George Orwell (1903-1950)

George Orwell, 1933.
1. Biography

Born **Eric Blair** in India in **1903**, he was the son of a minor **colonial official**.
Orwell was educated at Eton, in England where he began to develop an independent-minded personality, indifference to accepted values, and professed atheism and socialism.
1. Biography

On leaving college he started to work for the Indian Imperial Police in Burma (1922-1927).

George Orwell (third standing from the right) in Spain

George Orwell
He hated working in Burma and returned to England on sick-leave.
Once back in England he devoted himself to **writing** full time, publishing his works with the pseudonym of **George Orwell**.
2. Works

- *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) — a non-fiction narrative in which he described his experience among the poor.

- *Burmese Days* (1934) — based on his experiences in the colonial service.

- *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) — a report on the conditions of miners in the industrial North.
2. Works

- *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) based on his experience during the Spanish Civil War.

- *Animal Farm* (1945) made him internationally known and financially secure.

- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) his most original novel.
3. The artist’s development

- Rejection of his English background — he accepted new ideas and impressions.
- Conflict between middle-class education and emotional identification with the working class.
- The role of the artist — to inform, to reveal facts and draw conclusions from them — social function.

George Orwell.
4. Social themes

Influence of Dickens in the choice of:

- social themes
- realistic language
- misery caused by poverty
- depravation of society

Criticism of totalitarianism, the violation of liberty and tyranny in all its forms.

George Orwell while working for the BBC
5. Animal Farm

Historical background

- *Animal Farm* is Orwell’s reaction to:
  - Stalin’s Purge Trials (1930)
  - Stalin’s signature of the non-aggression pact with Hitler (1939)
5. Animal Farm

**Historical background**

- The book expresses Orwell’s disillusionment with **totalitarianism** in the form of an animal fable.
- It is an **anti-utopia** influenced by Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1721-1725)
5. Animal Farm

The plot

- Short narrative set on a farm.

- A group of oppressed animals, led by Napoleon, overcome their cruel master and set up a revolutionary government.

A scene from Animal Farm, a 1954 animated movie based on Orwell's book.
5. Animal Farm

The plot

• Napoleon’s leadership becomes a dictatorial regime.

• All the Seven Commandments are abandoned and only one remains: “all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others”.

A scene from Animal Farm, a 1954 animated movie based on Orwell's book.
5. Animal Farm

The meaning of the book

- Parallel with the history of the USSR between 1917 and 1943.
- Each animal symbolises a precise figure or representative type.

Stalin
5. Animal Farm

The meaning of the book

- *Animal Farm* is not only a satire on the Soviet Union, but a satire on dictatorship in general, as the name “Napoleon” shows.

Stalin
### 5. Animal Farm

#### The animals

Besides being a symbol, each animal possesses the traits of its species.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old Major</td>
<td>a mixture of Marx and Lenin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer Jones</td>
<td>Czar Nicolas II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball</td>
<td>Trotsky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleon</td>
<td>Stalin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Boxer         | the loyal, hard-working man  
his name derives from the Boxer Rebellion in China |
| The dogs      | a metaphor for the Terror State                                              |

George Orwell

Only Connect ... New Directions

Marina Spiazzi, Marina Tavella

2009
5. **Animal Farm**

**History as fable**

**Orwell’s inspiration**

- **Animated cartoons**
- **Literary sources**
  - The fables of Aesop or La Fontaine
  - Third and fourth books of *Gulliver’s Travels*

A contemporary edition of Animal Farm.
5. Animal Farm

The Revolution

- Animal Farm shows how the initial idealism of the revolution gradually decayed into inequality, hierarchy and finally dictatorship.

- This decay of the revolution is always seen from the community’s point of view, never from the pigs’ one.

A contemporary edition of Animal Farm.
5. Animal Farm

The Revolution

- *Animal Farm* does not attack the original ideals of the Revolution but the ways in which they were betrayed.

- Gradually, the privileges and abuses of the old regime are restored in a systematic, tyrannical form: this is what Orwell means by totalitarianism (each step violates some revolutionary principle of the Seven Commandments).
Description of the working class

- From different points of view through different animals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The animal</th>
<th>...stands for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The sheep</td>
<td>blind conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The high-strung hens</td>
<td>the easily agitated mob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boxer the horse</td>
<td>hard work, endurance and patriotic loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin the donkey</td>
<td>stoic detachment from all utopian ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Animal Farm

Religion

• Orwell remains conventionally socialist in portraying religion.

□ the raven Moses, who is Mr. Jones’s favourite pet, derives its name from the Hebrew word “lawgiver”. When the revolution turns conservative and nationalistic, Napoleon brings the raven back, as Stalin brought back the Russian Orthodox Church.
6. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

**Subject**

Life in a big totalitarian system, **Oceania** (North America, South Africa, Australia).

**Airstrip One**, a future England, is an outpost of Oceania.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Structure

1. Introduction of the protagonist, Winston Smith, in this oppressive world.

2. Winston & Julia’s love → happiness.

3. Winston’s imprisonment and torture.

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Setting


London: desolated city governed by terror and constant control of BIG BROTHER.

Nobody escapes the gaze of Big Brother.
Oceania’s ranks

- Oceania is a huge country ruled by The Party.

- The Inner Party (1% of population) controls the country.

- The Outer Party (18% of population) is controlled by the Inner Party.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Oceania’s ranks

- The **Proles** (81% of population) are the labour power who live in poverty.

- The **Brotherhood** is an underground rebel organization lead by Emmanuel Goldstein.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

An anti-utopian novel

A frightening picture of the future:

The Party controls everything:

- Ministry of Truth, Ministry of Love
- slogan "freedom is slavery" (Chapter 1)

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

An anti-utopian novel

No privacy:

"[...] an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound [...] would be picked by it" (Chapter 1)
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

An anti-utopian novel

A perpetual state of war:

*Two minutes Hate*

The Party provides for everything:

“..*some necessary article which the Party shops were unable to supply*” (Chapter 5)
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

An anti-utopian novel

Punishment against the rebels

“I have it in my power to inflict pain on you at any moment and to whatever degree I choose”
(Chapter 2)
Newspeak

- Newspeak is the **official language** of Oceania.
- The goal of the Party is to have **Newspeak** replace **Oldspeak** (standard English).

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Newspeak

- Newspeak eliminates **undesirable words** and invents **new words** – all to force **Party conformity**.

- **Aim**: to eliminate **literature, thoughts** and **consciousness**.

Doublethink

- **Doublethink** is the manipulation of the mind by making people **accept contradictions**.

- **Doublethink** makes people believe that **the Party** is the only institution that **knows right from wrong**.

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Doublethink

- The Ministry of Truth (where Winston works) changes history, facts, and memories to promote Doublethink. This historical reference to Stalin's will to change history.


George Orwell

Only Connect ... New Directions
Marina Spiazzi, Marina Tavella
2009
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

The protagonist: **Winston Smith**

The name

“Smith” is the commonest English surname so the hero is a sort of Everyman.

“Winston” evokes Churchill’s patriotic appeals during the Second World War: “blood, sweat and tears”.

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

The protagonist: **Winston Smith**

**His experience**

- alienation from society
- rebellion against the Party
- search for spiritual and moral integrity

In the first two parts of the novel Winston expresses Orwell’s point of view.

6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Characters:

Big Brother

- Big Brother is the perceived ruler of Oceania. He looks like a combination of Hitler and Stalin.

- Big Brother’s God-like image is stamped on coins and projected on telescreens. His gaze is unavoidable.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Characters: Julia

- Julia is Winston’s 25-year-old lover.
- She is a beautiful dark-haired woman who enjoys sex and claims she had affairs with many Party members.
- She is optimistic and her rebellion is small and personal.

Suzanna Hamilton as Julia in Michael Radford’s Nineteen Eighty-Four (1984)
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Characters: Goldstein

- Dangerous mysterious enemy.
- Name inspired by Trotzkij’s surname: Brostein.
- Theme of necessity of an enemy onto which people’s anger is driven.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Themes

• Importance of **memory** and **trust**.

• Abolishment of **individuality** and **reality**.

• Satire against **hierarchical societies**.

Big Brother poster from *1984*, a 1956 film directed by Michael Anderson.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Style and tone

- Documentary realism.

“his body was being wrenched out of shape, the joints were being slowly torn apart” (Chapter 2)

- Parody and satire.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Style and tone

- Pessimistic tone.

→ No consolation, but cruel reality.

→ The author sympathizes with persecuted people.

George Orwell.
6. Nineteen Eighty-Four

Author’s aim

- To inform.

- To reveal facts and draw conclusions from them.

- To give an interpretation of reality.

George Orwell.