

# Essays for Studying

by Lukas

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984) by George Orwell

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

## George Orwell. Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)

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### About the author

Eric Arthur Blair, who is more famous all around the world under his pen-name George Orwell, was born more than one hundred years ago, on 25 June 1903 in the town Motihari, British India in a family of an employee of the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service.

The iconic story *Animal Farm* and the novel *1984* are his brightest works written in the anti-utopian genre that flourished in the 20th century. The pioneer of the anti-utopia is considered to be a Russian writer Yevgeny Zamyatin, whose novel *We* influenced on the Orwell's works and not less famous Aldous Huxley, the author of *Brave New World*. And what is more, it was

Orwell, who came up with an expression *the Cold War*.

The father of a future writer held a position as if from the pages of a novel about the totalitarian hierarchic society, “the assistant of the senior manager’s junior deputy of the Opium Department”. That is why he could not provide his offspring with an expensive education. However, Eric Arthur Blair due to his abilities and determination managed to win a scholarship in Eton.

After graduating from the college, he served in the colonial police in Burma and tried to write in the genres of political journalism and fictional prose. Before he turned 30, Eric Arthur had lived on casual earnings, until he came to Paris, where his first, autobiographic story *Down and Out in Paris and London*, written under the pen-name George Orwell, was published.

His pen-name appeared not because he wanted to show off, but because it was necessary — his relatives did not share his left views.

The history of a pen-name is very simple: Orwell is the name of a small English river, and George is one of the most popular British names.

Later, for half a year the writer together with his wife fought in the war for the Left at the Aragon Front in the Spanish Civil war, he was injured in the neck by a frank sniper in Uesca.

Here his views suddenly changed. Orwell began

to hate the policy of Stalin because he considered him to be an epitome of evil.

Orwell's contemporary, a socialist Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman*, wrote that Orwell looked at the USSR bitterly, with the eyes of a revolutionist disappointed in his child, and thought that the revolution in the Soviet Union had been betrayed.

During the Second World War, Orwell wanted to enlist in the army, but, because of the health condition (he had tuberculosis), he could not. He hosted an anti-fascist program on BBC.

Orwell is also famous for hot-blooded criticizing of the existed in the USSR regime. In the essay *Why I Write* (1946), Orwell pointed out: "Every line of the serious work that I had written since 1936 was directed, directly or not, against the totalitarianism and for the democratic socialism as I understand it." Orwell sharply condemned Western authors, who identified socialism with the Soviet Union, in particular, George Bernard Show. Orwell was convinced that the countries which were going to build the socialism should not try to follow the Soviet Union, but, first of all, be afraid of it.

What would Orwell say about the modern digital information democracy where every person, like in the Book of Daniel, "is counted, weighed and considered"?

The most famous and scandalous event in the writer's life after the war was making the Orwell's list.

In 1949, Celia Kirwan, to whom Orwell had proposed not long before, asked him to recommend someone for a position in the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office. The unit's role was to counteract the Soviet propaganda; Orwell denied to work there, but recommended a couple of people. Orwell also offered to make a list of people who should not be considered as unit's employees because of their sympathies for the USSR and the Communism. From his personal notebook, which contained contact details of 135 people, including B. Show, J. Steinbeck, J.B. Priestley, C. Chaplin and others, Orwell chose 38 and passed them to Celia. Some of them he qualified merely by intuition as secret Soviet spies, but he was right, for example, the head of the Russian Unit in the Information Department, Peter Smollett. The Orwell's list was published about 50 years after the writer's death, Orwell's gesture provoked disputes, and his ill-wishers tried to use it to compromise the reputation of Orwell.

On 21 January 1950, the writer died from tuberculosis.

## **Two whales of the Orwell's heritage**

The anti-utopian parable or satiric story *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Revolution of 1917 and the following events in the USSR. It shows the

transformation of supposedly animal society: from the complete freedom after the cruel former owner, Mr Jones was banished to the dictatorship of the boar, Napoleon.

The animal farm lives according to the Animalism (mockery of the Communism).

The Animalism is based on the seven commandments that were invented by pigs and which they painted at the sidewall of a big barn:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

The twisted seventh commandment of this parable became a catchphrase: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

It appeared because many dwellers of the Animal farm due to their limitations were unable to remember all seven commandments, that is why, especially for them it was decided to shorten the regulations of the Animalism to a simple maxim “Four legs good, two legs bad. Later, the pigs, that stopped following the rules but did not stop propagandizing them among other animals, secretly changed them so they would not be

accused of breaking these rules. When the pigs started walking on two legs, the maxim was eventually changed into: "Four legs are good, but two are better!"

The evident satire on the Soviet Union, a British ally in the anti-Hitler coalition of that time, was published after the defeat of Germany, in August 1945.

In several years, Orwell created the main work of his life, the anti-utopia *1984*, that gave the world such characters and ideas as *Big Brother*, *the Ministry of Truth*, *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, *Ingsoc* and *Newspeak*.

The working title of the novel, *The Last Man in Europe*, was changed at the request of the publisher Frederic Warburg. It is believed that Orwell chose the year 1984 by changing two last numbers of the year when the novel was created (1948).

In his novel, the writer continued to develop the topics of betrayal of the revolution and authoritarian dictatorship that exploited the usurped achievements of the revolution. The new society, which changed capitalism after the Third World War, denies completely identity and personal freedom, suppresses and controls everyone.

«Who controls the past controls the future.»

Orwell emphasized that he intentionally set the scene in England because he thought the totalitarian society could appear everywhere.

The tragedy of an ordinary employee of the

Ministry of Truth, Winston Smith that developed during the constant wars between the three totalitarian superpowers was on par with such epic anti-utopian novels as *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1920), *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953).

In 1946, Orwell reviewed Zamyatin's *We*, which became a classic example of the anti-utopia of the 20th century, and he was then accused by the critics of "borrowing Zamyatin's idea, plot, main characters, symbols and the entire atmosphere." Nevertheless, after the publication, the novel *1984* got a warm reception from critics and colleagues, including Huxley.

Orwell wrote that the anti-utopia by Zamyatin, with its names consisting of letters and numbers and dividing the delinquents into atoms, is more technocratic than totalitarian.

The novel *We* asserted influence over another British anti-utopia, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. But unlike Orwell, who depicted the society where everything was prohibited, limited and censored, Huxley was afraid that the society of total consumerism would not need any prohibitions or censorship. And the slogan "Ending is better than mending" suggested from the childhood reminds strikingly the modern paradigm of marketing.

*1984* is one of the most famous anti-utopian novels of all times (along with *Brave New World* by

Aldous Huxley). This novel became a cornerstone of our culture, some kind of warning or prediction — it is up to a person to choose what it is for him/her.

## **Plot**

After numerous murderous wars and revolutions, Earth was divided into three superpowers that were permanently at war with each other in order to distract the population from the unsolved inner problems and to control it completely. In one of these superstates, Oceania, lives Winston Smith, an employee of the Ministry of Truth — the government body that specializes in destroying the unfavourable information and rewriting the past according to modern policy. Besides, it promotes the values of the existing regime. Every day Winston watches that the events happening in real life are changed in order to please political interests of the ruling elite, and he wonders whether it is right. He has some doubts and he decides to describe them in a diary, hiding from pervasive cameras (his TV screen not only airs what he is supposed to watch but also records his rooms). At this point, the main hero starts his protest.

There is no place for the individuality in a new system, so Smith hides it carefully. Things that he writes in his diary are thoughtcrime and punished by the death penalty. It is not easy to hide something from

Big Brother (the supreme leader of Oceania): all the houses are made from glass, there are bugs and cameras everywhere, the thought police is watching every movement. Winston meets Julia, a rather relaxed person who also hides her independent personality. They fall in love with each other, they choose to date at the residential area of the proles — the lowest workers' class. The proles are not watched very vigorously as their intellectual level is lower than medium. They are allowed to live according to ancient customs. There the heroes indulge in love and reverie about the revolution with the help of those proles.

Eventually, they meet a real representative of the opposition who gives them a forbidden book about the philosophy of the coming revolution. The thought police catch the couple reading this book: a reliable person turned out to be an agent of the thought police. After cruel tortures, Winston and Julia give up and betray each other. In the end, they sincerely believe in the power of Big Brother and accept a general point of view that everything is fine in the country.

There is the quintessence of the novel's idea in this part: Winston is reading a book that describes how the Party stays in power, and, of course, he asks himself why.

When he asks O'Brien this question he hears rather simple and direct answer: the power in the name of power.

In truth, it is the most fierce machine that can swallow almost everything, blend the ideas and motives of nearly any power and nature. The humankind looks like a helpless insect in front of such a machine.

But any insect, which manages to get behind a wheel, will continue the task to ride down the insects of its kind.

That is why it is so hard to read the end of the novel where Winston sincerely thinks over how he loves Big Brother:

Winston is sitting in The Chestnut Tree Cafe. His thoughts wandered again to what had happened to him: “They can’t get inside you”, Julia had said. But they could get inside you. O’Brien had said. That was a true word. “There were things, your own acts, from which you could never recover.”

After tortures, Winston met Julia at the Ministry of Love. She changed: “Her face was sallow, and there was a long scar, partly hidden by the hair, across her forehead and temple; but that was not the change.” Her waist, when Winston hugged Julia, felt like stone: like a corpse he once had to drag out of some ruins. They both confessed in betraying each other.

Victorious fanfares can be heard in the cafe: Oceania has defeated Eurasia. Winston also wins — he defeats himself. He loved Big Brother.