

The day of the triffids and nineteen eighty four essay sample



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The future: the indefinite but unavoidable time period after the present. For years, it has been embedded in human nature to predict the happenings of the future through mediums such as art and literature. The future can be divided into its two extremes - a utopia and a dystopia. A utopia is an ideal community or society possessing a perfect socio-politico-legal system. The word was imported from Greek by Sir Thomas More for his 1516 book *Utopia*, describing a fictional island in the Atlantic Ocean.

The term has been used to describe both intentional communities that attempt to create an ideal society, and fictional societies portrayed in literature. It has spawned many other concepts but most prominently, dystopia. The word "dystopia" traces its roots back to the Greek word "dys" (meaning "bad") and "topos" (meaning "place"). A dystopian society is one which has been degraded into oppression and complete control, frequently under the mask of being utopian. Dystopias are frequently written as warning, or as satires, showing current trends extrapolated to a nightmarish conclusion.

Humans were not meant to live in a perfect world. The Bible shows that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3: 23), ostracized from a seemingly perfect and blissful society. We can use this idea of a faulted or imperfect world to compare how two prolific English writers portray visions of the future in a dystopian society. 'The Day of the Triffids', published in 1951 by English science-fiction author John Wyndham, is centred around the protagonist, Bill Masen, who has made his living working with "triffids"—tall plants capable of aggressive and seemingly intelligent behaviour.

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They are able to move about by “ walking” on their roots, appear to communicate with each other, and possess a deadly whip-like poisonous sting that enables them to kill and feed on the rotting carcasses of their victims. Due to his background working with Triffids, Masen has developed a theory that they were bioengineered in the USSR and then accidentally released into the wild when a plane smuggling their seeds was shot down. Triffids begin sprouting all over the world, and their extracts prove to be superior to existing fish or vegetable oils. The result is worldwide cultivation of the plants.

The narrative begins with Bill Masen in hospital, his eyes bandaged after having been splashed with droplets of triffid venom in an accident. During his convalescence he is told of the unexpected and beautiful green meteor shower that the entire world is watching. He awakes the next morning to a silent hospital and learns that the light from the unusual display has rendered any who watched it completely blind. After unbandaging his eyes, he wanders through an anarchic London full of almost entirely blind inhabitants, and witnesses civilization collapsing around him.

The novel is a singularly unique and terrifying take on the fall of human civilization and the struggle to survive in a world turned upside down. It admirably portrays the terrifying confusion and fear of a scenario in which most of the population has been rendered helpless against a slow but persistent predator. Wyndham is also able to incorporate a tender love story amidst the terror and struggle for survival, a commentary on the pitfalls of mankind’s obsession with toying with nature, and even a frank discussion of

the types of societal structures that may arise after the breakdown of civilization.

And while the problem of blindness does cause mass chaos, it doesn't have the emotional impact of the mass-extinction events that other post-apocalyptic novels contain. Wyndham portrays the triffids as silent stalkers – not a menacing alien species with technology and firepower superior to our own. They are a product of our own manipulations with the natural order – something we think we have successfully tamed but eventually breaks free of our control as a result of the loss of only one of our five senses, demonstrating the frightening reality of how fragile and vulnerable humans can be.

Some might say it is painful to see the desperation that is so apparent in what we all see as the 'superior species'. It brings us to the idea that man's own ignorance can ultimately be man's downfall. It also demonstrates a great distrust within humans and how it is built into us that we create solutions to problems we don't fully understand or have the wit to comprehend and those solutions always come back to bite us. But in a way, the threat that is faced in this novel is more sinister than first thought.

Instead of instantaneous extinction, it seems to be happening slowly and painfully, almost with a sense of smugness as the triffids claim revenge on man for engineering the plants to fulfill their own greediness to seek profit at almost any cost. "Not with a bang but with a whimper" as T. S. Eliot put it. It demonstrates that humans often under-estimate and, as shown in the novel, find it difficult to deal with the consequences. We have evolved with an

unfortunate trait in which we take many things for granted and when we are restricted of them, we are capable of rapidly transforming ourselves into an alarming state of deliria.

Many foresee a future whereby man is terrorized but its own creations - i. e. androids and computers - but the fact that nature itself is wiping out humanity creates an interesting idea that man lives obliviously alongside its superiors and one day they will make their presence felt. This is somewhat touched upon in the 1963 French sci-fi novel ' Planet of the Apes' by Pierre Boulle. The novel tells the tale of three human explorers from Earth who visit a planet orbiting the star Betelgeuse, in which great apes are the dominant intelligent and civilized species, whereas humans are reduced to a savage animal-like state.

Like ' The Day of the Triffids', the theme of the novel is largely about an otherwise inferior species becoming unexpectedly more dominant and somewhat more intelligent over humans. Wyndham does an excellent job of slowly increasing the tension and desolation of the characters as they try to come to terms with this new reality - creating a scenario which seems worryingly believable. Arguably the greatest and most influential dystopian novel ever written - ' Nineteen Eighty-Four' by George Orwell - delivers the same horrifying dystopia but in a slightly different context.

The story unfolds on a cold April day in 1984 in Oceania, the totalitarian superpower in post-World War II Europe. Winston Smith is employed as a records editor at the Ministry of Truth and, depressed and oppressed, he starts a journal of his rebellious thoughts against the Party. If discovered, this

journal will result in his execution. For the sake of added precautions, Winston only writes when safe from the view of the surveying telescreens. By the end of the novel, Winston becomes a different man - overfilled with joy for the Party and for Big Brother.

The Party seeks to control everything - past, present, and future. Its first effort toward attaining that goal is to control and manipulate every source of information by rewriting and modifying the content of all historical records and other documentary evidence for its own gain. It is forbidden for the Party's members to keep written records of their lives, and the Party mandates that any photographs or documents be destroyed through "memory holes" placed throughout Oceania.

Since memory is unreliable unless corresponding reality may confirm it, over time, reality becomes blurred, and citizens are soon willing to believe whatever the Party informs them, demonstrating how their manipulation of the past helps them control the future. The novel is not simply about totalitarianism; it makes us live through it. The Party only wants power for its own sake and they carefully monitor the behaviour of all its constituents.

The Party demands that the only form of loyalty is loyalty to them and they do this by brainwashing their constituents to think that they are all part of collective family under the rule of the Party and no other such personal and biological "family" is recognized. The Party controls everything. This may be historical records, language or even thoughts. They torture and "vaporize" those who harbor rebellious thoughts. As mentioned, language is central to the control of behavior in 1984, especially for tackling disobedience.

The major proposition is that if control of language were centralized in a state, then any possibility of rebellion or disobedience would be eliminated. 1984 devotes significant time to examining the centrality of language - contextually, when Syme and Winston speak of the newspeak dictionary and explicitly, through Goldstein's manifesto - to culture, life, history, behaviour, thoughts and power. 1984 also depicts warfare as a necessary tool and symptom of a totalitarian state. Oceania is in constant warfare with one of the other two superstates of the world.

This is necessary, as warfare keeps citizens in constant flux and fear - they then willingly submit to the control of the Party. Only after this submission can the Party regulate supply and demand to ensure classism, and ultimately, power. 1984 details at length the effectiveness of torture as a tool to control subversion in a totalitarian state (or simply one where rights are not central to governing principles). Here, though, it also encompasses mind control, brainwashing, and indoctrination - torture is not just limited to physical pain.

The branch of government that oversees torture at Oceania is ironically named the Ministry of Love. It is, however, effective; through torture, the Ministry is able to transform rebellious minds into loving, accepting ones. Although it was his commercially most successful novel (or because of it), John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* has often been treated a horror story devoid of ideas rather than a science-fiction novel full of them. Because of this, some major themes have been ignored, despite the fact that they are shared with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

However, the main theme that is never discussed by critics of either book is, quite simply, permanent horror. It may be that people hate contemplating that possibility that they do not discuss it, but both *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Day of the Triffids* are about an eternity of irrecoverable pain. The only way of escaping it is not to have it start. Furthermore, the two authors are not religious and their eternity of pain is purely on this physical earth. Both novels have the purpose of accounting for the perpetual hurt present and both of titles are ironic references to their double treatment of time.

The Day of the Triffids will last till the end of the Earth and Winston Smith has no way of knowing that the year is 1984. Although the suffering is immediate, the authors premise this going on forever. Anyone in the year 1984 or after it, would know they were living in a world of unending and inescapable misery, whether it be Winston Smith, his lover Julia, friend Ampleforth, or any of the nameless victims. Similarly, anyone living, even on the triffid-free Isle of Wight to which the hero's party escapes at the end of *Day of the Triffids*, after the blindness, would be in the same state as their descendants.

There can be no recovery and this dead stop, and the anguish with which it is presented, distinguishes the two novels from others with which they are sometimes compared. In *Brave New World*, for instance, the inhabitants do not question the social stratification that sends them to die of radiation sickness because they are all bred to accept the status quo. Even though it may not seem like it at first, there are significant similarities that we can draw from the two science-fiction classics in question - '*Nineteen Eighty-Four*' and '*The Day of the Triffids*'.

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Both openings are strikingly similar and both equally powerful but at the same time, strikingly dissimilar to any other science-fiction novel of their period. “ It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. ”