, as a consequence of the Second World War, even though they were in alliance with the US. All in all, the perfect situation should be when the supply and demand meet, hence consideration of both must be done to prevent these extremes.¹⁸

Consumerism is usually connected with the Western world but the first civilizations such as Ancient Egypt or Ancient Rome had already shown first signs of consumerism. However, the first departure from a common life towards the consuming one is marked by *Consumerist revolution* in England during the years 1600 and 1750.¹⁹ There was an increase in the interest in luxury possessions such as clothes and decorative objects. Moreover, imported goods were also favored among people. For instance, meat consuming was something that everybody wanted therefore salt was the most wanted since it was used for preservation of meat. The reason for it was that there were no refrigerators back at the time. However, meat and salt were not fully consumer oriented. There was no mass consumption because people bought only what they needed for surviving. Since peasants produced basically everything for themselves, they did not have any urges to spend money for unnecessary goods and objects. They believed that

¹⁷ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 39.

¹⁸ Robert Bacon, and Walter Eltis, *Britain's Economic Problem Revisited* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 112.

¹⁹ Peter N. Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2015), 5–17.

showing that they can acquire more than the others would be inappropriate and offensive. Furthermore, their religion valued the spiritual wealth more than materialistic one.²⁰

Yet the idea of having possessions was present with stratification of the society. Classes are narrowly connected with consumerism as there is usually a group of people at whom products or services are aimed.²¹ Pre-modern consumerism helped the upper class to find their identity and to define them. In contrast with peasants, they enjoyed pleasure provided by having more than the others. Interests in goods differed from a place to place and it depended on what was special for a particular country. For example, people in Mediterranean sought for silk from China, Americans craved tobacco and Britain sugar. Two factors particularly caused the interest in acquiring – the expansion of the empire and the Industrial Revolution.

Although there was stratification between people and the higher classes had means for purchasing but they simply did not consider thinking in consumeristic terms. Peasants valued rather land for cultivating their own crops and farming cattle than wasting money for something temporal and materialistic. Crops, land and farm animals meant a security for generations. This has not changed until the period after the World War I. The war changed the economic standard in America. The system supported capitalism which meant a growth of small businesses and thus a wider range of choice. Before the full emergence of consumerism, there was a complexity concerned with classes that was based on poverty and subsistence economies. Subsequently, the focus changed to the middle class and the lower class because it consisted of a bigger amount of people. The Roaring Twenties are considered a period of the real emergence of consumerism in America. However, during the Great Depression and the Second World War, there was a stop to it. The re-emergence, and this time even greater, was during the 1950s to 1960s and this era is sometimes referred to as the golden age of consumerism.²² After the summit of consumerism, the criticism of the consumer society became common among a number of influencing figures in the English-speaking countries. It gave rise to literary groups that were disapproving of the stereotypical materialistic life of Americans. An example of such movement is the Beat Generation, which was disappointed with the official, American life.

²⁰ Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire*, 20–24.

²¹ Stearns, *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire*, 31.

²² Peter d'Alroy Jones, *The Consumer Society: A History of American Capitalism* (London: Pelican Books, 1965), 281–300.

They ridiculed the society, criticized it and tried to live a completely different life from the standard. This behavior could be labelled as *anti-consumerism*.²³

To illustrate a modern example of consumerism, we must think of *Black Friday* which is celebrated on the 23rd November – a month before the most consumeristic holiday, Christmas. There are usually advertisements weeks before *Black Friday* and this craziness is often prolonged for the whole weekend to bring the producers bigger profits. There are masses of people in the streets with one purpose only – to buy as many things as they can just because they believe there is a huge discount on them. The truth is that companies often strategically lie to consumers and only make the usual prices look as if they were reduced. Consequently, there should be a higher profit for the companies. Nowadays, it is something that people live for and do not even think about the problems that it causes in the society.²⁴

²³ Kim Humphery, *Excess: Anti-consumerism in the West* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 10–11.

²⁴ Sachin Anand Balram, *America: A Country of Great Expectations* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 52–53.

2 AMERICAN AND BRITISH CONSUMERISM IN THE 1950s

In the following paragraphs, there will be addressed the American and British culture of the 1950s mainly in terms of the popular culture and consumerism. Therefore, the main issues will be mentioned from the political situation and the life itself in the fifties to new innovations and interests of people in this period. Furthermore, there will be a comparison between the manifestation of consumer society in the United States and Great Britain throughout the 20th century and in the 1950s.

Before we start, it is necessary to clarify the term popular culture as it will be crucial for the comparison between the American and British society and consumerism in these two countries. There is a number of definitions for it. For instance, according to John Storey, popular culture is a manipulative commercial culture used primarily by the elites to make a profit.²⁵ The more general understanding of a popular culture is that it is a set of beliefs, practices, values and features that go in accordance with the mainstream of a particular era.²⁶ It is basically everything that majority of people prefers and likes in a given period of time.

Another type of a culture which is crucial for this thesis, and that goes hand in hand with the popular one, is *mass culture*. Mass in the term indicates that it is a population that has been influence by mass media greatly. All in all, mass culture is actually a popular culture and mass media together which create an impact on people's actions. They are often bombarded by a product that is propagated with the help of mass media till they eventually want it and believe they need it.²⁷ The process was easily accomplished with the inventions of television, radio and mass media in general as through them, the mainstream knew what was fashionable at a given moment. Consequently, there was a prominent rise of the usage of the terminology popular after the World War II and particularly in the 1950s. For instance, in 1950s America, ordinary people, or in other words the mainstream, was interested in watching the TV – especially comedies and westerns; listening to Elvis Presley's rock and roll and shopping in proliferating shopping malls.²⁸

²⁵ John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, White Plains: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012, 28-30.

²⁶ *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary* (Cambridge: University Press, 2009), 222.

²⁷ James L. Baughman *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 9-12.

²⁸ Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 30–33.

In America, the 1950s is a decade sometimes described as affluent but alienated.²⁹ Series of events that happened even two decades before them had an impact on forming them. Everything started with the Stock Market Crash on October 29, 1929 when the stock prices on Wall Street collapsed.³⁰ This led to a period of unemployment, failure and discontent called the Great Depression. During Great Depression, people lost their jobs, money and struggled for life. All that was aggravated by Dust Bowl in 1930s, which was another disastrous era, but this time caused by natural factors. It was a period of draughts and strong dust storms that disabled farmers to grow crops and consequently they had to move out to a different place. If they did not move out, they would die of hunger or poverty as they did not have jobs. Many of them ended up homeless despite the fact that they moved out of the agriculturally incompatible area.³¹ For the end of the Great Depression is considered the New Deal signed by the former president Franklin D. Roosevelt. New Deal was supposed to provide unemployment insurance, unionization and new job opportunities since it opened 42 new firms. However, some people argue that it was actually the Second World War that ended the Great Depression.³²

The United States officially joined the Second World War in 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in Honolulu, Hawaii. The bomb was intended to prevent Americans from expanding their land to Asia. It was a surprising attack in which about two thousands of people died and another thousand were wounded. Therefore, this Japanese attack left the U.S. with a thirsty desire for a revenge. In 1945, the American air force dropped two atomic bombs over two Japanese cities as a result of the Japanese refusal to surrender. Firstly, on Hiroshima and secondly on Nagasaki with the difference of two days. The bombs marked one of the biggest victories of the American history. Unfortunately, for this victory thousands of civilians had to die.³³

After the World War II, the United States had proven their military power and gained back their lost confidence. Winston Churchill, who was the British Prime Minister between the years 1940 and 1945 and also between 1951 and 1955, said in 1945 that “America stands at the summit of the world.” (Yalta Conference, 1945) He was, indeed, right as everything was booming from

²⁹ Peter B. High, *An Outline of American Literature* (London: Longman, 1991), 100.

³⁰ Thomas C. Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History* (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 81–94.

³¹ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History*, 101–113.

³² Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History*, 113–118.

³³ R. Conrad Stein, *World War II in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2011), 99–112.

the goods available for more people than ever, to economy and the development of suburbs. Economy was due to the government's spending for new technologies and inventions, such as airplanes and computers, doing increasingly better. The inflation and unemployment rates were low, wages were higher, and therefore the United States of America have become finally a prosperous country for majority of people after a long period of discomfort and disasters.³⁴

The fifties sometimes also called "The Fabulous Fifties", are especially known for its booming.³⁵ After the World War II, there were many things that could be described as booms. However, the most distinctive one was so-called Baby Boom. There was a huge rise of new born children as people believed that after the war there should finally follow peace, calm and prosperity. The number of new-born reached 4 million every year in the 1950s.³⁶

As a result of this high birth-rate, people needed to move to sub-urban areas where living would be cheaper. William Levitt, who was a Brooklyn-based urban developer, came with the idea of *Levittowns*. After a huge success of the first Levittown in New York, which started to be built in 1947, there were developed another in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, three in Maryland and one in Puerto Rico. These were originally supposed to be large sub-urban areas meant for World War II veterans and their families who could live in the family houses for an affordable price. To buy a house in Levittown cost about \$6,990 which is in comparison with the contemporary average price estimated for February 2019 by fedprimerate.com \$379,600 ridiculously low.³⁷ Consequently, later on it became a place mainly for young families. Levitt worked with his father and brother under the company name Levitt & Sons, Inc., in which his brother took care of the house designs whereas his father's work was landscaping. William Levitt himself was concerned with advertising, sales and financial matters.³⁸ As a result of the development of these heavily inhabited areas, Pohl and Kornbluth predicted the future of the overpopulated planet and the need for even more houses. This aspect will be further examined in the last chapter of this thesis. However, as it is described in the analyzed book *The Space Merchants*, Pohl and Kornbluth imagined that in the future, even the luxury houses will be tiny because of

³⁴ Howard Cincotta, *An Outline of American History* (S.I.: United States Information Agency, 1994), 254–277.

³⁵ W. H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (Oxford: University Press, 1995), 1–27.

³⁶ *An Outline of American History* (S.I.: United States Information Agency, 1994), 254–277.

³⁷ "Average & Median Sale Price for a New Home," New Home Sales Price History, FedPrimeRate, last modified May 31, 2019, http://www.fedprimerate.com/new_home_sales_price_history.htm

³⁸ Margaret Lundrigan Ferrer and Tova Navarra, *Levittown: The First 50 Years* (USA: Arcadia Publishing, 1997), 15–33.

overpopulation. To pursue this further, although there will be huge and profitable companies, they will have small conference rooms and offices.

"I've been thinking about our conference room," he said, and we all looked around at it. The room isn't big, it isn't small: say ten by twelve. But it's cool, well-lighted, and most imposingly furnished. The air recirculators are cleverly hidden behind animated friezes; the carpeting is thick and soft; and every piece of furniture is constructed from top to bottom of authentic, expertized, genuine tree-grown wood. Fowler Schocken said: "We have a nice conference room here, men. As we should have, since Fowler Schocken Associates is the largest advertising agency in the city. We bill a megabuck a year more than anybody else around. And-- " he looked around at all of us, "I think you'll agree that we all find it worthwhile. I don't think there's a person in this room who has less than a two-room apartment."³⁹

Another growth could be seen, as it was slightly mentioned above, in flourishing economy after the Second World War. The gross national product increased from \$200 thousand-million to 300\$ thousand-million and the US was considered the world's richest country. New inventions such as a colorful TV, microwaves or cars were now affordable for almost everybody. Due to this, there was an increase in the middle class as people could afford buying everything that before only the higher class could. As a result, this decade gave existence to a number of new consumer and social groups.⁴⁰

Sociologists defined six or seven social classes whereas the *occupational class* was believed to affect consumption in two ways: in terms of the educational level and the social status. The standard set of classes used in the 1950s till 1980s was based on the occupation of the head of a family, in other words, the man of a household. It was believed that this man had an influence on the value of living of all family members. The classes were distinguished by letters from A to E with two C classes. The A class included higher managers, administrates or professionals; B Class consisted of intermediate managerial, administrates or professionals; Class C1 supervisors or clerks whereas C2 were skilled manual workers. The last two classes, the class D and E, were considered the lowest as the D class consisted of unskilled or semi-skilled workers; and casual or lowest grade workers, widows, pensioners or long-term unemployed could be found in the absolutely lowest class E. According to O'Brien and Ford, the C2 class of skilled workers was the most numerous one with the 28% of population and the least numerous was the A class of higher managers with only 3%.⁴¹

³⁹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants* (London: Golancz / Orion, 2003), 2.

⁴⁰ David Halberstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993), 15–38.

⁴¹ Robert Bocoock, *Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2015), 7–22.

In the novel *The Space Merchants* the protagonist is a star class copywriter which can be compared to the A class. Judging by the rarity of his status, there is also a scarce number of the highest class in the book. Later on, his identity is stolen, and he gains a new one but this time of the lower social status. As he has to work on a plantation, his new social status may be seen as the D or E class – basically the lowest one. Even in the book, which is a science fiction, we can observe radical differences between privileges of various social spheres as well as contrastive mindsets between the people.

Nevertheless, the fifties were not only an era of prosperity, increase and booming but also of major conflicts. During the most of 1950s, until 1961, the President of the United States was a republican Dwight D. Eisenhower who took the oath of office in 1953. Before Eisenhower, the president was Harry S. Truman and during his presidential period, a number of essential events that continued in the fifties happened. For instance, right after Truman's entry to the position, an atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima during the World War II, he implemented the Marshall Plan, the Cold War started and through his doctrine, he stated the attitude of the United States toward spreading of communism. These conflicts, as it was mentioned, led to another in the 1950s and contributed to the development of the consumer society in the United States.⁴²

A conflict that is considered being the most important political issue of the post-war period and especially of 1950s, is *The Cold War*. It was a political tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. The roots of the disagreement between these two countries go back to the First World War and the Second World War when the countries had different opinions about political arrangements after the wars. Despite the fact that the countries were allies in the World War II against Nazi's Germany, there was still suspicion and distrust between them. The USSR was centralized and autocratic whereas the USA preferred democratic ideology. The start of the Cold War is dated to 1947, however, the long-lasting tension had already been there before.⁴³

This conflict led to the separation of the world to parts under the two leading superpowers. The states that were allies of the USA were called the *Western Bloc* and the USSR associates were called the *Eastern Bloc*. The United States parted with capitalist states and NATO and the Soviet Union had communist states by their side.⁴⁴

⁴² Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History*, 155.

⁴³ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 28–32.

⁴⁴ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 38–45.

Americans developed containment of the Soviet Union which meant that they wanted to keep the Soviet Union's influence within limits. Both superpowers were aware of their technological and military power, therefore they wanted to avoid the direct conflict and a possible atomic attack; hence, there comes the name of the Cold War. The containment started when George Kennan, a diplomat at the American embassy in Moscow, sent a long telegram known as "The Telegram" in which he expressed his opinion about the USSR. He believed that Soviet Union was fanatical and that it is impossible to be in peace with them. For this reason, the best strategy would be patient but vigilant regulation of their tendencies to expand their power and land.⁴⁵

Another manifestation of the Cold War was projected in the *Korean War* that lasted three years starting in 1950 and ending in 1953. It was a war between the communist North Korea with the support of the USSR and China, and the South Korea in alliance with the United States. The war in Vietnam, that had been destructive for both sides, also started in this period, to be precise in 1955, and lasted for twenty lengthy years. As well as in the Korean War, it was the Cold War which caused that the Americans fought in it.⁴⁶

The Cold War only contributed to an uneasy feeling about the USSR which had already been present during the World Wars. When the Second World War ended, the fear from Germans and the Japanese transferred to communists. As a result, *the McCarthy era* emerged at that time. It was an era during which hundreds of Americans were interrogated and accused of being communists. This period lasted between the late 1940s and late 1950s and it started when *Joseph R. McCarthy*, the former senator of Republican Party in the United States, during his speech in West Virginia in 1950 announced that he knows about communists who worked for the US department of state. A period of paranoia, accusations and hearings among people started with the proclamation below.

"Our job as Americans and as Republicans is to dislodge the traitors from every place where they've been sent to do their traitorous work." Joseph McCarthy, speech before the Republican National Convention (1952)

These processes were so-called McCarthyism named after the most vigorous anti-communist senator who initiated them. A considerable number of artists, actors, painters, musicians and writers, were accused of being communists at that time. Majority of them lost their jobs and were prohibited to work because of a "black list" which was actually a collection of names that were believed to have any past or present relations with

⁴⁵ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 35.

⁴⁶ Reeves, *Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History*, 140–143.

communists.⁴⁷ Interestingly enough, science-fiction writers were not harassed even though they had been writing about disastrous future involving political matters, oppression, atomic wars, etcetera. Kornbluth nor Pohl, the writers of *The Space Merchants*, were accused of being communists despite the fact that Pohl had been involved in the communist politic circles in the past. Pohl believed that in spite of the fact that there was no freedom in speaking, the mundane reader could not penetrate science fiction protocols and thus other areas than science fiction writings were attacked. Therefore, this genre became a means which enabled people to have a freedom of their opinions and speech.⁴⁸

The conflict between the USSR and the USA also commenced the *Space Race* which was a rivalry between the countries in terms of the dominance of space technology and deeper exploration of universe. It started in August 1955 when the United States announced their intentions of launching an artificial satellite to space to which the Soviet Union responded that they are planning to do the same in the near future. It was considered a national superiority for which both states made efforts. Therefore, there were firstly launched artificial satellites into space. The First American artificial satellite was *Explorer 1* which started orbiting around the Earth in the 1958. However, *Sputnik 1* was actually the very first artificial satellite in the space, and it was the Soviet Union who launched it in 1957. These launches contributed to a fast development of space science and popularization of it. Moreover, it attributed to the interest in the science fiction writing and in the genre in general as well as the establishment of NASA in 1958. Although many science-fiction writers were affected by the Space Race, the authors of *The Space Merchants* were not as they had already written their book when the competing started. In their case, the driving force was the situation that showed a possible escalation of the social's behavior and sci-fi enabled them to express their opinion publicly.⁴⁹

Apart from political issues as such, there was also *The Civil Rights Movement* that lasted throughout the whole fifties and continued in the sixties too. Although the Civil War, which happened between the years 1861 and 1865, abolished slavery, the black people were still discriminated and did not have the same rights as the whites. For instance, in a bus, they had to

⁴⁷ Peter B. High, *An Outline of American Literature* (London: Longman, 1991), 176.

⁴⁸ Michael Page, *Frederik Pohl* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 47–104.

⁴⁹ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 105–120.

sit only in the back and if a white person came, they had to give up their seats. One of the milestones of the Civil Rights movement was in 1955 when Rosa Parks, a woman who refused to leave her seat normally reserved for the whites in front of the bus, was arrested. Yet another significant person was Jackie Robinson who was a black American baseball player who started to play in the Major League in 1947 and with this success he broke the tradition of colors in an American sport team. In the 1950s, the blacks mainly from the South, despite the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution about voting rights, still could not vote as a consequence of impossible-to-pass literacy tests or other attempts to make sure that they would not vote. The minister of Baptist Church *Martin Luther King Jr.* was tired of all that oppression after he found out about Rosa Parks but as soon as he spoke on the topic publicly, he was arrested, too. Nevertheless, the blacks formed the Montgomery Improvement Association which boycotted bus system for 381 days. Finally, in 1956 the Supreme Court decided that bus segregation as well as segregation at schools is not acceptable and therefore should not be allowed by the constitution. The black gained a victory and found an eloquent and powerful leader of the Civil Rights Movement in Martin Luther King.⁵⁰

In 1957 the *Civil Rights Act* was eventually signed by Eisenhower and it guaranteed a federal intervention in cases where somebody would try to prohibit the blacks to vote. It was considered a huge step forward to a better and equal life for the black community and at the same time the first successful event after the Reconstruction. Furthermore, the act contributed to the commitment to continue fighting against oppression in the following decade.⁵¹

These were the major issues that define the fifties but what was life like in 1950s America for ordinary people? Apart from the always present threat of a war due to the Cold War and other political and civil issues, the citizens had a relatively satisfactory life. The victory in the Second World War brought prosperity into people's lives.⁵²

There is a crucial term *Fordism*, connected with the well-being of post-war period, that should be explained in order to understand the development of the consumer society in America. It is an economic term named after *Henry Ford*, one of the most prominent American entrepreneurs

⁵⁰ Cincotta, *An Outline of American History*, 298–301.

⁵¹ Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 139–145.

⁵² Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 105–120.

from the 20th century. He deserved this title thanks to the car production that he owned and that was extremely successful around the world. The term may describe either the mass production of the 20th century that started by the Ford Motor Company at the beginning of the century; or a post-war economic growth that led to a stronger sense of capitalism.⁵³

It were young people, who still lived with their parents but at the same time had jobs, that influenced the consumer patterns the most in the 1950s. Because teenagers did not have to pay bills yet, they had a remarkable amount of money. Therefore, they could afford buying extra products. As it has been already suggested many times, there were new technologies that had been finally affordable for everybody except for the poorest. The crucial for the new consumer society was, however, the TV as it was a new innovative means for the communication between the consumer and the marketer. Thereby, there was a rise in the number of adverts which helped to sell soap powders, cigarettes, drinks, clothing and last but not least kitchen equipment. These products were the most popular in the 1950s. Frozen meals and novelties such as frozen fish fingers or take-away curries were extremely successful, too.⁵⁴ These pre-packed meals that only needed to be heated before consumed were so-called “TV Dinners” and since young men and women worked as much as they could to buy extras, the frozen meals were a perfect and fast solution for them to eat after work. The dinners were supposed to be eaten while watching the TV and preferably adverts which would inspire consumers to buy more – hence the name TV Dinners. Additionally, there was also the first McDonald opened in California in 1955. It was especially popular among youngsters and the middle class.

The first signs of American consumer capitalism could be seen in 1920s and 1930s E. L. Bernays – the founder of modern public relations (PR) – an area which deals with the communication between an organization and an individual. In the sense of consumerism, the individual is a potential buyer and the organization is usually a product or services. He changed the attitude towards buying from acquiring only what people need to what they want.⁵⁵

During these years, consumerism stood at the summit as a consequence of the previous events. To pursue this further, it was considered to be a perfect American way of life to live fully

⁵³ Simon Clarke, “What in the F---’s Name is Fordism,” in *Fordism and Flexibility: Division and Change*, ed. Roger Burrows, Nigel Gilbert and Anna Pollert (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 15–24.

⁵⁴ Wendell Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating in *Consumer Society*,” ed. by Lawrence B. Glickman, *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 367–372.

⁵⁵ Robert L. Heath, *Handbook of Public Relations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 11–20.

without much consideration. Until this period, people had to watch every penny and therefore after the wars, they were eager to spend money. This quickly changed in the 1960s in which many people started to be against consumerism. Actually, the first signs of disagreement with the consuming way of life appeared in 1950s with the emergence of the Beat Generation.⁵⁶ We can say that they were against consumerism as they were disappointed with the mainstream American life. However, for many people, consumerism was understood as security, something, that was missing in the previous years. As a result of that, shopping malls were flourishing and there was seen a potential in the advertising industry. Advertising is a type of marketing communication with the consumers and back in the half of the last century, not only television but also women magazines and cinema contributed to the rising influence on prospective consumers.

One of such consumers were women. There were strict gender roles in the fifties and women were believed to be good wives and mothers and in spite of their jobs, their natural occupation was seen as housewives. Because of the strict roles, women did most of the shopping and therefore a number of advertisements were aimed at them. Again, through magazines and TVs they were promoted as housewives rather than business and career oriented. There were multiple TV shows that portrayed women like that. To illustrate, June Cleaver, a character from *Leave It to Beaver*, was a typical standard for a prototypical housewife. The show was about two boys whose mother always set them straight and while doing so, she looked perfect and had her work always done. The society at that time set a norm, that it was more important to have a husband than a degree for a woman.

Women were believed to be good wives and mothers and in spite of their jobs, their natural occupation was seen as housewives Interestingly enough, and perhaps due to the civil rights issues, Afro-American women were never portrayed as mothers or wives at home. Because of the strict gender roles, women did most of the shopping and therefore a number of advertisements were aimed at them.⁵⁷

There is no doubt about Americans wanting to pursue the American Dream as marriages and home ownerships skyrocketed in this decade. The American Dream is a national ethos that

⁵⁶ Paul Lauter, Richard Yarborough, and Jackson R. Bryer. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 14–18.

⁵⁷ Paul Lauter et al., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 20–25.

through hard work and honesty, freedom in America may bring you a prosperous and happy life and enable a social mobility for your family.⁵⁸

Apart from consumerism, nationalism has also risen during this era and not only in America but also in other parts of the world. Especially in those that were at present or in the past communist countries such as Eastern Europe and Russia.⁵⁹ Just like consumerism and consumption worked as a reminder of a convenient life, so did nationalism.

In Great Britain, there were similar problems as in America as a consequence of being after the Second World War. Right after the war, it were not good times for the British ordinary people as a consequence of horrible defeats in it. There were economic problems, major cities were bombed, and financial independence was also damaged. Britain at that time imported most of their goods and Germany's strategy was to attack incoming ships to starve the nation to submission during *the Battle of the Atlantic*. Clothing and food such as chocolate, butter or bread had to be limited and therefore rationed. Fruits and vegetable were only seasonal and there was not a range to choose from. However, rationing encouraged people to grow people's own food in their gardens and allotments or to get it from their relatives from different countries. Rationing could be seen in the literary work *1984* by *George Orwell* which can be compared to the American novel *The Space Merchants* and that is, as well, a dystopian satirical novel about a disastrous future.

Living was harsh and to help families to deal with it, the British Ministry came with "Make-do-and-mend" pamphlets which were intended mainly for housewives to be creative, non-wasteful and frugal. These tips were supposed to help people to stay stylish and positive in these hard times. Since 1949, when Britain and America entered NATO, the politics of these two countries were connected and headed towards the same aim. It was the fifties which changed the social and cultural landscape of Britain and healed the society after the war.⁶⁰

In 1951, The Conservative Party won elections even though the Labour party had more votes. This caused the collapse of liberal votes but the end of rationing. The state ownership headed

⁵⁸ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

⁵⁹ Robert Bocoock, *Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2015), 74–75.

⁶⁰ Ian Cawood, *Britain in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 200–242.

to private rather than state and the situation seemed to have a bright future. The unemployment rate decreased, economy started to boom and the life in Britain was finally getting comfortable. For young British people, there was a better education and housing than had ever been before. The nation reached financial independence which meant prosperity and innovations. The TV was extremely popular at that time. Moreover, as well as in America, the TV was the most influential invention now available for every household. In 1953 people watched the coronation of the Queen Elizabeth II on TV which was something absolutely new. Within 1955, BBC TV broadcasting covered almost the whole Britain. Watching the TV became a part of people's lifestyle and it interfered with their leisure time radically. Rock and Roll played in the radios or on TVs and it was especially enjoyed by teenagers. Through listening to this kind of music, they wanted to rebel against the society, which obviously caused a shock on the older generation's side. However, the new generation was just materialistic, individualistic and conservative as the previous one.⁶¹

Besides mass media expansion, the prosperity was also a result of the fact that The Royal Navy and The Royal Airforce were internationally recognized as the strongest. On top of that, in 1952 the United Kingdom became the third World Nuclear Power, following America and the Soviet Union, after an explosion of an atomic bomb in Australia. During the Cold War, Great Britain was a part of the Western Bloc and NATO and thus cooperated with America. A large number of military veterans, four times bigger than today, served abroad. As well as the USA, they participated in the Korean War and contributed with their naval and air units of Commonwealth. That included British, Australian, Indian, Canadian and New Zealand units.⁶²

It is no surprise that people enjoyed consumerism instead of worrying about the future. After the conflicts they experienced, they were emotionally drained and their country physically damaged. Therefore, during the period of conformity in the fifties, there were as well as in America traditional gender roles. Popular culture and mass culture enforced the roles. Apart from that, there were newly looking upbeat houses and the first motorway in Britain in 1958, finally marked the transition to the new and better future of the country.⁶³

⁶¹ Su Holmes, *British Television and Film Culture in the 1950s: Coming to a TV Near You* (Bristol: Intellect, 2005), 23–35.

⁶² Cawood, *Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 200–242.

⁶³ Matthew Hilton, *Consumerism in Twentieth-Century Britain: The Search for a Historical Movement* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170–183.

Despite the restored situation and the comeback of convenient life, in Notting Hill in 1958, there appeared riots which were race motivated. Attacking of black people showed present racism in the country. Therefore, oppression was an issue in both countries.⁶⁴

In conclusion, British and American 1950s were in a number of ways similar, especially after the creation of NATO which connected them and formed common goals. However, after the Second World War, American economy and society started booming but, on the other hand, Britain experienced rough years as majority of towns were bombsites. The rise of consumerism in the fifties firstly started in America since the major conflicts did not happen on their territory, and as a consequence of always present fear of a possible war. People embraced buying because it formed a stability which they desperately needed. Moreover, they enjoyed the economic boom after the Second World War. They wanted to feel security in something, and material things were the easiest tools for making it happen. The United Kingdom followed the United States in these terms and consumerism became eventually also the solution for conformity. Furthermore, it enhanced to solve the economic issues as well as emotional.

⁶⁴ Cawood, *Britain in the Twentieth Century*, 292–315.

3 POPULAR LITERATURE, SCIENCE FICTION AND SATIRE

For analysing the book, *The Space Merchants*, it is necessary to determine of which genres and subgenres it is. To start with, it is of a high importance to be able to tell the difference between the popular and high culture as it will be important for the further research. High culture is in comparison with popular culture not intended for a mass consumption and at the same time is not available for everybody. Only the most intellectual people can either afford products and services of the high culture, or these are the only ones who understand it and find it entertaining. These people are usually from the higher social classes and what belongs to the high culture are, for example, opera, theatre, the fine arts and books which require broader approach and perhaps even training to understand them. Moreover, this realm is considered rather sophisticated. Pop culture, on the other hand, does not usually require any special knowledge and is rather frowned upon as being consumeristic and superficial. Hence, the further examination will be of the pop culture and its forms.

Firstly, *popular literature* is a genre, which is sometimes also called popular fiction, and which is intended for masses of people. In comparison with its opposite – the artistic literature, it usually does not concentrate on the formal side of writing, but it is simply intended to entertain the reader. Nevertheless, the boundary between popular literature and artistic literature is rather murky. For instance, William Shakespeare was at his time recognized as a writer of popular literature but since then, a lot has changed, and his writings are thought to be artistic now. To sum up, the term popular is usually applied only for a period of time in which the work is the most wanted. In a few cases, the popular literature might endure in popularity and therefore is considered an artistic literature.⁶⁵

There are several types of popular literature. In the first place, the term novel should be defined since writings of popular literature are usually in this form. Generally, we recognize two kinds of writings judging by the length of it – a novel and a short story. As the name suggests, a short story is briefer than a novel. Nevertheless, a novel used to be described as a long short story which is usually fictional and written in prose.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John Storey, “What is popular culture?” in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, White Plains: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012, 1–16.

⁶⁶ Lewis Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 64.

The most prominent subgenres of popular literature are romance, horror, detective, western, thriller, chick lit, fantasy and finally, science fiction.⁶⁷ Despite the number of subgenres, the latest mentioned will be analysed thoroughly in this thesis as the studied book is of this genre.

Science fiction is a genre which may appear in literature, film or even in paintings. Although sci-fi is challenging to precisely define, everyone even laics are able recognize it. From the name itself, we can deduce that a text or a movie must be fictional – not based on a true story. In spite of this fact, it might contain a core idea which is real but frequently it is escalated to something that is only the matter of imagination. Another feature of sci-fi, which can be understood from the name itself, is that in most cases there is a role of technological advancement included in the story. There is a variety of other themes which indicate that a piece of writing is of this genre. For instance, the plot might depict time or space travelling, alternative or future worlds, imagined technological advancements, interplanetary wars, some kind of a change in the future or either utopian or dystopian visions.⁶⁸

In *The Space Merchants*, the topic are mainly dystopian visions but the reader may also find features of a change in the society – advertising companies have a bigger power over the world than political parties, or technological advancement as plantations are built as skyscrapers which can be seen in the extract below.

It was in the shadow of the Chlorella plantation, a towering eighty-story structure like the office "In-and-Out" baskets stacked up to the sky. There were mirrored louvers at each tier. Surrounding the big building were acres of eye-stabbing glare. I realized that this was more mirrored louvers to catch the sun, bounce it off more mirrors inside the tiers, and onto the photosynthesis tanks. It was a spectacular, though not uncommon, sight from the air.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, dystopian views are rather characteristic of this novel. Before the 20th century, there were only utopian writings that depicted ideal worlds with perfect population and political system. The first known *utopia* was written in 1516 by Sir Thomas More. The word comes from the Greek language and means no place or nowhere. This indicates that utopia is basically unreal desire for a perfect world. On the other hand, dystopia might become real if technological advancement, the behaviour of the society or any other possible threads continue to disastrous

⁶⁷ Turco, *The Book of Literary Terms: The Genres of Fiction, Drama, Nonfiction, Literary Criticism, and Scholarship*, 39–69.

⁶⁸ Peter Nicholls, *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 5–8.

⁶⁹ Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (London: Golancz / Orion, 2003), 73.

consequences. The definition of *dystopia* is therefore an imagination of a society or the world, usually in the future, in which the previously mentioned factors reached the maximum to have a catastrophic effect on the society. The common setting is a post apocalyptic world or totalitarian regimes. In the analysed book by Pohl and Kornbluth, the dystopia is seen in the fact that advertising reached absurd extents. Dystopian novels also might ridicule the present society in the distant future which is also the case of the book. Thus, another definition of it is satire because some parts contain irony, ridiculing and exaggeration. Through all this, the writers can raise awareness about present problems in the society. Pohl and Kornbluth warned about possible consequences of immoderate consumption, overpopulation and last but not least, the lack of natural sources.⁷⁰

Science fiction uses all these tools to attract the reader as people are curious about and sometimes scared of innovations. Back in the times of Mary Shelley and her *Frankenstein* published in 1818, there were individuals in Britain who were terrified of new technology and the advancement of science as it was the period right after the First Industrial Revolution. Thus, Shelley has written this book which even strengthen this fear. The novel is considered the first science fiction that has seen the light of day for English speaking countries. In America, the first elements of science fiction in literature appeared in writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Allan Edgar Poe. Poe with the French author Jules Verne are as well as Mary Shelley considered the founders of the genre. Apart from that, they are also believed that they started off the interest in this particular genre.⁷¹ From the years 1938 to 1946 there were the golden ages of SF in the United States in terms of the interest in it. Nonetheless, the popularity of sci-fi continued to the fifties.⁷²

What had an impact on science fiction writers in the fifties and after them? Perhaps it was the first successful launching of the artificial space satellite Sputnik in 1957 by the Soviet Union. As there was rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, a year after, there was also the first American space satellite orbiting around the Earth. These events had definitely an impact on booming of the science fiction writing as the human kind was getting a deeper insight into mysterious space.⁷³

⁷⁰ David Seed, *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 73–80.

⁷¹ Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 153–251.

⁷² Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, 121–151.

⁷³ Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, 253–270.

In the fifties, there were also favoured literary magazines. One of them was called *Galaxy Science Fiction* and as the name reveals, it was full of science fiction stories. Frederik Pohl also contributed with his stories and *The Space Merchants* made the first appearance in this magazine. It was publishing for thirty years starting in the 1950s. The main editor was H. L. Gold who made it rapidly one of the leading literary magazines with the focus rather on social problems than technological advancement. Furthermore, *The Galaxy* got Hugo nominations for the best professional American magazine. Pohl helped with managing *the Galaxy*'s production and in 1961, he took over the position as the head editor.

The most famous American SF writers of the 1950s were for instance Ray Bradbury, whose stories also appeared in *the Galaxy*, and Isaac Asimov. Asimov was as well as Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth a part of the Futurian movement based in New York. All of them lived in Brooklyn and enjoyed reading and writing fictional stories about the future. Moreover, some of the members contributed to the science fiction magazine mentioned above. As Asimov has written in his autobiography *In Memory Yet Green* the Futurians were inspired by *the Greater New York Science Fiction Club* whose head was Sam Moskowitz.⁷⁴ Bradbury is worth mentioning as his novel *Fahrenheit 451* could be compared to *the Space Merchants* in many ways. Both are a dystopian science fiction concerned with the social behaviour of the society.

As for Britain, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* written in the first half of the 19th century is considered the most prominent science fiction as it influenced masses of writers. As an example of another British SF writer is Herbert George Wells with his well-known publication *The War of the Worlds*.⁷⁵

Consumerism in fiction is not in fact remarkably common. However, there are a few novels which deal with similar topics as *the Space Merchants*. For instance, *Babbitt* (1922) by Sinclair Lewis is a novel about the criticism of the American Society and, as it has been already mentioned, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* published in 1953. As a result of such scarce

⁷⁴ Isaac Asimov, *In Memory Yet Green: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1920–1954* (New York: Avon, 1980), 179.

⁷⁵ Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, 253–296.

number of books devoting the topic to consumerism in the distant future, *The Space Merchants* is a unique creation and therefore significant in the history of American literature.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Peter B. High, *An Outline of American Literature* (London: Longman, 1991), 176.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL THE SPACE MERCHANTS

The book *The Space Merchants* is according to New York Times “*A novel of the future that the present must inevitably rank as a classic.*” It was written in 1952 by two American science fiction authors. Namely, Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth. This collaboration was not their first one nor the last as they were close friends, and both contributed to the same science-fiction magazine called *Galaxy Science Fiction*. In this magazine, there also firstly occurred the above mentioned satirical prophetic novel – *The Space Merchants*. As a result of their teamwork were also, for instance, *Search the Sky* (1954), *Gladiator-At-Law* (1955), or *Wolfsbane* (1959). All of them are of the same genre and that is science-fiction. However, the *Space Merchants* was the most successful work out of them all.⁷⁷

Both authors were *Futurians* which means they were enthusiasts about science-fiction who usually eventually became editors and writers of this genre themselves. Alongside with these two authors, there were other eminent sci-fi writers who were a part of the Futurian movement such as Isaac Asimov or Donald Wollheim.⁷⁸ The Futurian movement affected writings of science fiction not as a club but rather as individual members put effort into their works and included a number of intriguing topics related to the future. In the case of Pohl’s and Kornbluth’s collective work *The Space Merchants*, they hid hints of excessive consumerism and reflected problems of American society in the story.

Frederik Pohl, who is considered to be the father of the movement, was born in Brooklyn, New York. Alongside with this fact, he worked as a science fiction writer and as an editor of magazines and books.⁷⁹ An interesting fact is that he started working for a New York advertising company for getting insight into the business area.⁸⁰ His friend and co-writer, C. M. Kornbluth, was born in New York City as well. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why they have chosen this metropolitan city as a setting for their novel. The book’s major topic is advertising and when we think of the city itself, it is full of it. For example, Times Square is now famous for its bright led screens which literally hypnotize tourists with the newest

⁷⁷ David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), 82–93.

⁷⁸ Damon Knight, *The Futurians* (London: Orion, 2013), 15–17.

⁷⁹ Michael R. Page, *Frederik Pohl* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 25–31.

⁸⁰ Thomas D. Clareson, *Frederik Pohl* (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1992), 47.

products. Although there were not screens back in the 1950s, the square had already been full of banners and shops which had one purpose only – to attract a number of new customers.⁸¹

The *Space Merchants* is classified as a dystopian satirical novel. Dystopian novel, as it has been already mentioned in the previous chapter, is a subgenre of speculative fiction which extrapolates the future based on contemporary problems of the society. In this case, the authors predicted the consequence and an extreme development of consumerism in the future and ridiculed the whole idea mainly by exaggerating and depicting absurd situations. One of such situations happens when the main character Mitchel Courtenay has just been shot and wants to call for a help.

Surprised at my calm, I called the Metropolitan Protection Corporation.

‘Are you a subscriber sir?’ their operator asked.

‘Yes, dammit. For six years. Get a man over here! Get a squad over here.’

‘One moment, Mr Courtenay . . . Mr *Mitchell* Courtenay? Copysmith, star class?’

‘No,’ I said bitterly. ‘Target is my profession. Will you kindly get a man over here before the character who just took a shot at me comes back?’

‘Excuse me, Mr Courtenay,’ said the sweet, unruffled voice. ‘Did you say you were not a copysmith, star class?’

I ground my teeth. ‘I’m star class,’ I admitted.

‘Thank you, sir. I have your record before me, sir. I am sorry, sir, but your account is in arrears. We do not accept star-class accounts at the general rate because of the risk of industrial feuds, sir.’

I didn't blow my top; she was just a tool. "Thanks," I said heavily, and rang off. I put the Program-Printing to Quarry Machinery reel of the Red Book into the reader and spun it to Protective Agencies. I got turndowns from three or four, but finally one sleepy-sounding private detective agreed to come on over for a stiff fee.⁸²

As it is clearly seen in the extract above, the authors depicted a difficult situation in which it seems to be impossible for the protagonist to get help. By exaggerating the importance of advertising for the institution whose main goal should be helping the others, the authors achieve ridiculing of the consumer society and showing the absurdity of it. Another thing is that there is more than one protective agency which indicates *capitalism* as in such system, there are private ownerships and therefore a number of small businesses.

Given the fact that the book *The Space Merchants* was labelled as popular literature at that time and was intended to attract masses of people, the plot is not the most prominent part of this work. Those are the ideas which both authors included, and which were extremely ahead of its

⁸¹ Betsy Blackmar, 1991. “Uptown Real Estate and the Creation of Times Square.” In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William L. Taylor, 51. London: The John Hopkins University Press.

⁸² Frederick Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth, *The Space Merchants* (London: Gollancz / Orion, 2003), 34–35.

time as the book was written in early fifties and most of the contents predicted to which extents can consumerism and advertising lead. Some of the consequences mentioned in *The Space Merchants* can already be observed in nowadays society.

The story is about a copywriter whose identity is stolen and his high status in the society is lost due to a rivalry between two promoting companies and their desire for the biggest project for advertisers – to promote the planet Venus. The plot is intriguing and exciting in some parts but overall not exceptional as a whole. Nevertheless, the story, in a nutshell, takes primarily place in distant future in New York City as it has been mentioned above. It is the 22nd century and New York is the center of happening. The city is even more crowded than in the 1950s, and the Earth's conditions are at stake. Instead of taxis, there are only overcrowded shuttles or just rickshaws that are considered an indulgence. Moreover, there are no longer natural resources such as genuine meat, fruits and vegetables. Everything is replaced by artificial substitutes that often contain addictive substances to hook consumers on never-ending chains of products that interlock.⁸³

“The Crunchies kicked off withdrawal symptoms that could be quelled only by another two squirts of Popsie from the fountain, and Popsie kicked off withdrawal symptoms that could only be quelled by smoking Starr Cigarettes, which made you hungry for Crunchies.”⁸⁴

In the excerpt above, there is a vicious circle of consumerism shown. Crunchies were actually popular chocolate bars in the 1950s, Popsie, on the other hand is a made-up product which resembles Coca Cola or Pepsi as they are sparkly, contain caffeine and are usually drunk with meals. Furthermore, they are slightly addictive as well as Popsie is depicted. Both brands had already existed in the age this book was published.⁸⁵ However, the fictional coke is enriched for more artificial substances that guarantee the seller to have an ever-increasing profit. Pohl and Kornbluth strengthened the ridiculousness of such business moves with other examples of addictive meals and drinks.

„Coffiest contains three milligrams of a simple alkaloid. Nothing harmful. But definitely habit-forming. After ten weeks the costumer is hooked for life. It would cost him at least five thousand dollars for a cure, so it's simpler for him to go right on drinking Coffiest

⁸³ Gary Westfahl, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works and Wonders* (London: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1243–1245.

⁸⁴ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 85.

⁸⁵ Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 14–15.

– three cups with every meal and a pot beside his bed at night, just as it says on the jar.
“ 86

Coffiest in this case represents an alternative to coffee which is extremely rare to get in the new world. Coffee grains are scarce and only the richest can afford them. Nevertheless, even for them it is a special occasion to drink a real cup of coffee. In one situation, the main character is served with coffee and he stresses the fact that it is authentic, plantation-grown one.⁸⁷ It seems to be already ridiculous for a reader that the protagonist feels the need to mention that information. Hence, it indicates the features of a satire.

Another addictive product shown are cigarettes. In the novel there are Starr Cigarettes which are considered the first-rated brand. In the fifties, there was a growth of smokers as a result of promoting cigarettes mainly through televisions. Until then it was not that widespread.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, there were brands that are still popular nowadays such as Marlboro, Viceroy or L&M.

He sat down and gave me his Aztec grin. "Como 'std, amigo Jorge? Se fuma?" He extended a pack of cigarettes. They were Greentips. I said automatically: "No thanks. I smoke Starrs; they're tastier." And automatically I lit one, of course. I was becoming the kind of consumer we used to love. Think about smoking, think about Starrs, light a Starr. Light a Starr, think about Popsie, get a squirt. Get a squirt, think about Crunchies, buy a box. Buy a box, think about smoking, light a Starr. And at every step roll out the words of praise that had been dinned into you through your eyes and ears and pores.⁸⁹

The authors emphasized that in the capitalist regime, the brand is important as is a wide range of choice. Since the protagonist belongs to the higher social spheres, he can afford more expensive and quality products. Consequently, he gets used to it and refuses any other brands and cheaper versions. If applied to material products instead of those that can be immediately consumed, this could be understood as a belief in happiness due to material things.

Cigarettes are already addictive enough thanks to nicotine, that means that they do not have to put any extra ingredients in them. This, however, is exactly what the authorities want. They want to hook people to crave products to such extents that they are trapped in a viscous circle from which it is almost impossible to escape. Their obsession could be compared to a drug addiction. Obviously, it is not actually far from the truth since there are usually chemical

⁸⁶ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 4–5.

⁸⁷ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 29.

⁸⁸ "Tobacco Industry Marketing," Society, *The Guardian*, last modified April 1, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2009/apr/01/tobacco-industry-marketing>.

⁸⁹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 85.

substances added to awake a need for a particular product. It is not a problem for the wealthy, on the other hand, poorer people are in danger of losing everything else as a result of paying too much money for unnecessary things and goods.

I'd been paid again, and my debt had increased by eight dollars. I'd tormented myself by wondering where the money went, but I knew. I came off shift dehydrated, as they wanted me to be. I got a squirt of Popsie from the fountain by punching my combination--twenty-five cents checked off my payroll. The squirt wasn't quite enough so I had another-- fifty cents. Dinner was drab as usual; I couldn't face more than a bite or two of Chicken Little. Later I was hungry and there was the canteen where I got Crunchies on easy credit. The Crunchies kicked off withdrawal symptoms that could be quelled only by another two squirts of Popsie from the fountain. And Popsie kicked off withdrawal symptoms that could only be quelled by smoking Starr cigarettes, which made you hungry for Crunchies... Had Fowler Schocken thought of it in these terms when he organized Starrzelius Verily, die first spherical trust? Popsie to Crunchies to Stairs to Popsie? And you paid 6 percent interest on the money advanced you.⁹⁰

As it can be seen in the abstract above, once being in the consumer vicious circle, there is no way, or an extremely difficult way, to get out of it. Nevertheless, this is exactly what the authorities and owners of business want – to have ever-increasing number of consumers. For making this happen, it is the job of copywriters to create perfectly elaborated advertisements.

As it has been mentioned in the plot review, the fictional future world is also out of meat. Thus, a substitute called Chicken Little is created. It is an ever-growing nutritious chunk of meat which is kept in the chlorella plantation, a place where the protagonist lives and works after he loses his social status, and which also feeds all the employees there as they are served slices of Chicken Little for lunch and dinner.

Scum-skimming wasn't hard to learn. You got up at dawn. You gulped a breakfast sliced not long ago from Chicken Little and washed it down with Coffiest. You put on your coveralls and took the cargo net up to your tier. In blazing noon from sunrise to sunset you walked your acres of shallow tanks crusted with algae. If you walked slowly, every thirty seconds or so you spotted a patch at maturity, bursting with yummy carbohydrates. You skimmed the patch with your skimmer and slung it down the well, where it would be baled, or processed into glucose to feed Chicken Little, who would be sliced and packed to feed people from Baffinland to Little America.⁹¹

Perhaps Chicken Little was inspired by an experiment done by Doctor Alexis Carrel who was as well as the authors from New York. He put a piece of a chick heart tissue into a nutritious medium and, surprisingly, it lasted from 1912 to 1946. The cells were alive and were dividing. This was a turning point for medicine and additionally, it influenced the concept of cell immortality. Carrel got a Nobel Prize for this experiment sometimes also referred to as immortal

⁹⁰ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 84.

⁹¹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 79.

chick heart. Moreover, there is a small crater on the Moon named after him.⁹² The Moon is a place that is also illustrated in the analyzed book and which changed from a deserted natural satellite to a place of entertainment.

Another alternative of food in the novel, this time genuine but not culinary nor gustatory exciting, is the algae Chlorella. Because it is a highly nutritious algae that provides the body with essential vitamins, minerals and antioxidants it is sometimes considered a full-fledged meal. In the fifties, this functional food was seen as one of auspicious solutions for the future overpopulated world as a result of the Baby Boom which emerged throughout forties and fifties. Nowadays, chlorella is used as a food supplement and is still valued as a superfood.⁹³ Baby Boom aroused concerns about overpopulation among some people in the United States. Pohl and Kornbluth belonged to this group, too. Thus, they pictured a world in which congestion is an issue and vast spaces are unique.

Oddly, the most impressive thing about it to me was not the rocket itself but the wide swathe around it. For a full mile the land was cleared: no houses, no greenhouse decks, no food tanks, no sun traps. Partly security, partly radiation. The gleaming sand cut by irrigation pipes looked strange. There probably wasn't another sight like it in North America. It troubled my eyes. Not for years had I focused them more than a few yards.⁹⁴

The motifs of overpopulated world appear in the book various times and due to it, the idea of inhabiting another planet or products which should prevent people from having children until they can afford them occurs. “PregNot never prevents a couple from having a baby; it just permits them to postpone it until they can afford to do the job right.”⁹⁵ The people even wonder how rich they have to be to have some privacy.⁹⁶ Through all these symbols, the authors managed to warn about a possible overpopulation due to the Baby Boom, and a probable lack of natural sources as a consequence of consumerism which was gradually developing throughout the fifties. There are also characters in the book that reflect the typical consumer behavior which, as it seems from their writing, the authors despised. What is interesting is that

⁹² Alexis Carrel, “On the Permanent Life of Tissues outside of the Organism,” *Journal of Experimental Medicine* 15 (1912): 516–528.

<http://jem.rupress.org/content/jem/15/5/516.full.pdf>

⁹³ Warren Belasco, “Algae Burgers for a Hungry World? The Rise and Fall of Chlorella Cuisine.” *Technology and Culture* 38, no. 3 (July 1997): 608–634.

⁹⁴ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 49.

⁹⁵ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 31.

⁹⁶ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 29.

the focus is not at the consumers but rather on those whose job is to promote products. Therefore, we as readers can observe how the two worlds of these classes are different.

The reader can find personalities which are unique and show characteristics that are completely typical for the consumer era either because they admire it or criticize it. Firstly, the protagonist is Mitchell Courtenay who is a star class copywriter in the leading advertising company, and he is also a supporter of consumerism. He is extremely intelligent and passionate about his job. In spite of the fact that he shows these positive traits, he is also stubborn in various moments and rather too absorbed in his job to see what is happening around him. To put it differently, his job is his passion and he cannot imagine life without it. Once he even exclaims: “But I could not relax in the presence of so many books without a word of advertising in any of them.”⁹⁷ A sentence that only an avid advertiser as himself could say.

He has got an incredible talent for making advertisements and has a team of gifted people who help him with it.

"First, words. We want words that are about Venus, words that'll tickle people. Make them sit up. Make them muse about change, and space, and other worlds. Words to make them a little discontented with what they are and a little hopeful about what they might be. Words to make them feel noble about feeling the way they do and make them happy about the existence of Industries and Starrzelius Verily and Fowler Schocken Associates. Words that will do all these things and also make them feel unhappy about the existence of Universal Products and Taunton Associates."⁹⁸

They write them in such way, that it attracts consumers as well as makes them think the worst about the concurrence. Creating it makes Mitch content in his life and there is nothing else he can imagine doing. Nevertheless, this character finally realizes that the real problem on the planet Earth is exceeded consumerism as it can be seen in the extract below.

“The famous cherry blossoms were beautiful, all right, but, with my new-found Conservationist sentiments, I found them objectively ostentatious. ‘A dozen would have been plenty,’ I objected.”⁹⁹

The embodiment of capitalism trying to advertise and sell as much as they can is Fowler Schocken or “God of sales” as the main character refers to him. This nickname truly fits him since he is the director of the leading advertising company.¹⁰⁰ In this era of overproduction, he is considered to be one of the most powerful men in the world. Indeed, he is as he literally

⁹⁷ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 99.

⁹⁸ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 39.

⁹⁹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁰ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 146.

affects people's lives with his products. In consequence, they are forced to continue buying and consuming them. In one part he says a quote that perfectly describes the plot of the book as well as a result of capitalism and consumerism. 'There's an old saying, men. "The world is our oyster." We've made it come true. But we've eaten that oyster.'¹⁰¹

Yet, another embodiment of business is the main villain of the story Taunton. Taunton Associates is a rival advertising agency which is interested in the project Venus as well as Fowler Schocken Associates. As it has been stressed in the first chapter, for an outstanding company, there must also be a competition, otherwise it cannot be successful. This strengthens the fact that these two companies are the best.

I seemed to see Fowler Schocken sitting there instead of his rival, the man who stood against everything that Fowler Schocken stood for. "I wanted Venus, Courtenay, and I shall have it. Schocken stole it from me, and I am going to repossess it. Fowler Schocken's management of the Venus project will stink to high heaven. No rocket under Schocken's management is ever going to get off the ground, if I have to corrupt every one of his underlings and kill every one of his section heads. For I am essentially an artist."¹⁰²

In comparison with Schocken, Taunton is crueler and more aggressive as he is able to use violence to get something definitely not worth lives – prosperous projects. Otherwise, they have a lot of features in common such as the desire for money. However, Schocken is able to justify his actions as if they were good and he is naturally charismatic which only emphasizes that the society is superficial. There is another hint of criticism of consumerism and political situations as it literally makes people hurt each other in purpose to achieve what is desired by the authorities.

"How would we do that? You're dead already. Everybody knows that. You died on Starrzelius Glacier; don't you remember?" I struggled again, without results. "They'll brainburn you," I said. "Are you people crazy? Who wants to be brainburned?" The face said nonchalantly: "You'd be surprised." And in an aside to somebody else: "Tell Hedy he'll be ready soon." Hands did something, there was a click, and I was helped to sit up. The skintight pulling at my joints told me it was a plasticocoon and that I might as well save my strength. There was no point to struggling.¹⁰³

There is also something about their names, Schocken could evoke in someone the verb *to shock* because that is his main goal – to hook consumers. From Taunton's name, we have an

¹⁰¹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 7.

¹⁰² Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 114.

¹⁰³ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 113.

immediate overview of his personality as the verb *to taunt* means to intentionally annoy or upset someone.¹⁰⁴

Apart from powerful men, there are also women who represent the female gender of the 1950s. To start with, Kathy Nevin, Mitchel's wife, is also significant for the society. Although she does not have a higher status than Courtenay, her profession is without any doubt more important than his as she is a doctor. He realizes that she is recognized and that causes problems in their relationship. It seems as if Mitch valued her status more than her as a person.

Kathy Nevin is a complete opposite in comparison with the main character. She does not believe in business and she is against consumerism. The only characteristic feature they have in common is their intelligence and the uncanny ability to work in their field as well as they can. Kathy is not a typical woman of the fifties as she is not a housewife but has a career. Her job is not everything for her and she definitely does not put wealth and career on the first place of her priorities. What she does put there though, is the future of the world and to preserve the last bit of human's goodness. That is the reason why she is the kingpin Consie.¹⁰⁵ This word denotes those people, who are against consumerism and whose goal, as the reader later finds out, it to inhabit the planet Venus and start a new life there as the one on the planet Earth is already ruined. To be precise, the life still exists but the Conservationist Association does not agree with the ways it is heading. In the book, they are depicted as deluded and radical group of people who are dangerous for the society. People are through mass media advised that if they meet them, they should immediately call the police.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps this was used to create fear with the help of mass media as it is the most powerful way. In fact, Consies are those who are not deluded by the fake news. Just like people in America in 1950s who did not agree with the system, they try to be inconspicuous as a result of the stigma that is spread about them. Kathy then tries to hide the fact that she is a member of this group because Courtenay would never understand it as he is the supporter of advertisements.

On the other hand, Courtenay's loyal and diligent secretary Hester is a typical woman of that time. She is a depiction of an ideal woman as she would be able to do everything for a man she

¹⁰⁴ *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 1491.

¹⁰⁵ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 133.

¹⁰⁶ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 86.

loves or her family. She even sacrificed her life for Courtenay which only proves her loyalty and desire to be a perfect American woman.

"Don't drink it," she croaked, her hand kneading her belly. "The Coffiest. Poison. Your rations. I've been tasting them." Her nails tore first the nylon of her midriff and then her skin as she clawed at the pain.¹⁰⁷

Tildy Mathis, another Courtenay's coworker, is also an obedient woman that is submissive to men. Furthermore, she excels in writing slogans for advertisements which the main character admires.

There is another group that was slightly disadvantaged in the fifties. In the case of Jack O'Shea, it is rather physical as he is a midget. Yet, he became the very first person who has ever been to the uninhabitable planet Venus thanks to his abnormality. They needed to save fuel and weight of the space ship and therefore O'Shea was a perfect candidate for this mission. Jack O'Shea is unconsciously one of typical consumers as he buys products advertised by Shocken's company. Despite the fact, that he belongs to higher social spheres, he is undoubtedly a part of the mainstream and is as well easily manipulatable. He does not even realize this until the main protagonist tells him explicitly.

"You're wearing Starrzelius Verily clothes and shoes, Jack. It means we got you. Taunton and Universal worked on you, Starrzelius and Schocken worked on you--and you chose Starrzelius. We reached you. Smoothly, without your ever being aware that it was happening, you became persuaded that there was something rather nice about Starrzelius clothes and shoes and that there was something rather not-nice about Universal clothes and shoes."

"I never read the ads," he said defiantly. I grinned. "Our ultimate triumph is wrapped up in that statement," I said.¹⁰⁸

The authors show through Jack O'Shea how easily convinced the masses are and especially with the help of mass media which are able to challenge reality. In other words, they can lie through TV or banners but if the world is oblivious to what is actually happening around them, there is no doubt that they will believe it.

A Spanish speaking Gus Herrera belongs to this group as well. He is of a different nationality and because of that, he might be considered disadvantaged. He is a Conservationist who works at Chlorella plantation in Costa Rica. In 1948, there was the Civil War in Costa Rica in 1948 and the United States Policy played a crucial role in it.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps that is the reason for choosing Costa Rica and not another place for the plantation in the book.

¹⁰⁷ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 40.

¹⁰⁹ Erin Foley, and Barbara Cooke, *Costa Rica* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2017), 31.

If it had not been for Herrera, there is no other racial reference. Not a single Afro-American appears in the book. Either it is because of the stigma there was about them or, as it was written in the second chapter, they simply did not picture them in popular literature, movies nor sitcoms. Moreover, they were usually considered a part of the lower social spheres and since the book focuses rather on the higher, it is not a surprise that they are not included. There is also a third option that the authors intentionally did not describe appearance and nationalities except for Herrera whose accent reveals that he must come from a Spanish speaking country.

Courtenay distinguishes people to producers and consumers and the latter is considered to be obviously the lower social class – as in the years the book was written, the ideal consumeristic group was the middle class. Nevertheless, there is a comparison between the highest and the lowest rank of the society. Mitchel loses his identity and finds himself with a new name and occupation.¹¹⁰ He finally gets insight into this social group and finds out that it is not easy to live as poor. Furthermore, he meets Herrera who is according to him smarter than the others, but he still does not take him as someone who could be on the same level with him. Courtenay sees his stay among workers as an opportunity to see what actually these people want. This information should help him to make even more outstanding advertisements.¹¹¹ Again, this only demonstrates that the protagonist is passionate about his job.

To sum it all up, there are consumer symbols as well as historical background and social features of the 1950s projected in *The Space Merchants*. The characters are representatives of particular aspect such as the culture – Herrera, gender – Kathy, consumerism – Mitch, or business – Schocken and Taunton. Moreover, they add to the emphasis on the consumer society through their mindsets and behavior.

¹¹⁰ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 67–78.

¹¹¹ Pohl et al., *The Space Merchants*, 80.

CONCLUSION

Writing about social and political problems in the form of a fictional story rather than addressing them directly was in the 1950s safer. With the McCarthy era present in the United States, people who wanted to complain about the system could easily be blacklisted and afterwards they could lose their job or be forbidden to do it permanently. Therefore, Frederik Pohl and his colleague Cyril Kornbluth brought *The Space Merchants* to public. In the book, they hid typical features for a consumer society, which was seen through the absurdity of advertising everything including uninhabitable planets such as the planet Venus. The idea of a world that has sold everything that has to go to space to sell something new is ridiculous but chilling. Therefore, through ridiculing and exaggerating, the authors stressed that consumerism is not a good way to overcome problems and perhaps they wanted to suggest facing them instead.

Additionally, the current life and historical events such as technological and scientific innovations or stratification of the society were projected in the book, too. The authors use unique techniques to express their opinion. For instance, the main characters work as a tool for addressing the author's discontent with the way the American society is developing. To illustrate, the main character is a reflection of the American people's obliviousness to what is happening around them. Moreover, he is one of the enthusiasts who see the meaning of life in the consumer's attitude. On the other hand, his wife is against it and considers, for instance, preserving the human race a life goal. Not only that they are of a different gender, their mindsets are contrasting too.

There is also a huge gap in terms of the social stratification observable in *The Space Merchants* as the highest and lowest ranks meet in the novel. The problems of the advertisers seem to be absurd in comparison with the working class. The profit is what the authorities want and to get it, they lie, deceive and even hurt. They put addictive substances to hook consumers to never-ending vicious circles which causes that they spend all their money for unnecessary products. The focus of making a profit was aimed at the middle class since it was the largest social group in the fifties

In addition, the display of possible catastrophic consequences should work as a warning against consumerism and a current environmental situation. There is overpopulation, extinction of animals, lack of authentic products – all of them were based on the situation of the 1950s and previous conflicts. Furthermore, this is a confirmation that the book is a dystopia. It is clear that the book reflects the society of the fifties. Hence, a reader might notice the ideal of a woman at that time or that mass media are extremely powerful. All that can be seen, even though it is set in the future.

All in all, consumerism in the book appears in the form of criticism. The main tools for the manifestation of downsides of consumerism in the novel are exaggerating, ridiculing, shocking and reflecting features of the consumer society through it. However, it is up to the reader if they want to see the subtle warnings or not. The 22nd century is still a long time ahead of us but, who knows, maybe Pohl and Kornbluth genuinely predicted the future and the negative consequences of our consumerist way of life.

RESUMÉ

Cílem této práce je zanalyzovat román vědeckofantastického žánru *Obchodníci s Vesmírem*, a to převážně z hlediska Britského a Amerického konzumerismu. Protože je kniha napsána dvěma Americkými spisovateli, Frederickem Pohlem a Cyrilem M. Kornbluthem, hlavním zaměřením je studování Amerického konzumerismu a jeho promítnutí se v románu. Dalším důležitým aspektem práce je obraz doby, ve které studované dílo vzniklo – a tím jsou padesátá léta dvacátého století. V práci je tedy nastíněna jak politická, tak kulturní situace v Americe a Británii v daném období. Následně jsou tyto aspekty opět porovnávány a promítnuty v kontextu knihy. V neposlední řadě je prozkoumán žánr této populární literatury, kterým je právě sci-fi. Všechny tyto poznatky jsou následně znovu probírány v poslední kapitole, která se věnuje knize jako takové a kde se rozebírají citáty v nichž se hledají znaky témat z předchozích kapitol. Tato práce je tedy rozdělena do čtyř částí, přičemž první tři jsou převážně teoretické s občasnými vstupy a příklady z analyzované knihy, a poslední se dá považovat za praktickou, jelikož se zabývá hledáním znaků zejména konzumerismu, odrazu americké kultury padesátých let a odpovídajících žánrů přímo v knize.

První kapitola tedy podrobně vysvětluje termín konzumerismus a porovnává ho s často chybně zaměnitelným termínem spotřebou. V angličtině jsou tyto dvě slova téměř totožná (consumerism, consumption), a proto zejména u anglicky mluvících laiků může vzniknout chybné pojetí těchto dvou pojmů. Kromě nich se dozvídáme další termíny spojené s konzumním způsobem života, jako je například materialismus, kapitalismus, ba dokonce termín PR neboli veřejné vztahy. Reklama a PR jsou také porovnány pro předejetí zmatku v používání zejména z důvodu analýzy knihy, jejímž největším tématem je vyhrocené umění prodávat a lidský chtíč nakupovat. Nicméně tyto termíny jsou úzce spojeny, jelikož první zmíněné má na starosti propagovat produkty a druhé zmíněné se zaobírá dobrým působením společnosti za účelem zisku. Hlavní cílem obou aktivit, jak reklamy, tak veřejných vztahů, je tedy zisk. Dále v kapitole zjišťujeme kořeny konzumerismu ve světě a ve zkratce i ve Spojených Státech Amerických. Přičemž největší propuknutí má na svědomí druhá světová válka se Studenou válkou.

Tomuto tématu se však spíše věnuje kapitola druhá, jejímž cílem je porovnat Americký konzumerismus s tím Britským. Abychom se však dostali k tématu konzumerismus v těchto

zemích, musí být uveden i politický a společenský kontext. Z tohoto důvodu je prozkoumána i historie a způsob života v padesátých letech v obou státech. Prvotně je definována populární a masová kultura s příklady projevu v padesátých letech, a poté z hlediska historie zjišťujeme, že konzumerismus způsobily už události dávno před padesátými léty, jako je například velká hospodářská krize, kterou odstartoval krach newyorské burzy v roce 1929, nebo druhá světová válka. Právě po ní se konzumerismus rozmohl nejen ve Spojených Státech, ale i ve Velké Británii a ve světě. Nadměrné nakupování bylo výsledkem zlepšené ekonomické situace po válce a zároveň tak pomáhalo lidem vyrovnat se s tragickými událostmi, které se děly v předešlých letech. Studená válka, která přinesla opět strach z kdykoliv možného velkého konfliktu pouze přispěla k hromadění věcí. Dalším důvodem pro rozšíření konzumerismu v Americe a Anglii byl technologický pokrok a dostupnost technologických vymožeností, a to zejména masmédií. Televize, která do této doby bylo přístupná pouze zámožným lidem, se stala standardním vybavením každé domácnosti a zároveň tak nejefektivnějším nástrojem pro reklamu.

Ve třetí kapitole blíže prozkoumáváme žánr díla *Obchodníci s vesmírem* a odkrýváme tak, že je to sci-fi román který zesměšňuje společnost převážně z hlediska přehnaného nakupování a kritizuje populaci zaslepenou masmédií. Z tohoto důvodu je román také označován za satiru. Kromě toho je dílo dystopickým románem, jelikož se v něm objevují katastrofální vize budoucnosti, kdy světu vládou reklamní společnosti. Mimo podrobnějšího definování těchto všech žánrů se v této části dokonce odkrývají další autoři, kteří psali na podobná témata jako Kornbluth a Pohl nebo ti, kteří jsou považováni za průkopníky sci-fi žánru. Těmito autory jsou na příklad, Britka Mary Shelley, nebo Američan Nathaniel Hawthorne. Významným spisovatelem pro Americký vědeckofantastický svět byl také Isaac Asimov, který spolu s tvůrci *Obchodníků s vesmírem* přispíval do stejného žánrového časopisu *Galaxie*.

Všechny poznatky z předchozích kapitol jsou následně aplikovány v poslední souhrnné části, ve které je kniha zkoumaná podrobněji. Obsahem je v první řadě analýza částí knihy, kde se objevují znaky konzumerismu, odraz událostí z předchozích období, ale také odrážení společnosti a jejích problémů v padesátých letech dvacátého století. Je přidán také příklad citátu, který potvrzuje, že dílo je dystopický román a satira. Navíc jsou zmíněné zajímavé informace o autorech, jako je například fakt že pro napsání tohoto románu Pohl začal pracovat pro reklamní společnost, aby získal přehled o tom, jak to ve světě reklam vypadá. Dále mu tato zkušenost přinesla znalost odborné terminologie, na kterou by jako spisovatel a editor

pravděpodobně nenarazil. Tím, že oba autoři žili v New Yorku, měli přímo před očima vliv reklam působících na střední vrstvu společnosti a jak společnost manipulují k toužení po produktech, které mnohdy nejsou vůbec důležité k životu.

V knize se konzumerismus projevuje různými způsoby. Například zobrazením rivalit reklamních agentur o propagování planety Venuše za účelem zisku nebo skrze zesměšnění posedlosti lidí reklamami dokonce i ve vážných situacích. Postavy, které se v knize objevují jsou dalším nástrojem pro kritiku. Hlavní postava je dokonalým příkladem zaslepenosti, i přestože je velice inteligentní, nevidí obrovské problémy jak společenské, tak environmentální, které ve skutečnosti jsou všude kolem něj. Toto poukazuje i na dobu, ve které bylo dílo napsáno. Po válce se lidé snažili odvrátit svou pozornost od všeho zlého tím, že se obklopovali přežitkovými věcmi. Hlavní myšlenkou knihy je však absurdita reklam a kritika kapitalistického systému.

Z hlediska odrazu padesátých let jako takových poznáváme, že vědecký a technologický pokrok hrál při rozvoji konzumerismu obrovskou roli. Stejně tak tyto aspekty měly vliv na rozmach vědecko-fantastické literatury. Velkým přínosem a také inspirací pro Kornblutha a Pohla byla například první úspěšná kultivace srdeční tkáně provedená Americkým doktorem Alexisem Carrelem, za kterou v roce 1912 také obdržel Nobelovu cenu. V jeho experimentu vložil část srdeční tkáně kuřete do výživového média, což se ve výsledku vyvinulo v efektivní způsob udržení buněk při životě, a dokonce k jejich rozmnožování. V knize se tak objevuje podobná živá tkáň z kuřete, která nahrazuje přirozené maso a slouží jako obživa, převážně pro nižší nebo střední třídu. Může tedy být řečeno, že se autoři nechali inspirovat událostmi z dvacátého století.

Dílo tak můžeme pokládat za pomůcku pro vyjádření nespokojenosti ohledně situace vyvíjející se v půlce minulého století a zároveň tak varování pro společnost před nebezpečím konzumního způsobu života, které jak se v posledních letech zdá, může opravdu přerůst ve veliké sociální i environmentální zkázy.

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