How Do Orwell And Burgess Portray The Effects Of Societal Control In Their Novels 1984 And A Clockwork Orange?

According to Hayri Dundar, one can identify a dystopia as a society being controlled by an ideological radicalism where the rulers build the society on a struggle for utopia[footnoteRef:1]. Anthony Burgess and George Orwell successfully adhere to this summary within their dystopian novels A Clockwork Orange and 1984, respectively. As is the case with most dystopian works, their novels were penned as a reaction to the social and historical events which surrounded them - which I will delve into further in this essay. A common thread shared between these two vastly different depictions of a dystopian world is the idea of widespread societal control. Societal control is a prominent feature of the genre, which works to affect everything from plot to characterisation. Burgess and Orwell use various techniques to implement this idea in their fictional worlds, alongside other vital features of the genre. The authors' reliance upon the idea of authority and control is designed to showcase the detrimental social consequences of a state with too much power over its people. [1: Dystopia as a vital peek into the future, 2013. Hayri Dündar [ONLINE] Available at https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:632817/FULLTEXT01.pdf [Accessed 08/10/18]]

Burgess employs a fictional language which he coins 'Nadsat'; a blend of Russian words and East London 'Cockney' rhyming-slang. It is the main syntax throughout the novel, and it serves as an act of rebellion against the rigorous control of the state, as well as the typical forms of literary expression at the time of Burgess's writing. Alex, our protagonist, is a rebellious and counter-culture adolescent, which makes Burgess's insistence that he speaks only in Nadsat for the majority of the novel interesting. Through this linguistic choice, Burgess makes it clear to us that Nadsat was designed by, as well as used by, the youth to alienate them from the older, authority figures. We even get glimpses of the ever-evolving state of language in Alex's world, where the younger teens speak to him in a warped form of his own syntax, rendering him alienated from the youth himself - "' Who you getten, bratty? What biggy, what only?' These young devotchkas had their own like way of govoreeting.". This rehashing of the Nadsat language is incoherent, not even aided by the influence of Russian sounding words; instead, scattered with repetition, and very aggressive in tone. Burgess purposely toys with the language to ensure that it is inherently violent, therefore attracting the youth culture of the 'Clockwork Orange' world to a dark, gritty lifestyle that opposes the straitlaced, pragmatic world they have to grow up in.

The character of P. R. Deltoid serves as an indicator for society's insistence that young people must conform. He is Alex's "post-corrective adviser", implying that Alex has already been 'corrected' at the corrective school, despite his obvious and visceral attraction to violence; and is described as "an overworked veck with hundreds on his books". Burgess makes a point to depict just how difficult Deltoid's job must be, portraying him as "looking shagged" as he enters Alex's home – a crude choice of wording for how dishevelled he looks, also implying Alex's disrespect towards him as an authority figure. As well as Deltoid, Dr. Branom and Dr. Brodsky are authority figures with a duty to solve society's demoralised youth culture. Branom describes Nadsat as "Propaganda. Subliminal penetration", the use of the word "penetration" showing us

the sexual violence that is rife throughout the youth; aided by the slang that leans towards violent, aggressive words. This is not only ironic considering these doctors are the ones who subject our protagonist to the Ludovico technique; but also due to the weight that this language carries in Burgess's own life. Writing at the height of the Cold War, Burgess injected A Clockwork Orange with copious amounts of Slavic rooted words and names ("Brodsky", "droogs", "devotchkas") hinting heavily at the USSR's notoriety in the Western world. The most damning and violent words in Nadsat are drenched in Russian dialect – an obvious reference to the infamous surveillance state, paralleling a dystopia in itself.

In a similar vein, Orwell pens 1984 incorporating a fictional language known as Newspeak, though this language isn't for the purposes of rebellion, but indoctrination into the strict society of Oceania. Unlike Burgess's Nadsat, Newspeak is based off of English, shortening words down into compound, less abstract versions of what they were before in order to restrict 'thoughtcrime' (the emergence of opposing ideas). Orwell was also writing at a time when the Soviet Union was prevalent, but in Orwell's case, the communist nation was just beginning to properly emerge and make itself known on the international stage. Orwell satirises the surveillance culture of Soviet Union society, through his invention of different branches of government: "Their names, in Newspeak: Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv, and Miniplenty". The oxymoronic names Orwell uses for these ministries are humorous considering what we already know about the controlling world Winston lives in. The blatant overwriting of history is overseen by the Ministry of Truth; and the rampant brutality displayed by the Party; "at a signal from the officer, let free a frightful blow", is headed by the Ministry of Love. It's important to note how Orwell describes the violent actions of the Party - "a frightful blow". Despite the action of a blow being obviously heavy and painful, the sound of the word itself is soft, almost provoking the idea of a 'tough love state', in which the Party is a father figure, punishing its people out of a conceived love for them. This idea of concealed truth is heavily similar to what Orwell would have witnessed in the Soviet Union propaganda that flooded the outskirts of Europe. These pieces of propaganda were greatly criticised by media, as, like most forms of propaganda, they would promise great prosperity to the poverty-stricken Eastern European countries, but deliver nothing besides strict oppression and complete censorship. Orwell paints Oceania and the Party as direct reflections of these ideals, proving yet again, that societal control leads to nothing but confusion and paranoia.

Toying with his protagonist, Orwell uses Winston as a vehicle for rebellion in a completely different way to how Burgess mobilises Alex. We see Winston's increasing curiosity towards the society he lives in, as he begins to realise the faults and uncertainties that he's been so used to. As he picks up the pen and notebook for the first time, "a sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him", enabling us to empathise with his painful loss of identity and self. Orwell's usage of multisyllabic words in regards to Winston's realisation, aims to express a complex and disconcerting feeling – one opposite of the simplistic Newspeak words and ideals that the Party wants him to be connecting with. Winston's muted methods of rebellion are subsequently shown to us via the unhinged nature of his journaling: "he began writing in sheer panic… handwriting straggled up and down the page". 'straggled' being a rebellion of itself, considering the absolute uniformity that the people of Oceania are expected to display. His uncharacteristic outbursts are testament to the idea that when withheld and oppressed, human beings will eventually crack; the exact message that Orwell wants us to understand about the detrimental consequences of social control.

Socialising freely is acceptable in the world of A Clockwork Orange, and citizens are allowed to

interact in their own ways; despite the authority's disdain for Nadsat, and its derivations. However, regardless of their social freedoms, Burgess portrays nearly all of the characters as somewhat detached from each other and wholly unemotional. Even the act of sex, typically a symbol of loving intimacy, is referred to as "hyper sex", evoking this almost science fiction sound to an act which is so intrinsically human. "Hyper sex" is only ever for efficient pleasure as opposed to romance. Burgess even goes as far as to describe it as a "quick in out, in out", adding a visceral, cynical view to an act which is usually considered sacred and romantic in literature. Burgess, unfortunately, had first-hand experience with the concept of sexual brutality and violence, as his wife, Lynne, suffered an attack in 1944[footnoteRef:2]. His personal feeling of helplessness over the attack is metaphorised in the famous scene in which the author of the fictional A Clockwork Orange is beaten, and his wife is savagely raped in front of him by Alex and his gang of droogs. Keeping with this theme, it can be easily concluded that the character of Alex was purposely designed by Burgess to represent all that he deems wrong with his society; he is a troubled youth who's only escape from a controlling and oppressive state is to aggressively lash out at anybody, regardless of their innocence. [2: The International Anthony Burgess Foundation. 2018. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.anthonyburgess.org/about-anthony-burgess/. [Accessed 02/10/18]]

Orwell doesn't utilise the concept of sex in quite the same way as Burgess, preferring to keep sex as a purely pragmatic tool to keep society growing; keeping with the famed Oceanian practicality. The way in which relationships are carried out in the world of 1984 is easily summarised by the quote: "No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer.". The damning nature of this quote, which lumps the three completely different types of relationship (romantic, familial, and platonic) together in one continuous sentence, shows us that the Party have succeeded in creating a fearful, distrusting society; one which our protagonist Winston is aching to break free from. Potentially the easiest example within 1984 as to how deceitful these relationships can be is within the character of Mr. Charrington, a seemingly innocent older man who turns out to be an undercover member of the Thought Police, actively seeking out the rebellious members of society such as Winston and Julia. His entire role within the novel is to enable Winston's downfall. Charrington sells Winston the journal, which is the catalyst for his hyperaware nature towards the Party, and later on, he rents out the room above the shop to Winston and Julia so that they can conduct their affair in, what they believe, is private. However, as we find out, there is a concealed telescreen within this room; foreshadowed by Charrington's prole-like insistence that he has never owned a telescreen because they were "too expensive". In her article, Mr. Charrington's Junk Shop, Patricia Rae insists that Charrington was designed by Orwell to be a reflection of T.S Eliot, a modernist poet who Orwell staunchly defended over his leftist political message and transformative writing style.[footnoteRef:3] The pair fell out over Eliot's damning review of Orwell's socialist satire, Animal Farm, in which he stated that "we have no conviction … that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation"[footnoteRef:4] – it isn't a reach for Rae to believe that Charrington is Orwell's depiction of Eliot, considering the fact that he turned out to be distrustful and two-faced all along. Orwell's reaction at being essentially censored by Eliot's refusal to publish him [3: Mr. Charrington's Junk Shop: T. S. Eliot and Modernist Poetics in Nineteen Eighty-Four. 1997. Patricia Rae. [ONLINE] Available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/441569?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed 14/12/18]] [4: TS Eliot's rejection of Orwell's Animal Farm. 2016. Alison Flood. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/26/ts-eliot-rejection-george-orwell-animal-farm-british-library-online. [Accessed 14/12/18].]

Burgess toys with symbolism to send across his message of societal control and subsequent breakdown. The motif of milk is heavily implemented across the novel, signifying Alex's disinterest in family, order, and wellness. We see his family's near disgust at his homecoming after he is released from prison: "' Not,' he said, and he said it very like gloomy, 'that we're not very pleased to see you again,'", the word "gloomy" being almost fairy-tale like, conjuring imagery of wicked step-parents and mistreated protagonists. The bold symbolism in the Korova Milk Bar of milk being dispensed through the statue of a woman represents the familial detachment that Alex has to deal with, and realises a coping mechanism for his lack of maternal relationship with his mother. It also stands for the state of society that most, if not all, youths consume this milk, which is laced with drugs ("milk plus vellocet or synthemesc or drencrom"), in order to "sharpen [them] up and make [them] ready for a bit of the old ultraviolence". The corruption of a pure, natural substance with harsh chemical drugs is very on the nose; representing the blank canvases of teenage minds in Burgess's era being scribbled on by both communist and fascist propaganda. Additionally, by making the consumption of drug-laced milk a typical teenage thing to do, it shows us that Alex isn't alone in his distant relationship with his family, and also gives off a strong sense of rebellion from the younger people in the world of A Clockwork Orange. This rebellion is similar to the level of literary rebellion that Burgess portrays through the playfulness of his writing form. Burgess wrote A Clockwork Orange in the literary era of modernism, where experimentations with a 'stream of consciousness' format were used to portray the cynicism of a post-World War society[footnoteRef:5]; and although Burgess dips into some modernist aspects ('the stream of consciousness' is depicted by the first person retelling of his Alex's story), he tends to bypass this altogether, opting for his own brash form of storytelling, split into periods of time. As opposed to most authors of the time, influenced by modernist ideals, Burgess doesn't focus on the immediate, subtle, decline of post-war society, but rather looks far beyond in order to warn us of a bleak dystopian future[footnoteRef:6]. This in itself, is rebellion on Burgess' part as he breaks the literary conventions of his writing era. [5: Modernism. 2.11. [ONLINE] http://www.online-literature.com/periods/modernism.php [Accessed 23/11/18]] [6: The International Anthony Burgess Foundation. 2018. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.anthonyburgess.org/about-anthony-burgess/. [Accessed 02/10/18]

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A motif that both novels share is music. Music has always been seen as a valid vehicle of rebellion, and has been known to carry radical ideas which resonate with youth culture and suspicious adults alike. Orwell uses music to depict a break from Party control. The thrush bird which appears during Winston and Julia's first secretive meeting sings a "torrent of song", prompting nothing but pure emotion from Winston. "He stopped thinking and merely felt", being a complete contrast to everything that the Party has ever stood for. Music is seen a vehicle for change, both positive and negative, in the world of Oceania. Winston hears music playing from under his rented room above Mr. Charrington's shop, and sees that a prole woman is repetitively singing a song which speaks of "dreams … stirred", and how "they 'ave stolen my 'eart awye!". Juxtaposing the seemingly optimistic lyrics, her actions are wholly bland and domestic as she pegs out her babies diapers. The difference between the constrained prole woman singing Party-manufactured lyrics about hopes and dreams and the thrush bird singing as freely as this woman wishes to be is saddening, showing Orwell's true feelings behind how tragic societal control can really be. The woman thinks she is liberated by the songs she sings, but is in fact restricted to her conformist life.

In an entirely different move, Burgess deploys classical music throughout A Clockwork Orange;

making it Alex’s escape from world of corruption and crime. Burgess uses the classical music to show us that Alex is actually far more withstanding than his cunning criminal displays make him out to be – classical music is typically associated with calmness and intelligence. His ability to commit ultraviolence is bolstered by the rebellion chosen by the young people, and it is clear to see that he is influenced by his droogs and the drug-lined culture promoted by the fashionable milk bar. This goes to show us that Burgess believes hoodlums such as Alex are no more than regular teenagers who have just been corrupted by their environments. Another interesting way Burgess chose to play with classical music is by having it cause Alex’s suicide attempt. Due to the controlling and torturous Ludovico technique, the Ninth Symphony that Alex once relaxed to causes him so much pain that he resorts to the bleakest of solutions. Morrison states that via the overbearing state Burgess is creating a “vision of a near-future society as frighteningly persuasive”[footnoteRef:7], which is very agreeable considering how easy it was to persuade Alex to switch from loving his music to hating it with such passion that it causes him to seek death. [7: Blake Morrison, The Independent. 1996. Books: Vecks, Droogs and Roles. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books-vecks-droogs-and-roles-1306067.html. Accessed at 02/01/19]

As we can conclude, both authors seek to show the exertion of social control upon the people of their respective narrative worlds, and the subsequent rebellion that comes with stripping people of their free will.