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# Power & Politics: George Orwell's Incorporation of Political Science to the Realm of Dystopian Fiction

By Maribeth Guarino, Class of 2017

## INTRODUCTION

The world has been in a state of turmoil since the 2016 presidential election in the United States. Journalists, activists, and others have called out the administration numerous times already on its treatment of its citizens, as well as its attitude towards basic constitutional rights such as freedom of the press, and many people live in fear of what the next four years hold for the country and for the world. Podcast host Joshua Johnson, on a recent show of *AI*, says that some “people [have] beg[un] to worry if, not really that history [is] repeating but literature [is] manifesting itself.” He is referencing the dystopian genre, which coincidentally has seen a recent rise in sales with George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the number 1 spot on Amazon’s best sellers list on February 2 of this year. Fast forward almost a week to February 7, and it moved down only 3 spots, directly after Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. A month later on February 28, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was still on the list, although in the number 12 slot (“Amazon”). So what is it

about the times we live in that make literature, as one commenter on the podcast noted, so “eerily present” (Johnson)?

The idea of utopia is nearly timeless, dating back to 380 BC when Plato wrote *The Republic* and then even before that to the biblical garden of Eden, the only perfect place on earth. The term was first coined by Sir Thomas More and derived from the Greek language. The root *topos* means ‘place.’ However, with conflict between the Greek roots *eu* meaning ‘good’ and *ou* meaning ‘no,’ the word itself is a pun – ‘a good place’ or ‘no place’ (Dunca 30). In other words, a utopia is actually a fantasy: a good place that does not exist. That did not stop people from imagining or writing about it, though. In fact, through writings of philosophers, social and political theorists, and religious scholars, the utopian genre became an outlet for idealists and radicals across the social spectrum to express their desires for revolutionary changes in various aspects of reality.

Most written utopias are speculative fiction, or thought experiments exploring what society and life would look like if certain improvements were made to the present-day. Dystopia, on the other hand, is a genre that combines the speculation of utopia with cynicism in order to play out worst-case scenarios. In both genres, sequences of events, character development, and other narrative aspects of literature are guided by formulaic norms that usually follow logically from the question which also serves as the basis of political psychology – are people inherently good or

inherently bad? Utopian philosophy would say human nature is good. However, dystopian speculation follows logic based on the idea that human nature is bad, which coincides with semi-intuitive political theories that encourage a pessimistic outlook, the primary of which is political realism. This states that humans are selfish. In an anarchical world, or one without a system of governance and enforcement, all actions are motivated by self-interest. This results in a life that Thomas Hobbes describes as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” and full of “continual fear, and danger of violent death” (*Leviathan* np). Every decision is made out of a desire to survive and prosper, without any care as to how others fare. Any cooperation that exists only occurs so long as each actor's benefits outweigh their needs for survival. As dystopia follows this path, authors often do not need to fully understand the political psychology behind their characters' actions – it is intuitive. Political science does explain that intuition, though, as will be shown later in this paper, and some like George Orwell use it to create a sense of verisimilitude in comparison to reality.

Politically, there is another distinction between utopia and dystopia. Because utopias are purely hypothetical, political theory considers them to be only perfect worlds or thought experiments, like Plato's suggested republic, and any flawed society to be a dystopia. In the words of Eric Rabkin, a professor emeritus of English at the University of Michigan, “if a true utopia had ever really existed, it would still exist today and we would be reading travelogues instead of fiction” (1). For this reason, the utopian genre is considered a “literary-philosophical”

pursuit, which can extend to apply to dystopia, as well (Achim 26). Going further, I would argue that they are 'literary-political' pursuits, whether intentionally or not, since both genres use politics, sociology, philosophy, and personal authorial experience in this pursuit of speculative fiction. As authors use these genres in literature, they develop reality past a point of recognition to instead serve as a sociopolitical critique due to the nature of the genre and its content. Often, this coincides with another genre entirely: satire. Despite the presence of satire within dystopia and utopia, the genres are distinguishable by two factors: the content and the critical reception of the publication. If the focus is on more direct social critiques and the audience recognizes that, it is generally a satirical novel. If the focus is on developing the fictional world and speculating on that development, even if satire is used to do so, then the work belongs to the dystopian (or utopian) genre.

Because dystopia concerns itself with society, the idea of politics often enters into the analysis of works within the genre. A novel cannot be dystopic without reference to human institutions that organize power in society, so the works within the genre are more predisposed to political and social commentary. Regardless of genre, authors are not impervious to the social and political events that surround them, so there is social commentary included in even non-dystopian novels through symbolism, allegory, and even overt statements. Within the genre, these trends are exacerbated due to its closer relationship to the subject of politics. In fact, there is such a strong relationship between the two that some scholars believe that utopian ideas are

under “permanent threat of being appropriated, overthrown, and perverted by politics” (Achim 24). Political science theory helps explain several traits such as this predisposition that all dystopian novels have in common. Despite evolution of the genre over time, there is sociopolitical commentary within all dystopia, from Plato’s *The Republic* to 21<sup>st</sup>-century young adult fiction like *The Hunger Games*. Twentieth-century British essayist George Orwell demonstrates this connection between politics and dystopia through his own writings, which revitalized the genre for the modern and post-modern era through his explicit and implicit use of political theory in his speculation and cynicism.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF DYSTOPIA**

One of the earliest references to a utopian society came in the form of Plato’s *The Republic* (380 BC). This book is more of a political treatise rather than a fictional story, but still has an important role in the development of the genre as it describes a theoretically perfect society. It focuses on the reeducation of children to understand the world in such a manner that undesired tendencies and qualities are eradicated. Once the new system is in place, civilization would be held together by the central tenets of faith and trust in a ruling class, a government that would create the best possible conditions for society. This proposal was a mere thought experiment, which was never carried out or tested, but readers of this text have already pointed out problems that would be faced, such as defining qualities of the ruling class and implementing the new education system.

These potential issues present opportunities for exploitation that could turn Plato's republican utopia into a dystopia.

More than a thousand years later, Sir Thomas More published his novel *Utopia* in 1516 AD. In it, he continues the development of what a perfect society would look like. The first part deals with the problems in contemporary government. In the second part, More describes a nation which is the namesake of the book. However, it is not in reality a utopia. Although it tends towards peace and prosperity, there is still slavery, criminals, war, and ostracization of certain peoples, such as atheists, and the tension between Utopia and the rest of the world creates a dialectic that is satirical and dystopic as More speculates on possible outcomes (Wegner). The very existence of conflict shows the flaws in the supposed ideal – because not everyone shares the same tenets and goals, there are various interests within the community. Acting in one group's self-interest poses a risk to the governmental system and the nation as a whole. This conflict ultimately turns More's attempt at utopian ideals into a dystopia, just like Plato's philosophies. However, *Utopia* also jumpstarted the genre for the early modern era and its role in publishing critical and satirical commentaries is invaluable.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, authors such as Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier followed More's example by using elements of utopia to convey satirized portraits of their own societies. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) deals with several different fantastical lands, each of which has its own flaws. This is used to reflect on some of the issues that Swift sees

in his own English government. Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) presents Europe as corrupt and problematic, but there are similar issues on the other seemingly 'better' continents within the book, as his protagonist finds out on his journeys. In *L'An 2440*, Mercier describes a man's dream of a better, utopian world, but still there are inequalities and economic problems within the society. The novels are easily comparable to their contemporary societies, like fun-house mirrors depicting social flaws through distorted reflections of reality. The satirical element present in medieval renditions of dystopia altered how the genre was later composed, but the focus on sociopolitical commentaries remained the same from Plato and More.

These trends continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with novels such as *A Sojourn in the City of Amalgamation, in the Year of Our Lord 19—* (1835), *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (written in 1863 but unpublished until almost the 21<sup>st</sup> century), and culminating with the novels of H.G. Wells, including *The Time Machine* (1895) and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899). This century turned to science fiction and technological developments to portray its dystopias. George Achim even describes dystopia as "science fiction in the realm of politics," partly due to the heavy influence of technological progression on the genre during this period (25). Similar to satire, though, science fiction is a tool in the dystopian author's arsenal to speculate on reality.

Political themes have been woven into these stories since Plato, but they climaxed in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when the number of authors who published



dystopia exploded in the first half of the century, including Jack London, Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, Arthur Koestler, Vladimir Nabokov, Ayn Rand, and Ray Bradbury. They dealt with the sociopolitical issues through their work; as George Orwell commented in his essay, “Why I Write,” “[a writer’s] subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in—at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own” (np). With the growth of globalized communication and cooperation, tendencies towards expansionism and imperialism, and industrialized development, the world was confronted with an as-yet-unchallenged issue: a society that contained nearly every civilization on the planet. With this new challenge arose other related problems—conflicting ideologies, political disagreement, cultural incongruences, and power struggles. The main difference between the 1900’s and prior eras is the increasingly globalized political conflict and relevance of dystopia. With a broader experience and material to draw on, such literature produced more widely applicable criticisms that encouraged readers to be global citizens instead of isolated individuals.

In recent years, dystopia has undertaken a shift in audience; books such as Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008), James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* (2009), Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), and Margaret Peterson Haddix’s *Shadow Children* series (1998-2006) share similar sociopolitical commentaries with the earlier publications, but are intended for a much younger audience – children and young adults. This literature continues to draw on prior influences, using techniques like science

fiction and satire, but what is most notable is the continued basis of the speculation in political theory. This emanates from the rebirth of dystopia in the 1930s and 40s through one particular author who stands out for his dedication to the politics of the genre: George Orwell.

## **POLITICS & THE PURPOSE OF DYSTOPIA**

Eric Blair, under the pen name George Orwell, began publishing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century without hiding his political agenda. His belief was that literature, particularly with a political slant, was the way to achieve change in public opinion, and thereby public action. Many critics agree, saying that dystopia in particular is “an exhortation to us readers to mold a better future or avoid a worse one” (Rabkin 1). Some opposition maintains that politics has no place in literature, declaring that fiction like dystopia and utopia is “incapable of offering well-grounded solutions to real political and scientific matters”; it is merely a flight of fancy and its critics scorn the creators of such fantastical outbursts for their lack of levelheadedness (Achim 24). However, dystopia serves several purposes other than just being political, including several interrelated cultural, rhetorical, and social goals.

One is its use as an approach to social reality, providing an opportunity to both give and share a critical perspective of society. Any problem in the world is fair game for a dystopian tale, and it may translate off the page for readers by creating a social awareness of action and inaction. The presentation of an opportunity for sociopolitical commentary is similar to satire and authors often incorporate

satire as a tool in making their points; the flaws within the fictional portrayal of society are the critiques presented in the literary work. In the words of prominent utopian theorist Ernst Bloch, dystopias show how the ruling class is able to “deceive itself, and, most of all, others, by means of that imagination” which “justif[ies] the existing social conditions in denying [...] the exploitation” that forms the root of social divisions (114). According to Bloch, citizens perpetuate cultural flaws due to that “false consciousness” which allows them to ignore the negative consequences of their errors and rationalize them (114). This results in unorganized fragments of the population that present no resistance to the status quo and therefore could not possibly threaten the ruling structure. This is the basis for all sociopolitical arguments made in dystopia; satire and criticism generally focus on the justification of the exploitation of the middle and lower classes as a signal that a lack of resistance creates social perfection. But that is merely a construct created by society to protect itself, an idea which authors use to reflect the real world and that same false consciousness that exists in readers’ minds. This commentary is part of the paradigm established by the genre, the backbone of all dystopian stories, and the embodiment of the “social and political responsibility of art,” a principle which flourished among artists in the post-modern period when the tension between politics and art had deepened (Smyer 5). As I will later explore in more detail, Orwell ingrained this criticism into his dystopia.

Similarly, it serves as an author’s reflection of reality, giving him or her the flexibility in their approach to

cultural criticism as shaped by their own perspective. Due to the temporally fleeting relevance of politics, writing, and criticism, the context of setting, plot, and audience within dystopias is “epistemologically self-reflective” and encourages society to take the time to understand social flaws and to fix them (Wegner 195). As Achim noted, there is a persisting attitude that this is pointless as the novels offer no concrete solutions, but there exists a counterargument that satire and dystopia manage to isolate social problems in fiction so that recipients of the critique – in other words, the readers – can make the appropriate changes as a society. It is not the job of the author, as one person, to change the world. Instead, as dystopia achieves a “*demystification of a deeply anti-human reality, by means of fictional simulation,*” the objective is a cultural change; rather than fixing problems on an individual level, society as a whole should put forth the effort to correct the flaws revealed by such critiques (Achim 28).

However, such corrections are generally not enacted, and so the issues that the sociopolitical commentaries deal with become rather timeless. Some academics have even said that the idea of utopia “feeds the illusion of great social transformations,” and so it is only appropriate that dystopia replaces that image with the more realistic view of society’s stativity – or at the very least, reluctance to change (Achim 26). Richard Smyer says that “to survive as a piece of literature, to engage the imagination and emotions of future readers, may well depend on an expanded awareness of the book as an integral part of a much larger cultural fabric, its interwoven strands extending from the ancient past,” as this

this social stillness described by Achim achieves (9). Furthermore, the timeless nature of the criticism creates a universal applicability for the genre; although literature “outlasts its political subjects,” the universality of the issues allows the criticism and the image of authors’ contemporary times to survive past the end of that era and into the future (Berman np). This flexibility indicates that dystopian stories “narrat[e] a wish fulfillment that is not bound by [their] own time and the apparel of [their] contents” (Bloch 163). Because of the static nature of society, and the consistency of the issues at hand, dystopia is uniquely equipped to endure beyond its present and be continually relevant in terms of political and social critiques, as have Orwell’s novels.

The last purposes dystopia serves are those of moral advocacy as well as political preaching, and these are responsibilities that Orwell demands of writers as both a critic and an author himself. He notes that “there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics’. All issues are political issues” and he believes that it is not only the right of an author but also his or her duty to be involved in the conversation (*Politics* np). Although Orwell agrees that there are other reasons for writing and publishing such as “aesthetic enthusiasm” and “historical impulse,” he emphasizes the importance of understanding personal biases in order to increase the “chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one’s aesthetic and intellectual integrity” (*Why I Write* np). This aspect of dystopia’s purpose may also encourage a moral, not just a social, responsibility in readers. It is difficult for authors to remember to “always evoke political realities in all their

ambiguity and complexity, even if this involves being ruthlessly candid” on both sides of the argument (Bounds np). Bias exists in everybody, authors not excluded, and this can be seen through the politics of the dystopian author. In fact, dystopian novels act as “primers on moral and political education,” not just as entertainment or satire (Carr 35). Within the genre there is a “standard dystopian mechanism of depicting an ill-functioning society as a warning” while simultaneously portraying “a source of hope for the reader” that this future can be avoided or corrected (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 209). Consumers are intended to learn something from these stories and act on it, as the book functions as a go-between for the author and his or her readers. In this way, dystopia can motivate certain audiences in areas beyond fictional characters and be the impetus for social movements through developing habits “of examining [one’s] own thinking and feeling, of evaluating—nay, challenging—[one’s] own culture-bound biases, and the social consequences of [one’s] attitude” (Levine 31). All of this is merely a “prelude” to changing the world; dystopian authors are political and “didactic,” the very “opposite of the detached aesthete[s] immured in [their] ivory tower[s]” who are “heedless of the sufferings of humanity” (Reilly 1). Instead, they offer sociopolitical commentary, reflections of reality, and moral teachings in order to effect change starting from the ground level.

Part of the reason authors are able to initiate change is because the genre targets the segment of the population that is most likely to make a change, and the protagonists of dystopia often mirror that target audience. Winston Smith

in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a middle-aged man, the demographic that traditionally held social and political power in the early 1900's. Orwell specifically targeted the proletarian, working middle class that he speculated on within his book. At one point in the novel, Winston even says, "If there is hope, it *must* lie in the proles," (*Nineteen* 69). This is not just the character's thought, though – here we see Orwell coming through, telling his readers where the change in reality must come from. In the post-Orwell era, political power and social movements were concentrated in the youth demographic. In present day literature, main characters are often young adults confronted with their seeming lack of power and influence. Through this archetype, the authors of these dystopian novels "suspend adult normativity, encouraging young people's independence and resourcefulness" (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 205). This segment of the population is still developing and is more susceptible to influences from literature, making it a prime target audience. There has even been research on how young adults experience a "resistance to adult norms and development of relationships between the self and society" based on their intake of similar cultural influences that can be found in dystopia (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 208). For authors "wishing to comment critically on struggles and tensions in the real world," seeing the real influence of "characters whose future depends on an understanding and reshaping of social and political reality" on readers is an important incentive and encouragement (Deszcz-Tryhubczak 208).

Through the use of political theory, which helps develop the story and creates a semblance of verisimilitude within it, dystopia does extend beyond the realm of literature and into the political sphere. Here, political science theory relies on psychology to determine actions and reactions of various actors by establishing power hierarchies that demonstrate a logical speculative fiction. Two of Orwell's more well-known works, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), connect political themes more tightly to political science theories, further developing the genre throughout the mid-1900's.

## **AN ORWELLIAN READING**

It is power that drives everyone and serves as the basis of dystopia, showcasing the political realism in Orwell's writing as well as in other dystopian works. The fact that the world is not perfect and that utopia has not yet been achieved supports the realist claim that humans are selfish by nature, or at the very least disproves that they are naturally good. Power is the psychological key to understanding actors' motivations – power is how a person secures himself in a realist world. When everyone is looking out for themselves, one cannot feed, clothe, house, or protect oneself without power. This leads to the “physical and moral filth that pervade[s] [...] contemporary society” and embodies the conflict within dystopia (Dunca 32). Despite this, some people do strive to be good, and that is also showcased by dystopia. There is a hope held by some for a better future which can only be reached through a concerted effort to use power for good – “power at its best” versus



“power at its worst” (Popescu 197). Orwell’s writing certainly reveals him as a political realist as he takes “power at its worst” to a new level of cynicism.

The beast fable *Animal Farm* serves as a cautionary tale of how totalitarian systems, which are generally dystopic since their reality is much different from the normative ideals that inspired them, come into being, while the later, more futuristic novel of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a warning of the hopelessness that lies ahead of society if it continues to allow corruption to go unchecked. In his essay “Why I Write,” Orwell states that his purpose is to “push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples’ idea of the kind of society that they should strive after” by “mak[ing] political writing into an art” (np). These are the two novels where he truly achieves that goal, partly due to the inherent political nature of dystopia, which is amplified through Orwell’s use of political theory itself. Orwell manages to alter the image of dystopia held by his contemporaries by being explicit in his artistry and not shying away from politically realist thought. Through direct use of political theories, he shows a clear dedication to the speculative and cynical aspects of dystopia within his fictional worlds.

*Animal Farm* begins very innocently: the animals of the Manor Farm wish to be free from their human overlords, to be able to exert their independence and obey their own wills. Despite the seeming idealism in this desire, the reality is that the animals want power, which would allow them to escape the “misery and slavery” of their lives and instead live “in a comfort and a dignity that are now almost beyond

[their] imagining” (*Animal 7*). They want a utopia, but are lacking the ability to achieve it. Orwell draws the reader into the story with fear and empathy for the animals, explaining through the speech of an old pig named Major, who serves as the inspiration for the rebellion, that all the animals face overwork, hunger, and eventually death at the hands of the powerful humans. Major tells the other animals, and also the reader,

“You young porkers who are sitting in front of me, every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year. To that horror we all must come—cows, pigs, hens, sheep, everyone. Even the horses and the dogs have no better fate. You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the fox-hounds. As for the dogs, when they grow old and toothless, Jones ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond” (*Animal 9*).

Through such vicious imagery and in combination with the personification of the animals and their experiences, Orwell convinces his readers that the animals are in the right, that the rebellion is just. Even as a third-party observer with no ability to affect the outcome, the reader still sympathizes with the animals. But the situation cannot change without a shift in power.

The human masters in the tale use whips on the animals to control them, a form of power which functions through use of force, as well as through psychology – the fear of getting hurt. When the rebellion does take place, it is a spontaneous event as hunger overcomes the animals’ fear of the whips; in other words, their need for food security served as the impetus to seize control despite the risk of taking action against a more powerful being. The humans, losing their power and control over the animals, flee the Manor Farm (soon renamed Animal Farm) and the animals gain their power through that same fear mechanism that once subdued them, chasing their former owners off the property. They establish a new, egalitarian society with very basic rules, summarized as “four legs good, two legs bad” (34) and “all animals are equal” (25).

However, it very quickly becomes clear that this is not put into practice. Almost immediately after the rebellion, the animals go to bring in the harvest on their own, and the only ones who do not work are the pigs, who instead “direc[t] and supervis[e]” even “calling out, ‘Gee up, comrade!’ or ‘Whoa back, comrade!’” to their fellow animals, just like human plowers (27-28). Here readers can see the iron law of oligarchy take over, a political theory which states that in any system or organization, a ruling class will always emerge. Regardless of intentions of egalitarianism or other attempts at utopian-like states, society will fail and some oligarchic tendencies will take effect. In the case of *Animal Farm*, this one group of animals—the pigs—become the leaders. This paves the way

for dictatorship, as one class gains power over the rest without any checks or balances.

Two pigs in particular gain power – Snowball and Napoleon. There is tension between the two, as they each gain a following and a certain amount of influence. This power only serves to heighten the “intrusion of politics and state control into daily life” as each pig becomes a leader on the farm (Steinhoff 159). Their differences of opinion cause friction between the groups to augment and personal political goals to become more important than the good of society. These selfish attitudes, as political realism predicts, evolve into political – namely, ideological – divides between people of differing philosophies, resulting in a security dilemma between the two pigs. In other words, knowing that the other pig has power and influence over other animals causes Napoleon and Snowball to experience insecurity in their own power.

As each takes steps to increase their own capabilities, they begin to act as counterbalances for each other – just as the political balance of power theory suggests they will. As one pig’s power increases, his gain poses a defense problem for the other, incentivizing each other to build up their capabilities in an eternal cycle. For every success that Snowball has, Napoleon matches it: as Snowball creates “Animal Committees” with the essential function of welfare programs for the animals, Napoleon commands the education of the youth. They both take part in propaganda messages to animals on other farms. When Snowball leads a successful defense of the land against a human invasion,

Napoleon begins to recruit animals to undermine Snowball during committee meetings.

The cycle is broken when Napoleon eventually manages to drive his rival off the farm, motivated, as political realism indicates, by the desire for power; in his opinion, Snowball is too generous, too dedicated to the prosperity of Animal Farm's denizens, for the pigs to continue to rise above the other animals like Napoleon wants. Of course, in order for the coup to be successful, Napoleon convinces everyone that the other pig is actually a traitor and that it is he, Napoleon, whose primary goal is the benefit of the farm. In this case, Napoleon takes advantage of his off-guard comrade, isolating Snowball from his supporters and essentially crushing any power he had by overwhelming the balance between them. He then chases him away with attack dogs—force and fear—which no one protests due to the supposed threat Snowball poses to their new society. Not only is this significant to the balance of power, but also shows the reader the legitimate means by which Napoleon defeats Snowball. The people think that he is *right*—or at the very least, not wrong—and so his power grab is essentially 'legal.'

After this, the pigs become more blatantly power-hungry, but disguise their gradual seizure of power through rationalizations that boil down to 'trust us; everything we do is for the benefit of all animals.' Immediately following the ejection of Snowball, Napoleon disbands the town hall meetings that had previously been used to make decisions, replacing them with a committee of pigs led by him that would take charge instead. This is defended through

Squealer, a propaganda pig, who explains that Napoleon has sacrificed his time and energy “in taking this extra labour upon himself” and that all he does is in the effort of preventing treason like Snowball’s and protecting animals from humans (55-56). In defending his decisions, Napoleon also protects his power and retains a legitimate right to govern through the support—and on occasion, simply the lack of opposition—of the citizens of Animal Farm.

Once a person or group’s power levels reach a certain amount more than everyone else, as Napoleon’s does, it becomes exponentially more difficult to depose or even stand against them. Transparency and accountability decrease as power becomes more concentrated, relying on a flock mentality and blind trust in leaders. This is usually accomplished through subtle oppression, using promises of protection against external threats—like humans—to maintain power at home. Then, rather than balancing power internally, the group is concerned with balancing against those other forces. This gives the dominant internal power, Napoleon and the pigs, much more leeway and cooperation despite corruption and other problems, which leads to the subversion of utopian ideals. In this way, the idea of power grows beyond the individual and affects entire societies.

In this book especially, Orwell uses a rhetoric that is “designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind” in order to establish this belief in the other animals (*Politics* np). This type of rhetoric is useful in his efforts to “satirize the [rhetoric] of power characterising [*sic*] all totalitarian regimes in the world” (Popescu 193). It also

symbolizes how legitimacy is gained as well as the political theories that mark dystopian societies. Despite inner doubts, the farm's general public never acts upon its questions; the parody of legitimacy demonstrates the role that inactive citizens of a nation, particularly a democracy, play in the devolution of a society. Dystopia emerges from a false sense of security and the complacency of a people, as Orwell shows through Napoleon's uncontested reorganization of Animal Farm's government.

The iron law of oligarchy develops further throughout the novel, and is not fully realized until the very end. Already I have shown how it begins, with the pigs claiming power and leadership for themselves, but as the legitimate accumulation of power continues, the separation between the pig (read: ruling) class and the rest becomes more obvious. The pigs begin to slowly change the original rules of their society, adding "*with sheets*" to the rule "No animal shall sleep in a bed" (67) and "*to excess*" to the law that "No animal shall drink alcohol" (109) because they have begun to do these things. They even change the unwritten rules. Despite one of the first resolutions that had been passed that no animal should ever live in the farmhouse, the pigs soon move in, claiming they need the quiet to work and that it is a more dignified place for their leader to live (66). Napoleon also begins to kill the animals that he sees as threats to his power. He spreads propaganda and lies about them, claiming that they are treasonous like Snowball, conspiring with humans. He even manages to get them to confess their treason, before slaying them "until there [is] a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air [is]

heavy with the smell of blood” (84). Not only is this against another rule – “No animal shall kill any other animal” – but it is also a violent exercise of his power (25). The pigs’ desire for power has become more important than the good of the population as a whole. There is never enough power to go around, and “power has become an end in itself” (Carr 9).

This free reign of his lasts until the very end of the fable, as the pigs, Napoleon in particular, begin to wear clothes, walk on their hind legs (the maxim changes at this point to “Four legs good, two legs *better!*”), and carry whips (134). In fact, the written rules of the society are replaced at this point with one single epithet: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (134). The pigs become more and more like the humans who once ruled over the farm and its residents, to the point where animal witnesses find it impossible to distinguish between the humans (who are now invited to visit the farm and dine with the pigs) and the pigs (the leaders of the very rebellion that expelled two-leggers in the first place) (141). In the end, the iron law of oligarchy prevails and the same institutionalized ruling system that the novel begins with the animals escaping is put back into place, just under a different ruling class. Through the artistry of his unique incorporation of allegory, satire, fairy tale, and political theory, Orwell portrays one revolution of a dystopian cycle.

The other novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, uses the same political theories to show how dystopian societies can endure for long periods of time. Although that power abuse present in dystopia can end, Orwell’s outlook in this novel is



more pessimistic. Rather than letting readers off the hook and leaving them with a hopeful outcome, he returns to fear and pessimism, wishing to scare people into preventing a future he foresees. Just as *Animal Farm* uses politics to show how dystopia is established, the realism of politics in his last novel serves as a “conditional prophecy, a summons to preventative action” (Reilly 125). Without intervention, without morals or vigilance against corruption, the society portrayed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could become reality because the psychology of power that is seen through these political theories is strong and real.

In the futuristic setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the protagonist, Winston Smith, lives a mostly indifferent life in Oceania, one of the three militaristic nations in constantly changing opposition and alliance. Winston describes his city as a “grimy landscape” lined with “rotting nineteenth-century houses, their sides shored up with balks of timber, their windows patched with cardboard and their roofs with corrugated iron [...] where plaster dust swirled in the air and willow herb straggled over the heaps of rubble” (*Nineteen* 3). This is not how anyone would describe a perfect world. It is even noted later in the story that Oceania’s present is a far cry from

the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient – a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete – [that] was a part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person (189)

before the radical transformation of the world into its current social and political shape. This imagery is Orwell's not-so-subtle reference to reality, where the idea of utopia is similar to this unattainable vision of perfection, where there is no need for progress or change because there are no improvements that could make it better, but our reality is much different from that vision. This contrast is Orwell's way of reminding the reader that the world he is describing is very much the opposite of what was planned and desired – a utopia gone wrong.

The world Winston lives in is in eternal war, even though it is impossible for any of the three nations to be defeated, “even by the other two in combination” (186). They know this, but because there is always a desire for more power, to outmatch other actors, they are not satisfied with a balance. The ideal goal has been reached, a “roughly even” scale, but because the lust for power cannot be satisfied, the nations continue to fight (188). This exemplifies the eternal security dilemma and balance of power theory.

Presumably, there is also a balance of power issue within the Party, the ruling class of Oceania. Everyone not in the lowest social class is constantly monitored – by telescreens (technological spyware), the Party, political groups and organizations, and each other. The children are educated through the Spies and the Youth League, organizations similar to American scouting groups, where they “systematically tur[n] into ungovernable little savages” who only “ador[e] the Party and everything connected with it” (24). They turn against everyone who shows the slightest sign of disloyalty to the Party, including their own parents,

which helps the Party maintain control, but everyday citizens are not the only ones who are arrested for this ‘thought-crime.’ Prominent Party members are also arrested, who then, similarly to the animals that Napoleon kills in *Animal Farm*, confess to numerous crimes against the Party before they are executed and grateful for the punishment. The leaders of the society, characters like O’Brien—the ones who condition all the rest—are vastly more powerful than other members of the Party, which gives them the freedom to dictate.

There is another balancing theory present in the novel, and that is the balance of threat theory. It is similar to the balance of power, based off of perceived threats instead of overall capability. For instance, Winston knows that he will never be able to overthrow the Party, and neither would anyone within it. He does not have the power or capability to do so. But, he also sees that there is a group of people that *does* have the capability – the proles. The lowest class of society, the proles, also make up the largest percent of the population, and yet they do nothing. Winston sees that “they needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies” in order to “blow the Party to pieces” (69). But they never rebel, never take any action, so the Party ignores them. Every once in a while, they will “eliminat[e] the few individuals who [are] judged capable of becoming dangerous,” but otherwise the proles are left to live like livestock (71). They pose no real threat to the power hierarchy, and so there is no need for the Party to balance against them until they do.

However, there is a problem with power theories in this novel, and that lies in the practice of ‘doublethink.’ This is a mental exercise where people purposefully ignore certain thoughts when it is convenient for them, although it is really more complicated than that. As Orwell defines it within the novel, it is the ability to hold “two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accep[t] both of them,” which is both a conscious decision, “or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision,” but also unconscious, “or it would bring with it a feeling of falsity” (214). Oceania’s leaders are experts at doublethink, and due to their extreme ability to be selective in their thoughts, their powerlust is so deeply buried that it is difficult to discern as a motive. Because it is unthought, it is also unspoken, at least until the brainwashing of Winston. It is only then that O’Brien confronts him with the question of why the Party desires power in order to make Winston understand his ‘sickness’ – that is, his inability to believe in the Party. O’Brien tells Winston that the purpose served by the Party’s desire for power is power itself. He explains,

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 order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (263)

What he and the Party strive for is the accomplishment of subtlety in exercising their power, so that citizens do not realize they are powerless. Although idealistically leaders have responsibilities, the only ones who can enforce fulfillment of them are the ones with power – in other words, the leader (Carr 9). This is a rather intense and ironic tautology, often resulting in the decision to ignore ideals in favor of self-interest – a definite characteristic of political realism. The political theories I have already explained are exemplified here in the unwillingness of the Party to give up their power. Orwell, though, goes a step further in his cynicism and indicates that his fictional characters never had any good intentions. This may or may not be true, but as a possibility, it makes the reader think harder about the political implications of power in the real world. O'Brien and the Party may use doublethink and other educational brainwashing to achieve legitimate rule, but reality has also constructed legitimacy that allows power to remain in the hands of those who have it out of similar circumstances. This serves as a warning to readers to really think about to what and whom they give legitimacy.

Politically speaking, “legitimate” refers to a social belief in a person or group’s right to do something, not the legality of their actions. In exerting control over the will of the people, in gaining legitimacy, power is granted by the belief that one person or group may do certain things because they have the right. This induces obedience. Since people generally trust themselves or like-minded people more than others, “the rule of the few over the many,” or an oligarchy of sorts, tends to form through the legitimate accumulation

of power (Berman np). This is done through subtle oppression, as mentioned above, but also through gaining the trust of the people and establishing truths within a society. There is a heavy dependency within the Party on manipulation of the truth. An entire branch of the government is dedicated to creating a consistent history and story for the society, altering details and facts – except, once altered, they are factual. There are very few written records, and human memory is extremely short, so the truth is what the government says it is. This is how they establish a legitimate rule: The Ministry of Truth changes all mentions of falsities to the new truth as individuals exercise doublethink to erase the previous truth and know the opposite as true now.

Winston describes this effect by talking about the changing alliances with Eurasia and Eastasia: “Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore, Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia,” but in fact, “it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia” (34). Not only does the information change in the present minds of the people, but it changes in every written record (few though there are). The conditioning of political prisoners to confess is also an exercise in doublethink, and because the society is submerged in propaganda, everyone has similar thought processes which reduce the majority of the population to a state of complacency. As O’Brien tells Winston, “they are helpless, like the animals” (269) and subject to what the Party tells them. With a “reduced state of consciousness [...] favourable to political conformity” thanks to the process of doublethink, they believe every lie

and see it as truth (*Politics* np). This is the power – the control – that society and its leaders value and endeavor to obtain, as well as the reason that this dystopia Orwell portrays is stuck in a rut that can only get deeper rather than better. In this instance, Orwell paints a hopeless picture in order to motivate his readers to make a difference in reality, so that the world does not actually come to mirror the characteristics he has speculated upon in his dystopia.

### **ORWELL'S INFLUENCE**

Political theory is not the only politics in Orwell's novels, though. He makes many references to current events in the 1930s and 40s, creating a sociopolitical commentary that is directly relevant to his own time period. In *Animal Farm*, for example, Orwell uses specific diction such as “comrade” to allude to Russia and includes various references to Marxism and communism, such as the warning to “never listen when they tell you that [...] the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others” (*Animal* 10). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains even more explicit references to reality, such as in the Ministry of Love during Winston's brainwashing sessions with O'Brien, who says:

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 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.  
(263)

These specific references to Orwell's political beliefs and experiences are much more direct than most other authors, but Orwell writes in one of his essays that he is motivated, in part, by "some lie that [he] want[s] to expose, some fact to which [he] want[s] to draw attention" (*Why I Write* np). He does not shy away from unambiguous language because that is what his message is, and his stylistic choice as an author. It is perhaps for this reason that his dystopias are among the most memorable from his era and so influential in today's literature and current society.

Certain parts of Orwell's writing style, such as his ability to "re-create a child's fresh and vivid and highly subjective view of reality" is similar to authors such as Dickens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Smyer 28). This appealed to his contemporary audience, allowing him to impart "political perils too massive to be comprehensible to the Victorian mind" through the use of similar techniques (Smyer 28). This has carried over to young adult and children's dystopia, helping current authors to create "a distillation of real life" just as Orwell did (Ellis 37). He also, allegedly, stole imagery from his contemporaries, such as that of a boot stamping down on a face from Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908), the portrayal of romance in dystopia from Yevgeny Zamayatin's *We* (1921), and even images of Russian society from Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1941) (Steinhoff 153, 155-156). Considering that in most literary circles today, George Orwell is typically a more popular name than the rest, his influence in the dystopian



genre is evident. His interpretation of past sociopolitical commentary goes beyond appropriation and instead reimagines it to convey a stronger message than his own contemporaries and other authors of dystopia past. Perhaps due to the variety of influence on his work, his speculation reaches farther than the rest, allowing the readers to “recognize and understand more easily the paler versions around us” of the “heightened profile” in Orwell’s writing (Ellis 37).

In a similar manner, Orwell has become a part of popular culture today, inspiring not only those who have never read his work but also writers of present-day young adult dystopian fiction. Most people in the United States, whether or not they have read or even heard of Orwell, will recognize and understand the phrase, “Big Brother is watching.” He was influenced by the generations of utopia and dystopia work produced before him, and has himself influenced other authors. Regardless of his personal impact, though, authors of young adult fiction have followed his example by infusing their dystopian tales with their own sociopolitical commentary – materialistic capitalism in Suzanne Collin’s *The Hunger Games*, as seen in the contrast between the cosmetic beauty of the capital’s residents and starving citizens of the poorer districts; suppression of individuality in Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogy, portrayed through the sorting and segregation of people among five personality types; and destruction of free will in *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, conveyed by the government-controlled dictation of societal role. Of course, there are still the totalitarian criticisms

inherent to dystopia due to the nature of the political theories that Orwell exhibits in his novels. Even though they face different audiences, in different eras, with diverse cultures and a longer history, the timelessness and universality of the political theories means that authors today use the same techniques and political theories as Orwell, and their inspiration can, at least in part, be traced to him. Without his explicit use of politics within his writing, and the vast quantities of criticism that was sparked by it, dystopia would be a very different genre than it is today.

## **CONCLUSION**

Orwell's writing was powerful and direct, and dystopia today still draws on his influence. Although Orwell's portrayals of dystopia are extreme, as he clearly had a political agenda in publishing these stories, every dystopian novel has a similar pattern. Other authors may not be as overt in sharing politics or political influences as Orwell, but references to current politics and to politically influential behaviors are always present, and the same self-interested basis from political science guides the construct of speculation. Orwell's main contribution to the genre is his blunt tactics, which force readers to pay attention to the political side of art. The attention he garnered repopularized the genre, infusing it with a vitality which has not diminished in the sixty years since he was published and may in fact be increasing due to its relevance to today's current events. In the age of technology and information, politics is more accessible than ever, and yet there remains a problem with accountability, governmental transparency, and corruption.

Dystopia reaches out to the public with these problems and warns readers that they are out there by saying, “Look, this is how bad it could get if we keep going in this direction” (Johnson).

Years ago, but continuing into the present-day, the law began to lag behind the drastic leaps in technology we have taken. Now it plays catch-up, worrying about piracy, online intellectual property, and which uses of technology in the hands of powerful groups are and should be allowed, such as wire-tapping and satellite espionage. More recently, ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’ have become prominent in the media, on the Internet, and from previously reputable sources, mostly due to the influence of the new United States federal administration. With these implications of social iniquity, American residents are becoming increasingly skeptical of the truth and wary of authority. It is difficult to trust the people and institutions in our society that have power and exercise it. Based on current events, I can’t help but think about Squealer repainting the rules on the barn wall, or Winston Smith being watched by the telescreens. With such real manifestations of what is supposedly fiction, dystopia and its authors are more important than ever before. Even if we try to forget the situation or fool ourselves, “there is a vital link between literature, past and present, and the world [we] live in” that will not allow us to do so as long as dystopia is published and read (Levine 26). Dystopia is the obstruction to blissful ignorance, a hindrance to complacency, and an impetus to transform society, all the while serving as a reminder to remain aware of the very real psychology of power presented in the speculation of Orwell

and all the dystopian authors that come after him.

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