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Two Views of Dystopian Isolation [Literary Essay Sample]

*1984* and *Brave New World* are two of the most important Dystopian books from the 20th century. While there are a lot of things in common between the two of these books, including having big governments that control the people through the use of force, there is a pretty big difference in how each one of them talks about isolation. In *1984*, the protagonist, Winston Smith, is spied on constantly, which turns out to become a big problem for him after he falls in love with a woman and begins an illegal sexual affair with her. He begins to live his life in fear, knowing that the government is extremely strict and he lives in a police state. He can trust no one with his secrets and finds himself alone with many eyes on him. At the same time, in *Brave New World*, isolation happens in the midst of a society full of sex, drugs, and abundance without any tight government controls. The main characters are either frustrated by the system all around them or isolated through their education which awaken them to the culture of triteness that lives all around them. In one book, the walls are closing in, while in the other, it seems almost impossible for the main characters to find any sort of meaning at all. This paper will take a critical look to isolation in the two Dystopian classics.

In *1984*, Winston Smith lives in increasing isolation as he sinks deeper and deeper into rule-breaking. The citizens of Oceania, one of the few remaining super states on the earth, are being watched constantly. They are expected to take part in daily exercises and their TV watches them make sure they do it. Besides this, they are also forced to partake in the “Two Minute Hate” during which they are supposed to observe images of the enemies of the party and to either yell or become angry toward these people on the screen (Orwell, 54). In a world that is so collective that it is difficult for people to be by themselves, it might not seem that isolation would be one of the most important themes. However, Winston Smith does grow more and more isolated over time as he begins to break the law. This makes living a normal life very difficult for him. As a member of the government (although a very minor member of it), he knows that the elites who were educated are usually watched the closest, compared to the uneducated Proles who live self-absorbed lives and don’t know enough to see that they are being controlled (Orwell, 60-61). Since he is dangerous because he knows some things about the truth, Winston knows that he is always under surveillance by his T.V, and in his role as a government employee, but also that he is being spied on, meaning that he wouldn’t know who he could trust if he ever wanted to organize a conspiracy (Orwell, 49). So, as soon as Winston does anything that is against any of the rules, he could be in danger and begins to feel paranoid and isolated. One example comes when he visits a small bookshop and purchases a diary (Orwell, 78). Even though he doesn’t know for sure that he is breaking any rules, he is so worried about getting caught that he comes with a plan to say that he was just buying razors if he is arrested and interrogated. After he walks away from the store with his new book, he avoids contact with people because he doesn’t want to draw attention to himself (Orwell, 79-80). Ultimately, Smith is isolated by his society’s obsession with chastity, and even after he begins his affair with Julia, he is still not entirely sure that he can trust her (Ibid, 57-58). Even though he comes to trust her, he knows that as long as he is under surveillance, he is in danger and that his safest course is to act normally and avoid exposing himself to more people (Connors, 108).

While Winston Smith is feeling the walls closing in on him in *1984*, *Brave New World* instead shows a world of isolation through meaninglessness. In *Brave New World*, the world is held in control by the use of powerful recreational drugs and social conditioning. The main part of the culture is that everybody is supposed to be available for sex with anybody who wants them. Likewise, there is no real surveillance because nobody really commits crimes. This government feels like it created a utopia, and probably a lot of people would agree with them today. As much casual sex as a person could want, powerful drugs are widely available, and people are encouraged to pursue sports in their leisure time. However, isolation here comes from the fact that a few people see how bad this culture is for all of them. For example, Bernard Marx is part of the highest caste and works as a psychologist for social conditioning. In other words, he knows exactly what the conventional logic is for this society because it is his job to indoctrinate people born into it on how they are supposed to behave by having voices whisper into their ears as they sleep. He secures a date with Lenina, a young woman he’s attracted to. However, during their date, she becomes very uncomfortable when he treats her like an adult, like asking her to sit in silence while they watch a sunset (Huxley, 96). However, she hates where they are, and tells him that she is uncomfortable and wants to go home. However, Marx can anticipate everything she is going to say because he helped teach her what this is. So when she can only respond to his authentic gestures with sleep-trained social conditioning cliches, he feels alone (Huxley, 96-97). In fact, she is much more comfortable when he simply grabs her breast without asking, because that is how adults are supposed to behave in their society.

The other main character in *Brave New World* in society is Helmholtz. He occupies one of the highest positions in society as an Alpha Plus, meaning that he is not only extremely intelligent, but he is physically bigger than other people, and basically engineered to be perfect. Even though he has a privileged place in society he is increasingly disaffected by feeling like he’s never really challenged. Women throw themselves at him, such as three women from the Ministry of Propaganda who try to seduce him into going to the countryside with just them, but he is simply bored and doesn’t even respond to their offer (Huxley, 70-71). He likes talking to Bernard, even though he finds him unusual because of Bernard sort of thinks differently than other people he deals with (Huxley, 70). More and more, he is aware of how different he is than everyone else. Even though he is an intellectual in society and is trusted with writing material to be broadcast on the national radio program, he realizes that his writing abilities are limited because he can’t really ever express complex ideas, because there is no real need for them (Altuntas, 49-50). He struggles with this idea, being smart enough to understand that there are limits in his education, but equally upset that he doesn’t know what it is that he is missing. He knows that he is great at inventing phrases and that he is good at making ideas sound simple enough to people listening to him, but his own writing ability is now hitting the limits of his ability because there aren’t really any ideas that he has come across which are worth inspiring him to go to better places with his writing (Huxley, 72-73).

In conclusion, both of these Dystopian books make good use of the theme of isolation. In *1984*, Winston Smith has to live an increasingly private life as he is faced with being caught for all of the crimes against society that he is committing. Eventually, he is caught, and although the book doesn’t explicitly say how, he is eventually tortured until he is recommitted to the State. Kept from love and even his own thoughts, Citizens who don’t play by the rules in Oceania live lives of isolation. Likewise, the two Alpha Pluses in *Brave New World* (Berard and Helmholtz) have grown disaffected by their isolation, Winston from mature relationships and Helmholtz from mature ideas. Each of them is surrounded by other people’s utopia, yet they are miserable, suffering in isolation.

Works Cited

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