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Chapter 1: Background on George Orwell

1. The Life of George Orwell 21

*David Morgan Zehr*

Although a socialist, George Orwell was an anti-Communist who warned against the evils of totalitarianism in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. His humanism and appreciation for British cultural traditions enhance the artistry of his works.

2. Orwell Sees No Contradiction Between Patriotism and Socialism 37

*George Orwell*

Orwell argues that there is no contradiction in being both patriotic and a socialist. Despite his belief that radical change needs to take place in the British government, he is fully supportive of his country in World War II.

3. Orwell Was Highly Principled 45

*V.S. Pritchett*

In an obituary, the British writer and critic praises Orwell’s saintly qualities, calling him the “wintry conscience of a generation.”

4. Orwell Was Morally Right on Major Issues 49

*Christopher Hitchens*

Orwell was right on the three great moral issues of the twentieth century—imperialism, fascism, and communism. His instincts on these were guided by his own experiences. Orwell’s father was involved in the colonial drug trade, Orwell witnessed brutality in boarding school and as a policeman in Burma, and his participation in the Spanish Civil War showed him the dark side of communism.
Chapter 2: George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the Abuse of Power

1. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Is Terrifying
   Because It Rings True
   Irving Howe
   The vision of totalitarianism Orwell presents in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is chilling in its total absence of humanity, individualism, or emotion. The evils in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are not inherent in the human condition, but are specific to the twentieth century.

2. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Depicts the Irrationality of Totalitarianism
   Alex Zwerdling
   When he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell had come to believe that political behavior was irrational and perverse. The torture scenes in the novel, with their flavor of sadomasochism, are meant to evoke the brutality and irrationality present in totalitarianism.

3. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Predicts the Downfall of Totalitarianism by the Working Class
   Richard J. Voorhees
   *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains both a warning about the evils of totalitarianism and a prediction for how totalitarianism will be overthrown. The members of the working class, or proles, have retained their humanity, and there are indications throughout the book that they will eventually prevail.

4. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Absolute Compliance Is Demanded
   Alfred Kazin
   In Orwell’s chilling vision of the future in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, language has become meaningless, the government despises its citizens, and the past has been obliterated. Duped by a false sense of security, people have willingly abdicated their fundamental liberties to gain safety and harmony.
5. Nineteen Eighty-Four Warns of the Post–World War II Threats to Personal Liberty  
*Robert F. Gleckner*

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not a warning about what could happen in the future nor is it directed at totalitarianism in Soviet Russia and Communist China. Orwell’s intent is to alert readers to the threats on privacy in their own lives and the tendency of government to miscommunicate with its citizens.

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four Is About the Misuse of Power  
*Julian Symons*

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an important study of power and corruption, showing how human freedom is powerless in the face of a relentless erosion of rights. Although the book is marred by sensationalism at times, it remains a serious work about the misuse of power.

7. Nineteen Eighty-Four Promotes the Values of the Common People  
*Stephen Ingle*

Orwell wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a warning to the British socialist movement to distrust the intellectual elite, who he believed were advancing their own interests. The book remains relevant today as a reminder that those in power should retain the values of the common people.

8. Nineteen Eighty-Four Warns of the Dehumanization of Industrialism  
*Erich Fromm*

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is part of a trilogy—along with Yevgeny Zamiatin’s *We* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*—of dystopias that paint a bleak picture of the dehumanizing nature of a bureaucratic society. Orwell warns that the danger exists not only in Communist nations: industrialism puts everyone in danger of becoming an automaton and losing the qualities that make one human.
9. The Capitalist Past in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Is Presented Positively
   
   *Arthur Eckstein*

   While it may seem paradoxical that an avowed socialist such as Orwell describes the capitalist past in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in attractive terms, Orwell was a liberal as well as a socialist. And as a liberty-loving writer, he valued the tolerance and liberalism that thrived under capitalism.

10. Orwell’s Private Nightmare Proved Prophetic
     
     *T.R. Fyvel*

     Orwell used elements of his private terrors—his phobia about rats, images of a boot stomping on a face, loneliness—and created a prophetic work about the public issues of the day.

11. Orwell Accused the Leftist Intelligentsia of Abuse of Power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
     
     *John David Frodsham*

     In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell conveyed the horror of totalitarianism by creating a fantasy with two characters representing an Everyman and Everywoman being destroyed by a ruthless state. Orwell believed the greatest danger to democracy came from the left-wing intelligentsia who had been seduced by their love of power.

**Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on the Abuse of Power**

1. Islamic Totalitarianism Is Today’s Version of Fascism
     
     *Douglas Streusand*

     Like communism and Nazism, Islamic totalitarianism represents a serious threat to Western civilization. Defeating Islamic totalitarianism will require both military and nonmilitary means and will probably take more than a generation.
2. Autocracies Are Threatened by the Financial Crisis
   Joshua Kurlantzick

   The financial crisis of the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century has created a threat to the autocratic governments in China, Russia, Venezuela, and the Persian Gulf states. Prosperity was a tool that these autocratic governments wielded to buy the compliance of their citizens. Already, there are signs of increasing dissent in several such countries as their economies slow down.

3. Wiretapping by the George W. Bush Administration Was Illegal and Should Be Investigated
   Patrick Radden Keefe

   The U.S. Congress should launch an investigation into the scope of wiretapping monitored by the National Security Agency under the George W. Bush administration. In response to 9/11, the U.S. government illegally eavesdropped on its citizens. It is important to investigate this in order to understand the extent and nature of the abuse and to ensure that it cannot occur again.

4. Technology Makes Surveillance More Prevalent
   Peter Funt

   The son of Allen Funt, creator of the secret-surveillance television show *Candid Camera*, contends that Street View, a Google service, constitutes an invasion of individual privacy.

For Further Discussion

For Further Reading

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