



Foucault on a Perfect Day

A New Historicist Reading of
This Perfect Day
a Novel by Ira Levin

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ABSTRACT

This Perfect Day is a science fiction novel. Ira Levin wrote this novel under the influence of Ayn Rand and anti-communism society of his time. Rejecting the idea of altruism and collectivism are main concerns of the novel, also the influence of Foucault's theory of power and knowledge and biopower can be traced in the story. This dystopian novel deals with concept of deleting individuality of people in both physical and mental aspects to gain the power of controlling them. Using New Historicism as a theoretical lens, this essay explores the novel in the light of the cultural, political and social condition in the date of its publication in 1970 in United States of America.

Keywords: New Historicism, Foucault's biopower, Foucault's Knowledge and power, This Perfect Day, Ayn Rand, Ira Levin, 1960-70, Collectivism, Altruism.

1. INTRODUCTION

*We also need to fulfill our task, which means, among other things,
watching television and death at the age of 62.*

This Perfect Day by Ira Levin

Imagine a government that controls everything, even the death of its members (in other words it murders its people so they won't live as much as nature allows them but as much as government decided for them) that's what Levin wants the readers to picture and then try to avoid being part of that society. He creates a unified world where there is no nation or religion existed, no race or group allows existing, everyone is a member of a community name "The Family". The physical appearance and mentality of men and women are in control of the government.

Story happens in 22nd century and technology for medicine is so advanced that the government can create people in a way that suits its ruling system and everyone is under the influences of drugs that guaranty the obedience of people by keeping them in a calm mode. The theory of bio power by Foucault is really applied to this society. That for the first time made me to think of This Perfect Day as a political protest, with changing in my view soon I see that Levin do not only borrow bio power from Foucault but also the theory of knowledge and power again by the French philosopher is one of the main bases of the story.

Foucault is not the only influence on the book; Ayn Rand and her anti-communism ideas also play an important role in formation of the novel. The novel being published in 1970s although The Second Red Scare ended over 13 years ago but the influence of it still existed in Levin's character. Levin some time in his youth (the years of the Second Red Scare) read a novel by Ayn Rand which later influences him in writing This Perfect Day a novel about individuality and the standing of society against it, named *The Fountainhead*. He later had some short visits with Rand and participates in her lectures. She was an activist of individual rights and lived in Russia when the country was under the power of communists. She was against communism and in America in 1947, during the Second Red Scare, testified as a "friendly witness" described the disparity between her personal experiences in the Soviet Union and the portrayal of it in the 1944 film Song of Russia. Rand argued that the film grossly misrepresented conditions in the Soviet Union, portraying life there as being much better and happier than it actually was. (Mayhew 2005, 188) later in the meetings she had with Levin, she mentions her situation in Russia many more times.

The setting and narration of story are like other dystopian novels and stories such as: 1985 by George Orwell or Harrison Bergeron by Kurt Vonnegut but Levin is not as pessimistic as his fellow writers and believes that even such a powerful government can be defeated. This can be partly due to the fact that Levin witnessed the collapse of communism in Russia.

I start to read story not as a science-fiction novel any more but as an account of the mind of Levin. The best way to do so was to look at it by the glasses of a new historicist. But what is new historicism? According to David