

# The Dynamics of Terror in Orwell's 1984

Malcolm R. Thorp

Few twentieth-century novels have been as provocative as George Orwell's *1984*.<sup>1</sup> Orwell may have wished it that way, for in his mind the book aimed at being a political satire—"in a sense, a fantasy"<sup>2</sup>—that reflected the author's disillusionment with the present (the story was largely written during 1947–48) as well as his fear of the future. To him, the political process had gone sour, and literature could only reflect that fact:

This is a political age. War, Fascism, concentration camps, rubber truncheons, atomic bombs, etc., are what we daily think about, even when we do not name them openly. We cannot help this. When you are on a sinking ship, your thoughts will be about sinking ships.<sup>3</sup>

Far from surrendering to the mysticism of violence, Orwell acts as a voice of warning, lamenting the passing of liberal values, and decrying the totalitarian boot forever crushing a human face. By deducing what might be the next step beyond the barbarity of such masters of inhumanity as Hitler and Stalin, he confronts us with the uncertainty of the future. And he is in a real sense blaming "everyman" for collaborating with the enemy, for succumbing too

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<sup>1</sup>For various interpretations, see *Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: Text, Sources, Criticism*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963); Samuel Hynes, ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971); Jeffrey Meyers, ed., *George Orwell, the Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). Two useful introductions to Orwell's fiction are Jeffrey Meyers, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), and Robert A. Lee, *Orwell's Fiction* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969). But the best study connecting *1984* with the corpus of Orwell's writings is Ruth Ann Lief, *Homage to Oceania* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969). There is a useful bibliography on Orwell by Jeffrey and Valerie Myers, *Orwell, an Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (New York: Garland, 1977). Two recent collections of essays on the theme of *1984* are Irving Howe, *1984 Revisited* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), and Peter Stansky, ed., *On Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1984).

<sup>2</sup>"In Front of Your Nose, 1945–1950," *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1968), 4:378.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 463.

easily to the lure of authoritarian solutions to the political ills of his time.<sup>4</sup>

This essay will explore the methods of totalitarian control envisioned in Orwell's famous anti-utopian projection into the future of world politics. In many ways, *1984* was a logical culmination of Orwell's career as a political writer,<sup>5</sup> and the book illustrates his belief that since the 1930s political behavior had become increasingly irrational. Orwell's morbid fears about a totalitarian future had their genesis in his experience in Civil War Spain, where he fought as a volunteer for the socialist cause in 1937. On the Barcelona front, Orwell witnessed firsthand an attempted *coup d'état* by the Communists, who tried to crush left-wing allies rather than to lead the coalition into battle against Franco's Fascists.<sup>6</sup> Disillusioned by such strife, Orwell (who was wounded in combat) returned home to England convinced a major war was on the horizon. This fear of impending calamity is reflected in his novel, *Coming Up for Air* (1939), which is written with a rather successful touch of comedy, in spite of Orwell's gloom. In this story, George Bolling, who personifies a twentieth-century John Bull, becomes obsessed with the possibilities of air raids and totalitarian violence. While returning to the scene of his youth at Lower Binfield, Bolling encounters the first action of the war to come when the RAF accidentally drops a bomb on a greengrocer's shop. Reflecting on the dangers of the contemporary predicament, Bolling concludes:

*It's all going to happen.* All the things you've got at the back of your mind, the things you're terrified of, the things that you tell yourself are just a nightmare or only happen in foreign countries. The bombs, the coloured shirts, the slogans, the enormous faces, the machine-guns squirting out of bedroom windows. . . . There's no escape. Fight against

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 564; Patrick Reilly, "Nineteen Eighty-Four: The Failure of Humanism," *Critical Quarterly* 24 (Autumn 1982): 19-30.

<sup>5</sup>The best full-length biography of Orwell is Bernard Crick, *George Orwell, A Life* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980). Better written and more stimulating are Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* (St. Albans, England: Paladin, 1974) and the companion volume, *Orwell: The Transformation* (London: Constable & Co., 1979). Stansky and Abrahams's volumes end in 1937, and their thesis of a character transformation from Eric Blair to George Orwell is not totally convincing. No one interested in Orwell should neglect George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1966), which is a major contribution to insight into Orwell, the man, as well as his works. Raymond Williams, *Orwell* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1971) is a perceptive essay on Orwell, the man and the writer, by a leading left-wing intellectual.

All of Orwell's works contain autobiographical fragments, but special mention should be made of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). The former work was Orwell's first book and contains important material on his life in Paris in the late 1920s, as well as a sympathetic account of life among the underclass people in these two capital cities. *The Road to Wigan Pier* stands out in its own right as perhaps the most important social document of the Great Depression. In this work Orwell also includes an autobiographical account, as well as his justification for socialism.

<sup>6</sup>George Orwell's Spanish Civil War experiences form the basis for his *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952).



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George Orwell in 1943



it if you like, or look the other way and pretend not to notice, or grab your spanner and rush out to do a bit of face-smashing along with the others. But there's no way out.<sup>7</sup>

Even the Allied victory against fascism in the Second World War did not turn Orwell from his pessimism. In 1945 he published his classic allegory, *Animal Farm*, where he probed the theme of revolutionary betrayal.<sup>8</sup> In this story, the animals of Manor Farm (Russia) seize control from the incompetent farmer, Jones (Everyman). The animals proclaim an egalitarian society, but in the course of time the pigs betray the revolution. Led by Napoleon (Stalin), the pigs assert that although all the animals are equal some are more equal than others. Thus, the revolution ends in exploitation, although the animals are not aware of the extent of their plight, for memory of the old days has fled, leaving them with no way to evaluate if they are better or worse off than before the revolution (a condition that, as we shall see, is repeated in Oceania in 1984). *Animal Farm* is also reflective of history in the 1940s, as the warring farms and farmers around Manor Farm represent German fascism (Frederick) and the Allies (Pilkington). The card game at the end of the book is likewise supposed to represent the Tehran Conference of 1943, where the animals and farmers trade obsequities, but the whole affair ends in discord as both the pigs and the men are caught in the act of simultaneously pulling the ace of spades.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, *Animal Farm* concludes with the revolution becoming a new form of tyranny distinguished from the old mainly by the greater efficiency of the new masters. But the very success of this new despotism raises the possibility of a totalitarian future for all mankind. As the card game demonstrates, Pilkington and his cronies are not morally superior to Napoleon and his minions. In other words, Orwell was convinced that western leaders in the initial stages of the "cold war" were as corrupted by power as their Russian counterparts and that the bloodletting of war had not cured the political ills apparent to Orwell in the 1930s. Indeed, to Orwell, the metaphor of a diseased patient was apropos: "I think one must continue the political struggle, just as the doctor must try to save the life of a patient who is probably going to die."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>George Orwell, *Coming Up for Air* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), 267.

<sup>8</sup>George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946).

<sup>9</sup>George Orwell, "Author's Preface to the Ukrainian Edition of *Animal Farm*," in *Collected Essays*, 3:402; Lee, *Orwell's Fiction*, 109.

<sup>10</sup>Orwell, *Collected Essays*, 4:289.

Still, Orwell holds out at least a glimmer of hope that a cure can be found for the maladies of political culture. In a much neglected essay entitled "Toward European Unity," written in 1947 while Orwell was completing *1984*, Orwell outlines three possibilities for the future. First, he argues that America might launch a preventative war against the Soviet Union, although he dismisses this as unlikely. Second, the cold war could continue until the Russians obtain atomic weapons. Then, after a short breathing spell, there would occur a devastating nuclear war which would destroy civilization, leaving perhaps a few million survivors to inhabit a wasteland. Orwell sees the third situation as having the greatest possibility of fulfillment:

The fear inspired by the atomic bomb and other weapons yet to come will be so great that everyone will refrain from using them. This seems to me the worst possibility of all. It would mean the division of the world among two or three vast super-states, unable to conquer one another and unable to be overthrown by any internal rebellion. In all probability their structure would be hierarchic, with a semi-divine caste at the top and outright slavery at the bottom, and the crushing out of liberty would exceed anything that the world has yet seen. Within each state the necessary psychological atmosphere would be kept up by complete severance from the outer world, and by a continuous phony war against rival states. Civilisations of this type might remain static for thousands of years.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, a great amount of similarity exists between this futuristic prediction and the global politics described in *1984*.<sup>12</sup> But it is important to observe that Orwell does not see the emergence of such a system of power as inevitable. The best possibility for preventing the horrors of a future world carved up among three predatory totalitarian regimes, he believes, is for some major area of the world—such as Europe—to establish democratic socialism on a firm footing. Such a state would not only offer the world a model for a humane future but also act as a bulwark against the tendencies toward totalitarianism. Yet in his conclusion, Orwell returns to a pessimistic note, for he observes that the outlook for civilization is very dark. In Orwell's mind, the distinct possibility exists that the fantasy of *1984* could become reality.<sup>13</sup>

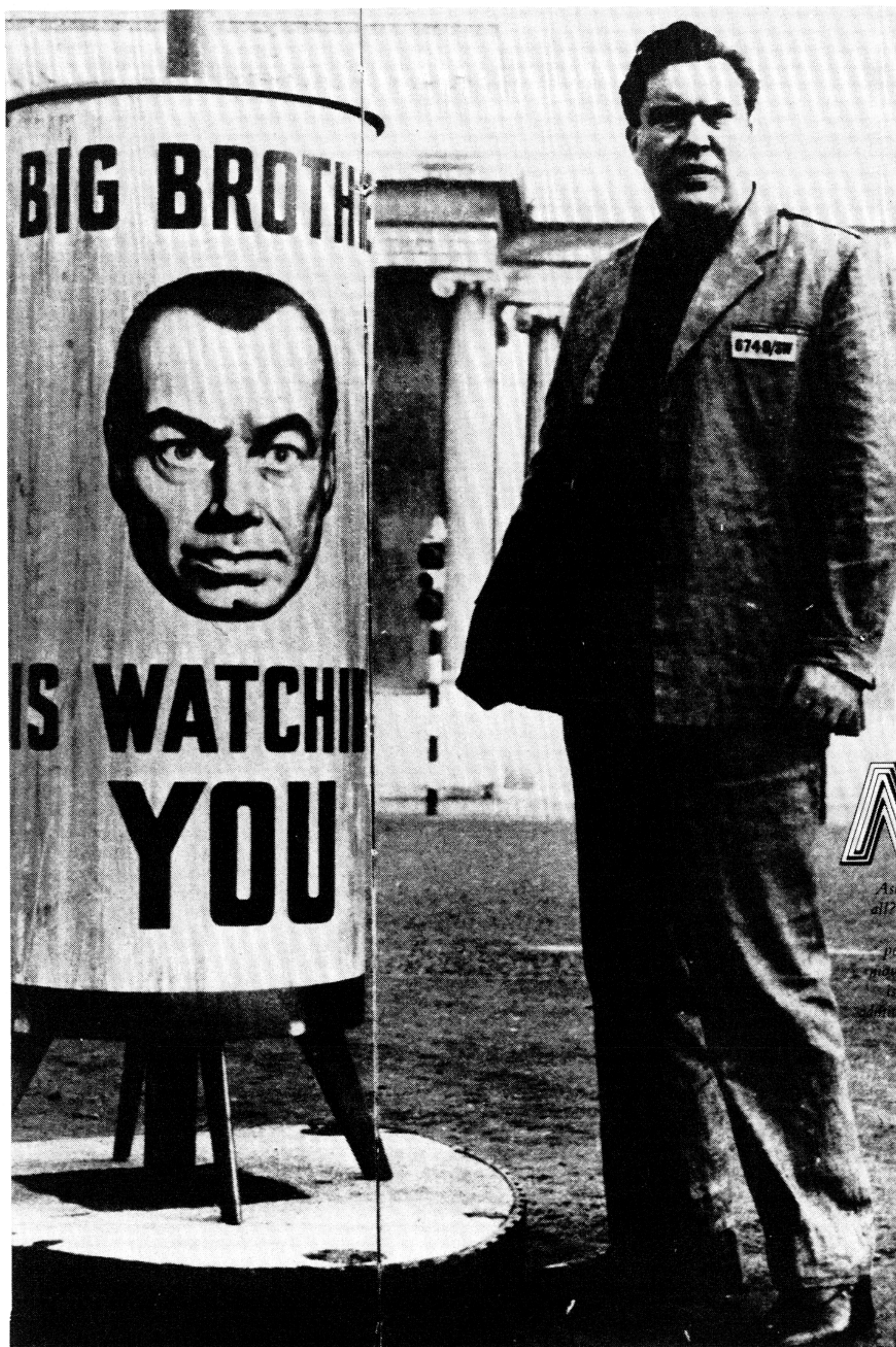
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<sup>11</sup>Orwell, *Collected Essays*, 4:371.

<sup>12</sup>The three superpowers in *1984* were Oceania (comprised of America, Great Britain, and the British Empire), Eurasia (formerly the Soviet Union and Europe), and Eastasia. See Orwell's discussion of such a division of the world in his critique of James Burnham in "Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle" (*ibid.*, 360–74).

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 423–29.





Poster from the movie *1984*, starring Edmond O'Brien (ABPC, 1957)



## II

The misfortunes of Winston Smith, Orwell's anti-hero, reveal the political system of the ruling state of Oceania in 1984.<sup>14</sup> Winston's mid-life identity crisis leads him to question the wisdom of, and even to develop hatred for, Big Brother, that enormous face on posters in London. While no one knows if Big Brother even exists, he does personify the reality of power within Oceania. For the slogan "Big Brother Is Watching You" becomes, as the story progresses, more than a simple platitude. Winston begins his rebellion with the thought that the state might control almost everything, but man still has a few cubic centimeters inside his skull that are his own which the all-pervasive Thought Police cannot penetrate. He discovers that this is not necessarily true. His rather amateurish dabblings into treason, as well as his illicit affair with the Anti-Sex league deviant, Julia, are from the beginning carefully monitored by the Thought Police. Through his ordeal of arrest and internment, Winston learns about the reality of power. After enduring the horrors of psychological rehabilitation, including an experience in the infamous Room 101, Winston emerges as a mindless puppet who in the end, along with the rest of the masses, loves Big Brother.

The party in control of Oceania is named Ingsoc, abbreviated from its predecessor, English socialism. Ingsoc, however, is socialist in name only; in fact, the Party does not adhere to any ideology. The sole purpose of the Party is to manipulate power on behalf of the managerial elite within the state. Comprising only about two percent of the population, members of the Inner Party include the technocrats, politicians, scientists, and intellectuals. This group differs from its totalitarian predecessors in that the Ingsoc hierarchy is chosen solely on the basis of the party member's ability to assist the state. The "Old Boy" principle and even oligarchical connections do not enter into the selection process. Below this managerial elite exists a wider base of bureaucratic functionaries, about twelve percent of the population. These beadle-like agents of despotism are of value to the hierarchy and are certain of survival as long as they keep in line with

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<sup>14</sup>George Woodcock relates: "All his [Orwell's] heroes are failures; indeed, he once said that every life, seen from the inside, was a failure" (*Crystal Spirit*, 227). Besides Winston Smith and George Bowling, the most memorable of the Orwellian anti-heroes are Michael Flory (*Burmese Days* [1934]) and Gordon Comstock (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* [1936]). Flory, an outcast among the English imperialists in Upper Burma, increasingly comes to reject their attitude toward the natives. Through Flory's tragic story, which ends in suicide, Orwell explores the evils of imperialism, which is the "religion" of the European Club, the organization that condemns Flory as a backslider. Comstock is a young, struggling writer whose antipathy is for the "money god" of capitalism. Eventually he is swallowed by the system and abandons poetry for a career as an advertising slogan writer.



politics. Before his rebellion, Winston Smith was a typical member of this group. Employed in the Ministry of Truth, he operated a Memory Hole, a device that obliterates unpleasant facts contrary to party propaganda of the moment.

On the surface, at least, the methods of terror Ingsoc employs are typical of the ruthless means totalitarian regimes use in the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> For example, purges and “vaporizations” of internal dissidents are thought an essential part of the mechanics of a government which uses such conventional instruments of brutality as truncheons, machine guns, grenades, bombs, rockets, hidden microphones, dictaphones, two-way televisions, and police helicopter patrols. In addition, Ingsoc employs the usual methods of mass psychology, such as propaganda broadcasts and Two Minute Hate Drills that are so effectively staged that the emotional frenzy momentarily mesmerizes even Winston.

However, in *1984* Orwell emphasizes that the totalitarianism of the future will exceed even the most brutal methods of the past. In *1984*, the state has developed a sophisticated technology that includes not only Memory Holes but also novel-writing machines and surveillance equipment that would seem to imply the use of computerized systems. Indeed, no parallels to the all-pervasive methods of espionage encountered in the novel exist. Secret microphones are not original, but the fact that they are hidden in the remote countryside as well as in the attic of the junk shop where Winston and Julia have their clandestine love affair is significant. Even the speck of dust that Winston places on his secret diary in order to determine if the police have searched his personal belongings is carefully placed back on the book by the Thought Police, leaving the impression that perhaps nothing of importance goes unnoticed. We should remember, too, that Winston’s secret phobia—rats—is discovered by this intricate spy network that seems not only to monitor outward behavior but also able to probe into the inward depths of the psyche.

Terror in *1984*, however, goes beyond the technology of espionage and of beating people into submission. It involves even more than scientifically devised means of mass psychology. The essence of the new despotism of *1984* is the use of subtle means of manipulating perceptions of reality. Terror involves mind control. “Reality,” it is

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<sup>15</sup>Meyers, *A Reader's Guide to George Orwell*, 144–54. Much of the argument that follows, however, disagrees with Meyers’s thesis that “*1984* portrays the very real though unfamiliar political terrorism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia transposed into the landscape of London in 1941–44” (p. 145). For a recent discussion written for a popular audience of the technology in *1984*, see David Goodman, “Countdown to *1984*: Big Brother May Be Right on Schedule,” *Futurist* 12 (December 1978): 345–55. Goodman’s article demonstrates a much higher level of technology than Meyers is willing to admit.



emphasized, "is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else."<sup>16</sup> The Party determines what is truth. An explicitly behaviorist assumption of the book is that by controlling the environment, especially perceptions that are fed into the mind, the Party can make people believe anything that it wants them to. Logical inconsistencies that cannot be eradicated through control of information are rationalized through the intellectual device of "double think"—the process of holding two contrary opinions as truth simultaneously, in spite of contradictions. Individual interpretations of truth are heresies, in the eyes of the Party; the "truth" must be interpreted for you. Free agency does not exist.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in Oceania there is no need for the existence of law. Attitudes, beliefs, and rules of proper social conduct are never written down. One is expected to display more than outward conformity. "A Party member is required to have not only right opinions, but the right instincts."<sup>18</sup> The loyal Party member whose mind functions properly is referred to as a "Goodthinker." The dissident, however, is always anxiety ridden, fearful of giving himself away. "Your worst enemy," Orwell remarks, "was your own nervous system. At any moment the tension inside you was liable to translate itself into some visible symptom."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Winston's anxiety is triggered by rather normal self-doubts associated with his amateur endeavors as a revolutionary. A feeling of uncertainty always gnaws at Winston: Is he really on the right side? Is isolated rebellion a meaningful endeavor? After all, the Party might be right.

Even sexual passion is frowned upon but, when condoned, is closely regulated. For the Party perceives a close connection between sexual abstention and proper political behavior. The hedonistic Julia, who is more passionate and less idealistic than her lover, perceives why sex is a political issue:

"When you make love, you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time. All this marching up and down and cheering and waving flags is simply

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<sup>16</sup>George Orwell, *1984* (New York: The New American Library, 1961), 205.

<sup>17</sup>According to Patrick Reilly, "*The new God [the Personified State] declines to lose a single soul, like Origen's deity rather than the more orthodox figure of the Last Judgment.* Hell has no place in the theology of Oceania, for hell is God's shame, his admission that there are wills too stubborn, evils too obdurate, even for his love to overcome—every hellbound soul is the devil's victory. The devils of *1984*, own-life, sexcrime and the rest, win no victories and are indeed permitted to exist simply to demonstrate the futile folly of seduction, in exalting God the more by their humiliating impotence. Winston, misinterpreting himself as rebel, is really acting out his role in an Oceanic *felix culpa*" (Reilly, "Failure of Humanism," 22).

<sup>18</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 174.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 56.



sex gone sour. If you're happy inside yourself, why should you get excited about Big Brother and the Three-Year Plans and the Two Minutes Hate and all the rest of their bloody rot?"<sup>20</sup>

Not only personal relationships, but even the establishment of one's individual identity is impossible in these circumstances, for there is no access to the experiences of other human beings in time. It is a cardinal party doctrine that "who controls the past . . . controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."<sup>21</sup> This brilliant Orwellian insight is significant because it relates to the way we think. As Trygve Tholfsen writes:

In a man's mind the past is constantly present in memory, the future in expectation. In the split second that constitutes "the present," the concrete reality is recollection of the past and anticipation of the future. As Dilthey put it, "the present as such can never be experienced. At a given moment a man embraces both past and future in his consciousness."<sup>22</sup>

Orwell is perceptive in realizing that the past cannot be totally denied to man. Winston's mind contains memories that not even the Party can eradicate. Nevertheless, the Party denies Winston any information that would enable him to corroborate his memories, as well as a comparative perspective that can be obtained only from encounters with the experiences of other human beings.

In another context, Orwell asserts that "a people without a history is like a person without a memory."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the mutability of the past is at the very basis of mind control in *1984*. The Party controls access to the past for two reasons. As already mentioned, by controlling the past, the Party insures that the individual has no standard of comparison, no method of judging the authenticity of human experience."<sup>24</sup> But the overriding reason is the need to safeguard the infallibility of the Party:

It is not merely that speeches, statistics, and records of every kind must be constantly brought up to date in order to show that the predictions of the Party were in all cases right. It is also that no change of doctrine or in political alignment can ever be admitted. For to change one's mind, or even one's policy, is a confession of weakness.<sup>25</sup>

History must be constantly revised in order to preserve the myth of perfection. Through this process, Big Brother becomes omnipotent.

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 110–11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>22</sup>Trygve R. Tholfsen, *Historical Thinkings, an Introduction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 248.

<sup>23</sup>Quotation is provided by Professor Arthur J. Slavin of the University of Louisville in a public lecture at Brigham Young University, spring 1980.

<sup>24</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 32–33.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 175.



Winston can remember that he was born in 1944 or 1945. As he attempts to reconstruct historical episodes that have transpired during his life, he recalls an air raid (about 1954) that caught everyone by surprise. An atomic bomb had been dropped on Colchester, and a war had ensued. In this situation of crisis, he remembers that something drastic happened to the government of the day. He vividly recalls being crowded into a tube station with his mother and younger sister. A grief-stricken, drunken old man dressed in middle-class attire had repeatedly sobbed, “ ‘We didn’t ought to ’av trusted ’em. I said so, Ma, didn’t I? That’s what come of trusting ’em. I said so all along.’ ”<sup>26</sup> Winston cannot remember who it was they should not have trusted. At this crucial point, his memory fails him. Following this incident, he can remember only one war after another, followed by the Great Purges of the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was about this time he first recalls hearing about Big Brother. But beyond these vague recollections, “everything melted into a mist.”<sup>27</sup> Winston is a man without a perspective on his own life, and this becomes the source of his identity crisis.

In a real sense, he suffers from amnesia: “He was alone. The past was dead, the future was unimaginable.”<sup>28</sup> Winston attempts to alleviate his anxiety through piecing together fleeting memories and inner feelings in a diary he has illegally purchased. The antique tome with its creamy smooth paper fascinates Winston. But when he attempts to write, his creative impulses are stymied. His thoughts are disjointed; his inner self does not emerge. Thus, Orwell establishes the impression that creativity is impossible within the confines of such a despotic system: “If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable—what then?”<sup>29</sup>

It is important to point out that Winston does not discover ultimate “truth” on his own. Through reflecting on his experiences as a low-level technician in the Ministry of Truth, he can piece together bits of information that tell him much about how the Party operates. And he can even prove that the Party has in fact distorted the past to serve its own interests. Hence, when Winston at last obtains a copy of the book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 25. The condition of amnesia is developed by Orwell in his novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935). In this earlier book, the suffering patient is Dorothy Hare, whose condition is at least in part self-inflicted. She is a victim of her own inhibitions (sexual), as well as her natural timidity that enables her to be exploited by her insensitive father, whose responsibilities for pastoral care she is forced to undertake. Although Dorothy is also oppressed by the pettiness of local society, she is not, strictly speaking, a victim of society, as is the case with Winston Smith.

<sup>29</sup>Orwell, 1984, 69.



written by the archtraitor Emmanuel Goldstein, he discovers that the book merely confirms what he already knows. At the same time, however, he is made aware that his knowledge is incomplete, for he knows only how the Party operates; he does not understand the theoretical foundations of power. The “why” remains a mystery until after his arrest. By then it is too late, for Winston, whom Orwell characterizes as “The Last Man in Europe,” is transformed into a vacuous-minded Party hack. Thus, contrary to what has been written,<sup>30</sup> Winston’s experience does not necessarily leave hope for a future transformation of Oceania; Winston’s quest fails, and if his ultimate discovery of truth is a victory, it is a pyrrhic one at best.

### III

According to Bernard Crick, “*Nineteen Eighty-four* can be seen as a ‘development model’, of a kind familiar to economic historians and social scientists, and every bit as tightly organised, logical and internally consistent as Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, the masterpiece of English political philosophy.”<sup>31</sup> But is this really the case? It seems Orwell’s book is weak at the same point where Hobbes’s treatise displays strength—that is, in his discussion on the connection between the abstraction of power and its relationship to the world of human reality. In *1984*, Orwell clearly exaggerates the extent to which Ingsoc wields authority. According to Inner Party theoretician O’Brien, power has become an absolute end in itself: “We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness; only power, pure power.”<sup>32</sup> Certainly Hobbes, as a political philosopher, would be the first to disagree. For the human element is always an ingredient in politics. Never can we have pure political power while human beings are still human. Contrary to O’Brien’s assertion, the Party cannot create human nature (men, he asserts, are “infinitely malleable”), for men do not always act in uniform patterns; hence they never have a “nature” that can be so manipulated. What is manipulated in Oceania is the environment, not man’s essence. Thus, at least a

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<sup>30</sup>David L. Kubal, *Outside the Whale; George Orwell's Art and Politics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 44.

<sup>31</sup>Crick, *Orwell*, xx. Irving Howe sees O’Brien’s speech on power as a brilliant intuitive insight that anticipates the actuality in the Communist state where the ideology of the party is crumbling yet its power survives: “the grim possibility is that they [Communist leaders] now have a realistic view of themselves as creatures holding power simply for the sake of power, and they find this quite sufficient.” It remains to be seen, however, if the nakedness of power can provide its own justification within the modern state. (Irving Howe, “Enigmas of Power,” *The New Republic* 188 [Year-end issue, 1982]: 27–32.)

<sup>32</sup>Orwell, *1984*, 217.



glimmer of hope exists that the future might produce a more capable dissident than Winston Smith, one with the incisiveness of mind necessary to outwit O'Brien.

Another problem related to the human element in politics is found in Orwell's discussion of the "proles," who constitute the remaining eighty-five percent of the population. Living in the grey slums of London, they are shown to be aware of the degeneracy of the past two decades—reflected in the deterioration in the quality of beer served in the dingy pubs. But the masses seem to have been bought off with pornography, machine-made salacious novels, rigged lotteries, and the humdrum routine of just trying to make a living.<sup>33</sup> Except for isolated police raids, terror does not extend into the prole sections of London. There is no need, for the revolutionary impetus is simply lacking. As Winston comes to realize: "*Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.*"<sup>34</sup> Truly, this is a brilliant insight, but does it fit the English working class that has been conscious of its existence for nearly two hundred years? And is the world really so corrupt that people would allow themselves to be so manipulated without the application of coercive force? What would happen in a contemporary totalitarian society if the majority of the citizens were left to themselves without the application of terror? One must question Orwell's realism on this point.

For other model builders, Orwell's novel is seen as an insightful exposé of the drabness of life in the socialist state, with its combination of public affluence and private squalor.<sup>35</sup> To be sure, England in 1984 is a vast seedy slum. Razor blades must be purchased on the black market; Victory Gin is consumed for dulling the mind rather than for its taste; and the lifts do not work (a common problem even in the heyday of capitalism). But the reason for these conditions has more to do with controlling people than with revealing the woes of socialist states.<sup>36</sup> For Orwell is arguing that these conditions are planned and are not a by-product of an inherently bad economic system. In Oceania, Ingsoc keeps the economy on a war footing, even in times of peace. The rationale for this is that revolutions traditionally

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<sup>33</sup>"By lack of understanding they [the proles] remained sane. They simply swallowed everything, and what they swallowed did them no harm, because it left no residue behind, just as a grain of corn will pass undigested through the body of a bird" (ibid., 129). We might question Orwell's plausibility here: to suppose that human beings will not be affected by life's experiences is a false assumption on his part.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 61; italics in original.

<sup>35</sup>James McNamara and Dennis J. O'Keeffe, "Waiting for 1984: Orwell and Evil," *Encounter* 59 (December 1982): 44.

<sup>36</sup>Orwell, 1984, 163–64.



occur in societies where expectations are on the rise, not where the masses are subjugated. In *1984*, Ingsoc contrives squalor and shortages of consumer goods both to prevent social mobility and to divert the energies of the Outer Party from materialistic concerns to the worship of the state. In this regard, Orwell definitely is not anticipating the economics of Milton Friedman, nor is there any evidence that if he had lived in 1984 he would be a neo-conservative.<sup>37</sup>

Still, the novel has important insights on how terror can be achieved. Smashing faces with rubber truncheons is only one aspect of terror, perhaps not even the most important. Winston Smith's struggle is not impaired by physical force, but by the more subtle means of creating intellectual disorientation. Much of Orwell's success in *1984* lies in his creating a plausible description of how totalitarianism can destroy the individual and turn him into an automaton. Indeed, what is unsettling about Orwell's novel is that, in it, terror is not a nightmare; terror is a realistic possibility.

#### POSTSCRIPT

In addition to the works already cited, the following sources are of special interest in understanding the evolution of the ideas developed in *1984*. One recently published document appears to be of considerable importance to Orwellian scholars. Bernard Crick has published an outline written in 1943 in which Orwell sets down the basic ideas for his next book. It appears that he then split his ideas to form the bases for *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Dating the origins of these books to 1943 is of considerable importance to students of Orwell. New insight into the genesis of *Animal Farm* is also promised in a forthcoming book, *Orwell: The War Broadcasts*, to be copublished by BBC Publications and G. Duckworth & Co. in the fall of 1984. The book will be based on the discovery of more than two hundred and fifty letters, as well as sixty-two radio scripts, by William J. West in the BBC archives at Reading, England. Orwell was the producer of a wartime propaganda program, and many of the themes of the broadcasts were later to influence his fiction, including *1984*.

Orwell was obviously influenced by Evgenii I. Zamiatin's novel *We*, written in 1923. Isaac Deutscher accuses Orwell of borrowing the basic theme of *1984* from this anti-utopian projection (see "1984—The Mysticism of Cruelty," *1984: Text, Sources, Criticism*, ed. Howe, 196–204). But the reader will want to compare

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<sup>37</sup>For the neo-conservative argument, see Norman Podhoretz, "If Orwell Were Alive Today," *Harpers*, January 1983, 30–37. All the evidence indicates, however, that Orwell remained a committed left-wing Socialist until his death. See, for example, Orwell, *Collected Essays*, 4:564; Crick, *Orwell*, xiv and passim; Alexander Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 205–6; D. Rankin, "Orwell's Intention in *1984*," *English Language Notes* 12 (March 1975): 188–92.



Deutscher's treatment to Orwell's review of Zamiatin's *We* (Orwell, *Collected Essays*, 4:95–99). Orwell's essay, "Prophecies of Fascism" (*ibid.*, 2:45–49) is a discussion of his negative reaction to Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, in which he compares this novel to H. G. Wells's *The Sleeper Wakes* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. For a scholarly comparison of Orwell and Huxley, see Jenni Calder, *Huxley and Orwell, Brave New World and 1984* (London: Edward, Arnold, 1976).

Many of Orwell's insights into totalitarian methods were derived from secondary accounts of the Russian purges of the 1930s. The most important of these sources was Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1941). Orwell reviewed this book in *Collected Essays*, 3:270–82. For a thorough treatment of the intellectual connection between these two writers, see Jenni Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968).

Orwell was also influenced by the American neo-conservative James Burnham, whose book *The Managerial Revolution* (New York: John Day, 1941) provides the basis for Orwell's understanding of the technocratic elite. Orwell attacked but did not deny Burnham's thesis of the inevitable movement toward such a revolution ("James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution," *Collected Essays*, 4:192–215; and "Burnham's View of the Contemporary World Struggle," *ibid.*, 360–74).

Orwell's 1941 wartime propaganda contribution, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (reprinted Penguin Books, 1982, with an introduction by Bernard Crick; also in *Collected Essays*, 2:74–134) is an important statement concerning the ethos of English "National Character" and is one of the few pieces of World War II propaganda that is still worth reading. Orwell also discusses, by contrast, the methods of fascism, as well as the need for a socialist revolution in England. One should also read his "Notes on Nationalism" (*Collected Essays*, 3:410–31) for a relevant critique of the dangers of nationalistic xenophobia and Orwell's views on internationalism.

In three important essays, Orwell explores the themes of freedom of expression and the relationship between politics and language. One can also see in these essays Orwell's pet theme that the intelligentsia has been anti-Fascist without being anti-totalitarian (see "The Prevention of Literature," *ibid.*, 4:81–95; "Politics and the English Language," *ibid.*, 156–70; and "Writers and Leviathan," *ibid.*, 463–70). As Robert Lee has stated, "The 'end of line' in *1984* is the loss of consciousness—and Orwell specifically defines this as the result of the failure of language" (Lee, *Orwell's Fiction*, 55). This is why in *1984* Orwell goes to great lengths to show how the language of "Newspeak" had been formulated (see especially the appendix to *1984*, 246–56).

Any scholarly discussion of totalitarianism begins with Hannah Arendt's classic study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958). Also useful are Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1941), and his insightful afterword to the American Library Edition of *1984* (257–67).