

The Future as Interpreted by Three Twentieth Century Authors

Throughout time, people have been fascinated with the future. Whether by crystal balls, palm readings or horoscopes, people have tried to discover their fate. Three nineteenth century writers presented their pessimistic opinions of the future in novels. In Fahrenheit 451, A Brave New World, and 1984, Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell all present a negative future where an individual rebels against his society, and in the process, comment on their own society.

In Fahrenheit 451 the future is portrayed as a scientifically advanced society ruled by an anti-intellectual government that seeks to suppress free thought and expression. In this society the most obvious obstruction to expression is a law forbidding all books which "...stimulate the imagination with complex ideas or vivid images of human possibilities" (Magill's 253). Since all buildings are fireproof in the future, Montag's career as a fireman entails collecting and burning books. On different days different groups and authors are burned. The people have been conditioned to think that books are evil and contain nothing of use. Beatty, the fire chief, illogically tells Montag that since everyone is bothered by some portion of literature, if it entirely destroyed, people will be ignorantly happy. He also says if the mental stimulation gained from books is not present, people will not have to think or make decisions, therefore allowing them to stay perpetually happy. The people themselves do not communicate freely or in any depth. They spend their leisure time in front of televisions that occupy four walls of a room so they can mindlessly involve themselves with the families and adventures displayed. The value people place on the "walls" demonstrates the extreme lack of imagination that pervades the society. If people do become bored or mentally flustered, they can place small sea shell apparatuses in their ears and listen to soothing sounds that relax their minds from all thought. The use of these devices is similar to the abuse of drugs, in that they are a physical means to escape the realities of life. Drugs, such as the sleeping pills, that Lenia take are another example of the inability of the people to cope with reality. Bradbury is demonstrating his view that without books to stimulate free thought and imagination, society will become damned to a fate of mindless dissatisfaction.

In A Brave New World Huxley presents a future portrayed by a scientifically engineered society, that doesn't permit individuality, free thought or the expression of deep feelings. First of all, people are

biologically predestined to have certain traits that will allow them to function properly in a predetermined caste to which they are assigned. While incubating in test tubes, fetuses are conditioned to have a certain strength, intelligence, and aptitude. In this way they are built to conform to their particular caste, and thus the possibility of variation is negated. For instance, people created to be in the lowest caste are bred with strength, but lack intelligence. That way they will spend their life doing the undesirable manual labor the rest of society wouldn't want to, but will remain happy. In these lower castes many exact duplicates are produced, thus crushing any form of individuality. Because people tend to think more when they are alone, citizens in the utopia are encouraged to maintain perpetual contact with others. The Brave New World tries to eliminate conflict by eliminating all emotions. From birth citizens are taught to have sex with everybody else because meaningful relationships could result in conflict. In certain religions, such as the one Bernard tries, people reach solidarity through sexual orgy. They are also encouraged to engage in mindless activities, such as feelies and soma. These provide an escape from reality and allow people to live without worry. Milton Birnbaum feels the world Huxley creates acknowledges his fear "...the world will drift in to a technological 'utopia', where the focus of life is on the human sphere, rather than the betterment of the mind and soul" (56).

The future in 1984 is portrayed by a government that imposes perpetual warfare, tyranny and terror upon its citizens. First of all, the world in 1984 is divided into three political entities, which are perpetually at war with one another. Louis Trilling states that to maintain a balance of power two are always allied against the other, and sudden alliance shifts often occur. Furthermore he states that this system of war is intact to insure absolute rule and maintain the stability of the economy (Trilling 26). The rulers of Oceania have gained complete power over the people and know, "...just as wealth exists only in relation to the poverty of others, so power in its purest aspect exists only in relation to the weakness of others." (Trilling 26) That is why they deprive all the citizens of every trace of individualism and self-worth they possess. The Party also maintains power by provoking absolute power over the people and utilizing fear as a weapon. An important image is that of Big Brother, who is an omni-present but never seen ultimate power. Early in the story we realize there are telescreens everywhere that permit the authorities to make sure citizens are acting accordingly. These telescreens are monitored by the

Thought Police, who serve as policemen against thoughtcrimes. The authorities in Oceania have the power to rewrite the past at their discretion. Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, where he alters history to fit the needs of the leaders. This systematic obliteration of history prevents people from considering their present condition because they lack knowledge of past events to base it on. The people accept the rewritten history because the official mode of thought is doublethink, which is "...the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accept both of them" (Hynes 17). This idea is reinforced by Newspeak, a language that contains no words that formulate free speech. Through *The Party* in 1984, Orwell documents the methods totalitarian governments use to acquire and maintain control of the citizens, and the negative effects these governments have on society.

In Fahrenheit 451 Montag rebels against society by coming to the realization that he is unhappy with his life and world, and that books have a great importance to mental well-being and genuine happiness. When we meet Montag, he has just finished a day of burning books. At first, he seems content with his work, but after talking with Clarisse, he hints his life is empty and purposeless. By asking him mind provoking questions and speaking of such abstract topics as morning dew and the beauties of life, she stimulates his mind to this realization. When he arrives home, his wife, Mildred, has apparently taken an overdose of sleeping pills, possibly a suicide attempt. He is unhappy with their relationship because they simply do not partake in conversation of any worth. While the emergency crew is cleaning his wife's stomach he thinks, "If only they could have taken her mind along to the dry cleaners" (Bradbury 15). After he hears Clarisse has died in an automobile accident, his melancholy feelings toward his life intensify. After experiencing an old woman who would rather burn with her books than give them up, he decides to look into what they really are (Magill's 252). He ends up hoarding a great amount of literature at his house that he attempts to read and understand, but because he can not fully understand the literature he seeks the teaching of Faber, an old English teacher. Faber's pro-literature influence weighs heavily upon the already brewing feelings of discontent and rebellion in Montag. When Mildred calls the fire department to her own house, Montag goes into a frenzy burning every thing in his house and then burns Beatty to a crisp. After this crime Montag is

forced into exile and is hunted by the police and the mechanical hound. With Faber's assistance Montag escapes the city before it is blown up in a nuclear attack. He stumbles upon a community of fugitives, who memorize books and pass them on verbally, so they can be rewritten when books become legal, and thus Montag achieves his goal of helping maintain the existence of literature. Through Montag, Bradbury demonstrates his view that the rebirth of an individual's intellect and free thoughts is possible in an intellectually deprived society, but in order for change to occur there must be some type of group effort.

When John is thrown into the Brave New World, he does not act in conjunction with the standards of that society, and furthermore is used as a tool to contrast the Brave New World with his own. John is from an Indian Reservation in America, but is the son of two Utopians. During his life on the reservation he is influenced by the Utopia, Indians, the Bible, and Shakespeare. He experienced pain and suffering, unlike the inhabitants of the Brave New World. Therefore he looks at the Utopia from an almost Christianized Western Civilization perspective. When John meets Helmholtz Watson, the two are deeply intrigued with each other's insights into the Utopia and spend time arguing with each other. The most obvious conflict he experiences in the Brave New World is his relationship with Lenia. She takes him to the "feelies" where he sees a blond, white woman and a black man making love. John is terribly upset by the erotic nature of the movie which he feels is "base" and "ignoble" (114). John loves Lenia dearly, but cannot allow himself to make love to her. In his mind this would be immoral and unloving, but in Lenia's it is the customary thing to do. This conflict comes to a peak when Lenia strips naked and presses up against John. He becomes infuriated, grabs her wrists, and exclaims, "Whore! Impudent strumpet!" (132). He then throws her from his apartment and goes into his bathroom, where he recites Shakespearean verse to soothe himself. He then goes to visit his mother, who has overdosed on soma and will soon die. When children come into the room for their weekly conditioning to see death as a pleasant process, John loses control and threatens to destroy the conditioning. He ends up living in solitude, unable to live in the hedonistic society around him, and eventually commits suicide. Through John's experiences in the Brave New World, Huxley best conveys his feelings of contempt for the Utopia.

By rebelling against his society through participation in illegal acts against the state, Winston exposes the ills of his society. Winston is dissatisfied with his life and is lonely. He, unlike most others, remembers a time when things weren't as dismal. The connection between Winston's rebellion and the past is evident in his reoccurring dreams of the past, the antique diary he purchases, and an old-fashioned paperweight that plays an important symbolic role. Because his job is to change history and design the future it seems ironic he tries to get to the past through his rebellion. His first act of insurrection is seen when he purchases a diary. His writings in the book drive his negative feelings toward the Party, and in response to these emotions, he begins an affair with Julia, an illegal act. He is well aware desire is a thoughtcrime, but is drawn to Julia for this very reason. He is lonely and unhappy with his life, but more importantly needs a tool to protest the Party. The two carry on the affair for a decent amount of time, but the relationship never develops past pleasurable sex and phony expressions of love. During the affair Winston becomes fascinated with overthrowing the Party. He approaches O'Brien, a high government official, with his problems because he suspects O'Brien is a member of the Brotherhood, a rebel group. Although Winston has no evidence to base his assumption on, O'Brien becomes a symbol of hope to Winston of a better life. Because Winston is so careless in his relationship with Julia and O'Brien ends up being in the Inner Party, he is caught by the Thought Police and convicted as a political criminal. He is sentenced to brainwashing and torture to reestablish his loyalty to the country. These activities are lead by O'Brien, who manipulates Winston's thoughts and emotions until he has become totally oblivious to his past dissatisfactions with Oceania, and is transformed back to an ideal citizen focused upon living only for the good of the government. Through Winston, Orwell shows the danger of totalitarian governments by documenting the inability of one man to achieve any individuality, freedom, or happiness in this environment.

Although he feels it is possible for mankind to diminish into the society in Fahrenheit 451, Bradbury uses Montag to demonstrate his beliefs that one, individuals can achieve fulfilling lives of self knowledge and two, the possibility of society developing into a place of knowledge and understanding is quite obtainable. Through his transition, Montag makes an effort, first to simply collect books, then to attempt to understand them, and finally to try to preserve their existence. As this process transpires, he

becomes more independent and able to think freely. The first section of the book entitled "The Hearth and the Salamander" (3) refers to Montag. Since salamanders are mythological known to be able to survive in fire, Montag, who is able to survive, is the salamander in the fiery hearth of the mindless society in which he lives (Magill's 253). He makes an important step in developing his own intellect by showing an interest in books, and deciding to hoard them. In the next section, Montag comes to the realization he needs assistance in understanding the ideas presented in the literature he has accumulated. He takes the initiative to contact Faber and risk getting caught with the literature. His new emotions and feelings of independence become obvious when he tries to discuss the worth of books with Mildred and her friends. Although a futile effort, this fervor demonstrates his new found intellect and reasoning. The most important decision he makes is to burn Beatty, because this is a definite choice to take literature and the development of his fullest self over returning to the ways of society. After he escapes the city and joins the fugitive group we see more fully his role. At this point the city is burning down completely, as are all the others. Because they continue to read and preserve literature, the group is symbolically referred to as the phoenix. Like a phoenix, which burns to death, but comes back to life better than before, the members of the group come from a wretched society, but are reborn into knowledge (254). This group of people used their own will to choose to enhance their lives by developing their own intellect through literature, and therefore, are Bradbury's ultimate symbols of the power of man to acquire a life of fulfillment.

In A Brave New World Huxley criticizes his own society by presenting a world in which people live only for physical pleasure and well being and lack any spiritual depth. Huxley wrote the novel in 1931. At the time he was upset by the materialistic behavior prevalent in many of the prosperous Western countries during the 20's (Wain 28). By showing this pursuit of physical happiness in an extreme form, he exposes the faults of his society. In the Utopia the main focus is to be content with life, thus ensuring stability among the masses. It achieves this by eliminating all deep emotions, such as death and family bonds. They also use genetic engineering and hyponopaedia to ensure citizens will be satisfied with their work. In the Utopia sex is the foremost source of pleasure. From birth children are taught that "...everyone belongs to everyone else" (67), and are encouraged to engage in sex with as

many people as they can. The people of the Utopia are also heavily dependent on soma, which allows them to escape from reality. Because of the materialism in this society, people lose all spiritualism and individuality. The people are simply incapable of truly loving anyone else. Lenia is physically attracted to John, but after John refuses her and is living in seclusion, she comes as a spectator to observe him as a savage. Mustapha Mond is an extremely bright leader, who at one time was a promising scientist, but gives up these talents in order to rule the Utopia. Helmholtz is a great writer, but in order to continue his work, he must be exiled to Iceland. These examples show how Huxley felt a society that neglected spirituality and emotions, was destined to create lifeless clones, unable to experience true feelings of gratification. (Wain 28)

Through the world he creates in 1984, Orwell examines several problems in his own society. First is attack on poverty and social classes. He was born into a middle class family in southern England, but early in his adulthood decided to live among the working class in the poorest part of London for a few years (Hynes 1). He experienced the oppression and poverty these people felt, and therefore was inclined to write about these topics. He was not only concerned with the financial aspect of class separation, but also felt the lack of money in the lower classes resulted in oppression and a poverty of the mind (Hynes 6). In 1984 there is an obvious separation between the Inner Circle, the normal class, and the proles. One example is the difference in Winston's and O'Brien's homes. More obvious than Orwell's attack on poverty, was his assault on totalitarian states, and in particular the Soviet Union. From the early 20's until 1948, when the book was published, Orwell witnessed the global emergence of totalitarian governments. Politically he was vehemently opposed to communism, and the spread of what he felt were states of anti-liberty (Hynes 4). The world he creates in 1984 is very similar to mid-twentieth century Russia, in that people are stripped of all personal independence, live in poverty for the most part, and focus their lives on contributing to the state. One obvious connection is the posters of Big Brother, which are almost identical to the posters of Joseph Stalin used in Russia. Another tool widely used in both worlds is propaganda. The posters with sayings such as "War is Peace" (1984), and events like hate week are used to brainwash citizens toward certain views and emotions. The people of Eurasia live in dreary, colorless homes and aren't permitted to enjoy any aspect of life, similar

to the situation of many Russians. This is done intentionally by both governments to insure the oppression of the people, and therefore control over them (Trilling 27). Although Orwell feels Russia's existence as a police state of absolute power is an image of the impending future, he is more concerned "that the ultimate threat to human freedom may come from a similar and even more massive development of social idealism of our democratic culture" (Trilling 27). He also feels if an oligarchical revolution is to occur, it will be led, not by military men or men of wealth, but by men of will and intellect, such as bureaucrats, scientists, trade-union organizers, teachers, and journalists (Trilling 28). By creating a world similar to his own in many ways, Orwell exposes the realistic possibility of the totalitarian world he created in 1984.

Although 1984, A Brave New World, and Fahrenheit 451 share many themes, none is more so resounding than freedom. May it be political, intellectual, or emotional, freedom is essential to achieving true gratification and for being happy. In the three works, governments deprive citizens of these fundamental freedoms to maintain control over them. This perverted approach toward governing people causes widespread unhappiness and meaningless living. These works are clearly saying if we, as a global community, ever hope to achieve a peaceful, ideal society where people are physically and intellectually satisfied, we must consider freedom for all the single, most important component.

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