Dystopia as a vital peek into the future

The importance of dispatching antiquated morals and establishing new ethics

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Abstract

This essay analyzes and tries to untangle the meaning and intention of dystopian literature, by analyzing two novels (Neal Shusterman’s “Unwind” and Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World”). From this analysis, whether or not the futures portrayed in dystopian literature relate to our own future is riddled out, furthermore the importance of the authors’ intention is debated and a conclusion is reached. As the dystopian future unravels, ethnicity, gender, class and sexual orientation, to mention a few factors, find their own place in the new world; this essay tries to establish their roles in the new society. When discussing the characters in the novels, Bourdieu’s theories on fields, habitus and social capital are used to figure out what they are competing for and in what ways they struggle for the reward. Furthermore, the development of dystopian imagining is discussed and its function as a reflection of contemporary society and the state of science. Delineating the roles of social classes in dystopias is an important task in figuring out whether social power still reduces minorities depending on class or gender. Our antiquated morals and ethics aren’t suitable anymore and need to be reformed; this is discussed based on dystopian literature and the image of the future. Furthermore, this essay gets into detail with the reduction of man and by what means we are enslaved and made to believe in the faux utopias. In the end, the conclusion reached is that dystopian literature delivers a hefty and important point that needs to be heeded and used as a rare look into the future.

Keywords: Aldous Huxley, Neal Shusterman, Literature, Dystopia, Bourdieu, Brave new world, Unwind, Hans Jonas, Utopia
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1. Introduction

Dystopian literature packs a powerful punch, both in its intention and its prospects, particularly in our day and age. One might ask why it should matter even more now than it did, say, fifty years ago. In my mind, the answer is simple yet terrifying – we’re catching up. When Aldous Huxley wrote his novel *Brave New World*, it was as if he had transcended time and stared into the future, for the alarming reality he portrays has practically blended with ours. A totalitarian state governs every citizen that is “born” (genetically manufactured) into their system, outsiders are known as savages. Human values are twisted and turned, people are bred into different social classes (“alpha” stands the highest and “epsilon” the lowest, these in turn have their own “subdivisions” where “minus” is inferior to all) with no chance to elevate their position. From the moment of their birth, the integration into society commences.

Neal Shusterman’s *Unwind* builds up a different world where the real dystopian nightmare lies in the power to regulate and impede unwanted citizen. Governmental power, as well as adult power, is the focal point of the totalitarian state. The novel is very actual in the contemporary progress and discussion of science and human morals. With questions like abortion and organ donations debated heavily, *Unwind* represents a dystopia where all the “wrong” choices have been made. The reason behind the choice of novels rests on the fact that they are written in different time periods and furthermore show different perspectives of dystopia – as will become clear throughout this thesis.

Before the novels are presented more clearly, several attributes of dystopian literature will be discussed as well as surrounding factors and when these tools have been gathered, the novels will be tied in.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Understanding utopia and dystopia

Since this essay portrays dystopian worlds, defining the terms utopia and dystopia is obviously central to my cause. At first glance, they might seem obvious and/or simply each other’s opposites. Thomas More is the father of the utopian term; “utopia” was an imaginary island that he crafted in his book with the same name which built the foundation that modern utopias stand on. The most common idea is that a utopia is

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merely a world that is ideal, a sort of heaven on earth. Whereas dystopia is often thought to be its exact opposite, nothing but misery awaits mankind and the world has plunged its way into dark days.

But, it’s not that simple. Take the utopian idea, for it is an idea and not simply a place, it can be something else completely, a mindset or a perspective. Barnita Bagchi follows the same train of thought “utopia is a resonance, a mode, a perspective.”³, while she also points out that it’s “speculative and difficult or impossible to actualize in reality”. And surely, utopian imagining can exist (secluded) as a subjective conscious mode for sole human beings? Utopian thoughts are highly affected by the world and society in itself but are not entirely dependent upon it. Ponder upon the thought of a human living his or her life in a subjective utopia even though the world might practically be a dystopia. Meanwhile, a dystopia practically affects all human beings from birth, rendering the thought of utopia difficult, but if it’s subjective, in a sense it can still exist. I’ll get back to this topic later on as the dystopian ideas have become clearer.

One of the most central ideas of dystopian imaginings is the regulation of human birth. Everything from controlling population so as not to overpopulate the nation to deciding career patterns (a career is substituted to what one can do to benefit society) for all individuals, in Brave New World, this is done through the artificial creation of humans, the fetuses are predestined to develop into different social classes. In Unwind, the regulation is used retroactively, societies unwanted can easily be disposed of (justified by the fact that the “unwinds” can keep living and not be technically dead since 100% of their salvaged body can be reused) without repercussions. The dystopias differ quite heavily, while Huxley’s world is rooted in scientific development, Shusterman tells the tale of a world that is shaped into some sort of utopia for adults, a more sociological development.

Generally, one can identify a dystopia as being ruled by ideological radicalism where the rulers build the society on a struggle for utopia. Take Brave New World for example; it all began with a utopian idea. No more sickness, cure for cancer, eternal youth, no more over-population or starvation and no violence – all utopian imaginings that most would want. But, the fulfillment that utopia might bring often culminates into dystopia. The cause of this culmination is more often than not hubris, Icarus flying too close to the sun. Michael Roth called dystopia “the utopia you must be careful not to

and sure enough, every utopia comes with its potential dystopia. Take a revolution for example, a utopian thought can quickly turn into a dystopian reality. In *Utopia/Dystopia conditions of historical possibility* the authors claim that the chance of failure is higher than success “in a universe subjected to increasing entropy, one finds that there are many more ways for planning to go wrong than to go right, more ways to generate dystopia than utopia.”

2.2 Aim

Perhaps the most central point of this essay is to reflect on dystopian literature as a reflection of society, whether or not it’s meant to be conceived as criticism against possible scientific progress and contemporary society. The goal of dystopian novels is to depict a future where society has crumbled and descended into more or less totalitarian states, but is this denomination accurate? I’ll try to surface some opinions on the matter and hope to reach a conclusion. Furthermore, how much a dystopian world is dependent on science as a factor will be an interesting discussion. What of our contemporary state? As we head into the future technology is progressing at an alarming rate, our morals and ethics are based on old beliefs that do nothing to regulate and guide us today. And what of governmental control of citizen, do minorities matter even less in a dystopia?

Another point of interest regards the difference of utopia and dystopia; can one regard dystopia to be an antithesis to utopia? On the surface, both terms are coined to be each other’s opposite, but in reality it’s not quite so simple.

Ultimately, the goal of this essay is to use the novels as a tool to discuss the dystopian questions I have in mind, extracts from the novels will be used to confirm or deny different approaches.

2.3 Method

Riddling out the definition of utopia and dystopia, in different aspects, will be my first and foremost task as to provide a solid foundation to ultimately bear along with me on the rest of the analysis. Before the actual analysis, it will be important to map out the different approaches one can take to the dystopian idea. Does one view dystopia as a

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4 Jörn Rüsen, Michael Fehr & Thomas W. Rieger (red.), *Thinking utopia: steps into other worlds*, Berghahn, New York, 2005.

utopian mindset gone wrong? Does dystopia always start with utopian ideas? Is utopian imagining individual as well as global? If a dystopian future is envisioned, can utopian order still preside within certain individual’s mindset? There are a lot of questions and hopefully I can tear through them and represent them when tying in the novels and their worlds. Furthermore the thought of utopia and dystopia as a warning for contemporary society will be discussed, how much can a reading of the future (or the past) lead us away from its path? Dystopian Science-Fiction explores the progress of machines and technology, often in a parallel futuristic world. More often than not, the new technology bars the way for human feelings, I’ll debate this link later on in this essay.

2.4 Previous Research

Finding research on the Science-Fiction genre isn’t difficult, but the dystopian viewpoint isn’t all that covered. Most authors debate the relation and definition of utopia-dystopia, and it’s a good point to branch out from. Other than the obvious connection to Thomas More, the utopian term is fleshed out in The Politics of the (Im)Possible, a volume that brings together articles primarily on utopia in a wide variety of disciplines, but the focal point for me, regarding this particular work, will be the definition of utopia. Gordin, Tilley and Prakash are on the same track in Utopia/dystopia: conditions of historical possibility, what differs here is the discussion on the future and progress “But does anyone believe in progress any longer? Even keeping to the realm of the spatial, which we have taken as an example, are the architects and urbanists still passionately at work on utopian cities?”6, they discuss a whole variety of different details (the importance of the streets, hydrocarbon utopias etc.). Sarah Ljungquist maps and discusses Swedish literary utopia and dystopia from 1734 to 1940 in her Den litterära utopin och dystopin i Sverige 1734-1940, she brings a historical perspective on the development of the utopian and dystopian style (even though the focus rests on Swedish literature, Ljungquist offers a broad overlook) which will be useful.7 Richard Slaughters Futures Beyond Dystopia differs from the other works in the regard that Slaughter’s interests lie in creating a future that isn’t an dystopia. This method of actively seeking ways to adhere to human values and elude bleak futures is a fresh standpoint that will surely be useful. Slaughter refers to the twenty-first century as a “make” or ‘break” time for humanity.8

6 Ibid, p.22
7 Sarah Ljungquist, Den litterära utopin och dystopin i Sverige 1734-1940, Diss. Umeå : Univ., 2001
Other works that I’ll be using, which don’t primarily concern utopia or dystopia, are Bourdieu’s theories on capital, social and symbolic power as well as Beardsley and Wimsatt’s *The Intentional Fallacy*. Bourdieu’s capital regards accumulated labor, when “agents” gather capital, they use it as a force to higher their social energy. Capital is what “makes the games of society—not least, the economic game—something other than simple games of chance offering at every moment the possibility of a miracle”. I will be using these theories to my benefit in the discussion of minorities in dystopias, as well as “unwinds” in Shusterman’s *Unwind*. Beardsley and Wimsatt discuss whether or not authorial intent is to be considered or not in the analysis of a work. They argue against the importance of the author’s intention, if the work is successful, the question of authorial intent is apparent, if not – then “the critic must go outside the poem—for evidence of an intention that did not become effective in the poem.” Hans Jonas provides a solid foundation to discuss morals and ethics that are paramount to the human race as we look into the future, his *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethic for the Technological Age* will be very useful.

### 2.5 The importance of dystopia in contemporary society

In writing an essay on a topic such as this, one might ask oneself why now? What marks the importance of dystopian literature today? Mapping out the future is very important, only imagining it isn’t enough. As I stated earlier, society and science is catching up to what just 100 years ago seemed foreign and beyond the capabilities of man. Scientific development has come a long way, what Aldous Huxley depicted in 1932 doesn’t seem too far off anymore.

The world we are living in is, in many respects, an illusion. Or, to put it more precisely, it is founded on illusions. That is, much that is conventional, taken-for-granted, the ‘way things are’ does not stand up to close examination. The affluent Western world has become entranced by its wealth, its success and its ever more compelling technological prowess.

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12 Richardson, p.15.
13 Beardsley & Wimsatt, p.3.
16 Slaughter, Introduction.
Slaughter means that the western world has become so entranced in the supposedly utopian advancement that it has forgotten the consequences of it. The technological aptitude that erases boundaries every day is enchanting and its excitement abolishes what was once considered scientific taboo. Dystopias often take this point as the base of their storyline, a world where technological progress has been let loose so freely that it has culminated into dystopia. In my mind, this is the prime reason for the importance of dystopian literature; it explores the possibilities of the present course of the world. It must serve as a warning for what is to come. What is the purpose of speculating in possible futures? It gives us a range of possibilities and reasons to avoid crash courses; it can provide an alternative to the purely technological pursuit that has ensued.

It can therefore be concluded that futures beyond Dystopia can be brought within imaginative, intellectual – and thus practical – reach. A strong focusing concept is that of a wise culture which places the pursuit of wisdom above raw technical power.\(^\text{17}\)

Not all dystopian future concerns the progress and might of science, but it is the most common fear (along with nuclear war). Slaughter suggests the pursuit of human wisdom and awareness over “raw technical power”, and that is the utopian alternative to the darkness of course. Yet, such a culture is farsighted and highly improbable deriving from contemporary society. Slaughter calls the process of increasing awareness and building a worthwhile future “Future Studies”, the proposition carries a code of ethics and it must pursue quality in every area.\(^\text{18}\) Such studies knit closely with dystopia; it understands the importance of the proposed futures and acts to mend. It can be defined as such: “the intellectual form in which a society renders account to itself of its probable and possible futures.\(^\text{19}\)" Obviously, dystopian literature is very important to this field as it highlights the fears and uneasiness that troubles all who have gazed into the future.

So is dystopian literature to be seen as criticism of society? In my opinion, it’s hard to overlook. In theory, all dystopian imagining carries with it some sort of criticism, whether it is political, humanitarian, fascistic or whatever else it might be. Since it usually reveals and fleshes out contemporary problems, its aim is often obvious. It can definitely be read as a critique of society in my mind. Not only can it, but more often than not, should be. When a bleak future is presented, one automatically compares it to the present as a way of differing out the prospects and what may have caused it. As Slaughter calls it, creating social foresight is imperative and can be gained by studying

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.30.  
\(^{18}\) Ibid, p.31.  
\(^{19}\) Ibid, p.35.
and understanding futuristic possibilities. The problem of this field is the limitations of the methodologies, Slaughter argues

…the when used in isolation, the methodologies per se have limitations. There are a number of reasons for this. For example, most futures methodologies lack a strong paradigmatic dimension. That is, they do not encourage those using them to review their underlying worldview assumptions (e.g. unquestioned economic growth; the dominance of Western thinking; the pre- eminent role accorded to instrumental means/ends reasoning) or the axioms of their disciplinary speech community.20

What would be required then, for the interpreter to ponder these questions, would be a voyage that isn’t entirely focused on the surface. The focus primarily lies on describing the state and conditions of society, perhaps a more broad approach is necessary to really spark a fire. As Huxley states in Brave New World Revisited

Twenty-seven years later, in this third quarter of the twentieth century A.D., and long before the end of the first century A.F., I feel a good deal less optimistic than I did when I was writing Brave New World. The prophecies made in 1931 are coming true much sooner than I thought they would.21

Is the world progressively turning away from human nature and neglecting to heed the signs of a terrible future?

3. Dystopian Legacy

When discussing what dystopian literature leaves behind, it normally propels into whether or not authorial intent is to be taken into consideration. Even though a work should always stand on its own, when it works as criticism against society, finding out what the author intended can bring more to the table, it shouldn’t be used as a way of defining the work as a whole. Beardsley & Wimsatt call this the “intentional fallacy”, they assert that the authors intention is neither wanted nor available.22 The notion is valid; a work is separated from its creator at birth and should be judged as a completely separate entity. However, when it comes to a work that functions as criticism, it might be awarding to ask what the author had in mind, even though the work delivers its point successfully – external readings are relevant at times. When making a Marxist reading, society is very relevant. It’s very similar when reading Huxley and Shusterman. When mixing society into the reading, another comparison can commence. From a quick glance, it’s easy to see that Huxley’s criticism concerns the progress of science and loss

20 Ibid, p.16.
21 Aldous Huxley, Brave New World Revisited, First Ed. 1965, New York, p.3.
22 Beardsley & Wimsatt, p.2.
of human emotion. Shusterman’s criticism was perhaps one of the human quests for power, where power is offered there are few who decline. The question that begs to be asked is then, what do these works hand down to future readers? What is the dystopian legacy worth? The authorial intention is in this sense paramount. As Huxley stated in *Brave New World Revisited* “Ours was a nightmare of too little order; theirs, in the seventh century A.F., of too much.”

What Huxley meant and tried to accomplish is a reflection of what he perhaps not feared but thought likely to happen sometime in the future. The same idea can be processed and entertained when discussing Shusterman. As *Brave New World* was published 1932, it can be used when measuring this particular topic. It is remarkable how meaningful it still is, Huxley’s vision of the future is something that still today holds strong and should very much be read and discussed. Perhaps the most enticing and thought-provoking element is that of the “Savage”, he is a character born outside of the regulated society and therefore is basically on the same page as the reader. He’s an outsider that has gotten a rare look inside of the system that everyone abides to. He is the reader embodied. The savage is kept as a social experiment by the community, but his behavior upsets the system. Free thinking is revolutionary thinking. When Bernard Marx starts getting too unstable for the well-being of the community, he is exiled to Iceland. These statements are what shape the core of the dystopian legacy. A citizen cannot change the system or the world, he or she must simply get in line to contribute. The utopian imagining turned into dystopia is what these works leave behind and it’s what will always make them important to contemporary society.

### 3.1 Totalitarian revolution

More often than not, dystopian literature depicts a world that is governed by totalitarianism. Before discussing it, clarifying what it means is paramount, even though it – as many terms – can be debated. Totalitarianism is an ideological notion, its goal might be seen as to tame free-thinkers, radicals, rebels, in broadest aspect, one can think of it as a way to prevent free thinking. Zizek is on the same path “is a kind of *stopgap*: instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire a new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively *prevents* us from thinking.”

Should one search for its purpose historically, there are examples in Italian

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23 Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, p.3.
fascism, Nazi Germany, Soviet Communism etc. Compared to these, futuristic totalitarianism has been taken to a new level. It is often alone in political standing and has wiped out any resistance. As I will discuss later, by creating “us” and “them” it ascertains its status and wipes out any resistance.

Whilst totalitarian states create the obligation of its citizen to always place the state above the self, it in return “protects” them from an outer threat. The individual is lost and becomes part of a whole. This effect is commonly created through indoctrination of youth, by erasing the self and integrating them in the machine that is society. In Zamyatin’s “We”, the term “I” is thought to be too individualistic and has been banned, humans are marked by numbers. The individual only serves the state if it is useful to the state. Controlling the thoughts of citizen is paramount to maintaining the totalitarian state. This is where dystopian literature mostly differs from each other. Huxley’s world breeds citizen who at birth already know their place through genetic code, while Shusterman’s world learn to serve the state or get “unwound” should they not be pleasing to their parents, more on this as I get into the respective work. Most worlds tend to watch its citizen and control them through mechanical constructions (television messages in Orwell’s 1984, electric eyes, police eyes etc.)\(^{25}\), the controlling factor is an important aspect in the constructed worlds, it contributes to the totalitarian world order where the government watches your every move. In Huxley’s world, as another ensuring layer beyond the genetic control, the government hands out “soma”, a drug that induces joy and carefree “holidays” without any repercussions.

The totalitarian worlds are normally introduced as a utopia in the opening chapters, an ironic approach that manifests an anti-totalitarian thought instantly. They are explained in a convincing voice which speaks of a world that has gotten used to the new ways. The pendulum has swung; it’s not in the middle, but all the way on the other side. The new world is appraised and normality springs from its center point. Reverting to the old ways is the real crime to society. The very first pages of Brave New World establishes that free and creative thinking is unwanted

For of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently-though as little of one, if they were to be good and happy members of society, as possible. For particulars, as every one knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are intellectually necessary evils. Not philosophers but fretsawyers and stamp collectors compose the backbone of society.\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) Ljungquist, p.268.  
\(^{26}\) Huxley, Brave New World, p.4.
It all leads to social stability which is the promise of this new society. Social stability brings with it a purpose; each human being knows his or her purpose from birth. “Community, Identity, Stability” the planetary motto.\textsuperscript{27} In Shusterman’s world, the totalitarian world order marks it presence in a different way. When one of the three main characters is performing a sonata on the piano in front of an audience, she knows that she needs to dazzle a tribunal that will ultimately decide her fate. She is a ward of the state, should they deem her life to be too costly without enough potential, she will be unwound. The tribunal decides that she has reached her potential and feel it would be better if she was unwound as to make room for another child with higher potential. But technological advancement has provided an opportunity not to just take the life of the subject but let them live on in a divided state

Please, Miss ward. It’s not dying, and I’m sure everyone here would be more comfortable if you didn’t suggest something so blatantly inflammatory. The fact is, 100 percent of you will still be alive, just in a divided state.\textsuperscript{28}

While the governmental influence isn’t as severe or inflicted as early on as in Huxley’s world, the very fact that a lingering threat such as unwinding constantly hangs like a cloud over the children that grow up in that society serves as a sort of stabilizer for society. From early on in life it is known to them that adults hold the power, if you don’t abide you will be unwound.

3.2 Oppression of minorities

Why this topic is interesting rests on a number of reasons. Primarily, I wanted to find out whether or not the injustice remains. Since it is a utopian thought that has manifested into something darker, has the pendulum swung and struck other groups or races? The utopian thought often erases any existing creeds and replaces them with its own, one that unites people. This develops into the dystopian creed that in turn binds them to the one and only important factor in life – the state. Do groups still exist in the new worlds that are able to fight for rewards? This is where Bourdieu comes in handy, what groups are fighting for what rewards?

In \textit{Brave New World} the most oppressed groups are the epsilons, bred with a restricted mind and looked down upon by all the others. One could argue that they are still accepted into their society and a vital part of making it work (they perform the

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p.4.
\textsuperscript{28} Shusterman, p.24.
manual labor). This is of course, the reasoning behind their existence and why, if someone would argue for the equality in the system – they would probably start at that end. If one searches outside of this system that they have manufactured to erase thoughts such as inequality, the “savages” are obviously oppressed and unwanted.

Society’s cast-outs, those who aren’t allowed inside so as not to stain the perfect image that has been created. The stability of the society allows for social capital to play a big role – but only in retaining your social status and benefiting from the system, the system isn’t meritocratic. Bernard Marx tries to boost his capital by executing a plan that no other genetically manipulated citizen would consider (Bernard isn’t like others, his characteristics differ from the rest and his personality is highly unusual. Rumor has it that an incident with alcohol in his blood surrogate made him stunted\(^\text{29}\)). Thus the utopian idea In *Brave New World* partly abolishes the regular oppression of contemporary society, but introduces others. The savages in turn hate strays that originate from the high society, such as the savage John’s mother Linda, who was pregnant with the directors (a shadowy figure with a great deal of power in the hatching facilities) child when she got separated from him and ended up living with the savages.

The world of unwind isn’t too different from ours, but the oppression of minorities has sort of been brushed under the carpet in favor of the united ignorance and blatant behavior of looking the other way. Aside from the obvious malice in unwinding humans, oppressiveness lies in the willingness to allow the system to prevail. Even though many aren’t unwinding their children, not taking action against the process doesn’t halt its progress. Secularization doesn’t seem to be a factor here, one of the characters we follow is in fact a “tithe”\(^\text{30}\), the tenth child born into a religious family who’s therefore to be unwound in honor of their church, 10 percent of everything is to go to their church. This is the first time the reader gets an understanding of how far society has plummeted when there’s a party held in favor of a 13 year old being sacrificed. Not all are slaves to the new standards

“Here’s to my brother, Lev,” Marcus says. “And to our parents! Who have always done the right thing. The *appropriate* thing. Who have always given generously to charity. Who have always given 10 percent of everything to our church. Hey, Mom- we’re lucky you had ten kids instead of five, otherwise we’d end up having to cut Lev off at the waist!”\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{29}\) Huxley, *Brave New World*, p.46.

\(^{30}\) Shusterman, p.28.

\(^{31}\) Ibid, p.30.
But small outbursts are all that they will receive from those who wish to clear their conscience.

3.3 Technological progress – humane regress?
Perhaps the most used scenario in a dystopia is the march of technology with no hint of second thought. It gradually paves the way for a mechanized future where humanity has delved into darkness. Technology, unlike philosophy, induces the people to forsake the essential, primordial responsibilities and experiences of life and instead rely on blind faith. Nature is sullied to the point where it doesn’t even exist in dystopia, what we’re left with is a dark state that controls its citizen with an iron grip. Human characteristics are superfluous, all that matters is community, identity, stability (as Brave New World suggests).32 The connection between technological progress and humane regress in dystopian literature is very present. One could almost visualize a diagram in which technology linearly ascends whereas the fundamental values and possibilities in life are plummeting on the other end.

The philosopher Hans Jonas reflected on the ethics of the state, an ethic of responsibility, of conservation and of preservation. In order to tackle the ethical problems that are being created by our contemporary science and technology, we need new ethics, new responsibilities.33 The basis for human living changes continuously, what was the standard in the past has changed, the rate at which technology (and the shift of power) is advancing is unparalleled, therefore the ethical laws must change to abide. Jonas believes that since we know how an entity can feel and suffer (take animals for example), we must treat it accordingly. We have a responsibility, bearing this knowledge requires ethics that regulate our infinite reduction of nature. Jonas then extends this responsibility and means that it can be applied to the whole living world, and in extension, its future. Hans Jonas suggests that literature presents good ways to depict the future and relate to it and its new morals.34 Realizing the consequences of the actions you do, and what they might lead to is paramount, by studying the future, man can develop a moral standpoint. And to further this understanding of the future, one can relate to the understanding of animal suffering; once we understand and feel how people suffer in dystopia we can begin to realize of what importance it is to us.

32 Huxley, Brave New World, p.3.
33 Hans Jonas, p.23.
34 Jonas, p.65.
Technology provides new ways of changing or abandoning human values, and in turn revealing new choices and ethical questions that are henceforth unknown. Technology is advancing at unparalleled speed like a tornado without thinking about the consequences. Ethical and moral values are blown out the window. In order to advance but still retain what are fundamental values, causality needs to be regarded. When thinking of the future and the effect some things done today may have in the future, possibilities open up to discover the unknown. Dystopian thinking doesn’t necessarily reveal a truth but a version of a possible future, they shouldn’t act as an answer to some kind of search for the truth but rather provide a peak into a shade of what may be. And in turn, new morals and new ethics should arise from this. Hans Jonas suggests that Huxley’s *Brave New World* is one of these experiments of thought and could be applied to said thinking.\(^{35}\)

In *Brave New World*, technology has reached such heights that any hint of an unstable entity (highly unlikely since the genetic code has been manipulated) might bust the machine and that entity must be removed from society so the virus doesn’t spread. As the Controller suggests, stability is paramount

> “Stability,” said the Controller, “stability. No civilization without social stability. No social stability without individual stability.” […] The machine turns, turns and must keep turning— for ever. It is death if it stands still.\(^{36}\)

Stability comes from the total control of man in an industry where the individual is nothing more than a part of the whole, an assembly line worker. Huxley makes it a point to use Henry Ford as a symbol for what society has come to be. They no longer refer to the year as “the year of Our Lord” but rather “the year of Our Ford” and the expression “oh, lord!” has been replaced by “oh, ford!”\(^{37}\), he stands for the mass-production that is vital to the new world, and the reduction of society is easy to determine as they speak of it with pride

> “Accompanied by a campaign against the Past; by the closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments (luckily most of them had already been destroyed during the Nine Years’ War); by the suppression of all books published before A.F. 150.”\(^{38}\)

They have no need of Shakespeare, instead, the introduction of Henry Fords’ first T-Model was chosen as the opening date of this new era, an era of the assembly line. They

\(^{35}\) Ibid.
\(^{36}\) Huxley, *Brave New World*, p.42.
\(^{37}\) Ibid, p.29.
\(^{38}\) Ibid, p.52.
sacrificed high art for social stability. Henry Ford stood at the center of their rise (downfall), as I will get back to later, this comparison is a central part of *Brave New World*.

4. Analysis and discussion

Whilst I have mentioned the respective works in passing in my discussing dystopia, minorities and technology, this is where I’ll go further in depth in both novels.

4.1 Brave New World

For starters, I’d like to give a brief account of Aldous Huxley and his contemporary society. I mentioned Henry Ford earlier and that if anything should prove the importance of intentionality in literature where contemporary society matters. Huxley wrote *Brave New World* in 1931 and published it in 1932. This was during an era when mass-production was on the rise and the assembly line reduced man to a tiny piece of a larger whole. Production ceased to be unique and was instead replaced by exact replicas that erased the mark of the creator. We get a look at the assembly line early in the Bottling Room of the Conditioning Centre, where eggs are passed by the Liners to the Matriculators to the labellers and onwards. Huxley used the rise of Henry Ford in his contemporary world as the start of a blind worship and trust that instigated the technological upswing which rendered in a broken world. Prior to this, Huxley had been born into a world which was going to see the loss of countless lives in the first world war, a sense of futility was easy to accumulate in the masses after this and a willingness to turn to something that could glue together a loose foundation of mass with no sense of happiness. The remnants of the old world turned into a new mechanical world with technological prowess. Huxley deciphered the world’s fears and constructed a world which adopted a dictatorship rooted deep in technology.

4.1.1 Born into civilization

The novel starts off inside a factory; the year is 2495, in London. We are paraded around much like a newly hatched citizen, studying and understanding the process of creation that define the backbone of society, constantly guided by “the director” who comes across as a fatherly figure to the students. The introduction to the new world is

paramount to understanding exactly what has happened to society. Community, identity, stability, the grand words that summarize the hatching facilities. Mass production and the neglect of individual capacity is introduced

“Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!” The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. “You really know where you are. For the first time in history.”

The world is introduced as a utopia, but quite soon, signs of madness beyond the erratic struggle for conformity and order. The assembly line is introduced, in the creation of man. With the ease and comfort that the director and Henry Foster (one of the supervisors in the hatchery) portray and sweet-talk this process, an image is conveyed of just how accepted this has become.

This is followed by the conditioning of babies in the Infant Conditioning Rooms, here follows a terrifying process which makes use of technology in order to properly ward the babies from the unwanted things in life. Books and roses are placed in front of the babies, they begin crawling happily towards the books and roses in order to play with them. The Director signals the Head Nurse to switch on the loudspeakers which emitted high and unpleasant shrills and alarm bells that cried with a deafening tone – the children responded with screams of fear and terror. Following this was the flick of a lever that proceeded to mildly shock the children, for the lesson to completely take effect. This treatment makes them fear the books and the roses, the totalitarian world order doesn’t need philosophers but hard working citizen who know their place and nothing else but what they’ve been taught (groomed) into doing. This conditioning is created from the legacy of the physiologist Ivan Pavlov who constructed such experiments on animals (he rang a bell every time the dog salivated to offer him food, after a while he rang the bell at random and the dog salivated, such experiences or fears can be propagated from childhood into adulthood) which he called conditioned reflexes. Huxley takes this to a new level and utilizes it to actively incapacitate human intelligence. These people are still able to be happy, their limited sense and intelligence enables them to still enjoy life in a sense. In some regards, ignorance is bliss, at least when it comes to being able to enjoy your when you don’t know what the world might look like.

41 Ibid, p.7.
42 Huxley, Brave New World, p.20-21.
“I suppose Epsilons don’t really mind being Epsilons,” she said aloud.
“Of course they don’t. How can they? They don’t know what it’s like being anything else.
We’d mind, of course. But then we’ve been differently conditioned. Besides, we start with
a different heredity.”
“I’m glad I’m not an Epsilon,” said Lenina, with conviction.
“And if you were an Epsilon,” said Henry, “your conditioning would have made you no
less thankful that you weren’t a Beta or an Alpha.”

Envisioning a utopia based on ignorance isn’t farfetched. When I discussed utopia
previously, several conclusions pointed to the fact that utopia is a mode and a
perspective that may very well be subjective. Even though the world that Huxley
constructs is very clearly a dystopia for the reader, the humans that are integrated into
the system are kept ignorant to what has been or may be: thus they can still live in a
subjective utopia.

For some doubt to exist in the system there has to be some kind of anomaly –
Bernard Marx is precisely that. As I mentioned earlier, some sort of incident with
alcohol left him shorter than the rest and with opinions that stood out. His will to take
Lenina to the New Mexican Reservation, in order to look at savages, commenced the
chain of events which lead the savage to their civilization. It’s quite peculiar as to why
they would allow their citizen to look at these savages and possibly be affected by their
ways. It might be because of their smug belief that their system is perfect and would
never breed anyone that would be fascinated by the savages. But when the axiomatic
civilization is left behind, someone like Bernard Marx uses the new-found freedom to
his advantage.

4.1.2 Soma and the savage

The civilized world enjoys regular spiritual journeys through the use of the drug “soma”
– a hallucinogen that the state offers freely to its entire population, it sends you on a
personal mental holiday from reality. Whenever you feel down or angry, a gramme of
Soma puts a smile on your face and leaves all your worries behind. Where other
dystopian literature portrayed the state as the watcher and made citizen cower from their
radical thoughts and retarded any unwanted thoughts, Brave New World uses soma as
the watcher. As an extra assurance following the genetic manipulation, soma ensures
that whenever you feel anger, sorrow or just want to leave the world – you can do it
without any repercussions. But in practicality, soma erases the human minds capability

44 Huxley, Brave New World, p.74.
to deal with everyday problems “that second dose of *soma* had raised a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds." their perception is thrown out the window. You’re left with half a life, a life that is a shadow of a normal human life – with all its problems. The pendulum that was supposed to swing between too little order to complete darkness has already swung and skipped the period at which order and freedom of thought coexisted.46

The world as we perceive it today is replaced with an illusion that can be flicked on every time you wish to escape your problems, as the character Lenina Crowne constantly aches for when she travels with Bernard Marx.47 In a sense, it is the replacement of alcohol. But not just a replacement, the perfect replacement that keeps the people happy without any physical consequences – no hangovers, no aggression or violent behavior to worry about. The state is the ultimate benefactor and also the benefited. They can control the public in such a way that no technological help is required, no force is necessary to keep them in check, instead they willingly stand in line and fulfill their own incapability. Ultimately, the selling point for soma is stability. Even though it might not be morally right (or even morally influenced) at all, what cannot be argued is the lack of calamities as a direct effect of this. Huxley doesn’t present everything as a clear right or wrong idea, the truth is even the scary futures holds some moral gray zones that aren’t impossible to side with. What is true is that the government can, through non-violent means, successfully manipulate mankind into standing in line to their own death.

In contemporary society, death control has reached such heights that overpopulation is standing at our doorstep. Mostly, this is owing to modern medical prowess and aptitude which has evolved so far that death control has become more technologically advanced and frequent than birth control. Medicine has become so accessible that no petty sickness will crave any lives, at the employment of the government such trifle matters are easily dealt with by any doctor. Meanwhile, birth control is in the hands of the people, and a great deal of the people is unfortunately not thinking of the future. All the presented ideas carry with them logical development rooted in present day problems that are or should be debated.

The savage provides an insight into this community of the future by the standards of modern day thinking – i.e. he could very well stem from our contemporary society and still be wandering around Huxley’s Brave New World gaining insight without

46 Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited*, p.3.
already being indoctrinated. As his mother Linda returned to civilization and an endless supply of soma (such was the force of soma that years and years of absence from it still did not let you get over it) and a holiday that never ended. The doctors readily admitted that the excessive use of soma would “finish her off in a month or two”\textsuperscript{48}, the only one that raised his voice about this was John the savage – much as a citizen of the present day would probably be baffled by it. John understood the concept of eternity through soma rather than a lengthened life of misery and pain, but he does not rest easy with it. As Bernard writes in his report to Mustapha Mond, John the savage shows “surprisingly little astonishment, or awe of, civilized inventions.”\textsuperscript{49}, which no doubt lies in the fact that he deems it all to be morally and ethically corrupt. These thoughts eventually escalate into active actions out of frustration – after visiting the (human) assembling room, he violently retches and keeps exclaiming “O brave new world”.\textsuperscript{50} His visit in the new world doesn’t treat him well and finally, at the sight of an innumerable amount of twins visiting the hospital after his mother’s death and the distribution of soma pills, he completely loses his cool and publically says that it’s poison and shouts that he’ll make them free.\textsuperscript{51}

Then follows a conversation with Mustapha Mond which works as a conversation with Huxley’s envisioning of the future, the ultimately responsible entity that has shaped the world. Mustapha Mond is one of very few that has access to old literature, movies and art. He has read Shakespeare and fully appreciates him. But one cannot build the perfect society on unstable human beings whom are full of ideas and are creative. The sheep-like existence that they promote is what ultimately creates the backbone of their society – and Mustapha Mond’s utopia. In order to create tragedies, social instability is necessary – no old literature would be allowed to break it, and neither would any new which is why it is prohibited.\textsuperscript{52} In other words, morals and ethics have been thrown out the window for social stability. The reduction of man enables the happiness of man through simple measures. The desire for religion also falls on this wish; the only deity required is the state.

The ingenuity of the last chapters is what completes the work in my eyes. A Brave New World is presented and we get to experience the daily routine and the ideas behind it – but the fact that they are logically explained and justified is what fully fleshes it out.

\textsuperscript{48} Huxley, p.154. 
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, p.158. 
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, p.160. 
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p.212-213. 
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, p.220.
The dystopian nightmare is taken to another level, a moral standpoint is all that stands between us and a possible dystopian future – the dark society is logically explainable.

4.2 Unwind

While Huxley’s intentionality needed the aid of his background, Shusterman’s is more conveniently accessible since it is relatively new. The world that affected and influenced his writing is the world that affects my writing and therefore is clear to me. It is a world where threats of nuclear destruction permeate our everyday lives, a world where we not only actively push our present into a gloom future but also do so at an unbelievable rate. As Slaughter states, “There will be no sudden enlightenment”53 but rather a process to reverse the outlook of the future is bound to take its due time. Political responsibility does not stretch beyond the matter of the foreseeable future in contemporary society. Hans Jonas returns to the ancient tradition of parental responsibility of a child’s future. The child’s right to exist binds the parent to it and causes it to actively care for it – only when the child itself releases the parent from this bond can they be released from their duty.54

This theory has great importance in Unwind, since it shines with its absence. The parental duty has been abolished and with it any responsibility for the future. A careless society is created, one that does not look beyond its own desires. The prime motives that drive the novel is the process of unwinding and storking. Unwinding came from a civil war that was fought over a single issue, pro-life and pro-choice.55 For the war to end, a set of constitutional amendments known as “The Bill of Life” was passed which satisfied both sides. The Bill of Life stated that human life was untouchable from birth to the age of thirteen. But once a child reaches the age of thirteen and until their eighteenth birthday, a parent can retroactively “abort” the child on the condition that the child’s life doesn’t “technically” (more or less 100 percent of the body must be used by others so that the child did not really die but live on in a divided state) end. This practice has been actively embraced and integrated into society and is very common. However, the ideal community hasn’t been completely regulated on the same level as Huxley’s Brave New World has. In Unwind teenagers are still “kickin AWOL” which basically means to flee their own unwinding. The authorities’ search for these unwinds with the

53 Slaughter, p.6.
54 Jonas, p.205.
55 Shusterman, p.1.
help of Juvey-cops that are dedicated to finding them. Once they turn eighteen, they are free from everything, it doesn’t matter if they went AWOL or not. The trick is surviving from the moment your parents sign the unwind order until your eighteenth birthday you will be constantly sought for.

The “Storking Initiative” allows for someone to leave their newborn child on the doorstep of a complete stranger, it’s “finder’s keepers” from there on. The baby is legally theirs. This initiative was a response to the bill of life that prohibited abortion, human life was worth very little after it and newborns ended up in dumpsters.

4.2.1 Gathering capital

Pierre Bourdieu presented three terms that I believe are very tight-knit with *Unwind*. These three terms are field, habitus and capital. Field is the social room in which the agents reside, an obvious one is the classroom. Habitus introduces a system of different experiences that one accumulates through the experience of different fields, these provide you with the right to act or speak in said field. Furthermore, the dominator in these fields can tail it after his or her own taste (take a teacher, the teacher always judges based on his or her own lifestyle, the student must adapt to the teachers preferences) and the dominated must heed since his or her capital is too low. Capital is what you gather and ultimately it is what makes you successful. There are different kinds of capital, social and cultural capital is primarily what matters in my reading of the character Risa in *Unwind*. In social capital, you gather such connections that if search for a job, you will get it ahead of someone who is much more qualified but has less capital. In cultural capital the concept is wider and can affect the whole picture of your being, how you dress, what you eat, what company you keep, how well you speak and so on.

Ultimately, this can be used to define the very existence of a human being born into the world of *Unwind*. From birth, you are involved in a battle for your own life. This battle is fought through the means of gathering capital and not getting in trouble with the law. Nowhere else does this carry more effect than in a state home (orphanage). You are basically there to compete for your own survival. These homes aren’t getting any smaller when more and more children are tossed away as a response to the world’s

56 Ibid, p.10.
57 Ibid, p.55.
58 Richardson, p.1.
carelessness. When you are one of these kids, you have to prove your worth to the state or they will deem it unworthy the cost to shelter you.

Here, the fight for capital ensues. The state home is the field and like the character Risa, you have to engage in some sort of art that renders you talented or once you’ve reached the extent of your potential – you are no longer necessary

“You’re a good musician, but…”
“As I said, you’ve reached your potential.”
“As far as you can go.”
“Perhaps if you had chosen a less competitive course of study.”

So unfolds the conversation that will end in Risa being unwound. In truth, her capital only stretches so far as she is a ward of the state. A piano teacher’s decent affection is all the she has gathered and her mediocre talent doesn’t weigh up for it. The wards are aware of the fact that if they aren’t exceptional, they can be sent off to unwinding once they reach an age where their potential has been reached. Their whole life is a trial of whether or not they are worthy of remaining alive, during a conversation with another ward of the state that’s about to be unwound, it becomes painfully clear just how much is at stake for them

“So, what did you do to get yourself unwound?” Risa asks.
“It’s not what I did, it’s what I didn’t do.”
“What didn’t you do?”
It makes sense to Risa. Not doing anything is an easy path to unwinding.
“I was never going to amount to much anyway,” Samson says, “but now, statistically speaking, there’s a better chance that some part of me will go on to greatness somewhere in the world. I’d rather be partly great than entirely useless.”

Most unwinds carry this attitude courtesy to the state’s indoctrination. Gathering enough capital is their only way out of it, either by properly making connections socially that have power, or by having some way of making themselves worth the “effort”.

4.2.2 Neglect of responsibility

What dystopian literature has come to base itself upon, in a sense, is the (complete) neglect of responsibility and morals that, by not actively working against it, allows the nightmarish tradition to ensue and progress. When the bill of life is introduced to the public in the world of Unwind, man is given the power to reject all responsibility at the

59 Shusterman, p.23.
whim of a bad thought. I stated earlier that with new technology, new world order and whatever the future may hold – new ethics must be nailed, in the world of Unwind the decision to propose such a radical notion shows that the necessity of a new kind of ethic law is long overdue.

The question, in my mind, isn’t whether or not mankind is responsible enough to deny themselves the opportunity to unwind once the bill of life is there. But rather, should mankind possess that kind of power? As with technology, it’s a scenario where mankind has flown too close to the sun and we get to follow the society that has already seen Icarus journey but when they’re left with such a power, of course, use it. The decision to create a bill of life was, very likely, made by politicians in power, i.e. adults and primarily elderly people. In an attempt to settle a war that claimed countless lives, they sacrificed the future.

When you are in a position of power, such as a politician, a sense of causality and the future beyond your own generation must be present. Hans Jonas agrees and proposes a principle: complete responsibility in all your tasks renders you responsible to look beyond your own fulfillment and make sure that this responsibility can remain in the future. The neglect of responsibility that culminated in the bill of life to be created in the first place is found in generations of the future that are, of course, affected by their surroundings. An example of this can be found in a young woman who has just become a mother but decides that she doesn’t want to keep the baby

From the time she learned she was pregnant she knew she would end up storking this baby. She had hoped that when she finally saw it, looking up at her so helplessly, she might change her mind – but who was she kidding? With neither the skill nor the desire to be a mother at this point in her life, storking had always been her best option.

[...] With the burden now lifted from her, she has sudden strength. She now has a second chance in life, and this time she’ll be smarter – she’s sure of it. As she hurries down the street, she thinks how wonderful it is that she can get a second chance. How wonderful it is that she can dismiss her responsibility so easily.

It has become so easy to discard responsibility that every teenager and child knows that once they pass eighteen years of age, anything can be dealt with by completely refusing to do their duty. Even paternal and maternal duty can be so easily discarded that once it’s done, no second thoughts pop into your mind.

Ultimately, technology has provided the means for the bill of life to exist, but the true dystopia lies in sociological darkness. While adults may carry on their life making mistakes and, with immense power, live their life, children suffer from their mistakes.

61 Jonas, p.188.
62 Shusterman, p.54.
It’s a corrupt world order where children must take more responsibility than adults, in order to keep their life. In *Unwind* we get to follow three teenagers that try to survive until their eighteenth birthday, but in my mind, it’s not the journey that is of prime importance but the world and the total lack of responsibility that it promotes. As these children struggle to evade the authorities, they are left on their own accord and must find allies in others like them.

It differs from *Brave New World* in many circumstances, primarily in the technological aspect. While Huxley envisioned a future where technology controlled everything, Shusterman has already seen a good deal of that future in his contemporary society. His future deals with morals and responsibility from a sociological viewpoint instead.
5. Summary and conclusion

In the introduction I stated that dystopian literature packs a powerful punch. After analyzing different aspects of it, it is more clear to me now than ever. Its importance in both contemporary society and its relevance in the future cannot be stressed. The possibilities it presents in both developing a sense of ethics but also pressing the rate at which humanity is degenerating is paramount. As I have shown in this essay, dystopian literature more often than not is born out of a utopian imagining, as a result of technological progress.

But it wasn’t as simple as a dystopia providing nothing but misery and darkness. In *Brave New World* mankind was reduced to nothing but an assembly line worker that did his job for the state, but they could still find happiness in their simple and, perhaps for someone today, futile presence. Even the most oppressed and simple of beings, epsilons, have their place in society and can, thanks to soma, still be happy. What is lacking in fundamental human values still deems it to be a dystopia, for if we do not carry with us our creativity and free thinking – we have abandoned the basic human values that make us what we are.

By reading *Unwind* and *Brave New World*, I’ve got two different works that one can compare in different ways. *Brave New World* sports the, perhaps more common, elite group of people with absolute power who are living their own utopia, while *Unwind* only has adults as the reigning power. They are written in two different eras, Huxley in an era where the assembly line was on the rise, a world that had been struck by war in the First World War and revolutions occurred frequently. Shusterman in an era where technology has reached a point where Huxley’s work has practically caught up and he depicts our future in a society where sociological values are questioned. The fact that they are written in different times provide a possibility to see how the world and the probabilities of the future have changed.

What binds these works is the neglect of responsibility; Hans Jonas was very useful in this regard. The prime reason for human decadence lies in the unwillingness and narrow-mindedness to heed causality and really ponder what one leaves behind through certain actions. Obviously the most debated and questioned topic of dystopian literature stems from the frenzy of technological progress. The world is continuously changing with the march of technology at the front and with them old ethics don’t preside. A new mindset and approach is necessary.
The means of control that the dystopian society employs was fascinating to study. Soma was essential in keeping the population in check, even though their genetic code had already been written. Something to really assure their happiness was required. In *Unwind*, perhaps something that resembles soma would be necessary to keep the children who were about to be unwind happy.

In the end, dystopian imagining is important in many aspects. Perhaps the most important aspect being to peek into the future and establishing new ethics that are more current and prohibit the abandonment of basic human values.
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