



Dystopia in Literature

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Abstract : *Dystopia or anti-utopia is defined as a society which is characterised by poverty or oppression. It usually exaggerates elements of contemporary society and function as a warning against some modern trend, often the threat of oppressive regimes in one form or another. Many utopias can be seen as dystopias with regard to their treatment to the issues of justice, freedom and happiness. The main point of a dystopia is to make people think about the world in which they live and to see how the idea of happiness can be perverted. Several novels have been written on this theme.*

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This genre of novel has found a strong footing in world literature. Some of the most famous novels translated into English are We by Yevgeny Zamyatin, The Unit by Ninni Holmqvist, Blindness by Jose Saramago and Battle Royale by Koushun Takami. The most read English dystopian novels are Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury, The Iron Heel by Jack London, The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood and Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro.

In our research paper we have referred to only three famous dystopian novels- Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go to study the presentation of dystopia in fiction.

Key Words: *Futuristic, Soma, Handmaids, Clones.*

Objective :

The objective of this research paper is to probe into the concept of Dystopia and how it has been presented in novels especially in English. This project aims to study the presentation of dystopia in novels written by English writers from different countries. The novels chosen for study are the English novelist Aldous Huxley's **Brave New World** (1932), the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's **The Handmaid's Tale** (1985) and the Japanese-born British author Kazuo Ishiguro's **Never Let Me Go** (2005). This project will analyse the presentation of dystopia by these writers from divergent nations. This project will also try to find out the continuity or evolution of dystopia as presented in these novels which were written over a period of 70 years.

The term **utopia** originated in the early 1500s as an idea created by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work **Utopia**. It refers to a place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions. Throughout history many writers have taken that idea and used its exact opposite **dystopia** as a literary device in their stories.

Dystopia or anti-utopia is a negative utopia where everything is imperfect. There is an undercurrent of criticism for a current trend. Often the negative social trends are taken to a nightmarish end. Dystopian novels are futuristic in nature, there is always a war raging on in the background of the novel. There is destruction, revolution, uprising and thus the world as we know it ceases to exist and thus totalitarian dictatorship and bureaucracy take over.

Characteristics of Dystopia: A Dystopian Society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world. Propaganda is used to control the citizens of the society. Independent thought and freedom are restricted. A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society. Citizens are under constant surveillance. Citizens live in a

dehumanized state. The natural world is banished and distrusted. Individuality and dissent is considered antisocial.

Brave New World :

Brave New World describes a world which seems perfect at first. Humanity is carefree, healthy, and technologically advanced. A closer look takes us to the dystopia behind this illusion. It presents a totalitarian state that doesn't frighten its citizens, but instead convinces them to *love* their slavery. Stability in the society is maintained by rigid control. The government promotes promiscuous sex and has eliminated the family life. The world controllers have taken out religion and God from the lives of people and replaced it with the worship of technology. Henry T. Ford the man who developed the Ford motor company is the GOD of this dystopian world. The society is divided in categories-Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon and savages. People are psychologically conditioned to fit into their social roles. The main characters of the novel are-John (Savage), Lenina Crowne (Beta), Bernard Marx (Alpha) and The Controller Mustapha Mond (Alpha). Since there are no families to bring up children, Hatcheries and Conditioning Centers create and raise the children. This mass production creates social stability but individuality is lost. Everybody in this world is happy because they have SOMA. It is a narcotic used to create pleasant sensations without any side effects. Death is a good thing as the bodies can be reused:

"The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They are well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers and fathers; they've got no wives, or children or lovers they feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help as they ought to behave."(Huxley 1994, 200)

The Handmaid's Tale :

The Handmaid's Tale is perhaps the most famous feminist Dystopian Novel, which depicts an oppressive parallel America of the future, the Republic of Gilead, which is a Christian theocracy. Ecological disasters ravaged the land, resulting in a dramatic decrease in fertility. The republic of Gilead is formed on the basis of patriarchy. Women are treated as inferiors for they are segregated into deprecating groups and are strictly dressed according to their social function of Wives, Handmaids, Marthas, Jezebels, Econowives, Unwomen, etc...Handmaids are the few fertile women in Gilead and because of this they are confined to a prison-like compound in order to be available for periodically programmed sexual intercourse with their Commanders. They have merely become breeders as they are bear children to the wives of the commanders:

"We are all for breeding purposes: We aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us. . . . We are two-legged wombs ,that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices."(Atwood 1985,146)

Handmaids are always seen in a red habit, symbolising fertility. The novel chronicles the life of a handmaid Offred. Offred is the patronymic of fred that has been given to her by the new regime, making her a possession of her current commander, Fred.

Christianity is the state religion. The Republic of Gilead is governed according to strict Old Testament-based religious dogma. Other religions are not tolerated. The leaders use a select few passages from the Bible to justify their cruel activities. The Handmaids have been forcibly separated from their families. They are pressurized

to the extent of suicide, if they are unable to conceive, they are declared "unwomen" and banished to the colonies. To consider men sterile is a punishable offence. Fertility of the women is considered to be of utmost importance.

Never Let Me Go :

Never Let Me Go takes place in the late 20th century in an England boarding school Hailsham where the students are clones who are bred for the purpose of harvesting their organs. Hailsham has its own set of rules. Life at Hailsham revolves around creating art and usual teenage concerns. Its students are not a part of the society as they are treated as sub-humans. The novel focuses on three characters – Kathy , ruth & Tommy and their discovery that they are clones and are reared to donate organs . The book is divided into three parts: Kathy's life at Hailsham, graduation from the Cottages and finally her life as a care-taker. These clones have been created to serve the so-called 'normals'. When they reach a certain age 'the middle age', the clones sacrifice their organs. One guardian does spell it out for them (and the readers) eventually:

"None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day. Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you are created to do."(Ishiguro 2005,80)

Clones are unable to change their fates. Essence of Humanity is lost and thus it raises question on morality. Girls can never have babies. Students can never get a job. They live an abbreviated lives of a donor. They donate and 'complete' i.e, die.

Analysis of the Dystopian Features in The Three Novels

	BRAVE NEW WORLD	THE HANDMAID'S TALE	NEVER LET ME GO
WHY THIS DYSTOPIA?	SO THAT THERE'S NO WAR, POVERTY & EVERYONE IS HAPPY	TO STABILIZE THE POPULATION RATE & OVER-COME STERILITY	TO CREATE A CANCER FREE SOCIETY THROUGH CLONING
RELIGION	PEOPLE WORSHIP TECHNOLOGY	EXTREME PURITANISM	PEOPLE WORSHIP ART
TYPE OF CONTROL	BUREAUCRATIC	RELIGIOUS	TECHNOLOGICAL
FATE OF PROTAGONIST	TRIES TO BREAKFREE, BUT FINALLY KILLS HIMSELF	HER END IS UNCERTAIN	STRUGGLES TO ESCAPE BUT REMAINS TRAPPED

Conclusion:

To sum up, Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) presents a "negative utopia" and looks into the idea of the government making the world so perfect and controlled that it really has the opposite effect. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Atwood takes a look at a totalitarian society and the issue of woman's rights within it. At first glance, the Handmaids seem not to have any power in the totalitarian Republic of Gilead, but after taking a closer look, the seemingly powerless Handmaids do have some power over the seemingly powerful members of the society. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) by Kazuo Ishiguro is an extraordinary novel which is not only about cloning, or being a clone. Sheltered from the outside world the children/clones were brought up in the dystopia to believe that they were special and needed to be protected, but they were only being protected from the "truth". This is more a book of love and friendship set in a dystopian environment.

Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1932, predicting many events for the future, most of which concentrate on a morally corrupt society. He believed that the future was doomed to a non-

individualistic, conformist society, a society void of family unit, religion and human emotions. Fifty years later, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) we see a group of Christian Fundamentalists overthrow the American government and create their own republic which is a Christian theocracy. Ecological disasters ravaged the land, resulting in civil wars, political turmoil and widespread sterility. Only a few women could still bear children and they are forced to provide children by proxy for infertile women of a higher social status. Years later in 2005, Kazuo Ishiguro in *Never Let Me Go* has portrayed a society where there are human clones-the donors, who donate their organs to the human beings to help them cure diseases like cancer.

The society Huxley envisioned in 1930s comes to reality in these later works. The world has evolved and so has the vision of dystopia. Man since his evolution has dreamt of utopia but has also dreaded of the possibility of a dystopia!

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