
The rapidity with which 1984 entered our language and popular consciousness can easily be traced in the first decade following its publication. The quick recognition of the book’s significance was not surprising, considering the growing suspicion in the U.S. toward the threat of communism. These fearful sentiments helped fuel the Cold War and made possible the rise to power of Senator Joseph McCarthy. In this atmosphere, 1984 was quickly seized as a tool to discredit Soviet communism.

Many who read 1984, or at least heard of it, were persuaded in a variety of ways that it was an accurate portrayal of life under Communist rule. Some readers were convinced of the reality of the book’s characterization of communist society by Orwell’s particular use of unforgettable symbols to show the total control of the individual by the “Party.”

As a symbol, the book served as a powerful warning of what could happen in America if certain political and economic trends outside the United States were permitted to continue to what some considered their inevitable conclusions. Thus, it is not surprising that 1984 became a primer on the dangers of communism. As a force against the growth of communism, it was included on “must read lists” for high school students, military and government personnel, and all concerned citizens in general.

During the book’s first decade, the threat perceived to our freedoms, such as the freedom to think independently, had distinct foreign origins: the threat of Big Brother “over there.” Our defense was a conviction that we must constantly be alert, to the point of suspending temporarily some Constitutional freedoms.

By the 1960s, the national concern for the threat of communism had diminished. Briefly, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, there was a small revival of concern but, as the Crisis diminished, so did concern for the threat of communism. In tune with the trend toward more rapid social and political changes in the

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A Reader’s Guide To George Orwell’s 1984

Raymond G. McInnis and Michael Turner

1960s, Orwell’s 1984 was being cited for different reasons. In 1960, just eight years after the book was being championed by then Representative Richard Nixon as a force against communism, parents in Miami, Florida, were demanding that it be taken off high school reading lists because they thought it was obscene. With 1984 in mind, writers like Erich Fromm increasingly began to point accusing fingers at social and political trends in the West, primarily the United States, implying that the society depicted in 1984 could, if we were not careful, mean us too. New and old readers alike, especially those disillusioned by our political system, began seeing parallels between 1984 and trends in the United States.

Many sensed a loss of identity in a bureaucratic
society. Concern developed about manipulation by science and technology.

The growing awareness of the military-industrial complex, the assassination of President Kennedy, the "doubtful" Warren Report, and the increased involvement in Vietnam under President Johnson were all issues contributing to a disillusionment with our political system.

In the 1970s, indignation and reaction surfaced against the seemingly increased use by government officials and others of what was called Orwellian "doublespeak." There was a wide suspicion that the euphemistic terms used to describe events in the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair were really attempts at some kind of cover-up.

To fight this trend in our language, the Committee on Public Doublespeak was formed as an arm of the National Council of Teachers of English. Annually this group awards two prizes, the "doublespeak" award, to the individual who has most flagrantly corrupted the English language, and the Orwellian award, to the individual who has made the most significant steps toward encouraging higher standards of English.

The first section below summarizes the book's contents. Successive sections analyze what writers say about the book's publishing history, its origins, its impact, and specific criticism it has received. Next, all sources discussed are cited. Finally a paragraph describes sources of additional information.

Summary of Contents

The novel is in three parts. In the first, Winston Smith is an Outer Party member working as a Newspeak writer in the Records Department of Oceania's Ministry of Truth. His task is to change all published material to match the current Inner Party policy. Increasingly, he engages in defiant acts against governmental structures. Beginning with keeping a diary, it-self an act the Thought Police view suspiciously, part one ends with Winston making passionate love to rebellious Julia. He believes that sexual relationships which accompany love result in loyalty between individuals — emotions contrary to Party policy.

In the second part, Winston and Julia surrepti-tiously rent a room from kindly old Mr. Charrington, seemingly an antique shop operator. Thereafter, the couple have a comfortable bed for their meetings. Winston meets O'Brien, a party functionary, and it is arranged that together Winston and Julia will visit O'Brien's apartment. After he leads the couple to believe he is a like-minded revolutionary, both Winston and Julia disclose to O'Brien their doubts about and sins against the government. O'Brien lets Winston read Goldstein's political tract. Shortly afterwards, due to O'Brien's betrayal, Winston and Julia are arrested in their rented room. What follows is a topsy-turvy reversal of outward appearances. Characters turn out to be the opposite of what Winston believes they are.

In part three, the couple are imprisoned separately in the Ministry of Love. Through torture, Winston is slowly "rehabilitated" under O'Brien's care. Not only does Winston learn what behavior the party expects of him, he comes to understand that all Party members must think and feel as Big Brother directs. Subjugated physically, emotionally, and mentally, he rejoices in the defeat of Oceania's current enemy, and feels gratitude and love for Big Brother. (Appendix A, pp. 407-409, of Crick, 1981, contains a version of Orwell's own outline of the novel.)

Origin

What most critics call an anti-utopian novel, 1984 visualizes a world in which everything Orwell hates has merged and become omnipotent. In the three superstates of Oceania, Eurasia, and East Asia, the characteristics of ancient slave societies, Platonic Utopianism, and the dynastic politics of early modern Europe are combined with the outward features and implicit tendencies of Bolshevism, capitalism, imperialism, Nazism, and Roman Catholicism (Kateb, 1966: 177.) Orwell's idea for these three totalitarian superstates (which roughly correspond to Western Europe and America, the USSR, and Asia) came from the Teheran Conference (1943), held to strengthen the cooperation of the United States, Great Britain, and the USSR in World War II (Meyers, 1977b: 178; Steinhoff, 1978: 226).

To Orwell, a struggle between the world's three classes of people — the High, the Middle, and the Low — was inevitable. In 1938, for example, Orwell himself lamented that the "one thing that never arrives is equality" (Atkins, 1954: 13; Kateb, 1966: 569). While all his writing reflects concern for the endless struggle between the social evils of class, oppression, and poverty and the values of decency, liberty, and justice, in 1984 Orwell particularly stresses these themes.

Industrialization has created the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisureed, orderly, and efficient. To Orwell, such hope is futile: "The dream of an Earthly Paradise results in an Earthly Hell" (Lowenthal, 1969: 162-165).

Since moral rather than political solutions had become supremely important to him, Orwell set out to write a political novel to influence the direction of human history (Lowenthal, 1969: 172-174; Kalechofsky, 1973: 133-134; Zwerdling, 1974: 105; Siegal, 1974: 150). Lowenthal, for one, claims that 1984 is really a political tract, designed as "a political analysis and ethical message" to educated intellectuals and experts, who — in Orwell's fictional world — are part of the "Outer Party." As in every line of serious work he wrote after 1936, its purpose is,
Orwell avows, "to push the world in a certain direction, to alter...people's ideas of the kind of society...to strive after" (Small, 1975: 17).

To Orwell, the first need of the concerned citizen is accurate information about how communist-type totalitarian regimes work. To preserve the "human heritage," 1984 attempts to give us the "moral" foundation needed to achieve the political reforms Orwell considers necessary. 1984 "speaks for the future nameless millions who might find themselves living under conditions which make it impossible for them to speak for themselves" (Lowenthal, 1969: 175; Hynes, 1971).

As a leading reason for the novel's excessively dark and foreboding atmosphere, critics frequently cite Orwell's failing physical health, caused by tuberculosis and other personal concerns, which converged during the writing of 1984 (Thomas, 1965: 82; Kalechofsky, 1973: 109-110; Meyers, 1975; Roazen, 1978: 679). Orwell himself admits that his condition probably contributed to his morbid attitude. "I think 1984 is a good idea but the execution would have been better if I had not written it under the influence of TB" (i.e., tuberculosis) (Thomas, 1976: 82; Meyers, 1975: 43-44; Crick, 1981: 384).

The central concept in O'Brien's and the Inner Party's ideology is that freedom and happiness cannot coexist (Meyers, 1977: 152). The idea comes from the Grand Inquisitor (upon which the character O'Brien in 1984 is based) of Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov, and is also a theme developed in Eugene Zamyatin's novel We (Kalechofsky, 1973: 111-112; Connors, 1975).

We was translated into English in 1925. There is confusion about exactly when in the 1940s Orwell discovered Zamyatin's book (Steinhoff, 1978: 225-226). Connor presents evidence that makes 1946 the date "at either the late formation or early composition stage of 1984" (1975: 107). Woodcock (1966) draws attention to a series of institutions, plot situations, and themes shared by both novels. Unlike Woodcock, however, Connor (1975: 108) claims that there are compelling reasons for reducing the influence attributed to Zamyatin in discussions of 1984.

In addition to identifying material derived from Dostoyevsky and Zamyatin, critics present evidence of ideas taken from satirists Jonathan Swift and Aldous Huxley (Richards, 1962; Steinhoff, 1975), novelists Charles Dickens and Henry Miller, and political essayists Arthur Koestler and James Burnham (Lowenthal, 1969: 175; Steinhoff, 1975).

Extensive treatment is given the alleged influence of James Burnham on Orwell, especially through his political treatise, The Managerial Revolution (Madison, 1961; Siegel, 1974; Zwerdling, 1974; Steinhoff, 1975). Both Madison and Siegel claim that The Managerial Revolution furnishes the model for the 20-odd pages of Emmanuel Goldstein's The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism that Orwell injects into the middle of the novel. Steinhoff argues that Goldstein is patterned after Trotsky, and that the treatise imitates Trotsky's writing. Seigel contends that, rather than the revolutionary rhetoric typical of Trotsky, Orwell injects the treatise with a "flat" style, typical of Burnham. To do otherwise would have given the book "a revolutionary elan that would have struck a jarring note among readers."

"To emphasize the moral and material regression under 'Ingsoc,'" Orwell's memories of London during World War II supplement the reconstruction of brutal characteristics of 18th century England, transmitted to Orwell by Swift. (Ingsoc is the fictional name Orwell gives Great Britain.)

One feature that distinguishes 1984 from other books on the future is Orwell's preoccupation with the ways a state can effectively control its subjects' thoughts and emotions (Steinhoff, 1976). His technique is parody, including his parody-language, Newspeak, and its related thought process, Doublethink. Based on attempts to develop artificial, international languages, for which he had a low opinion, Orwell used Newspeak as a vehicle for his message about the influence of language on thought processes, and, by extension, illustrated how a totalitarian regime would use the "rational rules of science as the instrument of power." (Fink, 1971; Steinhoff, 1976.) Under Newspeak, "the reality of a thing is the reverse of the language used to designate it" (Kalechofsky, 1973: 112; Sibley, 1973: 273). Or, as a language, Newspeak is designed not to expand, but to decrease the scope of human thought (Roazen, 1978: 692). Orwell's Doublethink, critics note with a mixture of amusement and disbelief, is the capacity of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously.

Publishing History

Orwell's works are published in both standard and paperback editions in Great Britain and North America, and have been translated into more than 60 languages, but 1984 is his most famous and influential book (Meyers, 1977b: 155ff). Bernard Crick, Orwell's biographer, says that the first printing of 1984 was 25,500 copies. A year after publication, 50,000 had sold in Great Britain and 170,000 in the United States. In the United States, distribution by the Book-of-the-Month Club added 190,000 copies to the number sold (Crick, 1981). In 1956, Columbia Studios produced a film version of 1984 (Goodman, 1978: 349). The movie is frequently broadcast on television and still influences successive generations of the masses and intellectuals alike (Chatfield, 1975: 947).
Impact

The predictions in *1984*, most critics agree, are behind schedule. Except for a flock of publications which mark the arrival of Orwell’s dreaded date, and perhaps a spate of television specials, *1984* will come and go, otherwise unnoticed (Malkin, 1970; Small, 1975). The impact of this “counter-utopian” or “dystopian” novel, nonetheless, is so significant, it is beyond measure (Chatfield, 1975: 947). To Lawrence Malkin, “no political book, whether fiction or nonfiction... has passed more thoroughly into the English language and popular consciousness than Orwell’s dark masterpiece.”

The book’s title is part of our collective consciousness as shorthand for the direst circumstances that can occur, either socially or politically. The exact reason why Orwell chose 1984 as the forbidding date probably will never be known (Malkin, 1970: 33; Frothingham, 1971; Siegel, 1974: 150; Small, 1975: 14; Goodman, 1978: 349), although it is a transposition of the last two digits of 1948, the year in which he wrote the novel. Lawrence Malkin says, “I never think of 1984, either the book or the year, without a slight shudder of foreboding.” Examples of 1984 as a reference point, minus the spectre of specific Orwellian images, are Richard Farmer (1973) and Jerome Tuccille (1975). Both authors are concerned with the consequences of projected real developments, not the dreaded predictions of *1984* (Goodman, 1978: 350).

Not only has *1984* certainly succeeded in rendering the essential quality of totalitarianism, but its evocation of the tone of life under such regimes has sensitized our perception of them for the past and present, as well as the future (Howe, 1963: 190; Kateb, 1966: 577–578; Steinhoff, 1975: 222). Given the book’s almost simultaneous appearance with the unfolding of the Cold War, it became a symbol of our worst apocalyptic vision of what, if unchecked, these events might hold for the future. (See entry for George F. Kennan’s “Mr. X” article.)

To Kessler (1957: 570), the reason *1984* seems so much closer to home is that our experience has been almost exclusively with the police-state kind of dictatorships Orwell describes. In support, Kalechofsky (1973: 133) argues that *1984* could only be written after the Russian revolution, the two World Wars, and the Spanish Civil War.

Seized upon as a major weapon in the Cold War, its message simplified and distorted, *1984* was used by the mass media “to direct unreasoning mass hatred against an only recently lauded ally” (Siegel, 1974: 148; Malkin, 1970: 38). Because of its message, however, there is evidence that *1984* was viewed as a threatening, subversive document by eastern European regimes. Czeslaw Milosz (1953: 40), a Polish intellectual writing of the Stalinist period, says: “Even those who know Orwell only by hearsay are amazed that a writer who never lived in Russia should have a keen perception into its life.”

Evidently the only one who has attempted a systematic account of the accuracy of Orwell’s predictions for the future, psychoscientist David Goodman (1978: 345) says “though 1984 has failed as a warning it has been succeeding brilliantly as a forecast.” According to Goodman, of 137 predictions for the future Orwell makes in *1984*, over 100 have come true. Goodman claims that almost all of his scientific and technical forecasts have occurred, and that, because of recent trends, Orwell’s social and political predictions look more and more plausible. In tabular form, Goodman presents lists of 30 predictions the book contains for military science, police technology, and psychobiology.

In particular, Goodman argues that evidence suggests Orwell is correct in predicting (1) the growth of totalitarian regimes, (2) the appearance of Doublethink, (3) a “denial of objective reality,” (4) communication in a form of Newspeak, (5) a deliberate “rewriting” of history, (6) Big Brother cults, (7) continuous warfare, (8) breakup of families, (9) erosion of personal privacy, and (10) an increase in public hangings. The impact of Goodman’s article was considerable: “Fueled perhaps by the publicity the article... received in newspapers, magazines, and broadcast media around the world, the response... [was] voluminous” (*The Futurist*, 1979: 140).

In agreement with Goodman, Ralph Hamil (1979), an official in the World Future Society, cites a 1961 survey of post-World War II literature which points out that “since 1939, governments of the future based on democratic principles have been all-but-nonexistent in science fiction generally.” With its omnipresent telescreen and a boot stamping on a human face, *1984* is the most powerful representation of this period. As well as a terrorist use of technological advances, Hamil points to the feasibility of thought control through “biocontrol” and “behavioral conditioning” as evidence of Orwellian predictions. Joseph Maloney (1979), a systems analyst, also in agreement with Goodman, claims that although a future like *1984* is inevitable, we need to see that it arrives in the least harmful form.

In dispute with Goodman, Burham Beckwith (1979), himself a futurist, argues that contemporary social conditions and his own declining physical condition contributed to Orwell’s morbid version of the future. Beckwith dismisses as unconvincing Goodman’s evidence about:
The growth of totalitarian regimes: “Once fascist” West Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Japan have all become model democracies.

The rise of Doublethink, noting that such predictions have long been made, and are not original with Orwell.

The alleged increasing “denial of objective reality,” arguing that “such denials are as old as Greek philosophy and organized religion,” and that Goodman’s claim “is entirely unsupported by reliable scientific evidence.”

The increase in Newspeak Goodman cites is based upon Goodman’s subjective interpretations of the decline of the quality of oral and written expression by various U.S. populations.

The revising of history books: rather than a deliberate “partisan revision of history books” to agree with dogma, “Western non-Communist historians have become more and more objective.”

The rise of Big Brother cults: “Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco have no comparable successors in advanced countries today.”

The suggestion that “today’s arms race is the equivalent of Orwell’s continuous war”: the evidence is too weak to persuade us that there exists “continuous war” between three superpowers.

The decline of family life: rather than a sign of decline, “breakup of families,” merely indicates that individuals are freer to choose more satisfactory mates.

An invasion of privacy: instead of an “erosion of personal privacy,” urbanization and the increasing tolerance of dissent and unorthodox lifestyles encourages more private lives.

An increase in public hangings: contrary to an increase in capital punishment as a mode of deterring criminal behavior, the numbers of “public hangings” have declined.

Likewise, Frederick Pohl, a science fiction writer, dismisses Goodman’s allegations, saying that he does “not think Orwell makes even one prediction of science of technology in 1984 that cannot be found in prior work . . . . The most powerful case for working to avoid 1984 is made by the novel itself.” Goodman’s “inflated claims” weaken, rather than strengthen this prospect.

As remedies against the threat of achieving a 1984-world, letters published in The Futurist, August 1979, argue for

(1) safeguarding democracy with anti-terrorist programs,

(2) working a “tradeoff” between centralization and freedom,

(3) strengthening democracy,

(4) “preventing, deterring, and accepting” terrorism,

(5) determining reality and setting objectives accordingly,

(6) developing “a global program” to prevent 1984, and

(7) working “for a free future through education.”

Other evidence of the impact of 1984, direct and oblique, is available from other quarters as well. Looking at the history of the concept of the “warfare state,” Keith Nelson, a historian, analyzes the origins of the idea of the “garrison-police state” and the “garrison-prison state,” first presented by Harold Lasswell in 1941. 1984, Nelson (1971: 139) writes, contains perhaps the most vivid presentation of such ideas.

David Rosenthal, a political scientist, laments rigid bureaucratic regulations, characteristics of 1984, intruding increasingly into contemporary society. Mulford Sibley (1973), also a political scientist, looks at the risk of technological development becoming increasingly detrimental to human survival, both individual and collective. He suggests that perhaps the pace of technological development should be slowed, with more prior critical analyses of its possible effect upon people and institutions.

A management professor, William Halal (1974) decries the enthusiasm with which “organizational development” is ready to apply the “behavioral sciences for conducting planned programs of organizational change.” Such trends evoke “the spectre of an Orwellian 1984, Huxley’s Brave New World, and Skinner’s Operant Conditioning . . . . This swing toward formal organizational development programs,” he says, “raises the crucial issue of their impact on the freedom, dignity, and privacy of the individual.”

Peter Breggin (1971: 60), a therapist, derides Orwell’s satirical projection of psychological science and technique on “a grant societal scale.” The net result is the “dossier society” that Orwell predicts, in which individuals give up their privacy to Big Brother and behave in ways that look good on their records.
The emphasis in criticism about Orwell has shifted from a concern for his status as a political satirist to his moral outlook and its personal origins (Small, 1975: 19-20). It seems paradoxical, Small declares, that Orwell's significance is primarily moral and religious. "He is known above all as a witness for the plight of the individual in an age of collectivism; at the same time, and not to be separated from his view of him, he represents the skeptic-religious man who, with 'all the important questions unsettled,' is trapped into thinking exclusively in political terms."

As well as examining his concerns about morality, there are critical examinations of Orwell's attitude toward imperialism, socialism, communism, anti-Semitism, and explorations of such topics as his criticism, style, patriotism, psychological insights, and nostalgia for the past (e.g., Lowenthal, 1969; New, 1975; Steinhoff, 1975; Meyers, 1977b; Smyer, 1979; Crick, 1981).

Orwell's alleged pessimism, in particular, receives much attention. Critics who discuss the "pessimism" position, note Kateb (1966: 564-65, 574-76) and Meyers (1978: 144), include Deutscher (1955), West (1957), Elsbree (1959), Howe (1963), and Woodcock (1966: 67, 218). Deutscher alleges that, although the illness that plagued Orwell at the close of his life undoubtedly is part of the pessimism, the main explanation of Orwell's disillusionment and pessimism lies not in his "death agonies," but in a "defeated rationalism." To some critics, this judgment is too harsh (Howe, 1963: 196; Steinhoff, 1975). But, states Kateb (1966: 565), even on the most generous estimate of Orwell's character, it is impossible not to conclude that "some serious personal shortcoming" helped produce a book like 1984.

Instead of pessimism, Lowenthal (1969: 165-166) and Kateb (1966: 575) argue that evidence in 1984 and other writings between 1940 and 1949 suggest Orwell was convinced of the inevitability of atomic war and the spread of totalitarianism. The totalitarianism of 1984 is not what is known today, Howe argues, but totalitarianism after its world triumph. "Strictly speaking, the society of Oceania might be called post-totalitarian" (Howe, 1963: 196; also Rif, 1954 and Meyers, 1975: 145).

Meyers (1969: 144) argues that, rather than prophetic speculation cast as a "nightmare vision of the future," 1984 is a "concrete and naturalistic portrayal of the present and the past." Its originality derives from "a realistic synthesis and rearrangement of familiar materials." For Orwell, 1984 is not only a "paradigm" of recent European history, but also incorporates beliefs and ideas he acquired between the Depression and the Cold War. The novel's origins are traceable throughout Orwell's writing.

Although it is not difficult to account for how it has captured the popular imagination, almost all critics agree that, considered purely as fiction, 1984 is a "flawed" novel (Kubal, 1972: 130; Crick, 1981: 384). States Howe (1963: 189), whether it is a remarkable novel or a novel at all, seems unimportant.

The plot, obvious, heavy-handed, and melodramatic, Kubal (1972: 130; Crick, 1981: 384) says,
reduces the major characters, Winston and Julia, to pawns. The antagonist, O'Brien, he says, emerges more like a parody of a science fiction villain than a figure that embodies inhuman tyranny. Akin to the literary convention of the letter in the Victorian novel, the Goldstein tract, Kubal argues, is a serious structural defect. For Kubal, 1984 exists, too, as an example of Orwell's distrust of the dramatic, a characteristic Kubal alleges is evident in almost all Orwell's writing.

An assumption that supports many interpretations is that, because it examines "social reality" and "public events," 1984 is understandable "only in political terms" (Howe, 1963: 190; Smyer, 1979: 141; Crick, 1981: 384). The novel does not explain, Howe says, "why totalitarianism occurs or is sustained." Critical assessments of the novel thus chiefly focus on those features that are "sociopolitically implausible," says Smyers. Critics fault the docility of the proles, especially their freedom from intrusion of government interference (e.g., Maddison, 1961: 78; Howe, 1963: 194; Smyer, 1979: 14). The "concept of power hunger," which supposedly justifies the Inner Party's brutality, critics accept doubtfully, notes Smyer. Why Orwell injects into the novel the Party's policy of suppressing sex, too, Smyer claims, is not clear.

"Because it accurately presents an idea which corresponds to our universal and ever present fear of what we might become," 1984 overcomes "its failure of plot and character, its imaginative vulgarity, and very well could survive as a 'good bad' novel" (Kubal, 1972: 135). Orwell takes figures and episodes already mythical (no one knew, for example, the truth about the purge of Trotsky for his role in the alleged plot against Stalin) and makes his own myths out of them. Being political and historical, they are available to Orwell's peculiar "documenting" imagination; being mythical, they are assimilated into art (Hynes, 1971: 17).

Rather than comparing our world and the world of 1984, Siegel declares, we should be conscious of Orwell's enduring insights into contemporary society. As proof of a society "not deficient in Doubletink," Siegel (1974: 156) points to the current U.S. policy of referring to puppet dictatorships as the "free world," and an economic system composed of giant multinational corporations as "free enterprise." In addition, he points accusingly at the inconsistency of allowing unemployment and idle machinery to exist alongside poverty and starvation and the "destructive bombing" by the U.S. in Vietnam, "to prevent a blood bath later."

Sources


A review of books on Orwell by Zwerdling (1975) and Steinhoff (1975).


A "political biography," this work devotes only one chapter to 1984. It is the only major work, however, that extensively examines Orwell's own materials.


Also in Howe (1963), Hynes (1971), and Williams (1974).


In addition to the text of 1984, Howe presents extracts from Zamyatin's We, Huxley's Brave New World, Trotsky's The Revolution Betrayed, and reprints of more than ten critical articles, including one of his own.


An anthology of twelve noted examinations arranged in three parts: (1) reviews, (2) essays, (3) viewpoints, plus chronology of important dates, notes on the editor and contributors, and selected bibliography.


An examination of the bases of Orwell's pessimistic conclusion which suggests that, "since it is likely the Orwells of this world have far greater influence than the political philosophers, there is good reason to study them."


A well-known Orwell scholar, Meyers and his wife have critically annotated over 500 books, articles, and important material published between 1940 and the 1970s. Meyer wryly observes, "the best work on Orwell was published between 1940 and 1961; most of the recent work is derivative or polemical, and generates more heat than light."


Eleven early criticisms, mostly book reviews, giving different interpretations of 1984.


First published in London, this inexpensive paperback includes a brief summary of the content and criticism of 1984. The selected references he cites are supplemented by the author's larger bibliography (1977a). The chapter on 1984 is an adapted reprint of his article in English Miscellany 23 (1972): 247-261.


Discusses over 200 works.


Small, Christopher. The Road to Miniluv: George Orwell, the State and God. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975.


The first book-length study analyzing Orwell’s literary influences and political thought, with
discussions of intellectual and historical background. Steinhoff “spends two chapters demolishing Isaac Deutscher’s rather negative ‘mysticism of cruelty’ argument,” and then reaffirms Orwell’s own statement, first published in Life in 1949, that 1984 is not a prophecy of the future, but a warning against the “perversions to which a centralized economy is liable” (Meyers, 1976: 228).


Sources of Additional Information


Obtaining references to material chronicling or assessing the literary impact of 1984 is not difficult (Meyers, 1977a, 1977b). Greater difficulty comes when one seeks to locate sources which specify concrete evidence of social and/or political impact of the book on the popular imagination. A measure of the book’s impact, the numerous times each year authors cite 1984, is recorded in the Social Sciences Citation Index.