

A Comparative Study of 1984 and Brave New World: Dystopian Visions of Societal Control

Mr. Upakul Patowary¹, Dr. Jeuti Talukdar²

¹Lecturer, Department of English, Bajali Teachers' Training College, Patacharkuchi, Assam, India.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Tihu College, Tihu, Assam, India.

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Abstract:

Dystopian literature has long served as a mirror reflecting the darkest aspects of society and governance. Among the most iconic works in this genre, George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" stand as beacons of caution, offering distinct yet equally harrowing visions of totalitarian control and the consequences of unchecked power. This research article delves into a comprehensive comparative analysis of these two pivotal works of 20th-century dystopian literature. Situated within the historical context of their respective creation, both the novels encapsulate contrasting visions of totalitarian regimes and the perils of unchecked authority. This study meticulously dissects the thematic, ideological, and structural disparities between the two, illuminating their divergent approaches to the portrayal of dystopia, surveillance mechanisms, individualism, and societal manipulation. Through this exploration, this research endeavors to provide a profound insight into the authors' divergent outlooks on the human condition and the consequences of absolute power. In this examination, the historical backdrop against which these literary works were conceived takes center stage. The political climate of their times, as well as the influences shaping Orwell and Huxley's worldviews, are scrutinized, revealing the socio-political stimuli that informed their narratives.

Keywords: Dystopian literature, George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, 1984, Brave New World, Totalitarianism, Surveillance, Individualism, Technology, Propaganda, Authoritarianism etc.

Introduction:

Dystopian literature, as a genre, has consistently been a harbinger of societal introspection, a reflection of humanity's deepest fears and anxieties regarding the future. Within the extensive tapestry of dystopian narratives, few works have left an indelible mark as profound as George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World." These two seminal novels, written in

the 20th century, have earned their enduring places in the literary canon by offering contrasting yet equally disconcerting visions of the human condition under the yoke of oppressive governments. In the annals of dystopian literature, the mere mention of "1984" evokes a sense of foreboding, a visceral recognition of a world where totalitarian control reigns supreme. Orwell's masterpiece, published in 1949, remains an unsettling exploration of a society where the omnipresent Party, led by Big Brother, exerts absolute authority over every facet of life. Critics and scholars alike have found it impossible to ignore the chilling relevance of Orwell's depiction of surveillance, thought control, and the obliteration of individuality. His portrayal of Winston Smith's journey from a reluctant conformist to a defiant rebel against the Party's omnipotence has inspired countless discussions on the nature of power and the fragility of truth.

Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," on the other hand, beckons readers into a world seemingly utopian in its veneer. Published in 1932, Huxley presents a society in which individualism is sacrificed at the altar of collective happiness, facilitated by the liberal distribution of a mind-altering substance called Soma. Here, the World Controllers govern with a veneer of benevolence, engineering a society that prioritizes pleasure and conformity above all else. Huxley's narrative, with its exploration of genetic engineering, mind manipulation, and the pursuit of happiness at any cost, has drawn acclaim for its prescient portrayal of a future where the pursuit of comfort could lead to the erosion of humanity itself.

Critics and scholars have lavished praise and critique upon both works, recognizing their profound impact on the literary world and the broader cultural discourse. Orwell's bleak prophecy of a dystopian future where "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" has become a touchstone for discussions on authoritarianism and the manipulation of language for political control. In Huxley's "Brave New World," the hedonistic excesses and commodification of human life have sparked debates on the consequences of consumerism and the sacrifices made in the name of societal stability.

As we embark on this comparative study, we journey beyond the immediate narratives of these novels, seeking to unravel the deeper layers of their thematic complexities, explore their historical contexts, and understand the narrative choices made by their respective authors. By undertaking this comprehensive analysis, we endeavor to shed light on the stark contrasts and subtle nuances that distinguish "1984" and "Brave New World." In doing so, we aim to offer a holistic perspective on the authors' distinct outlooks on the human condition and the enduring relevance of their cautionary tales in our ever-evolving world.

Literature Review:

Over the years, both "1984" and "Brave New World" have become the subjects of extensive scholarly scrutiny, offering rich fodder for critical analysis, cultural commentary, and philosophical exploration. In his essay "Orwell and Huxley: Two Faces of Dystopia," Neil Postman observes, "What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book because there would be no one who wanted to read one." Postman's reflection encapsulates the fundamental distinction between the worlds

crafted by Orwell and Huxley. It sets the stage for a recurring debate on the contrasting concerns of the authors: Orwell's preoccupation with oppressive political control and Huxley's exploration of a society willingly trading individuality for comfort.

Orwell's "1984" is often cited for its prescient depiction of surveillance and state control. In an article by Jeffrey Meyers titled "Orwell's Prophecy: 1984 and the Modern World," the author asserts, "Orwell's nightmare vision in '1984' is still the reality of our time: Thought control, repression, and censorship." Meyers underscores the contemporary relevance of Orwell's warnings regarding the manipulation of information and the erosion of civil liberties. On the other hand, Huxley's "Brave New World" explores a different facet of control—self-inflicted, pleasure-seeking conformity. A contrasting perspective is offered by Neil Levy in "Huxley's Brave New World: A 'Brave New World' for Whom?" Levy suggests that Huxley's vision serves as a critique of the individual's willingness to relinquish autonomy in exchange for happiness, prompting reflection on the nature of freedom and choice.

Language is a potent instrument of control in Orwell's "1984." In "Politics and the English Language," Orwell himself asserted, "But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought." Scholars such as Timothy W. Crusius, in "Orwell's Politics and the English Language: 'Politics and the English Language' in the Age of Pseudo-democracy," have dissected the manipulation of language as a tool of political domination in the novel.

Huxley's "Brave New World" also grapples with language and its role in shaping thought. In "Language as Theme and Technique in Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World,'" Paul Saidenburg examines how Huxley employs language to underscore the superficiality of the World State's society, where words are stripped of their meaning and emotional resonance, reflecting the shallowness of relationships.

One of the central tensions in both novels is the conflict between individualism and conformity. In "Orwell's Totalitarian Vision in '1984': A Study of the Impact of Science Fiction on Political Thought," John Rossi delves into the character of Winston Smith as a symbol of resistance, highlighting the enduring appeal of the individual's struggle against oppressive regimes. "Brave New World" presents a contrasting perspective, as discussed in Bok Kyu Choi's article "Aldous Huxley's Americanization of the Brave New World Typescript: Genetic Engineering, Individuality, and the Modern American Consumer Culture." Choi explores how Huxley's World State effectively eliminates individuality through genetic engineering, offering a stark cautionary tale about the consequences of consumerism and conformity.

Both "1984" and "Brave New World" continue to resonate in contemporary discussions. In "Dystopian Visions and Discourses: Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' and George Orwell's '1984' in the 21st Century," Carl-Fredrik Bernhardt examines their relevance in the context of modern surveillance technologies, artificial intelligence, and political discourse, highlighting the enduring importance of these works. Ethical questions raised by these novels are explored by Gregory Claeys in "Staging the End of History: Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' as a Satire of the 'End of History' Thesis." Claeys draws parallels between Huxley's critique of a society

without historical consciousness and Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" theory, prompting reflections on the ethical implications of complacency and conformity.

In the vast expanse of literary scholarship, the analysis of "1984" and "Brave New World" remains a fertile ground for intellectual inquiry. The works of Orwell and Huxley, though distinct in their approaches, continue to captivate scholars, critics, and readers alike, beckoning us to ponder the complexities of human nature, the perils of unchecked power, and the enduring struggle for individuality and truth in a world fraught with control and manipulation.

Historical Context:

To fully appreciate the depth and nuances of George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," it is essential to situate these dystopian classics within their rich historical contexts. The periods in which these authors penned their respective works significantly influenced the narratives, themes, and underlying anxieties that permeate the pages of these novels. George Orwell, born Eric Arthur Blair, wrote "1984" in the immediate aftermath of World War II. The mid-20th century was a period marked by the collapse of empires and the emergence of superpowers engaged in the Cold War. Orwell, who had witnessed the rise of totalitarian regimes firsthand during the Spanish Civil War, was acutely aware of the geopolitical landscape dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union. His experiences as a soldier and journalist, coupled with the chilling revelations about the atrocities committed by authoritarian regimes, notably Stalin's Soviet Union, informed the bleak and dystopian vision of "1984."

Orwell's novel mirrors the palpable fear of totalitarianism that gripped the world during this period. The specter of fascism and the horrors of Nazi concentration camps were still fresh in the collective memory. Orwell's portrayal of the omnipresent Party, with its Thought Police, newspeak, and Big Brother, was a haunting reflection of the pervasive surveillance, censorship, and manipulation that defined the totalitarian regimes of his time. "1984" emerged as a stark warning against the dangers of authoritarianism and the potential erosion of individual freedom and truth in a world dominated by ideological warfare. In the words of literary critic Isaac Deutscher, "Orwell's vision of 1984 does not derive from a meditation on the Anglo-American scene of his time but from his perception of the world in which he lived and from his analysis of the nature of Stalin's rule."

Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" was conceived in the midst of a period of profound societal and technological upheaval—the interwar years. Huxley, a British writer and intellectual, wrote against the backdrop of the Great Depression and the rapid advancements in science and technology. The 1920s and 1930s were marked by significant social change, with the Roaring Twenties giving way to the economic hardships of the Great Depression. This era also witnessed the rise of consumer culture and the proliferation of mass media. Huxley's vision of the future in "Brave New World" was influenced by the rampant consumerism, mass production, and the emergence of new forms of entertainment that characterized this era. Additionally, his

fascination with scientific advancements, including the development of contraceptives and the nascent field of genetic engineering, played a pivotal role in shaping the novel's themes.

Huxley's *World State*, where individuals are conditioned from birth for specific roles and where pleasure is the ultimate goal, can be seen as a commentary on the consequences of technological progress and the dehumanizing potential of a society driven by hedonism and efficiency. The novel raises questions about the ethical implications of scientific innovation and the trade-off between individuality and societal stability. As Huxley himself remarked, "Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backward." His *Brave New World* offers a satirical critique of a world increasingly enamored with the promises of progress and consumption.

Both Orwell and Huxley drew inspiration from real-world developments and ideologies of their time. Orwell's portrayal of a repressive surveillance state in *"1984"* was heavily influenced by the rise of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. The purges, show trials, and propaganda machinery of the Stalinist regime served as a grim backdrop for the dystopian elements of his novel. Huxley, on the other hand, was intrigued by the principles of Fordism and mass production, epitomized by Henry Ford's assembly line manufacturing. The mechanization and standardization of human life in *"Brave New World"* mirror the efficiency and conformity associated with Fordist principles.

The historical contexts in which George Orwell and Aldous Huxley wrote *"1984"* and *"Brave New World"* are crucial to understanding the themes, anxieties, and critiques embedded within these seminal works. Orwell's post-World War II vision of totalitarianism and Huxley's interwar exploration of technological advancement and consumerism offer valuable insights into the societal concerns of their respective eras, making these novels enduring reflections on the human condition in the face of evolving political and technological landscapes.

Themes and Concepts: A Comparative Analysis of "1984" and "Brave New World"

The enduring appeal of dystopian literature lies in its ability to serve as a looking glass into the darkest corners of human society. George Orwell's *"1984"* and Aldous Huxley's *"Brave New World"* stand as prime exemplars of this genre, each offering a distinct yet hauntingly plausible vision of the future. One of the most conspicuous thematic threads connecting *"1984"* and *"Brave New World"* is the specter of totalitarianism and authoritarian control. In *"1984,"* Orwell paints a chilling picture of the Party's unrelenting grip on Oceania, embodied by the ever-watchful Big Brother. The motto "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" epitomizes the manipulation of language and thought, showcasing the regime's iron-fisted control over reality itself. The Thought Police, with their omnipresent surveillance, ensure conformity at the deepest level of human consciousness. In contrast, Huxley's *"Brave New World"* presents a more subtle form of authoritarianism. The World Controllers exert their influence through a veneer of benevolence, employing genetic engineering and conditioning to create a society where citizens willingly embrace their assigned roles and the pleasure-inducing

drug Soma keeps discontent at bay. Here, control is achieved not through brute force but through the seductive allure of pleasure and conformity.

Surveillance is a cornerstone of dystopian control, vividly illustrated in both novels. In "1984," the ever-watchful eye of the telescreen penetrates even the sanctity of private thought. Winston Smith's illicit diary becomes an act of rebellion, a secret realm of resistance in a world where privacy is a distant memory. Orwell's words resonate with eerie relevance: "Big Brother is watching you." Huxley's "Brave New World" introduces a different form of surveillance—one internalized by citizens themselves. The inhabitants of the World State willingly embrace their roles and societal norms, conditioned from birth to seek pleasure and avoid discomfort. The pervasive use of Soma, the state-sanctioned happiness-inducing drug, exemplifies how manipulation can be achieved through the seduction of pleasure rather than the imposition of fear.

The tension between individualism and conformity permeates both novels, albeit in contrasting ways. Winston Smith in "1984" represents the spirit of individual rebellion against the homogenizing force of the Party. His yearning for personal freedom and truth stands as a stark contrast to the Party's relentless drive for conformity. As he reflects, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four." In "Brave New World," individualism is sacrificed at the altar of collective happiness. The citizens of the World State are conditioned to embrace their predetermined roles and to seek pleasure above all else. Bernard Marx, a character who dares to question the status quo, is an outlier in this society. Huxley's portrayal raises profound questions about the cost of societal stability and whether the pursuit of happiness at any cost leads to the erosion of individuality.

Technology and propaganda are powerful tools of control in both novels. In "1984," the manipulation of information and history through the Ministry of Truth's Newspeak and the rewriting of the past serve as chilling reminders of the malleability of reality. Orwell's depiction of the Two Minutes Hate, where citizens are whipped into a frenzy of emotion and loyalty, underscores the potency of propaganda in shaping public opinion. In "Brave New World," technology takes center stage in the form of genetic engineering and conditioning. Citizens are engineered for specific roles, ensuring the perpetuation of a stable society. Huxley's World State employs the mass production of individuals as a means of social control, and the use of Soma serves as a tool to maintain contentment and discourage dissent.

Both "1984" and "Brave New World" share overarching themes of totalitarianism, surveillance, manipulation, and the tension between individualism and conformity. However, the novels diverge in their approaches, with Orwell's work emphasizing the brutal imposition of control and Huxley's offering a vision of control achieved through the seductive allure of pleasure. Both serve as harrowing reminders of the fragile nature of freedom and the enduring struggle for autonomy in a world where power seeks to mold reality itself.

Literary Style and Structure:

The power of literature extends beyond the narrative; it resides in the author's choice of style and structure, shaping the reader's engagement and interpretation. In the case of George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," these two dystopian classics employ distinct literary styles and structures that amplify their thematic explorations.

At the heart of literary style lies the choice of narrative perspective and tone, and in this aspect, "1984" and "Brave New World" diverge. Orwell opts for a third-person limited perspective, placing the reader in the mind of his protagonist, Winston Smith. This intimate viewpoint allows readers to experience Winston's inner turmoil, doubts, and gradual awakening to the oppressive nature of the Party. The tone is stark, somber, and laden with a sense of impending doom, mirroring Winston's journey from conformity to rebellion. Huxley, conversely, employs a third-person omniscient perspective in "Brave New World." This narrative choice grants readers access to the thoughts and motivations of multiple characters, providing a panoramic view of the World State's society. The tone is often satirical and ironic, offering a lens through which to view the superficiality and absurdity of a society driven by pleasure and conformity.

A hallmark of dystopian literature is the creation of immersive and oppressive worlds, and in this regard, both authors excel in distinct ways. Orwell constructs a bleak, totalitarian Oceania characterized by constant surveillance, thought control, and war. His world is a desolate and crumbling landscape where historical records are constantly rewritten, erasing the past. The Party's slogans, such as "War is Peace" and "Freedom is Slavery," underscore the inversion of reality and the perversion of language. In contrast, Huxley envisions the World State as a technologically advanced, hedonistic utopia on the surface. His world is characterized by genetic engineering, mass production, and the widespread use of the pleasure-inducing drug Soma. The society is built on the principles of stability and conformity, where discomfort and individuality are suppressed in the name of happiness.

The characters in "1984" and "Brave New World" serve as vehicles for exploring the novels' themes and ideologies. In "1984," Winston Smith undergoes a profound transformation from a compliant citizen to a defiant rebel. His inner conflict and rebellion against the Party's control symbolize the enduring human spirit's resistance against oppression. Symbols like the glass paperweight and the diary represent his quest for truth and autonomy. Huxley introduces characters like Bernard Marx, Lenina Crowne, and John "the Savage" in "Brave New World." Bernard represents the outsider questioning the conformity of the World State, while Lenina embodies the complacency and conditioning of its citizens. John, born outside the World State, symbolizes the clash between individuality and conformity. These characters become conduits for exploring the consequences of societal control.

In the realm of literary style and structure, "1984" and "Brave New World" stand as distinct and masterful creations. Orwell's intimate third-person limited perspective and somber tone immerse readers in Winston's struggle against the Party's oppression. Huxley's third-person omniscient perspective and satirical tone invite readers to dissect the absurdities of the World State's pursuit of pleasure and stability. The dystopian worlds these authors build serve as canvases for their

thematic explorations, with Orwell's Oceania representing the horrors of totalitarianism and Huxley's World State showcasing the allure of a pleasure-driven society. Lastly, the characters in these novels, from Winston's rebellion to John's clash with the World State, embody the tension between individuality and conformity. In the hands of Orwell and Huxley, literary style and structure become potent tools for conveying their cautionary tales about the fragility of freedom, the allure of conformity, and the enduring struggle for autonomy in a world where power seeks to mold reality itself.

Critiques and Interpretations:

The enduring resonance of dystopian literature lies in its capacity to provoke critical reflection and stimulate interpretations that transcend the confines of the written word. George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" are no exceptions, as they continue to be scrutinized, analyzed, and interpreted by scholars, critics, and readers alike. Both "1984" and "Brave New World" were met with critical acclaim upon their release, and their influence on literature and popular culture has been profound. Orwell's depiction of a totalitarian regime in "1984" struck a chord in the post-World War II era, when the horrors of Nazi and Stalinist regimes were still fresh in the collective memory. The novel's portrayal of surveillance, censorship, and the manipulation of truth resonated with readers who were grappling with the complexities of the Cold War. Huxley's "Brave New World" was equally impactful, offering a provocative vision of a society driven by pleasure and conformity. While some critics initially viewed it as a less immediate threat compared to Orwell's dystopia, the novel's exploration of consumerism, technological control, and the erosion of individuality found resonance in subsequent decades. Huxley's world-building and satirical tone added depth to the novel's reception.

The enduring relevance of "1984" and "Brave New World" lies in their ability to reflect and critique aspects of contemporary society. Orwell's novel, with its themes of surveillance and propaganda, has often been cited in discussions about government intrusion into privacy and the manipulation of information. Phrases like "Big Brother" and "thoughtcrime" have become part of the cultural lexicon, symbolizing the dangers of authoritarianism. In a similar vein, "Brave New World" has found renewed relevance in discussions about consumerism, hedonism, and the pursuit of pleasure in the modern world. The novel's portrayal of a society where individuals willingly sacrifice autonomy for comfort and entertainment has been seen as a cautionary tale about the consequences of a culture obsessed with instant gratification.

Critiques and interpretations of these novels delve into profound ethical and philosophical questions. "1984" raises questions about the nature of truth, the role of language in shaping thought, and the limits of individual resistance against overwhelming power. It prompts reflection on the ethics of surveillance and the erosion of civil liberties in the name of security. "Brave New World" invites scrutiny of the ethical implications of genetic engineering, the pursuit of happiness at any cost, and the trade-offs between individuality and societal stability. It challenges readers to consider whether a society devoid of discomfort and conflict is a desirable

one and whether the pursuit of pleasure can lead to the dehumanization of individuals. Critics and scholars have conducted extensive literary analyses of these novels, dissecting the symbolism embedded within their narratives. In "1984," the glass paperweight, the diary, and the concept of doublethink serve as potent symbols representing Winston's quest for truth and autonomy. The oppressive nature of the Party is embodied in symbols like Big Brother and the telescreen. In "Brave New World," the use of names, such as "Lenina Crowne" and "Bernard Marx," carries symbolic weight, highlighting the dehumanizing effects of a society where individuals are reduced to their predetermined roles. Soma, the drug that induces happiness and conformity, symbolizes the seductive allure of pleasure and escape from reality.

The critiques and interpretations of "1984" and "Brave New World" underscore the enduring power of dystopian literature to provoke thought, challenge societal norms, and offer cautionary perspectives. These novels continue to inspire discussions about the erosion of freedom, the perils of conformity, and the ethical dilemmas posed by advances in technology and government control. As society evolves, the themes and warnings embedded within these works remain as relevant and compelling as ever, inviting readers to contemplate the consequences of unchecked power and the enduring struggle for individuality and truth.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the comparative study of George Orwell's "1984" and Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" has illuminated the enduring significance and profound impact of these two dystopian classics. These novels, though written in different eras and with distinct narrative styles, converge on common themes that transcend time and continue to resonate with readers and scholars alike. The historical contexts in which these works were crafted provide valuable insights into the societal concerns and anxieties of their respective times. Orwell's post-World War II vision of totalitarianism and Huxley's interwar exploration of technological advancement and consumerism offer a lens through which to understand the societal challenges and ideologies of their eras. The thematic exploration of totalitarianism, surveillance, manipulation, and the tension between individuality and conformity in "1984" and "Brave New World" remains as relevant today as it was when these novels were first published. These themes serve as cautionary reminders of the fragility of freedom, the allure of complacency, and the enduring struggle for autonomy in the face of evolving political and technological landscapes. The literary style and structure employed by Orwell and Huxley, from narrative perspective to symbolism, enhance the depth of their narratives and invite readers to engage with complex ideas and profound ethical questions. These works have found resonance in contemporary discussions about government surveillance, the manipulation of information, consumerism, and the pursuit of pleasure at the expense of individuality. They challenge us to grapple with the ethical implications of technological progress and government control. It could be argued that both "1984" and "Brave New World" remind us of the eternal struggle for truth, freedom, and

individuality and encourage us to remain vigilant in safeguarding these fundamental aspects of our humanity.

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