

The modern world looks to many like a dystopia — a version of “the darkest timeline”, to borrow a term from the American sitcom *Community*. Whose dystopia, though? Which writer best imagined this moment of turmoil and dysfunction? The greatest contributions to the tradition of dystopian fiction are two defining masterpieces from the 20th century, both of them bestsellers at the time and ever since: Aldous Huxley’s 1932 *Brave New World* and George Orwell’s 1949 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The two dystopias have many details in common. Both writers saw a future shaped by weapons of mass destruction — biological and chemical weapons in Huxley’s case, nuclear war in Orwell’s. They agreed about the danger of permanent social stratification, with humanity divided into categories determined by biological engineering and psychological conditioning (Huxley) or traditional class combined with totalitarian loyalty systems (Orwell). Both men imagined future societies completely obsessed with sex, though in diametrically opposite ways: state-enforced repression and celibacy in the case of Orwell; deliberate, narcotising promiscuity in the case of Huxley. Both men thought the future would be dominated by America.

Both men thought that future governments would spend a lot of effort permanently trying to incite economic consumption — not that either man thought of anything as wildly fantastical as quantitative easing. Both began their books with a short sentence designed to signal a world which was familiar but also disconcertingly futuristic: “A squat grey building of only thirty-four stories,” begins *Brave New World*. We are supposed to gasp with amazement at the “only”. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* begins: “It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.” Thirteen! The horror! Both men were writing warnings: “the message of the book”, said Huxley, was, “This is possible: for heaven’s sake be careful about it.” In his vision, humanity was facing a future world tranquilised by pleasure and drugs and the voluntary distractions of “civilised infantilisation”.



For Orwell, humanity was facing a permanent state of war and totalitarian mind-control, summed up by the image of "a boot stamping on a human face, for ever". For all the overlap, though, they are usually seen as contradictory, conflicting versions of the future.



Two

Title : ~~Two~~ Versions of the Future

The modern world looks to many like a dystopia, ~~and~~ greatest contributions of which are of Aldous Huxley's 1932 Brave New World and George Orwell's 1949 Nineteen Eighty-Four. Both writers ~~agreed~~ saw a future shaped by weapons of mass destruction and also agreed upon the danger of permanent social stratification by biological engineering and psychological conditioning (Huxley) or traditional class combined with totalitarian loyalty systems (Orwell). Both men imagined the future societies completely obsessed with sex, state-enforced repression, celibacy, celibate and narcotising promiscuity. Both thought the future being dominated by America and also that the governments would spend a lot of effort permanently trying to incite economic consumption. For all the overlap, though, they are usually seen as contradictory, conflicting versions



of the future. For Huxley, future was at pleasure, drugs and the voluntary distractions of "civilised infantilisation", whereas, for Orwell, future was at totalitarianism and a permanent state of war.

150 words