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**ISSN 2278-9529**

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Control of Human Identity in Dystopian Works with Special Reference to *A Clockwork Orange***

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**Article History:** Submitted-19/11/2023, Revised-18/12/2023, Accepted-20/12/2023, Published-31/12/2023.

### **Abstract:**

Dystopian writers are notorious for their depiction of a society which has been either taken over and controlled by an autocratic organisation or by technological means, which presents the readers with a bleak future, a society deprived of uniqueness and individuality, governed by a higher power and devoid of identity. The whole idea of dystopian writing is to compare a bleak future with the present as a way of differing the prospect and what may have caused it. Thus, by reading dystopian writing, one understands how important is the issue of free will, and why it is so necessary to maintain a true identity which is an inseparable part of human nature. The works of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Anthony Burgess, Margaret Atwood and many others reflect this issue of human identity, a key element of dystopian writings. The article will reflect this issue of human identity through the works of great dystopian writers around the world and will enlighten the present generation and posterity about the importance of being true to one's own identity and individuality.

**Keywords: Human Identity, Dystopia, Individuality.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The first known use of the term dystopia appeared in a speech by Greg Webber and John Stuart Mill before the British parliament in 1868. Later, the term dystopia (bad place) came to be applied to works of fiction that represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which the threatening tendencies of our present political, social and technological orders are projected into disastrous consequences. These works usually depict a society governed by a utopian system having at least one major flaw. The question arises as to why utopian thinking transformed into a pessimistic, bleak portrayal of the future, which flourished immensely in

literature during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. History provides us with an answer - historical events during the early twentieth century like the rise of Nazi Germany, the outbreak of the Second World War, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the technological growth and the nuclear war, challenged the Utopian literature and gave way to fear and disillusionment and made people ask questions about the future of humanity. Therefore, it gave rise to dystopian literature and the writers of this genre started to present a future which is dark, grim, bleak and disastrous. Steven Wilson writes, “*We are living in a dystopia, in a world that is dominated by technology and disconnect, alienation, loneliness and dysfunction*”. Dystopian works help us understand the dangers of oppressing an individual's free will. What if profit-motivated corporations directly controlled governments or even worse, became states themselves? What happens when religious extremists take control of the government and pass laws to regulate and control individuals? Dystopian fiction helps us think about these scenarios and cases without actually having to live through them. These works act as suggestions for course correction as well as warnings. George Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty-Four” (1949), Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale” (1986), and Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World” (1932) are some seminal works of this genre which contain both the elements of utopian and dystopian writings.

### **SOME COMMON TRAITS OF DYSTOPIAN FICTION.**

1. The main character hates the system and wishes it to be different.
2. Outward conformity to the system by the character’s friends and family leads the protagonist to isolation.
3. A strange and chance encounter with something or someone that makes the protagonist think and reflect that society is not as it seems to be.
4. The character finds a mentor or a fellow dissenter and explores the opportunity.
5. The rest of the novel deals with the character’s attempt to escape the system or the government, or bring the system down, or the realization of finding it futile to attempt to bring the system down.
6. Some dystopian works also explore the possibilities of the complete breakdown of dystopia and its aftermath and consequences.

### **QUOTES.**

- “*If one is different, one’s bound to be lonely.*” – Aldous Huxley

- *“All utopias are dystopias. The term dystopia was coined by fools that believed a utopia can be functional.” - A.E. Samaan*
- *“If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.” – George Orwell*
- *“Is it better for a man to have chosen evil than to have good imposed upon him?” – Anthony Burgess*
- *“When we think of the past it’s the beautiful things we pick out. We want to believe it was all like that.” – Margaret Atwood*

### **SOME PROMINENT DYSTOPIAN WRITERS.**

**Aldous Huxley** (1894 – 1963) was a British author who authored around fifty books and enriched the literary world with a large selection of poetry, articles, philosophical discourses, stories and screenplays. His most controversial novel “Brave New World” is perhaps the most defining work of the modernist era, which ushered in a whole new school of dystopian writings. Huxley explored the negative effects of scientific progress, the suppression of individual freedom and the adherence to conformity in his works. His works are also known for exploring the issues of nationalism, religion and ethics. Speaking of “Brave New World”, Huxley depicted the tension between social stability and freedom of the individual and the meaning of happiness in a seemingly utopian society. His works inspired the authors of the future generation who carried his legacy forward such as George Orwell and Anthony Burgess. His death gave rise to the counterculture, where the beliefs in government were questioned and doubted. His important works of fiction are “Crome Yellow” (1921), “Antic Hay” (1923), “Those Barren Leaves” (1925), “Point Counter Point” (1928) and “Eyeless in Gaza” (1936).

**George Orwell** (1903 – 1950), is best known for his seminal work “Animal Farm” and “Nineteen Eighty-Four”. His original name was Eric Arthur Blair. A journalist and a British author, Orwell was admired as a political and cultural commentator, and also as an English language essayist. He is perhaps best known for his political allegory “Animal Farm” (1945) and the dystopian novel “Nineteen Eighty-Four” (1948). George Orwell presented a grim view of utopian thinking in his novel “Nineteen Eighty-Four”. He drew inspiration from the works of Aldous Huxley, his teacher and Jack London, drawing on the themes of human nature versus social conditioning and the rise of fascism. He was also influenced by the work of Yevgeny Zamyatin’s “We” (1921) which was a dystopian critique of Soviet Social engineering. His

works inspired other writers who adapted their themes and messages to other countries and periods such as Anthony Burgess and Ray Bradbury. His other novels include “Burmese Days” (1934), “A Clergyman’s Daughter” (1935), “Keep the Aspidistra Flying” (1936) and “Coming Up for Air” (1939).

**Ray Bradbury (1920 – 2012)** was born in the early twentieth century when the great depression engulfed the world. There was a feeling of distrust in the government, which led to the separation of the fundamental bond existing between people and government. These events—such as the rise in poverty, famine, starvation, unemployment, and the struggle against slavery—had a significant impact on Bradbury. Bradbury turned to literature to escape the ongoing social and political events. His most celebrated work is perhaps “Fahrenheit 451” (1953) established him as a writer who was not only imaginative but also socially conscious. In the novel, the government manipulates and blocks all the sources of enlightenment and education, thus controlling human identity and individuality and demonstrating that the government can do anything and everything to maintain its autonomy. His other seminal work “The Pedestrian” (1951) gives us a crucial message that technology, which essentially helps humans to make things easier, is threatening humanity that we have to be careful and that precaution is a must when it comes to accepting and handling new technology. His writings, greatly impacted by societal issues, have motivated future generations by fostering critical thinking and imparting important life lessons. His other important works are “The Illustrated Man” (1951), “The Golden Apples of the Sun” (1953), “The October Country” (1955), “A Medicine for Melancholy” (1959), “The Day It Rained Forever” (1959) and “The Small Assassin” (1962).

**Anthony Burgess (1917 – 1993)** was a man of letters, novelist, composer, and musician, with a special interest in the works of Shakespeare and James Joyce. He is perhaps better known as the author of the dystopian novel “The Clockwork Orange” (1962) (later adapted into a controversial feature film by Stanley Kubrick) is set in a dystopian near-future London, focusing on a juvenile delinquent Alex, whose emotions and aggressions are controlled with treatment which destroys his natural sense of humanity (his deep love for music and Beethoven) and is also an example of how the government manipulates with the minds of young individuals for their profit. Burgess’ “The Wanting Seed” (1962) is a satirical fable and

a dystopian work where overpopulation is controlled by propagating and promoting homosexuality, controlling and limiting birth and ideologies of anti-fertility. Burgess took inspiration from Aldous Huxley and George Orwell and his works have the central concern of the erosion of human uniqueness and individuality. The politics of his time had an impact on him as well. His works help readers to get an insight into the political dystopian works of the twentieth century. He was also a noted musician, linguist, screenwriter and critic. He is known for his other literary works such as “The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy” (1956 – 1959), his long poem “Moses: A Narrative” (1976) and his biography on Shakespeare in 1970.

### **CONTROL OF HUMAN IDENTITY IN “A CLOCKWORK ORANGE” BY ANTHONY BURGESS**

The novel “A Clockwork Orange”, published in 1962, takes place shortly in London where crime and corruption have gone rampant. The novel uses “Nadsat”, a fictional register or argot used by the gangs and it revolves around the juvenile delinquent Alex DeLarge, a vicious young leader of a teenage gang of droogs. He faces imprisonment after accidentally killing a woman with his fellow delinquents. During his imprisonment, Alex volunteers to be a part of special treatment (Ludovico Technique) through which his body is tuned to create nausea and sickness (leading to fatal paralysis) wherever and whenever he sees violence of any kind. It controls his mind in a way that his natural desires and emotions are also suppressed. After a suicide attempt, the government is forced to fix him again. Burgess made two endings in this work. The first ends with Alex turning away from violence and leading a healthy and normal life while the second which is darker where Burgess leaves out the final chapter, and Alex turns to his old, ultraviolent self again. The novel constantly focuses on the issue of free will and identity and asks how can someone be good if he or she does not choose to be good. In the novel, Alex rapes, murders and steals because it gives him pleasure. When the government attempts to fix or tune his violent impulses, the consequences are equally dangerous. The title is highly significant as A Clockwork Orange is a metaphor for someone who has lost his free will. Someone who is an organism (orange) but is just a clock tuned by the almighty, the devil or the state. The existential dilemma is also evident, which is the overall essence of the novel, “Does God want goodness or the choice of goodness?”

*“And, my brothers, it was a real satisfaction to me to waltz and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the same time, one on*

*either side of his fat oily snout.*” The lines reflect Alex’s complete lack of humanity and the law. The usage of “waltz” illustrates how a sadist and vicious teen can enjoy the European classical music and its refinement. It is evident in the scene where Alex makes love (the old in – out in – out) to two adolescents ‘ptitsas’ to the tune of Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony. Alex says *“Then I pulled out the lovely 9<sup>th</sup> and set the needle hissing on the last movement.....this time they thought nothing fun and had to submit to the strange and weird desires of Alexander the Large.”* Later, this instinct of loving Beethoven is taken away with the help of ‘The Ludovico technique’, where anything related to his earlier violence or even music related to his acts of violence is controlled. This is a perfect example of how the natural desires and free will of the individual are changed or modified by the authority or the state. Alex can no longer function as a natural human since his identity and choices are now controlled by the government and he is merely a toy, a ‘clockwork’. Earlier, he could choose, albeit he chooses evil, but his ability to choose is the core of his existence.

The authority in *The Clockwork Orange* controls all aspects of society. From the TV station to the house in which Alex resides, the government controls all aspects of life. In such a scenario, the progress of an individual’s identity cannot be normal. His own choices and free will are secondary. Furthermore, Christianity is reduced to an ‘Old Bog’. Burgess despised this control of freedom by the authority. The belief that man’s emotions can be controlled or conditioned is the fundamental flaw that Burgess attacks. It is depicted through the character of F. Alexander, a member of an anti-government faction when he utters *“To attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my sword-pen.”* After being imprisoned by the authorities, Alex is no longer considered as a person. He is provided with the number ‘66555321’ which becomes his name and identity. So, the government strips away his name and his true identity. The only character who still believes in redemption of Alex is the prison chaplain who despite his flaws, encourages Alex to read the Bible and convinces him to take responsibility for his heinous actions.

Alex becomes the victim of the Ludovico technique when he is accused of beating another cellmate to death. Under the supervision of Dr Brodsky, Alex receives an injection that causes the feeling of severe nausea and Alex is forced to watch the footage and movies related to murder, rape and other violent acts. It includes movies based on Nazi concentration camps and the tortures inflicted upon the war prisoners by the Japanese soldiers during the Second World War. The idea here is to create a feeling of illness whenever Alex thinks or feels about

any acts of violence. And therefore, he will no longer commit violent acts. This is the key thematic element in the novel. Alex is deprived of free will and identity through the Ludovico technique. If free will is taken away, which is perhaps the essence of an individual, then what exactly is Alex? What has he become? Perhaps something like a clock that is adjusted and managed by a higher power, like a device that can only perform well. The government has stripped away not only his free will but his choices, his identity, as well as his humanity. In the words of F. Alexander *"A man who cannot choose ceases to be a man"*.

Alex is no longer a criminal, but he cannot choose. This moral dilemma is the key element of this novel and it also defines the theme of the work *"Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps in some way better than a man who has the good imposed upon him?"* The character of Dr Brodsky typifies the sentiments of the state by saying *"We are not concerned with motive, with the higher ethics. We are only concerned with cutting down crime."* It is the utilitarian viewpoint that Burgess despises and resists. For Burgess, choice and free will are all that matter. It is the focal point of human existence. It also proves that the evils of Alex are nothing compared to the elimination of free will by the state.

The duality of good and evil is also an important element in the novel. The state or the authority in the novel does not consider 'evil' as a part of human nature. They see it as a disease which needs to be cured by society through scientific means. Just as a human is a mixture of good and evil, Alex also has a passion for classical music and violence. Following the conditioning, Alex's dual nature is eliminated. He now has neither the capacity for violent acts, nor can enjoy classical music (played during the Ludovico technique that makes Alex sick whenever he hears it afterwards). Alex is now a machine which has lost all aspects of what is known to be a human. It is the destruction of the clockwork. The process which eradicated all the evils from Alex led to the elimination of his capacity for goodness.

## CONCLUSION

The dystopian writings show the world the horrible things humanity can do if we let corruption take over the state and lives. These writings may exaggerate things but it is not far from the truth. These writings are far more relevant now as the bleak future represented is appropriate for the present generation. The totalitarian regime is replaced by democracy in most places, but people still instil the fear of being under surveillance and individuals think twice before questioning the state or the authority. There is a clear crisis of free will and individuality



since the rules that the government dictates influence who we are. It would not be wrong to say that the futuristic vision of the dystopian writers has become true in today's world. Violence, corruption, and terrorism are still prevalent. People still have a fear of an impending apocalypse. The close study of these writings helps us in identifying such threats and avoiding the worst possible scenarios facing us.

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