



## Postmodern Humanism in English Dystopian Novels: From *Animal Farm* to *Fahrenheit 451*

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### Abstract

The “Dystopian” works in 20th century bear the subversion, questioning and criticism of the traditional utopian literature. Dystopian writers express their concerns and warnings about the living status of the human society through creating of dystopian works, and with one accord places the hope of human civilization on postmodern humanism which emphasizes the nature, mission, value, and individual development of mankind. Confronted with intricate social problems, postmodern humanism is the spiritual impetus to promote human progress, reflection, and self-improvement. This article focuses on two dystopian masterpieces—George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* to explore the postmodern humanistic themes and connotations implied in the two novels, and to disclose the postmodern humanism presentations under oppression and exploitation concealed in the totalitarian society. This article is intended to provide a new dimension for interpreting dystopian novels, which is conducive to further explore and study the humanistic significances and values of dystopian works.

**Key words:** Postmodern humanism; Dystopian novels; *Animal Farm*; *Fahrenheit 451*

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### INTRODUCTION

Utopia, a long-standing proposition in the history of Western literature, originally means “an ideal place that does not exist in reality” and can be traced back to Plato’s *Republic* and Hesiod’s *Works and Days* in ancient Greece. It is generally believed that the book *Utopia* written by the British humanist writer Thomas More in the 16th century invented the specific concept of “Utopia” in literature and laid the foundation for later Utopian literature. Utopia literature generally depicts a perfect world of communion, expressing the longing for an ideal society, and the pursuit of a better future. However, with the evolution and development of the genre, the western literature gradually reversed, presenting a “Dystopia” literary trend. It is contrary to Utopian literature and is the subversion, criticism and questioning of it.

The study of dystopia in China started relatively late. It began to draw attention in the 1980s and the research results were scarce in the early days. *Dystopia’s Revelation* analyzed the classical “Dystopian Trilogy”—Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s *1984*, and offered some inspirations and suggestions with the combination of social conditions of China in the 1980s (Wang, 1989, pp.46-49). This is the first study of dystopia in China. Since the 1990s, the number of domestic studies has increased. In addition to the commentary on a single dystopian work, conclusive review also appears. *A Brief Review of Dystopian Novels* implemented a comprehensive evaluation and analysis of the “Dystopian Trilogy”, and put forward the themes and features of dystopian novels, which were recognized and acquired by many later researchers (Liu, 1993, pp.89-92). *Development and Variations of Western Utopia Literature* described the transformation and development from utopian literature to dystopian literature, and analyzed its causes and related factors (Li, 1999, pp.83-85). In the 21st century, the domestic research on dystopia has seen a

significant increase. *Anti-Utopia and Dystopia* elaborated on the socio-historical roots of the dystopian thoughts in the 20th century such as the capitalist economic crisis and the setbacks of the socialist movement (Xie, 2006, pp.10-13). *Review of Utopian and Dystopian Novels* made an overall review of utopian and dystopian literature from domestic research and western research respectively (Bai, 2011, pp.165-166).

Western researches on dystopian literature gradually became systematic and mature in the 1930s. The 20th century was regarded as the heyday of the development of dystopian literature. *The History of Utopian Thought* combed western utopian and dystopian thoughts. While affirming the value of Utopia, it also explored the limitations of Utopia and conducted an objective investigation (Hertzler, 1923, pp.60-63). *A Story of the Utopian Vision of the World* illustrated the origins and development of Utopia, and discussed the issues related to utopian ideals from a variety of disciplines (Fischer, 1993, pp.5-25). However, some of its conclusions caused controversy among many scholars. For instance, it held that Utopia was not universal, and it existed only in a society with a classical Christian heritage. *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* analyzed works with dystopian characteristics in Western novels and plays (Booker, 1994). However, it has a clear limitation—all works that are contrary to Utopian literature are classified as dystopia, which is likely to generalize its scope. Modern American scholar Jacoby divided Utopian thought into two groups—Blueprint Utopianism and Anti-Idol Utopianism in *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age*. He deemed that Utopian thought is different from totalitarianism, and its exploration will exert a positive significance for the future (Jacoby, 2005, p.78).

In general, the overall review of dystopian literature is less than the analysis of a single dystopian work both at home and abroad. In terms of content selection, domestic dystopian studies are mainly concentrated on a single work or the classical “Dystopian Trilogy”. In terms of content analysis, a single perspective is adopted, while systematic review and generalization are rare. Due to the limitations of the first-hand data and language, domestic dystopia studies still have huge room for exploration. Researches on it have significant implications for modern society and still need to be further strengthened. This article firstly illustrates the humanism tradition in the west and its evolution, and points out common values of postmodern humanism and dystopian themes—anti-totalitarianism and anti-scientism. Then it explores the postmodern humanistic themes in *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451*, including the restrictions on human freedom—freedom of speech and thought, the suppression of human individuality—self-identity and creativity, and the depravity of human nature—human’s greediness, deceit and hypocrisy.

## 1. THE COMMON VALUES SHARED BY POSTMODERN HUMANISM AND DYSTOPIAN THEMES

### 1.1 The Humanist Tradition in the West

Humanism can be said to be the mainstream ideology in Western culture. It is generally believed that humanism is the product of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In fact, the Western humanist tradition dates back to the ancient Greek period and is an important part of ancient Greek culture. In philosophical sense, Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Protagoras proposed that “Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not” (Department of Philosophy (Peking University), 1957, p.138). This reveals the intrinsic essence of humanism, and also reflects the basic spirit of the era of Renaissance. One of the most appealing characteristics of the idea in ancient Greek period is human-centered rather than God-centered. In this period, people attempted to express human care through music, art, philosophy, etc.

What is the definition of humanism? There is no definition of humanism that can satisfy everyone. “The most appropriate term that can be found is the humanist tradition” (Bullock, 1985, pp.105-106). The Western humanistic tradition can be understood as a tradition that focuses on people and uses human experience as a starting point for people to understand God and nature. In this tradition, different understandings and emphasis on the “human” and “human experience” also constitute various forms of humanist thoughts, opinions and tendencies. Humanism involves almost all aspects of Western culture, and produces different schools of thought with different perspectives and even sharp conflicts among them. It has its own different characteristics in each historical period. According to *Science and Humanism—On the Three Forms of Western Humanism*, the three different forms of Western humanism are Renaissance humanism, modern humanistic humanism, and postmodern humanism (Meng, 2005, pp.27-33). Due to their different perspectives on the understanding of “human” and “human experience,” they also have different understandings of science and humanities and their mutual relations.

The main idea of Renaissance humanism is to praise and respect human nature, to be people-oriented, and to strongly oppose the God-centered thinking. It regards man as the creator and owner of life; extols human’s dignity and value; emphasizes personal talent and self-fulfillment. The human emphasized by the Renaissance humanism is an idealized “complete person” or “perfect person”. The “human experience” emphasized by it is also the “perfect” experience. To a large extent, it reflects the combination of rationality and sensibility, science and humanities. Therefore, they produce the revival of science and the renaissance of literature and art. Different from

Renaissance period, the central goal of modern humanism is the establishment of individual's subjectivity. In terms of ideology, modern humanism wants to demonstrate individual independence, autonomy, and self-awareness. In practice, it attempts to build individuals into active agents that are independent, autonomous, self-conscious, and armed with modern knowledge. In order to enable individuals to act freely in the capitalist state according to their own will, modern humanism seeks to shape individuals into the "spoken subject," "labor subject," and "moral action subject" that meet the standards of the capitalist system.

Postmodern humanism holds that postmodernism, modernism, and humanism are compatible. It criticizes and rejects the end and closure of modernism, deems that everything is uncertain and open, advocates pluralism and equality of all forms of life, and calls on humanity to return to love, understanding and human society. In this sense, postmodern humanism is the inheritance and development of humanism and modernism, and is a kind of humanism applicable to postmodern society. In other words, postmodern humanism is both postmodern and humanistic. It adopts the perspective of humanism to reexamine social issues, such as religion, science, and human society, and deepens the critique of modernity toward industrial society, emphasizing the nature, mission, status, and value of humans in a postmodern context. It's characterized by individuality, subjectivity, and relativity. Todd F. Davis is one of the representatives of postmodern humanist critics. He believes that "word games" and philosophical theories are insufficient to express and criticize the experience of the postmodern human world. It is necessary to use postmodern humanism to explore life and how humans can reduce the harm to the earth and the earth's biology (Davis, 2006, p.118). In fact, due to the same social and historical background, such as the influence of politics, economy and science, there are common values and similarities between postmodern humanism and dystopian themes—anti-totalitarianism and anti-scientism.

### 1.2 Anti-Totalitarianism

The political system is an indispensable part of the formation and establishment of a country and society, and it occupies a crucial place in the human's vision of utopia. The turbulent political situation of the 20th century and the emergence of totalitarian governments are important reasons for the transformation of the political content of dystopian novels. The breakout of the two world wars, the rise of fascism, the emergence of socialist countries, Stalinism and "The Great Purge" triggered reflections on political issues worldwide. The concept "totalitarianism" was first developed in the 1920s and then became an important criterion for people to consider the country's political system. This kind of ruling form, which has brought great suffering to mankind, was strongly exaggerated in dystopian novels, reflecting the writer's

postmodern humanitarian spirit—their reflections on reality and the future.

This wave of totalitarianism in the 20th century has flooded in literature and has become one of the important themes of dystopian novels. Through their depictions of the imaginative totalitarian society, dystopian novels reveal that totalitarianism is a great devastation to the physical and mental freedom of human beings, and thus warns people of the possibility of disasters in reality. The attention and criticism of totalitarian politics reflect the spiritual essence of dystopian novels that pays attention to reality and reflects on the present. When explaining the concept of totalitarianism, Arendt pointed out "The newness of totalitarianism does not lie in the pain it causes, because human beings are never lack of pain; nor have it killed many people, but it has put humanity at risk" (Zhang, 2005, pp.1-9). As a completely new political form that emerged in the 20th century, totalitarianism is different from traditional autocracy or tyranny, and Nazism and Stalinism are its standard expressions. The destruction of human freedom and nature is the ultimate goal of totalitarianism. Anti-civilization, anti-system, anti-utility, and anti-responsibility are concrete manifestations of its brutal nature. The fundamental purpose of the totalitarian government is to upgrade its own ideology to the dominant consciousness of the society, and to gain a general awareness of the members of society, thus reaching an attempt to dominate the cognition of the minds of the people and maintain their dominance. Ideology is a key factor that affects people's thinking and action. In dystopian novels, totalitarian government uses ideology as a means not only to influence people through language transformation and distortion, but also to confuse cognition by falsifying history and destroying cultural civilization.

In fact, the various manifestations of totalitarianism in dystopian novels are, after all, the result of the writers' reflection and introspection on the political system, reflecting their concern for social politics. In their novels, writers use the display of cruel methods of totalitarian politics to warn of the dangers of totalitarianism and express their expectations for a more democratic, equal, and liberal social and political system. In addition, the writers described the situation and destiny of the individual as the focus of the performance when discussing the political system. They described how those people who were physically and mentally abused and who were deprived of their freedom of individuality and thought became the puppets under the control of the totalitarian government. This kind of attention to people's predicament and fate reflects the deep postmodern humanitarian spirit embodied in dystopian novels.

### 1.3 Anti-Scientism

In the reflections and criticism of dystopian novels against Utopia, the most striking one is the consideration of

the material means on which Utopia is built—scientific technology and the ethics and value it raises. Since the modern times, science and technology has resulted in earth-shaking changes in human production and life. Especially after entering the modern society, it has become the primary productive forces in promoting social development. In this context, the magical power of science and technology has convinced numerous people. The ideology of scientism came into being and influenced most people's thinking.

However, along with lots of praise and affirmation, people's skepticism and criticism of scientific and technological forces are also inexorable and intensifying. Although science and technology have brought material benefits to human beings, their spiritual and moral deficiencies have also been increasingly exposed. Science is no longer knowledge of nature that people understand in a common sense, but is entangled in the encirclement of political rights and interests. Utopia built by science and technology has become a nightmare for people to escape. This nightmare not only caused the discussion of science and technology on the philosophical level. In literature, schools of naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism also pay attention to the relationship among science, technology and people. In dystopian novels, the reflection of modern scientific and technological civilization is an important part of its ideological content.

In literature, since the transformation from Utopian literature to dystopian literature in the late 19th century, a great number of anti-scientism dystopian novels, for example, *Erewhon* (1872), *We* (1921), *The Machine Stops* (1909), *Brave New World* (1931), and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), are the product of this crisis consciousness. *Fahrenheit 451* uses a super-ideological and more abstract approach to put the behaviors of restraining people's pursuit of individual spiritual pleasure and freedom of thought under the scrutiny and criticism of readers. In a consumer society that high technology seems to bring great convenience to life, the relationships among people have become indifferent and alienated without the pursuit of individual spirit and emotion. Collective rationality is placed in an unprecedentedly important position, and all human behaviors are unconsciously controlled in the convenience and illusionary enjoyment provided by the consumer society. "Simple and convenient" logically caters to people's physical desires, and the historical heritage and spiritual sustenance are unconsciously obliterated by the burning of books.

The science and technology that squeeze between us and nature has caused concern about the relationships among science and technology, ecology, and the survival prospects of human beings. However, the safety expectations that may fail will further force human beings to think about ways of self-help, and a deep reflection on the utopia of science and technology and strong refutation have also become one of the core orientations

of dystopian novels in the past century. Cultural scholar Ruan Wei summarized in an article, "In this self-styled 'postmodern' era, in this age when computers, information, and biotechnology have reached a high level and human cloning has no fundamental obstacles, it is not surprising that some people enthusiastically praise technology. What is strange is that many people turn a blind eye to the double-edged sword of technology and have no reservations about optimism in technological progress. In their view, the body can be copied, consciousness can be copied indefinitely, thus achieving 'non-physical survival', are not terrible"(Ruan, 2013, pp.21-28). Clearly, he has already seen a trend in the post-human era, but his views are still relatively optimistic. Indeed, cloning technology is able to copy a person's body, but so far it has not been able to "clone" the mind of a scientist with a very high IQ.

In short, dystopian novels call for the morality and ethics of science and technology, oppose the supremacy of science, examine the negative effects on humanity brought by science and technology, pay attention to the living conditions and prospects of post-modern humanity, reflecting the value orientation of postmodern humanism. Although the ethic of science and technology itself is complex, the awareness and concern conveyed in the dystopia novels have at least triggered readers' thinking. In contemporary times, echoing the vigilant consciousness of anti-scientism in dystopian novels is that many commentators have been trying hard to explore ways to prevent human beings to be worthless individuals in the powerful science and technology world without missing the great benefits and opportunities of scientific and technological innovation. This is the urgent task that contemporary people have been unable to avoid and need to re-select development methods after the defeat of the development path of technology utopia.

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## 2.THE POSTMODERN HUMANISTIC THEMES IN *ANIMAL FARM* AND *FAHRENHEIT 451*

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As two dystopian masterpieces, both *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451* express the same theme: to criticize the harm on mankind caused by totalitarianism and to extol the humanity and humanism. In *Animal Farm*, animals work hard and perform their own duties to establish an equal and democratic animal kingdom. In *Fahrenheit 451*, Montag and other people who love to read set up a "mobile library" to save books, which represent hope and knowledge. Through the two novels, the two authors described the torment and oppression of human freedom, personality, and nature under totalitarian rule in order to arouse people's attention to humanism. This article will analyze the profound postmodern humanistic themes reflected in the two novels--the pursuit of human freedom, individuality development and human nature.



## 2.1 The Denouncement of the Restrictions on Human Freedom

Freedom is one of the most important basic rights of human beings. It endows human beings with dignity and value, and has played an important part in promoting the progress of human society. However, freedom is also relative. Human freedom will be subject to different restrictions under different social and political systems. In the totalitarian society in *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451*, citizens' freedom of speech and thought were denied. The rulers eliminated all different opinions and voices, and freedom was devastated.

### 2.1.1 The Restraint of Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech refers to the right of citizens to freely express their thoughts and opinions on various issues in politics and society through various forms of language. It is usually considered an indispensable concept in modern democracy. Since speech is a necessary means and basic tool for citizens to express their will, exchange mutual ideas, and diffuse new information, it is also the basis for the formation of the will of the people. Therefore, freedom of speech is at the top of all political freedoms of citizens. Freedom of speech can be expressed not only in oral form, but also the written form, and even other forms such as literary creation, research, complaints, and accusations. Without freedom of speech, there will be no collision of ideas and progress of society. In this sense, freedom of speech is the cradle of other rights and is an indispensable prerequisite for almost every other kind of rights.

However, in *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451*, citizens' freedom of speech has been greatly restricted in order to ensure the absolute dominance of the totalitarian government. The restraint mainly concentrates on three aspects: learning information, expressing personal opinions, and sharing different ideas.

Books are the main medium for people to acquire and learn information. While in *Fahrenheit 451*, firefighters who have duties of quenching the fire in the past become useless, but they have a new "mission"—arson. Their duty is to burn books everywhere once they find them. Television education programs in schools are available, so they don't need any books. Radio and television have gradually replaced books as the only channel for people to acquire knowledge and information. The decline of books is described as follows:

...Then, in the twentieth century, speed up your camera. Books cut shorter. Condensations. Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending. ... Classics cut to fit fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve- line dictionary resume (Bradbury, 1996, p.43).

Similarly, in *Animal Farm*, freedom of expressing opinions is restricted by a special organization—secret police. The function of the secret police is similar to that of the Ming Dynasty in China. It is a killer organization

dedicated to the supreme ruler. In *Animal Farm*, the secret police are the ten enormous dogs that help Napoleon maintain order and eliminate dissent. Any animal that makes mistakes or is dissatisfied with the rule of Napoleon will be slain by these dogs:

Four young porkers ... uttered shrill squeals of disapproval, and all four of them sprang to their feet and began speaking at once, but suddenly the dogs sitting round Napoleon let out deep, menacing growls, and the pigs fell silent and sat down again (Orwell, 2010, p.23).

Over time, the animals lost their ability to fight and chose "collective silence" under collective tyranny. Freedom of expressing opinions had turned into a bubble, and they finally obeyed the orders and succumbed to Napoleon's totalitarian rule.

### 2.1.2 The Restraint of Freedom of Thought

Freedom of thought is the freedom to make rational judgments without any external interference, including the freedom of theories, opinions, or beliefs, etc. It is a freedom of inner activities, a kind of liberation of rationality, having its own independent status. In addition to the restraint of speech, the totalitarian government has also taken effective control over the citizens' freedom of thought. The consumer society in *Fahrenheit 451* is a typical example. 451 degrees Fahrenheit, is equal to 233 degrees Celsius, is the ignition point of the book. Its implied meaning of "burning the book" has made itself become a synonym for restraining the freedom of thought.

*Fahrenheit 451* depicts a peaceful and happy Utopia, in which people indulge in the imaginary images and entertainment life provided by the TV wall, seldom have face to face communications, and reject all unpleasant realities. Freedom of thought is also flattened along with the images. Because books easily lead to the subject's conscious and free thought, they become absolute banned items. Firefighters have turned into arsonists and take on the task of burning books. Captain Beatty once gave a warning to Montag:

A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? Me? I won't stomach them for a minute. And so when houses were finally fireproofed completely, all over the world there was no longer need of firemen for the old purposes. They were given the new job, as custodians of our peace of mind (Bradbury, 1996, p.58).

In *Animal Farm*, animals' thoughts have been destroyed by servility in their character. They obeyed all the orders and demands of the rulers, and never doubted the correctness of them, resulting in the loss of the independence of thought. Boxer a faithful follower of Napoleon and he expresses absolute obedience to all orders of Napoleon. He has two personal mottos—"I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right"(Orwell, 2010, pp.13-20). He believed that Napoleon was absolutely correct and never had a sense of resistance. He

had a chance to kill the nine vicious hounds, but he gave up because he firmly believed in his mottos. In the end, he not only failed to seize the opportunity, but also lost control of his life and destiny.

The television wall, overwhelming advertisements, and political propaganda in *Fahrenheit 451* caused people to lose individual rational judgments, and permeated every pore of them with values based on the concept of consumption and glorification of pleasure. In *Animal Farm*, the ruling class indirectly controls the people's thoughts by controlling the direction of public opinion and controlling the people's right to speak. The ruler selects his own spokesman and takes use of public opinion and violence as guarantees to subconsciously change the people and make them become the ruler's ideological practitioner. All in all, totalitarian governments in both novels take the means of "spirit—control—brainwashing" to ensure that collective moral concepts are fully accepted and followed in the general public. In this process, the independence and freedom of thought have also gradually vanished.

## 2.2 The Criticism of the Suppression of Human Individuality

Individuality is a unique feature of a person that distinguishes an individual from others. It includes creativity, self-identity, and subjective initiative, etc. It also makes us have our own strengths and interests. Encouraging individuality development is not only conducive to personal growth and progress, but also conducive to social renewal and change. But for totalitarian rulers, the development of individuality will shake their dominance. Therefore, rulers not only suppress the innovation of citizens, but also take various measures to blur their self-identity.

### 2.2.1 The Crisis of Self-Identity

Self-identity refers to the individual's self-recognition as well as some major issues related to self-development, such as ideals, values, occupations, etc. The achievement of self-identity means that individuals have a full understanding about self and can combine the past, present, and future of themselves into an organic whole, establish and pursue their own ideals and values, and make their own reflections on self-development.

According to American psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson, there are two extreme situations of self-identity. One is "too much of self-identity," which can be called "fanaticism" (Erikson, 1993, p.43). It refers to a person who is absolutely exclusive and is convinced that his way is the only way. This "excessive self" state easily leads to self-centeredness, personal worship, and fanaticism, and it was fully reflected in Boxer in *Animal Farm*.

In the farm, Boxer is a "labor model": "Boxer was the admiration of everybody. He had been a hard worker even in Jone's time, but now he seemed more like three

horses than one; there were days when the entire work of the farm seemed to rest on his mighty shoulders" (Orwell, 2010, p.7). Every morning, he asked the cock to wake him up half an hour earlier. He was willing to do more work than others. Later He built a windmill and then he even got up in three quarters in advance. He has made more contributions to the manor than anyone else. He has a loyal heart to the manor, but his loyalty has become servile and ignorant under totalitarian rule. In the end, he died because of overwork. Comrade Napoleon, whom he had embraced and firmly believed, sold his body to the butcher's field in exchange for a box of whiskey exclusively for pigs.

The other extreme situation of self-identity is the lack of identity, called "repudiation" (Erikson, 1993, p.43). It refers to a person who refuses to play a role in society and even denies his needs of identity. In *Fahrenheit 451*, citizens have lost their self and have a vague cognition of their own roles. They also lost their sense of responsibility, and indulged in a world dominated by consumption and the images of mass media. In the family and society where the hero Montag survives, the indifferent husband-wife relationship made him feel no affection and warmth of love. The indifference of his colleagues made him unable to feel the preciousness of friendship, and everything was just like a cold object. People are extremely happy and obedient in front of the TV wall, while they are indifferent to the real world and activities outside the visual screen. For example, Mildred's fascination with the video world forms a sharp contrast with her husband and terrorist war in reality; and the live television of the capture of Montag attracted people's enthusiasm. However, under the influence and guidance of live television, people neither cared about why Montag collected books, nor did they think about whether the policy of burning books was reasonable. Instead, they followed the camera lens closely to track Montag. After a period of search without result, the media collaborated with the police and presented the audience with scenes of stabbing an innocent walker as killing Montag. Eventually, the audience unquestionably accepted the conclusion given by the world of images even without leaving the door: Reading is an anti-social crime, and anti-social crimes have been brought to justice. The audience maintained their status as spectators from the beginning to the end.

### 2.2.2 The Suppression of Creativity

Social and personal development needs creativity. As a pursuit, or even a realm, creativity is closely related to human personality. Creativity endows people with a keen insight and an ability of thinking deeply, so they can make differences according to their surroundings, rather than always copy and obey old stereotypes. The founder of Humanistic Judaism Sherwin Wine said, "Imitation and conformity are necessary for survival. They are far from happiness. Successful people are creative. They refuse

to accept the world as fixed” (Greeley, 1988, p.163). The positive effects of creativity are self-evident. Some characters in dystopian novels are innovative. However, this kind of creativity is, to some extent, negative for the totalitarian government. The ruler regards it as a great threat. Creativity is very limited under the oppression of totalitarian rule, and even been deliberately destroyed.

Snowball is a very creative character in *Animal Farm*. He is versatile, not only good at conversation and organization, but also able to use scientific knowledge to carry out the design of the windmill, a major project of the farm. He has shown extraordinary leadership skills in the reorganization, reconstruction, and transformation of people’s mind. Under the leadership of Snowball, the animals established Animal Committees, the Egg Production Committee for the hens, the Clean Tails League for the cows, and the Wild Comrades’ Re-education Committee, setting off the Whiter Wool Movement for the sheep (Orwell, 2010, p.20). In order to read and remember the “Seven Commandments”, Snowball also formed a literacy class. Most animals were no longer illiterate. Most of the pigs were very fluent in reading and writing. Dogs also had a good reading ability.

However, Snowball’s ideas didn’t implement smoothly. From the very beginning, Napoleon had no interest in the various committees established by Snowball. He believed that the new government should educate the younger generation as early as possible, rather than educating all animals of different ages. So it quickly took nine newly weaned puppies away from their parents and locked them up for “education” in the isolated attic. Then, in a plenary session, with the help of the fierce and abnormal wolf dogs, Snowball was expelled forever. Later during the reign, Napoleon took use of the fierce dogs again and again to impose harsh laws and torture on the rebels and skeptics. The flame of creativity was annihilated.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, firefighter Montag’s self-salvation is an embodiment of creativity. He changed from the original law enforcer (the firefighter with the duty of burning books) to a fugitive with the duty of protecting books. Once on duty, he was greatly stimulated by witnessing an elderly woman burned herself alive with her books. Afterwards, he secretly read books and met Faber, a professor who loves books, but these were reported by his wife Mildred. Montag killed Beatty, the captain who tried to arrest him, and fled, and the city began a massive chase. Montag was fortunate enough to escape to the mountains, and met a group of people who saved books through recitation, just as a “mobile library”. Soon after the outbreak of the war, the city was blown up, Montag and his friends were hopeful to return to the city and begin the reconstruction of the world.

### 2.3 The Disclosure of the Depravity of Human Nature

Human nature has two sides and is vulnerable to external influences. It’s inherently kind, but due to the impact

of environment and experience, it will also change. In dystopian novels, after the rulers take power, the greed in their nature was exposed. They want to eliminate aliens and realize absolute totalitarian rule. At the same time, the rulers take various measures and fabricate countless lies to deceive the people. This fully reflects their deceit and hypocrisy.

#### 2.3.1 Human’s Greediness Toward Power

Orwell said that “power is psychologically addictive and inherently corrupting”(Greeley, 1988, p.48). From ancient times, greedy rulers have never ceased their struggle for power. The rulers in dystopian novels are also the same. The mastery of power has always been the goal pursued by totalitarian rulers, and they do not hesitate to take every measure to control power. After reaching the goal, power has become a master key. With this key, they can get everything they want. This in turn leads to the abuse of power and bring endless torture and suffering to the ruled people.

Napoleon in *Animal Farm* is such a greedy ruler who chases power and then abuses power. His greed and autocratic personality have a distinct process of development. After he resorted to military dogs to drive Snowball out of the farm and came to the throne, he became greedier in power, material, and beauty. He also became more and more arrogant in the exercise of power, and it was even worse than the old rulers. Although the “Seven Commandments” initially advocated by the animals have a certain restriction on him, these commandments are in fact useless and can be arbitrarily modified for the sake of power-holder.

At the end of the novel, the sky above the animal farm was shrouded in the shadow of an authoritarian ideology. The animals were not allowed to have personality and were not allowed to tell the truth. In fact, the animals had lost their nature and they did not even know what the truth was. The revolutionaries of the older generation were either crushed to death in the ideological cleansing movement or were dead in the building of peace. The seven commandments of the entire society have become only one: All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than other animals (Orwell, 2010, p.52). The word “equal” is not comparable, but “more equal” means inequality, and the essence of totalitarianism has already been revealed.

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the greedy rulers used a variety of methods to maintain their power - bombers, fire brigades, all kinds of monitoring facilities, and robotic hounds. Their role is to fight, destroy, monitor and detect ideas and the spread of them. This society does not allow reading in order to avoid the phenomenon of independent thinking that appears as a threat to the ruler. People are immersed in the deceptive imagery world woven by the rulers. This world never shows true suffering. It masks the imperfect real society, and makes people willing to become prisoners



of totalitarian rulers while being obsessed with images and visually trained. The greed and desire of mankind for power is evident in dystopian novels, highlighting the humanistic spirit of the writers' concern with the living conditions of oppressed groups under totalitarian rule.

### 2.3.2 Human's Deceit and Hypocrisy

Honesty is the basic principle for people and it is one of the most precious qualities of a person. Only by being honest can we gain the trust of others. However, honesty does not exist in the domination of totalitarian society. The power holders have concealed their wrongdoings and deceived the public, thus achieving the purpose of consolidating power. Deception is a common practice for those in power and is also an effective control method. In *Animal Farm*, as the spokesman for Napoleon, Squealer used this statement when explaining the use of apples and milk to pigs:

...Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. ... It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples (Orwell, 2010, p.15).

Squealer's words from the beginning to the end are all lies that are contrary to the truth. This is an obvious fact. However, the animals have always been convinced of his lies and believe that this is a reasonable explanation he has made, and are grateful for his rule. These animals have become numb under totalitarian rule.

In addition to the spokesman, Napoleon's deception of the public also employs a means - that is, to set an enemy to the people, thus diverting their attention. When a group establishes a common enemy, everyone's hatred is turned to the enemy, and all misfortunes are attributed to the enemy's fault. Then people are angry, rising up, being united, fully trusting and accepting leadership. This is similar to the means that certain countries must adopt in times of necessity to use warfare to shift the sight of the national economic crisis, or even provoke international disputes in order to cover up the growing malaise and gaps in various industries in the country.

In the totalitarian society in dystopian novels, human's hypocrisy is fully reflected in the propaganda made by the rulers. The so-called propaganda is that the ruler presents the distorted truth in the coat of hypocrisy to the public. In *Fahrenheit 451*, cars, televisions, news media constantly instill exciting, enjoyable, and superficial entertainment cultures into people's audiovisual senses. TV brings people into their ideal utopia. For Montag's wife, Mildred, television is the ideal stage for performing different roles. However, she still thinks the three TV walls in her home are not enough, because the lack of a fourth TV wall will make her find a real herself at any time. She urgently needs a fourth wall to maintain this illusion. With the fourth wall, reality and illusion can be separated. As a result, when people face the reality with this kind of inertial thinking developed in the virtual utopia, they will

lose sight of the spirituality of the human being in the real world, and they will not be able to view the real people and society with individual rationality.

### 2.4 The Differences of the Dystopian Settings of the Two Novels

As discussed above, both *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451* depict various social scenes caused by totalitarian rule in a dystopian society. Citizens rise up under the oppression and exploitation of totalitarian rule and launch a revolution against power-holders. Though they share some common humanistic themes, the two novels also have some differences in settings.

First, the story's main background is different. In *Animal Farm*, the main plot occurs after the animal's revolution against mankind. In order to build an ideal animal kingdom, animals drove farmer Mr. Jones away, thus achieving their mastership. The internal disagreements and conflicts were developed after their mastership. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the background of the story is set in a highly developed society in the future. The government uses technology to manipulate citizens' minds and deems that humans do not need books. Firefighter Montag initiated a revolution in protecting books after his awakening.

Second, the measures adopted by rulers in controlling ideology are different. In *Animal Farm*, the ruler mainly oppresses and threatens the animals through secret police—ten vicious dogs, and controls and influences the animals' thoughts through the spokesman—Squealer. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the ruler mainly brainwashed the public through high-tech—overwhelming political propaganda and the video wall of every household.

Third, the story endings are different. In *Animal Farm*, the original purpose of the revolution was to establish a more democratic and equal animal kingdom. Obviously, they eventually failed. After pigs became the new privileged class, the original revolutionary ideals had long been distorted and abandoned. The lives of animals were even worse than before. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the city was finally blown up, but Montag and other people who love to read eventually saved the books through recitation and had the opportunity to pass on to future generations. The story ending is full of hope.

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## CONCLUSION

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This article reveals the shared values between dystopian themes and postmodern humanism, and then analyzes postmodern humanistic themes implied in two dystopian masterpieces *Animal Farm* and *Fahrenheit 451*. In short, both novels are the microcosm of the destruction of humanism under totalitarianism, highlighting the postmodern humanist spirit of the two authors. Human freedoms in both novels are limited by the rulers. People are not allowed to learn new information, express personal



opinions, and share different ideas. And the rulers want them to become illiterate, thereby consolidating their rule. Human individuality—creativity and self-identity—has been suppressed, which makes everyone in a totalitarian society lose his unique identity, and humanism is completely absent. Furthermore, the dark side of human nature is fully exposed—the greed of the rulers brings endless exploitation and harm to the people. Numerous lies weaved by the rulers embody their deception and hypocrisy.

In *Animal Farm*, the animal's initial humanistic ideal is to build a more democratic and equal society through revolution, but it eventually leads to totalitarianism. The animal world simulates the survival mode of human society: the pioneers of the revolution finally become the eaters of revolutionary achievements. The initial revolutionary ideal for freedom and peace has gradually evolved into the road to totalitarianism. It's a microcosm of the development of the human revolutionary society. And it indicates the danger and harm of totalitarianism. As a typical novel of political criticism, there are obvious symbolic and realistic meanings in both character setting and plot setting. Orwell expresses the expectations and pursuits of ordinary people for freedom and equality. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the knowledge represented by books was extinguished, highlighting the lack of cultural and artistic positions that resulted from the murder of humanism in such a "dystopia" world. At the end of the novel, the significance of books is sublimated into the guardian of human life as well as the final salvation before the end of the world. Although this is a fictional dystopian novel, the writer has clearly placed the highest ideal in literary books—the symbol of humanism.

In conclusion, two writers used their humorous irony, lucid words, and even ghastly prophecies to reveal their humanistic thinking about the living conditions of mankind. Through the two novels, the writers express their postmodern humanistic ideals—pursuing the freedoms of human beings, encouraging the development of individuality, and praising the bright side of human nature.

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