

1984 and 1985:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Both George Orwell and Anthony Burgess are among the most important English novelists to emerge in the twentieth century. They have made major contributions to contemporary literature and thought. Their innovative works in diverse genres and their unusual choice of literary subjects have provided important models. The greatest achievements of the two writers lie in their ability to record and interpret the political, social and economic changes of their times. They are both regarded as great writers of dystopian or anti-utopian novels, who are keen on extrapolating from the most obvious and important events and trends which were prevalent in their lifetime.

The aim of this thesis is to compare Orwell's 1984 and Burgess's 1985 as two dystopian novels, and to highlight the analogies and differences between them concerning the theme, details, plot situations and characters. The thesis is also intended to demonstrate the attitudes of both Orwell and Burgess to language in general and the English language in particular.

The thesis comprises five chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one deals with the definition and origin of two diametrically opposed terms, namely "utopia" and "dystopia". It also reviews the most important and prominent utopian and dystopian works that have emerged since Plato till the twentieth century.

Chapter two tackles Orwell's attitude to Socialism and attempts to show its relevance to his literary works, especially his novels and autobiographies. It also traces the formative experiences that profoundly influenced Orwell as a writer and paved the way for his conversion to Socialism, namely those of class, oppression and poverty. Besides, this chapter discusses Orwell's experience of the Spanish Civil War which marked a turning point in his life and in his attitude to Socialism. It is true that the Spanish Civil War and the reports he received from Russia on Stalin's Purge Trials had an illuminating effect on him since they convinced him that Soviet communism was a corruption of true Socialism. He also became well-aware of the fact that Soviet communism, like fascism, denied the fundamental human values in which he believed, namely decency, liberty and justice.

Chapter three examines Anthony Burgess's treatment of the dispute between Pelagian liberals and Augustinian conservatives. According to Burgess, the liberal's optimistic belief in the essential goodness and perfectibility of man is traced to an ancient heresy, which is the Pelagian denial of original sin and assertion of free will. He also holds that the doctrinal bases of much of the pessimism pervading Western conservative thought are traced to St. Augustine's refutations of the Pelagian doctrine. Burgess's handling of the Pelagian-Augustinian conflict in terms of its broad philosophical,

political and social implications is quite obvious in most of his novels, notably A Clockwork Orange, The Wanting Seed and 1985.

Chapter four is devoted to a comparison and assessment of Orwell's 1984 and Burgess's 1985, pointing out the most salient points of similarity and difference between them with regard to the theme, plot, details and characters. It also reviews critics' views of Orwell and Burgess as novelists, and their two examined novels. It is clear that both Orwell's 1984 and Burgess's 1985 are placed in the category of dystopian fiction and nightmares. While Orwell in 1984 voices his deep apprehensions over power politics and totalitarianism, Burgess in 1985 expresses his great concern over the growing power of trade unions as well as the rapid influx of the Arabs and Muslims with their capital into England. Besides, both Orwell and Burgess are much interested in man and society. They attach great importance to human decency and freedom of choice, and warn against the annihilation of the autonomous individual. Hence, they both use rebellion as a means of exposing the society they describe and of creating characters that are keen on asserting their individuality and with whom the reader can feel some kind of identification.

Chapter five deals with the approaches of both Orwell and Burgess to language, highlighting their interest in language and its relation to thought. Both writers are fully convinced that there is a close

connection between language and thought, particularly political thought. They both hold that political language is mainly designed to make lies and false statements sound truthful and real. They also agree that language plays a fundamental role in forming people's thought and subsequent behaviour. The two novelists are of the opinion that the ruling élite in any society can control the citizens' modes of thought and make any expression of heterodox opinions impossible by controlling their language.



CHAPTER ONE

*UTOPIAS
AND
DYSTOPIAS*

Chapter One

Utopias and Dystopias

The idea of utopia has invariably been "a response to the current" social, economic and political situation. Utopia is, in fact, a means of tackling "in the imagination"¹ the fundamental issues of the present. It can also be "formulated as solutions to the . . . perennial problems of men, women and society."²

Utopia is "an ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants exist under perfect conditions. Hence, 'utopian' is used to denote a visionary reform, which fails to recognize defects in human nature."³ In other words, it is an imaginary society in which mankind's deepest yearnings, noblest dreams, and highest aspirations are fulfilled, where all physical, social and spiritual forces harmoniously work together to permit the attainment of everything people find necessary and desirable. In this connection, however, Irving D. Blum suggests three defining characteristics of utopia: (1) A utopia is "permeated with the

¹ Jenni Calder, Huxley and Orwell: Brave New World and Nineteen Eighty-Four, Studies in English Literature Series 63, gen. ed. David Daiches (London: Edward Arnold, 1976) 7.

² Calder 7.

³ "Utopia", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1960 ed.

feeling that society [is] capable of improvement." (2) It is "composed, at least in part, of plans for improving society, and (3) formed of proposals that are impractical at the time of its writing."¹

Giving a more comprehensive definition of utopia, J.C. Davies states that it is "a type of ideal society [which is] distinguished by its approach to the collective problem and its vision of a total, perfect, ordered environment . . ." ² He also points out that "the utopian mode is one which accepts deficiencies in men and nature and strives to contain and condition them through organizational controls and sanctions."³

Davis further argues that the utopian is concerned with controlling the social problems that the collective problem (i.e. the reconciliation of limited satisfactions and unlimited human desires within a social context) can cause, namely "crime, instability, poverty, rioting, war, exploitation and vice."⁴

¹ J.C. Davis, Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing 1516 - 1700 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 13.

² Davis 39.

³ Davis 370.

⁴ Davis 37.

As a matter of fact, Sir Thomas More (1480-1535) was the first to apply the word *utopia* to a literary genre when he called his imaginary republic Utopia (1516). He compounded the term *utopia* from the Greek *ou*, meaning 'not', and *topos*, meaning 'a place'. More published his Utopia in Latin as a pun on *eutopia* which is a "place where all is well."¹ J.C. Davis quotes Judith Shklar as reiterating the view that "classical utopianism" has no historical basis. "Utopia is nowhere, not only geographically, but historically as well. It exists neither in the past nor in the future."²

Expounding the term "utopia" in his 1985, Anthony Burgess writes:

The term Utopia, which More invented, has always had a connotation of ease and comfort, Lotus Land, but it merely means an imaginary society, good or bad. The Greek elements that make up the word are *ou*, meaning no or not, and *topos*, meaning a place. In many minds the *ou* has been confused with *eu*- well, good, pleasant, beneficial. *Eupepsia* is good digestion, *dyspepsia* we all know.³

¹ J.A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms (London: André Deutsch, 1977) 716.

² Davis 14-5.

³ Anthony Burgess, 1985 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978) 48.

In his Utopia, which is still being discussed and analysed after almost five centuries, More depicts an imaginary island where everything is almost perfect; an earthly paradise that every politician promises, and an ideal world which is based on "reason, charity and proper social organization."¹ In fact, More's welfare state is communistic as there is no private property; education and medical treatment are free, and there is national unity since all religions are tolerated.

More was the first to use "the device of satirising contemporary society by contrasting it with a traveller's account of a distant country".² His narrator speaks to Raphael Hythloday, who has just come back from Utopia. Unlike the majority of Englishmen, who suffer poverty and incessant war, the Utopians are rational, tender, peaceful and contented. It was More, in fact, that "raised the fundamental question", which George Orwell tackled centuries later, of whether men can possibly coexist "fairly" and "equally".³ In this respect, More gives an

¹ Anthony Burgess, English Literature: A Survey for Students (London: Longman, 1974) 93-4.

² Valerie Meyers, George Orwell, Macmillan Modern Novelists Series, gen. ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1991) 102.

³ Meyers, V. 103.