

An on speculative fiction essay



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Speculative texts through the creation of distinct worlds can challenge or reinforce understanding of ourselves and how we live in the world” Utopian and Dystopian composers employ the creation of distinct worlds as a medium to covertly express political concerns.

The fictional worlds created by Aldous Huxley and Ursula K. Le Guin in “ Brave New World” and “ The Dispossessed” elucidate prevalent social issues of their respective contexts, provoking alternate understandings of humankind. By examining the relationship between scientific development and the human condition in the distinct fictional worlds, Huxley and Le Guin pertain to the moral uncertainties of the contemporary reader. The distinct worlds created by Huxley and Le Guin allude to major political concerns of their time. Written in the post war era, Huxley satirically amalgamates his concerns of the rising dictatorships in Europe, the American invention of mass production and subsequent rise of monopolistic capitalism in “ Brave New World”, while Ursula K. Le Guin utilises a reversal in perspective to examine America’s advanced Capitalism and involvement in the Vietnam War from an outsider’s point of view in “ The Dispossessed”. Conforming to the convention of an all-powerful totalitarian state, the leader of which is revered and worshipped by the citizens, Huxley presents a political structure that echoes the fascist rule of Benito Mussolini in Italy and the “ internal hierarchy” of Russian Bolshevism in the 1930’s.

The totalitarian power of the “ World State” and quasi-religious worship of the “ Almighty Ford” satirically voice Huxley’s fears of the rising American consumerist culture infiltrating England and the rest of the world. The United States, a rising cultural and economic power of the time, saw Henry T. Ford’s

application of mass production through assembly line, the product of which was “ the introduction of our Ford’s first Model-T...” automobile. Ford’s industrial philosophy is taken directly out of Huxley’s society and dominates every aspect of life from the mass production of people through “ Bokanovsky’s process” to the sensory imagery of a clock tower “ Big Henry sounded the hour. ‘ Ford,’ sang out an immense bass voice” with authoritarian power in “ Brave New World”.

Employing the traveller/journey convention of early Utopian fiction, Le Guin uses Shevek’s perspective as an outsider to emphasise the futility of fighting ideological wars in third world countries and the exorbitance of advanced capitalism. Le Guin’s Urras closely resembles the world in 1974; a consumer capitalist society, A-Io, opposed to a state communist society, Thu, fighting ideological wars in Third World countries, Benbili. The parallels to the United States, the Soviet Union and Vietnam are clear. The views of an upper class older Urrasti man named Atro resonate with the typical right-wing American mentality, when Shevek asks whether the people approve of the war in Benbili to which Atro responds “ Approve? You don’t think we’d lie down and let the damned Thuvians walk all over us? Our status as a world power is at stake!”.

When Shevek clarifies that he meant the people who must fight, not the government he is met with the response “ What’s it to them? They’re used to mass conscriptions. It’s what they’re for, my dear fellow!” emphasising the stark nature embedded within in-egalitarian capitalist societies. Le Guin effectively uses subjective third-person narration to express Shevek’s and her own views on Capitalism “ He could not force himself to understand how

banks functioned and so forth, because all the operations of capitalism were as meaningless to him as the rites of a primitive religion, as barbaric, as elaborate, and as unnecessary.” Aldous Huxley’s satirical imagery and Ursula K. Le Guin’s use of point of view are used in the distinct worlds of “ Brave New World” and “ The Dispossessed” to covertly express political criticisms.

Exemplifying their own social contexts Huxley and Le Guin incite differing understandings of the human condition through the fictional societies of “ Brave New World” and “ The Dispossessed”. Huxley challenges the general rejection of traditional Victorian values during the “ Roaring Twenties” through a hyperbolic vision of the future, while Le Guin reinforces the widespread optimism and sense of community prevalent in the counterculture of the 1960’s through the creation of an alternative, Utopian society. The Modern Era in which “ Brave New World” was conceived was marked by a general shift from somewhat puritanical Victorian values towards the preference of a fast-paced city lifestyle, a sense of disillusionment and loss of identity. Huxley uses hyperbole to invoke emotional response and to invert the newfound modern values of sexual liberation, a break in the traditional family structure, and heavy alcohol consumption of the “ Roaring Twenties” when everything seemed feasible through technology. Sexual liberation is distorted into the sexualisation of children from a young age, advocating “ erotic play” on the premise that “ everybody belongs to everyone else”. The breakdown of the traditional family structure is upended giving way to a disgust and contempt for the idea of family achieved through propaganda; “ The world was full of fathers-was therefore full of misery; full of mothers-therefore of every kind of

perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts-full of madness and suicide.”.

The increased consumption of alcohol is replaced by a rampant drug dependency on the “ Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant.” drug named “ soma”, with “ All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects.”. Through the hyperbolic inversion of contextual social developments, Huxley challenges the altering values of his own society in “ Brave New World” conforming to the convention of citizens living in an unnatural and dehumanised state.

Prior to the publication of “ The Dispossessed” the counterculture of the 1960’s embraced the ideas of sexual liberation, feminism, environmentalism, free speech and general social reform creating a widespread sense of optimism for the future and the possibility, through social change, to escape the oppressive political structures of the time. Ursula K. Le Guin reinforced the sense of social responsibility, mutual tolerance and voluntary union of her own society through the creation of an alternative world. The fictional world of Anarres subverts the convention that Utopia must have rigid, set laws to govern the ideal society and through symbolic use of the circle exemplifies the integral values of the counterculture. Odo’s symbolic “ Green Circle of Life” which encloses all individuals and emphasises a holistic approach to life bears resemblance to the peace sign that became an iconic symbol of the 1960s. Written five years after the American moon landing as the counterculture movement gained momentum, the setting of a Utopian colony on another planet through anarcho-syndicalist revolution seemed a plausible alternative of the future.

In the alternative society of Anarres, despite scarcity and near deprivation of natural resources sexual liberation, gender equality, environmental awareness and responsibility flourish through the absence of wealth and the fundamental Odonian analogy that states “ excess is excrement” and “ excrement retained in the body is poison”. Le Guin’s use of symbol and analogy embody the ideologies of the counterculture reinforcing the societal values and ultimately invoking an optimistic understanding of humankind. Touching on the moral uncertainties of contemporary society, Huxley and Le Guin examine the relationship between scientific development and the human condition. Huxley portrays the potential dangers of science in an eerily prophetic vision of the future where scientific and technological advancements have replaced human morality, while Le Guin asserts that scientific and technological development is superfluous in a Utopian society. “ Brave New World” demonstrates how the use of science and technology to stabilise and placate our lives with convenience cannot exist without compromise and is a testament to how ‘ advancement’ can distort human morality. This compromise is addressed directly by ‘ Resident World Controller for Western Europe’, Mustapha Monde when speaking of the scientific and technological developments; “ the slower but surer methods of ectogenesis, neo-Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopaedia” used as a form of social control. HE states “ It hasn’t been very good for truth. But it’s been very good for happiness.

One can’t have something for nothing. Happiness has got to be paid for.”

The distortion of human morality within this society is evident in ‘ Bokanovskification’, a process used to purposely breed out individuality in

the name of “ Community, Identity, Stability” conforming to the dystopian convention of the death of individuals.

This is evident in the hysterical reply of the director when a student asks where the advantage lay in the development, ‘ Cant you see? Cant you see? ...Bokanovsky’s process is one of the major instruments of social stability!”

The characterisation of such attitudes in the powerful figures within “ Brave New World” forces the contemporary reader to contemplate our lives in a world driven by conveniences of technology. Conversely, Le Guin adheres to the convention in that the Utopian world of Anarres is opposite to our own, particularly in the uses of technology and science. “ The Dispossessed” is a moral allegory that states humanity should not be based on plenty or convenience. Despite the barren land, almost inhospitable environmental circumstances, and lack of modern technologies and conveniences humanity flourishes. It is evident that scientific and technological advancement is disposed of in this society.

Le Guin gives the contemporary reader a warning; if technology and science is used to maintain the tendencies of consumer capitalist society, then the contemporary world may end similarly to King Terra’s “ My world, my Earth, is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and gobbled and fought until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt. . .

. We Terrans made a desert”. Through the creation of distinct worlds, Aldous Huxley and Ursula K. Le Guin explore prevalent social and political concerns of their time and incite differing considerations and understandings of

humanity that force the contemporary reader to consider how we live in the world.