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Research Article



Revisiting the Idea of Totalitarianism in George Orwell's *Ninety Eighty Four*

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the lessons about truth and relevance that may be gained from literature by reading George Orwell's dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the context of philosopher Stanley Cavell's idea of "living scepticism". According to the idea, we can view the novel as a representation of life under a totalitarian system. The protagonists in the totalitarian society of the novel experience this experienced scepticism, which is a state of

confusion and doubt brought on by indoctrination as well as physical and psychological punishment. The three main types of authoritarian experiences that are imagined in the book are scepticism of the outside world, scepticism of language, and scepticism of other people's brains. The focus of the article is on the scepticism of other minds and totalitarian lived meaning among these three. It explicitly inquires as to who may be the "perfect case" in order for the main character to appreciate the viewpoints of others. Intimacy, privacy, love, brutality, and knowledge are all related in some way in the novel's imagined world. The article contends that through exposing us to The Party's peculiar unlearning pedagogy, Orwell's writing offers us a nightmare image of the elimination of the possibilities for love. What does it mean at the book's conclusion for the main character to "love" Big Brother? In the dystopian society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the reader might utilise these crucial questions to assess her own moral and intellectual limits. Can you imagine being so obsessed with Big Brother? Or does the use of the term "love" in this situation simply aim to provide the reader the ability to distinguish between speech that makes sense and speech that doesn't?

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Dystopia, Big Brother, Culture, Allegory, Psychology, Politics, Doctrinarian, Power, Social Values, Human Relations, Scepticism

Introduction

Twelve years after the publication of George Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but well into its famous career as a classic of dystopian literature, the Afterword was appended. Erich Fromm, a German philosopher, was the author. When discussing Orwell and his work, a common school of critical thought favours global categories over national ones, as evidenced by the analysis of Fromm that was previously excerpted. This view, which is still widely accepted, holds that Orwell stands for a seeker of universal truth who is unconcerned with ideological commitment or minor political differences. The claim that Orwell made no effort to show that his heart was in the right place, or the left place... He was interested merely in conveying the truth stated in 1952 by American literary critic Lionel Trilling, for example, is backed by this argument. Even while the nature of that truth is still up for debate, we can nevertheless come to the conclusion that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, like its creator, is interested in deeper truths about the nature of the modern world. In terms of politics, freedom can be characterised as a liberty issue that emphasises individual liberties and opportunities for all. It differs from other forms of human compulsion in this way, such as the colonisation process that gives rise to the master-slave relationship. People are said to have "free will" when their decisions are unaffected by forces or circumstances outside of themselves. If, however, one's freedom is predetermined, then being free is defined as the ability to do as one pleases within the bounds of one's capabilities, which are either directly or indirectly influenced by the external environment.

When discussing the subject of "Fiction and Truth, Learning and Literature", it is nearly impossible to avoid mentioning George Orwell's *1949*. I'll limit myself to only two. The most

glaring example is the contradictory fact that Orwell's fictional works are frequently utilised as instructional resources, possibly mostly by high school instructors, to promote student discussion on the risks that dictatorships pose to people's access to, preservation of, and respect for truth. Furthermore, it appears to have been written with a definite instructional goal. There is little doubt that Orwell intended for his writing to serve as a warning to readers about the dangers of totalitarianism that exist in the real world and the consequences for societies that are willing to renounce the idea of objective truth (Orwell, 1968: 460). Additionally, it makes sense that some individuals “cannot read Orwell” in an age where there appears to be a growing contempt for science and truth, as well as among those who disagree with the assertion that, in the words of the young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, “our house is on fire” (Conant, 2000: 269). Also included in the same book is Rorty's unambiguous reply to Conant's objection.

This paper won't focus on that subject, though, as I have already written about it elsewhere (Lofgren, 2019). Through this debate, which will act as a springboard and a source of compelling interpretive arguments, the subject will instead continue in a somewhat different but related direction. So instead of focusing on the concept of truth in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I'll concentrate more on the novel's analysis of ambiguity in a totalitarian society. In order to accomplish this, I'll concentrate on the connection between the novel's understanding of truth and the common language philosophy that Conant highlights in his analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Conant, in my opinion, makes a fascinating link between Stanley Cavell's idea of scepticism and the novel's portrayal of the destruction of truth. This article's major objective is to build and broaden this relationship in order to ascertain what lessons we may learn from the book as a result. I'll make reference to a few of Rorty's interpretive claims from time to time in this research since I think they (maybe unexpectedly) make the connections between them increasingly clearer.

But given the additional specific situation of a multidisciplinary research conversation concerning philosophy, literature, and pedagogy that the current issue of *Policy Futures in Education* seeks to engage in, it seems almost impossible to ignore a particular interpretive conflict between two eminent philosophers about the function of objective truth in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I'm talking to a debate that took place between James Conant and Richard Rorty, a supporter of neo-pragmatism and unambiguous philosophy. The conversation shifted from Rorty's relatively novel interpretation of Orwell in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, where he claims that “the question surrounding 'the possibility of truth' is a red herring”, to other subjects (1989: 182). Conant claims in *Rorty and His Critics* that Rorty is “unable to grasp Orwell” in “a very literal sense,” and that this point of view serves as the foundation of his counterargument (Conant, 2000: 269). Rorty's clear response to Conant's criticism is also contained in the same book.

This book provides a glimpse into life in a totalitarian society where men have lost control of their inner selves in London, the capital of Oceania. Only Winston Smith, the book's main character, makes an effort to resist indoctrination. In the novel, England is shown as being

an outpost of Oceania, a large totalitarian society that includes North America, South Africa, and Australia but no longer serves as the head of an Empire. The Party, which is led by a man by the name of Big Brother, is in charge of running the nation. There are three sections to the work. The main character Winston Smith is introduced in part one in the background of a rigid and authoritarian society. The second section talks of his love for Julia and the fleeting joy of their union. In the third chapter, Winston is imprisoned, tortured, and ultimately loses his intellectual integrity at the hands of the Thought Police. Making political writing into an art was Orwell's goal. (*From Why I Write*, 1946)

The novel, *Nineteen Eighty-four* is anti-utopian. The utopian genre that flourished in nineteenth-century literature arose and grew primarily as a critique and an opposition to utopian fiction, and depicts utopia gone wrong. The book demonstrates Orwell's steadfast opinion that a totalitarian society deprives man of his dynamic potential for life. The human personality has been destroyed in this situation, and man has been reduced to a component of a process that he is never given the opportunity to comprehend or manage. The “totalitarian danger lies within ourselves and in all the political structures of our time”, according to Orwell. (Gollo Mann, 277.) Oceanians are compelled to adore Big Brother. Big Brother has never been viewed. He appears as a visage on billboards and a voice on television. The party has decided to present itself to the public under the garb of Big Brother. As these emotions are expressed more easily toward a person than an organisation, Big Brother is someone to whom you focus your love, terror, and affection. One thing to take note of is a poster with the text “Big Brother is monitoring you” that has a huge face.

Winston starts to rebel against the government in little ways as his dissatisfaction grows. Winston's first act of defiance is to purchase and keep a diary. This offence is classified as a thought crime and is fatal. When there was a knock at the door while Winston was writing a diary, he became so afraid because he feared the thinking police had arrived. Winston sat there as still as a mouse, his heart hammering like a drum, but his face, possibly from old practise, was probably expressionless. By deliberately destroying people's memories and bombarding their minds with propaganda, the Party is able to replace people's memories with its own version of reality. In the first pages of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, the reader is informed that writing is a terrible crime in Oceania and that, if discovered, it will likely result in death. Smith acknowledges in the opening of his diary that “to mark the paper was the decisive deed” and that he was aware that it was a capital offence. The only thing he needs, he realises, is bravery because “the actual writing would be easy” (10). He intended to discredit a communist nation. Government uses a variety of tools, such as telescreens, thought police, newspeak, and doublethink, among others, to completely control people's thoughts. In Orwell's hypothetical universe, virtually every public and private location is monitored via “tele screens” that also transmit announcements, news, and propaganda. Social media preserves detailed data on user preferences and behaviours. The thought police can constantly see and listen to party members thanks to the tele screens, which also broadcast information and propaganda for the party. Like every other party member's residence, Winston's has a

television. Propaganda is another application for the television displays. The Thought Police, a group that keeps an eye on people's movements and activities as well as tries to delve into their brains and learn what they are thinking, is one of the tools the government uses to exert control over the populace.

The second responsibility of the dystopian protagonist is to present a “counter-narrative” in opposition to the dominant narrative. This work was inspired by the ideological mapping. Winston's seemingly insignificant but significant small acts of rebellion against the Party—including writing his own thoughts in his journal, having a secret association with Julia, and ultimately failing to overthrow the Party by joining O'Brien's enigmatic "Brotherhood"—are at the centre of the counter-narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston's endeavour to "carry on the human lineage in an inhuman environment seeking to deform and stifle it" is described in the novel as the culmination of each small rebellion into a greater counter-story. (Orwell, 1984, p. Here, we once more witness the dystopian emphasis on the universal in action. Winston advocates both for the people of Oceania and for all of humanity. In the Ministry of Truth, O'Brien confronts Winston, telling him, “If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. We are the insince your race no longer exists. Do you realise you are alone?” (Orwell, p. 271, in italics). Although Winston is the specific target of this statement, its overall implications go far further. The Party addresses heritors problems that are relevant to people as species-beings. Instead than retraining one to be a different or "proper" kind of man or to think about society or politics in a particular way, its goal is to eradicate the idea of thinking "man" completely. Winston's counter-narrative emphasises resistance against this threat of global annihilation, notwithstanding the futility of such resistance. Winston's opposition teaches us to question the conceptual frameworks that could eventually cause our own society to resemble Oceania.

The English disaster novel, on the other hand, typically supports ingrained ideals, particularly those that centre on Britain's role as an imperial power and the significance of English culture. It first surfaced in the late nineteenth century, much like the dystopia, in the wake of a protracted economic depression that weakened public confidence and sparked worries about the country's potential loss of global dominance. The very existence of these so-called primitive peoples generated a pervasive ambiguity about the status of English civilisation in relation to the rest of the world when read in light of recently popularised Darwinian notions of adaptation and evolution. After 1875, British imperial expansion led to this ambivalence. From their vantage point at the top of the food chain, the English were tasked with revealing the allegedly barbarous. On the one hand, the colonial encounter justified the imperial civilising mission. Darwin, however, held that societies, like animals, might degenerate and that social evolution did not always entail historical advancement. The English could only fall from that point forth, even if they were among the most powerful countries at the end of the nineteenth century.

One may reasonably describe *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a book about a catastrophe. The existing world order was genuinely post-catastrophic because it emerged after a protracted

period of nuclear warfare, as revealed by Winston's fuzzy memories and the historical account in Emmanuel Goldstein's book (Orwell, 1984 32–3, 194). Both catastrophic world-reduction and dystopian world-building led to the creation of Oceania. Because of the political split of the world into three equally potent superstates, as stated in the Goldstein book and later confirmed by O'Brien, Oceania is the world.

All sense of individuality and independence is destroyed by the party. Everyone shares the same dingy apartments, the same food, and the same clothing. Life is consistent and structured. Nobody can be singular. It is now illegal to write in a journal like Winston does. Only the ideas that the party wants people to think are allowed. Independent thought can be risky since it might inspire uprising. According to O'Brien, this independence is a sign of madness. To further the demands and objectives of the party, independence thought must be crushed. The reason Winston and Julia fail is because they think they are unique. But their detention and torture shatter this spirit. If Winston is a man, O'Brien responds, he is the last man alive. Winston is able to discover simplicity and beauty in a world that is otherwise terrifying, ugly, and violent because he seems to be inspired by music. The song "Under the spreading chestnut tree, I sold you and you sold me" is playing over the telescreen. The song appears to depict the broken emotions of these three men, who were once members of the Inner party but have since lost everything. Mr. Charrington teaches Winston the poem that begins, "Oranges and Lemons Say the Bells of St. Clements". Throughout the novel, Winston clings to this rhyme and looks for it in its entirety. A regular human being needs a nice and hearty life. The freedom of speech, the freedom of the mind, and the freedom to love and be loved are necessities for the average individual. No one has any of these freedoms in Orwell's authoritarian society. Men are required to do nothing except obey the party, and only the party. Through deception and conspiracies, totalitarianism can only be temporarily displaced. Readers of *Nineteen Eighty Four* get a sense of how INGSOC destroys lives and renders the mere notion of conspiracy useless through the characters. In a totalitarian state like Oceania, where man's life is devoid of its dynamic possibilities, "1984" demonstrates Orwell's unwavering belief. In such a society, the human personality is destroyed and man is reduced to a function of a process that he is never allowed to comprehend or manage. The totalitarian state believes that anything is possible and that anything can be accomplished via the use of words, history, and the minds of men. It is no longer necessary to acknowledge or experience reality. It is created in accordance with the requirements and desires of the state.

Conclusion

However, this conclusion has troublesome implicit assumptions of genre. In general, the term "genre" denotes "a kind, species, or class of composition" (Baldick 104), but it also denotes the standards and characteristics that direct the creation and understanding of those types. For instance, a writer needs to be familiar with the structure, typical character types, tonal, and stylistic elements of the detective novel genre in order to write one. The dystopian genre's primary interests are the broad issues of societal structure and political philosophy. No genre can be regarded as pure or whole. Like languages, genres are adaptable, social, and rooted

in history. Each piece of literature is composed of a hierarchy of generic components, some of which are more significant than others (Bakhtin 301-331). Despite the dystopian nature of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, other generic norms and expectations—other modes of perceiving and comprehending about the reality it depicts—are need to be in operation. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the year that this divide occurs. Even though it is never explicitly stated in the book, O'Brien may have deliberately managed Winston's conscious resistance to the Party: "There was no concept that he had, or could have, that O'Brien had not just known, examined, and rejected. He was thinking about Winston" (Orwell, 1984 256). Winston regularly refers to ideas and feelings that are only dimly permeating the edge of his awareness. For instance, Winston discusses a persistent dream that he first experienced seven years ago in which he hears a voice saying, "We shall meet in the realm where there is no darkness" (25) floating out of the gloom. This notion is finally validated by the events of the novel. He senses that this is O'Brien's voice but is unaware of why.

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