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## George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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### [1]Editor's Note:

The following text is a transcript of Jonathan Bowden's lecture, "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Totalitarian Leftism," which was delivered to the 23rd New Right meeting in London on September 26, 2009. In editing this transcription, I introduced punctuation and paragraph breaks. I also deleted a couple of false starts. You can listen to the lecture at YouTube [here](#) [2]. Several bits were unintelligible and are marked as such. If you can understand these words, please post a comment below.



I'd like to talk about George Orwell who was one of the major writers of the 20th century. Many people believe that the political novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is in many respects the novel of the 20th century. It is probable that by the middle of this century, at the beginning of the new millennium, this novel will be seen as axiomatic of much of what went on in the era just before.

Orwell was dying when he wrote this work, and he wrote it on the island of Jura; he wrote it in a tent; he wrote it in an island that had been rented to him by the proprietor of a magazine called *The Adelphi*. He was dying when it was written, but it doesn't really bear upon it the impress of a dying man.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* has entered into the language of contemporary modernity. Even the word "totalitarianism" was made fashionable by it. The term "Big Brother." The belief in an all-powerful and all-seeing yet strangely unknown party. The invention of Newspeak. The notion of Ingsoc or English socialism.

The extraordinarily famous broadcast in the middle of the 1950s which caused a scandal at the time the BBC broadcast it with the late Peter Cushing playing Winston Smith in the title role. It is said that one Tory MP got up in the House of Commons and condemned the BBC for having this broadcast because one of his constituents had dropped dead during the middle of it. The ultimate critical accolade: dropping dead in the middle of a TV performance. It is quite possible that she dropped dead at the moment when the rats were introduced into the mask to torture Winston at the end, by the Party.

If you remember, O'Brien, who is the sort of sadistic Party priest and has an Irish Catholic name of course because there is an anti-Catholic element to the novel and Blair, or Orwell, was a Scottish Protestant in many respects: that strand is there.

And she dropped dead at the moment when the rats were introduced. Do you remember the moment in the cellars of the Ministry of Love? When O'Brien says to Winston about the thing, the one thing that every individual fears above all, and he knows that in Winston's case it's rats, and rats are introduced into this mask. Richard Burton, of course, played O'Brien in the famous Virgin film actually, done by Branson's organization, of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1984. Burton was dying of cancer at the time, and it was not just his last great performance, but his last performance.

Now, this novel begins with a very famous phrase. I don't usually actually quote in my talks, but I think this is one occasion when I'll differ from that. This is a triadic novel in accordance with the Dante-esque schema which prevails in a lot of Western literature. You have a tripartite division: the affair between him and Julia, the Party dissident, is in some ways a slightly squalid version of heaven; the purgatorial existence under the rule of the all-seeing Party in the third part of the volume is purgatory; and the last sequence in the always lit, electronically lit cellars of the Ministry of Love, is hell. Under the dispensation of O'Brien and the totalitarian Party that he serves.

The novel begins in this way. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* part 1:

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a colored poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a meter wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed down from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Now, of course, that's a portrait, in a cartoon-like way, of Joseph Stalin. Who, if you remember, had the handlebar moustache and the eyes that seemed to follow you around the room in a sort of quasi-Elizabethan painting where the eyes are hollowed out and a spy watches you in between one room and another, and so on. On a personal touch, my mother's step-father had a portrait of Joseph Stalin on his wall, in the pantry, because he was Communist shop steward in the AVRO's works that built the Lancaster bomber in Manchester. And so Stalin gazed down upon the Butties and upon the Eccles cake, and upon the things in that Manchester pantry, Stalin: his hero.

Although he once said if it wasn't Stalin it would be Hitler, because he was one of these individuals who could never be in the middle, you see, and because he was naturally of an illiberal mind. But there we are. Don't forget these individual leaders had enormous cults earlier in the 20th century. The postmodern people wandering around with their shopping bags this

afternoon in central London are living in a totally different time and in a totally different temperature and moral climate.

Now, the novel begins with a lot of sense-data which shows that Orwell was a novelist and not a political ideologue. One of the reasons that this novel has lasted is because it is *not* political philosophy translated into novelistic effect. It's a novel infused with political ideas. What most apolitical people remember is the cabbage smell that's everywhere, the dirty mats that are everywhere, whenever you put your hand on something there's dust, and there's dirt. Everything's decrepit and broken down, and yet the Tannoy in the background's pumping out ideology about the glory of socialism and the coming struggle of the masses.

The one thing that's forgotten about this novel is that this novel's a comedy. It's actually an extraordinarily funny book, and Orwell used it in deeply dark satirical terms. The fact that the world has not read it as a comedy, but has actually read it literally as a fact, is a testament partly to the extraordinary cynical and dark and treacly nature of Orwells' outlook. Maybe it was also affected by the fact that he was dying at the time that he wrote it.

This novel is a satire on many of the Leftist Hampstead intellectuals that Orwell knew in the '30s and the '40s. Robert Conquest, who wrote *The Great Hunger* and *The Great Terror* about Stalinist atrocities in the Soviet Union, was able to do so by the mealy-mouthed and appeasive apologetics which he came across in the salons of Hampstead and elsewhere, and Orwell was very similar.

Orwell was a paradoxical man: a socialist of upper-middle-class origins, he was in revolt against the Empire of his day, and he wrote a book called *Burmese Days* which was a testament to that revolt. Yet also, a man who, in some respects, was a "Tory," in inverted commas, was archaic in Leftist terms, was a bit of a nationalist, and a man who always adored rubbing the fur of his own side backwards. Orwell was one of these people who is an extraordinarily difficult bedfellow, as his fellow Leftists were to discover.

He made his name, amongst other things, for editing Eniran Bevan's review *Tribune*, on the left of the Labour Party, in the 1930s. But his hostility to Stalinism and to Left totalitarianism, his hostility to the British Communist Party, and his hostility to the tactics Communists used to impose their discipline on others became apparent throughout the 1930s and '40s.

They were basically crystallized by his experience in the Spanish Civil War, where—typical of Orwell—he didn't go for any of the left militias that were most favored, and ended up with the POUM which was in the command of somebody called Nin, I think, who was a minor demi-Trotskyist figure, despised by the anarchists, and by the official Left, and yet to one side of the main socialist bloc fighting in the Republican cause. This is rather typical of Orwell because you know full well that he's aligned himself with the faction that, if crushed in internal Left disputes, would mean that he's actually persecuted by his own side, and this is, of course, what happened.

So, in the July days in Madrid, when the anarchists and the Communists fought with each other inside the Republican zone, when there needed to be a scapegoat for that fighting, they turned on this tiny little party that everyone hated called the POUM, and they became, "fascist apologists," "clerical dog-collarists," "running dogs of the international bourgeois conspiracy," and so on. And these individuals were hunted down with extreme ruthlessness, and all those that

were found were shot and killed without any sort of a tribunal or trial at all. The leader of this particular sect was tortured to death by the Communist secret police inside the Republican zone.

These incidents traumatized Orwell and made him a sort of critical figure of parts of the Left on the Left. We look back today through rose-tinted spectacles to a degree. When he wrote this sort of material the world was still very much in the balance, and the forces against which he was inveighing in art, novelistically, could well have come to power.

It's also interesting to note that most of Orwell's books are not forgotten today, but would have been partly forgotten had he not written the fable *Animal Farm* about the Bolshevik *coup*, and had he not written *Nineteen Eighty-Four* about the texture, and nature, and, what novelists call sense data, of living under a totalitarian Left dictatorship.

One of the interesting things to note is that Eastern European intellectuals, particularly in societies like Hungary, and Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere all regarded this book as essentially a factual commentary on their lives, so close was it an imaginary, and yet projected, identification with what it was like to live under Ceausescu's Romania, for example. There are also extraordinary parallels between reality and this novel which, don't forget, was written in 1948 which is why when he needed a title he inverted it and it became *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Now, in Ceausescu's Romania almost every telephone conversation was listened to, and if you rang into the country from the outside, the Securitate, the all-pervasive secret police, would break a line—very crude, pre-digital connections—and they would put in a new block of tape to listen to the message again. And you'd have to ring again, and then you would have to ring again, and then they would block the line, and you'd have to ring again, and so on. Because everything was being listened to even when it wasn't. Every cafe table had a microphone underneath it; but 80% of them didn't work; but people couldn't take a chance that it wasn't one of the 20% that happened to be working.

There are two extraordinary parallelisms between the Ceausescu regime and this novel. One is the endless production of works by the great leader. Ceausescu's collected volumes ran to 15, 20, 30 volumes. Of course, he never wrote a word of it. They were all written for him by communist scribes and apparatchiks. Hoxha in Albania had a similarly unread, cavernous library that was produced, to a boy, by tame scholars who would have been shot, or tortured to death, or their families killed, and their family homes bulldozed so that they never existed, hadn't they actually produced this sort of material.

The other parallelism is the pyramids. In this novel, the Party build four enormous ministries: Ministry of Peace, which is for war; Ministry of Love, which is for torture, oppression of the citizen, and to the purity of Ingsoc, the ideology of the dictatorship, which is called Ministry of Love because it's the inversion of that. Then there's other ministries: the Ministry of Plenty, which deals with economic affairs, usually involving endless braying statistical announcements of pig-iron production which Orwell thought was a hilarious joke from Eastern bloc dictatorships, but actually came quite close to the truth.

Now, in Romania Ceausescu ordered large pyramids to be built in the capital, and these were built and were observable when the regime fell in a coup organized by ex-communists and other factors to form what was called the National Salvation Front at that time. Do you remember the

scenes on television? When Ceausescu's on the podium surrounded by the Securitate. Many of whom were orphans, many of whom were taken from orphanages directly by the Ceausescu family and impregnated with the idea that they were related to him; that Ceausescu and his ubiquitous wife, who was always with him on all occasions, were their mother and father. That's one of the reasons, psychologically, why the Securitate gunmen fought to the end, unlike many of the other Eastern bloc dictatorship servants who gave up when the going got rather rough.

But that incredible moment, which is history as it's observed, when Ceausescu was orating about the dangers of fascism, the dangers of revanchism the dangers of counter-terrorism, the dangers of a new bourgeois elite arriving in Romania, and he suddenly stops. And the Securitate around him start to get worried because the crowd is getting restive. And the crowd is working out that if just a few of them move, nothing will happen, but if they all move together, the security police don't know what to do.

And there's a moment when Ceausescu is looking: "Do I step back from the microphone? Do I continue my anti-Western rant? Do I go into the helicopter with the Securitate?" And he suddenly decides to go with the Securitate, and they disappear.

And usually, whenever a regime like that's in trouble, there's an immediate cut in the television, and a ballet starts. Do you know? Or something like that. That always used to happen in the Soviet Union: whenever someone was being purged or something of moment was going on, a famous feature film would appear, you know, just to fill a gap, just like trooping the color but in Soviet terms, just put up, you know?

But the Romanian television just allowed it to run, and you can see the Ceausescus running across the top of the roof, surrounded by Securitate who had their weapons out by then, and then got into the helicopter and went off, by which time the crowd, or mob if you like, had broken in to the bottom of the building, and was coming up the building, and by then the whole structure was swaying. Later that day, of course, the Securitate got on top of many of the buildings and started firing down on the people, and many of them were determined to bring back the regime.

Now, this novel is interesting because it radicalizes certain elements of communist rule. One of the ideas that's almost got forgotten about in many treatments of the novel; and filming, and theatrical treatments like the Peter Cushing one and like the John Hurt one, and that sort of thing, can't really deal with this: and this is the language the Party creates called Newspeak. This is this all-purpose, jabbering, ideological, Marxist-Leninist language, sometimes referred to as Duckspeak. Duckspeak is the idea that you quack away, quack away, and your conscious brain is not really involved because your response to everything is a preformatted form of ideology.

If you remember, one of the dictionary makers who befriends him, he's called Syme, in the grubby canteen where they all have their dinners, in the Ministry of Truth, which of course is to propagate lies on behalf of the regime, and to rewrite the *Times* so that everybody's been purged, at the right place, and if someone is purged they are now an un-person, a un-person in Ingsoc Newspeak. And you have to go through the records and make sure that it's all filed, so there's no relationship with them, so you can never be accused of thought criminality by virtue of the fact they exist. Every spare bit of paper that relates to an un-person, someone they've done

away with, you put in the memory hole, which goes down into the furnace, which is everywhere, ubiquitous, behind these pipes, this little grill; it's just like a sort of waste disposal really, but the idea is it's waste disposal of all the lives who are being rewritten continuously, so that the current reality fits in with the Party view at any particular time.

The Party has two sections: the inner Party, which wears black and has special privileges; the inner Party can turn the telescreen off; like that screen back there, every apartment, every room has a screen but you can't turn it off, and it watches you as you watch it, so it's two way. And O'Brien of course in a famous scene in the second section of the book, can turn it off because he's in the inner Party.

For most people, the TV rather than at the end of the room. is in the center of the room on a wall, so it can look down on them, and so it can instruct you—"Citizen!," you know—in appropriate behavior. Everyone, like in Maoist China, at the beginning of the day in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell has to do physical jerks. You have to do physical exercises at the beginning of the day to coordinate yourself for the coming struggle and for the commitment to socialism which will occur throughout all of the hours before you go back to bed again.

Another interesting insight is the relationship that people have with their children. Orwell prefigures the world of bourgeois chaos where parents are frightened to discipline their own children, and which we increasingly see in liberal humanist societies. The parents are preyed upon by the young. One of the first, and great, scenes is with the Parsons family who live just up the corridor in the block, cause the Parsons boy is a terror. He accuses everyone of being, "You're a thought criminal!" he says, "You're a nasty little vanguard against the Proletariat elite!" He screams that at everyone he meets. And he's got a pop-gun, he says "You're gonna burn, you're gonna burn, you're going to the camps! You're going down [unintelligible]"

And his mother's terrified of him because to discipline him is to engage in the possibility of a counter-revolutionary act. So he knows that he's got his parents where he wants them by this endless sort of Young Pioneers brigading sort of behavior. And it's a way of corralling the older generation into conformity. Orwell's instinct for particularly Left totalitarian forms of power is very acute here considering that, except for a small period in Spain, he'd never really been subjected to them.

The other thing which is very interesting, and which Orwell knew extraordinarily well partly because of his time at the BBC, was the penchant intellectuals have for propaganda. Intellectuals adore the idea that they are independent spirits who are highly individualistic and always love gainsaying what anyone else has said to them. In actual fact, Orwell believed that most intellectuals are craven, and deeply conformist, and extraordinarily group oriented.

[Orwell] wrote BBC propaganda for India during the Second World War. He wrote it in Senate House, which is in Malet Street which is where the Central London university buildings are, the sort of whitewashed, slightly authoritarian sort of '20s, '30s type of heavy modern building. And there's a Room 101 in that, because all of the BBC offices had numbers, and the torture scene with O'Brien was the same room from which he broadcast anti-Axis propaganda to India, where, of course, Gandhian pacifism, and the Indian National Army that supported the Axis, and so on,

were active, and the BBC needed people to bring propaganda over to that part of the world during the Second World War.

Now, there's an individual in this book called Syme who's an etymologist. He's writing the 11th dictionary of Newspeak, and Syme meets Winston Smith in the grubby canteen. You remember the food they have? Your lunch would be a Brillo Pad, which is sort of pork or something, surrounded by bloody stew, surrounded by bits of decaying vegetable, all in a broth, and you sort of eat it down with Victory Tea in a chipped mug, and it's really hot because there's no milk in it, you know, and it's just sort of filth really, but you've just got to sling it down because it keeps you going. And all the time Symes talking about the 11th dictionary of Newspeak.

He says, "We're going to totally eradicate intellectual freedom of thought." This is an intellectual. He says, "We're going to so restrict, methodologically, the linguistic compass of the human, so that people won't even be able to think independently of Party rule," because to be able to think, you have to have not just a concept but the language with which to express it. We will so restrict language to the possibility that the signifier can never go beyond that which is signified, there can only be concrete concepts even for ideology, so that the mind works in a totally binary way, and you've filtered out the prospect of chaos and thought criminality before you've even uttered a word. And, of course, this is an intellectual who's devoted to the mind but finds in his own imprisonment and self-torture a strange pleasure.

Orwell has realized that there's a penchant in many intellectuals to weave the bamboo of their own cage in ever more fascinating shapes. And it's this extraordinary percipience in the way in which his own group behaves that gives the novel a particular power. Whether Syme is based on an academic called Syme who wrote a famous book about Roman history in the 1930s, which was about the concept of Caesarism, I don't know, or whether it's accidental. There are others, what are they, Tillotson, and various other Party weavers, and so on.

There's a great moment of illumination as they're biting into one of these meat sort of burgers, you know, and yet look around you. Just over there, the masses in a society like this will be eating meat that isn't meat. Don't you know that when you go to Kentucky Fried Chicken that many of the trays contain food that isn't food? A lot of junk food is gas. It's chemicals, has no food at all. There was an American television program a couple of years ago . . . well, you know what Americans are like. A fifth of them are so obese they could hardly fit through that door. I saw a man in America who was so fat that I thought to myself, if you fired a bullet through his body—I have these thoughts—you wouldn't hit a bone because he was so fat. And that's because he's spent his entire life eating that sort of muck.

But it's the same muck that the Party apparatchiks eat, and say that they like it, in the canteen in the Ministry of Truth. And Syme, he's sort of spitting out this sort of gristly non-meat as he's talking, you know; these are probably imagined dinners in the BBC sort of re-filtered through a novelist's imagination. And he's going, "This is marvelous, Winston," he says, "marvelous. In Ingsoc no freedom at all, the individual will be completely restructured and inert. Imagine a baby with its limbs cut off just quacking away ideologically, it's marvelous! Have another bit of chicken," you know? Because Symes is sold totally on the idea that his liberation is more and more enslavement, sort of anti-hermeneutically, to the minutiae of the Party's lexicographical control of man.

Now, to the non-intellectuals, to the mass of the population who are known as the proles, for whom the socialist revolution was created of course, none of this matters at all, and Orwell's extraordinarily aware of the ultimate class split, which isn't really about poverty but is about the mind. This split between people who live for and use the mind, and those who are purely physical.

One of the slogans of people who want change in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is "The future is the proles." They look at the proles, and all of them are looked at in a degraded way. One of the things that socialist and left critics, such as Professor Raymond Williams, have always said about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and related books is that they are degrading to working class people, that they are an attitude of bourgeois snobs in their ivory towers, liberals really, cracking on about theory, condemning those who are struggling for a better world. Williams, who was a sort of communist fellow traveler or crypto-communist, from his berth at Oxford, of course, for many years deep down had this view of Orwell and expresses it in the Fontana Modern Masters about Orwell. Interestingly, Fontana gave the Lenin volume to Robert Conquest, which is an absolute hatchet job, and they gave the Orwell volume to Williams, which is a mild hatchet job because Orwell couldn't be criticized too much.

Now, the desire for intellectuals to torment themselves and the division between them and those who are purely physical in this life is one of the cardinal themes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The moment when Winston, and Orwell partly identifies with Winston although he's not that fit, obviously, but he invents a certain emotional power that clearly comes from himself within the narrative into the Winston figure. There's a moment when he looks out, I think it's during a scene when he's about to have sex, you can't really say "love," with Julia, his lover in the novel, and he looks out and sees a proletarian washer-woman with some pegs putting some laundry on a line. And she sings a love song, "It was only an 'opeless fancy," and all this, you know, it's a musical, it's a vaudeville turn. And Winston looks out at her and says, "If there's any hope, it lies with the proles."

Now, one of the most interesting features ideologically in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that the Party creates its own dissent; the Party creates its own past; it creates its own present; it creates its own future. Because it controls the mind, the mental regime that people use to think about the past, the present, and the future. And it also creates its own dissent.

All the dissenters use a book called *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Immanuel Goldstein, who of course is Trotsky. And the two minute hate is oriented towards Trotsky.

The two minute hate is very funny. In the Ministry, all the chairs are lined up for the hate, and you get like a sort of performance, or giving a speech in the company office, you know? There's a certain buildup of tension in the bureaucracy prior to the hate, and they all sit in these rows.

And all of the blocs are at war with each other, because there's Oceania, there's Eurasia, there's East Asia, three great totalitarian socialist regimes dominate the world. Sort of North America/Latino bloc, European bloc, Asiatic bloc, and they just divide it, Africa and the rest of it. They're not even mentioned. Poor old Africans don't get a mention.



And initially the hate begins with millions of Eurasian troops, you know, sort of the depiction of North Koreans or the Vietcong during those particular wars of American power, you know, faceless, merciless Asiatic masses marching towards you tommy gun out, all depersonalised and impersonal. And then, Trotsky's features will appear on the screen, and they all start hissing immediately; women, uncontrollable, have sort of negative orgasms, and roam about throwing things at the screen, "Beast! Beast!" they scream. And the hate's beginning you see, and the Party officials are pointing out the Goldstein figure, because Goldstein wrote the book that defines the Party's negation.

But the inner truth is the Party wrote that book, because they control the mind even of their enemies. And there's an amazing scene with O'Brien in his Ministry, where he's turned the screen off so he can't be listened to, and he's dressed in black. And Julia and Winston, who he knows are lovers, dressed in denim, dressed in blue serge, are with him in the office. And they talk about Goldstein's book, and O'Brien says later on, "I wrote that book of course."

But no book's written by an individual. Books are written by committees, because the individual mind can never be trusted, so everything's done by committee. So his outlook is true: the Party degrades itself, denigrates itself, tells you pretty explicitly what's going on and why, but never why they're doing it. So if you provide your opposition with the mental feed that they need in order to oppose you, you partly control them. This is a very old idea, but in the 20th century, when mass propaganda became available for the manipulation of the masses, this was an extraordinary way of behaving. You actually create your own inversions so you can control them.

Now, Trotsky/Goldstein is a figure of the early Party who provides the figure of the renegade, the running dog, the one who turns against the purity of the Party position, and also the scapegoat, the goat that's actually tied with the rope to the tree. All rage, all the failures, all the espionage that goes wrong, every battle that's lost: it's the fault of Goldstein and the deviationists. They are the ones; they are the traitors. In every word, behind every lie, behind every false sausage, behind every false statistic, the traitors lurk. Sin, secularized sin really, lurks everywhere, always to be purged, purged in the hate, purged through self-criticism.

Under communist regimes, individual Party members had to undergo self-criticism on a regular basis. You'd be forced. "Self-criticism is expected comrade." You'd be forced to stand up in front of the others and to engage in dialectical critique: "I had moments of class evasiveness. I suffered from moments of false consciousness. I had certain religious moments where I denied the material nature of reality and the glory of the Party's ascendancy." And everyone would be going, "Mmm, yes." It's all very serious, you know. And under certain regimes this could be life or death.

I went to a Catholic school; you did religion four periods a week. But in loads of ex-Catholic schools in Poland you did Marxist-Leninism four periods a week. And you had to get those lessons right. It was very important. If you made a mistake about the 1844 Paris manuscripts in relation to *Grundrisse*, you were in error, and that was a serious matter.

Most of the liberals smile cynically about all this because they've never really had to live under the pressure of those sorts of institutions, and don't understand what it's like to have to play all those dialectical games and engulf yourself in all those sorts of lies.

The irony is that, broadly speaking, working class children weren't exempt, but as long as they just prated a few simplistic slogans it was alright, because they weren't the ones for whom it was done. The Party wanted to control the minds of those who could think, not those who, in a sense, follow, and who are physical and who need an architecture within which to be. So the very modern totalitarianism understands that you have to control the mind first. Control the mind, you control the body; control the present, control the past, you dictate the future. The future is the Party.

The Party has three slogans: War is Peace; Ignorance is Strength; Freedom is Slavery. And those are on everything. They're on every beermat. They're on every watch. They're on every tablecloth. They're on every flag. War is Peace; Ignorance is Strength; Freedom is Slavery. And then there's the ubiquitous "Big Brother is watching you." And Stalin's heavy Georgian features, although some people say he's Ossetian, his heavy features looking down on you. That sort of power, that sort of insistence, that sort of mask, because he was wearing a mask.

There is an extraordinary picture of Stalin after Kirov's death. Kirov was the Leningrad Party leader, who was assassinated in mysterious circumstances, and it's probable there were lots of Western Marxists and liberals who didn't understand what was going on. And, of course, Kirov was killed on Stalin's orders to set off the purge which sort of begins, in effect, the Ukrainian famine from the panoply of a politically-oriented purge.

Kirov was killed to provide an excuse for mass terror, less in the society than over the elite: terror over the bureaucracy; terror over the army; terror over the KGB, or one of its incarnations itself. Because Kirov was so high up in the regime that if he had been got to it must be because of conspiratorial forces of an anti-revolutionary tendency at the heart of the republic. This means that no one was safe, and that you look for the treason and the traitors right at the top, not at the bottom or in the middle.

The mass shootings and killings and tortures beforehand that got rid of between a third of a million and a million Party members, higher to middling apparatchiks and members of the armed forces, and that decimated the Soviet higher command before Barbarossa, and were one of the many reasons—partly because the army was in the wrong position in relation to the invasion because they were planning to attack Germany themselves and were caught unawares, and so on—but one of the many reasons for their collapse in the early days was because vast numbers of their officers had been purged, undergone self-criticism, failed self-criticism, down the plug.

But, of course, executioners and torturers and invigilators and those who interviewed those who were going to the camps or going to be shot, they themselves could be found guilty of deviation, because if they made a mistake, or if they had an elision of consciousness, or if they showed too much zeal in certain circumstances, if Party ideology shifted slightly in a subsequent moment, they themselves could be before the committees. It's just like the French Revolution but using sort of mass death technology in a way, and it's all quite deliberate.

And there is this amazing moment when Stalin looks down on Kirov, in this orthodox way when the body is laid out in the casket, and he looks down on Kirov, and it's a Mafia boss looking at a subaltern that he's had killed in order to start a war between clans, and you can see it, I mean

it's just a subjective way of looking at reality, but you can see that Stalin knows in his face what he has done.

And Stalin is this odd character. Western propaganda about Stalin has been based on Trotskyism for most of the 20th century. Stalin was an interesting and slightly creative man who was also a brigand and an extreme criminal addicted, psychopathologically very like Mao, to extremes of sadism and slaughter which he positively enjoyed, positively enjoyed, and gained pleasure from.

Mao certainly had pronounced sadistic features and used to enjoy the physical torment of former Party members who had fallen out with him. Their bodies, mutilated, would often be exhibited in the streets in order to terrorize the masses into obedience with socialist logic. It's probable that psychologically many Chinese have not recovered from this. The full extent of the terror that was represented in Asia by the Cultural Revolution is still not really explored, even by quite radical and mainstream Western historiography.

Certainly, many people in Hong Kong saw enormous numbers of bodies floating out to them, when Hong Kong was under British rule, of course. Many of these bodies were partly eaten as well, and many of them were Red Guards who started fighting with each other about moments of dialectical purity, because these bureaucracies have a tendency to start sort of ravening like dogs. They get so wild they start attacking themselves if there's no object to attack at a particular time.

This phenomenon also fed through into many other things, the collapse of discipline that was also ordered, a sort of planned chaos, particularly in relation to the mass rape of German women at the end of the Second World War by Soviet troops, which even today Premier Putin says never occurred: "Never occurred, Western lies fed by the enemies of Russia." Russia is a nationalist country now, and Putin in many ways is a man to be admired in certain respects, but the old ways die hard in many ways. Those mass rapes certainly occurred to the degree that the German communists pleaded with the Soviets to stop them because they were preventing the creation of Ulbricht's state in occupied East Germany. The reason they occurred was because commissars ordered them, and at the same time there was such a breakdown in order that that order was itself part of the chaos with which it ramified.

All of Stalin's atrocities are ordered and are written down. The Katyn forest massacre of the Polish officer corps. There's an interesting quasi-revisionist Polish national film called *Katyn* which is available now in certain art cinemas, not getting a general release, but who in the multiplexes would see it, let's face it? But it is available through art cinemas. It's very gruesome at the end, very truthful at the end. Now, the whole Politbureau ordered that. All of their signatures are on the death order, including Krushchev's, and the later thawists and reformers. Stalin's name: bigger than all the others, graphologically, is at the bottom: Stalin.

Because they thought they were going to win and that history was on their side and that all the records of the elite of the masses should be there for people to see for history to judge: "We have to wade through feces and blood and filth to create socialism and glory." Heaven can come down onto the Earth but you've got to wade through the blood to get it. Heaven is coming down but first: the abattoir. Onwards!

And Orwell in a sense understood the logic of many of these processes of purges and trials within regimes. Within months the men like Vyshinsky in the '30s at the show trials, screaming at the victims, certain of their subordinates could be on the other side being screamed at and could be executed very quickly.

Now, the interesting thing about this novel is that actually, the man, apart from in Spain for a few brief months before he got out, never really experienced the rigors of communism. There will be many on the Left who say it's a fantasy. It's an artist's metaphorization of what occurred in certain Eastern European societies, particularly certain societies that were less controlled by Soviet power: Hoxha's Albania, parts of Yugoslavia, and Ceausescu's Romania, where there were indigenous communist, terrorist, army-based, and paramilitary movements came to power without necessarily the intervention of the Red Army. Sometimes you see purer forms of communism built to excess of a sort that occupied Eastern Europe didn't always equate to, because there were certain balancing elements in occupied Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union of course, Soviet power and pure communism had been completely uncontrolled from the very beginning.

The term Bolshevik revolution is itself a misnomer. There was no revolution. It was a *coup* by the armed wing of the Bolshevik Party, and was thought so at the time by the people who did it. There was a moment when Trotsky, Lenin, and Stalin slept together in a room about as big as this after they had seized Kerensky's Palace, and with newspaper on the ground. It was the first day, after being up for over 20 hours, and after they had had a couple of hours sleep, Lenin got up and said, "Comrades, we have achieved a great thing. We have been in power for one day." Because power is what it's all about in relation to this ideology, which ramifies with what O'Brien says to Winston at the end.

The point is that Winston has intellectually denied the sovereignty of the Party's rule over the mind. Therefore he's far more important than some prole who just rebels physically against the Party. But then you break their arms or their legs or send them to a camp, that's of no importance. What matters is the mind that controls the body. So before they kill Winston they will torture him into submission: he must love Big Brother before they execute him; he must be reworked.

There's a famous moment, isn't there, when all his teeth are rotten, and O'Brien pulls all the teeth out—snap!—in one go, and pulls them out of the mouth, and he says, "Look what you've done to yourself, look how you've destroyed yourself." And Winston (John Hurt's always playing the victim, isn't he?) says, "You've done it to me, you've done it to me," and O'Brien says, "No! No, no, no, no, no, you've done it to yourself by denying the love of the Party!" Do you remember that line, "You're just a cell, Winston," he says, "a cell"? The individual has long ceased to exist in history as we define it. "You're just an individual cell within the body of the Party. Your death, your life is of no significance; you're just a cell. Do you die when you cut your fingernails?"

I say this in this theatrical manner because I've played O'Brien. When I was 18 we had a school play, and it was quite interesting. There was a very bad actor called—someone I won't name—whose surname was Smith, who played Winston Smith. And I played O'Brien dressed all in black, and we didn't have any girls in the school so we had one homosexual in the sixth form dressed

up as a girl who played Julia. And there's this strange moment, because this is an all boys' school, and all the Catholic brothers are down there, and it's all very odd. I'm one of the few Protestants there, there's a transvestite on the stage and a bloke who can't act and we're playing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it's typical. And when Julia comes on there's this great wolf-whistle that then dies in its own throes, do you know what I mean, when they all realize, "Good Lord, it's so-and-so dressed up!" And there's a moment of horror and terror, in which you see all these grammar school boys, about 17, you know, funny actually.

O'Brien is one hell of a part, I mean he really is, let's face it, because he's attracted to O'Brien from the earliest stages because O'Brien is a priest who believes in nothing but the ideology of the Party, and who is genuine. He's not a fool: he wrote *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. He believes in torturing Winston as a cog in the machine because it doesn't matter. You see, it's the futility of the absence of negation. They could just shoot Winston and have done with it. Why go through all these games?

But the games are important because they prove the meaning of meaninglessness, if you like. That's the point, because all of these ideologies are totally atheistic, totally anti-transcendental, totally mechanistic, and totally material. It's a sort of revenge of matter upon itself, if you like. It's the churning of matter, and he's the sort of scientific non-priest of the churning of matter, human matter.

There is a slogan of the Czechoslovak secret police where they used to say, "We are the engineers of human souls." And there's a famous Czech dissident novel called that, or uses it in the title, and that's how they really saw themselves. They saw themselves as a vanguard in history. The working class were being oppressed. They'd been degraded. They're being decanted from the agricultural state—this is in classical Marxist theory—into the industrial one. The industrial civilization creates its negation through social renewal and the creation of a vanguard which is drawn from all classes, particularly from bohemian, outsider intellectuals; half of them are Jews, although they don't say that in the ideology, half of them are Gentiles who want to destroy their own society because they hate it for various reasons, and want to tear it down, and want to see themselves—largely marginal figures hitherto—promoted to serious posts.

This is why ideology is so important for these sorts of regimes, because it's committees and groups of quasi-intellectuals fighting with each other about meaning and purpose, and plotting against each other, and doing each other down, and sort of releasing statements to the secret police so they can all be purged, so I can get his job, so I can edit this magazine, so I can overstep him, and so on. It's the universalization, with a ruthless and very violent terrorism added on, of the struggles that go on in the average university department today. But that sort of engine of destruction isn't added on. Orwell's extraordinary insight is his ability to see these processes at work.

Don't forget communism is one of the most extraordinary stories of modern man; here is a movement that emerges with almost no social support at all, and a few fringe ideologues around it, in the middle of the 19th century. By the first third of the following century, just passed, it controls vast stretches of the world; it kills tens of millions of human beings; it launches enormous wars; it creates enormous social structures; and then it fails, virtually, and

deconstructs, morally and structurally of itself, almost as if never believed in its own lies any more.

It's quite clear that Gorbachev was in many ways a liberal, or a Social Democrat in an old/new way, who allowed it to go. Because no reform of that system is possible unless you want to use violence and ferocious force, which Honecker wanted to do when the crowds began to come out in Germany prior to the deconstruction of the wall. Honecker's first instinct is the Stasi on the streets, fire, fire again, fire again, step on the bodies of those that are covered in blood and fire on them and step on their bodies: Socialism! Imposed on the masses! Because we are the masters of fate and history.

And it's only because Gorbachev said the Red Army will not back the Stasi up on the streets that Honecker remembered he was feeling a bit ill and had a bit of cancer on the way, and so they allowed him to clear off to Chile. And slightly more reformist, Euro-Communist types took over. And eventually sections of the wall were opened. Remember those incredibly dramatic moments when the bulldozers and so on brought down sections of the wall and the Stasi in [unintelligible] came out and stood with their Kalashnikovs, and the Germans came through the gaps that had been created? And the Westerners were on the other side cheering and this sort of thing.

When the Soviet Union collapsed there was a British trade unionist leader called Ken Gill who was the leader of TASS, a certain section of the electrical engineering union. And he said that when the Soviet Union collapsed—a bloke with a broad Wiltshire accent, a genuinely working class communist—Gill said, "A light went out for humanity when the Soviet Union went down." A light went out, and he died soon after. Because, you see, for people like him it was a pseudo-religion, and it was a belief in a radiant future as they used to call it in the ideology: *a radiant future for the masses!* And there was a belief in it.

It's why all of these people spied and so on. Of course many of them did it because they were owed money; they were perverts; they were rebels against their own system. But never forget that many of them converted to it like a quasi-religious conversion. Maclean, who was part of the Philby ring at Cambridge, read an incredibly boring book called *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* by Lenin which is based upon the materialism of a scientist at the beginning of the 20th century called Mach, and the light came into his eyes: "Now, history is clear to me, there is a plan! There is progress from agriculture to the industrial state, through the dialectical reversal via the vanguard that creates socialism that is above the masses." And eventually all the apparatus that is needed to install this—the terror; the lies; the propaganda; the secret police; the endless purging; the mass graves—will all fade away, all fade away, and be replaced by love. And by the encomium of forgiveness, as all members in all classes embraced each other, and there's no division. There's no division of race, of kind, of class, of gender, of ideology; all are one. All are one in the radiant future. And that's socialism, you see.

And there's a stage even beyond socialism: communism. Because if you listen to communist parties when they're in power, they will say that socialism is just an approximation of that which exists just beyond them. Another quasi-religious idea, really a quasi-idealistic conception, whereby the perfection of the future is still to be announced, and in that moment the state itself will wither away. There'll be no secret policemen. They'll start kissing their rubber truncheons, and this sort of thing, and throwing them away. It's all going to die before the dispensation of

love, and that sort of thing. But down in the abattoir, you know, comrades have got some dirty work to do in the name of progress.

It is, if you look at it, an enormous sort of materialist Greek tragedy acted out over about a century and a half, because it affected and changed the whole nature of the world, this ideology. China, of course, has done the reverse trick. They've kept an authoritarian, technocratic regime that's frozen the ideology like a theology it no longer even listens to, and it's introduced the most aggressive form of capitalism on Earth, using the very structures of authoritarian rule that were supposed to bring in its opposite. So there's a strange hybrid. Then you have these sort of dinosaur states like North Korea which strongly resembles in the cult of the Emperor/the Kim Il Sung figure who's worshipped like a god. Didn't you know he discovered the light bulb? Didn't you know he wrote all the books in the British Library? Didn't you know that he painted, personally, the roof of the Sistine Chapel? Didn't you know that virtually every scientific development has been done by Kim Il Sung and his semi-dead son? Because most North Koreans are taught this all the time.

There are also very interesting elements in the fugitiveness of communist ideology where you do wonder whether it's a materialist belief system at all. In camps in North Korea, if a dissident has a child, a woman, often the child will be killed by a commissar. The child will be born. The child will be presented as the child of a deviant and of a thought criminal. This is the doctrine of hereditarianism isn't it? This is the doctrine that the child inherits the social and secular sins of the parent. This isn't a Left-wing idea at all, essentially, so it's very odd, mentally. And the child, the commissar will step on its neck and crack it, break it in front of the camp. "Death of a deviant! Aliens of socialism and the praxis of the masses! I do not this as a crime. I kill not a human. I kill an enemy of the human."

When Yugoslav trials killed a large number of people in 1945/46—"trials" in inverted commas!—they were described not as trials of people, but as enemies of the people. The communist jurists would get up in the dock and say, "You are an enemy of the people," you know what that meant: not long to go; let's hope it's over quick. That's what people really thought when they were subjected to this.

What this novel does is it draws out the psychological, linguistic, and mental processes of what's going on in those quicker, enemy-of-the-people type trials which, of course, Ceausescu and his type got at the end. There is an occult principle isn't there, "What goes around comes around," as the hippies in the '60s used to say. And I remember when Ceausescu and his wife were tried the trial lasted for three hours. There wasn't much of a defense, just a bloke jabbering a bit, pushed to the side by the military policeman. They were dragged out of the court and shot. And shot as terrorists by the National Salvation Front, two thirds of whom were ex-communists. And remember there was that moment when the camera goes towards them as they're lying on the ground and the camera flicks onto the faces? The BBC, ITV, and CNN (if CNN existed then) cut that, because it was too distressing for Western audiences. Too distressing for Western audiences; but you could see the blood on the ground, you know, and they were dead. So they got the trial that they gave many others. And the Securitate, their bastard children, ideologically as well as structurally, fought to the end and died in burning buildings to keep it going.

Hoxha's Albania was an even more extreme example even of that. You could be arrested in Hoxha's Albania for owning an orange. Because it obviously hadn't been grown there, and you'd imported something from the regimes of the class enemy. So you were even a criminal for owning a bit of fruit. And that's why, if you view it in a cross-conscious European way, a very scandalous way, many European politicians from the comfortable West, like Kohl and so on — do you remember he went to East Berlin waving bananas? Waving great bunches of fruit saying, "You haven't seen this have you, you poor little people? You haven't seen this stuff for 50 years," extraordinarily condescending. But, the liberal materialism was at a much higher level. That's one of the reasons why they collapsed further east.

But the interesting thing is that communism is really the product of intellectuals. It's almost a sort of revenge of the intellectuals as a class upon life. The interesting thing is that some of the softest elements of Western societies, some of the most long-in-the-tooth elements, also some of the most economically comfortable elements are the people who pushed the Western/Eastern version of these ideas when they came to power.

There's a famous story of Jean Cocteau which may well be apocryphal, the French artist and poet and writer and film director, and all the rest of it. It's about 1910, and Lenin was certainly around then in Parisian salons as were many other people; don't forget Stalin was in Vienna. There are rumors that Hitler, Stalin, and Lenin once sat in a street in Vienna in different cafes, and they didn't know the other from the other, all developing their thinking. And you never know, because many of these bohemian undercurrents mix with each other in that decade of proto-revolution between 1900 and 1910, revolving around the Soviet proto-revolution of 1906, the early Soviet attempt at revolutionism.

I personally think, in a totally differentiated way, we're in a similar era now. We're on the threshold of enormous changes, of Herculean changes, the nature of which we don't really understand yet. And I think, very like the first decade of the last century, we're looking out on what's coming. Because quite clearly an attack upon Iran is prefigured by much of the rhetoric that's going on now, and much of which is being prepared now. They say they can't weaponize it by 2014 but who knows?

So, the interesting thing is the support of the wealthy and intellectual outsider for a belief system that materially offered them very little but intellectually offered them power. Power! Winston says at the end, "What's it all about?" to O'Brien. "What's all the hunger and the torture and the endless war and the propaganda and torturing me to death for a cause I don't really believe in to say I love Big Brother and then I do and then you shoot me. What's it all for?" And O'Brien says, "It's for power. Power," he says, "Power and more power. Power as a dialectical principle." You remember that great line? "If you want the future of the human race, Winston, imagine a boot, a boot, stamping on a human face forever!" And it's a sort of satire of a sort egomaniacal intellectual power using ideology purely as a vehicle.

And there's a very interesting insight into communism there. At the end Mao lived like a potentate. He lived like an ancient Persian or Egyptian Emperor. He was surrounded by women. He was surrounded by bastard children that he created. The politbureau used to meet him around his bed. Mao was quite a beast towards the end, and he used to say to Western correspondents he cleaned himself in his women. This is the great champion of humanity, the



great anti-sexist, you see. This is what they're like when they're in power. Have you ever seen pictures of his bedroom with an enormous bed like that of an emperor, with all these women and children around, and the secret police in their caps with the red star further back? And then these volumes of Marxist prose behind the Red Books, his own work allegedly, to the front. And then he'd be lying on this bed dictating to the others like a sort of overgrown child, like an ideological version of a mad Roman Emperor, essentially, because that's how it ended up. And probably the ideology had ceased to matter by then hadn't it? It had become a sort of mental chess that you played with yourself and with others for reasons of pure power.

Because these economies weren't making anything except more weapons, and the idea of Marxist critique of capitalism, that the proletariat is degraded because of the distinction between price and value, and that the surplus product is ripped out of the proletariat and invested by capitalists abroad in Empire. When Lenin wrote *Imperialism* in 1916 this is why he explained that revolution hasn't happened yet. It hasn't happened yet because they displaced the capital they have stolen from the people, stolen from the proletariat. And the irony was that extreme communism was an extreme version of what Marxism had criticized Western societies for: total degradation of the peasantry and proletariat; total ripping out of surplus value. Used to create more and more weapons in order to build more and more forms of power: pure power as an end in itself, but always at a material level because the ideology could only justify itself in material terms.

I think, to close, the interesting thing about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the one thing that's in my mind is the sense data. When Winston's in the Ministry of Truth and he needs to use the intercom he has to clean the holes in the device because they're full of dirt, you know? It's that grubby dirt-under-the-fingernails element that you get in state socialism, even in Western societies. Anyone who's ever queued in a DHSS queue—the glass in the office is cracked, there are no plants, there's no carpet. Everything's unnaturally cold and grubby. You know, your sub-standard, sub-standard NHS ward, you know what I mean? Everything's slightly out of focus. No one listens to you. Half of them are foreign anyway. No one really listens to you when you say something to them. They exist for you, don't they, not the other way 'round?

There's this logic, the state socialist logic, the logic of the producer writ large. You couldn't buy anything in shops in the Soviet Union at the end, but the Party could. You had a card, and you went to a special shop where you could get razor blades; you could get boots; you could get the niceties, soap, things you need to live, basically, in any sort of industrial society. And the masses would queue.

Anthony Burgess who wrote *A Clockwork Orange* once went to a restaurant in Moscow, and you sat there for five hours! "Can I get some service now?" "Screw you, we're the staff! You'll wait there for five hours." And then, after five and a quarter hours, you get this sort of cabbage soup, which is just a bit of cabbage in a bit of hot water with a sprig of parsley in it, sort of chucked at you, you know. It's like in Western restaurants now isn't it?

But it's that sort of idea of the grubbiness of its texture, when you've got this ideology of idealism and universal brotherhood, and yet you return to the cabbage soup and the smell in the dysfunctional lift and the hair floating in your soup, and you know that state socialism of that

sort, imposed by a party, a bureaucracy, an army has gone, and in all probability won't come back.

And yet the real point of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the reason why this novel lives, and still probably frightens people in a way, is the ubiquity of its concern with mental processes, and the belief that when humans, in many ways, reject the philosophies of the past they will try and subordinate the present to them. Communism has died.

It maybe killed 100 million in the 20th century, or more. It had to be fought. The tendency of which we are in some ways a part is accused by many out there of beastliness, of non-humanism, and all the rest of it. But I would say that there was a time when the forces of the Right had to be as ferocious, had to be almost as nasty as what they were attacking, and was attacking them, otherwise they would have been completely destroyed by it. This was an ideology that preached utopia but believed that the ends justified the means in a manner that's beyond that of a mafia don.

Do you remember the scene in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*? With the Jewish Hollywood producer who's a pedophile, and the Irish-German councilor of the Mafia clan? And they talk about him, and he's racially abusive to people of Italian and Germanic and Irish ancestry and all the rest of it. And the don waves that away. He's not bothered with all that. And Brando, big figure then, bit of a better actor then, said, "What does this man love?" And he loves a horse. So the mob cuts off the head of the horse and puts it in his bed. Why? Because the don is saying, "I am a man beyond all law, beyond all morality, beyond anything you could even think of. I can strike at you in a way you don't even understand. Because I have no limits. No limits."

And there was a time when communism, before it froze into a bureaucracy, had no limits at all. I'll close with Lenin's remark. Don't forget that the Cheka, the secret police was created momentarily. It was said it would be dissolved in a few years like the Terror under Robespierre. "It's just to impose discipline upon the class enemies so that paradise can begin." Towards his death in 1924 Lenin's brain was liquified. Many medical historians believe that at least half of it was liquid. And at the height of the terror and the war between the Red and the White, which of course the Whites lost, Lenin said to one of his aides, "Now is the time. There's maximum chaos, total starvation, the complete collapse of the Russian economy and civil war. Now is the time."

And the aide said, "Time for what?" And he said, "Time to seize all the assets of the Orthodox Church. Time to seize all their churches. Time to turn them into granaries and barns and shops, and places where we put tap paths and tractors." And the aide said, "Why?" And Lenin said, "Why not? Why not? We are history, we do what we wish." Lenin believed that in a moment of chaos you extirpate the meaning of the prior order that the chaos was destroying, because they always worked on the mind before they worked on the body.

Thank you very much!

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