

THE EXPRESSION OF THE THEME OF CHILDHOOD IN ANTHONY BURGESS
DYSTOPIAN NOVEL *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*

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Abstract: This article examines the complexities of childhood and adolescence, as well as themes such as personal freedom, moral choice, and social control, in the most famous dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess, a prominent 20th-century English writer, musicologist, and literary critic, and author of numerous works of fiction. The article analyzes the treatment of childhood in Burgess's works and how it fits into the dystopian setting.

Keywords: dystopia, dystopian authors, child character, theme childhood, personal freedom, social control, fight against violence.

INTRODUCTION

Since literature reflects the life of the people, it is natural for it to artistically express the national and universal aspects of social life. Nationality and universality leave a deep mark on the spirit of literature. Therefore, nationality and universality are not only social phenomena, but also aesthetic phenomena¹.

Dystopian societies are depicted in many works of fiction, and their action takes place in the future in new-age literature. Dystopia as a genre is often used to draw attention to the author's current problems in the environment, politics, religion, ideological upbringing, the inescapable problem of memory that destroys human happiness and causes mental suffering, ideological transformation and transformation of languages, crime and punishment, wars, drugs, caste and class stratification of people, and a number of other areas. Modern dystopian works cover not only totalitarian governments and anarchism, but also such topics as environmental pollution, global warming, climate change, health, science, economics, and technology². Indeed, the 20th century, while being a century of human, scientific, and technological achievements, unfortunately, went down in history as a century that expanded the scope of material, spiritual, political, and social problems for humanity.

Dystopian literature often serves as a means of criticizing social problems. In this genre, the image of a child has a strong symbolic meaning. Images of children are often used to explore themes such as ideological influence, loss of personal freedom, destruction of innocence, and resistance. While in utopian literature, a child is a symbol of hope for the future, in dystopian literature it is more of a distorted or controlled future. The image of a child is used as a symbolic device in dystopian works. In this work, childhood is often depicted not as a period full of joyful moments, but as a life filled with control and oppression. For example, in Orwell's *1984*³,

¹ Boboev, T. Fundamentals of Literary Studies. T., Uzbekistan, 2002. 85 p.

² Young, M. (2011-10-22) "Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults?". The Guardian. ISSN 0261-3077.

³ Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. Secker & Warburg. -328 P.



children are trained to observe adults as members of the “Spies” organization and even expose their parents for their treachery. This shows the desire of totalitarian regimes to bring childhood under ideological control. In this case, the child is not only a victim, but also an active member of the system. This makes the child a double symbol: a symbol of the violation of innocence and the success of ideology.

In modern dystopian literature, children are depicted not only as models of naivety, but also as spiritually complex and profound characters. The children of Hailsham boarding school in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*⁴ are human clones, whose entire childhood is organized in a way that they are unaware of the realities of life. They are engaged in art, they are educated, but this process serves as a means to make them fearless, obedient. They have accepted their fate as a sacred truth - and this is the most dangerous aspect of the dystopian system: the prevention of any dissent by shaping the mind from childhood.

As the pessimism that arose as a result of the great industrial and scientific achievements grew stronger, dystopias gradually joined the ranks of utopian calling for alarming changes and preparing for the reconstruction of society. This perspective actually describes societies that have, until now, been hopeful about some exceptional periods.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis grounded in literary theory.

The approach relies on three pillars which are Dystopian Literary Theory Works of Orwell, Huxley, and contemporary dystopian authors provide the conceptual background for understanding how imagined societies critique political and social structures. Bakhtinian Theory of the Novel Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, heteroglossia, and social language stratification is used to examine Burgess’s use of linguistic diversity (e.g., the invented slang “Nadsat”) and how it reflects social conflict, generational identity, and ideological control. Symbolic Interpretation of Childhood The analysis identifies ways in which children or youth characters symbolize innocence, ideological vulnerability, moral choice, and systemic control in dystopian narratives. Primary text analyzed include Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, with emphasis on the latter.

RESULTS

Across dystopian narratives, children symbolize loss of innocence, vulnerability to ideological manipulation, resistance or compliance and a distorted or controlled future. In *1984*, children are indoctrinated as “Spies” who surveil their parents, illustrating the totalitarian desire to control not only behavior but familial bonds and memory. In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro presents children as human clones raised in carefully structured environments. Their upbringing - full of education and art - is designed not to encourage freedom but to cultivate obedience and emotional resignation to their predetermined fate. Their acceptance of their destiny exemplifies how dystopian systems eliminate dissent by shaping consciousness from childhood.

Anthony Burgess presents childhood as a state of moral liminality - neither innocent nor fully responsible, yet profoundly shaped by social forces. The protagonist *Alex*, a teenager leading a violent youth gang, exists in a space between childhood and adulthood. His linguistic environment - Nadsat slang - illustrates Bakhtin’s idea that novels reveal social stratification through language. The youth dialect creates a subculture that resists adult authority while highlighting generational conflict. Alex’s story becomes a government experiment when he is subjected to the Ludovico Technique: a behavioral conditioning method intended to eliminate violence by removing free will. The findings show that the state’s attempt to “force goodness” strips Alex of moral agency. Without the ability to choose, Alex becomes a “clockwork orange”-

⁴ Ishiguro, K. (2005). *Never Let Me Go*. Faber & Faber. - 263 p.



alive but mechanical. Childhood is portrayed as the point at which ideology most effectively intervenes in the novel.

ANALYSIS

The analysis reveals that Burgess does not merely depict a future gone wrong. Instead, the dystopia exposes universal human tensions such as freedom vs. control, morality vs. obedience and individual will vs. societal expectations. Thus, dystopia becomes a mode for exploring what it fundamentally means to be human.

The novel is an artistically organized expression of social contradictions, sometimes different languages and personal thoughts. The internal stratification of a single national language into social dialects, group behavior, professional jargon, genre languages, languages of generations and centuries, languages of currents, languages of power, languages of circles and transient customs, languages of socio-political days and even hours - this internal stratification of each language at every moment of its historical existence is a necessary condition for the genre of the novel: The novel organizes all its themes, the entire depicted and expressed thematic-semantic world, in the context of social diversity and the personal animosities that arise on its background⁵. This statement about novels by the literary critic and theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin also finds artistic originality in the work of another representative of dystopian literature, Anthony Burgess. The author's 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange* is set in a future England with a subculture of extreme youth violence and tells the story of the protagonist's struggles with a state that intends to change his character to its will.

DUSCUSSIONS

The author presents *A Clockwork Orange* as a portrait of childhood, a place between evil and control. The protagonist, Alex, is a young man who has not yet reached adulthood and is characterized by his childhood of crime, violence, and disobedience to social norms. He is portrayed as a person who has turned away from childhood but has not yet fully matured. The novel begins with the words: "*What's it going to be then, eh?*"⁶ - a question that reminds us of human choice and responsibility throughout the novel. Each of the three parts of the work opens with the same seven words, and Burgess repeats this question frequently throughout the chapters, filtered through the voices of different characters. While the exact wording of the phrase is preserved in each appearance, its meaning is never the same. The question is used in a variety of contexts: from Alex's anxiety in anticipation of a night of violence, to the prison chaplain's chastising of a group of unruly inmates, and this continues to appeal to the reader's uncertainty about Alex's fate in prison.

Alex and his friends Pete, George, and Dim, despite being young children, are members of a violent gang fighting against society. Through this, Burgess exposes the moral problems of young people's personal development and the gaps in the social system. In this work, the author depicts childhood as a social experiment. In the novel, Alex's youth becomes an experimental field. The government uses the Ludovico technique to re-educate him. Through this technique, Alex is forced to refrain from violence, but this destroys his will. Anthony Burgess's main idea is based on the fact that a person cannot be moral without the right to choose.

In Anthony Burgess' dystopian novels, particularly *A Clockwork Orange*, childhood is depicted as a space between social control and moral choice. Through the young characters, he explores the balance of freedom and responsibility in childhood, as well as the impact of the social system on the younger generation. Childhood is interpreted in this work not only as the youngest period of a person, but also as the center of moral and political struggles in society.

⁵ Bakhtin, M.M. Questions of literature and aesthetics. M., 1975. Publ. "Khudojestvennaya literatura", P. 76.

⁶ Burgess, A. "A clockwork orange". W. W. Norton & Company, New York. 2005. – P.6.



The writer's vision is very profound, because he does not simply tell a dystopian story, but rather uses the concept of "dystopia" to reveal a universal and important aspect of what it means to be human. He does not get lost in semantics under the influence of various dystopian features. Instead, he reveals that utopias and dystopias can tell us about their own nature. In this way, *A Clockwork Orange* can be read not only as an interesting novel in the dystopian genre for this time, but also as a work that tells the story of what it means to be alive.

The results indicate that dystopian literature consistently uses children to critique contemporary society. The ideological manipulation of childhood serves as a warning: the future of humanity is shaped by how societies treat their youngest members. When children become instruments of ideology, the consequences include weakened moral autonomy, destruction of innocence, normalized violence or obedience, disintegration of family structures and long-term societal degeneration. Bakhtin's theory helps illuminate how Burgess crafts a linguistic and moral landscape that embodies these tensions. Through its multiplicity of voices - youth slang, political power language, and religious speech - the text stages a dialogic confrontation over who controls identity and moral values. Burgess suggests that when society prioritizes order and control over moral choice, it reduces human beings to mechanical objects. Thus, childhood functions simultaneously as an ideological battleground, a moral testing ground, and a mirror of society's future. This positions dystopian literature as not merely descriptive, but prescriptive - alerting readers to the dangers of authoritarianism, technological overreach, and moral manipulation.

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that dystopian literature uses childhood as a central symbolic and narrative device to critique social, ideological, and political structures. In works such as *1984*, *Never Let Me Go*, and especially *A Clockwork Orange*, childhood becomes a space where freedom, innocence, and moral autonomy are contested and often eroded by oppressive systems. Anthony Burgess's novel stands out by illustrating how youth are shaped not simply by personal choices but by linguistic, cultural, and political forces. Through Alex's journey, Burgess argues that genuine morality cannot exist without freedom of choice. Attempts to engineer goodness through force or conditioning lead to the creation of mechanical, dehumanized individuals. Ultimately, dystopian literature reminds us that the treatment and perception of children reflect the ethical condition of society itself. By examining childhood in dystopian works, readers gain insight into the universal struggle between individuality and control - and into the enduring question of what it means to be human in a rapidly changing world.

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