TCD School of English Evening Lecture

1984

George Orwell

Dr Mark Sweetnam
George Orwell
(Eric Arthur Blair)
1903–1950

- Born in India, son of a civil servant
- Moved to England in 1904
- Educated St Cyprian's School, Eastbourne (which he hated), Wellington (which was ‘beastly’), and Eton.
- Worked as an imperial policeman in Burma.
- Returned to England in 1927, to pursue a career as a journalist and writer (augmented by teaching).
- Became interested in poverty, social injustice, and oppression.
- Becomes interested in socialism, and ends up under Special Branch surveillance.
George Orwell
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- Fights in the Spanish Civil War, on the Republican side. "I've come to fight against Fascism".
- Injured in action, 1937
- With his wife Eileen, was charged, with "rabid Trotskyism" before the Tribunal for Espionage & High Treason, Valencia
- Enjoyed major success with Animal Farm (1945), and Nineteen Eighty Four (1949).
- Diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1947, and died in January 1950.
The Road to Wigan Pier (1937)

- First half records Orwell’s ‘undercover’ investigations of the living conditions among the working class in Lancashire and Yorkshire.
- The second half is an extend essay on Orwell’s upbringing and his relationship with Socialism.
- Espouses Socialism as an idea (though Orwell never defines what he means by socialism), but is critical of English socialism and English socialists (including ‘cranks’ who grow beards or wear sandals, vegetarians, and nudists).
1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.
I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account.
George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)
dystopian fiction
Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)
Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We* (1924)
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1931)
George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)
Surveillance
The tele-screen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard.
“Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your head.”
There are ... two great problems which the Party is concerned to solve. One is how to discover, against his will, what another human being is thinking, and the other is how to kill several hundred million people in a few seconds without giving warning beforehand.
Newspeak
It's a beautiful thing, the Destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word, which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take 'good,' for instance. If you have a word like 'good,' what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well – better, because it's an exact opposite, which the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good,' what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? 'Plusgood' covers the meaning or 'doubleplusgood' if you want something stronger still.
Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.
Controlling the Past
Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.
And when memory failed and written records were falsified—when that happened, the claim of the Party to have improved the conditions of human life had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and never again could exist, any standard against which it could be tested.
In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it. Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy.