LECTURE NOTES | LESSON PLAN

George Orwell
1984


Freewriting prompts:
- Starving artist stereotypes?
- What defines masculinity?
- The freedom of wealth?

Background:
- Written during the post-WWII period in 1947-48 (final ms. sent to his publishers on 4 December 1948, hence the title 1984), but it only appeared in print in 1949. Originally titled “The Last Man in Europe,” which recall’s Mary Shelley’s novel The Last Man and emphasizes the location, which is not Soviet Russia.
- Follows after Orwell’s career writing satiric critiques of British culture, such as Keep the Aspidistra Flying, which has a very similar ending, though set in an advertising firm that controls people through cultural hegemony.
- Orwell worked for the BBC during WWII (in other words, producing statist propaganda, though he did believe in the cause). None of his recordings survive.
- Orwell was active as a socialist and unionist. Despite his current reputation from 1984 and in particularly the CIA funded film version of Animal Farm, his works consistently critique capitalism and totalitarian governments. His other texts, and especially Road to Wigan Pier and Homage to Catalonia (about the socialist revolt in Spain), make his labour-oriented sympathies quite clear.
- In Spain he was closest to the Socialist and Anarchists. He opposed communism and resisted the Conservative conflation of Socialism and Communism.
  - In the Spanish Civil War, in which he was shot through the neck and permanently damaged his voice, he witnessed the Soviet-backed Communists suppress the anarcho-syndicalists (Labour), which led to his anti-totalitarian and anti-Communist views (both the Anarchists and the Communists opposed the Fascists,
though the Anarchists, who controlled Barcelona, obviously disliked authoritarian governments of any kind).

- In Spain, Orwell joined the Worker’s Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), which called for the overthrow of Capitalism and was allied with the Anarchists. POUM was suppressed by the Communists under Soviet direction.

- In Spain, the combatants were (generally) divided between the Republicans (the Leftist government that was ousted by the military) and the Nationalists (Franco who had led a coup d’état with the military to take over the government & secured a Fascist dictatorship of the right wing). The Anarchists were the third group, based around Barcelona, and tended to align with the Republicans. In many respects, this was a proxy war between the Soviet Communists and the Fascists, with most Western democracies supporting the Fascists, who eventually won, though the Communists also oppressed the Anarchists at times. Many bizarre allegiances developed from this split:
  - Fascist Italy & Portugal and Nazi Germany directly and militarily supported the Nationalists, as did the USA’s Texaco, General Motors, Ford Motors, and Firestone Tires (though the USA was officially neutral & most American volunteers fought for the Republicans).
  - The Soviets and Mexico directly supported the Republicans but directly opposed the Anarchists in Aragón and Catalonia – the Anarchists and POUM (Orwell’s group, for whom he fought in Catalonia) were outlawed by the Republicans and Soviets. POUM was a Trotskyist organization formed as a Communist opposition to Stalinism and was allied with the Anarchists (Anarcho-syndicalism).

- Orwell was an opponent of Imperialism and was often affiliated with Anarchist (non-governmental British quietist tradition). He self-described as a Democratic Socialist. Hitler’s Nazi party used the description “National Socialist” (Nationalsozialismus) in its self-title, but it was Fascist and opposed all forms of Socialism and Communism.

- When asked in a letter by an American about the book, Orwell commented: “My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter), but as a show-up of the perversions... which have already been partly realized in Communism and Fascism.... The scene of the book is laid in
Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else, and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere” (Collected Essays 546). American scholarship has almost universally seen the novel as a critique of Soviet Totalitarianism ever since – nevertheless, Orwell’s critique was articulated differently to readers in other countries.

- Although Antonio Gramsci’s notion of Cultural Hegemony was not published in Prison Notebooks until the 1950s, portions were circulating in the 1940s among Marxists and Leftists in general. Orwell may have accessed this notion, and if not, he established something kindred.

- A list of Orwell’s previous major works shows the general drift of his intellectual and political thought:
  - **Down and Out in Paris and London** (1933) – Orwell’s time living homeless and destitute in both Paris and London as a part of the poor in order to understand their plight.
  - **Burmese Days** (1934) – Orwell’s time as a British civil servant in Burma, an indictment of British colonial rule.
  - **A Clergyman’s Daughter** (1935) – The daughter of a clergymen suffers amnesia and is abandoned by her family. She becomes destitute and homeless, is arrested for vagrancy, finds and then loses a job, and ultimately returns to her life of servitude to her father, though now an atheist. Avant garde style, unusual for Orwell.
  - **Keep the Aspidistra Flying** (1936) – a poet working in an advertising agency engages in his own war against “the money god” but fails miserably and is inexorably drawn back into the advertising world and a class system that makes his life meaningless.
  - **The Road to Wigan Pier** (1937) – a documentary of British union strikes and attempts to gain livable conditions and a living wage.
  - **Homage to Catalonia** (1938) – a documentary of Orwell’s service with POUM in anarchist Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War.
  - **Coming Up For Air** (1939) – a British traveling salesman protests against his pre-packaged life and social control but ultimately fails and is reincorporated back into the system he struggles against.
- *Animal Farm* (1945) – a fable retelling the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin’s authoritarian regime from the workers’ revolution.

Orwell died of tuberculosis on January 21, 1950.

Class I:

How does this context launch us into an interpretive endeavor. For instance, how do you (the class) want to interpret “Ingsoc” (ie: English Socialism)? Do we approach this as a literary, theoretical, or political text? In other words is it:

- “literary” – an aesthetic object or art to be appreciated in the context of its contribution to a tradition and for this stylistic traits?
- “theoretical” – an attempt to work through the thornier elements of Marxist theory at this time in contrast to the Fabians, anarchists, and socialists the likes of Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, and those founding the London School of Economics? Is it primarily a way of developing critical thought?
- “political” – an attempt instigate direct action, either in the form of revolution, labour organization, or agitation. Is it “agit-prop” (agitation propaganda), which Orwell was well familiar with from the Spanish Civil War and the poetry of Auden and co.

**Literary:**

- Consider the parallels to T.S. Eliot’s poetic works, which Orwell admired greatly and attempted to imitate (despite Eliot’s royalist, conservative, and borderline fascist political views at this time).
- p. 1, p. 3, p. 3 – April, & Eliot (parallel to Chaucer, and note Orwell’s echoes of Eliot in previous works, like the poem in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*).
- Consider the physical object we have in hand, including the paper, typesetting, margins, and binding. Is this an aesthetic object?
- How we write (Newspeak as aesthetic, like Hemingway): p. 7, 8, 4-16, 27. p. 9, 10, 6, 29, 10, 11-12 [deixis].

**Theoretical**

(final par.: “no laws” parallel New Testament as a New Law that sweeps away the previous, instituting only mandatory love).

- Christianity and love: p. 282 \textit{295 355 (bottom)}

- Hope in the remainder or remnant (not totally effaced in a palimpsest), p. 40, \textit{p. 42 51}

- Political:
  - Class and culture as instigations to reform.
  - Consider the setting: London (p. 3 \textit{5 par 2}), dollars (p. 6 \textit{8 par 2}), the existing class structure (p. 9 & 11 \textit{11 & 12 xx}), and use of Atomic weapons (p. 32-33 \textit{34-36 41-43}).

  - For atomic weapons, Orwell \textit{greatly} feared an atomic war and lived in unhealthy isolation while suffering from tuberculosis in an attempt to protect his son from what he felt was an inevitable war.

  - The Soviets didn’t develop atomic weapons until 1949, but do recall the historical process of discovery (Hikosaka Tadayoshi, of Tohoku University in Japan, releases his “atomic physics theory in 1934; Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann discover fission in 1938, and in 1939 the USA began research work on a fission weapon while Germany and Japan did the same. Stalin started a program after learning of the American efforts in 1941.

- Timeline:
  - 16 July 1945 – first American atomic bomb tests (Trinity)
  - 24 July 1945 – President Harry S. Truman reports to Stalin that the USA has atomic weapons
  - 6 August 1945 – USA drops its “gun-type” uranium bomb on Hiroshima
  - 9 August 1945 – USA drops its “implosion” plutonium bomb on Nagasaki in order to complete its testing of both types of weapons
  - 4 December 1948 – Orwell completes and submits the final ts. of Nineteen Eighty-Four
  - 29 August 1949 – first Soviet atomic bomb test

- Question from timeline – if Orwell describes his city using dollars, looking at a poster of “Big Brother Wants You,” and atomic weapons being used against Britain, does he really mean this as an anti-Soviet novel?
Does Newspeak parallel the colonization of language? Think of Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s “Decolonizing the Mind.”

Potentially insert lecture on “Politics and the English Language” here.

Habits of mind and alcohol:

- pp. 5, 18 (show parallel to p. 297 to God), 287-8, 293-4, & 297.
- pp. 6-8, 20 (show parallel to p. 311 par. 2 of Gin to God), 300-1, 307, & 310 (final par., parallels p. 17 “rock of ages”).
- pp. 8, 23, (show parallel to p. 375-6 to God), 363 (end par. 2) and 364 (end par. 2), 371 (top, resurrection, etc.), & 375-6.
- pp. 296-7, 200-201, 204, & 289
- pp. 309-310, 200-201, 204, & 289
- pp. 374-376.

Class II – Deviance & Social Control:

Primary Notions for us here:

- Is all deviance essentially political in nature or politicized?
- Using Durkheim’s notion of the “social fact” (individual vs. social), how is “deviance” socially constructed and maintained? How is it medicalized and institutionalized? Think of a few blocks down Hastings Street...
- Do Winston’s alcoholism, sexuality, and “rebellion” (reading and writing with no actual acts) relate as deviant behaviour?
- Once one/we engage in this ritualistic and symbolic interaction between self and society, have we already given over control to social bodies that define and interpret (and hence control) our behaviour? This matches with Althusser’s notion of the “hail” and “interpellation.”

Alcoholism:

- For Orwell’s *1984*, consider alcohol use and social institutions (The Party / Big *Brother* [contra “the Brotherhood”]) and religious imagery
- Contrast the following descriptions of Gin:
  - pp. 293-4 307 Gin is *medical* = state baton
  - pp. 287-8 300-1 Gin is pervasive & caesura...
  - p. 297 311 Gin is blurred into his full incorporation into the state and social control
- Therefore, how does the deviance of alcoholism (medicalized) blend into or participate in an economy of
social institutions of control? If it’s a part of how social institutions work, then is it “deviant” *per se*?

- Also note, “Gin” is really “Victory Gin” and is state controlled, hence the deviance of Winston’s alcoholism is a submission to the state’s form of control (participation in deviant behaviors is just another form of control)
- Room 101 medicalizes deviance as “illness” with a state-run “cure.”

**Religion as an Institution:**
- Religion overlaps with deviance, addiction, and state power. All four are prominent throughout the novel.
  - p. 16 18 – “Saviour!” and prayer for Big Brother.
  - p. 17 19-20 – “Brotherhood” parallels Christianity, which was eventually taken up by the state in Rome by Constantine in 313 CE and hence institutionalized as normative rather than deviant.
  - p. 13 15 – Brotherhood and The Book (τε βιβλιο) and just to recap. “Heresies”
    - See p. 204 (mid) 212-213 as well for Paradise
  - pp. 296-7 310-1 – here the faith is washed down with Gin!
    - Trumpet of Calvary
    - Rock of Ages again
    - Ministry of Love (Christian doctrine of forced love) which institutionalizes “love” as the church does
    - Love for Big Brother (papa, father, who art...)

- So, Orwell gives us a world in which *addiction, desire, and autonomy* are controlled by society in a way that medicalizes and “cures” them as if they were a form of anti-social deviance.
  - The cure is *mandated* LOVE for Big Brother – parallel to the New Testament’s new law to replace the Ten Commandments of the Torah?
  - “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34, as well as 15:12 & 3:23)
  - “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two

☐ Is there a trend here?

☐ For further critical work akin to these issues, see:

Themes:

☐ **Class** is a major theme in the novel. Class is marked by a number of factors, ranging from visual appearance (clothing and visible signs of financial affluence), *as well as* accent, family, and other more difficult to change factors. This is an established theme across all of Orwell’s works. See the following for examples:
  - p. xx – xx.

☐ **Masculinity** is another significant theme in the text. We should consider the nature of masculine identity in the same manner in which we see the artificially constructed nature of femininity, as per feminist discourse.
  - xx