

FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

- From 1895 up to 1914 period of economical expansion , the "second industrial Revolution", the "Great Capitalism" and the expansion of colonial empires. The Bourgeoisie lives within its "belle époque" while workers's movement fight more and more for improvements at work and social changes. The first world war closes this period. After the war Europe is now deeply transformed and weak. The United States and Japan have the world hegemony and the communist Revolution has taken place in Russia.

- During the 1920's the situation improves and there is some sort of euphoria; these are the "happy twenties" but ideological and social tensions are about to get worse with the toughness of Stalin's communism with the arrival of the Italian fascism. All this provokes a weakening of the liberal democracy and the "crack " of 1929 is the evident sign of the crisis of capitalism; these are the "dark thirties." Hitler and the Nazism are in power while in France the "Front Populaire" comes to the power. All these factors provoke the confrontation which will take Europe to the Second World War (1939-1945)

-In the years after the war we find a Europe in tatters. Western Europe is under the pressure of on one side the USA and on the other side the communist Europe. Two opposing systems are now two giants in the world; these are the years of the "Cold War". The United States is more and more influential in the world from now onwards. Russian communism adopts less combative postures and western socialist parties also moderate their postures inclining them towards the social-democracy.

- From the end of the 18th century the bourgeoisie is losing their religious faith and substitutes it with faith on science, progress and on the certainty of scientific laws. There is a loss of confidence in reason, crisis of Positivism and subsequently a new relativism is born. Everything is relative, everything is liable to doubt. We must answer the questions in another way apart from reason. These answers are the "spiritualist reaction", the Irrationalism, vitalism and existentialism. These new trends have influenced 20th century literature a great deal. Most of the writers have chosen one or more of these options to express their ideas about human life and existence in general.

MODERNISM

Modernism had its center of intellectual gravity from the decade prior to World War I into the early years of World War II. In general terms, Modernism was something special in itself, it was marked by a rupture either with the social forces around them or with the cultural traditions of their particular art form. In this sense, Modernism was characterized by a determination to look at events from radically shifting points of view, the close juxtaposition of references from different areas of experience, the evolution of character types whose register is complex of emotional interrelations in a setting that is decidedly cosmopolitan, urban, industrial, and even technological. The phenomenon of Modernism during its period of greatest vitality can be divided in four generations separated by intervals of about 15 years:

1) The generation of 1875: Cézanne, Wagner, Mallarmé, Henry James, Verlaine, Nietzsche, Van Gogh. They were the precursors who called into question many of the values, convictions and conventions and who laid down paths for their successors.

2) The generation of 1890: It is where one finds a real explosion of modernist creativity. Freud, Bernard Shaw, Joseph Conrad, Miguel de Unamuno, and others. They break with accepted conventions of art, push to the forefront matters that had earlier been considered beyond the pale of good taste, redefine notions of time and space, reveal the irrational elements in the personality, and expose the relativity and subjective nature of all truths.

3) The generation of 1905: Kraus, Rainer Maria Rilke, Picasso, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Stravinski, Kafka, Ezra Pound, etc. Members of this generation were who realized the great modernist masterpieces in literature, music and visual arts. Here then are three modernist generations. For purposes of classification, they can be called the generation of precursors, the founders and realizers.

A fourth modernist generation may be identified as the generation of 1914. The collective impact of this generation was not felt until the war conflict had ended. Kokoschka, Broch, Vander Rohe, T. S. Eliot, Chaplin, Joan Miró, Ernest Hemingway, Bertold Brecht, Nabokov. The members of the generation of 1914 perceived their lives as being divided into three segments: prewar, war and postwar. They were adolescents before the war, adults between 1914 and 1918 and mature after the war ended. This generation grew up under the triple sign of technology, revolution and war. It was from leaders of the vanguard that these young people took their criticism of contemporary society, their taste for color, shape and sound and their visions of the future. The new culture was skeptical of science, subjectivist and relativistic, antibourgeois and antidemocratic. The war was a great disappointment. They all underwent its impact and carried the experience with them into the postwar world. Meanwhile the task of the Modernists within this generation was to contribute to the destruction of the old and work towards the construction of the new.

Modern Period of Literature

Content:

*lonely individual fighting to find peace and comfort in a world that has lost its absolute values and traditions

* man is nothing except what he makes of himself

* a belief in situational ethics—no absolute values. Decisions are based on the situation one is involved in at the moment

*mixing of fantasy with nonfiction; blurs lines of reality for reader

* loss of the hero in literature

* destruction made possible by technology

Effect:

*an approach to life: “Seize life for the moment and get all you can out of it.”

Historical Context:

*British Empire loses 1 million soldiers to World War I

* Winston Churchill leads Britain through WW II, and the Germans bomb England directly

* British colonies demand independence



George Orwell (1903-1950)

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in 1903 in Motihari, Bengal, India. In 1904 Orwell moved with his mother and sister to England where he remained until 1922. He began to write at an early age, and was even published in college periodicals, but he did not enjoy school. Orwell wrote about his unfavorable prep-school experiences in the essay *Such Such were the Joys* (1968). Orwell failed to win a university scholarship and without the opportunity to continue his education he went to Bruma and served in the administration of the Indian Imperial Police from 1922 to 1927 when he resigned in part due to his growing dislike of British imperialism, a dislike he vocalized in his essays *Shooting an Elephant* (1950), and *A Hanging* (1931). When Orwell returned to Europe he was in poor financial condition and worked low paying jobs in France and England. Finally, in 1928, he decided to become a professional writer. Starting in 1930 Orwell became a regular contributor to the *New Adelphi*, and in 1933 he assumed the name "George Orwell" by which he would become famous. For his first novel he used his recent experience with poverty as inspiration and wrote *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). While teaching in a private school he published his second major work, *Burmese Days* (1934). Two years later Orwell married Eileen O'Shaugnessy. During the 1930s Orwell had adopted the views of a socialist and traveled to Spain to report on their civil war. He took the side of the United Workers Marxist Party militia and fought alongside them, which earned him a wound in the neck. It was this war that made him hate communism in favor of the English brand of socialism. Orwell wrote a book on Spain, *Homage to Catalonia*, which was published in 1938. During the second World War Orwell served as a sergeant in the Home Guard and also worked as a journalist for the BBC, *Observer* and *Tribune*, where he was literary editor from 1943 to 1945. It was toward the end of the war that he wrote *Animal Farm*, and when it was over he moved to Scotland. It was *Animal Farm* that made finally Orwell prosperous. His other world wide success was *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which Orwell said was written "to alter other people's idea of the kind of society they should strive after." Sadly Orwell never lived to see how successful it would become. He died from tuberculosis in London on January 21, 1950.

Selected works:

- ? DOWN AND OUT IN PARIS AND LONDON, 1933
- ? BURMESE DAYS, 1934
- ? CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER, 1935
- ? KEEP THE ASPIDISTRA FLYING, 1936
- ? THE ROAD TO WIGAN PIER, 1937 -
- ? HOMAGE TO CATALONIA, 1938 - COMING UP FOR AIR, 1939
- ? INSIDE THE WHALE AND OTHER ESSAYS, 1940
- ? THE LION AND THE UNICORN, 1941
- ? ANIMAL FARM, 1945 - CRITICAL ESSAYS, 1946
- ? JAMES BURNHAM AND THE MANAGERIAL EVOLUTION, 1946
- ? THE ENGLISH PEOPLE, 1947
- ? ed.: BRITISH PAMPHLETEERS 1, 1948
- ? NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, 1949
- ? SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT, 1950

1984

Published in 1948 and set thirty-six years in the future, *1984* is George Orwell's dark vision of the future. Written while Orwell was dying and based on the work of the Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin, it is a chilling depiction of how the power of the state could come to dominate the lives of individuals through cultural conditioning. Perhaps the most powerful science fiction novel of the twentieth century, this apocalyptic satire shows with grim conviction how Winston Smith's individual personality is wiped out and how he is recreated in the Party's image until he does not just obey but even loves Big Brother. Orwell maintained that the book was written with the explicit intention "to alter other people's idea of the kind of society they should strive after." The book, a futuristic description of life in England after a totalitarian revolution, brought together ideas and theories that Orwell had been discussing for some years, most notably the corruption of political discourse through the destruction of language and the tendency for the growth of world superpowers engaged in a continual (but consciously fruitless) global war. It was published in 1949 to acclaim similar to that of *Animal Farm* (1946).

1984 was a bitter protest against the nightmarish direction in which the author believed the modern world was moving. In the story, Britannia has become Airstrip One in the superstate Oceania, which is controlled by Big Brother and the Party. The Party's agents constantly rewrite history. The official language is Newspeak, and the society is dominated by such slogans as "War is Peace", "Freedom is Slavery", "Ignorance is Strength." Goldstein with his book is supposedly plotting against Oceania, and a target of a hate period. The hero, Winston Smith, a minor Party operative, rewrites the past at the Ministry of Truth. He keeps a secret diary and has a brief love affair with a girl named Julia. He believes that O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party, is not sympathetic to Big Brother. O'Brien enrolls him and Julia in a conspiracy. One day Winston is arrested by the Thought Police, tortured and brainwashed. O'Brien directs Winston's torture and rehabilitation and tells that Goldstein is the invention of the Party. His spirit broken, Winston learns to love Big Brother. Winston and Julia meet briefly one day, they both have gone through the process and have lost their former love for each other. Some critics have related Smith's sufferings to those the author underwent at preparatory school - Winston is finally broken by rats. Orwell has said that the book was written "**to alter other people's idea of the kind of society they should strive after.**"

In 1984, Winston Smith lives in London which is part of the country Oceania. The world is divided into three countries that include the entire globe: Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. Oceania, and both of the others, is a totalitarian society led by Big Brother, which censors everyone's behavior, even their thoughts. Winston is disgusted with his oppressed life and secretly longs to join the fabled Brotherhood, a supposed group of underground rebels intent on overthrowing the government. Winston meets Julia and they secretly fall in love and have an affair, something which is considered a crime. One day, while walking home, Winston encounters O'Brien, an inner party member, who gives Winston his address. Winston had exchanged glances with O'Brien before and had dreams about him giving him the impression that O'Brien was a member of the Brotherhood. Since Julia hated the party as much as Winston did, they went to O'Brien's house together where they were introduced into the Brotherhood. O'Brien is actually a faithful member of the Inner-Party and this is actually a trap for Winston, a trap that O'Brien has been cleverly setting for seven years. Winston and Julia are sent to the Ministry of Love which is a sort of rehabilitation center for criminals accused of thoughtcrime. There, Winston was separated from Julia, and tortured until his beliefs coincided with those of the Party. Winston denounces everything he believed in, even his love for Julia, and was released back into the public where he wastes his days at the Chestnut Tree drinking gin.

"The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power." (from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*)