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# Dystopia And Science and Technology in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four

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## ABSTRACT

*The world of pessimism, control and domination is the most despised world to live in. George Orwell is famous for creating such a world in his novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four. This dystopian novel creates a sense of warning to the readers who considered this novel as a prophecy of the future. This post-war novel consisted of elements that divided the world into different realms of the constant fight with the help of technology. This paper discusses the elements of dystopia in the novel and the reason for its emergence. The paper also discusses the satirical way of writing by Orwell, which included events from that time period that made an impact in many writers' minds. Furthermore, the development of technology helped in the creation of such a pessimistic world and freedom and individualistic choices were snatched from the people and a new language was introduced to restrict the spread of propaganda within the country. The paper also discusses the author's suggestions for the readers to prevent such events from happening in the real world. With the development in the field of science and technology, people must be careful in order to maintain the autonomy that we have. The paper ends with a precautionary note about how people of the society must behave in order to avoid a situation similar to that of the novel.*

**Keywords:** *George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Dystopia, Science and Technology*

## I. INTRODUCTION

George Orwell is the pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair, who was an author of the twentieth century. He is famous for his polemical journalism and his criticism on Totalitarianism. His opposition to Totalitarianism and support for the democratic socialism gets reflected in his writings. George Orwell, in his essay *Why I Write*, wrote "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand". Some of his works are written about satires, utopias and dystopias. His 1949 work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is a dystopian novel which deals with the post-war world. This world is divided into spheres where everything is controlled by the

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superpowers of the ruling class. It deals with the role of truth and facts in the realm of politics, as well as how they are manipulated. This novel is best described as a “deterministic prophecy, as a kind of science fiction or a dystopia, as a conditional projection of the future, as a humanistic satire on contemporary events, as a total rejection of socialism of any kind”. The novel presents a protest against the totalitarian abuse of powers by ‘Big Brother’.

This paper discusses the ideas of utopias and dystopias and explains the dystopic elements of the novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell. The overuse of power and domination by the Inner Party on the people of the Outer Party is described. The paper also deals with the relation between the satire in the novel and the events of contemporary times. The events in the novel refer to something from the real world. Furthermore, this paper deals with the way in which technology was used to manipulate people and impose various rules on them. The novel explains the use of science and technology to suppress people’s choices and rights. The relationship between the individuals and groups of various backgrounds are distorted due to this imposition of new laws which restrict them.

## II. MAIN BODY

Fiction can be categorised into various genres. One of them is Utopian and Dystopian fiction, where the social and political changes are dealt in accordance with the author’s views. Utopian fictions are set in a way that is agreeable to the author and is appealing to the readers too. Dystopian novels, on the other hand, are represented in a completely opposite way which does not please its audience. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an example of dystopian novel, where the events are not favoured by the protagonist. The presence of oppression, dominance and many such negative traits, leads to hatred and an apocalyptic atmosphere in the novel. The system in a dystopic world tends to destroy the choices of an individual. Instead, they impose rules which lead to a world of control and domination. These novels are usually written based upon any social issue which could worsen in the future. These can also be parodies of certain events of the present. For instance, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written as a satire on the division of the world at Tehran by Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, betrayal of the intellectuals and to show the power hunger and totalitarianism. The critics and the reviewers of the novel described this novel to be “an explicit attack on socialism”.

These satires are significantly dependent upon contemporary events. Orwell, in his notes for a press release, said that something like “*Nineteen Eighty-Four* could happen. This is the direction in which the world is going at the present time, and the trend lies deep in the political, social and economic foundations of the contemporary world situation”. In the novel, ‘Big

Brother' controls all the people by keeping them under constant surveillance. Thus, by controlling the present, he controls the past and the future. This gets reflected through the famous dialogue between O'Brian and Winston Smith, 'If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face forever' (Orwell, 280). This gives us the picture of domination in society. The Ministry of Truth, from the novel, has the power to rewrite the history. This is seen as a satire on the events which are listed in The Soviet Encyclopaedia about Trotsky, a war hero, who was removed from all the historical records.

The dystopian qualities of the novel are characterised by power disclosure and totalitarianism. The people of the Inner Party hold all the powers in Airstrip One. Any individual in the society cannot do anything of their choice. No property can be privately owned. Everything is owned by the Party. The people are kept under surveillance by Thought Police through telescreens, cameras and hidden microphones. Those who oppose the Party become 'unpersons', who is later removed from the history by the Ministry of Truth and those who think about rebelling the Party are termed 'thoughtcriminals'. These aspects of the novel prove that no individual can even think of rebelling against the Party. This loss of freedom, omnipresent surveillance and the overuse of power are increasing as we advance with respect to science and technology, where social media acts as a mode of surveillance. According to William Staples, with the development of technology, people enter such a society, which he describes as, "We seem to be entering a state of permanent visibility where attempts to control and shape our behaviour, in essence our bodies, are accomplished not so much by the threat of punishment and physical force but by the act of being watched – continuously, anonymously, and automatically".

The dystopia in the novel is also expressed through various Ministries of Oceania. Their names carry the literal opposite meaning of what they actually do. For instance, the Ministry of Truth lies about people and history, the Ministry of Peace is an institution of war and the Ministry of Love punishes people. The world that people believe to be true is its complete opposite. The Party becomes the controller of language too, where it decided the vocabulary and intelligence of people through 'Newspeak', doing which the spread of truth can be destroyed. The Party cannot be questioned or doubted by anyone. The following lines show the inability to fight against the Party.

"He could not fight against the Party any longer. Besides, the Party was in the right. It must be so: how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken?" (Orwell, 228)

This technologically advanced world created fear among people, which was made use to manipulate and control. When machines take over, humans have no power over their lives. The

telescreen becomes a medium through which people of Oceania are watched by the Thought Police. It is a two way television that cannot be turned off. The power of the party is omnipresent through technology, thus, making it a method to control and dominate. If people disobey, they are manipulated to believe everything the Party says. The telescreen partially acts as a prison where the society is no longer free to do things of its choice. Technology forces itself into people's lives, making them miserable. The Language of the common people is modified through the implementation of 'speakwrites'. The Ministry of Truth uses this dictating machine to rewrite the histories. It operates only in the language Newspeak, which is used to remove unnecessary words from society which it believes are useless and would cause people to rebel. All these technologically developed instruments are handled by the Thought Police who can read people's minds, facial gestures even when they are sleeping. The following line suggests that he is being noted even with his back to the telescreen. The Thought Police can sense rebellion through the use of advanced technology.

"Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer, though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing" (Orwell, 5)

The technology is so advanced that any smallest change in facial expression can give away the idea of that person committing a thoughtcrime. It is a privilege to be able to turn off the telescreen, which can only be done by the members of the Inner Party. Children of the society are used as extra surveillance who can turn in their own people. The following line shows the level of control that the Party has on the people.

"You could not control the beating of your heart, and the telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up." (Orwell, 100)

The effects of World War II and the inclusion of machinery like aircraft and atomic bombs made Orwell think of a world, where technology is dominant and is used as a medium to control and manipulate the people of the country. This aspect of the novel made it, a world like this, a kind of a prophecy among readers. A world like that would be the last place one would want to live in. They do not want the government to interfere in everything that they do. Intellectuals must not betray their principles when they are asked to work in favour of the government. The danger lies in the acceptance by the intellectuals. Orwell said that it depends on us, to avoid any such situation and must not allow overuse of power and control. The society was called 'IngSoc', which meant English Socialism, and was filled with dread, helplessness and hopelessness. The slogans like 'War Is Peace', 'Freedom Is Slavery' and 'Ignorance Is Strength' gives the present a sense of warning, for we do not know what the future holds for

us. To escape from such an Orwellian world, justice and morality must prevail and people must hold on to their rights and individualities.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dystopic novel that was seen as a controversial prophecy which can be avoided if the intellectuals and the people refuse to allow it. The intellectuals must stick to their principles to avoid mistrust and domination. This satiric work had many pessimistic elements, but it made us think in a futuristic way and about the ways to avoid such situations in the near future. One must make sure that no party controls the present, in order to escape from a situation where they will control and manipulate both the past and the future. "Colloquial language, the common people and common-sense will survive the most resolute attempts at total control". The common people as well as the intellectuals must be careful in order to maintain the rightful freedom that we possess. The novel ends on a positive note, which can be seen after 'The End', in the appendix. It portrays the end of the totalitarian rule of 'Big Brother', who failed to govern the people in a peaceful state. The end of their reign resulted in the return of the lost freedom along with the language, which is not restricted to a specific vocabulary of 'Newspeak'. The individuality was restored and the defeat of the Party whose 'forever' did not last long. The victory is attributed to the language, Newspeak, the novel ends with the increase in the vocabulary, which was once limited, which is seen through the following lines,

"The whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought." (Orwell, 67)

"Literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it." (Orwell, 67)

The situation changed for the better, and the return of freedom and individuality is celebrated.

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