

Anti-intellectualism in Dystopian Novels

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Abstract

The actuality of the research is determined by the fact that dystopian novel is one of the most popular genres nowadays, because it reveals the problems of modern society and predicts how these problems destroy our universe if we don't stop them. The aim of the article is to demonstrate the role of dystopian government in the dystopian world, to describe their activities and methods, specifically anti-intellectualism. According to the study, we have used the following methods: description and comparison. The research showed that dystopian government in all dystopian novels tries to create a powerful mechanism to control the population without pain and extra effort. This strong weapon in dystopian novels is anti-intellectualism. If the population is less educated, it will be easier to control them; it will be easier to make them believe as you wish. They burn books, destroy everything that can make people think differently. Difference is the biggest danger for the totalitarian government. The government uses a new language and religion to vanish this difference, to limit the ideas and to control the minds.

Key words: government, newspeak, mind control, dystopian society

Dystopian literature is very popular today, as many critical essays and articles are written about this genre. Its popularity is due to the fact that the problems that depict this genre are very close to the society we are living in: lack of freedom, overpopulation, government's constant control, advanced technology and the lack of personal, real communication among people. Authors of dystopian novels predicted the universe we are living today, many years ago and they predict that the situation will be even worse in the future.

In most dystopian novels, totalitarian government uses several methods to control people, to make them one big mess, where everyone is equal; everyone thinks identically, everyone looks identically. They like the same things, they wish the same things. This is very difficult to achieve, but dystopian government gains it very successfully. One of these mechanisms is anti-intellectualism. Authors of dystopian novels George Orwell, Margaret Atwood and Ray Bradbury depict the world, where the government uses "newspeak", religion and burns books to create their "perfect universe".

In Orwell's "1984" the system, through which the government gains anti-intellectualism is "newspeak". It is the system, a new language which contains words and phrases that make it impossible to think differently and to think of a different idea, which is not acceptable for the government. If it exists in the mind, it will be impossible to express it. In fact this is the control of minds:

The purpose of newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of *Ingsoc*, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and *Oldspeak* forgotten, a heretical thought- that is a thought diverging from the principles of *Ingsoc*- should be literary unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words" (Orwell, 1989:373).

This process is very, very slow, but the purpose is clear - when “newspeak” will be completely adopted totalitarian government will work without opposition, everything will be perfectly organized.

Margaret Atwood also creates this kind of language, that functions identically, but in this case, religion is used to influence over people. Religious prayers, biblical phrases are used to make people think and act like the government wishes. At the beginning of the book, we see “the red center”. It is some kind of educational institute, but they do not teach anything, except the monologs of Aunts, where they speak about the spirit of the soul, humility, about the advantages of being handmaids and their pure mission to save the world, to reproduce. Besides this, handmaids are even banned to read and write:

Who knows what we’d make of it (the Bible), if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read” (Atwood, 1989:127).

This religion is transformed and changed as it is suitable for the government. In “Handmaid’s Tale” Margaret Atwood talks about the government which is extremely religious and which uses religious rituals, prayers and even the Bible to control the population, even the titles are from the Bible: Handmaids, Aunts, Marthas, Galaad, Bilhah, “Lilies of the field”, “Milk and honey” “all flesh”, among others. The Government uses the Biblical admonitions to make the handmaids believe that they are pure vessels and they are blessed: And so on and so forth. We had it read to us every breakfast. Blessed be this, blessed be that. They played it from a tape, so not even an Aunt would be guilty of the sin of reading. The voice of a man’s. Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed be the merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed are the silent. Blessed be those that mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Atwood, 1989:28)

Biblical admonition “Woman shall be saved in childbearing” in “Handmaid’s Tale” is transformed like this: „woman shall be saved by childbearing”. When the government sees the danger in any prayer or admonition, they change it immediately. Dystopian society believes that they obey not the government, but the god, they do not realize that this is fit for the government, this powerful tool is so flexible that the population look like fanatics, they can kill somebody, they can commit suicide for this false religion,

The country itself is called “Gilead”. The word also comes from the bible. In the Old Testament the country of Gilead is mentioned and depicted as rich and fertile area on the east bank of the Jordan River. The name is the direct hint - Government tries to create an illusion of being prosperous and untroubled and the dystopian kingdom that has less in common with biblical wealthy land, is called “Gilead” from which all the valuable things came from, for example balm and oil:

“Judah and Israel traded with you; they exchanged wheat from Minnith and confections, honey, olive oil and balm for you wares” (Ezekiel, 27:17).

In dystopian novels, there are many interesting rituals by means of which, the government tries to create the global point of view and frame society in one space, where different opinions or attitudes simply don’t exist. To reach this goal they use religious ecstasy, in which society takes part in a specific ritual created by the authority. These may be the ritual of hatred, stoning to death of a criminal, birth giving ritual, ritual of Ford and so on:

The president made another sign of the T and sat down. The service had begun. The dedicated soma tablets were placed in the centre of the table. The loving cup of strawberry ice-cream somawas passed from hand

to hand and, with the formula, “I drink to my annihilation,” twelve times quaffed. Then to the accompaniment of the synthetic orchestra the First Solidarity Hymn was sung:

“Ford, we are twelve; oh make us one,
Like drops within the Social River,
Oh, make us now together run,
As swiftly, as thy shinning flivver”(Huxley, 2013:79).

Every character in the dystopian society feels as they are the slaves of the language. They have no competence in language to express what they feel. Sometimes they feel like different, but they do not know how to say this, they even do not know what it is. The system is already in their mind, very deeply and they cannot escape from this new language. In “Handmaid’s Tale “ O’Fred wants to know something, something different, but she does not know what it is:

„What would you like”? He says still with that lightness, as if it is a money transaction merely, and a minor one at that: candy, cigarettes.

” Besides hand lotion, you mean” I say.

“Besides hand lotion” he agrees.

“I would like.....” I say. “I would like to know”. It sounds indecisive, stupid even. I say it without thinking.

“Know what”? He says.

“Whatever there is to know” I say. (Atwood, 1989:230)

The government uses language in order to limit the ideas, to limit any kind of different opinions. The screens in “Fahrenheit 451” get this effect, where we have the houses, which have big screens, instead of walls and the same program every day, where people hold meaningless dialogues and everyone in the society is addicted to these programs. They speak and act like the people in this program, talk about nothing, laugh about nothing; they do not worry and think that they are very happy. So, the main goal is achieved: people think and act, as they are one. Government knows that books are very dangerous for this universal happiness, because reading means thinking. You must not think in the dystopian society, you must be happy:

„So, now do you see why books are hated and feared? They show the pores in the face of life. The comfortable people want only wax moon faces, pore less, hairless, and expressionless. We are living in a time when flowers are trying to live on flowers, instead of growing on good rain and black loam. Even fireworks, for all their prettiness come from the chemistry of the earth”(Bradbury, 2012:79)

Conclusion

The research of the previous dystopian novels and presented examples revealed that universal happiness, the same thoughts, the same interests, the same opinions and values. Dystopian government succeeds its main targets with the most powerful weapon – anti-intellectualism, because if we read, if we think, we will see that something is wrong, that we have lost our individuality. We will see that government controls us as a stupid mess and we will have the protest against them. This is very dangerous and totalitarian government does everything to avoid it. Unfortunately, the authors of dystopian novels predict that dystopian society is anti-intellectual society.

Reference:

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