

4.10. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Nineteen Eighty-Four became Orwell's last book. It was published in the middle of 1949, and Orwell died in January 1950. But also in a figurative sense was this his last book. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the conclusion of almost everything that Orwell had written since 1936 when he with *The Road to Wigan Pier* began criticising the orthodox Left and when he went to Spain. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Orwell created a totalitarian universe, Oceania, with its own history and inner mechanism.

In the fourth decade of the twentieth century, Orwell says in the book, all main political ideologies were authoritarian. Paradise on Earth had been rejected at the precise moment when it became feasible. Every new political theory, whatever its name, led to hierarchy and regimentation. After wars, civil wars, revolutions and counterrevolutions all over the world Ingsoc (Newspeak for *English socialism*) and its rivals appeared as fully developed theories. They were a continuation of various political systems, generally called totalitarian, and the development had long been obvious.

"What kind of people would control this world had been equally obvious. The new aristocracy was made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organizers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists, and professional politicians. [...] As compared with their opposite numbers in past ages, they were less avaricious, less tempted by luxury, hungrier for pure power, and above all, more conscious of what they were doing and more intent on crushing opposition."
[NEF p. 164]

After the revolutionary period of the 1950s and 1960s, Orwell continues, society had as always returned to the old class system with an upper, middle and lower class. But the new thing was that the upper class had realised that collectivism was the only way of ensuring the oligarchy. Private property was "abolished" by expropriating the capitalists, and in this way private property was concentrated on fewer hands, namely one; the Party was the new owner.

The world of 1984 is divided into three super states that are at perpetual war with each other; the two against the third with the alliances changing constantly. Orwell says that it is a war with limited objectives in which none of the warring parties is capable of destroying the others. There are no material causes for fighting nor any ideological ones of any importance. What matters is to consume the products of the machine without raising the standard of living.

"The essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour. War is a way of shattering to pieces, or pouring into the stratosphere, or sinking in the depths of the sea, materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent."
[NEF p. 154]

Furthermore, a general increase in the standard of living would destroy the hierarchical social structure since wealth would no longer be something dividing the classes.

At the top of Oceania's hierarchy is Big Brother, who is infallible and all-powerful.

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"Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration." [NEF p. 166]

No one has ever seen Big Brother; he is a face on posters, a voice on the telescreen. Big Brother is the guise in which the Party has chosen to appear to the world. Big Brother is somebody to whom you direct your love, fear and affection, as these are feelings more easily felt towards a person than an organisation.

Below Big Brother in the hierarchy is the Inner Party followed by the Outer Party. The Inner Party is the brain and the Outer Party the limbs.

"The Party is not a class in the old sense of the word. It does not aim at transmitting power to its own children, as such; [...] The essence of oligarchical rule is not father-to-son inheritance, but the persistence of a certain world-view and a certain way of life, imposed by the dead upon the living. A ruling group is a ruling group so long as it can nominate its successors. The Party is not concerned with perpetuating its blood but with perpetuating itself. Who yields power is not important, provided that the hierarchical structure remains always the same." [NEF pp. 167-168]

And at the bottom of the hierarchy are the Proles, constituting about 85 per cent of the population. Orwell writes that nobody really knows anything about the Proles. Left to themselves they have reverted to a way of life that seems natural to them and that belongs to the past. They are born, grow up in the gutter, start working at the age of twelve, have a short blooming period of beauty and sexual desire, and mostly they die at the age of 60. They are not difficult to control. All the time agents from the Thought Police are among them, spreading false rumours and removing those individuals who might become dangerous. But no attempts are made to indoctrinate them with the Party's ideology; it is not desirable that the Proles should have strong political emotions.

The regime of Oceania has several methods of controlling the population. Agents from the Thought Police are everywhere and in all houses are telescreens capable of receiving as well as transmitting so that the occupants are under constant surveillance. Every day there is the Two Minutes Hate. People gather in front of the telescreens and watch a program that makes them scream and shout with hatred. To the book's protagonist, Winston Smith, the terrible thing is not so much that you are forced to participate but that it is impossible not to get carried away. The contents change every day but the main character of the program is always Emmanuel Goldstein.

"Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once [...] had been one of the leading figures of the Party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself, and then had engaged in counterrevolutionary activities, had been condemned to death, and had mysteriously escaped and disappeared. [...] All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teachings." [NEF p. 13]

According to the Party's propaganda Goldstein is the leader of a big underground army, the Brotherhood, working for the overthrow of Oceania. Goldstein has written a book, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* in which the history and inner mechanism of Oceania are explained. At the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it turns out that Goldstein is the invention of the Party and that his book is written by among others O'Brien, who represents the Party and who is the villain of the book. Goldstein is used as a scapegoat to divert discontent and for exposing rebels like Winston, who confides in O'Brien whom he thinks is a member of the Brotherhood.

A major reason for the hysteria during the Two Minutes Hate is repressed sexuality. The Party is against sex and the goal is not just to prevent men and women from feeling loyal to each other, which in turn will prevent the Party from exercising its control. The real purpose is to remove pleasure from sex.

"[...] sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war fever and leader worship." [NEF p. 109]

Apart from the mentioned concrete forms of control the Party also employs a more subtle form that is harder to fight against because it is aimed at the mind. First, the entire system is based on falsification of history - for two purposes. Outwardly the Party is infallible and is forced to change all information when it has been wrong in some connection or other. The falsification of history takes place in the Ministry of Truth where Winston works. Of course he knows what he is really doing, but that does not worry him because so many changes have already been made that he is just replacing one lie with another.

The second purpose is to eradicate memory from the minds of people. The only reason why people put up with their miserable conditions is that they have been told that it was much worse before the

revolution. And as no correct information about the past exists, nobody knows if it is true. Perhaps it really *was* worse before, and then you shouldn't complain.

When it is necessary to manipulate with history and your own memory it is equally necessary to forget that you have done so. This is accomplished with a mental technique, which in Oldspeak was called reality-control and in Newspeak is called doublethink.

"To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy, to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word 'doublethink' involved the use of doublethink." [NEF pp. 31-32]

Newspeak is the official language of Oceania and its purpose is to fulfil the ideological demands of Ingsoc. In 1984 no one employs Newspeak as the only means of expression, but it is expected that Newspeak will have replaced Oldspeak around year 2050. Newspeak consists of abbreviations, and Orwell writes in his Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on Newspeak that already early in the twentieth century abbreviations were part of political language. It was especially widespread in totalitarian countries and organisations. As examples he mentions *Nazi, Gestapo, Komintern, Inprecorr, Agitprop*. From a totalitarian viewpoint the advantage of abbreviations like these is that their meaning is limited and altered so that all associations are removed.

The purpose of Newspeak is not only to be a medium for the ideas and worldview of Ingsoc; it is also meant to make all other ways of thinking impossible and thus remove all heretical thoughts.

" 'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. [...] Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. Even now, of course, there's no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of self-discipline, reality-control. But in the end there won't be any need even for that. [...] In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking - not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.' " [NEF pp. 45-46]

At a point Winston writes in his diary that he understands *how* but not *why*. This *why* George Bowling already asked in *Coming up for Air* in 1939, and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* O'Brien gives him the answer.

"The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. [...] Power is not a means, it is an end." [NEF p. 211]

First of all you have to realise, O'Brien says, that power is collective. The individual only has power if he ceases to be an individual. Alone and free man will always suffer defeat. It has to be this way because man is mortal. But if the individual can subject himself completely, if he can escape from his identity, if he can let himself be engulfed so much by the Party that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal. Next, you have to realise that power is power over people, over the body and especially over the mind.

" 'If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face - for ever.' " [NEF p. 215]

Oceania is the result of a socialist revolution; it is a continuation of *Animal Farm*. Orwell's description of Oceania contains everything that the anarchists have said about the State, particularly the marxist state, ever since Russian anarchist and founder of historical anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin in 1873 wrote:

"For its self-preservation, the State must necessarily be externally powerful, but if it is so in its relations with the outer world, it must equally certainly be powerful internally. Every State has to be inspired and guided by a special morality conforming to the particular conditions of its existence, a morality which is a negation of human and universal morality. The State must make sure that all its subjects, in thought and above all in deed, are inspired only by the principles of this patriotic and particular morality, and that they remain deaf to the teachings of a purely human and universal morality. Hence the need for State censorship, since too much liberty of thought and opinion is - as Marx believes with good reason if one accepts his eminently political point of view - incompatible with that unanimous adherence which security of State demands." [Note 22]

It was also Bakunin who said that the lust for power is stronger and more perverting than any material or economic motive.

Because of the obvious anti-communism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the book was a great success in the USA where McCarthyism had just reared its head. It was overlooked, however, that Orwell in the book says that *all* ideologies in the mid-twentieth century were authoritarian. Because *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was misinterpreted and in some cases misused, Orwell wrote in 1949:

"My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences." [CEJL vol. 4 p. 564]

http://www.k-1.com/Orwell/storgaard.htm#Chap4_10