

ORWELL AND 1984 TODAY: GENIUS AND TUNNEL VISION (2019)

– To the great shade of my friend and teacher Raymond Williams –

[W]e look at this display of passions, and the consequences of their violence; the Unreason which is associated not only with them, but even (rather we might say especially) with good designs and righteous aims.... [A] simply truthful combination of the miseries that have overwhelmed the noblest of nations and polities, and the finest exemplars of private virtue, forms a picture of most fearful aspect and excites emotions of the profoundest and most hopeless sadness, counterbalanced by no consolatory result.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* [1822-1830]

There is, I think no more pressing task for progressive people in the First World than tirelessly to analyze and diagnose the fear and anxiety before Utopia itself...

F. Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* [1994]

*1. Introductory*

In the first week of the Trump administration, sales of George Orwell's [~~1984~~ *Nineteen Eighty-Four*] (further written NEF) increased 95-fold, catapulting this title to the top of global bestseller charts. *The New Yorker*'s pundit blithely announced this June: "The postwar Sovietization of Eastern Europe produced societies right out of Orwell's pages, but American readers responded to *1984* as a book about loyalty oaths and McCarthyism. In the nineteen-seventies, it was used to comment on Nixon and Watergate" (Menand). One internet commentator wrote, "As [Trump's spokeswoman] recast White House lies as 'alternative facts,' Orwell's tale of doublespeak read like a manual" (Silcox). This powerful book still interpellates us.

"Practice without theory is blind," said Kant and repeated Marx. And it may be exhilarating to have new theories in our profession – *theoria* after all means vision – but pure ideation needs the feedback from some kind of verification, of which texts are the kind I can best cope with. How is one then to look at NEF in terms of genre and its formal value systems – not for purposes of pedantic classification but for understanding how may a reader approach it?

What strikes most commentators is that Orwell was always an "occasional" writer, impelled to write in his criticism and fiction, positively or more often negatively, about a concrete collective situation present in time and space: "a particularly interesting experience, or an argument or fear nagging in his mind" (Woodcock, in W-CE 163). Goethe held that the occasional poem, when properly done, is the highest kind, no doubt because vividly felt. It arises as a quintessentially bourgeois democratic form, thisworldly, concrete, and particular, often embattled or pungent; the line of "occasionalists" would in Anglophone literature – the only one that Orwell was ever seriously interested in – run at least from Milton and Swift through the major Romantics to much Dickens and the later Naturalists such as Gissing, names that were also Orwell's main favourites (while Shakespeare and other writers for theatre are obviously always occasionalists). These situations are, Orwell maintains, "in front of your nose," but since perception as well as independent reflection are for a great majority of people deadened by poverty

and then by enforced hurry, class prejudice, and hegemonic “common sense,” the situations need to be RE-presented by a writer both keen of eye and firm of courage as if seen anew. This *estranging view*<sup>1/</sup>, comic and/or elegiac, was both an age-old current in literature and a specifically modernist approach to overload in huge and massified metropolitan cities, theorised by the Russian Formalists and Benjamin, practiced, say, by Joyce and Eliot, with Brecht uniting practice and theory (see more in Suvin “Parables”). In bad times, as Orwell rightly felt his were, it easily turns parodic and satirical.

How can such occasionalistic particularity be reconciled with a general horizon and validity? Matthew Arnold praised, with Victorian certainty, the exemplary writer who could “[see] life steadily, and [see] it whole” (poem “To a Friend”). Orwell certainly saw it very steadily but it is dubious he saw it “whole” – not in the sense of thematically encompassing all, impossible even for Balzac, Whitman or Tolstoy, but in the sense of facing the hugely mounting contradictions by incorporating objections to his steady estranging gaze. Orwell neither wished nor could do this. Even thematically and agentially, he had two *almost unbreakable* limits: his stance toward foreigners and women (though the stance towards manual workers was also rather troubled and finally resulted in their marginalisation in NEF). As to the first, Orwell was in some ways a “Little Englander,” and some depictions of the Burmese in his first book are little short of disgraceful.<sup>2/</sup> True, he indignantly spurned “the habit of assuming that human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled ‘good’ or ‘bad’” (CEJL 3: 362), and his love for Catalonian workers at the peak of his and their revolutionary socialism remains a shining example of widening horizons. However, he understood as few people did, though as usual one-sidedly, that “the high standard of life ... depends upon our keeping a tight hold on the Empire.... The alternative is ... to reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes” (*Road* 144) – a step toward Airstrip One of Oceania. Second, all of his naturalistic protagonists bar one are middle-class males trying, and mostly failing, to be intellectuals who should understand not only *how* but also *why*, as Winston Smith puts it. Orwell is imaginatively unable to focus on “rounded” female characters. His only, not too bright, female protagonist, Dorothy in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, obligingly suffers amnesia right near the beginning and becomes a blank slate on which wandering through unconventional societal spaces can be inscribed. I shall return to women and proles in NEF.

“Almost unbreakable”: for there is a shining exception in, to my mind, Orwell’s best book, *Animal Farm*. It is the best, probably the only successful, version of his propensity for generic intermixture: an animal fable as political satire. In its allegorical air, ethnicity and gender became irrelevant, and the author’s loves, hates, and descriptive strengths stood out cleanly and starkly. Finally, even class became clear as animal workers vs. overlords: in this book, Raymond Williams notes, instead of Orwell’s stock isolated and protesting would-be mediator there comes about a class revolt (albeit of the animal class): though in the end defeated, it is accompanied “in many places [by] a strong and liberating intelligence [that] transforms a bitter perception into an active and stimulating critique” (W-O 74). I wish I could analyse it as it deserves but I cannot do it here.

The world success of NEF, aided by much pushing from the pro-NATO forces and CIA financing, [e]specially of its TV and movie versions (see Thompson in W-CE 80-81, Saunders on CIA, and the useful, if uncritically celebratory, encyclopedic net cast by Rodden in *Politics*), can be gauged by the fact that by the early 1970s *Animal Farm* and NEF were selling a million copies a year in the UK and the USA. Thus, Orwell’s work was massively commented upon and fought over, deified and demonised. I shall here briefly summarise one of the weightiest accusations levied at NEF, by Isaac Deutscher, an intelligent anti-Stalinist to be taken seriously even where he exaggerates. He rightly took Orwell’s political impact very seriously, since NEF became “a sort of an ideological super-weapon in the Cold War” (W-CE 119, and see the whole 119-32). Deutscher allowed that the text had “subtler” aspects, such as pity for the oppressed characters and “satire on the society of his own days,” but these were

overshadowed by “stunning the political mind [rather than fertilising and enriching it from the inside]” (120). This stems from an “honourable obsession” with seamlessly oppressive rule, as seen in Stalinism and Nazism but also with significant roots in English smells, sights, and relationships. However, Orwell did not know how to explain this oppression in “the terms of empirical common sense,” so that he succumbed – probably in part also because of his sickness and approaching death – to “a quasi-mystical pessimism” (128 and *passim*). It made for an “extraordinary gloomy intensity of his vision and language and [its] almost physical immediacy,” yet “the warning defeats itself because of the boundless despair.” History is in NEF brought to a standstill, oppression is invincible, and Deutscher ends by not only citing the famous phrase: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on the human face – for ever,” yet also objecting to it: “1984 has taught millions to look at the conflict between East and West in terms of black and white, and it has shown them ... a monster scapegoat [that is, totalitarianism, DS] for the ills that plague mankind” (131-32).

Some of Deutscher’s central arguments I find correct, but his essay does not have the balance I would want today. He was mainly a political historian and theorist, and he fought off a politically incompatible Cold War stance. I think that Williams hit the mark when he concluded half a generation later, “Orwell was neither traitor nor liberator, neither truth-teller nor slanderer. Rather, very deep in his work were *contradictions and paradoxes* – including truth and falsehood, humanity and inhumanity – that he had both articulated and been limited by, ... in his remarkable development” (W-CE 4). Williams’s booklet *Orwell* remains permanently valuable as path-breaker, and I am in full sympathy with its horizon. Still, this indispensable sketch is today insufficient: it not only demands notional filling in, it demands to be confronted with a “thick” analysis of the text itself.

My hypothesis for Orwell’s contradictions and paradoxes is that he was a representatively typical class fraction composed of one person, a view which does not prescind from but rather draws strength from his personal history and idiosyncrasies. This is the type of analysis he himself practiced, most clearly in the essay on Dickens, to which I add only Williams’s “class fraction” concept (see his “Bloomsbury”) and a few other terms. Eric Blair was born into a lower, professional service fraction of the English and imperial ruling class (the professions were army, administration, and clergy); his father, stemming from a very junior branch of landowning upper class, was employed in the Indian (that is, imperial) civil service. This fraction was “*simultaneously dominator and dominated* [, from which] an at once powerful and disturbed [double vision issues]” (W-O 19, emphasis DS). Yet the fraction’s status was sinking, “pushed down by the growth of centralised bureaucracy and by the monopoly trading companies” (W-O 25) – exactly by that combination of the State and monopoly power which was Orwell’s major nightmare and enemy.

In the post-Lenin world swept by winds of revolt, this position was for Orwell becoming politically and existentially unbearable. Politically, he found that the real ruling class in position of wealth and power, “half a million people, the people in the country houses” out of 46 million in 1940, was sharply decaying in ability (CEJL 2: 70 and 69); existentially, after five years as policeman in Burma, he rejected the servile component of his class position utterly: “I felt I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man’s domination over man” (*Road* 134). His embattled horizon was as of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 a revolutionary socialism firmly committed to freedom and equality, and therefore opposed both to Labourite social-democracy, which he thought of (wrongly) as represented mainly by weak-kneed bourgeois intellectuals, and to Stalinist – Orwell used this term! – pseudo-communism (cf. W-O 13 and 55-58). In 1940, he searched for a way of “both defeating fascism and finishing capitalism” (cited in W-O 26), defining it as “a third alternative, a movement which is genuinely revolutionary, i.e., willing to make drastic changes and use violence if necessary, but which does not lose touch, as Communism and Fascism have done, with the essential values of democracy” (CEJL 1: 350), and it was then widely shared in Britain as a third way between the USA and the USSR.

Therefore, “his account of the Spanish struggle is very similar to later accounts of the struggles in Budapest [1956] or Paris [1968]: bitterly hostile at once to the capitalist order and to orthodox [Stalinist, DS] communism” (W-O 60). But finally, Orwell’s lifelong struggle to understand socialism oscillated between reducing it to State ownership of means of production with top-down State planning and a lucid acknowledgement this had to be supplemented by “approximate equality of incomes... [and] political democracy” (CEJL 2: 80).

I shall further concentrate for our purposes on NEF, though I go along with the majority opinion that Orwell’s best works are the small gem-like flames of *Homage to Catalonia* and *Animal Farm*, together with a handful of brilliant essays on English culture, highbrow and lowbrow (say, on Dickens, Boys’ Weeklies, McGill’s grotesque postcards, crime stories...) which he found both inevitably complicit with and yet “to some extent against the existing order” (W-O 23). Pithily, the *Animal Farm* slogan “all animals are equal ... but some are more equal than others” remains a terrible warning against mealy-mouthed and lying collective oligarchies that we see ruling everywhere after the antifascist moment passed – as I argue for Yugoslavia (in *Splendour*), for the Soviet Union (in *Lessons*), and for the “1968 moment” of France and Japan (in *Words and Lesions*). That is why to my mind these writings of Orwell’s remain, for all their limits, our Great Ancestors today: as opposed – for all the strong aspects of NEF - to its finally harmful dead end and defeatism, to which I now come.

## 2. Nineteen Eighty-Four

### 2.0. Approaches

2.01. Allow me to present first my ideological credentials. The first thing I ever wrote about utopia was as the associate editor of the Zagreb student union weekly *Studentski list* at the end of 1955 after my return from study in England (I had, if memory serves, at my first 1951 visit read there NEF, as well as *The God That Failed*). So I wrote a brief note titled “First of All, Analyse,” objecting to the attack on NEF by a Zagreb publisher, well-known as a kind of old-fashioned fellow traveller of the Communist party (of which I was an enthusiastic young member). I argued that Orwell’s book may well be wrong but that it is an awful warning against Stalinism which we need, so that its lessons should be carefully analysed and only then weighed as pros or cons. Two thirds of a century later I’m getting to this.

For the record, I recurred to NEF twice in the interval. First, it was a poem at end of 1983 titled “Eightie-Foure Is Icummen In: Lhude Sing Goddam!; Or: 1948–1984–2048,” addressed to “Poor Eric ... fashioning/ Out of his pain, rage and dead despair a finally – we must admit –/ Bad book, more important than a score of Jameses on ladies// (Or flower-girls) leaving the shopping mall at five”; and second, in a lost lecture of the inescapable year 1984.<sup>3/</sup>

A reminder about method: analysing even an openly and programmatically political utopian SF novel must start from understanding how fiction is always already embedded in the reader’s world. A work of fiction is neither a prophecy nor a pain-killer, though neither prophets nor pain-killers are to be sneezed or sneered at. Instead, it is, as the great narratologist Iurii Lotman formulated it, “a particular model of the universe.” Thus, it can have no meaning for a reader that would try “to deal with the text totally apart from all its extra-textual relation,” and I would add it can have only some authorially unintended meaning for a reader who takes into account only those extra-textual relations admitted in her or his normative ideology. All the presuppositions and conventions that make a text meaningful are supplied by the extra-textual bonds “between the set of elements fixed in the text and the set of elements from which any given element in the text is selected” (Lotman 50). In the terms of Hayden White, both

historical and fictional writings need internal coherence and outgoing correspondence (22). This finally means “that the definition of an artistic [or in fact of any, DS] text cannot be complete without ... [taking] the addressor and addressee into consideration” (Lotman 55). Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire phrased this in terms of dialogical polyphony vs. the monophony. For polyphony we need clear horizons and flexibly responsive positions. Monophony is characteristic of simple illustrations and repetitions of authorial ideology, as in a newspaper article or in the never-ending *muzak* rumour of what I have called disneyfication drowning out thought. Was NEF dialogical or monological or a collage of both? I shall attempt to answer this in my conclusion.

One final double caveat, reposing on an as strict as possible distinction between analysis and further use or indeed reworking of a text (cf. Eco, both titles, and Ricoeur). In my youth literary studies totally forbade using an author’s biography to explain a text. The text was undoubtedly *there*, on the page, and whatever the author privately meant but did not write – including notes or variants previous to the text one was analysing – was irrelevant; the “extra-textual bonds” were either vaguely collective, just “human,” or dross and often misleading. When writing my dissertation, I found this was unduly constricting *if* (and only if) one could find in the actual text on the page a sufficiently firm “bond” to social, including personal, extra-textuality. Thus, when I say “NEF,” I am analysing the text cited in my bibliography and no other. However, it would be of course inhuman to disallow a *use* of the text for biographical, political, or any other purpose, while keeping in mind that such a use is tricky for it necessarily relies on fragments or aspects sundered from the text as totality, and that the critic’s purpose or interests have themselves to be evaluated. For this, previous textual analysis and much tact are needed.

2.02. There is a terrible sentence about Orwell’s text by the early critic Jenni Calder, attempting to justify the info-dump of extracts from “Goldstein”’s book about the Oceania world: “This serves to explain a situation that for most of the novel has been more emotionally real than intellectually probable” (W-CE 145-46). This seems to imply NEF feeds its readers on emotional shocks that are notionally, logically, or realistically untenable – a procedure that would be halfway between an admiss horror melodrama and outright fascist obfuscation, thus on the level of Ayn Rand’s novels (that symmetrically invert horror into statuesque exemplarity). Calder did not really mean this, for she was an admirer of Orwell, and quickly shifts to his prophetic perspicacity in concocting the tripartite global politics in NEF, but her sentence indicates, in a lame way, a real irresolvable internal contradiction – not so much in the stale and untenable terms of emotion vs. reason (cf. Suvin “Emotion”) but in terms of textual composition and structure. Let us face it.

This aporia was first identified by Williams, who noted that Orwell developed as person and writer in the years of the Great Depression and advent of fascism, and with relentless courage exposed himself to the “lower depths” in England and Paris: he was unemployed, penniless, later a fighter in Spain. This was the fate of millions at the time, though of few writers. Yet there were serious gaps in and limits to his stance, which was upon return from the imperial colonies that of “a foreign observer, new to England” (W-O 27), looking for analogies between the oppressed natives and the working class and finding them only on the level of existential squalor and impotence. Agentially, “almost all Orwell’s important writing is about someone who [tries to get] away from an oppressive normality... but fails... in the end” (W-O 39); this is brought to an emphatically clear point in NEF. Let me therefore analyse this novel as to its agential system, its spacetime descriptions, and its composition.

## 2.1. Paradigmatic Analysis

### 2.11. Agential System

Back to Williams: Orwell's central agent is "the figure of the intermediary ... who goes around and to whom things happen," not to be simplistically identified with Orwell the author and citizen (W-O 47 and 48). What does his activity amount to? "[T]he deep Orwell pattern [is]: the man who tries to break away from the standards of his group but who is drawn back into it and [as a rule] destroyed" (W-O 46). The reader's entire libido is necessarily invested into this central figure of failed dissident as guide to hell, since it is at the center of the writing all of the time and we see the textual world only through its positions. Yet surely this perennial protagonist and focus is the marker and allegorical personification of Orwell's societal position and stance of the defeated intermediary. The revolutionary war to bring down capitalism of which he dreamed in early 1940s – an abstract but close parallel to Lenin's stance in the First World War!<sup>4/</sup> – has not happened, and Orwell realistically does not see it happening in "Oceania" in any foreseeable future; rather, faced with the armies of Hitler and Stalin he suddenly veered toward the USA as the least evil.<sup>5/</sup> "[O]bservation through a limited intermediary," Williams concludes, "[uses] the limit as the basis for a deeper pattern: a self-proving both of the need and the impossibility of a sustained break...." (my longer analysis below arrives, alas, at the same conclusion). For Williams, a politically valid "active intervention dwindles to a temporary protest of self-assertion" (W-O 49).

A while after Williams's pithy formulation of "simultaneously dominator and dominated," Pierre Bourdieu was defining intellectuals and artists as being the key part of the dominated fraction of the dominant class (cf. his *Pascalian*). It is not necessary to remember this in order to see that Orwell's mediating observer and sufferer is *an intellectual*, however grotesquely failed. Thus Winston Smith, the English Everyman as oppressed intellectual, is – like Brecht's Galileo – obsessed with an urge to understand precisely the deeper structures of society: "I understand HOW. I do not understand WHY." (NEF 91). Brecht's Galileo fails through political miscalculation, but the play brings at the end a cognitive yield transmittable to future generations both in Galileo's dialogue with a parting pupil and the hidden scientific manuscript he confides to him for smuggling into a freer country. In Oceania there is no freer outside at all, the diary manuscript seems known to the secret police from the outset, all horizons are hermetically sealed, and the only bleak future is more of the present, "a boot stamping on a human face – for ever" plus terror-induced brainwashing: "He loved Big Brother" (NEF 307 and 342).

Except for our representative suffering delegate in the text, Winston, all other agents are seen only from the outside – that is, as types rather than supposedly rounded characters. This permanent weakness of Orwell's (cf. Woodcock, W-CE 167-69) is as a rule perfectly sufficient for satire and for utopian and science fiction which uses the model of the Yahoos vs. Houyhnhnms and Gulliver rather than mariners out of Joseph Conrad (cf. the pioneering Amis), but it leads to problems in the two main interlocutors, O'Brien and Julia. The shadowy Inner Party can well remain "embodiments of the power principle" (Greenblatt in W-CE 116), and the Outer Party members believing clerics in a vile mixture of Catholicism and Puritanism. But already O'Brien is both described convincingly enough and too much invested or cathexed into as a father principle for the sudden mutation into a sadistic torturer to be believable,<sup>6/</sup> while functioning well as another in the powerful series of horrific shocks with which the text closes.

And the vision of Julia is much more seriously flawed. Not only is she pointedly identified as rather mindless, though very adept at living in the moment, her only independent activity is a pursuit of pleasure as revenge against the rulers. Thus she alternates as, first, personification of sexual pleasure and private sabotage in drab Oceania, and second as guide to, and almost nymph of, nature outside political control. Woodcock's characterisation of this love affair as a lugubrious travesty may be overdone but it points in the right direction (W-CE 169). Why did Orwell, as I mentioned, never envisage a strong female agent but rather tended to occasional "run-of-the-mill misogyny" in a fairly stock "*combinatoire* of patriarchal assumptions"?<sup>7/</sup> An indispensable part of the answer is that in NEF women, including Winston's saintly mother, are the private underclass analogous to the public proles; indicative for the

fusion of roles is the superb because overblown prole washerwoman and songstress whom then Winston sees as “she had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart, and a fertile belly” (NEF 251). (By the way though not marginally, the occlusion of male workers is the most significant agential absence in NEF.) For Winston *and* for the narrating stance women and proles are equally identified as, on the one hand, an ideal image of potential energies – private and public, personal or political – that the lonely intellectual dreams of, but on the other hand “[both] are treated as if they were only bodies” (Wegner, *Imaginary* 217 and see 284; cf. also Beatrix Campbell in Norris ed. 133-34). Therefore, bodies have to be decoded, notes McManus (17, n. 26), by our privileged interpreter, Winston. The advantage of the “private” Julia, herself a low clerical worker, is that she can briefly and marginally, but for him most pleasantly, rebel “from the waist downwards” (NEF 179).

In sum, the *agential constellation* in NEF is one of a petty bourgeois nuclear family: O’Brien as the imposing but finally deceiving and violent father-figure, faint but recurring nostalgic echoes of a soon lost sweet and protective mother, and the lone, so to speak orphaned prodigal son breaking out and transgressing behaviour norms, the “hero-victim” (W-A 96 and passim). Beside this unholy family there are Julia, the mindless masses of fellow-travellers (the Outer Party), for example in the Two Minutes Hate, the warm but stolid and easily contented proles, and the omnipresent power structure of Inner Party oligarchy and Thought Police. Yet behind such a suggested family triangle there looms a kind of Holy Family, with O’Brien as God the Father (supplemented by Big Brother as the all-seeing “Saviour,” NEF 19, though O’Brien too is masochistically seen partly as a saviour), Winston as a failed but suffering Christ figure – all seen through a Manichean disgust – and Winston’s mother remembered as a distant Madonna-like figure of suffering and protective kindness (cf. Greenblatt in W-CE 116-17). Most important, Winston is the narrative’s fulcrum, camera eye, protagonist, and (limited) interpreter, oscillating between estheticizing the proles and confiding into a better variant of Inner Party, in the precise structural position of a shilly-shallying individualist in the middle, his wavering only rendered palatable by the suffering that presents him as more sinned against than sinning.

### 2.12. The Chronotope

The spacetime of NEF has curiously shrunk to space description only, always Orwell’s forte that renders all of his fiction interestingly semi-essayistic (cf. Crick 19), that is, reaching for immediately applicable insights. There is a remnant of narrative time encompassing Winston’s brief rebellion and downfall, but it is from the outset insistently marked as a lost cause and results in little narrative tension except for how badly shall our loving couple fare when discovered (the answer is very). The time is shown as fully under the oligarchy’s dominion, which falsifies the past and puts paid to any different future, so that only a perpetual, shrunken and grim, present remains. It is a time oppressively collectivised both intensionally and extensionally, bolstered by and in fact consubstantial with permanent warfare with missile bombings affecting civilians, brooking no private time beside itself except as deceit and snare – a nightmare stasis without beginning and end, a kind of Satanic frozen and disgusting eternity. I shall return to this in my conclusion on NEF.

The more remarkable is the rich variety of spaces, ranging from repulsive drabness of daily life in Oceania (and one supposes everywhere else on the globe too, unless even worse on the actual frontlines) to a little Arcadian island of privacy and sex for the erotic couple, in two masterly variants: the original country variant of a small forest clearing (NEF 136-45) and the city variant of the room above the old antiquity shop. Both turn out to be no alternative, and doubly so: first, because the secluded *locus amoenus* (cf. Curtius 183ff.) is here deeply shaped by an ugly streak of hyperbolic hate against the hyperbolically drawn oligarchy, which indeed provides a main element for Winston’s attraction for sinful Julia as rebel; and second, because they are apparently delightful but in fact treacherous oases,

sinisterly corrupted doubles of the ancient Arcadian escape and the blessed or at least magically sexualised island, if not Earthly Paradise, from Homer to Shakespeare.

The forest glade is a wonderful episode of NEF, but it seems to me history has proved its motivating political point – that political repression needs also sexual repression – to be wrong, a better fit for Orwell’s hated Catholic rule, or indeed for a Puritan one, than for capillary capitalism violently insinuating profit into every manifestation of life. To my mind, Aldous Huxley’s sex orgies fostered by the Fordist corporative rulers of *Brave New World* are a better choice for the set of elements to be picked out from reality and fixed in the text. However, Orwell’s love episodes, and then the final anti-Arcadia of the horrific torture rooms, draw on two of his firmest convictions. The first one is that “decency” between people is indispensable for any tolerable societal system; I agree with this bourgeois democratic principle, while pointing out a/ that it was often used for enforcing bigoted orthodoxy, and b/ that this would be only the first modest item of half a dozen virtues that a more encompassing plebeian democracy would adopt (such as solidarity). Orwell’s corollary conviction was then that decency – beginning with respect for human life, obviously violated in mass State murders and tortures – decayed in England and the world after World War 1. Again I agree: any possible advance towards plebeian or communist democracy must surely incorporate a full undoing of the savagery of ruthless capitalist competition unleashed in the unceasing World Wars, now into their second Hundred Years. True, this orientation of Orwell’s was also a very idealised nostalgia for his childhood Edwardian days (he was eleven when World War 1 broke out) that included a reasonable respect for intellect and access to mostly unsullied nature for the middle class of a society pacified by the economic spoils of empire – except for the up to 30% of population “in dire poverty” whose massive wave of strikes was only interrupted by the World War (Rose 30). The breakdown of the empire and decency was a central component for Orwell’s internally contradictory stance, which can be glimpsed in his marvellous designation of Swift as a “Tory anarchist” (CEJL 4: 216). I shall return to this in a separate subsection.

2.13. In sum, NEF’s paradigm has three main, well integrated conceptual or propositional strands (see W-A 99-100): division of world into three perpetually warring States (prophetic of today even where much too monolithic); seamless internal tyranny of each ruled by oligarchies beyond capitalism or socialism (effective but the easiest to falsify in retrospect); assumption of brainwashing thought control by propaganda communications systems raised to a central mode of domination alongside secret police and torture (much the strongest strand, and the one that has best survived).<sup>8/</sup>

## 2.2. Syntagmatic Analysis: The Composition as Equivalent of Limited Vision

### 2.21. Composition

Orwell’s standard procedure in fiction is empiricist. He starts by presenting one or a series of experiences and then argues from them – in his terms, first how and then why. This seems inductive but it is nothing of the kind, for the choice of both what and how to present is predominantly shaped by the authorial stance, its insights and blind spots, in fruitful cases well integrated with verisimilar observation but in sterile cases pure ideology. In macro-compositional terms, the description and the explanation are very often not well integrated: even in *Homage to Catalonia* the biographical experiences on the Aragon Front include a central chapter arguing about that war’s politics, and then segue into his return to Barcelona where the truth of such politics will come out, integrating the two strands. This “undulant” procedure (cf. Woodcock in W-CE 164-67) is found in a spread between two poles: one in which the use of two text registers is unsure or slapdash and one in which they reinforce each other. Furthermore,

pure description will only go so far in a text, and “while Orwell is always anxious ... to provide an opening that will immediately involve the reader, he is so little concerned about his endings that more often than not he goes out with an anticlimax” (idem 166), avoided only in *Catalonia* and *Animal Farm*. His friend Woodcock’s verdict is, a bit harshly, one of “the failures of general structure in his books” (idem 169). The author himself acknowledged unspecified flaws in NEF, calling it “a good idea ruined,” and even “I ballsed it up rather, partly owing to being so ill while I was writing it...” (Crick, *George* 551 – my dictionary says this slang expression means “to do something badly, making a lot of mistakes”). A “general failure” would apply to NEF if it were a novel aiming for “round” characters, but for all the wealth of acute observation it is not such, nor would Orwell have been capable of one. It does have an unwieldy and kind of broken-backed compositional structure, and the open question is to my mind how far this flaw is compensated for, first, by poetic clamps, and second, by what he got right within the generic expectation of the estranging utopian genre. My thesis is: it is compensated in good part, but not fully – in part because of his illness and haste, but in a major way because of ideological blindness.

NEF consists of a naturalistic sequence of descriptive-cum-explanatory events that could be called “the Winston story” (1) and a second type of texts, itself divided into two, the fully explanatory “Goldstein excerpts” (2a) and the Appendix “Principles of Newspeak” plus a footnote announcing it (2b). In SF criticism, the two non-diegetic texts would both be called huge info-dumps. An info dump is where an estranged story must, in order to be understood, explain its world, agents, and the reasons for their actions in ways not fully or not at all fitting into the standard realistic plot of events and discussions between the narrative agents, often as extracts from a future Galactic Encyclopedia, “Captain’s Log” of *Star Trek* or similar. The use of two different text registers, of a broken-backed composition, and of info dumps was pioneered by More’s *Utopia*, for it faced the same narrative problems as later SF: to reconcile diegetic travel through a fully alternate world with readers’ understanding of it. Both the “realistic” justification and the presumed authorship of the two non-diegetic texts are rather complex.

The Goldstein excerpts are cleverly justified as an Inner Party fabrication, possibly in part by O’Brien, but they function primarily as an indispensable stop-gap compensation for the authorial failure to discuss the “why” of Oceania, and remain weighty as the text’s only available explanation. Though in Oceania banned as oppositional, they are deeply complicit with the ruling system, arguing for its possibility and ineluctability. They are at some points perfunctorily interrupted by Winston’s brief discussion of them with a bored Julia; I got the impression this was a kind of apotropaic warding off so that the average reader would not get bored too. For their exactitude is exacting in its cyclical and cynical Hobbesian vision, the dry dreariness of history simply as power struggle where the rulers might have changed (but no longer do), yet the ruled necessarily lose.

As for the Newspeak appendix, perhaps as important as the rest of the book, no author or authors are specified – no wonder, it is realistically incompatible with the atmosphere and set-up of Oceania. It is announced by a strange little footnote at the book’s beginning, saying “Newspeak is the official language of Oceania,” and then referring to the Appendix. Their common narrative point of view is not the same as in the Winston story for it is, as in the Goldstein strand, “conscious of its audience,” uses the past tense (Sanderson 588, whose lucid argument I accept), and positions itself somewhere between 1984 and 2050; yet it is to my mind indefensible to assume some deep plot by Orwell that this should add a totally different perspective to the Winston story by situating a collective happy ending in its future. True, Orwell saw such a procedure in London’s *Iron Heel* and may or may not have entertained some such idea at the outset. But within his decision for integral gloom and doom, the Newspeak strand seems rather a parallel brilliant, if flawed and compositionally displaced effort that could well have been a separate satirical essay. It was written out of the same well of indignation but only joined to the plotted strand “at the waist,” as a separate Siamese twin, whenever language politics come in or (once) when

Winston is mentioned by name. The Newspeak strand has a powerful central perception of the political use of language forms, crystallising mainly in the neologistic portmanteau words. It is also internally inconsistent; as Williams notes (W-A 98), it shuttles in perhaps momentarily effective but illogical ways between the time stance of the Olympian historian similar to Goldstein (“It is with the final perfected version ... that we are concerned here”) and of the indignant author (“... many Newspeak sentences ... would be barely intelligible to an English speaker *of our own day*” – emphasis DS). Furthermore, it is based on and suffused by conservative nostalgia: once upon a time, it seems (in Orwell’s childhood?), language was “without any silences or erasures of its own, without any historicity at all before being so degraded; and ‘doublethink’ describes the same process in the sphere of ... a mode of thinking which must once also have been outside history...” (McManus 14). However, this is not to deny the brilliant insights, for example in the three politico-ontological slogans of “A is B” form. These have proved durable.

The other two texts, “Winston’s” mainly descriptive and “Goldstein’s” argumentative strand, are united by the believable *realistic tone*, rebellious, more or less weary, yet precisely aimed. It is the tone of a directly involved and expert protagonist. Winston is an outraged sufferer, the aggrieved *homme moyen sensuel* yearning for some peace and modest comfort, while Goldstein is Orwell’s broken-off attempt at indignant overview; both are in Bakhtin’s sense monological, just as the agents in both are opaque monads to each other, relating only on a power scale (though the sex subplot might be a Benthamite felicific calculus). I would call the tone a neo-Swiftian one translated into the high journalism of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century; it is necessarily more variegated than Swift’s in a much larger and more complicated world, but has the same type of inventive and controlled disgust discharging itself in limpid and sharp observation of a lived-in semantic (or should one say a-semantic?) world. This tone is the only common element of the three texts of NEF. However, Orwell knows no longer quite where his reader stands so that the disgust often dissolves into Winston’s gloom and doom, or is disguised as a string of mini-facts, or is conservative nostalgia (of which even the Newspeak essay is not free).

The Winston story, our plot backbone, undulates in and out of different interactions: first with his diary, an *alter ego* often as third-person eyewitness, then with Julia, and finally with O’Brien, the traitorous father figure (cf. McManus 13-14). It proceeds through and by means of two emotionally drenched and contagious components, *passive disgust* and *sense of doom*. It has a plangent dirge-like undercurrent announcing absolutely inevitable doom for Winston – and Julia, though we do not see her doom – but also for all humanistic efforts at understanding and decency; in this sense Winston is for a sarcastic O’Brien “the last man” (NEF 309-10). The main poetic clamp or brace of this strand is the repetition with incrementation of the “Oranges and Lemons” ditty, while passive existential disgust oozes from all we see through Winston, including his low self-esteem. The proceeding or device (*priëm*) of sophisticated recurrences of foreboding building up to a climax stems from lyrical poetry, of which Orwell was a good connoisseur and reasonably good practitioner right down to his appreciation of a young Dylan Thomas (though ideological obstinacy made him blind to young Auden). For all their naturalistic gloom, these powerful elements in NEF establish a distance both to a realistic novel and to an old-fashioned utopian story that makes *one* big solid point – say More’s communism and no gold. This is part of a larger modernist sea-change, best put perhaps by John Berger’s great novel *G.* as “Never again shall a single story be told as though it were the only one” (133), but signalled already by the recomplications of narrative voices and spaces in Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* and Zamyatin’s *We*, and issuing in Le Guin’s “ambiguous utopia” as well as Moylan’s “critical utopia” and then “critical dystopia” (in his *Demand and Scraps*). On the other hand, dystopia is here immeasurably strengthened by nitty-gritty realistic believability, which might be Orwell’s main contribution to this genre and had a major influence in the 1950s-60s.

Thus the composition of NEF is multiply split, with complex interactions between the strands, reminiscent of the rather clearer Great Ancestor *Utopia*.

### 2.3. Making Sense of NEF

#### 2.31. “Tory Anarchism” as Fertile but Limited Vision

What is Tory anarchism? Discussing Swift, Orwell found it meant “despising authority while disbelieving in liberty and preserving the aristocratic outlook while seeing clearly that the existing aristocracy is degenerate and contemptible . . . , [and being unable] to believe that life ... could be made worth living” (CEJL 4: 216-17). In spite of the strong love/hate involved here, Orwell claimed this appellation for himself early on (Crick, *George* 174, 205, 211, and passim), and I believe it was a lasting, though not the only, stance of his.<sup>9/</sup> It meant for Orwell positively a fierce and unremitting opposition to ruling ideas and practices in the name of conserving past values, such as confidence in personal experience – whence his admiration for Joyce and Henry Miller – often inflated as a pure model beyond what was in the past actually available to most people and at most times. Negatively, it is an inability to see how the putative past values could be integrated in a realistic societal future, since the present ruling class of the UK is degenerate and no radical alternative (for which Orwell was in desperate search from the late 1930s on) has proved viable but only the threat of new oligarchies. Its ground bass – what NEF got absolutely right, miles ahead of anybody else I can think of in Anglophone prose – is the misery and wretchedness of the poor under a regime of perpetual warfare. Orwell in some of Burnham/Trotsky’s clothing put it splendidly in Goldstein’s chapter “War Is Peace”:

The problem was how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world. Goods must be produced, but they must not be distributed. And in practice the only way of achieving this was by continuous warfare.

The essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour. War is a way of shattering to pieces, or pouring into the stratosphere, or sinking in the depths of the sea, materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent.... (NEF 220)

In brief, as Rousseau and Madison well knew, war is being waged to dominate one’s own people as well as, if not rather than, enemy territories.

Of course, Goldstein’s central thesis, that there could be three “self-contained economies” on this globe not needing wars for markets and raw materials, is plain wrong, which invalidates the whole NEF system. And today, the “War Is Peace” thesis is repeated assiduously by the US government and all the aligned media from the 1990s on – though, as the present set-up is not yet seamlessly fascist, this is usually put in reverse, “Peace Is War.” Therefore we must have, as in NEF, a threatening enemy – after Soviet so-called communism, it would be first drugs then terrorism, and secondarily Russia, China or Iran.

The blind spots in NEF, whether we describe its author as Tory anarchist or not, concern to my mind two quite central matters. The first is, as I suggested about the love affair, a blinkered and stunted view of women and femininity, if you wish of the female yin to Orwell’s strong but rather limited macho yang. This of course obtains not simply in the complementarity of male and female (as in the sexual coupling of NEF) but also in all human – and for Daoism even in natural – relationships such as Winter and shade vs. Summer and brightness, or left vs. right, or disorder and order in sociopolitics. This last couple seems what Orwell was interestingly getting at in Tory anarchism, but he never managed to make stubborn Swiftian disgust and resistance into a consistent and liberating horizon. He could mimic James Burnham’s or Andrés Nin’s texture (cf. Crick, *George* 365), and he knew well what he hated and rejected

in detail – as in the famous list from “Inside the Whale” ranging from concentration camps to Hollywood movies and tinned food. However, his “Goldsteinian” attempt at theoretical overview starts with a sound what – which is more than a huge majority did in his time – yet ends in an improvised and unbelievable why: it is not only the Thought Police that prevent Winston from reading the upshot of Goldstein, it is Orwell himself who defaults here.

The second blind spot or hole in NEF, caused by hope-denying conservative anarchism, is a tenable view of ruling class power. The split textual strands are symptoms of what Williams found was a deeper double vision, which might be identified as *being revolted against the rulers but not believing the revolt can succeed*. To begin with, Orwell follows his fellow radical socialist and Little Englander William Morris in disliking both economics and mass production: they are in Goldstein simply supposed to exist somewhere, perhaps in *News from Nowhere*’s underground caverns.<sup>10/</sup> At the very beginning of the Goldstein text, a specifically anti-Marxist view of history is introduced: where the *Communist Manifesto* begins (together with Engels’s footnote, present in all of its editions since 1888) with “all written history [of] ... hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” (Marx and Engels 14), which is elsewhere explained as a binary one, on the model of “bourgeois vs. proletarian,” Orwell begins with a deviant counter-project: “Throughout recorded time ... there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle and the Low” (NEF 213). But his text then refuses any active status to the mindless Low, and the rich Marxist dichotomy of oppressor vs. oppressed is reduced to the new one of the Middle against the High, or intellect and impotence vs. cynical power. As he formulated it à propos of Ernest Bramah’s dystopia *The Secret of the League*: “the middle class... wrongly imagined that they were menaced from below and not from above” (CEJL 2: 32).

No economics entails in NEF no fusion of class with economic interest and no class struggle. As I mentioned in 2.11, male workers are glaringly absent from NEF; this literal blind spot extends to capitalism on the level of conceptual explanation.

Here an insoluble problem arises out of lack of solidarity between the intellectual and the labour of “millions of coolies” on which – as Orwell often reiterated – his up to a point privileged status depends. His talent has an aggrieved, dominated-class “anti” edge, but as he precisely put it, it is a view from “the lower-upper-middle class ... the [shabby-genteel] layer of society [not far from the bottom income of] £300 a year” (*Road* 112): when writing NEF, this view forgets there is beneath it another, even lower class that it does not want to see (even in the above quote about Bramah those “below” are faceless!), the proles<sup>11/</sup>. This view uses naturalistic events of the Dickens-to-Wells-and-Gissing school “in sharp detail, and the sense of a climate, an atmosphere, is memorably created.... Class ... is described mainly in terms of differences and snobberies in accent, clothes, tastes, furnishing, food” (W-O 23). But class is never seen in terms of exploitation of labour: only its empirical manifestations and then its transcendental and transhistorical power are noticed. The Winston story is entirely built on *hugely unequal binary conflict* of a puny sick loner against a total State:

...on one side the regime, its success, on the other, the man, just him, his rage and pain and despair. There is nothing outside of him which can be figured in any positive way.... The novel has no content to give to his rebellion except the sheer fact of it. (McManus 31)<sup>12/</sup>

It follows that *power, as the constitutive and all-pervasive adversary of a rational but impotent intellectual, must be (first) irrational and (second) invincible*. Flying in face of all recorded history, the reason for power becomes power. It is not a sociopolitical reason, it is in NEF the reason of power-hunger and sadism (that Orwell blamed *Brave New World* for leaving out), an eternal or “natural” psychology.<sup>13/</sup> This is quite untenable as an either Weberian or Marxist explanation of a ruling class, and no sustainable class psychology either.

#### Lévi-Straussian Table of Oppositions

<i>OUTCOME//QUALITIES</i>	QUASI-CLASS	VALUE HORIZON
SUCCESS – WINNING	Inner Party (the oppressors)	Irrational Power
FAILURE – LOSING	Winston (the oppressed)	Intellect (how & why)

The immediate predecessor from which Orwell drew much about power was the discussion in the Philomath club of London’s *Iron Heel*, where the main capitalist spokesman declares: “We are in power.... It is the king of words – Power. Not God, not Mammon, but Power” (384). This reach-me-down Nietzscheanism was bolstered by Orwell’s readings of Borkenau and Burnham. Thence O’Brien’s final truth about the Inner Party in his torture diatribe, directed equally against Marx and Jefferson: “Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power.... The object of power is power” (NEF 302). This “inevitability of the will-to-power in every political intellectual” fed directly into stamping out of efforts at dissidence in the USA and other NATO countries, and indicates the deep kinship of anti-utopia with reactionary anti-intellectualism (Wegner, *Imaginary* 227, and see Jameson, *Archaeologies* 171).

True, Orwell oscillated for years whether the total darkness is going to come about: “Some days I know it’s impossible, other days I know it’s inevitable” (*Coming Up for Air* 160, cited by Crick, *George* 371, and cf. 370-86). What matters is that when writing NEF, he plumped for inevitability, for a fully “occluded future” (Wegner, *Imaginary* 124 and 255). The suffering in the name of urges for decency and knowledge remains, but is left bombinating in a societal vacuum. As he himself best phrased it against Burnham, “*Power worship blurs political judgment because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue*” (CEJL 4: 174, emphasis DS – see Orwell’s other excellent objections on 164-81). NEF, where he forgot it, must be judged by this insight.

In sum, Orwell is weak and quite erratic on the synoptic view from above, what Brecht called the events behind the events – and therefore on structure. What is more, the affinity to Swift extends to Orwell’s frequent impulse toward extremes and employment of hyperbole: “all or nothing” (Rees 103-04)! His binary oscillations between extremes can lead to a mutual neutralisation or a forked tongue. Neutralisation and stalemate: the rebelling talent makes for revolt, the hyperbolic and anarchoid predilection makes for the revolt’s absolutely unavoidable failure. Or: on the one hand his ideal of democratic socialism means “[a] complete abandonment of the upper-class and middle-class attitude to life” (*Road* 146), on the other hand the narrative logic of NEF is built on the impossibility of its coming about (cf. Wegner, *Imaginary* 190-91) while the system is most infelicitously called Ingsoc (English socialism – Orwell at moments believed no less than that “National Socialism is a form of Socialism,” CEJL 2: 25).<sup>14/</sup> Forked tongue: as Jameson has pinpointed, in NEF “the premise – that no science or real thinking is possible – is contradicted by the sheerly scientific perfection of the anti-Utopian machinery of state surveillance that is then pressed into service as a causal explanation for just that ... state of affairs in which no science is possible” (*Seeds* 58). Or: in tandem with often well-motivated horror, Orwell had a tendency after 1936 toward flight into the symmetrically extreme and quite daft belief into immediate socialist revolution as, for one example out of many, his May 1942 prophecy of imminent “revolution or disaster” in UK (CEJL 2: 214), which underlined his being frankly out of his depth.

Unfortunately in the extant text of NEF the disaster alternative, helped by his illness, totally dominated him. It is a far cry from the crystal clarity of Zamyatin, who deploys an equally vigorous, indeed more coherent, narration to prove there can never be a “final” revolution – nor, *a fortiori*, a final counter-revolution (cf. Suvin, *MOSF* 283-87).

No doubt, there remain in NEF great strengths: first, its force lies in the disgust, accompanied by the nostalgia for what has been lost: “the elegiac sense of the loss of the past, and the uncertainty of

memory” (Jameson, *Archaeologies* 200). Second, where his thematics were very limited, his textural skill was penetrating. The best encapsulation I know is by Woodcock:

His descriptions are magnificent; his polemical arguments, even when they occur in the wrong places, are always intensely readable; every one of his books contains episodes which most writers would give years of their life to have written; his style in the narrower sense, his way with words, is inimitable (W-CE 172).

NEF was written in order to stun; it still stuns.

However, Orwell may today, after all, have a Parthian shot. There is an important secondary, though not a full, excuse for Orwell’s error: *the long duration rise of fascism*. He noticed very well that and how new amoral power-holders of the World Wars epoch had dispensed with the traditional religious props and adopted a monophonic neo-Nietzscheanism. Such Will To Power is fully present in fascist Master Race theory, while Stalinism had to don a mask featuring the original Leninist idea of doing it for the benefit of the world masses it leads (in the final dialogue, O’Brien sneeringly refutes the Stalinist option and affirms the Nazi one). A significant example, valid again today: “the re-institution of slavery.... The forced-labour camps all over Europe and North Africa ... are simple chattel-slavery... [with] conditions probably worse than they were on the American cotton plantations” (CEJL 2: 259 – Orwell’s time had not yet gotten to debt-slavery). The devolution of capitalist politics toward fascism is, no doubt, a quite essential event of Orwell’s and then of our post-1990 time, and he was one of the first to draw consequences from it; unfortunately, without integrating into power politics a critique of political economy, they were generously concerned but half-baked and therefore wrong consequences. How the Nazis achieved a comfortable symbiosis with big capital or how the Stalinists replaced it by a growing apparatus of State “capital” never was of interest to him. His vision is of a world ruled by the Manicheans’ Satan, and we are lost. The independent lower middle class intellectual cannot win against the big mass apparati.

### 2.32. The Totalitarianism Snare

Autobiography again: the second thing I wrote in our field was a brief 1958 survey of SF and utopias with the title from my recently discovered Zamyatin, “A Sailor on the Mast.” Following him, I argued that what the Stalinist censors classified as “harmful” literature, because it was breaking new and heretofore unknown ground, is indispensable to socialism because it challenges “calcification, sclerosis, crust, moss, quiescence” (Zamyatin 109). A dozen years later I spelled this fully out in pages devoted to him, first in an article and then in my *MOSF*, which argued his was not an anti-Soviet anti-utopia but mainly a dystopian awful warning by a revolutionary who believed he was going the Bolsheviks one better, against the loss of freedom both in western and eastern Europe. This quite Marxian stance also subtends my book on SFR Yugoslavia (see Suvin, “15 Theses”).

In that vein I am arguing now that the central model for the totally controlled and militarised society of NEF is an uneasy and inconsistent amalgam between the Nazi set-up and what Orwell perceived as Stalinist Russia, with odd bits of Catholic Inquisition times (the proles are not mobilised but flooded with propaganda) and other spacetimes thrown in. The Nazi strand accounts for the central features both of power for its own sake (no doubt in Germany papered over by the fake, nationalist science of racism in which Orwell was curiously disinterested) and of there being no way out, the Stalinist one is obvious in the Big Brother vs. Goldstein – the Stalin-Trotsky – relation as well as many minor details. The image of “a boot crashing down on a human face,” used to great effect in NEF, characterised the Nazi goose-step in Orwell’s *The Lion and the Unicorn* (cited in Crick, *George* 404). From a text of Orwell’s about the Nazis (CEJL 2: 259) stems also the “nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but the past. If the Leader says of such and such an event, ‘It never happened’ – well, it never happened. If he says two and two are five – well, two

and two are five”; but then he also read Eugene Lyons’s eyewitness report of Moscow being awash in lights proclaiming “ $2+2 = 5$ ,” which actually meant a quite different thing, that is, the Five-year plan will be accomplished in only four. The fusion of the two into “totalitarianism” was powerfully buttressed and validated by localising it into an impoverished England drenched in the shabby, run-down sense perceptions from Orwell’s novels and articles after 1929. Cold War blinkers have occulted the fact that Oceania is descriptively mainly a nightmare England of the Great Depression “lower depths,” composed mostly of “all that he hated and disliked in his own surroundings” – the filth, drabness, and monotony of the English industrial suburb, the food rationing and government control in World War Britain, the rubbishy newspapers, the government’s heavy black-and-white propaganda, etc. (see Deutscher in W-CE 126; the Ministry of Truth is a hyperbolic BBC plus Ministry of Food where Orwell’s wife worked – see Crick, *George* 434). This was refunctioned as an inescapably closed horizon ruled by a crude mix of British colonial, Nazi, and Stalinist violence but with the persuasiveness of medieval Catholic plus US admiss brainwashing (for the former cf. Wegner, *Imaginary* 201).

Nonetheless, the determining horizon of NEF is arrived at by “the substitution of communism [of the Stalinist stripe, DS] for fascism as the totalitarian threat” within a postwar choice for the USA – about which Orwell knew precious little – as against the USSR (W-O 67).<sup>15</sup> Jameson’s summary distinguishes three levels of NEF: first, an articulation of what Orwell knew or assumed about the contingent history of Stalinism; second, “its ahistorical universalization into a baleful vision of human nature as an insatiable and lucid hunger for power and its exercise, and finally the truly pathological and obsessive fixation on this conjuncture ... in conversion into a life passion” (*Archaeologies* 200). All of this went had in hand with a total loss of confidence in the survival of freedom: as Orwell wrote after the atomic bomb, “political behaviour is largely non-rational... [T]he world /sic!/ suffers from some kind of mental disease which must be diagnosed before it can be cured” (CEJL 4: 249; Williams rightly calls it “the conclusion that matters... in understanding his last work” W-O 67).

All of this amounts to Cold War tactics promoted to the only possible strategy and fatal horizon. We could debate whether the tactics were correct for the exasperated sabre-rattling years of 1946-51, say after Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech that stressed “compact oligarchies operating through a privileged party and a political police,” with accompanying anti-communist purges in US media, soon to become full-fledged Maccarthysm. “Oceania” or NATO was at that point of High Stalinism facing a USSR much weakened by the war’s horrendous bloodletting and devastation yet militarily powerful, mainly defensive yet given to sudden bouts of military flights-forward such as the blockade of West Berlin in 1948-49. I well remember coming in Fall 1948 to the first year of my studies in knee britches and boots, preparing for immediate draft in case of a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia – the distance of the Soviet armoured corps in Hungary from Zagreb being 95 km, that is ca. 3 hours. Indeed, in the Khrushchev reconciliation years, Zhukov told Tito that Stalin had him prepare two invasion plans for Yugoslavia around 1951; but then the tension got channelled into the Korean War. Now this may show why the anti-Russian tactics could be necessary in a topical newspaper article, but it does not at all speak to the fated destiny of England or the globe for a whole historical epoch – in Orwell’s hyperbole, to smashing the human face forever.

In the essay on Swift, Orwell accused him and his Houyhnhnms of lacking any notion “that life here and now is worth living, or that it could be made worth living, or that it must be sacrificed for some future good...” He also judged that in his “permanently... depressed mood” that harps on disease and dirt, “Swift is not actually inventing anything, he is merely /sic!/ leaving something out. Human behaviour, too, especially in politics, is as he describes it, although it contains other more important factors which he refuses to admit” (CEJL 4: 219 and 222). Surely Orwell knew Horace’s tag “Change the name, and the story is told of thee.”

### 3. Some Radiations from Nineteen Eighty-Four

3.1. Let me here refer back to Hegel's gloomy conclusion with which I opened this essay, mainly a retrospect on the French Revolution from a distance equivalent to our distance between the 1950s and the 1990s from the Russian Revolution. The gloom at the failure is expressed in a rather different language but it is of the same kind as Orwell's in NEF. Hegel's overarching answer was the voyage of the World Spirit, just as misleading as Orwell's totalitarianism (which is a kind of demonic new World Spirit).

I would concede that Orwell's may well be the best concoctable propaganda image of "totalitarianism," where the common denominator of what follows competitive capitalism is the squalor of dominated mass life and the suffering of the dominated intellectual – a view from the victims, much superior to the Burnham-Arendt-Popper theorisations. But the concept itself fuses partly compatible but then also partly and probably wholly incompatible aspects, obvious in the fact that Nazism and (even Stalinist) Communism were mortal enemies. Therefore, even the NEF's most impressive, so to speak humanistic image will necessarily be narratively deficient: it can explain neither whence the urge or lust for absolute power - the aspect of Nietzsche leading to Nazism – nor the seamless victory of the bearers of the urge, the new ruling class. It can only persuasively present its awful toll in misery and suffering. It is a book written in order to persuade by stunning, a dubious choice where the medium threatens the message, but which worked exceedingly well for the "common reader."

I need to put here a disambiguation for the meaning of Communism, though I cannot go into anything approximating its analysis; I have done it at length elsewhere ("15 Theses") and will baldly simplify them. I find the term split between two opposed poles, well exemplified by the kibbutzim as well as by Lenin's *State and Revolution* vision of integral plebeian democracy vs. the KGB's concentration camp hells. If what is meant by it is "really obtaining Stalinism" in USSR after the end of the 1920s and then in eastern Europe after 1944, I recognise that it brought not only unavoidable centralisation and cruelties of two wars and accelerated industrialisation to prepare for a following one, but also a huge amount of avoidable oppression and a finally inefficient leaden oligarchy ruling without clear input from below. If you allow me more autobiography, I was as a young activist on a KGB blacklist of enemies, presumably to be liquidated if Yugoslavia were occupied. Thus I have no problem at all appreciating not only the bleak wit, spare writing, and satirical edge but also the political horizon of *Animal Farm*: it is fair comment. But Communism also meant the horizon of Marx, Luxemburg, Lenin, Gramsci, Brecht, many great poets and artists and hundreds of thousands of people sincerely devoted to freedom and equality; and it brought immediately after revolutionary accession to power in the USSR, Yugoslavia, China, Cuba, and some other countries great disalienating advances: agrarian reform, universally accessible schooling up to and including the university, universal health service, a move of tens of million from village hovels to cities, development of industry and a large professional class, etc.

To conclude on the conflation of Stalinism and Nazism: this is by now old hat, and totalitarianism as a term and concept has been much doubted in scholarship, though it reigns unabated in the media. None of this should ever deny, as Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin summarise their book's findings, that the nature of both Nazi and Stalinist oppressions was most hateful, and the extent of inhumanity and suffering the two brought is comparable to each other – as well as to wild capitalism (now returning) – and resulted in "unprecedented levels of repression and of attempted indoctrination, manipulation, and mobilisation.... But ... the term 'totalitarianism'... has little or no explanatory power" (Kershaw, in idem and Lewin eds. 89). For, the differences, in part based on systematic Nazi racism, are at least as

large, and outside of propaganda probably larger (Kershaw and Lewin 3-5, and cf. more in Kershaw “Totalitarianism”) – even if I would not go to the extreme of denying much similarity (as for example Geyer and Fitzpatrick do, 3-21). Communism as a historical phenomenon, rather than the Stalinist perversion, has little to do with this comparison: I contend it has a Janus nature, one face young and eutopian and the other old and anti-utopian, that precludes a simplistic endorsement or condemnation in general or forever (Orwell did so in the heat of battle). Each phase of that movement in each country must be judged in its context and on its merits. To my mind, total refusal of a contradictorily rich historical experience is both epistemologically and morally equal to total endorsement: unrealistic and dehumanising.

Finally, my narratological unease at NEF is coupled with and culminates in Ernst Bloch’s general position on the horizon of utopias, in a section where he also first introduces the concept of Novum (PH E, I: 222-23):

To stick to things, to sail over them, both are wrong.... Everything living... has a horizon. An inner horizon, extending vertically as it were, in the self-dark, an external one of great breadth, in the world-light.... Where the prospective horizon is omitted, reality only appears as become, as dead.... Where [it] is continuously included in the reckoning, the real appears ... as the path-network of dialectical processes which occur in an *unfinished world* [emphasis DS]....<sup>16/</sup>

The fully closed, no-exit horizon of NEF excludes the possibility of a utopian correlate, both as eutopian project of freedom and happiness and dystopian awful warning, as well as a real encompassing novum.

Factoring this too into the total closure of NEF leads to the conclusion it presents no diagnosis, only an at times masochistic recognition of a class blind alley transmogrified into humanity’s horrific utter and final defeat. I agree with Jameson that what is dominant in NEF is anti-utopia in the sense of “a central passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm” (*Archaeologies* 198-99). Lyman T. Sargent classified early estranged utopianism as “utopias of sensual gratification or body utopias,” exemplified by the Cockayne folk story, and “utopia of human contrivance or the city utopia,” exemplified by Plato’s *Laws* and then More’s *Utopia* (“Three” 10-11). To this, Orwell’s NEF furnishes a perfect undialectical rebuttal: an anti-utopia of utter bodily discomfort caused by human contrivance in the mega-city (O’Brien explicitly tells Winston this). This has serious overall consequences.

There is, however, a potential justification at hand which might almost wipe out objections to Orwell’s stance and horizon, if it were true. If NEF were a satire, it would necessarily carry an implicit utopian charge in its generic pact with the reader to call up the obverse of the textual situation, imaginable on the basis of the values present in the text that established a right to satirise. It would then be a very muddled satire – but I disagree that overall it is one (*pace* Bernard Crick, “NEF” 147-48, repeated in several publications), the differences to *Animal Farm* are deep and decisive. I would propose NEF is a very impure generic mixture of dystopia and anti-utopia with some effective moments or aspects of sardonic satire, such as the quite perfect Two Hour Hate or the rewriting of the past. This is why I have attempted elsewhere (see chapter 21 of this book) a discussion of the nature of eutopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia, that is, of the contract with the reader these literary subgenres establish as necessary for their intelligibility and effect. My hypothesis is that the particular genre mixture of NEF, where the awful warning of dystopia is dominant in the description of daily life in Ingsoc and anti-utopia in the whole ending, finally tells the reader nothing can be done about the picture presented.

3.2. Thus, the best brief label for NEF might be a term Orwell took from Chesterton in the article “Good Bad Books” (CEJL 4: 19-22). He is evidently in search of a definition to which he does not quite get,

but suggests it vaguely: books that “[remain] readable when more serious productions have perished,” his examples being “escape literature,” such as the Sherlock Holmes stories, *Dracula* or *King Solomon’s Mines*; or books which are not “‘good’ by any strictly literary standard” but are sincere and tell a good story with characters a reader can feel sympathy with. His main point is “that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one’s intellect refuses to take seriously”: thus as different from Carlyle, Trollope remains readable though less intelligent than the former. Orwell’s supreme example is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*: “unintentionally ludicrous..., full of preposterous melodramatic incidents ... also deeply moving and essentially true....” NEF would not quite fall into any of his categories; however, I propose it is a “good bad book” because its premise and conclusion are untenable, but not only is it moving but its strength and limitations give rise to serious thinking about essential matters of political survival in his time – and ours too. Example: as I conclude in 2.13, Orwell’s picture included a prescient, if hyperbolically monolithic, vision of the world divided between three mega-centres of power in perpetual warfare with each other.

Centrally, Orwell’s strength as well as limitation lies in “a steady insistence in the value of thinking for oneself and of refusing the official simplifications which all ruling groups employ” (W-A 119-20), and, for NEF, in a steady, quite indignant sympathy and compassion for the downtrodden “little man.” His major mistakes are well put by Williams: first, perhaps less important, the conflation of a basically World War 2 warfare on the heels of a ludicrously miscalculated impact of the supposed atomic war that then explains the poverty of Ingsoc; his denial of both traditionalist and new forces of resistance to tyranny; and the quite central blind spot about political economics (see 2.31 above), evident from the real history of, say, Germany and Japan within our much more polycentric tripartition of the world. The two last factors logically lead to the theory of “power for power’s sake,” as well as to his disbelief in the huge powers of recuperation within capitalism, splitting the world today into the still privileged North as against the starving South (W-A 106-12 and 116-17). Thence NEF’s finally predestined doom and gloom. In brief, he suffered from a strange alloy of true clairvoyance for some matters (those within his class experience and structure of feeling) and tunnel vision.<sup>17/</sup> As I have been trying to present it here.

3.3. In conclusion: while I find NEF to be a concerned, appealing, and in some ways useful text, it *lacks wisdom*. As Wegner perspicaciously noted, it “attempts to create a ‘counter-utopia’ to the historical vision of utopia as such” (*Imaginary* 197). It stimulates both resignation and a belief that bad as capitalism is, the alternative is even worse. It outlaws hope (Winston thinks “if there is hope it lies in the proles,” but the text decrees these are forever quiescent). Hope belonged to the communist, and possibly Nazi, totemic field, and must be denied (cf. Thompson in W-CE 83).

Thus, Orwell’s aberrant fictional horizon and validation of anti-utopia, certainly striving for and gaining strong political influence but finally one that readers can share or reject, has been logically enlisted into the drive for our present totalising and inescapable extra-literary or existential anti-utopia. Anti-utopia is not “good to think with” (Clute 43) as all other varieties of utopia, it is a preachment to the willy-nilly converted or kept at bay. What it amounts to, behind elaborate smokescreens shaming the puny Wizard of Oz, is a world where all, and primarily all people and human possibilities, exists only as adjunct capitals for profit – unless also as mercenary servants (see more in the last section of chapter 21 in this book). Overtly or covertly, this is the dominant horizon of “post-communism.”

In the style of the *Communist Manifesto* and Brecht, we could ask: within the production of human suffering, what are Attila, Gengis Khan, Stalin, and even the (fortunately) short-lived Hitler State compared to agribusiness, Big Pharma, the Seven Sisters of oil, and the capillary grip of financial capital? As the ruin

of Shelley's King of Kings Ozymandias required of us, "Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!" (I much counsel reading this anti-despotic sonnet).

### Notes

1/ Rai notes it well for *Road to Wigan Pier*: "He approaches the afflicted areas with all the clear-eyed ignorance of ... a Martian" (69).

My warm thanks for much help in bibliographic matters and materials sent go to Lyman T. Sargent and Tom Moylan, for clarifying discussions and sending me their works first of all to Fredric Jameson, also to Patrick Parrinder, Daphne Patai, Darren Webb, and Phil Wegner. Special thanks for Patricia McManus's close reading of my essay and the kind loan of her own draft paper on NEF (cited), that between them allowed me to make a dozen important clarifications, and for a comradely afternoon of discussion. I couldn't have written this essay without the kind and efficient help of the Clare College staff and the Cambridge University Library, also of Jake Culank from Cambridge.

2/ Cf. W-CE 159-60, and see the excellent contextualisation for Burma in Rai 57-67 and 174-75.

3/ I judged mine to be a bad good poem, that is, not very poetic though notionally right, and didn't publish it in my Canadian collection of 1984, *The Long March*, but it appeared in the *Foundation* journal. Today I'd say I was almost as unfair to him as he was to his ideals in NEF. The lecture was at U of Lausanne and approached NEF too as a good bad book.

4/ The curious evocation of "St. Petersburg 1916" in his diaries (CEJL 2: 374) could suggest he was quite conscious of this revolutionary parallel. I have found no discussion of Orwell's relations to Marx and Lenin. He was certainly not indifferent to the former – I point out below that he must have read *The Communist Manifesto* – but little interested in the latter, and one gets the impression he read little of both at first hand. Within Orwell's usual adversariness, his opinions about both of them, and of communism, were largely "prejudices [as] angry, antagonistic responses to the ruling left orthodoxy... and in this he anticipated the wholesale rejection of Communism which became a central feature in Natopolitan ideology. And this failure .... denied the possibility of *hope* within the pattern of social change wherever Communist influence could be detected[-]" (Thompson in W-CE 82-83)[.]

5/ I ought to record I shared this stance between ca. 1948 and 1954.

6/ Calder pointed perspicaciously out that this duality or double vision is of a piece with Orwell's attitude to Hitler, whose projected figure he – rather unbelievably – found both hateful and appealing as a Christ-like sufferer (CEJL 2: 12-14). On the other hand, Big Brother's Q&A speech style (NEF 54) is pure Stalin – shades of an Orthodox theological seminary (cf. Suvin, "Archeology" and *Lessons*).

7/ First quote Patai, "Third" cf. also her *Orwell*, which may bend the bough a bit; when I wrote her this, in an e-mail of May 21, 2019, she agreed and answered she would today rather stand by her partial correction in "Third," which she kindly sent me (unpaginated). Second quote Wegner, *Imaginary* 218.

8/ Williams commented in 1984: “There have been changes of style and technology but certain basic methods of the oligarchy – endlessly repeated slogans, displacement of one kind of news by another, the regular institution of hate-figures – are still clearly recognisable” (W-A 120). In other words, Orwell knew from the inside how capitalist and bureaucratic thought-control machines work.

9/ To begin with, Orwell attributes to Swift many of his most important stances (and blames him for not having some of his), so that the essay’s formulations can often be used as involuntary but precise autobiography. Just exchange the names in these three quotes and see, the tale is told of thee: “Swift was one of those people who are driven into a perverse sort of Toryism by the follies of the progressive party of the moment”; Swift has strong “strands” of reaction plus misanthropy as well as of progress, with the specious excuse that “[t]o be occasionally inconsistent is almost a mark of vitality in Utopia books”; in the Yahoos “Swift has overreached himself in his fury and his shouting at his fellow creatures. ‘You are filthier than you are!’” (CEJL 4: 207, 212, and 218). Conversely, Orwell hates the Houyhnhnms and sees them as, so to speak, totalitarians with a fully accomplished Newspeak.

10/ Orwell knew quite well what he was leaving out. In the earliest 1943 outline he noted among “To be brought in” the item, “Interrelation between the party & the Trusts” (Crick, *George* 583). By 1948, he had left economics out.

11/ “[T]he sociology of the proles, considering their importance as the sole vehicle of hope, is sketchy and, as it stands, implausible,” notes the regretful Crick (*George* 551). It is curious how this marginalisation of workers, especially industrial ones, is a besetting sin of most “middle-class” – however ideologically “Left” – utopias and SF, in Twain, Bellamy, Wells, Bogdanov, even Morris...

12/ This is nicely subverted in Dalos’s 1985, where in order to bring down “really obtaining socialism” Winston is (unbelievably) made into a Wałęsa or Havel-like leader of opposition. My thanks to Professor Sarah Brown of Anglia Ruskin U for giving me a copy of the book.

13/ There are few, and to my mind no conclusive, approaches to Orwell and NEF based on psychological theory. In Freudian terms, it is not difficult to find both sadomasochism and narcissism in the author and his writings. The real yield would come if this could be integrated with other types of analysis.

14/ The Cold War use, latching on to the “Ingsoc” name, of pointing to the Soviet system was quite athwart Orwell’s conscious purpose to “[lay the scene] of the book in Britain in order to emphasise that ... totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere” (CEJL 4: 502)[.] Williams is quite right: “[T]here is the really savage irony that a citizen of Oceania [i.e. USA and UK, note DS], in 1984, is thinking as he has been programmed to think, but with the reassurance of the book to tell him that he is free and that only those others are propagandised and brainwashed” (W-A 101).

15/ It might be relevant that the “totalitarianism” concept was excogitated in the 1930s by committed ex-communists Ignazio Silone, Franz Borkenau, and Arthur Koestler, and communist sympathisers for a time André Malraux and George Orwell. Borkenau and Koestler had some direct experience of Nazism, the others did not, and none of them could know of its inner workings; most of them hated it without much emotional involvement.

16/ I cannot forbear transcribing the beautiful key title of this section of Bloch's – PH, Part II.17, Vol.1: 222-23: "The World in which Utopian Imagination has a Correlate; Real Possibility, The Categories Front, Novum, Ultimum, and the Horizon."

17/ An example of Orwell's strategic political clairvoyance coupled with a self-imposed *Denkverbot* to think political economy: "The real question is not whether the people who wipe their boots on us during the next 50 years are to be called managers, bureaucrats or politicians: the question is whether capitalism, now obviously doomed, is to give way to oligarchy or to true democracy" (CEJL 4: 165).

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