



George Orwell (1903-1950)

Compact Performer - Culture & Literature
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ZANICHELLI



George Orwell

1. Life

Born **Eric Blair** in India in **1903**,
he was the son of a minor
colonial official.



George Orwell with his son Richard.

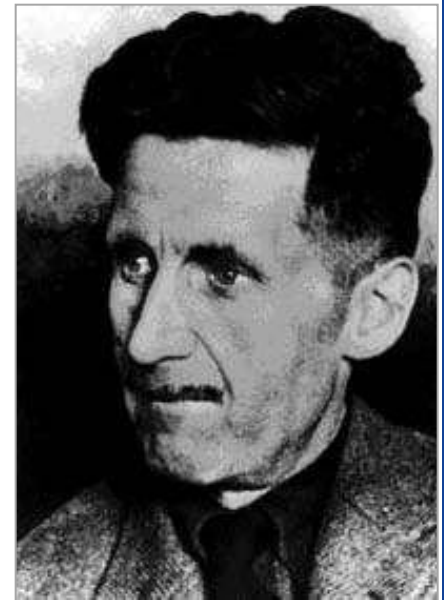
George Orwell at his typewriter.



George Orwell

1. Life

- Orwell was educated at **Eton**, in England, where he began to develop an **independent-minded** personality, indifference to accepted values, and professed **atheism** and **socialism**.
- On leaving college, he started to work for the **Indian Imperial Police** in Burma (1922-1927).
- He hated working in Burma and **returned to England** on sick-leave.



George Orwell



George Orwell

1. Life

- Once back in England, he devoted himself to **writing** full time, publishing his works with the pseudonym of **George Orwell**.
- **Rejection of his English background**
→ he accepted new ideas and impressions.
- Conflict between middle-class education and emotional identification with the working class.
- **The role of the artist** → to inform, to reveal facts and draw conclusions from them → **social function**.



George Orwell (third standing from the right) in Spain.



George Orwell

2. Works based on personal experience:

- ***Down and Out in Paris and London*** (1933) → a non-fiction narrative in which he described his experience among the poor.
- ***Burmese Days*** (1934) → based on his experiences in the colonial service.
- ***The Road to Wigan Pier*** (1937) → a report on the conditions of miners in the industrial North.
- ***Homage to Catalonia*** (1938) → based on his experience during the Spanish Civil War, when he followed ideas of socialism, brotherhood, equality.



George Orwell

2. Dystopian Novels:

- *Animal Farm* (1945) → It expresses Orwell's disillusionment with **totalitarianism in the form of an animal fable**. It made him internationally known and financially secure.
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) → his most original novel. It's a satire against the totalitarian state.



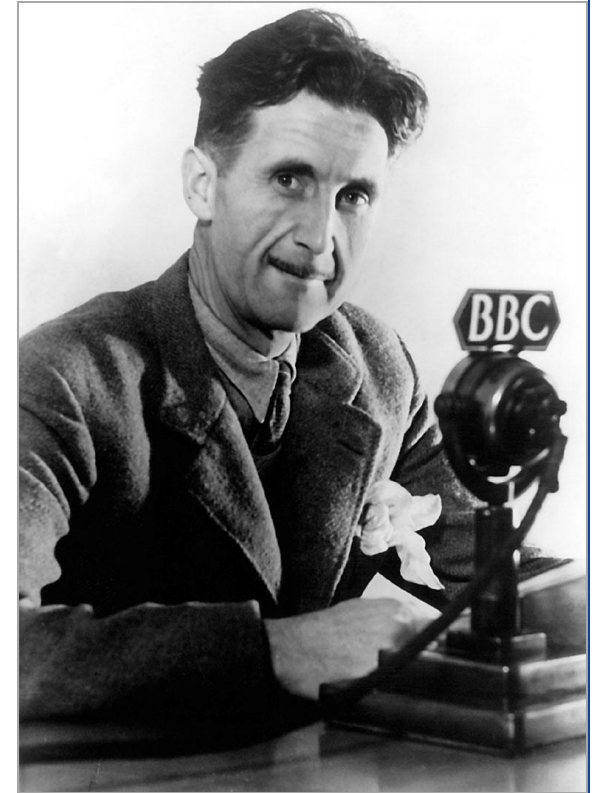
George Orwell

3. Social themes

Influence of Dickens in the choice of:

- **social themes**
- **realistic language**
- **misery caused by poverty**

Criticism of totalitarianism, the violation of liberty and tyranny in all its forms.



George Orwell while working for the BBC.



The dystopian novel

- After World War II some intellectuals began criticizing the industrial society and totalitarian states.
- **Dystopia** (the opposite of utopia) describes the most negative, the blackest picture possible of the present and the future to come.
- It describes a **dreadful imaginary society**, bringing to the extreme some modern system or idea.
- In the dystopian society **individuals are powerless**, controlled by an oppressive government and by technology.
- The **hero questions** the social and political systems but he **fails** to change them.
- It's a **way of criticising society**. The reader can recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world



George Orwell

6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Subject

- The future world is divided into: **Oceania**, **Eurasia** and **Eastasia**
- Oceania (North America, South Africa, Australia) is **a big totalitarian system**.
- **Airstrip One, a future England**, is an outpost of Oceania.



Poster for Michael Radford's 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (1984).



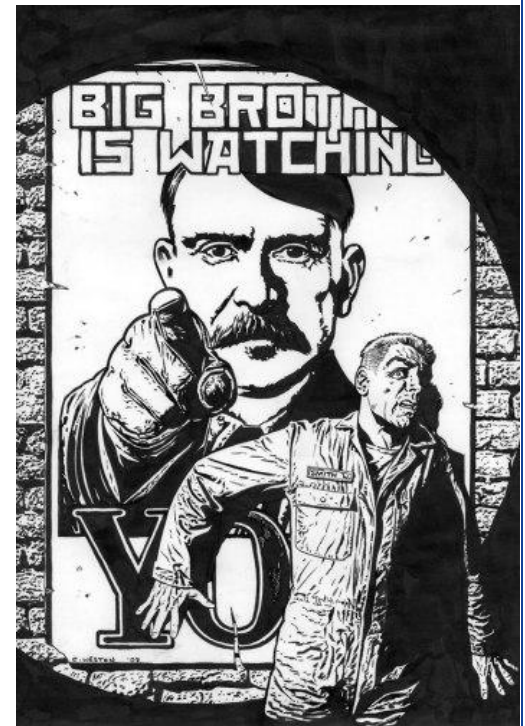
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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Setting

London, in the mythical country of Oceania, **1984** (**in the future**), ruled by **The Party**

London: a desolated city governed by **terror and the constant control** of **BIG BROTHER**.



Nobody escapes the gaze of Big Brother.



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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

A dystopian novel

No privacy:

TELESCREEN



'[...] an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound [...] would be picked by it' (Chapter 1)



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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Newspeak

- Newspeak is the **official language** of Oceania.
- The goal of the Party is to have **Newspeak** replace **Oldspeak** (standard English).
- Newspeak eliminates **undesirable words** and invents **new words** – all to force **Party conformity**.
- **Aim**: to eliminate **literature, thoughts** and **consciousness**.





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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Doublethink

- **Doublethink** is the manipulation of the mind by making people **accept contradictions**.
- **Doublethink** makes people believe that **the Party** is the only institution that **knows right from wrong**.
- **The Ministry of Truth** (where Winston works) changes history, facts and memories to promote **Doublethink** → historical reference to **Stalin's** will to **change history**.





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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The protagonist:
Winston Smith

The name

“**Smith**” is the commonest English surname so the hero is a sort of **Everyman**.

“**Winston**” evokes **Churchill**’s patriotic appeals during the Second World War: “***blood, sweat and tears***”.



John Hurt as Winston in Michael Radford’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984).



George Orwell

6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The protagonist:
Winston Smith

His experience

- alienation from society
- rebellion against the Party
- search for spiritual and moral integrity (love story with Julia)

In the first two parts of the novel, Winston expresses Orwell's point of view.



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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Characters: Big Brother

- Big Brother is the **perceived ruler** of Oceania
→ he looks like a combination of **Hitler** and **Stalin**.
- Big Brother's **God-like image** is stamped on coins and projected on telescreens → **his gaze is unavoidable**.



Big Brother looks like a combination of Hitler and Stalin.



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6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Themes



Big Brother poster from '1984', a 1956 film directed by Michael Anderson.

- The **threat of a totalitarian state** (censorship, denial of an objective truth)
- Importance of **language** in shaping thought and opinions
- Importance of **memory** and **trust**
- Abolition of **individuality** and **reality**
- Satire against **hierarchical societies**