

**CONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD IN DYSTOPIAN FICTION: THE LITERARY
DYNAMICS OF CHILD CHARACTERS IN DYSTOPIAN WORLDS**

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Abstract: This article explores how childhood and child characters are constructed in dystopian fiction. It examines the symbolic, psychological, and narrative roles that children play in dystopian narratives, analyzing how authors use the innocence, vulnerability, and adaptability of youth to critique societal systems, imagine alternative futures, and amplify the emotional weight of totalitarian control. Through close readings of works such as George Orwell's "1984", Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go", and Lois Lowry's "The Giver", this paper reveals how dystopian literature frames childhood not only as a biological stage, but also as a powerful ideological battleground.

Key words: dystopian fiction, protagonist child, childhood, social freedom, resistance.

Dystopian fiction has long served as a vehicle for socio-political critique. Within this genre, the figure of the child occupies a particularly potent symbolic space. Child characters are often employed to explore themes of indoctrination, identity, loss of innocence, and resistance¹. Unlike the utopian child who represents a hopeful future, the dystopian child frequently embodies a corrupted or threatened future, manipulated by oppressive regimes or born into a world that devalues individuality and freedom.

Childhood in dystopian fiction is rarely portrayed as a time of carefree innocence. Instead, it is redefined through the ideological lens of the dystopia itself. For instance, in Orwell's "1984", children become instruments of state control. The "Spies" a youth organization mirror Hitler Youth or Stalinist Komsomol, showcasing how totalitarian regimes infiltrate even the earliest stages of personal development. The indoctrinated children betray their parents to the Thought Police, revealing how deeply surveillance culture penetrates familial structures².

Orwell presents children as tools of Big Brother. They are taught to spy on adults, including their own parents, and report any signs of disloyalty. This is exemplified in the Parson family, where Mr. Parson's own daughter turns him in to the Thought Police for saying "Down with Big Brother" in his sleep. Childhood in 1984 is corrupted from the start. The Party eliminates natural

¹ Baccolini, R., & Moylan, T. (2003). Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination. Routledge. P.24.

² Hintz, C., & Ostry, E. (2003). Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults. Routledge.- P.31.

familial affection and replaces it with loyalty to the regime. As a result, children become aggressive, suspicious, and emotionally stunted.

Children, therefore, are not only victims of dystopian systems but also agents within them - albeit unwilling or manipulated ones. This duality increases their symbolic weight: they reflect both the regime's success in reprogramming innocence and the horror of a society that weaponizes its youngest members³. Orwell's portrayal of children in 1984 is not just about individual characters, but serves as a powerful commentary on how totalitarianism seeks to control every aspect of life—including the minds and loyalties of the youngest citizens.

Unlike earlier dystopias where children were flat or incidental characters, modern dystopian fiction offers psychologically rich portrayals of childhood. Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go" presents children raised in a seemingly nurturing environment that masks a dark bioethical reality. ⁴The students of Hailsham are clones bred for organ donation. Their upbringing - art classes, education, and limited social freedom is designed to instill docility and suppress existential rebellion. The novel interrogates how a controlled childhood can erase the very notion of resistance by shaping perception from the start.⁵

The emotional restraint in Ishiguro's characters emphasizes the moral ambiguity of their world. Readers are not faced with monstrous oppressors but with a system so normalized that its victims quietly accept their fate. The children, while intelligent and sensitive, lack the cultural or moral framework to conceive of resistance - suggesting that dystopia is most effective when it begins with the shaping of childhood.

In contrast to Ishiguro's resigned protagonists, dystopias like "The Giver" by Lois Lowry frame childhood as a site of potential resistance. Jonas, the young protagonist, begins as a conforming member of a strictly controlled society where emotions and memories are suppressed. As he becomes the Receiver of Memory, he awakens to the depth of human experience - love, pain, choice-and ultimately chooses to escape the community to preserve individuality and truth.

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

⁴ James, P.D. (1992). The Children of Men. Faber & Faber. -P. 121.

⁵ Ishiguro, K. (2005). Never Let Me Go. Faber & Faber. – 263 p.