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The Conscious Collective

An exploration of Orwell's Representations of Individualism within Authoritarian Societies

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Abstract

This master's thesis examines the prolific author George Orwell's representation of the struggles associated with individualism within authoritarian regimes. By drawing on Hannah Arendt's *Responsibility and Judgement*, a discussion of the Eichmann trials, and the responsibilities of the German people, this thesis establishes a theoretical framework. This framework is used to discuss the responsibilities of the individual when they find themselves in politically compromised situations and to discuss whether the individual or the collective is tasked with opposing authoritarian regimes. This exploration is conducted through separate analyses of the two chosen novels, *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, highlighting the different ways the two novels discuss the responsibilities and opportunities of the individual to rebel. Following this, the thesis conducts a comparative analysis of the two novels and their similarities to attempt to shine a light on Orwell's political commitment. This thesis concludes that considering the similarities between the two narratives, it is plausible to argue that Orwell remained critical of both individualism and collectivism. Seeing the potential issues with both individualism and collectivism, Orwell calls for a specific kind of collective to oppose authoritarian regimes. However, this collective must uphold particular criteria. The most central aspect of this collective is that it needs to retain consciousness by having the members be free-thinking individuals.

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This master's thesis marks the end of my 18 years of schooling and is the final stepping stone before moving on to the "adult" world. Although it seemed to be the bane of my existence at times, the topic of individualism kept pulling me back in. However, the combination of Orwell's simple yet elegant and thought-provoking writing style, and the constant reminders of the topic's relevancy to the world around me helped me through some of the hurdles.

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1.0 Introduction

One way to read literature is to view works of literature as political statements, and recognize that every story has some political message. One writer who is heavily associated with political writing is Eric Arthur Blair, more commonly known as George Orwell, who spent his life and career developing and expressing his political ideas and opinions. In an essay titled “Why I Write” written in 1946, shortly after having published what would become one of his greatest works, *Animal Farm*, Orwell expresses a wish to “make political writing into an art” (Orwell “Why I Write” no. pg.). This is something most readers and critics would agree that he succeeded in doing. Orwell had been interested in writing most of his life, and stated that he was a “lonely child” with a “habit of making up stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons” (Orwell “Why I Write” no. pg.). But the young author Orwell would need more life experience before he started writing novels. Early in his career as an author, Orwell would establish himself as a provocative writer, discussing political issues regardless of reactions. Amongst the political topics Orwell commonly wrote about were totalitarianism, authoritarianism, capitalism, class divisions, gross abuse of power, and individuality. This final topic is what this thesis will revolve around, namely Orwell’s representations of individuality in *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These two novels were written at entirely different points in time in Orwell’s political and authorial life. Despite this, they contain many similarities that will be discussed in this thesis.

1.1 Thesis

After noticing the similarities between the two novels, from the micro-levels of characterization and description to the more macro-levels of theme and message, the core argument for this thesis started to form. These similarities are made clearer if one boils down the two novels to their core message, a depiction of two individuals who attempt to maintain their individuality in hostile collective environments. The choice of having both novel contain strongly individualistic protagonists, one even being highly based on own experiences, would likely serve as an indication of Orwell’s political beliefs. Despite Orwell’s seeming fondness for individuality, his protagonists ultimately fail their task of altering their surroundings. Within both narratives, Orwell expresses that the individual is incapable of opposing their respective societies, and that the ones able to oppose said regimes are the collective. Orwell remains aware that this challenge cannot be put forth by any collective and asserts that there

are certain criteria that need to be fulfilled if the collective is to be capable of opposing the authoritarian regime. With these similarities in mind, I set out to write this paper to argue my thesis, which claims that: *Orwell argues that the individual is helpless in defeating the authoritarian regime, and that for change to happen there needs to be a conscious collective that opposes the authoritarian regimes.*

This argument can thus be said to be twofold: firstly, I claim that the individual is helpless on his or her own in the fight against authoritarianism. Secondly, I address the issue of who is then able to oppose these regimes, as Orwell's understanding of society allows him to see the limitations of the individual to bring forth changes, which he expresses through having his protagonists fail at achieving their goal. In both novels, Orwell implies that changes happen through the collective – as seen either through Flory's attempts to alter the opinions of the Club members in *Burmese Days* or the proles who are the passive majority in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This understanding also allows Orwell to depict the collective in multiple ways as, in both novels, readers are given two different experiences of the collective: one negative and harmful and the other hopeful yet pessimistic. Orwell seemingly sees the need for a specific type of collective, one that is comprised of thinking individuals that combine forces.

One issue that arises when comparing these two novels is with regards to the choice of words, more specifically authoritarian versus totalitarian. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using authoritarian when discussing the novels together, as this term's definition holds true for both the British colony and Oceania, although it does, to an extent, fail to capture the terror of the totalitarian regime of the Party.

For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the Encyclopedia Britannica's definition of "Authoritarianism." Encyclopedia Britannica's defines Authoritarianism as a

principle of blind submission to authority, as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action. ... any political system that concentrates power in the hand of a leader or a small elite ... Authoritarian leaders often exercise power arbitrarily without regard to existing bodies of law, and they usually cannot be replaced by citizens choosing freely among various competitors in elections. (Britannica, "Authoritarianism")

This definition of authoritarianism is used as it can clearly be seen reflected in the two novels, and following the scope of this thesis it covers the major aspects I wish to discuss.

Furthermore, the word “authoritarianism” is a word most readers will have some level of understanding of. Thus, I wished to establish the definition I use for the word throughout my paper.

1.1.1 Research questions

In order to support and argue for this thesis, there are a handful of research questions that need to be answered. These are as follows: firstly, what are the responsibilities of the individual within an inhumane and all-consuming authoritarian regime? Secondly, who are the ones, if any, that can oppose authoritarian regimes? These questions form the core of my argument and drive my investigation of Orwell’s depictions of action and inaction in the face of authoritarianism. These two questions relate to my thesis, as the answers to these two questions, in particular, form the arguments for the thesis as a whole. To help reinforce my claim regarding Orwell’s views on individuality, I seek to answer a third question of whether or not Orwell depicts the possibility of maintaining and developing the individual within these depicted authoritarian societies? The final question I wish to raise for my thesis is related to Orwell’s relevancy in the twenty-first century, as why should readers in the twenty-first century read Orwell’s mid-twentieth century novels?

The first three questions relate directly to the topic at hand, discussing the nature of individualism as present in the two novels and how individuality relates to questions of responsibility, rebellion, and complicity. The final research questions relate more to the nature of Orwell’s political literature, and its relevance across time. Although there may be many answers to why one should read Orwell now, this thesis aims to use the first three questions as springboards into the discussion of Orwell’s relevance – as the answer to these three questions will also be answers to the reason for reading Orwell.

Why should one care about the topic of individuality within Orwell’s literary works? One of the major reasons for the importance I would place on this topic is that this question of individuality versus adherence to a collective is an issue that most people living in modern society face, and by answering how this is relevant in Orwell’s fiction one can start applying it to issues that may be closer to home in the twenty-first century. As an example, the question

of individuality versus collectivism remains relevant to the process of positioning oneself within a society to this very day: where is the line between maintaining my individuality versus conforming to the wishes of the collective? This question of individuality and collectivism can be found in many aspects of life from gender identities to the critical judgment of one's own government.

1.2 Orwell's life

Before diving into the discussions of theory and the novels, I wish to devote some time to outlining Orwell's life in order to establish the importance of certain aspects of Orwell's personality and political journey. Orwell attempted to follow an academic path in life, but failed to fit in with his upper-class peers. After abandoning the academic route, Orwell followed in his father's footsteps by taking up a position as a civil servant in English Burma – more precisely as a police officer. It was during this service that Orwell would develop a key element of his political identity, an aspect that would be reflected and explored in many of his later novels: his general dislike of any authoritarian regime. Orwell took issue with the consolidation of power amongst a small elite or a singular person. The events Orwell experienced in Burma, the sightings of the abuse of power exerted by him and his fellow Brits, would be a formative experience in Orwell's journey towards a political identity.

The short stint in Burma would be one of many important events in Orwell's political life, forming his general political opinions and attitudes, especially around imperialism. After returning from Burma, Orwell would continue developing his political ideology and general topics of discussion within his novels by spending years living in poor conditions around Europe and his motherland of England. The experiences here would lead him to write his first published work, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, an autobiographical depiction of the lives of the poor in these two landmark cities in Europe.

Orwell's next publication, his first novel *Burmese Days*, would be published a year later in 1934 – although to some resistance in the British empire. This novel would see a stylistic shift from his earlier publications in that the novel was not entirely autobiographical, rather consisting of a story of the British timber merchant John Flory's life in British Burma towards the end of colonial rule. The novel was first published in America, as the British publishers were worried the novel's critique of British rule in Burma was likely to foster

harsh responses in England (Meyer 8). This first novel would set the tone for all novels that followed, gritty depictions of political issues explored through a combination of experience and fictional stories.

The next event of importance to this thesis is Orwell's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, in which Orwell fought against the Nationalists. There Orwell experienced the infighting amongst the socialist camps, in which Orwell and others would end up labelled as fascists by the soviet socialist forces. Orwell would later attribute this to the soviet forces' "suppressing the revolutionary idealism that had motivated so many volunteers to fight" (Rae 252). Orwell argued that the Soviets were more interested in the control of the people, and strengthening relations with "capitalist democracies, on whose support it will depend should Hitler turn his sight towards Russia" (Rae 252). This would be the spark of Orwell's critical view of the Stalinist regime. This newfound mistrust of Stalinist Soviet would be an inspiration for his later novels such as *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell's distaste for Stalin's regime is perhaps most apparent in the iconic final line of *Animal Farm*, a novel serving as an allegory for the Russian revolution of 1917, "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again: but already it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell 202 *AF*). With this, Orwell likely refers to the difficulty he saw in separating the fascists of Europe and Stalin's Soviets.

This comparison of the two regimes would later return as one of the sources of inspiration for Orwell's best known and most culturally impactful novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this novel, Orwell again expresses his distaste for totalitarian regimes and the dangers of unchecked political powers. Reading the novel now, in the twenty-first century, it is difficult to distinguish whether the governing forces of Oceania are based on Nazi Germany or the Stalinist Soviet Union. Orwell would, however, never get to see his political masterpiece of fiction rise to the cultural impact it has today, as he died in 1950 due to tuberculosis.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

It may seem contradictory to claim that my thesis focuses on individualism, yet argue for the failings of the individual as it is depicted in two given Orwell novels. The concept of individualism is an enormous one, so I wish to narrow it down to a more specified definition

of individualism within politically compromised situations. I seek to accomplish this by establishing a theoretical framework that encompasses the specific issues that arise in the clash between individualism and politically compromised situations, particularly authoritarian states. The primary source I draw upon for my theoretical framework is Hannah Arendt and her discussions in *Responsibility and Judgement*. In the following section I give a brief definition of individualism, as the term can be interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Following this, I delve further into the theoretical framework and why it is of importance.

The concept of individualism has been explored by multiple scholars, who often explore either what aspects make people individuals or how individualism comes to be and evolves within a society. An example of one such scholar is Georg Simmel, who explores both the philosophical and sociological aspects of individualism. Simmel divides individuality into four main categories: epistemological individuality, ethical individuality, structural individuality, and cultural individuality (Müller 16). Epistemological individuality tackles the questions of “what makes a human being capable of living an individual existence?” (Müller 16), or the questions that individuals must ask themselves. The step above the epistemological level is ethical individuality, or the questions of what modern individuality is and how it can be achieved. The epistemological and ethical combine to form what Simmel considers the philosophy of individuality. The sociology of individuality, on the other hand, is comprised of structural and cultural identities. These fields study the “social structure of society to find out whether there are chances for freedom and individuality” (Müller 16). Furthermore, Simmel points to the cultural impacts on the individual and how the culture impacts the formation of an individual identity. This last aspect of individualism, the sociology of individuality, can be seen as often being more prevalent in especially Asian countries. These countries stand contrary to the rugged individualism, a core idea of American culture placing heavy emphasis on personal liberty and self-reliance (Britannica, “Individualism”), that is apparent in American society; in many Asian countries the goals of the collective take precedence over the goals of the individual. This is not to say that in these communities there is no individuality, for there certainly is, but this individuality is often more pressured to adjust itself according to the goals of the community, whether it be local, government or just family, rather than adjusting based on personal goals. Countries such as China and Japan have cultural ideals that put heavy emphasis on harmony, and striving to create a harmonious community rather than achieving personal goals. This is, however, only one of the many ways

one can discuss individuality and individualism in a theoretical light. Others have attempted to relate individualism to practical situations, often explored through situations similar to the ones depicted in *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

One often sees the question of individualism raised within the sphere of politics. Here all aspects of individualism are applied, combining philosophical, sociological and ethical considerations of individualism to most often either support or discredit the importance of individualism. Individualism is, however, rarely discussed within politics on its own, as individualism is consistently seen in contrast to its opposite: collectivism. In politics these two fields are often discussed together as they are two sides of the same story, being opposites of each other as one puts the goals and freedom of the individuals over the goals and freedoms of the collective, and vice versa. The political discussion of individualism can be observed in the society around us today, but also within the confines of historical and fictional authoritarian regimes. The clash between individualism and collectivism will often take center stage when discussing political extremes.

As I stated above, the primary source used to draw the theoretical framework is Hannah Arendt's *Responsibility and Judgement*, which was a follow-up to her previous publication, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which was an account of the Eichmann trials shortly after the Second World War. In her follow-up, Arendt primarily defends her previous comments surrounding the Eichmann trials, through discussions of the responsibilities of the German people during the Nazi regime, and reiterates our ability to judge those actions taken and not taken. Where this discussion interacts with my thesis surrounding individualism is in Arendt's reflection around people in extreme conditions, much like Winston and Flory and their moral obligation to act. Arendt does not explicitly discuss the question of responsibility in relation to individualism, yet there is a clear connection to be found between her discussions of responsibility and complicity and the struggles individuals face in politically challenging situations. At the core of Arendt's discussion regarding responsibility is the question of what one should do when one finds oneself in a totalitarian state. Arendt sees two different outcomes: one can uproot everything and escape the totalitarian state by fleeing to some neighboring country, or one can become a part of the collective system. Here again, you are given two options, according to Arendt: one can either become a complicit part of the system or one can attempt to change the system

from within (Arendt 44-45). Based on these discussions, one can draw a clearer picture regarding Arendt's views on the collective versus individual debate. It seems that Arendt could be placed somewhere in the middle as she is critical of both individualism and collectivism. Arendt calls for a collective that is comprised of thinking individuals, as she sees flaws in both blind complacency towards a collective, as well as in rugged individualism. Despite how politically powerless this thinking collective may be under a dictatorship, Arendt argues that they still hold power through their acts:

We have only for a moment to imagine what would happen to any of these forms of government if enough people would act 'irresponsibly' and refuse support, even without active resistance and rebellion, to see how effective a weapon this could be. It is in fact one of the many variations of nonviolent action and resistance – for instance the power that is potential in civil *disobedience* (Arendt 47-48).

The solution being found through a combination of collectivism and individualism can be made most clear by looking at Arendt's judgement of both those who fled Germany and those who were passive participants. What responsibilities does the individual have when faced with extreme conditions? Arendt argues that individuals are responsible for bringing change: one can't become complicit and hide behind "I was only following orders" or "I couldn't have changed anything." The solution is found, according to Arendt, in a collective that is composed of thinking individuals. Arendt is fully aware of the limitations of the individual stating, "no man, however strong, can ever accomplish anything, good or bad, without the help of others" (Arendt 47), and that those without political power were to an extent exempt from the same moral judgement (Arendt 45). But these limitations can be counteracted through a collective with a shared ability for moral judgement.

Problems arise in cases of political extremes, when individual choices and values clash with the authoritarian desire to consolidate power amongst a small group. One of the most central aspects of authoritarianism is the need for obedience towards a given regime's rules. This goal of controlling aspects of society to ensure obedience towards authority does not mesh well with the overarching theme of individual control and choice, and authoritarian regimes often restrict the opportunities of the individual. Despite individualism's contrast to authoritarian regimes, there was a wave of authoritative regimes being established throughout the twentieth century. Arendt attributes this wave to the changing societal structures of modern society, a society built on a sense of "normality" and uniformity. Furthermore, Arendt

argues that in these conditions the failure to “challeng[e] societal truths” (Niemi 54) leads people to fail to act as individual thinkers, establishing the perfect society for authoritative regimes to reign as they are dependent on total dominance over the inhabitants. This line of argumentation shows one of the inherent struggles of individualism: if everyone acts in the best interest of the individual, how does one maintain peace and cooperation within a society?

It can thus be said that Arendt viewed complacency as a major component in the spreading of totalitarian regimes in Europe. Niemi quotes Arendt stating, “Eichmann was not a diabolic mastermind, but instead his evil actions sprang from his ‘inability to *think*’” (Niemi 54). In Arendt’s eyes, the actions of Eichmann were a result of the society he grew up in, a society in which people were expected to remain complacent towards society around them. According to Arendt, this claim of only being “a cog in a system” (Arendt 31) only serves to shift responsibility from the individual to the collective. The attempts to hold all of Germany responsible will effectively whitewash those individuals who actively committed the horrible crimes in question, “for where all are guilty, no one is” (Arendt 21). Furthermore, this claim of innocence through an action being the work of a massive collective, rather than an individual, can be rebutted through asking why someone became or continued being a cog in a system.

One of the central aspects of the clash between individualism and political extremes is the forcible actions that follow. Here the two chosen texts do well to show more exactly how these situations play out. In an authoritarian state, the state forces its inhabitants to make difficult choices. This choice boils down to a question of survivability and individualism. Do you uphold your individual views and morals, or do you forsake these values in order to conform to the society around you? Arendt shines a light on this internal struggle through her discourse on the options of the average German people. They observed the immoral actions directed towards minority groups and those who didn’t conform to the new status quo installed by the Nazi regime. The actions of the state thus forced a choice for its citizens: either conform and remain silent, accepting the status quo, or take action towards fixing what they perceive as morally unjust. This internal discourse of action versus inaction is reflected in Orwell’s texts, for example with Flory. Flory sees himself as a friend of Dr. Verasami, yet does very little to help his friend improve his position in society. Flory seems to choose conforming, remaining silent when the other club members berate the locals. The reason for this choice is that if Flory were to take a stand for his friend, he would himself face

consequences. This internal struggle that Flory faces is discussed throughout the novel, with Flory often ending his internal discourse by damming his own cowardice. Flory refuses to act on what he sees as morally wrong in fear of social reprimands.

The choices that these authoritarian political extremes would force a citizen to make do not necessarily have to be between complacency and counter-action, though. As depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the totalitarian state of Oceania forces its citizens to participate in various mental aerobics in order to avoid committing thoughtcrime as citizens are routinely asked to hold two contradictory thoughts in their minds. Complacency is actively used by the Party officials in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a means for societal control. The proles, Orwell's representation of the blind collective masses, account for roughly eighty-five percent of the population, yet, much to the frustration of Winston, they remain passive. This inaction from the proles is explained to be a result of the Party giving the proles more or less personal liberty to do as they wish. This freedom pacifies the proles, and as Winston ponders, "Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (Orwell 74 1984). The proles are too preoccupied by other trivial matters, so they don't see how oppressive the Party is, as we see when Winston hears a great commotion in the proles' quarters and rushes over to see if it is the start of a revolution, only to see some prole women fighting over a cheap saucepan. This inaction from both proles and Party members is partly attributed to Oceania constantly being at war with one of the other superpowers. As for the hierarchy of Oceania to survive, the citizens must "have the mentality appropriate to a state of war" (Orwell 200 1984), which brings the added benefit of never having excess resources that can make people's lives easier which would allow for personal growth. No individual can grow and reflect on their surroundings when their life is a constant fight for food and water.

Despite the difficulties, there were those who did not follow the orders of the Nazi regime. Arendt points to those who refused to kill, not out of following the biblical commandment of "'Thou shalt not kill,' but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer- themselves" (Arendt 44). This internal discourse, or thinking, as Arendt calls it, is the leading force that the individual can fall back upon when they find that "common law fail[s] to guarantee civilized action or the protection of human rights" (Niemi 50). The connection between this statement and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is quite clear, as much of the novel takes the form of internal discussions of Winston as he attempts to weave his way

through Oceania. The connection becomes more shrouded when approaching *Burmese Days*, as the conflict of Flory is one purely based around societal norms and values. Winston faces a real danger in his fictional world, as the Party is shown to have the capacity to remove anyone from history, showing that a single unremarkable individual poses no real threat to the Party. Flory, on the other hand, is stuck in a constant battle between staying true to his values and ideals or conforming to the values of the other Englishmen.

It must be stated that the conflict of both novels could be entirely circumvented if the protagonist were able to remain complacent, but in both novels a factor beyond their control leads them towards individualism rather than complacency. In the case of Flory, it is the arrival of Elizabeth whose affection leads Flory towards expressing his individual values when in her company, whereas in Winston's case the drive towards individualism is mostly led by his inner monologue and faint memory of things having been different.

The next two chapters will be devoted to conducting a deeper dive into each of my chosen novels. Firstly I will establish important background information for each separate novel, before diving into the analysis of each novel. Through the analysis of both novels, I will show how they separately depict the struggles between the individual and authoritarian society. This analysis will be conducted through a combination of literary evidence and usage of Arendt's discussion. Following the two chapters devoted to each novel, there will be a chapter devoted to the comparison of the two novels, as the discussion of the similarities between the two texts will further reinforce my thesis of Orwell's political stance.

2 Burmese Days

2.1 Introduction

Looking at Orwell's first publications, one sees a clear trend that would continue throughout his literary career, namely his tendency to focus his works on a distinct political issue. The first trace of this is seen in his first published book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, a memoir of his experiences living in the lower echelons of society in both Paris and London that serves to expose the poor conditions of those worse off in life. A year later, Orwell would publish his first full-length novel, *Burmese Days*, a combination of fiction and autobiographical experiences. The novel follows the final months of John Flory's life before he takes his own life. Flory works as a timber merchant in the British colony of Burma. Flory lives a dreadfully boring life, spending his time drinking, playing cards, and having pointless discussions with his fellow British citizens at the Clubhouse. This changes one day when in a spark of heroism, he saves the newly arrived Elizabeth Lackersteen, the unwed niece of the manager of the timber firm, from a water buffalo. The rest of the novel focuses on Flory's attempts and failures at winning Elizabeth's affection. Much of the conflict of the novel is correlated with complacency and individualism, as both Flory and Elizabeth take turns feeling their individual traits and values being disregarded by those around them. In this chapter, I will be focusing on the novel's depiction of individualism within a politically compromised situation. Firstly, I will discuss some important background information surrounding the novel and its production, as this information helps the understanding and reading of the novel and furthers my arguments. The core argument for this chapter revolves around the interactions between individualism and politically compromised societies and how this is reflected in the chosen novel. More specifically, I wish to discuss how the novel reflects the "give and take" nature of societies, where individuals must often forsake fragments of their individuality to ensure cooperation and safety in a collective. Furthermore, the setting of *Burmese Days* does not contain any outright authoritarian regimes that directly inhibit Flory, but I still wish to discuss this novel with individualism in the face of authoritarianism in mind. Whereas the authoritarian regime does not directly inhibit Flory and his actions, the actions he's left with are altered by the regime. Flory is stuck at a crossroads, as he has to either deal with the loneliness from forsaking the Club or the horrid attitudes and dullness of the Club. To counteract any possible confusion in regards to the text's relevancy to my claim of

individualism in authoritarianism, I wish to explain and define the term “politically compromised societies” and state why I choose to interpret the novel the way I do. Following this, I will move on to the core of the chapter, where I will be discussing *Burmese Days* in correlation to my main thesis on Orwell’s stance regarding the difficulties an individual faces when they oppose an authoritarian regime and the responsibilities of the individual when they find themselves in said regime with regards to maintaining individual thinking and judgment.

2.1.1 Background

Orwell’s bibliography is heavily influenced by his surrounding times and his political journey, and this was as true at the start of his literary career as it was at the end. As stated above, the novel is a combination of fiction and autobiographical elements from Orwell’s own life. Many of the autobiographical elements of the novel are taken from Orwell’s own time serving as a policeman in Burma. In his essay “Why I Write” Orwell pointed to his time in the Burman police as an important time in his formative years, as it “increased my natural hatred of authority ... and the job in Burma had given me some understanding of the nature of imperialism.” (Orwell “Why I Write” no. pg.). This understanding of imperialism and hatred for authority would shine through in *Burmese Days*, as the novel heavily criticizes the British imperial colonies. Orwell was especially critical of the isolating effect the colonial power held and the effects this isolation had on the individual.

The novel seems to have fallen out of favor in recent times, as most know Orwell for his cultural giants such as *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. *Burmese Days* was, however, quite controversial when it was first published (Meyers 8). Due to the negative attitude towards the British colonial powers, combined with the real-world inspirations of the story and events, the novel was at first held back from publication as British publishers were hesitant to publish it due to fear “it would give offense in Burma and India” (Meyer 8). It would, however, be published in the United States in 1934 before being published in England a year later following its reception in the United States (Meyer 8).

A logical consequence of the novel’s focus on an imperial state is the idea of orientalism. Orientalism is the study of all things Asian, from culture and art to the history of Asian lands. The term has in later times been used, primarily by Edward Said, to denote the generally reductive attitudes of western society towards the Asian continent. Amongst the

attitudes Said denounces is a general attitude of superiority held by officials like Arthur James Balfour. Said recounts a lecture held by Balfour at the House of Commons (Said 31), in which Balfour argues in favor of British rule in Egypt, stating that “you may look through the whole history of the Orientals in what is, broadly called, the East, and you never find traces of self-government” (Said 32) and goes on to say that the entirety of Oriental history is built on foreign rule (Said 33). Balfour uses this proposed history to justify British rule in Egypt. An issue with this stance is, according to Said, that Balfour gives no evidence that would indicate that the Egyptians want the English there, nor does he let the Egyptians tell their own history (Said 33). Furthermore, “any Egyptian who would speak out is more likely to be ‘the agitator [who] wishes to raise difficulties’ [rather] than the good native who overlooks the ‘difficulties’ of foreign domination” (Said 33). This lecture, according to Said, gives a clear indication of the superiority held by British imperial powers, the idea that those they control are dependent on the good faith of the British to improve these poor natives’ situation.

This idea of superiority and discussion of the benefits of British rule are discussed within the novel on multiple occasions. Superiority plays a major role throughout the novel, as the Club members view themselves as better than the “dirty natives” and Elizabeth thinks of them as beasts. Even Flory, our representative of modern-day respectable values, is corrupted by this idea of superiority. Despite seemingly loving the natives for their culture, he sees no issue with using the native women for their bodies and casting them aside as soon as a white woman appears in Burma. Furthermore, Flory and Dr. Veraswami argue on multiple occasions about the reasons for the British being in Burma. Flory, the pessimist, asks whether the British purely are “in this country for any purpose except to steal? It’s so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets” (Orwell 38 *BD*). Dr. Veraswami replies to this by pointing to all the improvements the British have brought with them. Veraswami’s words reflect the ideas of Balfour, praising the British for bringing improvements for the natives, keeping the peace and building out the infrastructure. Veraswami is similar to the “good native” (Said 33) in overlooking the flaws of British rule in favor of the benefits they bring: “they construct roads, they irrigate deserts, they conquer famine, they build schools, they set up hospitals, they combat plague, cholera, leprosy, smallpox, venereal disease” (Orwell 41 *BD*). These aspects of orientalism will be explored further during the analysis of *Burmese Days*, as they can be found throughout the narrative.

A final piece of important background information I wish to discuss is the historical context of the novel. As was stated earlier, the novel is semi-fictional, being based on the experiences of Orwell during his time in Burma. According to Stephen Keck, “Despite the fact that George Orwell clearly did not play a formative role in the history of Burma or the British Empire, he has been regarded as significant” (Keck 32). The British annexed what we today know as Myanmar, which they called Burma, following the Third Anglo-Burmese War in 1885. Following the annexation, the British faced several issues, from religious secularization to economic downfall and rising nationalism (Britannica, “The British in Burma”). Amongst the issues that afflicted British Burma was the British decision to enforce Christian or secular teachings in Burma, which led to a societal decline as long-time traditions were slowly disappearing (Britannica, “The British in Burma”). Another factor that led to further decline in Burmese society was the shift from an economy based on redistribution to one centered around the export of goods and resources for the benefit of the British (Britannica, “The British in Burma”). The final aspect of societal degradation was the rising wave of nationalism that spread across Burma. This nationalistic wave was spearheaded by the youth who had attended the secular British schools and ultimately led to a protest movement called Thakin movement, an ironic name as the word “Thakin” was an honorary title the Burmans had to use when addressing the British (Britannica, “The British in Burma”). The movement ultimately achieved Burmese separation from India, as Burma had been made a province of India during its original annexation, receiving its own constitution (Britannica “The British in Burma”).

2.1.2 “Politically Compromised situations”

My thesis focuses on authoritarianism and similar politically compromised situations, a description that may seem odd to give a British colony. To clear up this potential confusion, I wish to explain and present my arguments as to why I feel the description fits the situation that is presented in the novel. The central conflict affecting individualism in politically compromised situations, like authoritarianism, is the repression of individuals’ ability to think, express or enjoy freely. This clash between the individual and the wish to belong was discussed within the theoretical framework, primarily through the question of complacency towards the majority. And it is namely this that one sees much of in *Burmese Days*. If we were to use Arendt’s example of what the individual can do in a politically complicated

situation, we face some difficulty placing Flory within her paradigm: Flory does not possess the “ability to [automatically] exchange one system of values against another” (Arendt 44), as he judges the values of his fellow Club members to be abhorrent, but he fails to become a “nonparticipant” (Arendt 44) remaining a member of the Club and suffering in silence. Arendt argued that the reason for nonparticipants refusal to cooperate came from an internal “unwillingness to live with a murderer-themselves” (Arendt 44). An example of this inner monologue happens when Flory lays awake on a warm night thinking

Cur, spineless cur’ Flory was thinking to himself; ... ‘sneaking, idling, boozing, fornicating, soul-examining, self-pitying cur. All those fools at the Club, those dull louts to whom you are so pleased to think yourself superior- they are all better than you, every man of them. At least they are men in their oafish way. Not cowards, not liars. Not half-dead and rotting. But you- (Orwell 62 *BD*)

From this “soul-examination,” as Flory calls it, we see the difficulty of labeling Flory: he is rife with an internal conflict of disagreeing with the systems of value, as Arendt calls it, that have been put in place at the Club, yet he remains a complicit member to counteract the potential loneliness of the jungle. Throughout much of the novel Flory remains stuck in his ways, rotting away in his self-pitying cowardice, too scared to stand up for his friend or leave the other Club members behind, yet still considering himself to be above his fellow Club members at some moral level.

One of the continuous sources of conflict within the novel is the gathering point of all the British citizens who live in Burma, the Club. Here all of Flory’s fellow countrymen gather to play games, drink and discuss the goings-on in Kyauktada. It is at the Club we get to see the effects of complacency in favor of belonging most clearly shine through in characters beyond Flory. There are few who stand out more than Ellis, an angry, hateful racist stationed in Burma. By being the loudest at the Club, Ellis is able to affect the other members of the Club into sharing his values. This, however, changes after the revolt of the Burmans and the subsequent heroic actions of Flory to put an end to the riot. Before the riots, there were few other than Flory who were in favor of extending Club membership to natives. However, their opinions seem to shift after the riot towards being open to inviting one of Flory’s native friends.

The European Club plays a major role in the novel, as pointed out by scholar Ralph Crane, who focuses on the effects of the Clubs depicted in Foster and Orwell's works, and how these clubs exist to "sustain an isolated or remote (in all its myriad meanings) community which fears for its survival outside its enclosing borders" (Crane 19). Crane goes on to compare the Club to islands and states that the club functions as a "'island' microcosm within a larger framework of colonial isolation" (Crane 19). To extend on what Crane discusses, I aim to show how the Club illustrates the politically compromised situation in *Burmese Days*.

The importance of the Club is established early in the novel when Flory introduces the town of Kyauktada, exclaiming that "when one looked at the Club ... one looked at the real centre of the town. ... the European Club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain" (Orwell 15 *BD*). The combination of the Club's importance to social status and Flory's mismatching values to the other Club members serves as the source for many of the conflicts and resulting loneliness and isolation Flory feels. This somewhat gets solved when Elizabeth arrives as Flory finally has someone with whom he can "talk, simply to talk! ... when you have existed to the brink of middle age in bitter loneliness, among people to whom your true opinion on every subject on earth is blasphemy" (Orwell 120 *BD*). This question of loneliness is important for my reading of the novel. As I discussed in the theoretical framework, the question that often arises in politically compromised situations is whether one remains complicit towards one's surroundings or stays true to one's own moral values and abandons the society one is moving towards. Flory is shown to prefer a level of complicity, as despite considering Dr. Veraswami his friend, Flory remains quiet when Ellis berates the locals and Veraswami in particular. Flory, like many of the Germans Arendt discusses, remains complicit in order to maintain the group identity and the protection it brings.

It must, however, be said that it is not only the European Club that serves as a reflection and stand-in for the politically compromised relationship between Burma and Great Britain. The premise of the novel could be argued to be a depiction of a politically compromised situation as the novel is partly a commentary on colonialism and the colonial power. The native Burmans find themselves in constant hardships. They find themselves in their own country – yet hold no real power. The entire framework of colonial powers,

especially the British variant, constitutes elements very comparable to authoritarian regimes. There are many elements of society used to describe the authoritarian state that coincides with the historical colonial powers, namely the concentration of power in a small group, which demands a blind submission towards authority from its subjects. Furthermore, it is depicted in the novel that there is no ability to change the seats of power from the outside without the use of violence. Lastly, there's the disinterest in the actions of the individual as long as they remain submissive to the laws of those in power – shown by the British allowing the Burmans to continue their traditional and religious practices as long as they kept in line with the laws.

2.2 Conformity or solitude

A key aspect of the European Club that is present in *Burmese Days* is its exclusivity, a distinction that is present from the first introduction of the Club. The first description of the Club is given by Flory, who states that the Club was “the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain” (Orwell 15 *BD*). Furthermore, Flory describes that “it was the proud boast of Kyauktada Club that, almost alone in Burma, it had never admitted an Oriental” (Orwell 15 *BD*). The importance of this point is further reinforced when one inspects what purpose the Clubs had, namely “the main focus of social life ... those who failed to join were considered outcasts” (Crane 18). The Club serving as the social hub for the entire village of Kyauktada brings with it a palpable political power to change various aspects of village life, a power that is withheld from the natives. Early in the novel the idea of admitting a native is aired by Westfield, one of the more complacent Club members, stating “Got to put up with it, I suppose, ... We're about the last Club in Burma to hold out against 'em” (Orwell 20 *BD*). Hearing this Ellis reacts in his usual way, going on a hateful tirade, “We are; and what's more, we're damn well going to go on holding out. I'll die in the ditch before I'll see a nigger in here” (Orwell 20 *BD*). Ellis' rants often shine through with remnants of orientalism, as he often refers to the natives as “dirty” and lesser beings, his nickname for Dr. Veraswami being “Dr. Very-slimey” (Orwell 20 *BD*). In Ellis's eyes, the British are superior to the natives, thus it only makes sense that the British should hold a superior position in society. This air of superiority reinforces Ellis's reaction to anything that would challenge this superiority, such as the admission of a native to the Club.

What's interesting about this scene is how it shows both the exclusivity of the Club and its reinforcement of an orientalist view of British superiority, as well as the fact that it is one

of the earliest scenes to show the complacency we see in the Club members. The complacency in question is shown primarily through Westfeild's response to Ellis' angry rant, as he remains quiet before stating, "Not worth while quarreling. Too hot" (Orwell 22 *BD*). This lack of real response or challenge is echoed by Flory, who remains passive while Ellis berates and degrades the only "friend" Flory has. This is one of the many scenes in which Ellis berates Dr. Veraswami in front of Flory, in other scenes making lewd suggestions regarding Flory and Veraswami's friendship. On all but one of these interactions, Flory remains passive, either leaving the Club or staying quiet. The only time Flory interjects is when the Club members are discussing the admission of a native, to which the other members grow increasingly annoyed at Flory for remaining steadfast about the admission of Dr. Veraswami. After the other members berate both Flory and Dr Veraswami, Flory snaps back with "Oh, shut up! I'm sick of the subject. Veraswami's a damned good fellow – a damned sight better than some white men I can think of." (Orwell 203 *BD*). Flory's defense of his friend fails to bring any change, however, as the biggest thing it accomplishes is making Ellis nickname Flory "nigger's Nancy Boy" (Orwell 212 *BD*) – an old saying used to refer to homosexual men. Here it is shown that, despite both members being British, Ellis maintains a certain level of superiority over Flory. This sense of superiority stems from the two men's differing attitudes towards the natives, as Flory fails to conform to the generally established attitudes of superiority that are present at the Club. The question that then arises is why does Flory so often decide to remain silent when his one and only friend is being mistreated and misrepresented? The answer to this can be found when analyzing the purpose of the Club. The Club serves to "reinforce a collective identity" (Crane 18). The collective identity that is being reinforced is that of the British ruling class. Thus, to retain their social position, most of the characters remain complicit in order to avoid scandals at the Club. This is perhaps most clearly seen after the Burman riots towards the end of the novel, when Flory uses his newfound social status as the hero of the Club to champion the idea of inviting a native to membership. Flory uses his newfound honor amongst the other Europeans to praise Veraswami for his heroism in stopping the riots, restoring the good doctor's name, and "his election to the Club could be taken as assured" (Orwell 278 *BD*).

Seeing as the Club is a very isolated part of Kyauktada, it also pulls double duty, providing the British with a safe haven. This safety that the Club provides is mostly explored through the character of Elizabeth. There are two scenes in particular where Elizabeth shows

the safety that the Club provides the British. The first occurs when she watches the pwe-dance together with Flory, and while sitting in the crowd, Elizabeth ponders, “Why was she not back at the Club with the other white people?” (Orwell 109 *BD*). This scene comes to a boiling point when Elizabeth angrily storms off, not “feeling inclined to forgive him, [Flory],” until they reached the Club gate (Orwell 111 *BD*). On another occasion, when Flory attempts to push his appreciation of the Native culture on Elizabeth, who “really wanted to head straight back to the Club” (Orwell 133 *BD*), she again storms off in a rage after seeing what she views as the disgusting lives of the natives, and peace is only restored once they have resumed the “reassuring atmosphere of Club-chatter” (Orwell 139 *BD*). The safety of the Club is needed as, much to the chagrin of the Club members, the empire is slowly collapsing: “then the conversation veered back to the old, never-palling subject – the insolence of the natives, ... the dear dead days when the British Raj *was* the British Raj” (Orwell 32 *BD*). This discussion, as well as Mrs. Lackersteen’s comments that “We seem to have no *authority* over the natives nowadays” (Orwell 26 *BD*), both express the decline of British rule in Burma. These discussions, and Elizabeth’s disgust at seeing the natives, oozes with influences of British superiority. The perceived superiority Said discussed can thus be seen both in the words and actions of the British Club members. The orientalist ideal of the “good native” is also reflected in Dr. Veraswami who, even after being dishonored and exiled to a second rate town, “will never believe that a white man can be a fool” (Orwell 304 *BD*). Veraswami remains ever faithful to the British, despite their treatment of him.

The backdrop of the British colonial power functions similarly to an authoritarian state, demanding obedience to the law and authority of those few in power. The Club further serves as a substitute for the British colonial power, as said by Flory when he describes it as “the real seat of the British power” (Orwell 15 *BD*). In this position, what is the individual supposed to do? Flory appears quite unique in that he presents multiple approaches to the issue of opposing the authoritarian regime. At the start of the novel he shows the complacency many who would find themselves in such situations go towards as, despite “knowing” it to be wrong, Flory remains quiet to maintain the benefits of being part of the Club. Towards the latter portion of the novel, however, Flory also shows how the individual can go about changing a difficult situation. Flory remains a member of the Club slowly amassing influence. He uses this newfound influence to affect the other members of the Club, bringing change through altering the collective whilst retaining individual values. This is reminiscent of

Arendt's arguments regarding political power, as Arendt argued that the individual alone rarely holds the influence to affect those around them (Arendt 45). Furthermore, Arendt argues that if the individual gains said influence, they are morally obliged to attempt to alter the collective. In the beginning of the novel, Flory is quite disliked by the Club members, thus he holds no political power to change anything. Towards the end, however, he gains influence and thus attempts to use this newfound political power to alter the Club. A counter-argument that must be kept in mind is the question of what about outsiders? It must be remembered that despite being quite the outlier with regards to his personal opinions of the native, Flory remains an Englishman – thus having some level of power. It would be difficult to imagine a similar effect if Flory happened to be a native or Veraswami being the one to attempt to challenge the authoritative regime.

Our protagonist Flory has many individualistic traits that set him apart from the rest of the cast of the novel. These traits range from his personal values to his physical characteristics. As discussed above, his personal values differentiate him from the other British citizens stationed in Burma, and these values and attitudes towards the natives make him somewhat an outsider. Stephen Keck points out the autobiographical elements of Flory's characterization: "Flory ...portrayed the young Eric Blair as someone who was a loner, alienated from 'the Club' and all that it entailed" (Keck 34). Other similarities include their distaste for imperialism and their shared dislike for repetitive thoughts. Orwell would express this distaste for repetitiveness through Flory's reflection on his fellow Club members, "Was it possible that they could go week after week, year after year, repeating word for word the same evil-minded drivel Would none of them *ever* think of anything new to say?" (Orwell 31 *BD*). In his later essay "Politics and the English Language" Orwell outlines the guiding principles he follows when writing stating that, "This last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and vagueness generally" (Orwell "PEL" no. pg.).

Flory's individualistic traits do not, however, end at his attitudes towards the natives, as he is described as having a very distinct "hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth" (Orwell 14 *BD*). This birthmark serves as a constant reminder to Flory that he is who he is, as he is constantly aware of how he positions himself when talking to people to avoid showing his birthmark. It affects not

only his actions, but also the options Flory has. Arendt outlined the options the individual has when they find themselves in a politically compromised situation, and amongst the options was the option of accepting the new set of values as your own in order to become a complacent part of the masses. This is done to disappear into the “collective identity” (Crane 18) or to become a cog in the system in order to absolve any personal responsibility and judgment (Arendt 31). This is, however, not an option for Flory as, due to his birthmark, he remains forever identifiable within a group. Furthermore, akin to a cosmic punishment, his birthmark ultimately ends up being one of the final characteristics that drive Elizabeth away from him. After Ma Hla May causes a scene in the church, Elizabeth looks over at Flory – and without understanding a word of what Ma Hla has been shouting, she faces a realization:

[W]orse than anything, was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old. It was like a skull. Only the birthmark seemed alive in it. She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonoring, how unforgivable a thing it was. (Orwell 293 *BD*)

This revelation comes only days after Flory has saved Elizabeth and the other Englishmen from the riots, which had “made him almost a hero in her eyes. ... she forgave him everything, even Ma Hla May, because he had shown courage at the right moment” (Orwell 277 *BD*). After the church scene, Flory again asks Elizabeth if she could ever love him, to which she responds, “No, never, never! ... Never, never! I wouldn’t marry you if you were the last man on earth. I’d as soon marry the- the sweeper!” (Orwell 296 *BD*) All love that was there for Flory before has now disappeared, and she now thinks of him as a “beast!” (Orwell 297 *BD*), a description she had earlier used when thinking of the natives. Finally, as some sort of cosmic twisted joke, after Flory shoots himself, when Veraswami inspects Flory’s lifeless corpse, it’s noted how, “With death, the birthmark had faded immediately, so that it was no more than a faint grey stain” (Orwell 302 *BD*). The birthmark is by no means the sole reason for Elizabeth’s hatred for Flory, but it is what reveals his ugliness in his final moments for her. Flory’s birthmark, and the disgrace at the church, leave him “less than a man ... The instinct was deeper than reason or self-interest, she could no less have disobeyed it than she could have stopped breathing” (Orwell 298 *BD*). Ultimately, Flory’s birthmark makes him incapable of hiding his identity, something that comes back to bite him.

Despite seemingly placing himself on a higher plane than his fellow British Club members, such as Ellis, Maxwell, or MacGregor, Flory can be compared to them in many ways. Perhaps the characteristic that shines through the greatest is that despite his apparent appreciation for the Burmans, he continues to exploit them and their resources – most pressingly present in the novel through the character of Ma Hla May. Flory uses Ma Hla May for her body, and after making love “he turned away, jaded and ashamed, and lay silent with his left hand covering his birthmark. ... He buried his face disgustedly in the pillow” (Orwell 53 *BD*) After sex Flory grows increasingly angry, in the end comparing Ma Hla May to a prostitute (Orwell 54 *BD*). It must be stated that Ma Hla May is by no means a saint, believing “lechery was a form of witchcraft ... each successive embrace sapped Flory’s will” (Orwell 53 *BD*). Both characters continue their self-destructive habits – the difference being that Ma Hla May does it for the social status of being a “‘*bo-kadaw*’ - a white man’s wife” (Orwell 52 *BD*), whilst Flory does it out of a sense of loneliness and self-pity. This is until Elizabeth arrives, and Flory tosses Ma Hla May to the side at the arrival of a white English woman.

Much of Flory’s distaste for the other Club members can be said to be due to the mismatch between their attitudes towards natives and his and, to an extent, the feeling of needing to suppress his own feelings to gain their company. This feeling leads Flory to a loneliness that lasts until Elizabeth arrives in Burma. In his excitement to have someone with whom he can talk, Flory tries to show Elizabeth his appreciation of both the Burman and general culture – something Elizabeth has grown to hate after growing up in poor conditions with her painter mother in France.

He did not realize that this constant striving to interest her in Oriental things struck her only as perverse, ungentlemanly, a deliberate seeking after the squalid and the ‘beastly’ He had not grasped even now with what eyes she saw the ‘natives’. He only knew that at each attempt to make her share his life, his thoughts, his sense of beauty, she shied away from him like a frightened horse. (Orwell 138 *BD*)

In his delusions, Flory has created a perfect life with Elizabeth, believing her to be somehow different from the other hateful British stationed in Burma. Unlike Flory, the reader sees that Elizabeth is by no means any different from the other British citizens, preferring the lush life

at the Club and seeing the natives as beasts. After the death of Flory, Elizabeth marries MacGregor, someone who “was a far better match than Flory” (Orwell 307 *BD*), and she lives her life as a woman whom the “the servants live in terror of” (Orwell 308 *BD*). In the end, Flory did not change Elizabeth – she comes to Burma hating the foreign and high-class society, and ends up living her life in high society whilst keeping her hatred for the natives.

Complacency and group identity are not something we see only expressed on the side of the British, however: the native Burmans are mostly delegated to being seen as one great big mass. Being oppressed, the natives have very few chances to bring change to their situation, having few options to seize power and their resources being siphoned by the British. The violent riots in response to Ellis’s attack on a Burman youth do well to shake up the status quo, despite being dispersed without having achieved their vigilante justice. In effect, what this scene accomplishes is to instill fear in the British citizens. Another scene that shows how the Burmans are slowly starting to rebel is the murder of one of the Club members. Maxwell, a lesser character within the novel, is at some point killed by a group of Burmans in a revenge-fueled rage, and his mutilated corpse is delivered to the Club. The murder of Maxwell serves as a wake-up call for the British, as it shows how they are not as godlike and untouchable as they might have hoped. They are fully aware that they are sitting in a decaying seat of power, as seen in their constant discussion of the “dear dead days when the British Raj *was* the British Raj” (Orwell 32 *BD*). With the murder of Maxwell and the riots, the natives have both been made aware of the potential power they possess but also shown that the British oppressors’ status as untouchable has started to show cracks.

2.3 Chapter Summary

Despite being a commentary on the evils of the Imperial state, the story of *Burmese Days* lends itself well to discussions of the individual in the face of an authoritarian state. Interestingly, the novel displays the effects of the authoritarian state on the individual from differing standings, as it depicts both an individual from the oppressing class through Flory but also shows the alternatives of the individual who is being oppressed through the actions and various devious plans conducted by U Po Kyin in his attempts at gaining entry to the Club. Examples of U Po Kyin’s actions include his responsibility for a riot that takes place in a neighboring village. This riot was put into motion so that U Po Kyin could claim the honor for disrupting it.

The novel, furthermore, shows the corrupting power of the authoritarian state, as depicted through Flory's spiral into loneliness when he fails to conform and, despite hating the actions of the other Club members, the many similarities he shares with his compatriots. Despite Orwell judging his early works, such as *Burmese Days*, to be "failures of various kinds" (Rodden and Rossi 32), he would return to the depiction of a lonely individual surrounded by systems of oppression which they despise at later points in his career. The final novel Orwell produced, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, shares this topic of resentful individuals trapped in systems of oppression beyond their control. There are multiple similarities between the stories explored in these two novels. In the next chapter, I will be taking a deeper dive into *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Following this I will compare my two chosen texts to find further proof of the original thesis regarding Orwell's stance on the individual facing an authoritarian state.

3 Nineteen Eighty-Four

3.1 Introduction

In Orwell's 1946 essay titled "Why I Write," Orwell outlined four major motivations for writing other than making a living. Amongst these motivational factors was "Sheer Egoism. A desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death" ("Why I Write" no. pg.). Few would argue against Orwell having accomplished this goal of remaining relevant after death. Perhaps most relevantly, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* lives on today both as a fantastic piece of literary semi-fiction, as the fictional setting and political systems are based on real-world events, and the massive impact the work has had on popular culture. Many terms from the novel, such as doublethink, Big Brother, and thoughtcrime, have moved from being aspects of the novel into becoming everyday terms. At its core, the novel is a story of a disgruntled party member and his internal conflict between complacency and individuality as he attempts to live his life in an increasingly hostile world. In the following chapter, I will be analyzing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* alone, with special emphasis on how the novel represents individualism when faced with the pressing nature of authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, I will explore how the novel portrays the responsibilities of the individual to act against a politically compromised situation. In the next chapter, I will be looking at my two chosen texts, *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and discuss how by combining these two stories from two differing points in Orwell's literary and political life, one gets a clearer picture of Orwell's political commitments. Furthermore, I aim to show how they together serve as better evidence for my thesis claim of change being brought forth by collectives composed of individuals rather than individuals on their own or complacent collectives.

3.1.1 Background for the novel

Before diving into the analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is essential to discuss the time when the novel was written, the period following the Second World War. The world had seen enormous destruction of people, land, and political values. There had also been two new major political boogymen, namely Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. These two political systems were likely an inspiration for the terrifying Party that Orwell depicted, an amalgamation of both regimes. Orwell gave a bleak depiction of a potential future, a dystopic depiction of a war-torn world where states seemingly spend equal amounts of time being at

war with each other and their own citizens. The Party goes to great lengths to dominate the citizens of Oceania with the end goal of prolonging their control.

The idea of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being a warning has been the source of much scholarly debate. An example of scholarly intervention in this debate is Gorman Beauchamp, who states that it's "misguided to consider *1984* as prophecy" (Beauchamp 2). Orwell himself is quoted as saying, "I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe ... that something like it *could* arrive." (Beauchamp 3). With the developments of society that Orwell observed, especially the concerning rise of totalitarian ideas amongst the intellectuals, he sought to "draw these ideas to their logical consequences" (Beauchamp 3).

The reason for this warning may seem pointless to some, as most who live in the democratic world would never wish for totalitarian rule. This, however, was what Hannah Arendt showed to be misguided through her analysis of how totalitarian regimes sprung up. Arendt saw an issue in how the modern world had a societal tendency to lean towards complacency, which opened the doors for totalitarian regimes to seize power as people were too afraid to make personal judgments.

3.1.2 Invention into previous scholarly research

Due to the cultural impact that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has had, there is a vast amount of scholarly works within different fields that focus on the novel. The novel lends itself well to examinations of a variety of topics, from the individualism I am exploring to examinations of the usage of power and the panopticon put into practice. Bernard Crick discusses the important context surrounding *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Whereas Crick argues that the novel should be read as a Swiftian satire, I have chosen to bring parts of his discussion into my arguments: primarily Crick's discussion of mutual trust and its importance for the narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Crick discusses the importance of mutual trust for the narrative and how the destruction of trust is a deliberate act to ensure obedience and loyalty to the Party, rather than between individuals. I will be expanding on Crick's discussion of mutual trust through the relevancy trust plays in the narrative towards the retention of individuality. Winston and Julia's trust allows them to maintain their individuality, as when the trust

disappears, they become mindless complacent Party drones losing their once strong individualities.

In general, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* lends itself well to discussions within most fields of social sciences as Orwell's observations and reflections around society remain equally relevant 80 years after its original publication. An example of the usage of Orwell within social fields is Mehran Shadi's 2007 article "The principles of Newspeak or how language defines reality in Orwell's 1984". Within this article Shadi examines the Party's usage of Newspeak in order to exert a level of reality-bending. This article is of importance to my thesis as amongst Shadi's points of discussion is the importance of Newspeak in enforcing the collective identity of the Party. Through the limitation of language, the Party can effectively limit the range of thought and thus eradicate individuality. When there's no room for thought, there can be none who are different.

The final field of scholarly works I wish to discuss in relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is gender studies. An example of Orwell's representation within the field of gender studies is Blu Tirohl's article for the *Journal of Gender Studies* on the representation of sexuality within *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Tirohl examined the usage of sex within the novel as an act of rebellion and analyzed Orwell's depictions of women. Whereas Tirohl is more interested in the political act of sex and rebellion, I seek to show how the sexual relationship between Winston and Julia is both an act of political rebellion but also as a way for them to express and reiterate their individuality

3.2 Escaping Big Brother

The concept of individualism plays a significant role in the story of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, so much so that the first drafted title for the novel was "The Last Man in Europe" (Crick 149). Throughout the novel, we see individualism expressed and explored through multiple lenses, both from the perspective of our protagonist and also expressed through the side characters. Furthermore, the novel also explores varying levels of complacency towards the systems that have been put in place by the Party. In the following section, I will be analyzing choice scenes that explore the eternal dance between individual values and compliance with the values assigned by the Party. This is done to further supplement my argument regarding Orwell's stance on individualism in the face of authoritarian states. A factor in the choice of scenes to

analyze was their similarities to the chosen scenes analyzed in the previous chapter about *Burmese Days*.

At the center of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is Winston Smith, a disgruntled Outer Party member working for the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth. Winston serves as an “Everyman, a human consciousness we can readily identify with. . . . [who allows the reader to] approach Oceania through the eyes of a human being” (Gottlieb 56). It is through the eyes of Winston that we can approach the world of Oceania, but this means we have an unreliable narrator – for as is shown, the world of Oceania is constantly changing, history is not static, and the unconditional “truths” we hold such as “ $2+2=4$ ” are shown to be flawed in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A consequence of Winston being an unreliable narrator is that there is uncertainty regarding his descriptions of other citizens and society as a whole. Our personal views and values heavily drive our understanding of the world, thus Winston’s descriptions of his surroundings must be questioned. For my readings, I have chosen to take many of Winston’s descriptions at face value, despite his potential unreliability as a narrator. This was done because, seeing as Winston is the sole narrator, the reader is given no other frame of reference to approach the society of Oceania with.

Thinking back to the options put forth by Arendt for what the individual can do in an authoritarian state, we see that placing Winston within a category is somewhat more straightforward than it was for Flory in the previous chapter. Despite Winston being by no means characterized as a very rebellious hero, he still goes into active rebellion against the Party, whereas Flory remains mostly complacent throughout the novel. Winston, on the other hand, is conducting various rebellious acts from the first chapter. When Winston starts writing his diary he thinks, “This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp” (Orwell 8 *1984*). The writing of the diary is the first of many rebellious acts Winston will undertake, but he is not entirely sure as to why he writes it, considering that “Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him: or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless” (Orwell 9 *1984*). This decisive act of writing in the diary sets the plot of the novel in motion. In his act of writing the diary, Winston admits to having gone against Party wishes: “The Thought Police would get him just the same. He had committed the essential

crime that contained all other in itself. Thoughtcrime “(Orwell 21 1984). Following this act, Winston becomes more and more carefree: “*they’ll shoot me I don’t care they’ll shoot me in the back of the neck I don’t care down with big brother*” (Orwell 21 1984). In Winston’s eyes, the outcome of his life has already been determined, thus he is compelled to continue acting on his increasingly rebellious thoughts: starting an affair with Julia, trusting O’Brien, renting Mr. Charrington’s flat and seeking to join the Brotherhood.

At the center of Winston’s rebellious nature is his strong individualistic tendencies. Winston is continuously haunted by a feeling that “[e]verything had been different then” (Orwell 34 1984). This feeling, combined with his hatred for the Party’s restrictive power over the individual, fuels his rebellion. One of Winston’s central beliefs is the idea of “truisms,” as he states that “The solid world exists, it’s laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet ... *freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four*” (Orwell 84 1984). However, Winston’s beliefs regarding truisms do falter, as once caught by the Thought Police, Winston is tortured both physically and mentally to confront his “insanity”. Here O’Brien breaks all of Winston’s beliefs, leaving him a husk of a man, or “sane” as O’Brien refers to it (Orwell 265 1984). During the interrogations, the cracks in Winston’s mind start to show: he firmly believes the past is the past and cannot be altered, yet the past does not exist anywhere other than in records and people’s memories. Since the Party can alter the records at a whim and have complete control of people’s memories (Orwell 260 1984) through doublethink, they have, in essence, fastened an iron grip around reality. When the past is what the Party wishes, the present and future become inseparable. When the Party decides what gets written down, they can present themselves as the saviors of humanity. This constant reinforcement of the notion that the Party improves the lives of the citizens leads to complacency amongst the masses. In the near future, there will be no one who has lived in a world outside Party rule. Thus they will have no frame of reference to a different time, which would remove one of the reasons for rebellion.

Oceania is depicted as being a society built on demanding blind complacency and obedience from its citizens. The Party accomplishes this through having a monopoly on power, but O’Brien sets forth one significant difference between the Party and earlier states like the Russian communists: “we do not merely destroy our enemies, we change them” (Orwell 265 1984). The Party, having learned from earlier rulers like the Russian Communists

or the Spanish Inquisition, are not content with murdering or forcing confessions from those who oppose them, as this leads to martyrdom and the rise of further resistance: “for every heretic it burned at the stake, thousands of others rose up” (Orwell 266 1984). Through institutions like the Thought Police, combined with constant wars and breaking the trust between people, the Party has forced a complacency amongst the people, which leads to blind obedience to Party slogans and commands. Those who fail to comply with the will of the Party are doomed to commit thoughtcrime, and “Nobody ever escaped detection, and nobody ever failed to confess. When once you had succumbed to thoughtcrime it was certain that by a given date you would be dead.” (Orwell 107 1984). Winston is, however, shocked when he meets his neighbor Mr. Parsons in the holding cell, a man of whom he had earlier noted, “[Parsons], on the other hand, would never be vaporized” (Orwell 64 1984), owing to Parsons’ “imbecile enthusiasms – one of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom, ... the stability of the Party depended” (Orwell 24 1984). Parsons’ arrest can be said to give hope to Winston’s cause, as it shows how the Party has yet to achieve complete control of the individual’s thoughts when even the most devoted drudge is shown to commit thoughtcrimes.

However, this complacency amongst the citizens is not only demanded of the members of the Party, as they make up 15 percent of the population, but also of the proles. The vast majority of Oceania’s citizens are the proles, the working classes in charge of all types of manual labor. In his diary, Winston writes, “*If there is hope, ..., it lies in the proles. ...*” (Orwell 72 1984), as the Party could only be overthrown by the collective masses of the proles, as those who oppose the Party from within could only ever unite in twos or threes. This hope is, however, shown to be pointless, as the proles have effectively been pacified by the Party. The proles are afforded all the liberties taken away from Party members, the Party even encouraging natural instincts within the proles through spreading pornography amongst them. Winston is, however, fully aware of the extent to which the proles are made complacent: “They needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies. ... surely sooner or later it must occur to them to do it? And yet----!” (Orwell 73 1984). As long as the proles remain indifferent towards the Party, and can be spurred into patriotism when it was needed, the Party disregards the proles almost entirely: “Proles and animals are free.” (Orwell 75 1984). The proles represent the disinterested majority, being incapable of focusing on anything other than “specific grievances” (Orwell 75 1984). The proles are, much

to the chagrin of Winston, stuck in a paradox of “*Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.*” (Orwell 72 1984). The proles are the ones with the power to change society – yet they remain blind to their position in society, due to the influences and actions of Big Brother.

Despite Winston’s first impression, he is not alone in despising the Party and its oppression of the citizens of Oceania. Winston finds companionship in Julia, with whom he starts an illegal affair. Winston hated Julia from the first moment he saw her, assuming her to be an orthodox Party member following the Party doctrine of purity and chastity after seeing her Anti-Sex League sash (Orwell 12 1984). Whereas Winston’s rebellion against the Party is fueled by a strong individuality and desire for change, Julia is much more driven by her desires and personal freedoms. There are primarily two reasons for Julia’s rebellion: firstly, her longing for sex and all the carnal pleasures that follow, which the Party has attempted to outlaw, and secondly, her hatred of the homogeneity of a society that leaves no room for individuality.

After confessing her love to Winston, Julia shows her cunning by planning their first “romantic” getaway to the countryside. After following Julia’s carefully laid plan, Winston finds himself in the countryside with no telescreens or microphones visible around them – they are finally afforded a rarity in Oceania, the ability to be alone. The scene in the countryside plays an important role, as this scene serves to validate Winston’s trust in Julia. In their paper about sexuality as a weapon in the revolt, Blu Tirohl outlines three significant functions of the relationship between Julia and Winston. Firstly, it acts as an outlet for sexual needs and urges. Secondly, she is living proof of the failures of the Party to completely eradicate sex as anything other than reproduction. Finally, she gives Winston loyalty and trust, standing with him and proving that he is not alone (Tirohl 58). This second function is the one I am most interested in, as the Party has put heavy emphasis on turning sex into a duty to the Party and nothing more. The reasoning for this is, according to Tirohl, that the Party wishes to “sustain in its members a state that permanently anticipates pleasure and then channels that energy for its own purposes” (Tirohl 56). The Party has accomplished this to a large extent as they have succeeded in removing this sexual instinct, along with other natural instincts such as the parental one, in many of the citizens as “in the year 1984, reproduction is already widely referred to as a ‘duty to the Party’” (Tirohl 57) This shift in values is

reminiscent of Arendt's discussion, as Arendt points to those who can "exchange one system of values for another" (Arendt 44), as those who become complacent. This aspect of society is most apparent in the dichotomy between Winston's two lovers, Julia and Katherine. Whereas Julia simply "adores" the sexual act in of itself, not the love for another person or the duty to the Party, but rather the raw natural instinct (Orwell 132 *1984*), Katherine is depicted as "goodthinkfull ... stiffening as soon as he touched her, the way in which she still seemed to be pushing him from her with all her strength, even when her arms were clasped tightly around him" (Orwell 138 *1984*).

As a final point, before moving on, I wish to discuss the impact of Winston and Julia's separate rebellions. Winston seeks to rebel due to ideological differences from the Party, as he wishes for a world where the individual can flourish, whereas Julia's motivations for rebellion are at times much more selfish. One of the main reasons for Julia's rebellious tendencies can be said to be her wish for sexual pleasure itself. This then raises the question: Which of them, Julia or Winston, accomplishes something with their rebellion? An argument could be made for Julia's rebellious acts being more productive, as when Winston eventually is caught, his rebellion is snuffed out due to its being aimed more towards the Party itself. Julia, on the other hand, works to "corrupt" the other Party members, bringing chaos to the world of Oceania. Through their engagement in the sexual act, she shows the Party's failure to remove the sexual instinct. Furthermore, the act of having sex for sex itself would be an act of rebellion, or as Julia puts it, "When you make love you're using up energy; and afterwards you feel happy and don't give a damn for anything. They can't bear you to feel like that. They want you to be bursting with energy all the time" (Orwell 139 *1984*).

Julia is also shown to share some motivation with Winston in her wish for more individual identities. Julia is shown to be very unique in the collective society of Oceania, having very crass language and, much like Winston, Julia is shown to dislike those who "belong" (Orwell 128 *1984*). Julia's individuality shines through and expands once they rent the flat from Mr. Charrington, as they believe it to be a safe haven with no telescreen. Here Julia giddily shows off different beauty products she has procured, exclaiming,

Yes, dear, scent too. And do you know what I am going to do next? I'm going to get hold of a real woman's frock from somewhere and wear it instead of these bloody

trousers. I'll wear silk stockings and high-heeled shoes! In this room I am going to be a woman, not a Party comrade. (Orwell 149 *1984*).

The presumed safety of the flat allows Julia to explore her identity as a woman, something that is impossible in the society around them due to the constant surveillance. Due to the threat of being scrutinized at any time, the act of exploring your identity would indicate “ownlife” (Orwell 85 *1984*), which is dangerous as it expresses a thought outside the Party. This wish is mirrored by Winston, as when he sees Julia in the flat, he describes her as “not only very much prettier, but, above all, far more feminine.” (Orwell 149 *1984*). This femininity is what makes their actions in the flat rebellious. Through the exploration and expansion of her gender identity, Julia is expressing her identity as “Julia the woman” rather than “Julia the comrade”. This allows her to explore her individuality rather than being a part of the larger collective that is the Party. The Party opposes any expression of individuality because it would allow for questioning and reflection upon the society around them. Expressions of individuality undermine the Party doctrine of a collective identity.

O'Brien can be said to represent the Party and its wishes and goals. I have now gone to lengths exploring the ways in which the citizens of Oceania explore their individuality and rebel against the Party, but what reason for this attack on individuality is given within the novel? O'Brien explains one of the primary reasons why society needs to be a collective during the interrogation, “the individual is only a cell ... power is collective. The individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual. ... Alone – free- the human being is always defeated. It must be so, because every human being is doomed to die” (Orwell 276 *1984*). As O'Brien admits, unlike the earlier rulers, the Party does not lie to itself by claiming to be interested in anything besides power (Orwell 276 *1984*). During this interrogation it is also admitted, although not explicitly, that Big Brother is not a singular person but rather an ideological tool. As O'Brien says, every individual is doomed to die, whereas the collective put in place by the Party will remain in power long after the death of individuals such as Big Brother or O'Brien. This faith in the collective is seen through O'Brien's envisioning of the future: “if you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on the human face – for ever.” (Orwell 280 *1984*). O'Brien expresses the conflict between the individual and the collective from the side of the oppressor, as he is the representative of the Party. He further explains the way to counteract this “ultimate failure”, and states that the goal of the individual

should be to “escape from his individuality, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal” (Orwell 277 *1984*). Through the words of O’Brien, Orwell expresses how the collective is needed to bring change, as the individual remains powerless to oppose authoritarian regimes. Orwell can then be said to be aware of the potential pitfalls of both sides, as the collective can be used to limit or eradicate the individual, but the individual alone is powerless.

Bernard Crick outlines the destruction of mutual trust as one of the most important tools of the Party, as “individuality can only be destroyed when we are utterly alone. While we have someone to trust, our identity cannot be destroyed” (Crick 149). This trust creating individuality is also part of the reason Winston and Julia’s relationship is so dangerous to the Party. They have chosen, behind the back of the Party, to love each other, thus utilizing their individual power of choice whilst also further expanding their individuality in each other. Orwell plays with the concept of trust within the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as he depicts a world in which all levels of trust are erased. Trust plays a role on multiple occasions throughout the novel, as Winston constantly reflects on the level to which Party has severed the trust between citizens. Through Winston’s observations and reflections, the reader sees a society where trust is wholly eradicated and how this affects the citizens. The first instance of this the reader is exposed to occurs after Winston helps Mrs. Parsons. Winston leaves their apartment thinking, “Nearly all children nowadays were horrible. ... by means of such organizations as the Spies they were systematically turned into ungovernable little savages, ... it was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children” (Orwell 26-27 *1984*). This fright is in Winston’s words “for good reason”, and this is proved when Mr. Parsons, the model Oceanian citizen, is caught for thoughtcrime in his sleep and reported to the Thought Police by his own daughter. Despite being reported by his own flesh and blood, Parsons, in his dutiful obedience towards the Party, is proud of his daughter, saying, “I don’t bear her any grudge for it. ... it shows I brought her up in the right spirit, anyway.” (Orwell 245 *1984*). The effort the Party has placed into severing this trust between the individuals in Oceania furthers their control over the mind of the individual. As Crick states, the individual cannot be destroyed as long as we have someone we trust because then we have someone to interact with our identity unfolds. In the world of Oceania, the lack of trust between individuals, regardless of connection, colleagues, mother and children, wife and husband, leads to a feeling of loneliness for characters such as Winston. Those who do not fit

in or agree with the Party doctrine have no one to confirm their thoughts with to counteract the insanity that is loneliness. Thus as O'Brien says, it is "the act of submission which is the price of sanity. You preferred to be a lunatic, a minority of one. ... Reality exists in the human mind, ... Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, ... only in the mind of the Party which is collective and immortal" (Orwell 261 *1984*). For Winston, the question of lunacy is not what frightens him, but rather "the horror that he might be wrong" (Orwell 83 *1984*).

Part of Winston's work is to rectify different articles and documents to erase people who have recently become "unpersons" (Orwell 41 *1984*). The making of unpersons is in reference to someone who has been vaporized due to becoming a thought criminal or a shift in Party doctrine. The terror of the unperson is, however, not the ability of the Party to remove someone, as a state that seizes a monopoly on power can accomplish this. The terror arises from the demands the Party puts onto the remaining citizens when someone, regardless, has been made an unperson. For the society of Oceania to function, the central ideological tool of doublethink— for instance, simultaneously acknowledging that someone has existed, as their impact must be rectified, while also maintaining that they have never existed - is a necessity. Those who express too individualistic tendencies would all at some point be taken by the Thought Police, like Winston's colleague Syme. Despite being fully orthodox and zealous towards the Party, Syme is too intelligent, lacking a "saving stupidity" (Orwell 58 *1984*). The inevitable vaporization of Syme displays the severity with which the Party seeks to rule: orthodoxy and zealousness are not enough for safety; the Party demands a complete lack of individuality in favor of complete envelopment into the collective immortal identity of the Party.

Besides the lack of freedom and trust, the world of Oceania is depicted as a rather miserable place even for the most orthodox of citizens. Oceania is stuck in constant shifting wars with the two other superpowers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Eurasia and Eastasia. Once Winston joins the Brotherhood and gets access to Goldstein's manuscript, the mystical manuscript written by the first enemy of the Party Goldstein which exposes the Party, he learns the reason for these endless wars: "The primary aim of modern warfare ... is to use up the products of the machine without raising the general standard of living." (Orwell 196 *1984*). With the constant ongoing war, the states are able to "waste" consumption goods as a

means to control the citizens. When resources are in abundance, wealth would automatically be distributed, and as people enjoyed more leisure and security those who once were “stupefied by poverty would become literate” (Orwell 198 1984), and thus realize that the privileged few who held power served no function and they would be overthrown (Orwell 197-98 1984). The goal of the Party then becomes to keep Oceania in a constant war in order to ensure that there never are any surplus goods that could raise the people’s standard of living. This point is made early in the novel when Winston explains how “at any given moment there was some necessary article which the Party shops were unable to supply” (Orwell 51 1984). This constant lack is then revealed to be a deliberate action from the Party rulers.

The Party does not use the wars purely to destroy resources, as the war itself serves as a means to herd the populace – especially the proles. Much of the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is driven by hatred, as the lack of trust makes everyone a potential enemy, thus making fear and hatred the prevailing emotions of the citizens. Hatred serves as an overarching theme in the novel, as famously shown by the Two Minutes Hate sequence in the novel. The Two Minutes Hate is a near tribal ritual performed in Oceania. All ministry workers are brought together and exposed to propaganda. The ritual ends with all participants shouting obscenities, hiding and throwing shoes or any other object they can get their hands on towards a monitor showing the enemies of the state. However, as Winston states, “The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but that it was impossible to avoid joining in” (Orwell 16 1984). Even the most individualistic and introspective citizens, such as Winston, are incapable of not falling into the herd mentality of the collective. Winston can sometimes direct his hatred towards the Party, Big Brother, and the Thought Police, but this rarely lasts as he soon finds his “loathing of Big Brother changed into adoration” (Orwell 17 1984). This power of hatred is, however, not only used on the Party members, as this combination of fear and hatred is at times instilled in the Proles. The proles, whom Winston believes to be the key to defeating Big Brother, are usually indifferent towards the war as, “when left to themselves they are capable of forgetting for long periods that the war is happening” (Orwell 224-25 1984). The Party can, however, when it is necessary prod the proles into “frenzies of fear and hatred” (Orwell 224 1984). This periodic prodding of the proles is done to keep them pacified, as they are mostly left alone to live their lives in “peace”, intermittently broken up by attacks from the Eurasians or Eastasians. Thus

the foreigners remain the enemy of the proles rather than their real enemies: Big Brother and the Party, which keeps them working hard-manual labor.

The final aspect of the clash between the individual and the all-powerful regime I wish to discuss in direct relation to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is Newspeak and its impact on the individual and their resistance to authoritarian regimes. Mehran Shadi points to the importance of the less conspicuous acts done by the Party to force a collective identity – namely, the development of Newspeak (Shadi 181). Although not as explicitly graphic as the physical or psychological torture conducted by the Party, the corruption of language serves an equally important role on the Party’s road to total domination over the individual. Shadi establishes that to achieve the total control that an authoritarian regime wants, the ability to alter the “outer manifestation of an individual’s behavior” (Shadi 181) is not enough. Total control demands control of the individual’s mind, and manipulating their views of the world around them is also required. This can, according to Shadi, be acquired through commanding the language the individuals can use or their discourse (Shadi 181). The end goal of Newspeak is to eradicate all opportunities for expression of opinions other than Party opinions.

The combination of doublethink and Newspeak serves as the ideological backbone for the Party’s collective identity and strength, as with these two leading paradigms, the Party can gain command of a person’s inner-most thoughts. Although Winston’s earlier comments of “Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull.” (Orwell 29 *1984*), the Party has largely managed to gain complete control of people’s thoughts, as is proven in the end when Winston is assimilated into the Party ideology. Newspeak helps the Party enforce the collective identity through the limiting of language and discourse, as Syme proudly boasts, “the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought ... we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (Orwell 55 *1984*). This reduction of language helps accomplish the Party’s goal of complete orthodoxy, and “Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (Orwell 56 *1984*). This lack of consciousness can be seen to have taken control over Winston’s coworkers, as in the cantina Winston is incapable of distinguishing what a man a few tables over is saying – but he is completely certain that it is “pure orthodoxy” (Orwell 57 *1984*), going as far as thinking, “Winston had a curious feeling that

this was not a real human ... It was not the man's brain that was speaking, ... the stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech" (Orwell 57 1984).

With the development of Newspeak, not only does the possibility of thoughtcrime disappear, but also the exploration of individuality and the world around you. With the language being as restricted as it is, there ends up being no way to express the complexities of an identity. When the language does not allow for complex self-reflection, it shuts off the opportunity to expand one's identity. It is, however, not only the individual's inner workings that are affected by the restrictiveness of the language, but also their perception of the reality around them. O'Brien shows during the interrogation that through the logic of the Party, the "real" world does not exist anywhere other than inside the mind of the people (Orwell 261 1984). Then if the world exists nowhere besides the mind of people, the individual is made incapable of standing alone – as they have no way to express any opinion or understanding that is their own and not mandated by the collective identity of the Party.

The final aspect of Newspeak I wish to elaborate upon is the simplification of the language. In the words of Syme: "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" (Orwell 55 1984). This reduction of language helps the process of dumbing down the citizens, as seen in Parsons, who is described as an oaf who "could not follow the figures, but he was aware that they were in some way a cause for satisfaction" (Orwell 61 1984). When the citizens remain dumb they are more susceptible to the Party's demands of unconscious acceptance of why Big Brother's power. How can the individual question his situation and his standing in society and thus be made conscious of the need for rebellion if the language does not allow for this level of reflection?

3.3 Chapter Summary

The narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can then be said to focus on the constant struggle between the individual and the collective. This tug-of-war between individualism and collectivism is one that we see around us in everyday society, both in literature and the real world. Orwell excels in his depiction of how this conflict might devolve when experienced in a politically compromised situation. As Bernard Crick summarizes it, at its core, the story of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a depiction of Winston's struggles to maintain his individuality

(Crick 149) and his inevitable failure to retain individuality in the society of Big Brother's Oceania. Orwell further expands his introspection by exploring the rhetoric of the all-powerful regime and exposing the means they might employ to retain their power. It must be kept in mind that Orwell never wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to serve as a prophecy of what was to come but rather as a warning (Crick 149) for what can happen when individuality and language are bastardized and corrupted.

It is impossible to sit here reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* without acknowledging its relevance for many social issues that plague us in the twenty-first century. Living in the social media world demands huge amounts of introspective thought. People are constantly bombarded with news, facts, and opinions, which can serve as both a blessing and a curse: it leads to issues becoming more visible in other parts of the world, such as racial issues in the United States, but it also leads to people spreading fake news and information purely for the satisfaction of causing anger and hatred. This constant stream of information, unfortunately, leads some to become complacent, forming their opinions and thoughts purely through the internet instead of through their own experiences and thoughts.

The next chapter will be devoted to the comparison of my two chosen novels. This will be done to show their connections and how, by pairing them together, we can get a clearer view of Orwell's stance regarding individuality and collectivism. The chapter will then bridge the two novels together while also discussing their differences – as some of these differences are rather extensive and need to be acknowledged.

4 Comparison of Burmese Days and Nineteen Eighty-Four

4.1 Introduction

I have now analyzed both of my chosen novels, *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, discussing their ways of representing the role of the individual in politically compromised situations. In this chapter, I will be comparing these two novels, especially focusing on how, despite being published nearly 15 years apart, they share the same core theme of an individual who attempts to maintain their individuality in a problematic situation. Fifteen years may not seem too much in the sense of an author and their works, but these fifteen years were very turbulent years with Orwell's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the rise of regimes such as Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Thinking back to the introduction of my paper, the argument I set out to discuss was: *Orwell argues that the individual is helpless in defeating the authoritarian regime, and that for change to happen, there needs to be a conscious collective that opposes the authoritarian regimes.* This thesis has been kept in mind during the individual analysis and I have shown how this stance was reflected in the given texts. I wish to devote this chapter to comparing these two novels, showing how they reinforce the thesis when combined. This comparison aims to give further evidence to the thesis through the discussion of Orwell's choice of literary themes throughout his career. The fifteen-year gap between the two texts would be likely to have had an impact on Orwell's view of the world and society, but as is going to be explored in this chapter, the core messages of these two texts are eerily similar. This chapter then intends to show how the similarities of these two texts can indicate a central belief that the author has which has seen little change during his career. This analysis contradicts Orwell's own words that "nothing about an author's life can be relevant to his work" (Tirohl 59).

4.2 Comparative analysis

Throughout both the previous chapters, I have discussed the various ways in which Orwell depicted individuality in his works. Both novels can be boiled down to representations of individuals who attempt to retain their individuality in hostile environments that leave no room for individualistic expression. These similarities between the two novels spread to all

levels that define a novel, from the micro-level of descriptions and characterization of the protagonists to the macro-level of the central themes and messages of the novels.

Both Flory and Winston are depicted as being unique men in their respective societies. They are both described as not fitting in due to their strong sense of individuality. Much of the narrative progression is driven by both men's wishes to retain their individuality in trying situations. Examples of this found within the two novels are the many rebellious acts conducted by Winston throughout the novel, and Flory's attempts to kindle a fondness for the natives within Elizabeth so he would become less dependent on the other Club members. Winston's motivation for rebellion can be said to be a combination of his individuality and his nagging feeling that the past was in some sense "different". This feeling drives Winston's actions, for example, when he visits a prole pub, a dangerous yet not "illegal" action per se, and strikes up a conversation with an old drunken prole. Much to Winston's annoyance, however, the old prole is incapable of answering any of Winston's questions regarding the past as, "the old man's memory was nothing but a rubbish-heap of details" (Orwell 95 *1984*). The characters of Flory and Winston share many traits; they are both strongly individualistic people stuck in oppressive societies that strike down expressions of individuality, they both rebel against said respective societies, and they both ultimately fail to accomplish their goals.

This direct influence of individuality on actions is much clearer in the actions of Winston, as one of his primary reasons for rebellion is his dream of a time when the individual is free to be an individual. At first glance, the actions of Flory, like his potentially dangerous attempts at ending the native riots, would seem to be driven by his love for Elizabeth. When one takes a deeper look at Flory and Elizabeth's relationship, however, a somewhat different picture emerges. Flory's feelings towards Elizabeth are seemingly purely driven by Elizabeth's being new in Burma. Thus, in Flory's eyes, she has not been "corrupted" like all the other Englishmen. In an almost cosmic irony, through Flory's constant attempts to mold Elizabeth's views on the locals, he is in essence doing the very same thing he hates the Club for doing towards him. Winston's relationship with Julia is similarly driven by their wish to retain their individuality. Furthermore, neither of the relationships can be said to be driven by a feeling of love – as Flory wishes to mold Elizabeth into a "clone" of himself so he is no longer dependent on the Club to avoid loneliness, whereas Winston views the relationship with Julia as an act of rebellion against the Party and a way to express his individuality.

A difference between these two relationships that can't be ignored is the respective roles of the women. Elizabeth is depicted as a relatively passive participant in the relationship, mostly existing within the narrative to be a female companion for Flory to pine over. Much of this could be written down to Flory's constant attempts to alter Elizabeth, despite her constantly showing her distaste for both the natives and anything bohemian. Very little of the narrative presence is given to Elizabeth as an individual, as most of the focus is on how well Elizabeth fits into the Club member lifestyle. This relationship is quite a contrast to the one shown in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where Julia's individualistic characteristics are given more narrative presence. Julia plays a more active role in her relationship with Winston, and more narrative is given to exploring Julia's functions within their relationship. Examples of this are how the narrative gives room for Julia to function as a fellow rebel with Winston, both as someone with whom he breaks the law and as someone who challenges Winston's views of the world. This is seen when Julia explains the reason for outlawing sex, to which Winston remarks that he had never thought of it that way as

[u]nlike Winston, she had grasped the inner meaning of the Party's sexual puritanism. It was not merely that the sex instinct created a world of its own which was outside the Party's control and which therefore had to be destroyed if possible. What was more important was that sexual privation induced hysteria, which was desirable because it could be transformed into war-fever and leader-worship. (Orwell 139 1984)

Furthermore, Orwell leaves room in the narrative to delve into the differing ways in which Winston and Julia fundamentally rebel. Winston is defined as an intellectual, someone who wishes to rebel partly for the carnal pleasures, but more importantly, he is interested in the methods the Party employs to retain power, and ultimately Winston is striving to regain the freedom of thought. Julia, on the other hand, is less interested in the intellectual side of the rebellion, caring little for Goldstein's unmasking of Party tactics. Elizabeth and Julia both serve their narrative purposes to differing degrees, but one of them is given more room for exploration. One argument that can be raised for the limited space given to Elizabeth can be the room given to the respective "others" in the two novels. *Burmese Days* devotes more narrative to exploring the options and actions of the local natives through the exploits of characters such as U Po Kyin and his devious plans, whereas the Proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are given minimal time in the spotlight.

Keeping in mind Orwell's constant goals of social commentary within his narratives (Orwell "Why I Write" no. pg.), I would argue that Orwell's use of an individualistic protagonist likely reflects his personal beliefs. Both *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depict protagonists who express individuality within societies that suppress individualism in one way or another. Both novels are also semi-fictional in that they combine elements and experiences of the real world into fictional stories to explore differing conflicts and ideas. *Burmese Days* combines Orwell's personal experiences and emotions into the protagonist of Flory, as was discussed by Stephen Keck. Other biographers have pointed to Flory, seeing the similarities between the outcast and loner of Flory and comparing him to Orwell during his time in Burma (Keck 34). His later novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts a very similar protagonist, an individualistic loner type who finds it difficult to fit in with his surroundings. Winston differentiates himself from Flory in that the entirety of the narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* revolves around Winston, as he serves as the readers' lens into the world of Oceania (Gottlieb 56). Whereas the narrative of *Burmese Days* spends time on seeing what goes on in the town of Kyauktada, nothing happens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* without Winston being present. I would argue that since Orwell produced these two similar texts at such differing times in his life, one can safely claim that Orwell is a believer in the individual. Crick shares this argument to an extent, reflecting on how Orwell seemingly believes that "individuality can only be destroyed when we are utterly alone" (Crick 149). Despite seemingly being fond of individuality, Orwell remains aware of the shortcomings of individuality when put in opposition to the collectiveness of an authoritarian society.

This individuality, however, becomes both characters' downfall, as they constantly strive to maintain their individuality, putting them in opposition to devious characters. Winston's effort for a world where individuality is restored puts him in direct opposition to the Party, which views the individual as the utmost threat to the stability of their power. As O'Brien explains it, "Alone – free- the human being is always defeated. . . . if he can merge himself with the Party, so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal" (Orwell 277 1984). Flory's downfall, on the other hand, is less directly connected to his individuality. In Flory's attempts at maintaining his individuality and personal values, he distances himself from the other Club members. Thus, he is in essence alone in the jungle, which leads him to make Ma Hla May his partner. Flory's earlier relationship with Ma Hla May ends up being U Po Kyin's final tool for accomplishing his goal of gaining entry to the Club. Both characters

face the same end, as both our protagonists end up dead by the end of the novels. At first glance, it would appear that their reasons for dying would be different: Winston dies as a result of his rebellion against Big Brother, whereas Flory kills himself due to Elizabeth having entirely moved out of his grasp. Flory had escaped the acute loneliness of the jungle for a while, but when Elizabeth leaves him, he finds himself again faced with the same loneliness. But as discussed above, Flory's reasons for loving Elizabeth can by no means be called a true feeling of love – as Flory constantly attempts to mold her, ignoring her individuality in an attempt to have a fellow white person share his opinions. Thus when Elizabeth leaves Flory for the last time, he loses the one person he hoped to share his individuality with, which destroys him. Flory reflects upon this same issue in his final moments, thinking,

So he was back again to this – to the old, secret life – after everything, back to where he had been before. ... Was it not possible to endure it! He had endured it before. ... No, it was not endurable any longer. Since Elizabeth's coming the power to suffer and above all to hope, which he had thought dead in him, had sprung to new life. The half-comfortable lethargy in which he had lived was broken. And if he suffered now, there was far worse to come. (Orwell 299 *BD*)

Remembering that Flory likely serves as a reflection of Orwell the person, and thinking back to Crick's argument regarding Orwell's thought that individuality could only be destroyed by being alone, we can make sense of Flory's reaction to the rejection. Flory had escaped from the pressing loneliness as he thinks back to how he endured it earlier, but he is now back to where he was. What differentiates Flory's current predicament from his earlier one is that Elizabeth had given Flory hope for a better future. Furthermore, she would also be forever visible in Burma but never achievable.

Bernard Crick argues that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* needed to end with the downfall of our protagonist, as “a happy ending would be a satirical deflating of the pretensions of a grim satire” (Crick 149). Whereas Crick argues for the ending needing to be grim to maintain its satirical elements, I argue that the ending being the way it is can be traced back to Orwell's goals of writing and his view on society. This influence can be found by analyzing Orwell's bibliography. Through comparison to his earlier works, one starts to see a tendency within

Orwell's fiction: the reoccurrence of grim endings with protagonists' failures and the autobiographical influences on all his works.

In his 1946 essay "Why I Write" Orwell outlined his approach to writing from an early age: "I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels, with unhappy endings" (Orwell "Why I Write" no. pg.). This wish to produce naturalistic writing would be reflected in all of Orwell's later writing, as his novels all depict, with a vivid lifelikeness, differing aspects of society. Commonplace amongst his novels are the influences of either autobiographical elements, such as *Burmese Days* being inspired by Orwell's time as an officer in Burma, or his contemporary influences, such as the post-war era for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Despite his fondness for individuality, as explored earlier in this chapter, Orwell remains aware of the potential failings of individuality. Orwell remains aware of the potential dangers of maintaining high levels of individuality within certain societies or situations. I would argue that this awareness of potential dangers indicates Orwell's understanding of society and how it works. Orwell is seemingly aware of the power of individuality, promoting individuality by having his protagonists be advocates for individuality within strongly collective societies. However, Orwell's understanding of society allows him to see the limitations of the individual to bring forth changes, which he expresses through having his protagonists fail at bringing change to their surroundings. In both novels, Orwell implies that changes happen through the collective – the altering of Club members in *Burmese Days* and the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Another point of similarity between the two novels is how both novels depict their societies primarily through the eyes of a member of the oppression. Both Flory and Winston, as much as they despise their surroundings, are also part of the oppressive regime in various ways, and both stand to benefit from the system that is built up around them. The majority of the narrative and world-building in both novels is done through the eyes of our protagonists, who both are parts of the societies they oppose. For all the hatred Winston has for Big Brother, he is still a worker in the records department, where his job is to rectify documents to solidify the might and power of the Party. Winston even reflects on his complicity towards the Party's eradication of history:

Winston's greatest pleasure in life was in his work. Most of it was a tedious routine, but included in it there were also jobs so difficult and intricate that you could lose yourself in them as in depths of a mathematical problem – delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say. Winston was good at this kind of thing (Orwell 46 *1984*)

Despite Winston expressing his distaste for the Party and what it does on multiple occasions, he still finds enjoyment in the work he does to help further the Party. Winston does, to some extent, excuse his actions, stating that “it was not even forgery. It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another.” (Orwell 43 *1984*). Despite Winston's justifications, one can think back to Arendt's argument regarding inaction to see the fallacies in this line of thinking. Arendt argued that part of the reason for these new regimes prospering was a societal change where people were afraid of judging actions of and as individuals (Arendt 19). Despite Winston's loathing of the Party's destruction of the tangible past, he actively takes part in the continuation of said destruction.

In a somewhat similar manner, Flory also stands to benefit from his position of power within Burma. Due to his origins as an Englishman, Flory is given immense social standing and power amongst the Burman locals, despite his relative unpopularity amongst the other Club members. This influence he holds is apparent through the actions of Dr. Veraswami and Ma Hla May, who both benefit from their relationship with Flory. Flory's position in society can both be used for devious means but also utilized in a positive manner, as Ma Hla May sees Flory as a tool to boost her own social status at the markets, being seen wearing new dresses and expensive golden bagels. Ma Hla May is perfectly aware of her exploitation of Flory's position as a white man, thinking of herself as a witch who drains Flory of his willpower for her own benefits (Orwell 53 *BD*). Dr. Veraswami, on the other hand, represents the more positive effects Flory's race can have on his relationships. When U Po Kyin attempts to slander Dr. Veraswami's good name, Veraswami assures Flory that:

Heaven forbid that you should get into trouble with your European friend on my behalf. Please, please, never to embroil yourself! The mere fact that you are known to be my friend benefits me more than you can imagine. Prestige, mr Flory, iss like a

barometer. Every time you are seen to enter my house the mercury rises half a degree.
(Orwell 46 *BD*)

Whereas one could make an argument that this is pure manipulation from Veraswami, much like Ma Hla May's witchcraft, I would argue against this. Due to his characterization throughout the novel and his genuine appreciation for the British, as shown in his many discussions about the state of Burma with Flory where the good doctor stoutly defends the British rulers in Burma (Orwell 36-41 *BD*). Through the characters of Ma Hla May and Dr. Veraswami, Orwell explores how Flory's position within society can affect him in indirect ways. This influence he holds, and how according to Dr. Veraswami: "prestige iss all" (Orwell 156 *BD*), can also be said to be a reason for his solitude in the jungle of Burma. Flory does not fit in with the other Club members due to his personal values, but he cannot seek friendship amongst the natives either, as they would likely use his race for their own benefit.

In both cases, Orwell has written characters who oppose the systems they are a part of. This issue is one that many others have explored, as it is a common problem when individuals find themselves in these systems. The individual may be perfectly aware of their own complicity but remain complicit due to fear of the consequences. When considering both novels, one gets a clearer picture of how these consequences can unfold in differing ways: from the threat of harm in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the threat of becoming a social outcast in *Burmese Days*.

Part of the foundation for an oppressive regime is, according to Hannah Arendt, the "universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal *judgment*" (Arendt 24). Whereas Arendt applied this principle to the early years of the real world Nazi regime in Germany, I would argue one can apply similar ideas to Orwell's fictional regimes in Oceania and Burma. Both regimes in *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demand a level of complicity of their citizens. As mentioned above, the oppressors of the two given novels maintain their position of power through different means. Both regimes rely largely on instilling complicity and indifference amongst both their direct members and their respective "others."

The threat of the consequences discussed above is the primary tool that the authoritarian regimes utilize in order to keep our protagonists and, by extension, others in similar situations

complicit and pacified. Both protagonists, the representatives of strong individualistic thoughts and beliefs, are mostly complicit in the societies around them, only being stirred into action by the introduction of another character. Their rebellions are both driven by the introduction of external motivators in the form of female companions, but Flory and Winston still remain separate in what level of change we see in their actions. As seen in Flory, the arrival of Elizabeth revives a “hope” he thought long dead (Orwell 299 *BD*), and this hope affects Flory’s bravery. Elizabeth’s arrival leads to Flory standing up against the other Club members (Orwell 203 *BD*), the collective society, and gives him the bravery to bring an end to the Burman riots to ensure Elizabeth’s safety (Orwell 267-72 *BD*). As Flory states in his final moments, the hope that Elizabeth revived in him makes it so that he is incapable of returning to the lethargic life he once lived without immense suffering. For Winston, on the other hand, the external motivation of Julia is less directly responsible for his inevitable downfall. It must be stated that this risk-taking behavior was there from beforehand, as apparent from his reflection while writing his diary: “He was already dead, he reflected. ... The consequences of every act are included in the act itself ... *Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death*” (Orwell 30 *1984*). Julia’s role within the narrative then becomes to further increase Winston’s bravery. With the hope that there are others like him he gains from Julia, Winston acts on his blind trust for O’Brien (Orwell 174 *1984*) and rents Mr. Charrington’s flat (Orwell 146 *1984*).

These scenes discussed above show Orwell’s clear understanding of the failings of individuality. Both protagonists find someone whom they hope to share their individuality with, and through this newfound companionship, they hope to bring changes. Orwell’s choice of these two protagonists failing to bring forth the change they wish for may then very well indicate his thoughts around the failings of individualism. Orwell does not seem confident that individuality alone is capable of opposing these authoritative regimes.

Orwell appears fond of individualism, as expressed through his narratives’ focusing on the experiences of individuals stuck in collective authoritarian societies. How does Orwell represent the collective in the two chosen novels? In both novels, readers are given two different experiences of the collective: one negative and harmful and the other hopeful yet pessimistic. The primary opposition for both Winston and Flory is in their respective collective societies of The Party and The Club. These collectives demand a set of values and

complicity to their actions that the protagonists oppose. The Party and The Club represent Orwell's distaste for blind obedience to collectives, especially collectives that heavily restrict or try to destroy the individual. These collectives are the ones Orwell, and others like Hannah Arendt, warn us about when they discuss authoritarian regimes. These systems rely heavily on reducing the individual to a "cog in the machine," in the words of Arendt (31). This reduction of the individual is expressed by Orwell through the thoughts of O'Brien that "if he [the human being] can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal" (Orwell 277 1984).

Orwell does, however, not only depict the collective as something dangerous, seeing the potential found within a collective. This positive attitude towards the collective is expressed through the depiction of the rioting Burmans and the pacified proles. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston is painfully aware of the impossible odds he faces, seeing that

The Party could not be overthrown from within. Its enemies, if it had any enemies, had no way of coming together or even of identifying one another. ... the proles, if only they could somehow become conscious of their own strength ... they could blow the Party to pieces tomorrow morning (Orwell 72-73 1984).

A similar scene can be found in *Burmese Days*, where the natives, fueled by anger, gather like a storm outside the Club demanding justice for Ellis's attack on a native boy (Orwell 264 *BD*). The collective of the Natives, who are the majority are attempting to bring forth justice to an Englishman and, by extension, challenge the power structures. As I have discussed earlier, this riot does not bring any immediate change for the natives, being brought to an end by Flory's heroics, but it still carries importance. The scene shows a growing boldness amongst the natives, and their riot would make the locals aware of their potential to shake up the power balance of Burma.

The difference in setting between these two novels must also be discussed. This difference plays a role in the discussion, seeing as the presented societies share many similarities, but the means with which the respective regimes employ to maintain their control vary. Most strikingly is the difference in punishment for not conforming to the wishes of the collective, as this punishment is wildly different. Failure to comply with the wishes of the Club members is punished through social exclusion and pressing loneliness that follows this loss of social

standing. Failure to remain complicit to the Party, on the other hand, is punished by vaporization or the act of complete and utter deletion of any individual who opposes the collective. Thus, the danger that Winston braves can be said to be a real danger of bodily harm, whereas Flory mainly faces the threat of becoming a social outcast.

An essential point of discussion regarding this difference is how different it would seem in Orwell's eyes. Keeping in mind that "Orwell believes that individuality can only be destroyed when he is utterly alone" (Crick 149), one can argue that the danger that Flory faces can be considered similar to the ones Winston faces. Considering Orwell's fondness for individuality and the individual, it doesn't become too far a leap to assume that Orwell considered a social death to be on par with real death. This likeness can also be a reason for why the two protagonists face the same end, death, despite their opposition having widely different access to outright harmful punishment.

In this chapter, I have discussed the two novels in unison. This was done to show how one can paint a clearer picture of George Orwell by looking at the two novels together. The unfortunate truth is that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has held more significant cultural value and, through its grandeur, has put other of Orwell's earlier works more in the shadows. This impact was discussed by John Rodden, who states that "*Animal Farm* is a high school staple. *1984* is also fairly widely thought in Anglo-American Schools." (Rodden 503 *Orwell in the Classroom*). Many readers will be exposed to different authors through their schooling, either in high school or university. Thus, most readers will only be introduced to Orwell's cultural landmarks like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*.

As shown in this chapter, there are many similarities between the two novels, with both novels discussing individualism in various collective societies. I would argue that keeping in mind the turbulent years between these novels' publication and their relative similarities in narrative focus, one can make an educated guess regarding Orwell's persona. Despite his apparent fondness for individuality, Orwell remains aware of its limitations – as expressed through both his protagonists failing to bring forth change. Furthermore, Orwell is aware of the potential benefits of the collective, seeing that the collective masses are the driving forces behind societal shifts. However, this potential for change also carries the potential for corruption and authoritarianism. In both novels, the opposition consists of a collective society

that aims to limit the individual's expressions. Both representations of the individual are to some extent complicit within their respective societies, but their individuality becomes a driving force for their rebellions. Orwell seemingly advocates for a conscious collective consisting of thinking individuals who are allowed to make their own judgments separate from the collective. This thought of a conscious collective is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt's thoughts regarding totalitarian regimes relying on societies where the individual is not granted personal judgment (Arendt 19). Orwell expresses this hope most visibly through the pacified proles, who only has to become conscious to blast away the Party and its influences yet fail to do so.

5 Conclusion

At the core of my thesis is the discussion of individuality versus collectivism in the face of authoritarianism, an issue one can find at most points of recent history to differing degrees. This specific issue's presence is likely tied to the old adage that "man is a social animal." Throughout most of human history, human beings have come together in groups for survival and protection regardless of location. Many authors have observed and discussed this constant tug-of-war between the individual and the collective. Authors have achieved this through depicting and representing this discussion from various viewpoints, from Orwell's depictions of the trapped individual within a collective to Erlend Loe's *Doppler*, a lesser-known Norwegian novel about a man who escapes society to live in the wilderness of a Norwegian forest. Orwell separates himself in his choice of setting, having his protagonist deal with this question of individuality and collectivism within politically compromised societies. A consequence of this focus on individuals within authoritarian regimes is the question of which of these schools of thought can challenge the authoritarian regime. Orwell manages to skillfully comment on the question of individuality and collectivism while also reflecting on the responsibilities and opportunities for rebellion.

Throughout my thesis, I have explored how Orwell depicted this clash between individuals' wishes to retain their individual values and the collective authoritarian society around them that demands complacency and obedience towards the collective demands. Through a textual analysis of my two chosen novels, *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I have shown how Orwell depicts the various aspects of this clash. Amongst these aspects is the necessity for individualism expressed in Orwell's novels, as individualism is amongst the defining traits for humans in Orwell's eyes. Nevertheless, despite this fondness for individualism, Orwell remains aware of individualism's limitations, much like Arendt's discussion of the powerless individual (Arendt 45) when put opposite authoritarian regimes.

Despite Orwell's apparent affection for individualism, he gives various depictions of collectivism and its effects. Orwell remains ever critical to both sides of this discussion, depicting collectivism as a potential hindrance to the individual through the Party and Club, while also seeing the potential for change the collective can bring. Orwell seemingly reflects Arendt's words that "no man, however strong, can ever accomplish anything, good or bad,

without the help of others.” (Arendt 47). This idea of the individual’s powerlessness is reflected through the protagonists’ failing to accomplish their goals while indicating that the ones able to challenge the respective authoritarian regimes are the collectives.

Both Orwell and Arendt saw the limitations of both the collective and the individual at challenging an authoritarian regime. The solution can seemingly be found through a combination of the two, a collective composed of conscious individuals. Through a collective composed of conscious individuals, one could counteract the failings of both individualism and collectivism. Through this new collective, the limiting factor of the individual holding little power would be solved while also preventing the potential for the collective to become a blind herd. Both Winston and Flory experience great difficulty in retaining their individuality throughout both novels. Whether through the threat of violence Winston feels from the Party, or the threat of isolation Flory experiences in the jungle, both men experience hindrances when attempting to remain who they are. This hindrance can be explained when considering Simmel’s definitions of individualism, as the societal structures built up around the two men leave little room for individuality. Whether for protection or power, the societies of Oceania and the Club are dependent on a collective identity or complacency towards said identity to continue functioning in their designed ways.

Given that these societies are built on enforcing a collective identity, what responsibilities do the individuals have towards opposing said regimes? In Winston’s eyes, the Party’s eradication of individualism also eradicates human beings. This thought spurs him into action. For Julia, the restrictive nature of the Party’s politics becomes a direct hindrance to her own goals. For Flory, the continuous restriction of his individuality he experiences at the Club causes internal strife that builds up over time. Despite neither protagonist being particularly heroic, their faith in individualism causes them to go in opposition to the systems around them that would inhibit them.

Part of the goal for this thesis was to bring more attention to one of Orwell’s lesser known works. The prestige associated with Orwell’s flagship novels *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* has to some extent, led to less focus being put on his earlier works, such as *Burmese Days*. By comparing these two novels, *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I

sought to show how these topics of individualism can be found throughout Orwell's literary works.

The topic of individualism versus collectivism will remain a central question for humans, regardless of whether they live in authoritarian societies or not, as questioning one's place within society is an important reflection all people experience growing up. The importance of this question for all humans may be one of the reasons as to why the topics I have discussed, or novels focusing on people escaping society, have a tendency to succeed at being part of academic discussion but also general reader enjoyment. The importance of this question is one of the reasons I believe Orwell will retain his relevancy for many years to come, as the topics he discussed within his narratives relate to central questions for the social animal, man.

It must be stated, that this thesis does not only discuss the question of individualism and collectivism, but also reflects on the responsibilities of the individual to maintain and defend said individuality. Freedom House, an American funded global freedom watchdog, reported that over the last 16 years, there has been a steady decrease in global individual freedom (Repucci & Slipowitz 1). Examples of this decline can be found in many countries around the world, from the January 6th storming of Congress in the United States, to the limiting of political opposition in countries like China and Russia (Repucci & Slipowitz 4). It becomes the responsibility of the individual to hold those in charge responsible and defend democratic values from attacks from within. Whereas Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to no degree was a prophecy but only a warning, many aspects of the society Orwell depicted ended up becoming a reality, from the constant surveillance of phones and cameras, to the slow degradation of civil liberties as seen with the new Texan abortion bans or Florida's "Don't say Gay bill", and increasingly authoritarian regimes worldwide.

A limitation of my thesis was the choice of language, as the two novels depict similar situations, but they have severely different settings and political implications. The choice to use the word authoritarian when referring to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, caused some of the terror associated with the novel to disappear.

To conclude this thesis, I wish to bring attention to potential future research. First, I hope that other of Orwell's lesser-known works, like *Burmese Days*, can be brought more into the limelight. Furthermore, I wish to see more attention given to Orwell's depictions of women

throughout his novels, as the women of Orwell often serve secondary or passive roles within the plot. This has to some level been tended to in later years, as seen in Sandra Newman's decision to write a "feminist retelling of Nineteen Eighty-Four ... [a reimagining of] the story from the perspective of Winston Smith's lover Julia" (*Guardian*, "Julia"). This fresh retelling of the novel can open the door for more scholarly research into the women of Orwell's works. Orwell's works will likely remain enjoyable fiction and serve as entryways into academic discussions for years to come.

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