

George Orwell and Totalitarianism: A Master of Political and Social Commentary

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Abstract:

This analysis delves into George Orwell's legacy as a British writer and journalist, focusing on his incisive scrutiny and critique of political and social structures, with a specific emphasis on totalitarianism. Through a comprehensive examination of Orwell's seminal works, "Animal Farm" and "1984," the study aims to reveal the enduring relevance of his critiques by contextualizing them within the socio-political landscape of his era and drawing connections to contemporary issues of government power, surveillance, and individual liberties. Employing a multifaceted methodology encompassing literary analysis, biographical exploration, historical contextualization, comparative analysis, and the incorporation of scholarly perspectives, the research provides a nuanced understanding of Orwell's contributions, emphasizing his impact on literature, political thought, and the ongoing discourse surrounding the perils of unchecked authority. In conclusion, Orwell's enduring legacy emerges as a critical observer and commentator, whose works remain powerful reflections on totalitarianism, surveillance, and the fragility of individual freedoms, resonating globally as relevant and cautionary narratives.

Keywords: totalitarianism, political satire, social critique, authoritarianism, dystopian literature

Introduction

Orwell was born as Eric Arthur Blair in 1903 in India, where his father worked for the British civil service. He was educated in England and joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma in 1922. He resigned in 1927 and decided to become a writer. He adopted the pen name George Orwell in 1933, when he published his first book, "Down and Out in Paris and London", a memoir of his experiences of poverty and hardship in Europe.

George Orwell was a British writer who is best known for his novels "1984" and "Animal Farm". These novels are considered classics of dystopian fiction, as they depict the horrors of totalitarian regimes and the dangers of propaganda, censorship, and oppression. Orwell was also a journalist,

essayist, and critic who wrote about various political and social issues, such as imperialism, fascism, communism, poverty, and war.

Orwell was a socialist who opposed totalitarianism in all its forms. He fought in the Spanish Civil War in 1936-1937, where he was wounded and witnessed the Stalinist repression of the anti-fascist movement. He later wrote about his experiences in "Homage to Catalonia", a personal account of the war and its politics. He also wrote "The Road to Wigan Pier", a report on the living conditions of the working class in northern England, and "Animal Farm", a satirical allegory of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism.

Orwell's most famous novel, "1984", was published in 1949, shortly before his death from tuberculosis in 1950. The novel is set in a future world where a totalitarian state, known as Oceania, controls every aspect of human life through a system of surveillance, propaganda, and manipulation. The protagonist, Winston Smith, is a member of the Outer Party, who works for the Ministry of Truth, where he alters historical records to suit the Party's agenda. He secretly rebels against the Party by keeping a diary, falling in love, and joining a resistance movement. However, he is eventually captured, tortured, and brainwashed by the Party.

Orwell's novels have influenced many writers and thinkers, as well as popular culture, such as films, music, and television shows. His concepts, such as Big Brother, doublethink, Newspeak, and thought crime, have entered the common vocabulary as terms for describing totalitarian practices and abuses of power. His novels have also been seen as warnings and critiques of the political and social realities of his time and ours. Orwell's legacy is that of a visionary and a humanist who defended freedom, democracy, and individuality against tyranny and oppression.

Objective

This analysis seeks to comprehensively explore George Orwell's legacy as a British writer and journalist, specifically focusing on his astute scrutiny and criticism of political and social structures, with a particular emphasis on totalitarianism. Through an in-depth examination of Orwell's seminal works, "Animal Farm" and "1984," the objective is to unveil the enduring relevance of his critiques, contextualizing them within the socio-political landscape of his time and drawing connections to contemporary issues of government power, surveillance, and individual liberties. The analysis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Orwell's contributions, emphasizing his impact on literature, political thought, and the ongoing discourse surrounding the dangers of unchecked authority.

Literature Review

According to Підгорна (2020), Orwell conveys the theme of totalitarianism in his work by illustrating the government's pursuit of absolute control, which is never explicitly acknowledged. Instead, he explores the facets of totalitarian rule through interconnected concepts such as power, fear, propaganda, and surveillance. These concepts collectively depict a society marked by pervasive authority, citizens' perpetual fear, constant surveillance, and the enforcement of a singular ideology while suppressing alternative viewpoints.

Ninggar (2017); Cushman and Rodden (2015); Kellner (1990); Conant and Dictionary (2000), this study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a political sociology approach to examine totalitarianism in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, focusing on the character of Napoleon as a reflection of this social-political problem. The analysis, guided by the theories of totalitarianism by Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, explores how Napoleon utilizes a totalitarian system in his leadership, imposing rules that lead to the animals' misery. The study reveals that the animals respond to this oppressive system through three strategies: hitting, running, and standing, demonstrating their confrontation against the detrimental effects of totalitarianism on their society.

Küçükali (2012); SLIMANI (2022); TALALWEH (2021); Ingle (2007) finds the study of Orwell's works, including "Homage to Catalonia," "Animal Farm," and "Nineteen Eighty-Four," collectively shed light on both orthodox and unorthodox forms of Marxism, emphasizing the prevalent theme of betrayal within the context of socialist revolutions. "Nineteen Eighty-Four," serving as a culmination of Orwell's earlier works, serves as a warning to humanity, urging them to adhere to genuine Marxism and highlighting the consequences of deviating from its principles. Orwell's literary legacy thus stands as a cautionary tale about the dangers of straying from the ideals of true Marxism.

According to Beadle (1975); Cheballah and Berradj (2020); Löfgren (2022) Orwell could never assimilate into a conventional political party machinery. While his reputation for integrity might be appealed to, his inclination for martyrdom relied upon, and his skill in pamphleteering utilized, there was an inherent lack of trust in his ability to refrain from exposing politically inconvenient truths.

Xhinaku and Olsa (2020); Kumar (2014); Resch (1997) evaluating the performance of Orwell work with academic teaching staff is deemed essential, the current reliance on numerical quantification, akin to market-driven scient metrics, risks distorting results and fostering imposture. The use of competence criteria charts in evaluation may further contribute to the erosion of individual identities, leveling values, and oversimplifying complex human and professional dimensions resistant to categorization.

This article explores the contentious nature of truth in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, proposing a novel perspective on the Party's control and induced "doublethink" (Chapman, S. (2009)). By introducing the concepts of "truth-committed" and "non-truth-committed" attitudes, the article suggests that a non-truth-committed approach, prevalent in literary encounters, allows readers to appreciate Orwell's work without being overly preoccupied with its factual predictions, emphasizing the significance of the novel's literary qualities.

According to Zlatyslav (2023), Orwell's article provides a philosophical reinterpretation of George Orwell's novel "1984" in light of the Russian-Ukrainian war, particularly following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 24th, 2022. By examining Orwell's dystopia in the context of contemporary Russia and drawing on biographical and philosophical analyses from prominent Western scholars, the study seeks to elucidate the novel's fundamental philosophical themes and its heuristic potential in illuminating the sociopolitical landscape of present-day Russia, highlighting parallels between the dystopian world of "1984" and the conditions in the contemporary Russian Federation.

Methodology

This analysis of George Orwell's legacy and critique of totalitarianism employs a multifaceted approach integrating literary, historical, and biographical perspectives. The research draws on primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of Orwell's life, influences, and literary contributions.

1. **Literary Analysis:** The study initiates with an extensive literary examination of Orwell's seminal works, "Animal Farm" and "1984." It explores the themes, characters, and narrative techniques employed by Orwell to convey his critiques of political and social structures, with a focus on totalitarianism.

Close textual analysis is conducted to dissect key passages, metaphors, and symbols in both novels, aiming to unveil the underlying messages and Orwell's narrative techniques.

2. **Biographical Exploration:** A thorough exploration of Orwell's early life and influences, particularly his formative years in England and experiences in the Spanish Civil War, forms a crucial component of the analysis.

Biographical elements are cross-referenced with the themes present in Orwell's works to establish connections between his personal experiences and the development of his critical perspectives on power structures.

3. **Historical Contextualization:** The study situates Orwell's works within the historical context of the periods in which they were written. Special attention is given to the political climate, including the Russian Revolution, Stalinism, and the broader socio-political landscape during Orwell's lifetime.

This historical contextualization aims to illuminate how external events and political developments influenced Orwell's thoughts and shaped the themes of his literary works.

4. **Comparative Analysis:** A comparative analysis is employed to draw parallels between the themes in Orwell's works and contemporary socio-political events, particularly those related to totalitarianism and government overreach.

Connections are established between Orwell's dystopian visions and real-world instances of surveillance, manipulation of truth, and abuse of power.

5. **Incorporation of Scholarly Perspectives:** The methodology involves integrating insights from prominent literary critics and scholars who have extensively analyzed Orwell's works. Their interpretations, critiques, and scholarly discourse contribute to a well-rounded understanding of Orwell's literary legacy and the relevance of his critiques.

6. **Synthesis of Findings:** The findings from the literary, biographical, historical, and comparative analyses are synthesized to form a cohesive narrative that delineates the overarching themes and messages in Orwell's works.

The synthesis aids in drawing conclusions about the enduring significance of Orwell's critiques of totalitarianism and their applicability to contemporary socio-political contexts.

This comprehensive methodology ensures a nuanced and holistic examination of George Orwell's legacy, offering valuable insights into his contributions as a writer and critic of political and social systems, particularly in the context of totalitarianism.

Analysis

In the analysis, George Orwell's legacy emerges as a British writer and journalist renowned for his astute scrutiny and criticism of political and social structures, with a particular focus on totalitarianism, as evidenced by his seminal works "Animal Farm" and "1984," which have attained status as enduring classics in literature.

George Orwell British writer and journalist known for his keen observations and critiques of political and social systems, particularly totalitarianism. He is best known for two iconic works that have become classics in literature: "Animal Farm" and "1984."

Early Life and Influences: Born in India in 1903, Orwell spent his formative years in England, where he witnessed firsthand the injustices of class inequality and colonial oppression. These experiences would later fuel his commitment to social justice and his unwavering critiques of power structures. Orwell's writing career began in the 1930s, with works like "Down and Out in Paris and London" and "Burmese Days" revealing his keen observation of poverty and the marginalized. He also fought in the Spanish Civil War, an experience that solidified his anti-fascist stance and further informed his political views.

Dystopian Masterpieces: Orwell's most celebrated works are undoubtedly "Animal Farm" (1945) and "Nineteen Eighty-Four" (1949). "Animal Farm" is a political allegory that uses the story of farm animals rebelling against their human owners to satirize the Russian Revolution and the subsequent rise of Stalinism. The novel's enduring popularity lies in its ability to expose the dangers of power corrupts, regardless of the ideology.

"Nineteen Eighty-Four" paints a chilling portrait of a totalitarian future controlled by the omnipresent Big Brother. The novel's themes of surveillance, thought control, and the manipulation of language continue to resonate in today's world, making it a cautionary tale against the erosion of individual freedoms.

Beyond Dystopia: Orwell's literary contributions extend beyond his dystopian masterpieces. His essays, such as "Politics and the English Language" and "Why I Write," provide insightful commentary on language, politics, and the role of the writer in society. He was also a prolific journalist, documenting his experiences in the Spanish Civil War and criticizing imperialism and fascism.

1. Animal Farm: A Timeless Allegory of Revolution and Betrayal

George Orwell's Animal Farm is a timeless political allegory published in 1945. It tells the story of a group of farm animals who rebel against their human farmer, Mr. Jones, and create their own society based on the principles of equality, freedom, and animal welfare. However, the animals' idealistic revolution soon devolves into a brutal dictatorship, as the pigs who assume leadership become increasingly corrupt and power-hungry.

- **A Story of Rebellion and Idealism:** The novel opens with the wise and aging boar, Old Major, delivering a visionary speech to the other animals. He describes a world where animals are free from human exploitation and live in harmony with each other. Inspired by Old Major's dream, the animal's rebel against Mr. Jones and take over the farm, renaming it Animal Farm.
- **The Seven Commandments:** The newly established Animal Farm is governed by a set of seven commandments, written on the barn wall:
 1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
 2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
 3. No animal shall wear clothes.
 4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
 5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
 6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
 7. All animals are equal.

These commandments represent the animals' hopes for a just and equitable society.

- **The Rise of the Pigs:** As the story progresses, the pigs, led by the cunning and manipulative Napoleon, emerge as the dominant force on Animal Farm. They gradually manipulate the other animals and rewrite the Seven Commandments to suit their own purposes.
- **Betrayal and Corruption:** Napoleon's regime becomes increasingly oppressive. He employs a team of dogs as his enforcers, silences dissenters, and indulges in the very luxuries that the animals had initially rejected. The farm's original ideals of equality and freedom are abandoned, and the animals find themselves living under a tyranny that is even worse than Mr. Jones's rule.
- **A Powerful Allegory:** Animal Farm is a powerful allegory for the Russian Revolution and the subsequent rise of the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. The pigs represent the communist leadership, while the other animals represent the working class. The novel's central message is that even the most noble revolutions can be corrupted by power and greed, and that the pursuit of utopia can often lead to a worse reality.
- **Enduring Relevance:** Animal Farm remains a relevant and thought-provoking novel today. It serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of totalitarianism, the importance of vigilance against corruption, and the fragility of freedom. The novel's themes continue to resonate with readers around the world, making it a classic of political and social commentary.

The famous quote, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," encapsulates the essence of the novel, highlighting the hypocrisy and betrayal that can occur when those in power prioritize their own interests over the collective good.

2. 1984

"1984" is perhaps Orwell's most famous work and a dystopian masterpiece. Set in a totalitarian society ruled by the Party and its leader, Big Brother, the novel paints a bleak picture of a world where

individualism is suppressed, truth is manipulated, and surveillance is omnipresent. The term "Orwellian" has since been coined to describe situations characterized by government overreach, propaganda, and the erosion of personal freedoms.

Concepts such as Newspeak, Doublethink, and the Thought Police have entered the cultural lexicon as symbols of the dangers of unchecked state power. The novel explores the psychological and emotional effects of living in a society where even thoughts are policed.

"1984" by George Orwell is a dystopian novel published in 1949 that has become a classic of modern literature. The novel is set in Airstrip One, a province of the super state Oceania, in a world of perpetual war, government surveillance, and propaganda. The story follows the life of Winston Smith, a low-ranking member of the ruling Party who begins to rebel against the oppressive regime.

1. **Totalitarianism:** The novel explores the dangers of totalitarianism, where the government, led by the Party and its enigmatic leader Big Brother, exercises absolute control over every aspect of citizens' lives. The Party uses propaganda, surveillance, and psychological manipulation to maintain power and suppress dissent.
2. **Surveillance and Control:** Orwell's depiction of constant surveillance through devices like telescreens and the Thought Police emphasizes the lack of privacy in this dystopian world. The Party monitors not only actions but also thoughts, creating an environment where even thinking rebellious or dissenting thoughts is a punishable offense.
3. **Newspeak:** The Party introduces Newspeak, a language designed to eliminate words that could be used for subversive thoughts. By controlling language, the Party seeks to control thought, limiting the range of possible dissent and rebellion.
4. **Doublethink:** The concept of doublethink involves holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously and accepting both as true. This illustrates the Party's ability to control and manipulate the minds of its citizens, making them accept and believe in ideas that are logically inconsistent.
5. **Historical Revisionism:** The Party constantly revises historical records to align with its current propaganda and control the narrative of the past. The idea is to control not only the present and the future but also the interpretation of the past.
6. **Individual vs. Collective:** Winston Smith's journey represents the struggle of the individual against the collective power of the Party. His desire for personal freedom and independent thought runs counter to the Party's goal of complete conformity.
7. **Emotional and Psychological Manipulation:** The Party uses various techniques, such as fear, torture, and the manipulation of emotions, to control and break the will of individuals like Winston who dare to rebel.

"1984" remains relevant as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked government power, surveillance, and the manipulation of truth. The novel has had a profound impact on popular culture, and many terms and concepts introduced by Orwell, such as "Big Brother," "Orwellian," and "Thought Police," have become part of the common lexicon when discussing issues of government overreach and

surveillance. The themes explored in "1984" continue to resonate in discussions about political control, freedom, and the potential consequences of sacrificing individual liberties for the sake of collective security.

Orwell's Critique of Totalitarianism:

George Orwell's critique of totalitarianism is a central theme in his works, particularly in "1984" and "Animal Farm." Orwell's experiences, including his observations of totalitarian regimes during the Spanish Civil War and his concerns about the rise of authoritarianism during his time, deeply influenced his perspective on the dangers of concentrated power. Here are key aspects of Orwell's critique of totalitarianism:

1. **Abuse of Power:** Orwell was profoundly skeptical of centralized authority, particularly in the hands of a few individuals or a single party. His works illustrate how those in power can abuse their authority, leading to oppression, manipulation, and the suppression of individual rights.
2. **Surveillance State:** One of the most striking aspects of Orwell's critique is the pervasive surveillance present in his dystopian worlds. The constant monitoring of citizens, both in their public and private lives, serves as a tool for the state to suppress dissent and control behavior. This theme reflects Orwell's concerns about the potential erosion of privacy and personal freedom in a surveillance state.
3. **Manipulation of Truth and Information:** Totalitarian regimes, according to Orwell, manipulate information and control the narrative to shape public perception. In "1984," the Party engages in historical revisionism and the creation of a fictional past to control the present and future. This manipulation of truth undermines the possibility of dissent and critical thinking.
4. **Censorship and Thought Control:** Orwell explores the suppression of dissenting opinions and the control of thoughts through mechanisms like Newspeak and Thought Police. The aim is to limit the range of acceptable ideas and eliminate any opposition to the ruling ideology. This theme emphasizes the danger of limiting intellectual freedom and stifling independent thought.
5. **Dehumanization and Social Engineering:** Totalitarian regimes often seek to mold society according to a predetermined ideology, leading to dehumanization and the loss of individuality. Orwell's works depict the degrading effects of such social engineering, where individuals are reduced to mere cogs in the machinery of the state.
6. **Individual Resistance:** Despite the overwhelming power of the totalitarian state, Orwell's protagonists often engage in acts of resistance. Winston Smith in "1984" and the animals in "Animal Farm" symbolize the human instinct for freedom and the resilience of the individual spirit against oppressive systems.
7. **Warning Against Complacency:** Orwell's works serve as a warning against complacency and the dangers of apathy in the face of encroaching totalitarianism. He emphasizes the responsibility of individuals to remain vigilant, question authority, and defend the principles of democracy and personal freedom.

George Orwell's critique of totalitarianism is enduring, resonating with readers across time and cultures. His works continue to be relevant as cautionary tales, urging societies to guard against the concentration of power and the erosion of individual liberties in the pursuit of collective security or ideological purity. Orwell's insights into the dynamics of authoritarian rule have left an indelible mark on political thought and have become essential reading for those interested in the perils of unchecked government power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, George Orwell's enduring legacy lies in his role as a British writer and journalist critically examining political and social structures, particularly totalitarianism, through seminal works such as "Animal Farm" and "1984." Orwell's early life experiences, including witnessing class inequality and colonial oppression, fueled his commitment to social justice, shaping his unwavering critiques of power structures. His dystopian masterpieces, "Animal Farm" and "1984," serve as cautionary tales against the corruption of noble revolutions and the dangers of unchecked government power, resonating with readers globally as relevant reflections on totalitarianism, surveillance, and the erosion of individual freedoms. Orwell's broader contributions extend to essays on language, politics, and journalism, making him a significant figure in political and social commentary.

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