

What do you find disturbing about George Orwell's vision?

George Orwell's books are not conventional. They use extremely vivid and alarming descriptions to support thought-provoking subjects, and their endings are far from happy. I felt a strong sense of despair at the end of both 1984 and Animal Farm, even though I found them gripping and fascinating. George Orwell, being a socialist, was strongly opposed to totalitarian rule, and his books are clearly a warning as to how political movements can backfire. The books are influenced by events of his time, the most obvious being the Russian Revolution symbolised by Animal Farm. There are hardly any lasting aspects in either 1984 or Animal Farm that are pleasant; the themes of both books are worrying. I think that one of the worst aspects of George Orwell's vision is the systematic perversion of our feelings, emotions and instincts.

In my opinion, the worst action of 'The Party,' the ruling political power in 1984 is the way it frowns upon love, a natural human instinct, and tries to completely suppress it. This is a cold, tyrannical act that destroys such a pure, selfless instinct. Love brings joy that - as Winston Smith, the main character in 1984, experiences - makes life worth living. Without love, Oceania's inhabitants are reduced to a pointless, miserable, isolated existence. I think the most depressing event in the story of Winston Smith is how the Party crushed his love for Julia so completely, accentuated by the powerful unconditional nature of their love for each other before. Consequently, the Party, and its figurehead, 'Big Brother,' condemn sexual intercourse with fierce and active distaste, evident in the formation of 'The Junior Anti-Sex League.' Sex, the most intimate, loving act two people can share is seen as a threat to the Party's power, and is only acceptable in absolutely necessary circumstances - to create a child - and is devoid of all sentiment. Because it is detested by the Party, making love becomes an act of political rebellion, which destroys the fact that it should be an expression of love. One of the nastiest yet most haunting descriptions in 1984 is Winston's recollection of his visit to a prostitute in an attempt to satisfy his sexual instinct. His visit is 'brief' and 'coarse' and he admits that 'it was really the paint that appealed to me,' not any real desire to be intimate with the woman. In 1984, love within families is corrupted, as children spy against their parents and report them for the slightest incident. Family values - essential to nurturing a child with care - are destroyed; even when Winston's acquaintance, Parsons, is betrayed by his own daughter, he 'doesn't bear her any grudge.' In Orwell's dystopia, love plays no part, except in utter submission to Big Brother, and it is the concept of existing in a life so absent of love and affection that disturbs me. If I had to exist without love, I believe I would lose my will to live.

Another instinct, essential to harmonious, happy human life is that of trust. Again, the Party endeavour to totally control and pervert this instinct. Trust is the exact opposite to fear so cannot be practised when fear presides. Fear seeps into every aspect of life in 1984: fear of betrayal to the thought police; fear of what could happen to you if you committed a 'crime' and were caught; fear of your own thoughts wandering. Living in such a fragile community, where everyone is scared into solitude, and having children spy on people, corrupts the general principles of loyalty and human decency to such a level at which I would no longer want to associate with such people. Children, the embodiment of innocence and dependence, being routinely perverted, taken advantage of and coaxed into turning against their own providers, their parents, is a concept I find abhorrent. The manipulation of innocent and defenceless children is immoral, disgusting and disturbing. In 1984, the only trust allowed to exist between two parties is that of the individual for Big Brother. With a horrific act of total submission and resignation, people blindly accept all Big Brother tells them, completely disregarding information from their own senses, whilst subconsciously being aware that what Big Brother tells them is untrue. If I had to exist in Oceania, I would find that aspect the hardest to accept, as I feel a reassurance in knowing I can believe and trust whatever my senses tell me. With that knowledge removed, I'd be lost, confused and scared, as I would have lost my grip on reality - which keeps humans sane. As Winston thinks, 'if the Party

could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event that it never happened- that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture or death’.

In *Animal Farm*, another frighteningly harsh story by George Orwell, perversion of trust is also a prominent theme. Just like the citizens of 1984’s Oceania, the farm animals are too trusting for their own good. I grew sadder and more anxious each time the animals ‘believed every word’ of what their selfish leaders – the pigs – told them. To me, it is very poignant the way the animals are so unsuspecting and grateful towards the pigs, who repeatedly use them. The most trusting and devoted animal on the farm was the old carthorse, Boxer. Boxer trusted the pig leader - Napoleon - to such an extent he created the slogan ‘Napoleon is always right!’ In total disregard of this trust bestowed upon him, Napoleon sent the horse to the slaughterhouse. I was shocked when, at the end, the animals simply accepted the pigs’ superiority and power. What distresses me most is the despicable way in which the pigs take advantage of the innocent animals, who have blind faith in them. I am even more upset knowing *Animal Farm* is based on genuine events: the sheer trust the proletariat had in Stalin, after the Russian Revolution, which Stalin twisted to benefit himself.

The civilization of 1984 is ‘founded upon hatred,’ an unnatural human emotion. O’Brien tells us Oceania is progressing towards a state where ‘there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph and self-abasement.’ I find this devastatingly selfish and cruel, as it terminally oppresses the sole desire of mankind: to be happy and enjoy the process of life. The most dehumanising and evil event in the lives of the citizens of Oceania is ‘Hate Week,’ It is not only the atmosphere of contagious compulsive contempt which enables ‘Hate Week’ that disturbs me; it is the way in which hate, the most hostile and dangerous feeling, can be generated on such a large scale with absolutely no reason. In the middle of ‘Hate Week,’ the enemy changes, but the proceedings continue without the blink of an eye. It scares and disgusts me that Orwell can see such a strong emotion directed at a target, regardless of why the target is hated. Winston realises that ‘the fear, the hatred and the lunatic credulity which the Party needs in its members can only be kept at the right pitch by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force.’ The Party has twisted and corrupted natural instincts to benefit themselves.

In my opinion, the manipulation of human emotions, instincts and feelings is the most dishonest, corrupt way of gaining power. It is chilling to imagine the uncompromising, omnipresent, omnipotent power that would be required to enable such an atrocity. I would find it so hard never to be able to feel and love, and I would see no point in existing if I could not. Without our feelings we are no more than machines. The mere contemplation of having to exist without joyful emotions fills me with despair. I would truly prefer to die than to live intoxicated with misery and depression, without hope for a better life. I share Winston’s sense of helplessness and injustice when O’Brien tells him ‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever.’