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EXTENDED ESSAY

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***To what extent do Ayn Rand, Aldous Huxley and
Stephen King portray a dystopia namely in terms of
technology, freedom and social conduct?***

ABSTRACT

The aim of this Extended Essay is to explore the portrayal and creation of dystopias accepting technology, social conduct and illusion of freedom as three common tenets of a dystopian society and analyzing these three subjects. In order to make an analysis and comparison of the creation dystopias, three dystopian fiction novels, each written by an author from different contexts and earthly visions, were picked. Furthermore these works were chosen specifically because they portray dystopias of different kinds and backgrounds, which stands for the dominant one of the three chosen common forms of oppression and control. The three works analyzed were *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *Anthem* by Ayn Rand and *The Running Man* by Stephen King, first published under the pseudonym Richard Bachman. These works are analyzed in depth with regards to the context in which they were written in, the three aforementioned tenets and the influence of the authors own ideas. The analysis is paired with the comparison of each text both to avoid exceeding the word limit and to avoid repetition within the essay itself, which would have rendered it too repetitive and unpleasing to the critical reader. The analysis and comparison were not however completed with a final decision on which work is better at creating a dystopia than the others but are rather ended by leaving the decision to the reader.

228 words

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Extended Essay

1) Introduction

As dystopias differ between eras, contexts and authors, no two dystopias can be exactly the same. While producing their works of dystopian fiction authors have always provided their audience with images of their ideas of a dystopia and how they imagined a future world in chaos and turmoil. In her novella *Anthem*, Ayn Rand portrays a future where the world has become an ideological and bureaucratic dystopia. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley portrays a future world that has become a technological dystopia. *The Running Man* by Stephen King, written and published under the pseudonym Richard Bachman, presents a corporate dystopia set in the year 2025 A.D. It is their successful portrayal of dystopias which will be thoroughly analyzed in this extended essay.

2) Comparative Commentaries

a. Anthem

The dystopian state in the novella *Anthem* is the aftermath of years of war waged against the individual resulting in the victory of collectivist thought: the revolution carried out by the masses in Russia, on October 1917. This is the reflection of the dystopian ideas of the year 1937 when this book was written and Ayn Rand's own ideas. Coming from bourgeoisie origins in the newly formed Soviet Union, having escaped the conformist and collectivist ideals she was strongly

against for her entire life, the novella is the reflection of all her thoughts towards the communist state. These factors make it possible to analyze the novella in terms of technology, the extent of freedom provided by the government and social conduct.

The dystopia in the novella is particularly different than those in *Brave New World* and *The Running Man* because it is not technologically advanced but a technological backwater. This results in technology not being a direct way of control over the people as it is in the other works. This is due to the restart of civilization after the Great Rebirth and the bureaucratic control imposed upon technology to keep it from advancing without control. It is apparent when the protagonist, Equality 7-2521 faces the World Council of Scholars with his electric light bulb:

“*And if the Councils had decreed that you should be a Street Sweeper, how dared you think that you could be of greater use to men than in sweeping streets?’... ‘What is not done collectively cannot be good.’... ‘This would wreck the Plans of the World Council,’ said Unanimity 2-9913, “and without the Plans of the World Council the sun cannot rise.”*

Not only is he shunned and put down for bringing such a creation which would topple the plans of the World Council because it would devastate their plans, but he is also looked down for stepping over his boundaries as a street sweeper. This, when paired with the change Equality 7-2521 goes through when he discovers the light bulb, points at the idea that technology is held back because it grants the person the right to be an individual and stand out inside the society, something the collectivist state is aiming to destroy.

Further on comes the social conduct between people in their daily lives. Much like *Brave New World* the people are divided by their works and gender however intelligence is not a way for people to be separated. Intelligence is an indirect means of separation within the society for when

it serves the government it is awarded by a respectable job and when it is roaming free as an individual or when it is simply missing, it is punished. Compared to *The Running Man* where the division in the society is the result of the economic system, in *Anthem* it is closer to that of *Brave New World*, determined by the laws that do not let contact between jobs and persons of different standings within the society. The societal division start with basic gender specifications as people are firstly divided by their gender:

“For men are forbidden to take notice of women, and women are forbidden to take notice of men...”

Males and females are not allowed to come into contact during their daily lives except for the Time of Mating, where they are assigned a woman to impregnate. This way social conduct is limited to one’s own family of brothers or sisters depending on his gender. This keeps the people under control and prevents the exponential and arbitrary increase of the population caused by unplanned births. Moreover they are divided in themselves depending on their Trades and houses:

“It is a transgression to speak to men of other trades, save in Social Meetings.”

Except for Social Meetings it is forbidden by law for any two people not belonging to the same class to communicate. People are forbidden, taught and voluntarily cannot think of themselves as superiors to other citizens but rather as equals, ironically they are conditioned to think of those in better jobs to be superior than themselves. This way, people remain in their own surroundings without coming into contact with those that are much more intelligent and skilled than they are. This way people are kept from indulging in matters that could enrich them, which is against the idea of equality – that the world is a family – the collectivist state is trying to impose.

Compared to *Brave New World* and *The Running Man* the government control is much more apparent in *Anthem*. It differs from *Brave New World* as people are free to move about and act as they please within the limits drawn for them by their castes and the World State and in *The Running Man* freedom is not determined by the government but rather by the economic system as there is no freedom of any kind granted to the people by the authoritarian and all mighty state:

“We remember the House of Infants where we lived...We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the State...You shall do that which the Council of Vocations shall prescribe for you.”

The people are in government control from birth till death. Their conception is planned by the state and they are taken from their mother upon birth to be raised and educated by the state. Man is taught to keep his brothers and sisters above himself for the good of the state. It is punished as a crime being different than the others in physical and mental terms. People have their jobs assigned to them by a council against their free will and it is considered a transgression to prefer anything. The joys and entertainment given to the people is all planned by the government. The collectivist state which Ayn Rand portrays uses its power to control and equate each individual inside the society and revokes all freedom from the people.

b. Brave New World

The dystopia in *Brave New World* is the final result of a technologically advanced world that has finally found the ways of being self-sufficient by turning that technology to both serve the people and make obedient servants out of them. This is because the novel, written in 1931, conveys the fears of its own era, where the frightening dream was that of overpopulation, overconsumption and ideologies, such as communism in Russia, had been trying to create automatons out of man,

using American engineered solutions such as Taylorism¹ and Fordism², to solve all these problems. That is why the dystopian World State can be understood through analyzing the use of technology, government limitations and the illusion of freedom.

The first aspect of this dystopia is the extensive usage of technology in predetermining and dictating human lives. In *Brave New World* technology is immensely and largely used, compared to the backwardness in *Anthem* and the use of technology yet relative backwardness in *The Running Man*, as a way of keeping the people under control. The caste system of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons is one of the major uses of technology in this society to control mankind:

“...how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky’s Process...”

Each caste is either developed individually in their decanting bottles to become clever human beings as it is with Alphas and Betas or they are Bokanovskified³ and are caused to have arrested development resulting in lower levels of intelligence but higher bodily strength as it is in Deltas, Epsilons and Gammas. This way each caste is developed physically fit for the jobs the government has cut out for them. The Alphas and Betas become brain workers, such as writers and scientists whereas the Deltas, Gammas and Epsilons are employed in manual labour such as operating elevators or working in plane hangars. The predetermination of the living conditions of

¹ Named after the American mechanical engineer Frederick W. Taylor, Taylorism is a theory of economic management to improve efficiency, especially in labor productivity.

² Named after American automotive magnate Henry Ford, Fordism is an economic and social system based on mass production.

³ This process can be summed up as the process of creating an average of up to 96 individual per embryo. The Podsnap’s Technique is used with the Bokanovsky’s Process to increase the growth rate of the embryos.

the castes is continued on into the development of the babies into children by the use of hypnopaedia:

“But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason.”

Each caste is subjected to hours of sleep-learning which teaches them the tenets of their society, how they should use up their time and how they should be glad to be in their own castes compared to the others. This way no two castes, except the Alphas and Betas, mix and mingle with each other, and the system once again does not allow people to exceed their limits and break the vicious cycle imposed by the state. Technology has also replaced intricate works of art with simple machines such as the scent organs:

“It’s prohibited you see... ‘You’ve got to choose between happiness and what people call high art. We’ve sacrificed high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead.’”

The scent produces scents for the user to enjoy without doing any thinking about it, so that the arts are not liberating the people from their conditioning but rather keeping them in chains by subjecting them to crude sensations. The allures of the past grand works of art, which brought out complex emotions and ideas within people, are removed from the society and thus high-art is lost so that stability can prevail and the conditioning of the people is not broken as thoughts and emotions are not present within the people. The final control mechanism science offers is the perfectly crafted and manufactured hallucinogen called “soma”:

“The perfect drug.”

Soma being an artificial drug causes a soma-coma where the user is cut off from reality, by inducing happiness. People are given daily rations of this drug so that they are kept happy. This way the government is able to keep the people under control and in chains, as in their free time they are not in solitude or in the act of illegal activities, perhaps critical thinking, which might open their eyes and disillusion them regarding the state. Rather they are in the arms of soma induced paralysis.

After technologically created control over the people comes the limits imposed upon the people in their daily lives. Social conduct in *Brave New World* is divided into classes just like the other works, however the reasons and limitations on people are not based on economic nor work related reasons but intelligence and divisions stemming from the conditioning of people. While the government in *Brave New World* does not seem to impose rules and restrictions, there are limits on human life brought forth by the dystopian society. The ideas of solitude and being an individual is shunned and looked down upon as a menace to be feared and avoided in the society.

“’And then he spends most of his time by himself – alone.’ There was horror in Fanny’s voice.

Twelve of them ready to be made one, waiting to come together, to be fused, to lose their twelve separate identities in a larger being.”

The whole fabric of the society has been changed in a way that the common understanding is that solitude and any related idea is feared and group activities are encouraged as much as it can be. This understanding is such that talking about solidarity is a chilling experience, a variety of scary stories and people are assigned Solidarity Service, an ironically named orgy of twelve, to keep solitude out of the lives of people. Fatherhood, motherhood and monogamy are the equals of

sacrilege and blasphemy, and the idea of a family is perceived as profane to the extent that it is considered equal to cursing in all daily talks:

“‘And parent’?” questioned the D.H.C. There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed.”

This way the traditions of the old are kept out of the lives of the people of the state and the conditioning is kept intact, as any act to breach is not allowed to occur. Furthermore parenthood is looked down upon because it is the way that the “savages” live and breed and is pushed further away from the lives of the citizens of the World State.

Further on comes the illusion of freedom provided to the people by the World State. When compared to the economical limitations of *The Running Man* or the state control of everything in *Anthem*, people have much greater freedom in *Brave New World* as they are free to do anything they wish, to the extent of their castes, with a few exceptions. People are given complete freedom of movement inside the World State as long as they stay in their own respective castes and their own limits of physical build and mental strength:

“... the huge Lower Caste barracks and, on the other side of a dividing wall, the smaller houses reserved for Alpha and Beta members.”

Thus the separation of the people inside the society by conditioning is unbroken by the system not allowing the higher castes of Alphas and Betas to mix with the lower castes of Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons. Each caste in their freedom of movement, ironically limited into their own castes, can travel to designated recreational facilities and mingle with their own kind. Further on, though travelling is not forbidden and the intercontinental rockets and the helicopters widely

used in transportation make travelling easier, there are places in the world that no caste, except the Controllers and those granted entrance, can go to: the Savage Reservations:

“A permit for you to initial, Director’... ‘For the New Mexican Reservation?’... ‘...divided into four distinct Sub-Reservations, each surrounded by a high-tension wire fence.’”

Furthermore since the life inside the Reservation is perceived as a threat and corrupting factor for the teachings of the World State, nobody is allowed in or out except by special decree of a Controller. This is also the only point where those living inside the Reservations are brought under control of the World State: they are free in their actions inside but they cannot attempt to leave their lands. All for the sake of keeping the people clean and away from a way of living perceived as immoral and obsolete, whereas for the “savages” their way of living is correct and the people outside are immoral beings.

c. The Running Man

In *The Running Man*, the dystopian United States of America and the world as a whole is the reflection of the fears of the world in 1982. These fears may be connected to several events of the year. The ongoing Cold War and the record high unemployment rates across the world; the chaotic Falkland Wars and the prophetic Syzygy⁴ all seemed to send the world to the brink of collapse. The only sector to profit seemed to be the scientific and corporate community which made quite the profit with the release of Commodore 64. The implications of all these can be seen embedded in the novel the corporate control through television, unemployment, the rise of

⁴ Syzygy is the lining up of three celestial bodies. In this case the prophetic “Jupiter Effect” by John Gribbin Ph.D. which hypothesized that on March 10, 1982 when all planets in our systems line up catastrophic events will happen. Syzygy did occur without any catastrophes.

the black market, the division of society by economical means and the lack of order replaced by different authorities across the world. This is why the dystopian United States of America in the novel can be examined through its technological means, impeachment of freedom and control over the lives of people.

In the novel technology is the by-product of the corporate control over the citizens of USA, which in the form of the Free-Vee has found its way into each and every household. Though it is compulsory to have them, which accounts for the name Free-Vee, it is still left to the people to watch it or turn it on or off. However this does not stop the influence of media over the people as everyone knows the shows on TV and eventually, as in the case of Ben Richards, even though they hate it, they are forced to turn to it to either numb their pain or find a way out of their misery. Furthermore the television functions as a sedative mechanism over the people:

“‘What’s the air-pollution count in Harding?’... ‘They don’t give them with the weather any more’... ‘They gave us the Free-Vee to keep us off the streets so we can breathe ourselves to death without making trouble.’”

This is obtained as the people are fed deadly gasses everyday and only the rich are offered any kind of protection from these gasses. Since the poor are kept in the dark about such subjects, they are submitted to the control of television and money so that they are unaware and nonresponsive to their surroundings, unless they show a special interest in the issue, acting only to gain money. Though the influence of technology is not vast in *The Running Man* it is a way for the corporations to keep the people at bay and do as they please, as they are influencing the people and conditioning them to become a part of the system, separated by economical means:

“The picture dissolved to a still of Sheila...The sweet, not-so-good-looking face had been transformed into that of a vapid slattern...The studio was filled with screamed cries of ‘Boo! ...‘Get out you creep!’ ‘...Kill the bastard!’ ...”

This can be seen in the introduction of Ben Richards’ wife to the audience whose photo is highly photoshopped to make her appear savage and demonic to the viewers so that the poor is embedded in their memories as being creatures they would not even want to mingle with. Here technology is mainly used to keep class distinctions, and to manipulate the people into hating each other; however this is weaker than that in *Brave New World* used zealously and still stronger than that in *Anthem* where technology does not even serve such a purpose. The system imposed by the corporations and the media on the people is based on the idea that the world stops and money talks. This kind of money based social conduct is different than the others as every distinction is economical whereas in the *Brave New World* it is intelligence and caste based and in *Anthem* it is profession based:

“...but it runs on New Dollars, and only the employed people have any.”

Everything from housing to healthcare and their quality is governed by the money which can be old Dollars or the New Dollars, the latter with a higher buying capability than the former. The poor, in the possession of old Dollars, resort to cabbage smelling, crammed Development slums for shelter, the cheapest healthcare and midwife medicines and they are constantly kept as a lower class for the rich to trample and have fun with. The Games Network comes in here as the mortar in this mixture keeping everything together and providing propaganda and a distraction for the people:

“They accepted only chronic heart, liver or lung patients, sometimes throwing in a crip for comic relief. Every minute the contestant could stay on the treadmill (keeping up a steady flow of chatter with the emcee), he won ten dollars... ‘If you last thirty days, you win the Grand Prize. One billion New Dollars.’”

While doing so the Networks preys on the poor and their need for money to generate shows such as ‘Treadmill to Bucks’ or ‘Running Man’ which is not just a way for them to showcase their paying abilities and soothe the poor masses but also a way for them to keep the society divided in itself.. Moreover the divided society and the economic differences are seen whilst Richards is making his way towards the airport as on one side of the road are posh, well kept and rich people and on the other side the poor rotting while still alive, wearing scraps for clothes are standing watching Richards pass along. Contrary to the poor, the rich is portrayed to have access to nearly everything from the best healthcare money can buy, high rise apartments and protection against the hazards of life that the poor face every day. Furthermore the poor are brought against one another which can be observed as the wife and child of Richards is murdered to get to the money he has sent to them.

The last tenet of this dystopian society is the illusion of freedom given to the people. Though it seems that the people are free to do what they want with their lives, they are limited by their economical standings. This is different than the other works, as the freedom of people is impeached by the economical system not the government. There is not a governmental power looming over the people watching and dictating even the minutest detail but rather one that sometimes works for the people as seen in the example of the failed Compulsory Benefit Bill of 2021, which was aiming to take away the liberty of closing the Free-Vees. The people are not

restricted by the government but rather by the system in which everything functions. Though the people have their freedom, their freedom and their lives are not invaluable in the society:

“ *‘The program is one of the surest ways the Network has of getting rid of embryo trouble-makers such as yourself, Mr. Richards.’...‘You – or your estate – will be paid an additional hundred dollars for any Hunter or representative of law you should happen to dispatch-’*”

It can be observed in the examples of the shows ‘Treadmill to Bucks’ – which uses the life of a human being for entertainment and for a cash prize – and in ‘Running Man’ – which sacrifices a human being and his freedom – that in order to enthrall a nation and a price is put on the lives of each participant. Though the people are in no way limited in their legal actions, their freedom is impeached by their economical statuses inside the system. This way it seems that within this vicious cycle people have their limited freedom with the price being their lives

3) Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that dystopias tend to concentrate on the subjects of technology, freedom and social conduct and what makes them different and perhaps superior in their plausibility, is their emphasis on any one of these subjects. *Brave New World* and *The Running Man* portray dystopias that seem much closer to reality than *Anthem* because the formers portray worlds based on reality, some of which are still happening today, compared to the fictional world of the latter. As the idea of a dystopia and utopia vary between each reader to decide which one is superior, is and always will be up to the reader.

3895 words

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