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Where There Is Heroism There Is Hope

ABSTRACT:

Dystopian fiction, in many ways, reflects a broken, modern society that craves individuality, aches for purpose, longs for unity, and yearns for a sign of relief when there seems to be no hope in sight. With an ever changing, all consuming, life sucking, obsession with media today, coupled with the loss of individuality in a world that tries too desperately to sell the idea of uniformity for the common good, dystopian texts present an interesting perspective of the human existence. This paper seeks to add to the ongoing discourse on the human existence within the world of literature, which includes a close examination of several examples of dystopian fiction that demonstrate opposition toward modern reliance on consumer capitalism, criticizes mass manipulation through oppressive media propaganda, and calls for a response to an instinctive obligation for renewal of the human existence. George Orwell's *1984*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* reveal an unsettling, yet realistic and unfiltered view of the human existence with a modernistic response that attempts to restore peace and balance to the human experience through the audacious actions of an antihero. Central to this examination are the fears and anxieties exposed in dystopian fiction that ask readers to consider life's purpose, showing that without the ability to think and act freely, humanity is doomed to a life that is void of individuality without needed social change.

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Where There Is Heroism There Is Hope

When asked “What if,” no logical response is required, and oftentimes acknowledgement of hypothetical ramifications might include an element of imagination with a hint of suspicion. Consider for a moment, those existential questions raised throughout dystopian fiction. Contemplating the various scenarios and consequences of which the outcomes of the “What if” events emerge, readers of dystopian fiction are transported into societies, oftentimes eerily similar to their own. Dystopian fiction explores humanity’s darkest anxieties, revealing nefarious consequences. Adding to the ongoing discourse on the human existence within the world of literature, a close examination of dystopian fiction demonstrates opposition toward modern reliance on consumer capitalism, criticizes mass manipulation through oppressive media propaganda, and calls for a response to an instinctive obligation for renewal of the human existence. A comparison of themes and symbolism found in several dystopian texts reveal a needed departure from modern consumerism and blind obedience if the fate of mankind is to prosper. Since the origin of human existence a yearning for independence has infused itself into the story of mankind; through unwavering persistence, an unexpected hero ultimately sets him or herself apart from authoritarian control to attempt a renewal of peace and unity among humanity. George Orwell’s *1984*, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, and Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* will be examined through the literary lenses of New Historicism and Marxism, revealing an unsettling, yet realistic and unfiltered view of the human existence with a modernistic response that attempts to restore peace and balance to the human experience through the audacious actions of an antihero.

Modernist principles in response to the rising fear of political idealism intensified during the Cold War era. Dystopian fiction, as a result, gained a following as an avenue through which

mainstream beliefs and values are rejected accomplished by the resolute actions of the main characters. A totalitarian system in each text is based on complete control of their citizens, reflecting the social class in dominance as Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan point out in “Marxism, Critical Theory, History” in *Literary Theory An Anthology*. Each society reflected in *1984*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Hunger Games*, presents a government that is “determined by economics” and which contain “contradictions that threaten society from within” (712). Rivkin and Ryan state that Marxist criticism “is one form of historical criticism”, where the “New Historians see the historical as textual” by creating anew understanding between the literary text and the historical context (714). Several concepts will be spotlighted here and will focus on Marxist’s ideas of estranged labor and alienation and Michael Foucault’s notion of panopticism as a form of citizen control. In conjunction to focusing on elements of control, each text is examined through the lens of New Historicism that takes into consideration, as Jim Greene points out in “New Historicism”, “readers [are] a product of their own distinct cultural environment” and will impart their own understandings, attitudes, and assumptions at the time of their reading (Greene 1). For the purposes of examining each text here, the view of the text will be examined through the eye of a reader in the year 2020.

Many view dystopian fiction as a warning for future generations, a handbook, so to speak, of what not to do in the off chance humanity, as we currently know it, is to survive beyond the contemporary society now called home. What makes dystopian fiction so captivating? For one, providing the foresight needed to explore a future world not yet known, yet so ominously surreal, captivates the attention of even the most reluctant readers and catapults them into worlds of unknown technologies with consequences not so farfetched and implausible that readers are left to question their own existence. Dystopian fiction, often referred to as

speculative fiction, raises numerous questions that explore the persistence of humanity. What is revealed about cultural beliefs and values during the time period the text was written? What can be said and understood about governmental influences the author experienced that are revealed through the story? What recurring motifs and themes seem to provide insight into the importance of individual thinking and rebellion against modern expectations? Is there hope for humanity's longevity? Dystopian literature acknowledges the struggles in life and provides hope for prosperity through an unexpected hero.

Exploring the themes and motifs found within dystopian fiction demonstrate the validity and importance of acknowledging the genre as a meaningful contribution to the continued discussion and exploration of the human existence. Examining texts from various time periods points towards the tenacity found within the human story; seeking constantly to discover and understand cultural and intellectual history is a contributing factor to how society progresses and evolves. Dystopian literature provides an authentic view of humanity's fears, anxieties, and concerns regarding the state of society's future that can not be revealed any other way, and it is through literature that connections are made with the past, present, and future.

Similar themes and motifs, a modernist resistance against mainstream values and beliefs, the use of mass media propaganda to manipulate society, the loss of individuality, and rebellion towards authority, daringly suggest that the root of humanity's problems seem to stem from the growing connection to a society willing to conform without question. George Orwell's *1984* explores the hopelessness of a society forced to forget history and warns of the way government uses language to control its citizens. Orwell warns readers of a society who willingly relinquish their right to think freely in return for a deceptively unrealistic perception of safety. This adds to the dystopian notion that a society so willing to abandon individual rights for the sake of selfish

desires blindly becomes susceptible to manipulation for the sole benefit of those in power. Similarly, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* reveals the anxieties of a society who willingly destroy knowledge and wisdom, replacing it with happiness found in materialistic objects and advanced technology, perpetuating the idea that reliance on media is a suitable replacement for critical thinking. Without the skills to critically think for oneself, developed through close introspection of other written works, humanity subjects itself to the mercy of the organization in power, and likewise is vulnerable to manipulation. Bradbury highlights the manipulation factor through the use of society's consumeristic reliance on various technologies which become a surrogate instrument to supply counterfeit happiness. Both of these dystopian worlds emphasize the consequences of blind compliance.

While the previous mentioned novels were first written in 1949 and 1951 respectively, nearly sixty years later, Suzanne Collins reveals in the novel *The Hunger Games*, written in 2008, that the fears and anxieties of the future state of mankind continue to expose unsettling truths of the influence of mass media and manipulative propaganda. Dystopian worlds depict a humanity subjected to oppressive governmental control at the loss of one's unique, autonomous existence. Bradbury and Orwell both describe a future where freedom is restricted; superficial happiness is forced upon the masses, and knowledge is censored. In a society not too unlike that created sixty years prior, Collins explores the consequences experienced of citizens whose blind obedience is subjugated to the happiness of the wealthy class. The after effects of a country that tried but failed at an attempt to rebel against a totalitarian government raises a few questions. What aspect of modern life seems to reflect a growing superficiality of banal conformity? Collins seems to comment on this by revealing the perplexing dissonance of the districts who are told that everything about their way of life is seemingly working for the growth of citizens, yet

are painfully aware of the major problems. Michael Foucault's concept of a disciplined society takes center stage in *Panem* as citizens in the districts are largely controlled out of fear of death. Foucault suggests that a perfectly governed city is "traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation . . . the town [is] immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies" (4). Despite the constant surveillance and inability of the districts to freely convene, Collins, like her counterparts, crafts a central figure who embodies the rebellious nature of humanity in the search for truth and freedom who represents hope through heroic civil disobedience.

What is most interesting among these three texts is that there is a character within each who dares to question authority, not your typical heroic protagonist, rather, an antihero who seems to represent the ordinary citizen. What does this suggest about cultural beliefs and values? How are the philosophies of Old Testament prophecy, regarding the future of mankind, revealed through these unlikely heroes who provide hope in the darkest of times? Impactful for future generations is the knowledge and understanding gained from the wisdom imparted through modernist, dystopian literature. Even the least suspecting individual has the power to grow, unfold, and develop the idea that mankind is capable of preserving individuality and integrity for the benefit of future generations. Knowledge and understanding gained from the pages of dystopian literature reveal the courage of unlikely heroes that create a hopeful possibility of living in a universe with peace and justice.

Modernism, a literary movement often associated with censorship, sex, liberated women, and violent avant-garde is thought to have had its inception as early as the late nineteenth century, spanning after the end of the Second World War. Some may even argue that modernism is a style of writing that can still be found in twenty-first century literature which may suggest a

deeper “ever shifting field of cultural activity” (Potter 2). Modernization created a harsh reclassification of citizens, which ended up widening the disparity between the poor and rich. Rachel Potter explains in *Modernist Literature* that the term *modernist* was first used to describe literature in 1927 in a book titled *A Survey Of Modernist Poetry* by Robert Graves and Laura Riding, who both “defended the ‘difficulty’ of modernist as opposed to ‘traditional’ poetry and discussed the fact that modernist writing was necessarily distanced from the ‘plain’ or ‘ordinary’ reader” (2). Modernists first strayed from traditional forms of writing, experimenting with techniques of “inner monologue and poetic fragmentation” and evolved from there as time went on (2). It can be said then that dystopian fiction is a result of the modernist response, exploring the darker side of social anxieties which seem to have begun with the widening of the social status gap resulting from urbanization of a booming industrial revolution.

With the close surveillance of citizens, the government easily can classify people and populations according to any criteria that is set into place. As Hassan Abootalebi makes clear in “The Omnipresence of Television and the Ascendancy of Surveillance”, “contemporary surveillance eliminates individuality and uniqueness” (10). A modernist response to the elimination of uniquenesses seemingly leads to rebellion for the collective good. Dystopianism can be thought of as representing a modernist fear of what the future holds if humanity does not avert catastrophe as well as reflecting worse case scenarios that could likely become historical reality.

Literature is said to be a reflection of the state of humanity during the time in which it was written. Andrew Hammond writes in “The Twilight of Utopia” that the “Cold War was the guiding influence on all major forms of cultural and philosophical expression in the period” (662). The Cold War seems to have influenced the story of human fortitude by shaping cultural

experiences which reveal themselves in literature that came out of the skepticism society seems to maintain about the end of times and the human story. There is no doubt that the Cold War shaped a generation searching for the answers to existential absurdity as the term “dystopia” can arguably find its origin during this period of time. What is the appealing nature of dystopian fiction? In part, dystopian fiction offers an element of escapism, but seems to satirize society as it currently exists. Dystopian fiction, Hammond writes, “imaginatively intensifies contemporary trends in order to caution against them” during a time when idealistic changes seem to call for social change (664). Where utopian fiction seemingly offers an idealistic view of society, Hammond clearly points out that “utopia betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that had to be imposed by force”, suggesting that dystopian fiction became the response to the human attempt to search for hope in the midst of uncertainty (644). Old Testament prophets such as are found in the book of Isaiah first reveal the human necessity to live in hope for a coming hero who will provide restoration. Isaiah writes in Chapter 12, verse 2, “See, God has come to save me. I will trust in him and not be afraid. The Lord God is my strength and my song; he has given me victory” (Biblia). Even from the earliest of recorded history as Isaiah writes, a longing for a coming hero is necessary for humanity to thrive together. Christians around the world read, study, and tell of the stories of the savior who came to save the world from sin and death, which is to say that it is not surprising to discover an antihero in a world of dystopia who also bears resemblance to the humble beginnings of Jesus, known to Christians as the savior, who rescues humanity. At the core of Western civilization where Christianity has a great deal of influence, the belief that the light of the world is found within the unexpected hero prepares society for what could be at the end of time. Representing social and cultural ideals, the unexpected savior is a reflection of the issues plaguing humanity; dystopian

fiction supports the revelation that only the one who resists modern principles that seemingly stifle individuality will be the one who can provide hope in the darkest of times.

Unlike any other year, 2020 has produced cultural attitudes and assumptions that create a new perspective for readers of each of these texts in the years to come. In the *New York Times* article, “The 20 Phrases That Defined 2020”, Tim Herrera notes how words and phrases like “contract tracing”, “Black Lives Matter”, “doomscrolling”, “essential worker”, “flatten the curve”, “frontline workers”, “hydroxychloroquine”, “remote learning”, “social distancing”, “quarantine”, and “zoom” sound like something out of the future that one might read about in a dystopian novel; however, they have become part of our everyday vocabulary. Ironically, this is now the reality. Reading dystopian fiction of the past again in the year 2020 will no doubt impact the way readers understand and connect with the fears and concerns of that time period because of the experiences endured during that era in history. Those who read *1984* again or for the first time after the year 2020 connect with the concept of being under constant surveillance with the amount of technology that can now react to voice commands or track one’s every movement with global positioning capabilities, otherwise known as GPS.

Fears of governmental control permeate pages of dystopian fiction across all time, emphasizing the need for individual choice and the fear of loss of freedom. From the omnipresent threat of constant surveillance through telescreens, George Orwell wrote in the year 1949 of a government that watched every move its citizens made. In Oceania, citizens can not escape the sight of the country’s seemingly omniscient leader, known only as Big Brother, whose figure can be seen everywhere one looks. Controlling the thoughts of the citizens by prohibiting free thinking, sex, and individuality of any kind, the oppressive government has caused the main character Winston Smith, who works for the Ministry of Truth, to begin questioning his

government that requires him to alter historical records to meet the needs of the Party. Winston becomes a symbol of hope against totalitarianism as he recognizes the consequences of removing cultural and intellectual history from the permanent records of the country. When Americans were outraged in the summer of 2020, at the height of the Black Lives Matters protests, many questioned events in the country's history that have gone unstudied in high school history classes and wondered what else is being forgotten and ignored. A call to action, a plea, by ordinary people willing to speak up called for a reexamination of the current educational curriculum in an effort to more accurately account for the nation's past. Considering Winston's ordinary last name of "Smith" and examining his place in society closely and his repetitive rebelliousness throughout the novel, it seems to suggest that he symbolizes the common citizen in the same way the BLM, ordinary citizens demand acknowledgement of the past. Furthermore, compared to the aspirations of the Party, Winston represents citizens who are manipulated into mindless believing of the propaganda they are fed by the upper class who are associated with the powerful Big Brother. Like any common citizen willing to separate themselves from divisiveness, Winston becomes the unlikely hope for restoration of human tenacity.

Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth, to rewrite portions of the nation's history, was to "not only supply the multifarious needs of the Party, but also to repeat the whole operation at a lower level for the benefit of the proletariat" (Orwell 43). Winston's thoughts reveal his rebelliousness as he contemplates the manipulative nature of the Party's motives, questioning the "delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say" (Orwell 43). Beginning to boil with rage as the novel opens, Winston serves as a juxtaposition to the Party who uses common citizens to manipulate the intellectual and cultural history of the country.

With further crimes against the Party serving to cultivate a growing sense of disdain, Winstin becomes a cog in the wheel of mass manipulation. Being a member of the lower class, Winstin represents all common citizens who are manipulated, controlled, and dependent upon a government that does not have the citizens' well-being in mind. One could say that Winstin was motivated by fear, but that would not explain the continued crimes against the Party; rather, his motivations grew out of a sense of rebellion, a sense of the basic human desire for freedom, and a growing need for renewal of humanity.

Similarly, in an unnamed, futuristic American city, Guy Montag a fireman, sets fires rather than puts them out. Writing in 1951, Ray Bradbury describes a futuristic society in which Montag lives that does not read books, enjoy nature, have meaningful conversations, or think for themselves. Instead, the government seemingly has convinced its citizens that true happiness only comes from mindless watching of a wall-sized television, inevitably becoming obsessed with what is viewed on T.V rather than the people in their own lives and the world in which they live. Montag's government controls what citizens do with their free time by outlawing reading and subsequently, critical thinking of important life issues. Citizens are controlled by the technology that is marketed to consumers as a means to provide happiness and fulfillment in life. Again, as seen in Bradbury's writing, the removal of cultural and intellectual history from texts of the past seems to have created a group of individuals who are left not having any other influence upon their thoughts and behavior other than what the government provides them.

Like Winstin, who works for a power system that controls and manipulates its citizens, Montag also poses as a fireman who burns the texts in which is found the story of humanity. Bradbury and Orwell were fearful of what new technologies meant for a rapidly transforming society reliant on other means of communication, education, and recreation. Emphasizing a

changing society, with alarming consequences to the fate of humanity, Montag, like Winston becomes a symbol of hope for the common man who has been forced to believe that the government knows what is best for the people. In this way, Montag “wore his happiness like a mask” that indicated his growing disdain for the apparatus for which he pledged his daily allegiance; however, after meeting young Clarise with eyes that “were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact”, Montag realizes that ridding the world of texts that fueled discourse and were a part of the intellectual history of what enabled conversation, he too rebelled against manipulative governmental control of one’s ability to think and question freely (Bradbury 5 and 9). Bradbury hints at Montag’s importance here as an unexpected hero who connects with the miraculous innocence embodied in Clarise’s eyes, a reminder of the importance of inquisitive nature of youth that seems to be stifled with technology that keeps them too engaged to think for themselves.

Nearly sixty years later, fears of governmental control of citizens continue to engage readers as Suzanne Collins joins the likes of Orwell and Bradbury to describe a doomed future society who has seemingly allowed the government to take control of how citizens live and spend their time. Protagonist Katniss Everdeen questions The Capitol and President Snow’s motive early on and readers are also introduced to the manipulation of the citizens of Panem through the propaganda each household is forced to watch when President Snow wants to make an announcement. Citizens are unconvincingly manipulated to believe that The Capitol provides food and entertainment for the interest of the country’s future; however, in reality, the involuntary entertainment is truly for the wealthy who reside in The Capitol, at the fatal expense of the poor districts who are forced to sacrifice one male and one female to be sent into an arena

to fight to their death. Each district's food is rationed to individual districts, which is never enough, leaving them ever dependent on the government to survive.

Katniss, the protagonist in Collins's dystopian world, does not work for the government in the same way that Montag and Winston seem to; rather, she represents the oppressed classes of society who work tirelessly in the outlying districts to provide for the wealthy who live prosperously in the land of milk and honey. As a way to remind the citizens of Panem of their powerlessness after the uprising, a painful memory of the country's past in which an attempt to overthrow the government ended in defeat, The Capitol requests that each district select one male and one female tribute, otherwise thought of as a sacrifice, to be sent to the Hunger Games. Manipulation of the citizens for the entertainment of those living in The Capitol is the means by which the government controls the country's cultural identity and thereby reminding them of the sacrifices needed for what the government states is for the good of all citizens.

Working tirelessly to provide goods or a service for the controlling government with little in return to provide for their own families, is known as Estranged Labor, a term coined by Karl Marx. Each text represents a government who arguably manipulates ordinary citizens into thinking that the established law is what will maintain community prosperity, and whether citizens are producing a product or completing a task they have been assigned to do, individuals are likely in a situation where they have been led to believe that they have no other choice. In a society where governmental control is involved in every aspect of life, little time is left for many to question the government's true motives. In a society where the workers become poorer as the more wealth that is produced, Marx writes, "The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things . . . [a] direct proportion to the devaluation of the world of men" also increases (719). Considering the society

from which Katniss comes, the citizens of Panem work to provide goods to the wealthy while their own families struggle to survive. As the wealthy continue to value and need the goods only the outlying districts can provide, the tension between the workers and The Capitol increases as does the need and demand of those goods.

Equally oppressed is Winstin who has been led to believe that it is in the best interest of society to rewrite what is known about the past. Working for the government in this way, Winstin begins to question the government's motives and as the government begins to feel the questioning of its citizens, it becomes even more necessary for the Party to manipulate what the citizens believe to be true. Winstin becomes aware of the fact that he must not be the only one tasked with rewriting his portion of history, as he takes note that, "Very likely as many as a dozen people were now working away on rival versions of what Big Brother had actually said" which seems to suggest that a number of workers are needed in order to manipulate the history to the government's satisfaction (Orwell 45). Completing the task that requires multiple workers invariably lessens the worth of the individual who becomes nothing more than the commodity it produces. Winstin further observes as he witnesses, "some master brain in the Inner Party [who] would select this version or that, would re-edit it and set in motion the complex processes of cross-referencing that would be required, and then the chosen lie would pass into the permanent records and become truth"; yet, not a single question was dared ask that might suggest opposition to the order to change history (Orwell 45). Winstin, like so many other protagonists of dystopian fiction represent the institutionalized manipulation of common citizens who have systematically been stripped of individuality and made to believe that the world in which they live is better off the way it is presently understood. In this way, governments of such societies manipulate the cultural and intellectual identity of its citizens for the benefit of themselves.

Comparing modern life to that of the past and what is created through the world of literature offers a new historical view of life as suggested by New Historicists. Greene points out further that through the New Historicist lens, readers can embrace “conflicting interpretations of a work, finding value in the notion that an author or a work can seem to offer positive and negative views of events, figures, and ideas simultaneously” (1). Furthermore, on a deeper level, the aim is to generate an understanding of the predominant cultural issues that define both the author's and reader's times. At the heart of analysis through a New Historicist lens, leads readers to first consider the historical reference point from which the author writes in order to understand the society from which the literature originated.

Understanding the historical context and influence of mass media and government propaganda becomes an interesting vantage point to consider in each text, shedding light on cultural struggles where readers explore how each society is influenced and the means by which information, or in many cases, misinformation is transmitted. With a growing distrust of government, historically speaking, themes of an implied struggle between the attempts by governments to influence society and citizen vocalization of needs and actions becomes the focal point running through the foundations of the texts reflecting society's fears and anxieties.

Considering the tremendous influence that social media has had on current American culture, especially in the year 2020, a modern reader's point of view is one that reveals an impression that the organizations, individuals, and governments in a text seek to influence citizens through the various forms of media. In “Social Media and Society”, Anatoliy Gruzd points out that the term, “‘social media’ first appeared in literature in the early 2000s”; yet, the term is for obvious reasons not included in dystopian fiction of the past (647). However, the uncanny similarities of a watchful government and the influence of an underlying agenda can be

discerned through the struggles of Winston Smith, Guy Montag, and Katniss Everdeen. Since the invasion of the television into homes in the 1950s, to the omnipresent social media outlets, and the seemingly omniscient eyes and ears of devices like Siri and Alexa, there is no doubt that technology has redefined culture and the way modern readers understand dystopian technology. Because most dystopian stories stem from the struggles a society experiences as a response to governmental involvement, it is not surprising that studies show a marked decline in the trust of its government which end up being reflected in literature. Consider a 2016 Gallop poll that suggests, “popular trust in the U.S. Congress has declined from 42% in 1973, to 22% in 2005, to an extreme low of 9% in 2016” (Gruzd 651). One can likely conclude that no matter the time period in history, a recurring theme is a society’s distrust of its government which seems to weaken as the technologies used to influence and manipulate them increase.

The term Big Brother refers to Winston’s powerful leader whose propaganda and Alexa-like qualities to hear everything citizens say and do, seems to suggest this distrust in government, a theme that permeates throughout the novel; however, a deeper consideration might take one into an unfamiliar world where ethical exploration is at the root of political and social concerns. Winston contests the desire of Big Brother to produce inaccurate historical records influenced by a political agenda as he contemplates, “It might very well be that literally every word in the history books, even the things that one accepted without question, was pure fantasy” which seems to draw attention to the novel’s central question asked later by O’Brien, “Then where does the past exist, if at all?” (Orwell 75 and 248). In a time of societal uncertainty, the modern approach is to reflect a fictional future world that can be considered a historical narrative itself. Orwell seems to raise a poignant question by suggesting that the present we know to be true may

in fact be manipulated and careful consideration should be taken by those who choose to blindly believe it.

Similarly, fire is used as a recurring theme throughout Bradbury's novel with the burning of books accomplished by Montag and other firemen. This notion has its historical roots during a time when the Nazis burned books and a wave of censorship spread across the nation of Germany in the early twentieth century, creating a cloud of fear by the House Un-American Activities Committee and McCarthyism, which Ramin Bahrani writes in "Why 'Fahrenheit 451' Is the Book for Our Social Media Age", "brought political repression, blacklists and censorship of literature and art. These anxieties permeate the novel" (1). Readers understand the historical context that brought this dystopian world to life; considering the current civil unrest felt just in the United States alone in the year 2020, Bahrani makes a solid point regarding heightened anxieties when citizens feel as though their voices and opinions are being censored.

Consider if the voice of the president of the United States can be censored, as happened to President Trump on January 8, 2021 when the social media platform Twitter announced that his account had been suspended, the common citizen must question the implications of any subsequent form of censorship. What were the Nazis trying to accomplish when they burned books in 1933? What about in the twenty-first century, as social media platforms ban average citizens and even the president of the United States from having a voice? Much could be debated here; however, the focus is simply that the slippery-slope society treads when allowing censorship to occur creates a toxic environment we all must live in. Bradbury feared the destruction of knowledge and loss of intellectual identity. The Nazi's burning of books was an attempt to eliminate individual opinions that strayed from the ideologies of those who held governmental power. One must consider how similar in nature it is when a social media platform

can so easily stop the voice of the president of the United States. What happens if a society believes that it would never happen to them too? What happens if people stop speaking up for oppressed groups of people? What happens if individual opinions are outlawed?

Bradbury's main concern is the loss of what can be learned through books that enable individuals to contemplate opinions for themselves. With the invasion of the television into people's homes, Bradbury's anxieties are exacerbated as society seems to blindly allow themselves to become a drudge in front of the idiot box while their books lay unread.

Readers in the twenty-first century can certainly relate to the effect that such technology has on society, but are enough citizens cognizant of the manipulation of their opinions and ideologies if they allow themselves to be sucked in, affecting the way individuals are able to think for themselves? Bradbury wrote about the burning of books to warn against the loss of intellectual individualism and the threat of becoming more obsessed with television than the world around them. Television in the 1950s can easily be compared to the take over of social media today, having formed a society that is glued to a screen as Beatty insists to Montag that, "...the word 'intellectual', of course, became the swear word it deserved to be" (Bradbury 55). What can be understood here is that a movement by the government to prohibit reading or knowledge of any kind is an attempt to stifle individualism. Modernist dystopian authors like Bradbury feared the loss of individuality and critical thinking, which would undoubtedly make society easy to control and manipulate over a period of time. Dystopian fiction of the twenty-first century reflects this period of time in which professing individuality has resulted in a present world of submissive and conformist members of society who have internalized the punishment for expressing individual thoughts, deterring a segment of the population from engaging in rebellious acts, while

those who dare express their opinions, willing to question authority and unwilling to conform, are seen as a threat.

By understanding these texts as a reaction to a time of global upheaval and uncertainty, readers become more attuned to the kinds of complex ethical questions each text may be asking regarding how to view cultural expectations. Take for example the strange world of Panem which symbolizes a dystopian United States; a recurring theme throughout the novel. Taken from Latin, Panem is translated as “bread”, more specifically, the phrase *panem et circenses*, as defined by Miriam Webster, is translated as “bread and circuses : sustenance and entertainment provided by government to appease public discontent”. What might this suggest about the modern state of the world? Modernist dystopian works seem to suggest, as Alexandra Peat powerfully discusses in the article, “Traveling to Modernism’s Other Worlds” that “preoccupation with strange new worlds and foreign encounters” highlights “important affinities with transnational modernism” reflected in the body of dystopian literature which share the same concern of a modern world and the problem of how to survive in it (39). Peat makes a solid argument here, considering the current state of America in 2020, suggesting that many struggle to find a peaceful way to survive, not just the isolating consequences of a pandemic, but the political and civil unrest that is constantly apart of seemingly every media outlet every hour of the day.

Personal uniqueness and individual opinion is what is at the heart of critical thinking and development of the human race; however, dystopian worlds often suggest otherwise. Governments are described as not allowing any personal freedom, individuals are forced to behave as the authorities expect them to, and to make sure that citizens comply with orders, whatever is the dominant surveillance demands obedience and conformity from all. Representing

the end of liberty, total subjectification of each individual to the invasive authority figure, citizens have been trained to actively participate in the surveillance protocols without question. It is in the darkest of moments that humanity yearns for a hero, a symbol of hope. Looking again at the bread and circuses in the fictional land of Panem, modern readers empathize with a growing disconnect between the government and its citizens' lack of faith and trust in economic conditions. Questions regarding the uncertainty that defines life comes directly from the Capitol whose constant threat upon individuals' lives comes in the form of the reaping for the bread and circuses known to them as the Hunger Games.

How does an entire society become mindless followers of totalitarian ideologies? In this case, the obedient and complacent citizens would represent the docile bodies referred to in Michel Foucault's theories of social control that he discusses in his book *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* in which he emphasizes the emergence of punishment from violence against the body to the individual's mind and soul through a mechanism known as panopticism. Therefore, without question, citizens passively accept what the system has deemed as appropriate behavior because of the threat against their way of thinking, going so far as to compare discipline to that of educating. Knowing that every movement or thought is being recorded, listened to, or observed by those who instill power, thereby instill fear into citizens in the attempt to control their behavior. This is evident in a conversation between Guy Montag and Clarisse McClellan in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*:

“Do you ever read any of the books you burn?”

He laughed. “That’s against the law!”

“Oh. Of course.”

“It’s fine work...burn ‘em to ashes, then burn the ashes. That’s our official slogan.” (Bradbury 7)

Through the concept of panopticism, Foucault explains that each individual is fixed in his or her place, and if any slight movement were to be made against the established law, they do so at the risk of their own life (Foucault 1). Bradbury creates a world very much like the one a reader in the year 2020 experiences, where individuals interact with their “friends” in much the same way the characters do through the life-size, wall covering television screens. Montag’s wife Mildred is sent a script in which she is to take a part and interact with others through the “wall-to-wall circuit” which seems to have controlled Mildred’s ever waking moment. Because she is convinced that her obsession is all in good fun, she does not seem to have any recollection of taking all of her pills one night, and states, “Oh, I wouldn’t do that” (Bradbury 17). Montag, however, is aware of Mildred’s lack of time awareness, a concept that supports the idea of panopticism as a means of social control. Foucault writes that “Every day, the intendant visits”, in this case it is the host of the television show that Mildred has allowed into her home through unknowingly giving those on the other end an invitation into her home (2). She is being observed by those who appear to have no power, yet unbeknownst to her, it can be assumed that a report would be made upon her household should there be acts such as free thinking or books visible that would cultivate such illegal acts.

In this way, the inhabitants are being observed for their compliance, while the loss of individuality and free thinking is being taken away without the person even realizing it is happening. Bradbury’s fear of mindless compliance through the use of surveillance techniques as described by Foucault, painfully correlates to the world today. To consider that there is a camera everywhere one goes ensuring citizen compliance is as contemporary a technique used today for

social control as it has been for quite some time. But, what happens if citizens begin to think too much about who is watching their every movement at any hour of the day? This act of “thinking” is the very behavior that the system wants to cease and has done so by keeping their citizens entertained and happy, recognized in Mildred’s hypnotic state the night she mindlessly ingested an entire bottle of pills.

Several themes emerge out of dystopian texts warning of the consequences of blind compliance through oppressive governmental techniques. Controlling forms of discipline through surveillance techniques, organizing entertainment ensuring citizens are too distracted to think for themselves, and suppressing thoughts of rebellion with the use of mass media and propaganda are all examples of techniques used to lure society into blind compliance. As Foucault writes, “hence in order to extract from bodies the maximum time and force, the use of those overall methods known as timetables, collective training, exercises, total and detailed *surveillance*” are utilized to keep the citizens from having excess time to do any individual thinking (6). Take, for example, the all consuming nature of any social media platform today: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. Teenagers as well as adults can be found, whether in their own home or while waiting in a doctor’s office, glued to the tiny screen of their smartphone seemingly unaware of how many wasted minutes or hours have gone by without taking any notice to the world around them. These methods are equally observed through the ability of the Party in Orwell’s *1984*, to implement the authority of the Thought Police to punish those who had thoughts against the acceptable rules of society. Winston contemplates his predicament noting, “Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. . . . The Thought Police would get him just the same” (Orwell 19). Complying with the mandates in light of the threat of discipline clearly emphasizes Foucault’s

notion of mass compliance using the threat of constant surveillance. When citizens are aware of their every move being watched, controlling the masses is a way of exercising power over all the citizens, which is an uncomplicated way for a government to separate out those who pose a threat to the ideologies of a disciplined society.

Flashing the face of Goldstein, “the Enemy of the People”, onto the public screens during the daily Two Minutes Hate which “varied from day to day” reiterated for the citizens the grim consequences of individual thought and rebellion against the Party (Orwell 12). Goldstein had been “condemned to death” for his demands for “freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought”, an act that was deemed individual and contrary to the compliance order put into effect by Big Brother (Orwell 12). Amidst the intimidation of the system, citizens continue to fear for their life because of the constant messages delivered through the various forms of mass media and propaganda.

Loss of individual identity continues to threaten the human story in Collins’ *The Hunger Games*, similarly to that of her predecessors. At the heart of the Games is the elaborate production serving to remind districts that the government has total control over their life and wellbeing. For each of the districts, the government keeps the citizens under constant peacekeeper surveillance and control through the uncertainty of food and safety, two of the most basic life necessities. Ironically, the loss of individuality and installment of social control seems to work like clockwork during the preparing for, participating in, and celebrating of the Games themselves as tributes are forced to prepare themselves for sacrifice, while the wealthy tune in for enjoyment.

The loss of individuality comes with the tribute’s embodiment of the entire district, no longer are they an individual; they are the representation of the underlying emptiness of the

hierarchy under which they are constantly observed. Foucault discusses this hierarchical figure as, “strict diffusion; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power” (3). Through the forceful integration of surveillance observation, district citizens are aware that their every movement is recorded and analyzed. On the train ride to the Capitol, Effie comments on Haymitch’s behavior saying, “Your mentor has a lot to learn about presentation. A lot about televised behavior”, emphasizing the notion that every move is under the watchful eye of those in the Capitol, a surveillance technique used to reinforce compliance (Collins 46). Effie continues to inform Katniss that Haymitch, “can well be the difference between your life and your death!” (Collins 47). Bringing to light the realization that there is a division between the districts for purposeful social control, Foucault would describe this confinement as that which gives “rise to disciplinary projects . . . [the] division between one set of people and another, . . . and organization in deputy of surveillance and control [creating] an intensification and ramification of power” (3). Keeping a watchful eye upon the behavior of each citizen induces fear and maintains social control, where individuality and critical thinking are associated with fear of death, the hopeful deterrent of rebellion. District citizens represent disadvantaged, poor, and impoverished Americans while those living in the Capitol seem to exploit the sorrows of the less fortunate for their own consumeristic desires. Collins seems to compare Panem’s historical roots to the ancient Romans and their arena games, linking past and future, showing how humanity’s innate inclination for rebellion is linked with war and destruction.

At the core of humanity are a certain set of rights that form an intrinsic desire to pursue happiness and a life of enjoyment. America, for instance, was founded on these basic principles

which are written in *The Declaration of Independence* and establish for American citizens that as a collective country, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” But, what happens when citizens feel as though their rights have been taken away? What happens when their ability to experience happiness and a life unobstructed by tyrannical control has been threatened? Citizens ban together in a rebellion against the very government that is oppressing them. British citizens, who would later call themselves Americans, rebelled against the King of Britain who refused to grant them their most basic human rights and as *The Declaration of Independence* would later declare:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. (National Archives)

Countless other groups of people have since separated themselves from oppressive governmental control for the same reasons; at the core of humanity is the hope for freedom. When freedom is threatened, it is by human nature to rebel against that which threatens it, and in America, *The Declaration of Independence* acknowledges the need for separation from allegiances that no longer fulfill the most basic of all human rights: freedom.

Any legitimate government is founded upon these most basic principles of human freedom. What is revealed then, through the passages written by Orwell, Bradbury, and Collins? Before there was dystopian fiction, the stories found in the Old Testament lay the groundwork for a troubled humanity wrestling with oppressive, deceitful, murderous leaders, searching for a

hero who would restore hope for mankind. Hope for freewill and restoration of peace drives even the most ordinary individual to declare enough is enough. What is often overlooked is the passage after the famous introduction in *The Declaration of Independence* pointing to a crucial understanding in the basis for any rebellion. Recognizing the need that citizens may feel compelled to separate themselves from that which oppress them, the historical document declares:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (National Archives)

Universally, the desire to pursue happiness stems from the ability to freely go about life in a manner that individually meets the needs of citizens. When a governing body detracts from its citizens this ability to achieve individual happiness, *The Declaration of Independence* encourages Americans to “alter or abolish” the governing body that has diminished the “safety and happiness” of its citizens; pointing to the human desire, and arguably innate right, to rebel against any threat to individual well-being.

In the book *The Politics of The Hunger Games*, Jamey Heit makes a solid point when she states that, “When a government ceases to be effective in protecting rights and preserving freedom, the government is the problem” which is the basis for the rebellion in *The Hunger*

Games, representing all oppressed people (102). Undebatable then is the justification of rebellion against the oppression of basic human principles. Given the current state of unrest in America in the year 2020, rebellion in response to oppressive ideologies continues to permeate the human experience. Heit boldly describes President Snow as one who “very clearly fails to provide the safety and happiness of anyone outside his own personal interests”, which could be said about many present day political leaders (103). For years, the citizens of Panem complied with President Snow’s tyrannical governance out of fear of losing their lives, which supports Heit’s suggestion that the only reason President Snow continued to enforce the games is because “any right to abolish the government has not been exercised” (103). During all the years of the games in the history of the government, not a single person made an attempt to boldly question the government’s need for the games. The citizens are undoubtedly fearful to do so because they know full well what will happen if so much as a whisper of noncompliance leaves their mouth; however, Katniss becomes the symbolic figure who catapults the rebellion into motion. Prior inaction of an entire society rests on Snow’s ability to manipulate the entire country out of fear which is used to silence anyone who dares criticize his tactics.

Symbolizing a rebellious response to modern society steeped in oppression, an anti hero can be found in any ordinary citizen with enough gumption to prevail against all odds. Winstin, Montag, and Katniss all share similar foundations that Isaiah alluded to in the ancient text of the Old Testament. Isaiah often alluded to the coming messiah, the one who would bear mankind’s burdens, who would willingly give his life to restore peace. He writes in chapter 9, verse 6, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Biblia). Peace is the key antidote for restoration of the human existence as Isaiah

indicates for the Israelites who, like Winston, Montag, and Katniss, search for reestablishment of balance for a peaceful society. Jesus is arguably the ultimate antihero foreshadowed in ancient Old Testament stories because he faced opposition and resistance almost every day of his life, later revealed in New Testament Stories. His humble beginnings and life of blameless servitude demonstrates the courage and willingness needed to sacrifice self for the sake of humanity. Similar demonstrations of selflessness are found in Winston, Montag, and Katniss who, likewise, choose bravery and courage to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the collective society.

The antihero's place in the human story reflects a universal struggle emphasizing the quest societies and cultures experience needed for restoration of peace, balance, and unity among a people. Dystopian antiheroes represent the presence of social unrest that causes a disconnect within a culture revealing unsettling truths about the brokenness of humanity. Whether a section of society continues to suffer oppression, a group of people continue to fight racism, or a segment of the population continue to experience inequality, hope for restoration and peace comes from an individual who dares to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, someone willing to die for others to rebuild humanity. The role of the antihero reflects the ongoing resistance to mainstream cultural beliefs with motives and actions that dare oppose the destructive qualities of unchecked governmental power. While on the surface life appears prosperous; the antihero reveals that underneath the deceit is the superficiality of oppressive influence to cultural conformity.

Culturally impactful is the message that dystopian themes and characters reveal by showing the devastating consequences of mindless compliance. Worlds of dystopian fiction unmask the condition of a humanity too reliant on modern technology and too obsessed with the superficiality of consumerism, glaringly acknowledging the core element of what unites cultures

across time periods. Setting him or herself apart from the societal expectations, the steadfast gumption of the unexpected hero reveals the desire to achieve renewal of peace and balance in the story of humanity. The fears and anxieties exposed in dystopian fiction ask readers to consider life's purpose, showing that without the ability to think and act freely, humanity is doomed to a life that is void of individuality without needed social change. When life's hopelessness seems to have emerged from totalitarian control, an unlikely hero emerges who willingly sacrifices themselves, rebels against conformity, calls for a response to oppression, and renews the importance of individual uniqueness to provide hope for the future of humanity.

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