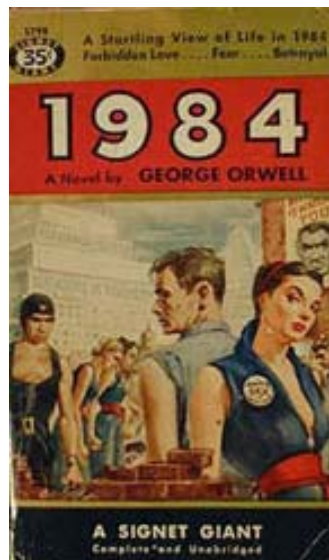


**ORWELL'S *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*
AND ENGLAND'S INTELLIGENTSIA**



A thesis by
Wendy Hassler-Forest

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Introduction

Many great satirists, most famously Jonathan Swift for his Fourth Book of *Gulliver's Travels*, have been labeled pessimists and misanthropes when the warnings they issued were interpreted as predictions. Orwell is frequently labeled a pessimist, a misanthrope and a disappointed Socialist for the bleak image of the future portrayed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by a surprisingly large number of critics who interpreted the novel as Orwell's prediction of where the world was heading rather than of where the world could be heading if people did not become aware of certain dangers.¹ A work of tragic satire warns its readers that they are significantly underestimating a subject's danger.² However, contrary to a tragedy, a work of tragic satire does not accept the inevitability of this danger establishing itself in society. After all, there would be little point in issuing a warning if it did. In fact, its criticism comes from a view, held by the author, of where we should be heading, or of what society should be like, instead. This is referred to as the satire's underlying satiric norm. In this sense, a tragic satire, which aims to make us aware of the fact that we're heading in the wrong direction, is the opposite of a tragedy, which accepts the inevitability of that direction, however much it regrets it.

George Orwell's satire *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has often been understood as a criticism of the politics of repression witnessed in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. This interpretation, however, does not explain the novel's setting in London and Orwell's geographical division of the world in the year 1984. Nor does it take into account the fact that much of Orwell's work dealt with English culture, English politics and particularly with the role of the English political left wing.

In his preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm*, Orwell wrote:

I have never visited Russia and my knowledge consists only of what can be learned by reading books and newspapers. Even if I had the power, I would not wish to interfere in Soviet

¹ In his introduction to *Inside the Myth; Orwell: Views from the Left*, a collection of critical essays on Orwell by left-wing authors, editor Christopher Norris writes: "In the end [...] the reader is brought up against the same negativity, the same despairing upshot to every line of thought in Orwell's political writing. It is for critics on the left to point out the varieties of false logic and crudely stereotyped thinking that produced this vision of terminal gloom."

² Paul Gabriner "Satire: What Is It?": Hand-out from the "Twentieth Century Satire Tutorial" (2002-2003), University of Amsterdam.

domestic affairs: I would not condemn Stalin and his associates merely for their barbaric and undemocratic methods. It is quite possible that, even with the best intentions, they could not have reacted otherwise under the conditions prevailing there.

But on the other hand it was of the utmost importance to me that people in western Europe should see the Soviet régime for what it really was. Since 1930 I had seen little evidence that the USSR was progressing towards anything that one could truly call Socialism. (Orwell and Angus 2000C, 404-405)³

He goes on to say that, because the English live in a country where there may be class distinctions and poverty, but where overall democracy and just and unbiased rule of law prevail, and where “to hold and to voice minority views does not involve any mortal danger,” the common man will fail to appreciate the implications of accounts of “concentration camps, mass deportations, arrests without trial, press censorship, etc.” and “innocently [accept] the lies of totalitarian propaganda.” According to Orwell:

This has caused great harm to the Socialist movement in England, and had serious consequences for English foreign policy. Indeed, in my opinion, nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated.

And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. (March 1947) (Orwell and Angus 200 C, 405)

Even in writing *Animal Farm*, which is unmistakably an account and a criticism of the Russian Revolution and the developments leading to Stalinism, Orwell therefore did not have the Soviet Union in mind so much as the *English perception* of the Soviet Union. But why was Orwell concerned with how the English people perceived the Soviet Union?

During the 1930s and '40s, the political line in Orwell's writing gradually changed. When Orwell began his career as a writer, much of his work was concerned with the oppression of the working class, a heritage, he explains, from his experience of oppression in Burma. As a declared Socialist (please note: not a Communist), Orwell's criticism was at first largely directed at the “oppressors,” i.e. the ruling class and the consumer class (*cf.* his criticism of English coal consumption in view of the living conditions of miners in *The Road to Wigan Pier*). In the late 1940s, however, his criticism was mostly focused on the

³ Orwell's original text was not found. This quote was re-cast into English from the Ukrainian translation.

Communist Party and the discrepancy between its declared goals on the one hand and the means it was willing to use and its apparent actual goals on the other (*cf.* “Catastrophic Gradualism,” 1945). This shift of interest may be explained by two related factors: 1. Orwell’s recognition of the repressive nature of Soviet Communism, largely owing to his experiences during the Spanish Civil War, and 2. his perception of certain tendencies among English *intelligentsia*, traditionally England’s moral backbone, which fell in line with Soviet preachings rather than being critical thereof. Two of these tendencies are discussed in detail in Orwell’s essays and play prominent roles in his satire *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The first is the ability “to hold simultaneously two opinions which [cancel] out,” satirized in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as *doublethink*. The second tendency is a kind of language use Orwell perceived to be on the rise among Communist Party members and academics, where vagueness and euphemism were used as a means of avoiding accountability. This is satirized in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as *Newspeak*.

Although Orwell considered himself a Socialist, he stated in the introduction to *Animal Farm* quoted above that the word “Socialism” had been hijacked by the Communist Party and redefined as a reference to the Soviet political system, which in reality had very little to do with the original concept of Socialism. As this example illustrates, manipulation of language had such far-reaching consequences that even the highly verbal Orwell was denied the possibility of defining his own political outlook in a single phrase.

This thesis will examine the role that thought manipulation and language habits and policies play in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and their implications for the novel’s interpretation. Which specific political developments in the 1930s and ’40s was Orwell concerned with when he wrote the novel? And how, according to Orwell, did those developments relate to the manner in which language was being used by the English *intelligentsia*?

Chapter 1

The Power of Language in 1984

1.1 Oceania: a negative Utopia

The setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is London in, as the title suggests, the year 1984. The world has been divided into three super-powers, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia. The novel's protagonist, Winston Smith, lives in Oceania, which consists of the Americas, the Atlantic islands including the British Isles, Australasia, and the southern portion of Africa.⁴ The governments of the three states have ensured their complete isolation from the other two by cutting off all channels of communication, and thus all means of comparison. Oceania is ruled by "the Party," personified by Big Brother, a man – or the face of a man, as his actual existence is considered doubtful or even irrelevant – with an appearance resembling that of Joseph Stalin. Big Brother's control of the lives of Party members is absolute, and is maintained through an elaborate system of surveillance and indoctrination methods.

The Party's object in having such absolute control is explained as follows:

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. 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. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just round the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in

⁴ NEF 164: geographical explanation in the one book of opposition, supposedly written by Emmanuel Goldstein. Emmanuel Goldstein is the Party's one consistent enemy. He was once close to Big Brother, but is said to have betrayed the Revolution. All shortages, alleged acts of sabotage and supposed criminal activities are said to be linked to him. He is also the leader of the one illicit group of opposition. Like many aspects of Oceanic society, it never becomes clear to what extent this story is true or, for that matter, whether Goldstein even exists. Goldstein is clearly based on Soviet Russia's Leon Trotsky. They are treated in the same manner by Big Brother and Stalin, respectively, and Goldstein's appearance is described as being similar to Trotsky's. In addition, Goldstein is a Jewish name, quite likely a reference to Trotsky's Jewish background.

order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (Orwell 1984, 227; my emphasis)

As is clear from the above, the Party seeks to have an absolute grip on Oceania. Not only does it control Party members' professional careers and private lives, it also seeks to control their thoughts. It demands complete political orthodoxy of its citizens, which entails that citizens must believe all the Party says. Luckily, law-abiding citizens are provided with tools to help them avoid any slip-ups in this respect.

Winston Smith is very much the anti-hero, an unattractive, relatively unsuccessful middle-class (Outer Party) man, whose job is to "correct errors" in historic documents, newspaper articles and speeches, so as to make it appear as if the Party's predictions always come true, its enemies have always been its enemies and its power has always been unquestioned and absolute. Winston has some very faint childhood memories of the world before Big Brother, though only enough for him to feel that the world was a different and perhaps a better place, but not sufficient to give him any real basis for comparison. He is unhappy with the lack of freedom, especially intellectual freedom, afforded to the citizens Oceania, but feels so isolated from other people – assuming that he is alone in his unorthodoxy – that he feels he cannot express his criticism of the political system in place.

His first step towards reclaiming his freedom is to buy a diary and write down his feelings. These prove to be bordering on hysteria. His second step is to allow himself to fall in love with a girl who, in all likelihood, was initially looking for a sexual liaison rather than a dangerously illicit love affair. His third step is to join what appears to be the one prohibited group of political opposition.

1.2 *Newspeak and doublethink in Nineteen Eighty-Four*

As there are external forces which are outside the Party's control (Oceania's enemy at war, the weather's influence on crops, etc.), statements issued by the Party are inevitably inconsistent and, as the Party is always right, history has to be updated continuously. These updates must be consciously accepted by Oceania's citizens, after which the act of acceptance must be immediately forgotten again.

The two most prominent methods of thought control in the novel are *doublethink* and *Newspeak*. They are both tools for ensuring political orthodoxy in citizens, though *doublethink* is imposed by the subject internally and *Newspeak* is imposed on the subject by the state. *Doublethink* stems from the assumption that all that the Party says is true, even if the Party contradicts itself. This means that when such a contradiction becomes apparent, one of two "truths" must momentarily be forgotten. If this is not possible, for instance because the situation involves a discussion of that very contradiction, the alternative method is to temporarily abandon one's logical capacities, i.e. deny that the contradicting "truths" cancel each other out by some trick of words or logical fallacy. The process of *doublethink* therefore entails an abandonment of critical thought and consequently, by laying the responsibility for one's thoughts with a higher authority, a waiver of the right to be critical. Orwell defines *doublethink* as follows:

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 be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy [is] impossible and that the Party [is] the guardian of democracy, to forget whatever it [is] necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it [is] needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That [is] the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you [have] just performed. Even to understand the word "doublethink" [involves] the use of doublethink. (Orwell 1984, 35)

Winston's resistance to Big Brother's regime may be attributed to his unwillingness to perform the process of *doublethink* on his own ideas, stemming from his attachment to common sense and critical thought. Because of the awareness of Big Brother's policies

and their implications that unavoidably ensues from Winston's failure to apply *doublethink*, Winston is not comfortable using *Newspeak*, either.

If *doublethink* allows citizens to control their thoughts, *Newspeak*, the official language of Oceania, takes the process one step further. *Newspeak* is a simplified version of English, from which all words have been purged which could possibly lead to unorthodox thought. Of all the "tools" used by Big Brother to retain and reinforce his grip on Oceania, *Newspeak* is given the most prominent part in the novel. The language's importance to the story is clear from its frequent mention throughout the novel, specifically in explaining the mindset of Party members, both required from above and imposed from within. In addition, the Appendix is devoted entirely to a detailed explanation of how the language works and what its intended effects are.

There are many *Newspeak* words, such as *doublethink*, *Oldthinker*, etc., which stand for concepts preeminent in Oceanic culture for which no words exist in the English language as we know it (*Oldspeak*). Even when a word seems translatable into English (*goodthinkful* might, for instance, be translated as "orthodox"), the English word does not carry the additional connotations attached to the *Newspeak* word and therefore cannot be considered an exact synonym. The fact that *Newspeak* words tend to be loaded with connotations may cause the reader to think that *Newspeak* is no more than the language corresponding to the culture of Oceania and expressing its ideas in a fuller way than is possible in English. In the Appendix to the novel, and through Winston and particularly through Winston's friend Syme in Chapter 5 of the novel, Orwell explains that this is not the case. While *doublethink* is employed to purge oneself of doubt regarding Big Brother's assertions, *Newspeak* takes away the words needed to formulate any thoughts that could lead to such doubts. And, in addition to censoring thought, *Newspeak* words dictate proper conduct.

As Orwell illustrates with the words *goodsex* and *sexcrime* – the former meaning sex for the sole purpose of begetting children, the latter all forms of sexual deviation, including sex for its own sake – blanket terms are used to describe the conduct and particularly the state of mind expected of people. In order to be orthodox, one need not know what specific types of sexual deviation exist, merely what proper sexual conduct is and that all

other forms of sexual behavior are both wrong and punishable by death. The word *goodsex* might bring to mind the Junior Anti-Sex League, its banner-waiving events and its lessons on sexual purity. *Newspeak* therefore does not only remove the means of political opposition, it also indoctrinates Oceanic subjects with the standards they are expected to uphold.

1.3 Big Brother's power over Oceania's minds

The process described above may be viewed as the short-term goal Big Brother has assigned *Newspeak*. In the long term, the language is expected to have more serious effects. In Chapter 5, Winston is discussing the progress of the 11th edition of the *Newspeak* dictionary with his friend Syme, who is working on the Dictionary and takes a great interest in the workings of the language, when their attention is caught by another man seated at the cafeteria.

Just once Winston caught a phrase – “complete and final elimination of Goldsteinism” – jerked out very rapidly and, as it seemed, all in one piece, like a line of type cast solid. For the rest it was just noise, a quack-quack-quacking. And yet, though you could not actually hear what the man was saying, you could not be in any doubt about its general nature. [...] Whatever it was, you could be certain that every word of it was pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc [English Socialism, as explained in the paragraph below; WHF]. As he watched the eyeless face with the jaw moving rapidly up and down, Winston had a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck. (Orwell 1984, 51; my emphasis)

The passage cited above calls the reader's attention to the *form* of *Newspeak*. Not only does the creation of this new language involve the destruction of “obsolete” words, the language is used in such a way as to prevent its users from choosing their own words from the remaining vocabulary. Not only does the *Newspeak* vocabulary largely consist of compound words, the language only works in “compound” phrases like the one used above. The advantages of using ready-made phrases will be clear. First, it renders it impossible for the speaker to say anything that is not entirely *Ingsoc*, i.e. in accordance with the principles of English Socialism, the theory underlying the political system in Oceania. But more importantly, it relieves the speaker from the burden of thought. When

pre-determined phrases may be tacked together, the necessity of choosing one's words no longer exists. And a free choice of words must always be considered undesirable, even when only a limited vocabulary is available, as it requires the speaker to consider what he is trying to say. As a result, words can be uttered unconsciously and, as Syme explains, "orthodoxy is unconsciousness" (Orwell 1984, 50).

The word *duckspeak*, literally to quack like a duck, explains how *Newspeak* is related to unconsciousness. Syme is reminded of the word by the man in the cafeteria described in the quote above. Syme explains to Winston that "[i]t is one of those interesting words that have two contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it is abuse, applied to someone you agree with, it is praise." In other words, mindless, hysterical yapping is encouraged in supporters, but despised and feared in opponents.

Newspeak's short-term goal is therefore to take away the words needed to have or express an unorthodox thought and thus commit *thoughtcrime*. Its long-term goal is to eliminate thought altogether and turn people into mental slaves of the regime, as Orwell tells his readers in the Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

In 1984, when Oldspeak was still the normal means of communication, the danger theoretically existed that in using *Newspeak* words one might remember their original meanings. In practice it was not difficult for any person well grounded in doublethink to avoid doing this, but within a couple of generations even the possibility of such a lapse would have vanished. (Orwell 1984, 266)

Most analyses of *Newspeak* view the language as a way of retaining and expanding control over the minds of Party members in the manner described above. There are, however, a number of reasons to think that the language's centrality in the novel has a more profound but less obvious reason: Big Brother was able to come to power and to reinforce his power owing to early, non-formalized forms of *doublethink* and *Newspeak*.

1.4 From 1948 to 1984

To understand how Big Brother was able to come to power and what role proto-*Newspeak* and proto-*doublethink* played in the process, this thesis needs to go back in the novel's timeline. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, history has been altered and re-altered to such an extent that it has become impossible to tell fact from fiction. Winston is able to identify a few concrete lies. For instance, Big Brother claims he invented the airplane, but Winston remembers airplanes from his earliest childhood, and he also remembers that he was older during the period of violence following which Big Brother came to power.⁵ Winston remembers a scene from this period of violence, after his father had disappeared and his mother, his baby sister and he are dying of starvation. He says he cannot have been less than ten years old, "possibly twelve," so the year must have been between 1955 and 1957. Assuming that the violence he remembers ("rackety, uneasy circumstances," "periodical panics about air-raids and the sheltering in the Tube stations, the piles of rubble everywhere, the unintelligible proclamations posted at street corners, the gangs of youths in shirts all the same colour," (Orwell 1984, 142-143) etc.) is in fact the revolution by which Big Brother came to power, this would mean that the revolution was ongoing in the late 1950s.

And there are other hints as to what took place during the revolution, and how it was settled. Winston's and Julia's second rendezvous is in "the belfry of a ruinous church in an almost-deserted stretch of country where an atomic bomb had fallen thirty years earlier" (Orwell 1984, 114). This means that England must have been at war (possibly in civil war) in 1954. Winston remembers when the bomb was dropped, or at least he has memories he is able to link to the bomb.

Winston could not definitely remember a time when his country had not been at war, but it was evident that there had been a fairly long interval of peace during his childhood, because one of his early memories was of an air raid which appeared to take everyone by surprise. Perhaps it was the time when the atomic bomb had fallen on Colchester. He did not remember the raid itself, but he did remember his father's hand clutching his own as they hurried down, down, down into some place deep in the earth, round and round a spiral staircase which rang under his feet and which finally so wearied his legs that he began whimpering and they had to stop

⁵ Winston is "fairly sure" he is thirty-nine, which means, counting back from 1984, he must have been born in 1945, around the end of World War II.

and rest. His mother, in her slow, dreamy way, was following a long way behind them. (...) Finally they had emerged into a noisy, crowded place which he had realized to be a Tube station.

(...) Winston and his mother and father found themselves a place on the floor, and near them an old man and an old woman were sitting side by side on a bunk. The old man had on a decent dark suit and a black cloth cap pushed back from very white hair: his face was scarlet and his eyes were blue and full of tears. (...) In his childish way Winston grasped that some terrible thing, something that was beyond forgiveness and could never be remedied, had just happened. It also seemed to him that he knew what it was. Someone whom the old man loved - a little granddaughter, perhaps -- had been killed. Every few minutes the old man kept repeating:

'We didn't ought to 'ave trusted 'em. I said so, Ma, didn't I? That's what comes of trusting 'em. I said so all along. We didn't ought to 'ave trusted the buggers.

But which buggers they didn't ought to have trusted Winston could not now remember. (Orwell 1984, 33; my emphasis)

Based on the passage quoted above, it is now possible to build a hypothesis on what happened after World War II. The war was followed by a period of peace. In the early 1950s, England faced a Socialist revolution (Ingsoc, “unintelligible proclamations posted at street corners,” “gangs of youths in shirts all the same colour”). The revolution turned into a civil war and the Socialist party gained the advantage by dropping the atomic bomb.⁶ The violence and shortages continued while Big Brother consolidated his power, and, as Winston’s father disappeared after the bomb was dropped but before the famine started, it may be assumed that he was a victim of the first wave of purges.⁷

It may now be guessed who the “buggers” were who “didn't ought to have [been] trusted.” Winston’s memory of the crying old man offers the key to understanding the significance of *doublethink* and *Newspeak* to the novel’s interpretation: the English people allowed Big Brother to seize power, all the power he wanted, by trusting him, by relinquishing their right to think critically and speak honestly and straightforwardly for the sake of political orthodoxy, blind faith in the Party.

⁶ In his essay “You and the Atom Bomb” (October 19, 1945), Orwell wrote “From various symptoms one can infer that the Russians do not yet possess the secret of making the atomic bomb; on the other hand, the consensus of opinion seems to be that they will possess it within a few years.” It would therefore theoretically have been possible for the English Socialist Party to obtain such a weapon from its allies in the Soviet Union.

⁷ The famine after the revolution may be a reference to “Lenin’s famine” of 1921-1922, i.e. three years after the Russian Revolution. Lenin “had the courage,” as a friend put it, “to come out and say openly that famine would have numerous positive results ... Famine, he explained, in destroying the outdated peasant economy, would ... usher in socialism ... Famine would also destroy faith not only in the tsar, but in God too.”

1.5 Orwell's concerns for England in 1948

But what prompted Orwell to set the novel in London, conceivably making it a warning against the faith the English people were putting in potential “Big Brothers”? It is no coincidence that Orwell chose the year 1984 as a setting for his novel. It is, in fact, the inverse of the year in which it was written, 1948. It has frequently been argued that the title refers to a future form of the year of authorship because the novel deals with tendencies recognized by Orwell in English society in 1948. Although Orwell does not provide his readers with a clear timeline between the two dates, he offers sufficient information to construct one in the manner above. It therefore stands to reason, also in view of the fact that, as argued in the Introduction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a tragic satire, that Orwell was issuing a warning against what might be waiting if certain concerns he had in 1948 were not addressed. One of these concerns was the state of the English language.

In 1946, Orwell published an essay entitled “Politics and the English Language,” in which he identified a number of developments in the English language which he considered detrimental to the ability to think critically, particularly with regard to politics. Quoting a number of passages he selected “because they illustrate various of the mental vices from which we now suffer,” he analyzes these vices as follows:

Each of these passages has faults of its own, but, quite apart from avoidable ugliness, two qualities are common to all of them. The first is staleness of imagery: the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing. As soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a pre-fabricated hen-house. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 129-130)

Orwell argues that vague language allows one to get away with saying almost anything, either because the statement in question simply cannot be tested against reality, or

because the pretentious diction has a euphemistic effect.⁸ Vague language may be used to avoid being explicit, and thus accountable for one's statements, or it may simply result from sloppy habits of thought, an unwillingness to pin down in unambiguous terms what precisely one is trying to say. If an author's mind is "[invaded] by ready-made phrases," they will take over what he started out to say and his original meaning will be lost, also to himself.

The idea underlying this essay is not the improvement of literary English. Rather, it is concerned with "language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought." The idea is that if you simplify your English, it is impossible to be entirely orthodox, first of all because you will not be able to avoid being confronted with certain truths if the subject matter is boiled down to the essence, and secondly because it is difficult for a speaker to be dishonest while speaking plainly, that is without telling an outright lie.

The examples cited by Orwell include quotes from Professor Harold Laski, Professor Lancelot Hogben, an essay on psychology, a Communist pamphlet and a letter to the *Tribune* on the inflated accents of BBC broadcasters, whose author is clearly no stranger to inflated language himself. In the mocking example written by Orwell quoted in footnote 8 below, Orwell takes an English professor defending Soviet repression. Orwell's main concern therefore seems to be with *Communist* politics and the language used by *English intellectuals*.

⁸ Orwell writes: "Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. He cannot say outright, 'I believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so.' Probably, therefore, he will say something like this: 'While freely conceding that the Soviet régime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods [...].'"

Chapter 2

Orwell and the Left

2.1 History of Orwell's concerns with Communist language

The above gives rise to the question what relationship Orwell saw between intellectuals and the English language on the one hand and Communism on the other. The prominent role given to *doublethink* and *Newspeak* in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be traced back to earlier concerns Orwell had with the Communist Party and its powers of thought manipulation. In a broadcast talk in the BBC Overseas Service entitled "Literature and Totalitarianism" (1941), Orwell expressed his concerns with the nature of totalitarian Communism and its restrictions on intellectual liberty:

When one mentions totalitarianism one thinks immediately of Germany, Russia, Italy, but I think one must face the risk that this phenomenon is going to be world-wide. It is obvious that the period of free capitalism is coming to an end and that one country after another is adopting a centralised economy that one can call Socialism or state capitalism according as one prefers. With that, the economic liberty of the individual, and to a great extent his liberty to do what he likes, to choose his own work, to move to and fro across the surface of the earth, comes to an end. Now, till recently the implications of this were not foreseen. It was never fully realised that the disappearance of economic liberty would have any effect on intellectual liberty. Socialism was usually thought of as a sort of moralised liberalism. The state would take charge of your economic life and set you free from the fear of poverty, unemployment and so forth, but it would have no need to interfere with your private intellectual life. Art could flourish just as it had done in the liberal-capitalist age, only a little more so, because the artist would no longer be under economic compulsions.

Now, on the existing evidence, one must admit that these ideas have been falsified. Totalitarianism has abolished freedom of thought to an extent unheard of in any previous age. And it is important to realise that its control of thought is not only negative, but positive. It not only forbids you to express – even to think – certain thoughts, but it dictates what you *shall* think, it creates an ideology for you, it tries to govern your emotional life as well as setting up a code of conduct. And as far as possible it isolates you from the outside world, it shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison. The totalitarian state tries, at any rate, to control the thoughts and emotions of its subjects at least as completely as its controls their actions. (Orwell and Angus 2000B, 135; my emphasis)

Orwell expected that then democratic states might adopt totalitarian Communism as their political system as the logical result of the failure of capitalism he predicted. The link between the Communist economic model and repression of free thought is, as described

in the quote above, control. Controlling all economic enterprises is a way of putting a rein on individualism, creativity and independence. It is a power mechanism. There are two, non-exclusive ways of looking at this. First, if the state wishes to retain absolute control over its economy, it will have to convince people it is doing so for their own good. If it fails to stay in control of people's minds, its restrictive economic policies will eventually be rejected. Another way of looking at the matter, however, is that people who gain that measure of power want power for its own sake. The revolution is made in order to gain power of government, the economy is collectivized to gain power over commerce, and the people are indoctrinated to gain power over their minds. Over the years, particularly following the Spanish Civil War, Orwell became increasingly concerned that the Communist Party was not working towards a worldwide revolution in order to release the oppressed, but in order to become the oppressor and consolidate its power.⁹

But: "to be corrupted by totalitarianism one does not have to live in a totalitarian country"(Orwell and Angus 2000D, 67). Orwell saw the effects of Communist indoctrination in his own country. This Section will examine the development of his interest in the relationship between bad language use and totalitarian thought, as well as its reverse, the relationship between clear language and political honesty.

Orwell's first interest in the relationship between language and power can be traced to his account of the living conditions of miners in Northern England, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). In this book, Orwell not only examines the conditions under which miners live and work, but also the way in which the working class approaches other classes, the nature of working class Socialism and the discrepancy between the middle-class, highly educated members of the Communist Party and the working class (or "proletariat") whose rights they are supposed to be defending. This difference is also manifest in the language used by Communist Party representatives, with respect to which Orwell wrote the following:

⁹ It is important to note here that Orwell was essentially a libertarian. He considered himself a Socialist, but defined Socialism differently than the leading Socialist and Communist parties did. To Orwell, Socialism meant the end of class repression, based on the principle that all men are equal. A certain extent of economic reform would be unavoidable in the state he imagined, first of all to ensure a fair (but not necessarily equal) distribution of wealth, but also because the end of repression entailed the end of colonialism, a major source of English income.

I remember hearing a professional Communist speaker address a working-class audience. His speech was the usual bookish stuff, full of long sentences and parentheses and “Notwithstanding” and “Be that as it may,” besides the usual jargon of “ideology” and “class-consciousness” and “proletarian solidarity” and all the rest of it. After him a Lancashire working man got up and spoke to the crowd in their own broad lingo. There was not much doubt which of the two was nearer to his audience, but I do not suppose for a moment that the Lancashire working man was an orthodox Communist. (Orwell 2001, 163)

According to Orwell, this gap between the Communist Party and its intended audience, the working class, stems from the very nature of Marxist Communism. In 1940, he wrote to Humphry House:

My chief hope for the future is that the common people have never parted with their moral code. I have never met a genuine working man who accepted Marxism, for instance. I have never had the slightest fear of a dictatorship of the proletariat, if it could happen, and certain things I saw in the Spanish war confirmed me in this. But I admit to having a perfect horror of a dictatorship of theorists, as in Russia and Germany. (Orwell and Angus 2000A, 532)

In this letter, Orwell makes explicit his main objection to Communism: it is a socio-economic theory which, because of its complexity, does not appeal to the people it is supposed to represent, i.e. the proletariat or working class. Instead, and for the same reason, it is adopted by more educated people who enjoy theorizing about and romanticizing “the dictatorship of the proletariat,” world-wide revolution, etc., even though they themselves, “by birth or by adoption,” belong to the class of the oppressors, the bourgeoisie. According to Orwell, those orthodox Communists who are of working class heritage are not or no longer “working men,” and have therefore effectively been adopted by the bourgeoisie.

It is of course true that plenty of people of working-class origin are Socialists of the theoretical bookish type. But they are never people who have remained working men; they don't work with their hands, that is. (Orwell 2001, 164)

Not only does Orwell find this hypocritical in the present, he does not find it promising for what the future would bring if these “parlour Bolshies” were in fact to come to power, which is not likely to be an actual dictatorship of the proletariat, and would probably turn out very similar to the dictatorship of the theorists Orwell recognized in Soviet Russia. The quote below is from Orwell’s explanation of how he first became interested in the plight of the English working class after returning from Burma. Having

been one of the oppressors himself for five years, Orwell was determined to “submerge” himself among the oppressed, to cleanse himself of the guilt of having been one of the ruling class mistreating the locals. He does not, however, feel inclined to join the advocates of the cause of the working class who call themselves Socialists or Communists.

On the other hand I had at that time no interest in Socialism or any other economic theory. It seemed to me then -- it sometimes seems to me now, for that matter -- that economic injustice will stop the moment we want it to stop, and no sooner, and if we genuinely want it to stop the method adopted hardly matters. (Orwell 2001, 139)

Orwell is concerned with a moral revolution, not a political one. His concern with language and politics is related to this moral revolution.

It is important to make a distinction here between Communist sympathizers and even card-holding members of the Communist Party on the one hand and *orthodox* Communists on the other. Orwell is not arguing that there are no true Communists or Socialists among the working class, merely that the effort needed to be orthodox, i.e. to fervently believe all that is said by the Party even if one fervently believed the contrary the day before, cannot be made by people as firmly rooted in reality as Orwell perceived the working class to be.

[I]t must be remembered that a working man, so long as he remains a genuine working man, is seldom or never a Socialist in the complete, logically consistent sense. Very likely he votes Labour, or even Communist if he gets the chance, but his conception of Socialism is quite different from that of the book-trained Socialist higher up. To the ordinary working man, the sort you would meet in any pub on Saturday night, Socialism does not mean much more than better wages and shorter hours and nobody bossing you about. To the more revolutionary type, the type who is a hunger-marcher and is blacklisted by employers, the word is a sort of rallying-cry against the forces of oppression, a vague threat of future violence. But, so far as my experience goes, no genuine working man grasps the deeper implications of Socialism. (Orwell 2001, 163-164)

These deeper implications include handing over complete power to a small group of Party members, who will then centralize the economy and rid society of all forms of opposition, whereas, in Orwell’s view, what the working class man has in mind when he cries out for a Communist state is a state in which there is social and economic justice.

The conclusion Orwell draws from the above is that Communism as advocated by the Communist Party is not about handing power to the proletariat, but about shifting power to the Communist Party, which, in Orwell's perception, largely or even exclusively consisted of bourgeois theorists. According to Orwell, this discrepancy was covered up through euphemistic and often blatantly dishonest language. In addition, the chasm between the Communist and Socialist movements on the one hand and the working class on the other was being widened rather than reduced by the bookish language used by intellectuals, particularly those intellectuals claiming to represent the working class. Not only does he ridicule the language used by bookish Socialists at working-class rallies, he argues in favor of language use that is closer to the English of the working class.

2.2 The users of proto-*Newspeak* and proto-*doublethink*

As I have argued in Chapter 1 above, *Newspeak* and *doublethink* have such a prominent place in the novel not only because they help Big Brother maintain and increase his power, they (or earlier forms of the same tendencies) also helped him climb to power in the first place. This gives rise to the question to what extent Orwell dealt with earlier forms of *doublethink* and *Newspeak* in his other works.

In his essay "The Prevention of Literature" (1946), Orwell laments the fact that at a meeting of the PEN club on the occasion of the tercentenary of Milton's *Areopagitica*, a pamphlet in defense of freedom of the press, not a single speaker stood up to defend the political liberty or the "freedom to criticize and oppose." It was, on the other hand, agreed that writers should be allowed "to discuss sex questions frankly in print," and some speakers, interestingly enough, used the opportunity to defend the purges going on in Soviet Russia. What Orwell is really driving at in this essay is that, because the world had been divided into two (or three?) rigidly defined camps, i.e. the capitalist and the Communist camp, and, during World War II, the Allied powers and the Axis powers, while the Communist-capitalist division continued to exist within the Allied camp,

freedom of the press was under attack from all sides.¹⁰ Orwell interprets the position of opponents of free press for ideological reasons as follows:

The enemies of intellectual liberty always try to present their case as a plea for discipline versus individualism. The issue truth-versus-untruth is as far as possible kept in the background. Although the point of emphasis may vary, the writer who refuses to sell his opinions is always branded as a mere egoist. He is accused, that is, of either wanting to shut himself up in an ivory tower, or of making an exhibitionist display of his own personality, or of resisting the inevitable current of history in an attempt to cling to unjustified privileges. The Catholic and the Communist are alike in assuming that an opponent cannot be both honest and intelligent. [...] One can accept, and most enlightened people would accept, the Communist thesis that pure freedom will only exist in a classless society, and that one is most nearly free when one is working to bring such a society about. But slipped in with this is the quite unfounded claim that the Communist Party is itself aiming at the establishment of the classless society, and that in the USSR this aim is actually on the way to being realised. [...] Fifteen years ago, when one defended the freedom of the intellect, one had to defend it against Conservatives, against Catholics, and to some extent – for they were not of great importance in England – against Fascists. Today one has to defend it against Communists and “fellow-travellers.” One ought not to exaggerate the direct influence of the small English Communist Party, but there can be no question about the poisonous effect of the Russian *mythos* on English intellectual life. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 61-62)

In this quote, Orwell directs his criticism almost entirely at intellectuals with Communist sympathies. Of course, freedom of thought was under just as much pressure from the right, especially while the war was ongoing. Why then was Orwell so much more outspoken in his criticism of the Left?

The reason is that intellectual freedom was being attacked not by conservative “Blimps” or a Catholic minority, but by the very group that ought to be defending that intellectual freedom, the group that depended on it most. There is, however, another reason why Orwell focuses on the Communist Party and its followers. First of all, in Orwell’s opinion, repression went against Communism’s very nature, as the very justification of the existence of this movement was its claim to be the defender of the ordinary man and of the principle of equality among men. Unlike any other political movement in England,

¹⁰ The theory of a world divided into two camps is exemplified by the first Soviet Constitution, ratified in 1924, which contained the following passage: “Since the foundation of the Soviet Republics, the states of the world have been divided into two camps: the camp of capitalism and the camp of socialism. There, in the camp of capitalism: national hate and inequality, colonial slavery and chauvinism, national oppression and massacres, brutalities and imperialistic wars. Here, in the camp of socialism: reciprocal confidence and peace, national liberty and equality, the pacific co-existence and fraternal collaboration of peoples.”

Communism claimed it could bring about a Utopian society. If all men are equal, however, why was it becoming normal practice in the USSR for some men to kill others for having the wrong opinions? And why, measured by the extent of freedom enjoyed by the common man, did society there seem to be moving away from a Utopian society rather than towards it? Why was criticism of these measures from within the Communist Party's own ranks considered tantamount to treachery? Why, if the common man was the backbone of Communist society, were the economic and social theories on which it was based only intelligible to intellectuals and theorists? And, most importantly, why was not this discrepancy laid bare by the intellectuals, the guardians of critical thought?

Secondly, Orwell was concerned with the highly manipulative methods used by the Communist Party to influence the public and the general dishonesty within the Communist Party, unknown in traditional conservatism and only otherwise occurring to a certain extent in Nazism. In his essay "The Prevention of Literature," Orwell writes with respect to the falsification of history by the Soviet Union:

The organised lying practised by totalitarian states is not, as is sometimes claimed, a temporary expedient of the same nature as military deception. It is something integral to totalitarianism, something that would still continue even if concentration camps and secret police forces had ceased to be necessary. Among intelligent Communists there is an underground legend to the effect that although the Russian Government is obliged now to deal in lying propaganda, frame-up trials, and so forth, it is secretly recording the true facts and will publish them at some future time. We can, I believe, be quite certain that this is not the case, because the mentality implied by such an action is that of a liberal historian who believes that the past cannot be altered and that correct knowledge of history is valuable as a matter of course. From the totalitarian point of view history is something to be created rather than learned. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 63; my emphasis)¹¹

Thirdly, Orwell held the firm belief that raw capitalism was untenable, and that Communism or some form of Socialism was its natural successor.¹² This made it vital to reform the Socialist movement from within, so that it would not come power in the totalitarian form seen in Soviet Russia. Orwell was very much in favor of a Socialist

¹¹ Please note that the myth that the Soviet government was secretly recording actual history for later generations is an example of the blind and unjustified faith in political leaders against which Orwell is warning his readers in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, when the old man in the tube station says: "That's what comes of trusting 'em. I said so all along. We didn't ought to 'ave trusted the buggers" (NEF, 33).

¹² It should be noted here that this shows that Orwell himself also considered the world as one divided into two camps, as he expected the failure of the one to automatically result in the prevalence of the other.

revolution, as long as it resulted in a society based on liberty and equality, not on economic control and certainly not on control of the truth.

Finally, Orwell had witnessed the effects of Communist propaganda and manipulation first hand during the Spanish Civil War, where he and the party he had been fighting for were betrayed and persecuted by their Communist allies. His eyes had been forcefully opened to the Communist Party's true aim, which by that time was to consolidate power, not bring about a truly Socialist society. In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell puts forward the Franco-Russo pact as a possible explanation of the Communist strategy during the Spanish Civil War. The Soviet Union was unable to defeat the Western powers, so that its only way of consolidating power was to maintain the status quo. As France was strongly opposed to the Spanish Revolution following the general elections in which the Social Revolutionaries were elected by a narrow majority, Russia found itself in the dicey position of having to support international Socialism on the one hand, and not rocking the boat too much in the European political order on the other. According to Orwell, it dealt with this predicament by joining the Spanish Socialists in their fight against Franco, while at the same time undermining that fight with accusations of Trotskyism and purges among its "allies." After this experience, it had become impossible for Orwell to believe that the Soviet Union was in it for the common man rather than its own interests.

Orwell was not, however, only concerned with the problem of censorship imposed from above, for instance by the Soviet government or the International Communist Party, he was as much – or more – concerned with the problem of people imposing such censorship on themselves, feeling that any failure to be entirely orthodox in their political beliefs would in a sense be tantamount to aiding their political opponent, all the more so because this tendency was clearly established in the English intellectual and political arena. Naturally, this line of reasoning only works if the political realm is viewed as a war between two entirely opposite camps, one of which must be joined. The idea is then that, although there may be problems within one's own camp, it was generally to be much preferred over the opposing camp. Propaganda wars were a relatively new phenomenon and the concept was fully embraced by the Communist and the capitalist camps. In such a war of propaganda, any strike from within was a strike for the opponent. In his 1945 essay "Through a Glass, Rosily," Orwell described this type of thinking as follows:

Whenever A and B are in opposition to one another, anyone who attacks or criticises A is accused of aiding and abetting B. And it is often true, objectively and on a short-term analysis, that he *is* making things easier for B. Therefore, say the supporters of A, shut up and don't criticise: or at least criticise "constructively," which in practice always means favourably. And from this it is only a short step to arguing that suppression and distortion of known facts is the highest duty of a journalist. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 34)

Orwell held a different view. In his essay "The Prevention of Literature," Orwell quotes the chorus of a Revivalist hymn:

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone;
Dare to have a purpose firm,
Dare to make it known.¹³

He then goes on to say:

To bring this hymn up to date one would have to add a "Don't" at the beginning of each line. For it is the peculiarity of our age that the rebels against the existing order, at any rate the most numerous and characteristic of them, are also rebelling against the idea of individual integrity. "Daring to stand alone" is ideologically criminal as well as practically dangerous. The independence of the writer and the artist is eaten away by vague economic forces, and at the same time it is undermined by those who should be its defenders. It is with this second process that I am concerned here. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 60)

Apart from the long-term dangers to the truth that Orwell foresaw in the approach to criticism described above, Orwell had another objection:

The whole argument that one mustn't speak plainly because it "plays into the hands of" this or that sinister influence is dishonest, in the sense that people only use it when it suits them. [...] Beneath this argument there always lies the intention to do propaganda for some single sectional interest, and to browbeat critics into silence by telling them that they are "objectively" reactionary. It is a tempting manoeuvre, and I have used it myself more than once, but it is dishonest. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 36)

The problem with Communism was that, unlike conservatism, Catholicism and Fascism, it had a strong appeal to the intellectual community, and, in Orwell's opinion, it was

precisely the responsibility of this group to guard intellectual freedom. Even though England was still largely a liberal country at the time Orwell wrote this essay, he saw the effect of Communism on the intellectual community. As Orwell did not see any strong political inclination in the working class, he feared the impact of the sympathies of *intelligentsia* on English society could be massive:

[W]hat is sinister [...] is that the conscious enemies of liberty are those to whom liberty ought to mean most. The big public do not care about the matter one way or the other. They are not in favour of persecuting the heretic, and they will not exert themselves to defend him. They are at once too sane and too stupid to acquire the totalitarian outlook. The direct, conscious attack on intellectual decency comes from the intellectuals themselves. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 70; my emphasis)

The essay “In Front of Your Nose” is devoted entirely to the prevalence in democratic countries of the state of mind satirized in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as *doublethink* (which I have called “proto-*doublethink*”), required for, for instance, holding the belief that the economic theories applied in Soviet Russia result in a healthier economy than does capitalism, while having witnessed that Russian soldiers were ill-equipped and under-fed during World War II. Orwell argues that such beliefs can be held almost indefinitely, that is until they are tested in the battle field or in science. He therefore concludes that the maintenance of this state of minds relies on the assumption that one’s assertions will never be tested:

In private life most people are fairly realistic. When one is making one’s weekly budget, two and two invariably make four. Politics, on the other hand, is a sort of sub-atomic or non-Euclidian world where it is quite easy for the part to be greater than the whole or for two objects to be in the same place simultaneously. Hence the contradictions and absurdities I have chronicled above, all finally traceable to the secret belief that one’s political opinions, unlike the weekly budget, will not have to be tested against solid reality. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 125)

This is where the falsification of history and “proto-*Newspeak*” come in. As Orwell argued above, testing one’s political beliefs against reality would cause the contradictions contained in those beliefs to come to the surface. However, these contradictions must be maintained if power is to be maintained, as it may be assumed that a people would never hand over power to somebody claiming to want it solely for the sake of power itself. It

¹³ The theme of being intellectually independent and not afraid to voice one’s opinions stems from a Protestant non-conformist tradition among English writers, including Milton, to which Orwell may be considered to belong.

would always have to be “for good of the people.” Therefore, if the contractions cannot be done without, “solid reality” will have to be sacrificed.

It is no coincidence that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s protagonist works for the Ministry of Truth and spends his days bringing history in accordance with the Party line. If reality is not documented in some permanent manner but becomes dependent on what the person yelling the loudest claims to be the truth, there is nothing against which to test one's political beliefs. Rather, it becomes a matter of faith in the person making such claims.

Another way of making it impossible to test political statements is by phrasing them in so vague a manner as to make it impossible to ascertain against which criteria they are to be tested. “In Front of Your Nose” was published in the *Tribune* on March 22, 1946. Only a few weeks later, in April 1946, “Politics and the English Language” was published in *Horizon*, in which Orwell wrote (as quoted above) “prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a pre-fabricated hen-house” (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 130).

He is referring to the “line[s] of type cast solid” used by the man in the cafeteria in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Somehow, according to Orwell, one becomes less human when one speaks in the phrases prepared by other people than when one chooses one's own words. Orwell says in “Politics and the English Language” that “one often has the curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them.” In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell describes the speaker in the cafeteria in the following manner: “His head was thrown back a little, and because of the angle at which he was sitting, his spectacles caught the light and presented to Winston two blank discs instead of eyes” (Orwell 1984, 50). Apparently, choosing one's own words and voicing one's own opinion are, for Orwell, conditions *sine qua non* for being human. Following this line of reasoning, the kind of language invented and used by the Communist Party is in itself contradictory to its proclaimed goal to bring about a Utopia for all humanity.

Meaninglessness is not only achieved by tacking together ready-made phrases. Communist language has a whole vocabulary consisting words whose meanings depend entirely on the connotations loaded into them by Party doctrine. Quite frequently, this is caused by the fact that they have been literally translated from other languages (usually Russian), while they would otherwise never be used in a similar context in English. Orwell lists the swear words *hyena*, *hangman*, *cannibal*, *petty bourgeois*, *these gentry*, *lacquey*, *flunky*, *mad dog* and *White Guard*. Sometimes words are newly created by abbreviating existing words. In the Appendix to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell explains the practice of abbreviation as follows:

It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it. The words *Communist International*, for instance, call up a composite picture of universal human brotherhood, red flags, barricades, Karl Marx, and the Paris Commune. The word *Comintern*, on the other hand, suggests merely a tightly-knit organization and a well-defined body of doctrine. It refers to something almost as easily recognized, and as limited in purpose, as a chair or a table. *Comintern* is a word that can be uttered almost without taking thought, whereas *Communist International* is a phrase over which one is obliged to linger at least momentarily. (Orwell 1984, 264)

The process is such that the effect becomes a cause and so on indefinitely. Political factions divide the political realm into two camps. The public is forced to align itself with one of them, as nothing lies in between. The choice must be absolute – so as not to aid the other camp – which means that anything one’s party says must be believed. This requires the relinquishment, at least to a certain extent, of one’s critical faculties through “proto-doublethink.” The process is facilitated by vague language use: hearing someone make a statement in the kind of language described above evokes far fewer questions than hearing someone make a pointed, unambiguous statement. But it cuts both ways, as the political supporter need not question his own ideas, either, while discussing them, as long as he allows his words to be chosen for him. The final result is a nation, or world, of “eyeless dummies.”

2.3 The implications of proto-*Newspeak* and proto-*doublethink*

If vague or sloppy language use makes one into an eyeless dummy, does clear and honest language, according to Orwell, make citizens think critically? In “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell wrote:

The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns, as it were instinctively, to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink. In our age there is no such thing as “keeping out of politics.” All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred and schizophrenia. When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find – this is a guess which I have not sufficient knowledge to verify – that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years as a result of dictatorship. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 137)

He then goes on to say: “[I]f thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought” (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 137). But if the use of euphemisms, blanket terms and indiscriminate swearwords limits the opportunities to take thought, renders accusations unanswerable and thus increases the power of the party in control of the language use, can the opposite also be said? In other words, does honest and precise language use make the subjects of a political regime more aware and therefore more critical, and is power thus shifted from the political power in force to the people?

It seems that Orwell thought this was the case:

Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration [...]. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 128; my emphasis)

This is his justification for an essay on dishonest, slovenly and stale language. His essay “Propaganda and Demotic Speech” throws another light on his objection to stale, meaningless and how-brow language. In this essay, written in 1944, Orwell argues that propaganda could be made more an effective means of rallying pro-British (and anti-Nazi) enthusiasm if the language used in speeches, on posters and radio broadcasts were closer to spoken language, and preferably closer to the spoken language of the common man. In

support of this argument, he remembers a news broadcast he heard in a pub where “a gang of navvies were eating their bread and cheese.” The men went on solidly eating their dinner during the broadcast, until the announcer interrupted his BBC English and slipped into English as normally spoken when he quoted a soldier. According to Orwell, the colloquial language visibly grabbed the men’s attention. His point is that if you want to get something across to the people of England, you should use the language of the people instead of the pretentious diction of most politicians and newsreaders, which emphasizes the distance between the social classes and causes listeners to tune out.

As Orwell argues in “Politics and the English Language,” however, language should not only be as honest and simple as possible for purposes of propaganda, but for general political purposes as well.

In his essay “Why I Write” (1946), Orwell wrote: “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it.” It is important to define what Orwell meant when he called himself a democratic Socialist. Which features did his ideal society include, and which did it explicitly not include?

2.4 The politics of 1948

Following the General Election of July 1945, the first election in ten years, in which the Labour Party led by Clement Attlee was hugely victorious over Winston Churchill’s Conservative Party, Orwell’s “democratic Socialism” may have seemed within reach. Orwell covered the Election for *The Observer*, and seemed mildly optimistic about the results. T.R. Fyvel, a fellow reporter and friend, explains what happened next as follows:

As for Orwell, I thought that he might now see some of the democratic socialism enacted for which he had asked in *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Yet after the six long years of war which had seen so many setbacks, it had become harder to summon up political enthusiasm. Still, like most people around him, Orwell looked pleased at the Labour victory. But three weeks before *Animal Farm* was due out, the Americans dropped their atom bombs upon Japan. Like everyone else, Orwell was profoundly affected by this awesome, disastrous start to the nuclear age. Most people, like myself, managed to put it out of their minds, but one can see from his letters and

writing that the thought of the nuclear devastation which he always saw ahead filled him with dark forebodings which never left him. (Fyvel, 132)

On October 26, 1945, the *Tribune* published Orwell's essay "You and the Atom Bomb,"¹⁴ in which it is evident that Orwell considered the rise of a small number of authoritarian superpowers to be imminent. Therefore, while otherwise his concerns for post-war Britain might have been appeased by the Labour Party's election to power, his concerns became more urgent. The focus of his concerns became more general as well, being not only on the ideological threat that lay in the failure to recognize the dictatorial nature of the Soviet Union, but also on the dangers of having a few ultra-powerful super-states only. After all, with the prospect of the Soviet Union developing an atomic weapon of its own, and the cold war Orwell predicted would result from having a few such super-powers,¹⁵ the political climate in smaller nations such as the United Kingdom seemed irrelevant, as such nations would soon be forced to "choose sides."

This brings us to Orwell's opinion of the Soviet Union, and its international arm, the Communist Party. In or around 1938, Orwell wrote to the poet Stephen Spender:

You ask how it is that I attacked you not having met you, & on the other hand changed my mind after meeting you. I don't know that I had exactly attacked you, but I had certainly in passing made offensive remarks [about] "parlour Bolsheviks such as Auden & Spender" or words to that effect. I was willing to use you as a symbol of the parlour Bolshie because *a.* your verse, what I had read of it, did not mean very much to me, *b.* I looked upon you as a sort of fashionable successful person, also a Communist or a Communist sympathizer, & I have been very hostile to the CP since about 1935,¹⁶ and *c.* because not having met you I could regard you as a type & also an abstraction. (Orwell and Angus 2000A, 312; my emphasis)

In 1945, Orwell wrote to the Duchess of Atholl¹⁷:

¹⁴ In this essay, Orwell argues that the atom bomb is difficult and expensive to produce and is therefore an "undemocratic" weapon, meaning that, unlike, for instance, the musket, it is only in the power of great states to produce them, which, in turn, gives such states additional power.

¹⁵ Orwell is said to have been the first, or among the first, to coin the phrase "cold war," which he used in the essay cited above, "You and the Atom Bomb."

¹⁶ Presumably either a reference to Stalin's purges, which were at their peak from 1935 to 1938, or to the Franco-Soviet Pact, concluded in 1935, or to both.

¹⁷ The Duchess of Atholl (1874-1960), a Unionist MP 1923-38, became in 1924 one of the first two women to become a Minister in a British Government. She was known as "The Red Duchess" for her very strong anti-Franco feelings during the Spanish Civil War. Throughout her life she campaigned for various "causes." (footnote from Orwell and Angus 2000D, 30)

Certainly what is said on your platforms is more truthful than the lying propaganda to be found in most of the press, but I cannot associate myself with an essentially Conservative body which claims to defend democracy in Europe but has nothing to say about British imperialism. It seems to me that one can only denounce the crimes now being committed in Poland, Jugoslavia, etc if one is equally insistent on ending Britain's unwanted rule in India. I belong to the Left and must work inside it, much as I hate Russian totalitarianism and its poisonous influence in this country. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 30; my emphasis)

Orwell is not entirely clear about the point in time that he first began to realize the nature of the Soviet system. In the letter to Spender quoted above, he cites the year 1935 as something of a turning point, while in his 1940 letter to Humphry House he writes: "It is as Nietzsche said about Christianity [...], if you are all right inside you don't have to be *told* that it is putrid. You can smell it – it stinks. All people who are morally sound have known since about 1931 that the Russian régime stinks." What is probably more telling than the dates Orwell refers to is that, although he clearly inclined to the Left from the time that he first started to write, he never wrote anything *in favor* of the Soviet regime. It would then seem that there never was any one incident that turned Orwell away from Communism: it just *stank*. The one objection he voiced over and over again is that the basic theory of Socialism, i.e. all men are equal, was undermined by subsequent theories, such as "the dictatorship of the proletariat," which *de facto* meant a "dictatorship of theorists."¹⁸ As explained above, what Orwell refers to as "democratic Socialism" is a libertarian concept, meaning that the emphasis is on democracy and liberty; it is thus in direct contrast with the Soviet interpretation of Socialism, which involves the dictatorship of the proletariat, collectivization of farm lands and a repressive regime. Democratic Socialism refers to a society in which class distinctions have been truly abolished, and have been abolished from the start. The major difference therefore lies in the importance attached to means and ends. Orwell did not "buy" the excuse made for Soviet policies that "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" when there was no omelette to be discovered. In his essay "Catastrophic Gradualism" he described the way in which Communist and Socialist sympathizers tried to fit the dilemma of Soviet totalitarianism into their ideal of an equalitarian state.

At present this theory [the Theory of Catastrophic Gradualism, i.e. "nothing is ever achieved without bloodshed, lies, tyranny and injustice, but on the other hand no considerable change for the better is to be expected as the result of even the greatest upheaval"; WHF] is most often

¹⁸ Letter to Humphry House (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 532)

used to justify the Stalin régime in the USSR, but it obviously could be – and, given appropriate circumstances, would be – used to justify other forms of totalitarianism. It has gained ground as a result of the failure of the Russian Revolution – failure, that is, in the sense that the Revolution has not fulfilled the hopes that it aroused twenty-five years ago. In the name of Socialism the Russian régime has committed almost every crime that can be imagined, but at the same time its evolution is *away* from Socialism, unless one redefines that word in terms that no Socialist of 1917 would have accepted. To those who admit these facts, only two courses are open. One is simply to repudiate the whole theory of totalitarianism, which few English intellectuals have the courage to do: the other is to fall back on Catastrophic Gradualism. The formula usually employed is “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs.” And if one replies, “Yes, but where is the omelette?”, the answer is likely to be: “Oh well, you can’t expect everything to happen all in one moment. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 16)

In an editorial to *Polemic*, he writes: “So we arrive at the old, true, and unpalatable conclusion that a Communist and a Fascist are somewhat nearer to one another than either is to a democrat” (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 160). Orwell’s criticism of the Soviet Union was thus similar to his criticism of Nazi Germany, as in both cases his strongest objection was to the repressive nature of the regime in place. Orwell wrote in his essay on James Burnham:

English writers who consider Communism and Fascism to be *the same thing* invariably hold that both are monstrous evils which must be fought to the death: on the other hand, any Englishman who believes Communism and Fascism to be opposites will feel that he ought to side with one or the other. The reason for this difference of outlook is simple enough and, as usual, is bound up with wish-thinking. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 175)

During the 1930s and ’40s, the world had increasingly been divided into rigidly delineated camps, but with the first use of the atom bomb by the United States on the Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki, George Orwell predicted the rise of two or three “super-powers” in his essay “You and the Atom Bomb,” as it only seemed to be a matter of time before the Soviet Union would be able to produce the bomb for itself. In the face of the threat of a world divided into states that professed to be each other’s opposites while in effect being two versions of the same thing, Orwell considered it vital that the world become aware of the fact that Russian Communism was not a viable alternative to capitalism. People looking at the Communist Party for a way of ending oppression of the poor would, according to Orwell, in effect be consenting to oppression of all, instead.

His main warning with respect to Soviet Communism was therefore that, as it was essentially the same thing as Fascism, it was not a viable alternative, although it may have

presented itself as one. Its main danger – in places where it was not yet an established force – was that people who believed in the ideals that had once stood at its foundation would swallow its totalitarian methods. By underlining that “a Communist and a Fascist are somewhat nearer to one another than either is to a democrat,” he was pointing to a real alternative, i.e. democracy, rather than an apparent one.

However, in his essay on James Burnham, he is less forgiving, or more accusing, of English Socialist intellectuals. Here he says:

It was only *after* the Soviet régime became unmistakably totalitarian that English intellectuals, in large numbers, began to show an interest in it. Burnham, although the English Russophile intelligentsia would repudiate him, is really voicing their secret wish: the wish to destroy the old equalitarian version of Socialism and usher in a hierarchical society where the intellectual can at last get his hands on the whip. Burnham at least has the honesty to say that Socialism isn't coming; the others merely say that Socialism *is* coming, and then give the word “Socialism” a new meaning which makes nonsense of the old one. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 179)

In other words, English intellectuals were attracted by Soviet power politics. This power hunger may not have been equally strong in all English Socialist intellectuals, but it does offer an additional explanation of the ban on criticism from within Left, the extreme repression of alternative Socialist and anarchist movements – whose goals were, in theory, quite similar to those of Soviet Communism – and the eagerness to defend the sometimes barbarous methods applied by the Soviet Union.

Chapter 3

What Goes Around Comes Around

3.1 Orwell's warning

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Orwell's political outlook underwent a sudden change. He had been strongly opposed to the oncoming war until 1939, when he had a dream in the night before the conclusion of the Russo-German pact, in which England was at war with Germany.¹⁹ This dream awakened in him the realization that it would be a relief when the long-dreaded war finally came as well as an awareness of his desire to participate in the war when it came.²⁰ The reasons he gave for his support of the war if it came were, first and foremost, the strong – middle-class – patriotism that had been instilled in him and, second, the fact that he saw no alternative to fighting Fascism other than surrendering to it. This newly discovered patriotism did not, however, do away with his Socialist sentiments. He was very careful to explain to his readers that patriotism was not the same thing as nationalism.

By “nationalism” I mean first of all the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labeled “good” or “bad.” [...] By “patriotism” I mean devotion to a particular place and the particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people. (Orwell and Angus 2000C, 362)

He also emphasized his view that patriotism is the opposite of Conservatism, because it is the “devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same,” a “bridge between the future and past” (Orwell and Angus 200B, 103).²¹ Rather than adjusting his political goals to his patriotic sentiments, Orwell fitted his patriotism into his revolutionary ideal. In fact, at that time he considered a Socialist revolution in

¹⁹ The reason Orwell provides for his initial opposition to a war with Nazi Germany is that he considered the evil nature of the British Empire more or less equivalent to that of Nazi Germany, while England was less honest about its repression and discrimination of the population of the colonies than was Germany of its treatment of its Jewish communities. Orwell's line of reasoning was that, if Britain were to engage in a war against the Axis powers and were to win, its geopolitical position would be reinforced, and its colonial rule would continue.

²⁰ “My Country Right of Left” (Orwell and Angus 2000A, 539)

²¹ From *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

England a necessary condition for winning the war, in view of the “inefficiency of private capitalism.” On the other hand, England’s involvement in the war was, in Orwell’s perception, the only thing that could end the “drowsy years” and push England into revolution. As Orwell put it: “We cannot win the war without introducing Socialism, nor establish Socialism without winning the war.” What had been missing in the Socialist movement in England was the recognition of the strength of patriotism and its pervasiveness in English society. In “England Your England,”²² Orwell explained how, despite the vast differences between the different social classes and regional populations, patriotism “runs like a connecting thread through all of them.” Consequently, a shared danger, as World War II presented, could also bring inter-class solidarity and could open the door to a Socialist revolution.

As mentioned in the Introduction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a work of tragic satire. The method by which a tragic satire issues its warning that we have been making too light of a serious situation is by highlighting the contrast between the way we have looked at the problem so far and its actual gravity. This contrast may be emphasized by allowing the reader to identify with a protagonist who represents, to a certain extent, the underlying satiric norm and who – hopefully – appeals to our own sense of what is right. Another way of underscoring the danger is through exaggeration. The circumstance that the reader is being warned of will still be recognizable to the reader, but it is brought to the foreground and is treated in such a way so as to become fearful and contemptible. Just as Big Brother directs his subjects’ hatred toward Emmanuel Goldstein, Orwell directs the reader’s hatred toward Big Brother and the system he represents.²³

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell employs both devices. First, there is the protagonist, Winston Smith, who has a very faint memory of a different society and cannot accept the yoke of Big Brother. Second, there is the story line, which is romantic in the sense that love and escape are still to be found in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and in the illusion that political rebellion is still possible when all political freedom has been relinquished. Orwell allows both his protagonists and his readers to retain their belief in this illusion until all its aspects disintegrate in the hands of Big Brother.

²² The Lion and the Unicorn (Orwell and Angus 2000B, 56)

²³ For a concise explanation of the figure of Emmanuel Goldstein, please refer to footnote 4.

In addition, as O'Brien explains in Chapters 2 and 3 of Part 3, Big Brother's regime is similar in its methods to that of the Russian Communists and the German Nazis, but, by wanting to have absolute control over the thoughts of its subjects, it takes totalitarianism one step further. Heresy is no longer possible as it was under the totalitarian regimes of the early and mid-twentieth century. Big Brother allows no one to die a martyr. In addition, Big Brother's regime it is more honest with itself about its objects. Unlike the leaders of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, Big Brother does not pretend to have any intentions of ever relinquishing power, nor does he pretend to be acting for the sake of some higher cause, like a truly Socialist state. The power structure of Oceania is a more extreme, more outspoken form of the power structures of the totalitarian states, and of the Communist and Fascist ambitions present in a number of democratic states, that existed during the 1940s.

The evidence for the fact that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is indeed a satire and not a tragedy largely lies in the character of Winston Smith and in the story line. If Orwell were not calling on his readers to prevent such a political regime from gaining power, he would not have had any reason to make his protagonist so unhappy with the life he was living because of the regime in power. Also, the romance between Winston and Julia is nothing more than two people looking for love and a little covert freedom and privacy in a world where all these concepts have been erased. The things they seek are the things we all cherish and that are still enjoyed by most people in the Western world; they are part of the underlying satiric norm.

The object of criticism is referred to as the butt of the satire. It should be pointed out that a work of satire may be criticizing several, related or separate, tendencies in a society. These objects of criticism may be independent of one another or subordinated to one another.²⁴ The main warning issued by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seems to be against the dangers of handing over power to a small, centralized group, a danger ignored by the majority of Western Socialists of Orwell's time. The main butt of the satire at hand is therefore the willingness of the intellectual community to relinquish its right, or abandon

²⁴ One example of a work of satire criticizing several, seemingly unrelated aspects of a society is Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, which targets both the US judicial system and Wall Street superficiality.

its obligation, to exercise its critical faculties, and its ensuing failure to recognize the Soviet Union's true nature. However, Orwell goes on to dissect the system underlying this power, the various "tools" used by Big Brother to retain and increase control and delude his citizens. These points of criticism are subordinated to the main butt of the satire, as their meaning depends on the larger context of the novel. Like the main butt of the satire, these subordinated points of criticism are based on an implied positive. In other words, Orwell criticizes intellectual blindness and dishonesty because he feels intellectuals should have integrity, be outspoken and be honest: they should be Daniels. Similarly, he warns his readers against the manipulation of language based on an idea of how language should ideally be used. This implied positive, referred to as the satiric norm, is contrasted with the butt of satire, thus creating satiric effect.

In a letter to Francis A. Henson of the United Automobile Workers, answering questions on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell wrote:

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 centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised 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. The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasise that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 502) (extract from the original letter; my emphasis)²⁵

In December 1948, Orwell had written to Roger Senhouse complaining about a draft version of a blurb for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, explaining that what he had intended to discuss in the novel was "the implications of dividing the world up into 'Zones of influence'" and the "intellectual implications of totalitarianism" (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 460).

That Orwell considered that these "intellectual implications" would, as discussed in Chapter 2 above, eventually result in a loss of self and thus in a loss of humanity re-

²⁵ Excerpts from this letter were published in *Life* magazine of July 25, 1949, and the *New York Times Book Review* of July 31, 1949. The quote above is an amalgam of these excerpts,

emerges in the fact that the alternative title considered for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was “The Last Man in Europe.”

3.2 The proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

If, however, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a satire and Orwell is warning his readers about the “intellectual implications of totalitarianism,” why does he leave the proles, representing 85 percent of the population, untouched by Big Brother’s brainwashing tactics?

In the cafeteria scene from quotes above, the following conversation takes place between Syme and Winston:

“Has it ever occurred to you, Winston, that by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now?”
“Except –” began Winston doubtfully, and he stopped.

It had been on the tip of his tongue to say “Except the proles,” but had checked himself, not feeling fully certain that this remark was not in some way unorthodox. Syme, however, had divined what he was about to say.

“The proles are not human beings,” he said carelessly. (Orwell 1984, 50)

When Winston sets out to discover what the world was really like before the Revolution, haunted by his own words “If there is hope, it lies in the proles,” he approaches an old prole in a “drinking-shop (‘pubs,’ they called them).” He notes that it is quite a rare opportunity to be able to speak to someone whose mind was formed before the revolution.

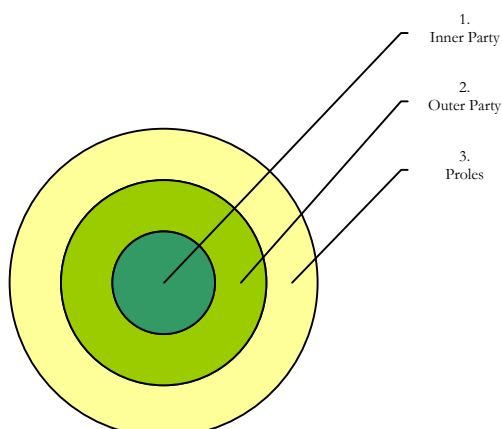
As Winston stood watching, it occurred to him that the old man, who must be eighty at least, had already been middle-aged when the Revolution happened. He and a few others like him were the last links that now existed with the vanished world of capitalism. In the Party itself there were not many people left whose ideas had been formed before the Revolution. The older generation had mostly been wiped out in the great purges of the fifties and sixties, and the few who had survived had long ago been terrified into complete intellectual surrender. If there was any one still alive who could give you a truthful account of conditions in the early part of the century, it could only be a prole. (Orwell 1984, 78)

Why has the proles’ intellectual life remained untouched by Big Brother’s regime? Why hasn’t Big Brother ever taken an interest in them? The most obvious explanation is

Orwell's romanticized view of the English working class as the backbone of English society. Particularly in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell linked to the poverty and the simple lifestyle of the English working class a basic common sense that was not easily affected by complicated socio-political theories and was mostly concerned with day-to-day affairs, such as economic comfort and the communities in which they lived. It is therefore possible that Orwell is merely arguing that the working class is essentially a different race ("the proles are not human beings"), and that they have not been brainwashed because they lack the intellectual capacity necessary for complicated processes like *doublethink*. Big Brother therefore might not consider them a threat to begin with, and may consequently have decided to leave well enough alone.

However, in the context of Orwell's warnings against totalitarianism, this explanation discounts the fact that none of the totalitarian societies Orwell was concerned with (Communist Russia, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) left well enough alone when it came to the working class. In fact, the working class was the focus point of the USSR, and was almost equally important under Nazism and Fascism. The distinction lies in the difference between the political support from the working class in these countries on the one hand and in England on the other. Lenin, Hitler and Mussolini had been brought to power largely by the working class. In England, however, the major totalitarian threat came from a Communist Party mostly backed by the upper middle-class and the *intelligentsia*. In other words, the Russian, German and Italian working classes had "signed up" in advance for the treatment they later received. The English working class had not. This is not to say that there were no supporters of the Communist Party among the English working class; rather, according to Orwell, there were no *orthodox* supporters of the Communist Party (see the quotes on page 19 above).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, power is structured as shown in the diagram below.



1. The Inner Party is compared to the brains of the body. It consists largely of original Revolutionaries and their confidantes. The Inner Party is the author of Oceania's

architecture and it has set out Oceania's path for the future. Power is centralized here, and members of the Inner Party have the corresponding privileges. On the other hand, the Inner Party has suffered the most extreme purges of all population groups, and its members have frequently been "exposed" during show trials.

2. Winston belongs to the Outer Party. The Outer Party is compared to the hands of the body: it performs the work set out by the Inner Party. Members of the Outer Party are watched closely for evidence of unorthodoxy and are punished severely if they arouse any such suspicions, but they have a better survival rate than members of the Inner Party.
3. The proles provide the resources needed by the Inner and Outer Party. They provide cheap labor and are thus the backbone of Oceania's economy. The proles have no power and no luxury, but they have the largest measure of personal freedom of the three groups. Apart from the liquidation of the incidental prole who has become too smart (and has thus become a potential member of the Outer Party class), no purges take place among the proles.

3.3 Satiric norm

The classes into which Orwell has divided Oceanic society correspond with three groups of Socialists he recognized in English society. According to Orwell, the power-hungry intellectuals referred to in the quote on Burnham on page 32 above, who only started to take a genuine interest in Socialism after the repressive nature of the Soviet regime had become visible to the outside world, had no interest in Socialism in its original meaning. They were interested in becoming the ruling class. Orwell describes this group as follows:

If one examines the people who, having some idea of what the Russian régime is like, are strongly Russophile, one finds that, on the whole, they belong to the "managerial" class [...]. That is, they are not managers in the narrow sense, but scientists, technicians, teachers, journalists, broadcasters, professional politicians: in general, middling people who feel themselves cramped by a system that is still partly aristocratic, and are hungry for more power and more prestige. These people look towards the USSR and see in it, or think they see, a system which eliminates the upper class, keeps the working class in its place, and hands unlimited power to people very similar to themselves. (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 178-179)

This group represents the direct danger of which Orwell intends to make his readers aware in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.²⁶ As the Inner Party, we see the kind of rulers they will make if they are allowed to come to power. In Oceania, we see the kind of society they would build given the chance. And as this group consists of “teachers, journalists, broadcasters [and] professional politicians,” it traditionally represents the guardians of democracy, truth, liberty and critical thought. Based on that tradition, it has the people’s trust and thus the power to provide a moral justification of Soviet methods. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we see that this group is not only a danger to society: it is also a danger to itself. Its members’ only chance at survival is becoming entirely orthodox, but being entirely orthodox entails a loss of humanity, a loss of self. In other words, this group has a choice between physical death or intellectual death, and it is unclear which is to be feared most. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell is therefore warning society’s power-hungry intellectuals that, even if they succeed, the power they gain will be false, because it will be centralized in one totalitarian ruler (like Soviet Russia had in Stalin), who will strip them, to the extent that they have not done so themselves, from any intellectual freedom they may have left.

The second group Orwell distinguishes are the Socialists who believe that means can be justified by ends. This group sees the world as divided into two camps, and has chosen the Socialist camp. This camp is effectively run by the Soviet Union and the International Communist Party. This group of Socialists sympathizers has accepted that, for its side to be successful, its members must unconditionally and uncritically adhere to the Party line. They have learned to perform exceptional mental feats in order to maintain their orthodoxy, such as accepting overnight the Russo-German Pact of 1939, which went directly against what the Party line had been only the day before. The “Inner Party” keeps this group, satirized as the Outer Party, in the dark about its true motives, and the “Outer Party” group dare not raise any questions for fear of being found disloyal. Orwell’s warning in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to this group is: if you continue to close your eyes to what

²⁶ Please note that in “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution, Orwell specifically targets the English intellectuals as the group in which hunger for power is the strongest. He writes: “[I]f one studied the reactions of the English intelligentsia towards the USSR, there, too, one would find genuinely progressive impulses mixed up with admiration for power and cruelty. It would be grossly unfair to suggest that power worship is the only motive for russophile feeling, but it is one motive, and among intellectuals it is probably the strongest one.” (Orwell and Angus 2000D, 174)

is really happening and preach blind loyalty, you are in effect handing absolute power to the people who are in reality unworthy of such absolute faith and thus forfeiting your right to influence the world you live in. In addition, by advocating complete uncritical conformity, you are entitling the “Inner Party” group to provide its definition of orthodoxy as well as the criteria on the basis of which it will be tested, and the methods by which those who are found to be insufficiently orthodox will be purged. You could become one of the eggs going into a fictitious omelet.

If this group of Socialists were to become aware of the ways in which it was being manipulated, *inter alia* through the language used by the Communist Party, and were to reclaim its independence of thought, the Socialist movement could be rejuvenated and cleansed of its totalitarian tendencies.

The third group is the working class, satirized as the “proles.” This group forms a dilemma for Orwell. On the one hand, Orwell believed that the working class man was essentially a better man than was the “bookish type.” The working class man, according to Orwell, is more firmly rooted in reality. Unlike the intellectual, he uses his common sense and common decency to determine his position. Therefore, in theory, Orwell’s Utopia would have been a land ruled by the principles applied by the working class in organizing their day-to-day lives. However, the very make-up of working class mentality made such an ideal unrealistic. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston muses:

But if there was hope, it lay in the proles. You had to cling on to that. When you put it in words it sounded reasonable: it was when you looked at the human beings passing you on the pavement that it became an act of faith. (Orwell 1984, 77)

One of the problems is, of course, the “the working classes are generally more conservative than the bourgeoisie” (Orwell 2001, 121). Members of the working class are interested in employment, housing and health care, that is in ways of increasing their own daily comfort. If these aspects are improved, the working class as a whole is not, according to Orwell, likely to support a revolution. When members of the working class *do* call for a revolution, they are, according to Orwell, calling for social justice, not the end of, for instance, the monarchy. This is why, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the proles are so easily

contained by Big Brother. Big Brother recognizes this group's priorities and provides it with enough distraction (beer, pornography, music) to keep any resistance at bay.

It may therefore be argued that Winston's faith in the proles is a red herring when it comes to pinpointing the satiric norm underlying *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In fact, Orwell did not believe that a Utopian society, based on working class "common decency," could be achieved. He did, however, believe in the possibility of a society in which intellectual freedom prevailed and in which a larger degree of economic justice could be realized. If, on the other hand, Socialism continued to be defined as collectivized totalitarianism, and the Socialist revolution Orwell felt to be imminent did indeed take place, England would be in grave danger indeed. It was up to the English *intelligentsia* to return to its tradition of defending intellectual liberty.

"For people [...] who suspect that something has gone very wrong with the Soviet Union, I consider that willingness to criticise Russia and Stalin *the* test of intellectual honesty."

(Orwell and Angus 2000C, 203)

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