

CLASSICAL AND MODERN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

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REFLECTIONS ON “1984” AND THE LIFE OF GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell’s *1984* is a worldwide masterpiece, and there has been renewed interest in this work recently. We would like to discuss *1984* while reflecting on his life. In the following discussion, we will focus on three perspectives: the author’s life and historical background, the author’s experiences reflected in *1984*, and the futuristic nature of *1984* and relevant art movements.

The Author’s Life and Historical Background

We begin firstly with the diagram above which shows the timeline of George Orwell’s life alongside the timeline of the world at that time. The diagram shows that the period of his life coincided with a series of major events in the world. It is highly likely that these various upheavals influenced his life and works.

The Author’s Experiences as Reflected in *1984*

Second, we would like to discuss his experiences and their reflection in *1984* from three perspectives.

The first is about his experience of working for the Indian Imperial Police. He worked as a police officer, but at the same time, had developed a distrust of imperialism. However, he could not express his distrust or criticize imperialism because speech was more controlled at that time than it is today. Since it was dangerous even for someone to find out that he held such ideas, it seems to have become a habit to hide such thinking. This may be apparent in *1984* when the term “doublethink” appears. This is a way of thinking in which one believes two contradictory things at the same time. It is possible to see his experience as a practice of the simpler version of “doublethink.”

The second is the experience of serving in the Spanish Civil War. George Orwell was a socialist, but he rejected the Soviet system under Stalin’s dictatorship because he had participated in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republic and witnessed the Soviet Communist Party’s suppression of non-Stalinist organizations and its concealment and the falsification of objective facts. He saw the Soviet system under Stalin’s dictatorship as a totalitarian regime and realized its threat.

However, at the same time, he also experienced a situation there that was close to his ideal of a socialist world. In the Spanish militia, a world where everyone was equal and people could live with dignity was realized, even for a short time. In his book, “Homage to Catalonia,” he said that his experience strengthened his hope for socialism and his belief

in humanity.

The third is his experience of working at the BBC. While working there, he was part of a section that made radio broadcasts to the Indian intelligentsia. This section was set up in response to the German radio broadcasts to India, which at the time were aimed at German interests. Here, he realized the importance of information warfare in modern conflict. In addition, the scripts used for radio were under strict control of the Ministry of Information and had to undergo careful scrutiny. When he read something different from the prescribed script, he was forced to stop his live broadcast. This sense of the importance of the mass media and the experience of daily censorship were both greatly reflected in *1984*.

The Futuristic Nature of *1984* and Art Movements

1984 is one of the original forms of dystopian novels. Dystopian novels depict the world or society which is censored and controlled by the government or some form of repressive authority. *1984* was explained as a novel which shows the society of then USSR. Also, *1984* shows us futuristic world which is really similar to our current one. An example of this is the Telescreen. Big Brother uses it to watch what people do and say. If someone does anything suspicious, then that individual would be arrested and erased from the society. Also, the main character Winston Smith used an automatic typewriter, and foods and drinks are supplied by automatic machines. These ideas were really futuristic for people at the time. People still argue about how he could write such a futuristic story.

Although the society had such a great technology, people led poor lives. Also, their foods and products were scarce because of the war so that laborers and even party members could eat little food. On top of that, party members could not drink, smoke, and have any relationships with the opposite sex. They had to work for Big Brother, so alcohol, cigarettes, and love were considered needless. By contrast, laborers could freely drink, smoke, and have sex. It was a strategy of Big Brother who tries to make people lead life without doubt to him. Laborers do not doubt him because they are satisfied with their current lives. They are given a lot of amusement, and come to be unconscious to politics. Many party members believe him. Also, he makes people monitor each other, and when someone does something suspicious, that person would be reported and arrested.

The situation of laborers in the book is similar to our current world. Recently we often use SNS, games, and YouTube. Some people say that people feel uneasy that people are immersed in those amusement and cannot not think for themselves. In *1984*, it is said to be bad that laborers which form a huge part of the society do not have consciousness of society's problems. If they stand up, the situation could easily be changed. But they have been spoiled and do not care whether statistics have been changed or not. So they cannot notice that the society is not normal.

We have to watch our society, learn them, and unite to stand against evil. One way of uniting people or informing people of what you think is an art. George Orwell wrote "animal farm" to satirize the social and political system in the USSR. He tried to show us dangerousness of excessive communism and totalitarianism by writing these novels.

In Japan, art movements have also done the same. One example of this is "ReFreedom Aichi movement," which was done to protest to censorship by the government. Also, the Able

art movement which was done to improve disabled people's status is another good example. These movements evoke a lot of reactions and could spread information about problems. Art has great power to move people's heart and change their situation.

Conclusion

In summary, *1984* is a work that reflects a great deal of George Orwell's life experiences. Furthermore, it is believed that he used his keen eye and wealth of experience to write a satirical piece about the real world at that time when the world situation was changing dramatically. His work contains both warnings about the real world and solid hopes for the future, and it is truly a book that we should read today.

References:

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