Gamesmanship and Androcentrism in Orwell's *1984*

George Orwell's most important contribution to dystopian literature—to fictional visions of “bad places”—is generally taken to be his analysis of power in *1984* (1949), an analysis already implicit in *Animal Farm* (1945). When we compare *1984* with some earlier twentieth-century dystopias, Orwell's innovation stands out clearly. Its major precursors depict societies dominated by “reason,” eugenics, and the production process. Eugene Zamiatin's *We* (1924) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), probably the best-known examples, are similar in their views of mechanized societies whose citizens are deprived of freedom through physical and psychological conditioning. The rulers of these societies justify their power by moral arguments; that is, they consider the pursuit of power a means to a socially desirable end.

Early utopian fiction repeatedly uses an almost anthropological model to explain the workings of the utopian society: through long dialogues between a “native informant” and a representative of the familiar old society, the reader is exposed not only to impressions of the new society but also to a closely reasoned presentation of its inner logic. The dystopian literature that began to be abundantly produced toward the end of the nineteenth century varies this formula: now there is typically a scene in which the key authority figure explains the logic of domination to the rebellious protagonist. The pattern these dialogues follow owes much to the legend of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* (1880). In a crucial scene set in Seville during the Inquisition, Christ, having reappeared, is taken into custody and brought before the Grand Inquisitor. Man, according to the Inquisitor, is weak and irrational and unable to deal with the burden of freedom. The Church must therefore take this burden on itself, providing its flock with happiness, security, and unity instead of freedom. In one way or another, this rationale for power also appears in Zamiatin's *We* and Huxley's *Brave New World.* But Orwell explicitly breaks with this pattern by presenting a vision of the immediate future without offering any moral justification for the control exercised by the Party. It is, in fact, precisely this lack of moral justification that is the essential feature of Orwell's novel. Other twentieth-century dystopias, such as Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1907) and, especially, Murray Constantine's *Swastika Night* (1937), adumbrate a fascination with power for its own sake, but *1984* is unusual in its complete rejection of the moral justification for the exercise of power.

An analysis of the implications of this rejection suggests that the Party's actions can best be understood as a game. The concept of play throws considerable light on O'Brien's behavior in *1984*, and a perspective borrowed from game theory clarifies Winston Smith's role. This approach leads us to recognize that both O'Brien and Winston are players operating from a common frame of reference, sharing fundamental values. The examination of these values leads, in turn, to a critique of Orwell's androcentrism in *1984*, which, given his moral sensibility, helps us understand his despair.

In a variation on the Grand Inquisitor scene in other dystopias, Orwell has O'Brien explain to Winston Smith that the answer Winston has been seeking—the “why” of the Party's pursuit of power—lies in power itself. The means have become ends: power is pursued entirely for its own sake (217). O'Brien spells out for Winston precisely what power involves: “power is power over human beings” (218). In a series of questions and answers that is compared to a catechism, O'Brien asks, “How does one man assert his power over another, Winston?” and Winston,
after weeks of torture, knows the answer: “By making him suffer” (219). O’Brien explains the implications of this answer: “Obedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own?” (220). The Party will always have available to it this intoxication of power, the thrill of victory; the image of the future that O’Brien presents to Winston is of a boot stamping on a human face—forever (220), an image borrowed from London’s The Iron Heel.

If we disregard, for a moment, the particular content of the activity O’Brien is involved in and concentrate instead on its form, we find that the rejection of instrumentality—that is, of activities pursued as means to an end—is an important feature of utopian fiction. William Morris, for example, in his News from Nowhere (1890), depicts a simple society that has voluntarily rejected many of the questionable gains of technology for the sake of creativity and pleasure in work. This ideal is close to the Marxist one of the creative, nonalienated person, and it implies freedom from the realm of necessity. Even utopias that do not envision such an achievement seem to share in the ideal, as we can see from their goal of an ever-decreasing workday that allows the cultivation of leisure. The more that human beings are freed from the realm of necessity, the closer they can approach the ideal of an intrinsically valuable existence.

In other words, play and not work characterizes the good life, but to understand this idea we need to go beyond the common view of play as an escape from or a compensation for the rigors of daily life, or of leisure time as the mere period of recovery that it becomes when labor predominates in life. One of the most fundamental features of games, as virtually all students of play agree, is gratuitousness or immanence. Games are ends in themselves. They are not means to further ends (except in certain ambiguous situations in which some basic divisions are contravened—as, for example, in professional sports). One of the simplest and clearest ways to envision the lack of instrumentality in games is to focus on the constraints imposed by play—the rules of the game, in other words. Consider basketball: if the purpose of the game were merely to put balls through baskets, a ladder could be brought in or the basket could be lowered or made much larger. Clearly, the voluntarily accepted rules of the game impose difficulties or obstacles that are essential to its pursuit. The aim—to make baskets—is thus not sufficient to define this activity as play. This end can be pursued only within the framework of certain constraints that constitute the game; accepting this framework is what playing the game means. Similarly, if someone throws a ball into the basket to dislodge a knife that might fall and injure a player during the game, this act cannot properly be viewed as playing the game. The game is an activity that is intrinsically valuable and that is pursued for its own sake. But to say that games are gratuitous is not at all to say that they are without meaning. Much can be learned about a society through the study of its games, and the games played in 1984 are no exception.

Not all forms of play, of course, depend on contest or competition, as Roger Caillois shows in extending Huizinga’s conception of play. In addition to contest or competition, which he calls agon, Caillois introduces three other categories of play: chance (alea), simulation (mimicry), and vertigo (ilinx). In 1984 all four categories of play appear, but it is above all the competitive game of power that is pursued. When power is pursued for its own sake, it becomes a game, and clearly it must be a competitive game, for, far from being an absolute or independent abstraction, power always consists in a relation. In other words, the obstacle or difficulty that makes the game of power possible is another human consciousness. But not just any other consciousness, and especially not a weak one. A weak opponent in the game of power produces the same unsatisfactory victory as a weak opponent in a game of chess: for the game to be relished, a relative equality between the players is needed. This requirement explains a great deal about O’Brien’s relationship to Winston Smith.

The game analogy provides a model that helps us understand the interactions within 1984, but in no way should it detract from the utter seriousness with which we should view the world Orwell projects in this novel. We need first of all to free ourselves of the conventional opposition between the realm of play and the serious concerns of “real” life (see Ehrmann). Games can be serious—deadly serious—as the game-playing aspects of military com-
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that have no fundamental effect on the wars, are clearly depicted as games—as activities engaged in for their own sake, without hope of resolution. The three world powers want only to prolong the game, not to arrive at an endpoint. At the same time, however, these wars, which define so much of life in 1984, serve a social purpose, as Goldstein's book explains. The wars are fought both to use up surplus production in a socially useless way—that is, without raising the standard of living—and to justify the eternal need for an elite group that must bear the burden of conducting the war. There are, then, reasons for the war, but these do not negate its gamelike character. All is process; the wars will presumably go on forever. But precisely because the wars serve an ulterior purpose—because they seem to justify the Party's rule—they are not occasions for the absolutely free exercise of power. In addition, they are far-off and in some sense abstract, hence they cannot provide the immediate boot-in-the-face thrill of power that the Party seeks.

With every aspect of life controlled, at least for the 12 1/2% of the population who are Outer Party members and who make up the group from which dissidents might arise (the proles, of course, do not count; they are so insignificant that they can be left more or less alone as they struggle to eke out an existence), the Party may in fact find itself frustrated in its exercise of power. The constant routine arrests of quickly terrorized or already converted people must be a starvation diet for those whose reason for living is their domination over others. It would seem that, while the Party has an ever-increasing need for strong new opponents, who alone permit the full enjoyment of power, the Party's total control of life makes such victims harder and harder to find.

A similar contradiction at the very heart of the Party's policies relates to the development of newspeak. When the world of 1984 has evolved further, when newspeak is perfected—as Syme, who is working on the definitive newspeak dictionary, explains—thought crime will literally be impossible and there will be no thought at all in our sense of the word (44-46). When this comes about, will the Party feel its power? Or its powerlessness? The latter is the more likely outcome, for power requires the contrast, some-thing pulling against it, an obstacle to be overcome. Since power is inseparable from domination, conflict is its necessary arena. But how will O'Brien or his future counterpart feel powerful when there is no opposition at all, when no one can even conceive of opposition? The pursuit of power is thus a more delicate operation than O'Brien, and perhaps Orwell, imagines. Can one speak of power when the people are all lobotomized, as in Zamiatin's *We*? Against whom will O'Brien test his power in the future, when no Winstons can possibly exist?

In evoking a world he had seen grow ever more likely throughout the late thirties and the forties, Orwell apparently allowed his passion to distract him from the inner logic and dynamics of the fictional situation so that he could create a more compelling portrait of inescapable total control. In 1984, the Party already seems to have difficulty in finding worthy opponents. Most of Winston's acquaintances, for example, are ideal Outer Party members. If they are arrested—as are Syme, the dictionary maker; Ampleforth, the poet; and even Parsons, the total Party sycophant (who, however, is overheard in his sleep denouncing Big Brother and is turned in by his own seven-year-old daughter)—these arrests apparently serve merely as daily doses of terrorism to keep the Party's appetite for power whetted.

But let us look more closely at Winston's development as an opponent of the Party. Since there is no law in Oceania, no reason for arrest need be given and no specific act need be engaged in before one can be arrested. A wrong expression, a wrong thought—perhaps any thought at all—can provide the occasion. Yet the Party has played hard to develop Winston as an opponent. He has been watched for at least seven years, as O'Brien tells him (228); his very dreams are known to the Party and may, in fact, have been in some way planted or induced by the Party. The Party has engaged in theatrical play—with disguises and props—and has provided Winston and Julia with a meeting place, the room above Mr. Charrington's shop. For all we know, the shop itself was there solely for Winston, a Party offering that caters to his taste for the past. O'Brien himself, in predicting (erroneously, it seems) that the Party will always have victims, tells Winston: "This drama that I
have played out with you during seven years will be played out over and over again, generation after generation, always in subtler forms" (221).

O’Brien, in other words, has gone to a great deal of effort to turn Winston into a serious opponent. The Party itself may even have provided Winston with the first concrete proof that it was falsifying history—the clipping he had accidentally received eleven years earlier. We do not know the origins of Winston’s hatred for Big Brother, but we do know O’Brien’s important role in focusing and strengthening Winston’s opposition. O’Brien initiates Winston in the probably nonexistent Brotherhood, provides him with a copy of Goldstein’s book (and later tells Winston that the book was actually written by Inner Party members, including O’Brien himself), and supports Winston’s rebellion against the Party by falsely claiming to be a conspirator too. All this deception, simply put, is an elaborate entrapment through which O’Brien creates for himself an opponent of a better quality than the run-of-the-mill arrests provide. By contrast, in Zamiatin’s We and in Huxley’s Brave New World there is no entrapment, no effort by the State to stage situations that will provide occasions for displays of power. Instead, the State considers its policies important for the well-being of all and it genuinely promotes a quiescent, stable, and subdued populace. It conditions and controls the people, but there is no indication in these books that the power exercised is either an end in itself or a source of pleasure to those who use it.

A further significant contrast between We and 1984 is that in Zamiatin’s novel the protagonist is genuinely seduced into rebellious acts by a woman who leads an opposition group. In 1984, however, it is not Julia who is responsible for such a seduction but rather O’Brien. Winston sees his sexual relationship with Julia, which she initiates, as a political act, a blow against the Party. It is thus made to serve a political purpose—or, in other terms, it is corrupted by the Party’s all-pervasive control. Julia, in contrast to Winston, seeks sexual encounters purely for pleasure. Winston’s true alliances are clear from the beginning of the novel: he hates Julia (evidently because he finds her attractive) and feels drawn to O’Brien. The smallest expression of interest from O’Brien makes Winston blos-

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At this point game theory can be helpful. But I should make clear that the idea of a game, in game theory, is quite different from—and in some respects the very opposite of—the game playing I have been discussing. The play concept of games, as we have seen, has to do with activities that have intrinsic rather than instrumental
value. But the emphasis of game theory is in some sense the reverse: game theory aims at maximizing payoffs—that is, it is a highly abstract, mathematical way of determining the strategy most likely to result in the attainment of each participant’s goals. But, above all, game theory is of interest for its emphasis on rational decision making in interdependent situations, those situations in which two (or more) players find that the decisions of each depend in part on what the other does. It is difficult to use game theory in situations that have many variables and that offer less than perfect information about the players’ motives and choices; in other words, game theory is difficult to apply in situations that are not highly controlled and carefully defined, that is, in most human situations of any complexity. But game theory provides an interesting vocabulary and helps us focus on some important issues. The absolute pursuit of power, as outlined in 1984 by O’Brien, is a kind of zero-sum game. A simple model of a zero-sum game is chess (a game frequently mentioned in 1984): it is a game of total conflict, in which whatever one player loses, the other gains. But zero-sum situations assume that gains and losses can be quantified, and measurements are hard to make in interactions of the kind pursued in 1984. Still, it is easy to see that, for O’Brien, if there are no losers, there can also be no winners.

The implications of game theory for many fields are now being explored, and in the last few decades it has become an important tool in the study of decision making. One anthropologist, Walter Goldschmidt, has argued that game theory has a contribution to make to cross-cultural studies by providing us with a way of looking at human behavior so as to find what the goals are. Put another way, game theory assumes the goals to be known and with this knowledge calculates the strategies. Social anthropologists examine the strategies and through these calculate the great unknown in exotic cultures: the values.

Game theory, in this view, can provide us with the conceptual apparatus for understanding the values that lie behind the selection of certain forms of behavior. Even if we eschew the formal application of game theory, with its matrices and game trees, the approach can still help us focus on the details of an interaction.

The novel explicitly tells us what O’Brien’s motives and values are—and the analysis presented above has involved fleshing out those motives to see how his actions further certain specified ends. With Winston, however, we have almost an opposite problem: we know his actions in far greater detail, but we do not have the overriding rationale that makes sense of them all. We do not know why he is initially drawn to O’Brien, or why he enters into a game with him in which, as he repeatedly says, he knows he is doomed from the start, or why he interacts with O’Brien in the way he does, to the point of loving and indeed almost worshiping him (208), even after he knows he has been trapped. Game theory assumes the rational pursuit of strategies; it assumes that choices are rationally consistent with perceived preferences. Can we infer some overall goal from the choices Winston makes at various points in the narrative?

Let us note, first of all, the initial description of O’Brien as “a member of the Inner Party and holder of some post so important and remote that Winston had only a dim idea of its nature” (12–13) and as “a large, burly man with a thick neck and a coarse, humorous, brutal face” who nonetheless seems curiously civilized (13). Fascinated by O’Brien, Winston entertains the hope that O’Brien’s political orthodoxy is not perfect. The same scene depicts Winston’s antagonism toward Julia and his suspicion that she may be an agent of the Thought Police. Given the novel’s later development, this scene reveals to us Winston’s incredibly poor judgment of character. After the Two Minutes Hate, Winston catches O’Brien’s eye and imagines he knows that O’Brien is thinking the same things he is: an unmistakable message had passed. It was as though their two minds had opened and the thoughts were flowing from one into the other through their eyes. “I am with you,” O’Brien seemed to be saying. “I know precisely what you are feeling. I know all about your contempt, your hatred, your disgust. But don’t worry, I am on your side!” And then the flash of intelligence was gone, and O’Brien’s face was as inscrutable as everybody else’s.

Although we can interpret Winston’s response as due in part to O’Brien’s intentional deception,
this explanation is not sufficient to account for Winston’s special attraction toward O’Brien; for up to this time Winston, after all, knows nothing about him except that he has an unusually high status within the Inner Party. As the book unfolds, we encounter no one more powerful than O’Brien—except the mythical Big Brother himself (who is, incidentally, of the same physical type).

We expect a contest to be provoked by the person who anticipates winning, as Martin Southwold points out (27), and indeed it is O’Brien who first makes overtures to Winston by finding a pretext for having Winston come to his house. But this does not make Winston a purely passive instrument of O’Brien’s will. What is of interest here is the precipitous response Winston makes to O’Brien’s gesture (130): he feels as if he has been waiting for O’Brien’s move all his life, and he is at once ready to throw himself entirely on O’Brien’s mercy, to incriminate himself as an enemy of the Party. Of course, this feeling might be an indication of his heroic character and his desperation in combating Big Brother. But does the scene in O’Brien’s apartment bear out this reading? In this crucial scene, which James Connors discusses in an insightful analysis of Winston’s character, Winston readily agrees to cheat, forge, blackmail, corrupt the minds of children, distribute addictive drugs, encourage prostitution, disseminate venereal diseases, and throw sulfuric acid in the face of a child—all for the sake of weakening the Party (142). Thus Winston has no moral grounds for differentiating himself from the Party, as O’Brien reminds him when Winston later expresses outrage at the Party’s single-minded pursuit of power for its own sake.

For the moment, it is still unclear why Winston is willing to act as O’Brien asks. But what is clear is that he cannot be seen merely as O’Brien’s innocent victim. Winston has agreed to use others as means to his own ends, causing unspeakable pain and harm if necessary, and he therefore has no moral basis for indignation when he discovers that O’Brien, in turn, is using him. Winston’s very words and actions, after all, have led him to this path; so he is, we must conclude, an active participant in the game the two men are playing. This argument is one answer to the possible objection (to which I return later) that Winston enters the game unwillingly—a circumstance that would seem to violate a fundamental rule of play. As we see, although he is not fully informed, he does bear responsibility for his presence in the game. Without this element of personal responsibility, the novel would not be interesting; it would merely be mechanical. But Winston is O’Brien’s accomplice; he is thereby implicated in his own downfall, for he did accept O’Brien’s terms—the rules of the game, as it were—and these rules prevail at their subsequent encounter in the Ministry of Love. By his own words and actions in O’Brien’s apartment, then, Winston has entered the game. His illusion about O’Brien, about the Brotherhood, marks this stage—and, indeed, the very word “illusion” means “in play” (in-lusio).

There is an important sense in which O’Brien does not deceive Winston. He depicts the Brotherhood in almost exclusively negative terms, as hopeless and ineffectual. He leaves Winston with no doubt that any opposition is doomed to failure, perhaps for as long as a thousand years, that Winston will be caught, will confess, and will then die. Here we have the irony of truth told for the sake of a grand deception. Yet Winston accepts the Brotherhood as his salvation, and he agrees to all the conditions and rules set down by O’Brien. Indeed, it is Julia who first rejects separation from Winston for the sake of the Brotherhood—it is she alone who dares interrupt O’Brien’s litany to assert the claim of personal feeling (143). Winston, then, does agree to the game—but without recognizing its genuine configuration. As in the eternal wars among the three powers, the means are always the same and the rules are agreed on; all that changes is the identity of the opponent.

It is as important for us to understand the “why” of Winston’s behavior as it is for him to understand the “why” of the Party’s pursuit of absolute power. The second scene between Winston and O’Brien, in the Ministry of Love, helps to clarify Winston’s motivation. We need to recognize, however, that O’Brien’s total victory is not quite the foregone conclusion that he tells Winston it is. For one thing, if it were entirely predetermined, once again the pleasure of the victory would be diminished. O’Brien too is operating under some constraints. Resisters do, after all, die under torture; they do sacrifice
themselves for others (as Winston knows from his own observations of women and their children); and they can even refuse to play. These options make us realize that although O'Brien can kill Winston at any time, having to do so before extracting full enjoyment from the situation would not give O'Brien his preferred outcome for the game. Winston hopes to escape with his life and his dignity. O'Brien wants his own power affirmed; but that goal gives him no special reason for killing Winston, and he does not care whether Winston lives or dies. Roger Caillois points out that “one does not play to win as a sure thing. The pleasure of the game is inseparable from the risk of losing” (173). For O'Brien, obviously, losing is relative; the key issue is how much power and domination he can gain over Winston. After Winston passes through the first two stages of his “reintegration”—learning and understanding—he is restored to health, strengthened and fattened for the psychological kill of the third stage, which is acceptance (215). When Winston hopes for death, O'Brien assures him it will come eventually; were it to come too soon, it would deprive O'Brien of a full victory.

If Winston cannot induce his own death and end both his suffering and the game, what option does he have? There is one, although he never considers it: he can refuse to play. His choices are limited; he is being defeated level by level: his belief in objective reality has been shattered; his sense of his own moral superiority has been destroyed; his body has been broken. He knows that the Party denies the possibility of martyrdom—hence the purely private torture and the mere obliteration, later on, of all signs of the victim's existence. But this last detail also suggests that the Party is aware of ways (such as martyrdom) by which its domination could be nullified. Winston only learns, concretely, about the ways of the Party through his game with O'Brien. He does not know what the Party's aim is until O'Brien explains it to him. Does his attitude change, then? If we assume the rationality of Winston's choices—that is, if we assume that his moves reflect an effort to achieve certain goals—the logic of his behavior, from the novel's outset, comes into focus. It now appears that Winston cares more about winning O'Brien's recognition than about sustaining his own inner world, and with this virtual challenge to O'Brien he sacrifices the latter to the former and keeps the game going. However temporarily, Winston has got something out of O'Brien—recognition—and he is once again pathetically grateful for O'Brien's understanding. Winston himself acknowledges the shallowness of his rebellion against the Party (228). Now we see the role that his attraction to the powerful O'Brien has always played in Winston's choices. Winston has been a true opponent for O'Brien, persisting in the game partly because of his desire to partake of O'Brien's power by gaining the recognition that O'Brien alone can bestow on him. This desire explains Winston's emphasis on being understood—and it explains why he is more in O'Brien's thrall after the weeks and months of torture than before.

Since Winston undergoes no change of heart when he discovers (or, rather, acknowledges what he has always known) that O'Brien is not part of the Brotherhood, it has clearly not been the hope of participating in a rebellion that has motivated Winston from the beginning. His choices throughout the game reveal that what he is after is recognition and affirmation from O'Brien, the most powerful man he knows. If this were not so, Winston would have every reason not to play, would distrust O'Brien and hope for nothing from him. That Winston, instead, continues to accord O'Brien respect and even love reveals that the two men are operating from within the same frame of reference, the same values. Both respect power, both see persons in terms of power roles—where they differ is in the degree and type of recognition they require from others. O'Brien, who is powerful, wants the stimulation of a worthy opponent to make the
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Winston, who is powerless, wants the recognition that he has been a tough opponent in his way, that he has held on to his inner world against all odds. Not surprisingly, Winston feels that O'Brien's mind contains his own (211). At the heart of their apparent struggle is an agreement about values—despite their disagreement about the nature of reality—and this agreement is the corruption at the core of Winston's rebellion.

It is clear, then, that in some sense Winston deserves his fate, for he is drawn to O'Brien, admiring precisely the power and domination that O'Brien will, of course, ultimately use against him. The subtext of the novel has to do with Winston's embrace of the wrong values. Although Winston is not himself a brutal, domi-

nant man, he wants the recognition of such a man. This conclusion, which is hinted at through-out the novel, becomes unavoidable when we see Winston's final bid for O'Brien's recognition.

Orwell's handling of the interaction between the two men illustrates what Fredric Jameson has called the "ideological double standard." Jameson applies this term to adventure stories that allow the reader vicariously to experience and satisfy a taste for violence, while they ostensibly criticize such violence on political and social grounds (182). The term can be extended to cover situations in which a value system is in fact derived from the very values that are being criticized. In 1984 we find instances of both these aspects of an ideological double standard, but, perhaps because the torture scenes are not always convincing, it is the implicit adherence to a value system the book ostensibly criticizes that is the more pernicious. Curiously, Orwell was perfectly aware of this potential in literature, as his comments on Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga re-

veal: "Well, the thing that strikes one about Galsworthy is that though he's trying to be iconoclastic, he has been utterly unable to move his mind outside the wealthy bourgeois society he is attacking. With only slight modifications he takes all its values for granted" (Collected Essays 2:205). We can make the same criticism of the way Orwell depicts Winston's interaction with O'Brien.

When Winston defiantly declares that after all he has not betrayed Julia, he makes that betrayal indispensable to O'Brien's victory and shows himself once again to be the intelligent opponent-participant whose defeat O'Brien could espe-

cially relish. The "place where there is no darkness," in which Winston always imagined he would meet O'Brien, thus turns out to be the illuminated playing field of the torture chamber in which Winston gives up the last vestige of his inner world.

The peculiar intimacy between Winston and O'Brien is perhaps typical of competitive situations. In a study of the psychology of competition, Stuart Walker writes: "In few activities other than competition can a participant find a similar opportunity to assert his unique significance and simultaneously attain approval from the people he most respects. For his competitors become the people who mean the most to him" (3). O'Brien and Winston, as we have seen, are locked together in their game, each requiring the presence of the other. It is important to realize, however, that all victories in the game of power are temporary. Mastery and domination over another human being cannot be permanent; rather, these must be continually reestablished. It is in the exercise of power that power comes into being. The eyes of a dead victim no longer express recognition of the superiority of the master; a corpse is merely a thing, unable to ac-

knowledge defeat. Similarly, when the Party has finally succeeded in completely breaking—that is, converting—a human being, that person is of no further interest. This is why, once Winston has betrayed Julia, his torment is over and there are no further episodes with O'Brien.

At the end of 1984, Winston is sitting alone at the Chestnut Tree Café. He is now in the posi-

tion earlier occupied by the three purported Party traitors: people broken by the Party, shunned by others, playing eternal games of chess over eternal glasses of Victory Gin. The chess problem that Winston is absorbed in is an appropriate and fairly obvious metaphor for his game with O'Brien, as Winston himself senses. He is still trying to reason, but his reasoning now leads him to conclusions that oppose his earlier ones. He notes that in an ideal chess game White always wins and that white sym-

bolizes the good, and he then inverts this ob-

servation and concludes that whatever wins must be the good, by virtue of its victory. Since Big Brother clearly always wins, as he has won over
Julia and Winston, Big Brother must be good. Here Orwell applies the game metaphor to the entire society of 1984: all its members are engaged in a game, and in this game Big Brother always wins against the individual.

In a sense, Winston has been forced to agree that whatever is, is right. If life is merely a neutral game, then one must, as in other games, admire the winner, regardless of who or what the victor is and how the victory comes about. Here is the ultimate logic of Winston’s conversion: the victory he desired over the Party and Big Brother is transformed into the only possible victory available under the circumstances—that over himself. And this is what the last line of the novel tells us: “He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother” (245). In typical doublethink fashion, defeat is now called victory. This reversal is clearly a logical result of Winston’s acceptance of the Party’s value system, which, as we saw, underlay even his rebellion. He continues to operate according to Party models: victory and winning are still what activity is about, but the enemy has been redefined. It is not O’Brien or Big Brother or the Party. It is Winston himself. If he cannot affect the outside world, then at least he can transform the way he thinks about it—thus achieving as much reality control as he can in the circumstances. In a world based on domination, Big Brother, being stronger, is always right, just as White always mates Black in the ideal chess game. Winston has no choice but to worship this ultimate strength.

Orwell uses game imagery in one other important instance toward the end of the book. Winston’s last memory in the novel, a memory he quickly decides is a lie or a trick, is of a different kind of game, of play that was joy. He recalls an occasion when, as a child, he and his mother had played Snakes and Ladders. They played eight games and won four each. Surely Orwell did not think this detail would be overlooked, positioned as it is just before Winston’s final capitulation (in which he identifies with Oceania’s new victory and discovers that he loves Big Brother). Now the only winning possible for Winston is the victory, as he puts it, over himself, through his identification with the all-powerful Big Brother. By contrast, his recollection is of an almost idyllic time, when games were not rigged, when opposing players might take turns in winning.

But, in focusing on this episode, Orwell invites us to consider once again the distinctive aspects of the games played in 1984. In three major ways, Winston and O’Brien’s interaction departs from what we usually understand as playing a game. First, Winston, despite his complicity, is not a fully informed player of the game; he is more like the victim of a confidence game. Second, his participation is not purely voluntary, as his sudden arrest underscores. And, finally, he cannot truly win, although he can have some effect on his losses. This imperfect fit points to a significant feature of the game pursued in 1984. Like everything else in that world, it is a perversion—a perversion of a game, similar to the perversion of intimacy, of sexuality, of family life, of nationalism, of language, and of all facets of cultural life in Oceania. But what this characteristic reveals is that even O’Brien’s pursuits are subject to the peculiar limitations and inauthenticity of life in Oceania; his pleasure can only be partial, since he cannot have a perfect game partner under the rules that prevail in 1984, any more than he can have a genuine sexual intimacy or friendship. Thus the very aims and rationale of the Party in 1984 must necessarily be undermined by Party policy. The ideology of domination carries within itself the seeds of its own failure; it is thus a paradox. Orwell can successfully evoke the inescapable oppressiveness of life in Airstrip One, but he cannot convincingly explain Oceania’s inner dynamics, which tend toward entropy. In this respect Philip Rahv’s criticism of the novel (although not directed to this feature) is correct.

Yet Orwell seems to have believed in the cogency of his vision; had he not done so, he would not have ended the novel on such a desperate note of capitulation. In a sense, then, he seems not to have carried his analysis far enough. All the perversions depicted in 1984 are due to domination and the pursuit of power, and Orwell seems to see this situation not as a social possibility that requires explanation but as a mysterious fact of nature in its own right. He thus reduces the desire for power, in effect, to the status of a biological instinct or an innate characteristic of human beings. Although he was aware, as we have seen, of the potential for.
manipulating public emotions through spectacles such as sports, Orwell seems to have accepted the aggression and hatred thus released as examples of “savage combative instincts” (Collected Essays 4:41).

Nothing I have so far said about 1984 adequately explains the despair one senses at the end of the novel. The novel itself, after all, may be viewed as a demonstration of the incredible coercive forces that need to be brought to bear on human beings to reduce them to their worst possible selves: the constant spectacles of hatred; the sanctioning of the intimacy of pain, fear, and hatred and the prohibition of the intimacy of love and friendship; the continual material deprivation; the impediments put in the way of genuine thought. Orwell depicts all this in great detail, while also showing us how the games played and the roles assumed within a game have everything to do with the overall values of a given society: in Oceania children participate in youth organizations called Spies, and in playing at spying, they learn their social roles. Orwell seems to have been perfectly aware of the importance of such conditioning. And yet, when it comes to the essential problem of power and domination, he offers not even a hint of an etiology and instead appeals to unexamined notions of human nature. But the world of 1984 is not a world in which human nature is seen playing power games; it is specifically the story of two men committed to shared ideas of what it means to be a man and, as we have seen, dependent on each other's recognition.

III

In the previous section, I argue that the analysis of gamesmanship in 1984 reveals weaknesses at the heart of Orwell's critique of power: a value system derived from the very thing Orwell is ostensibly criticizing and a belief that power is important to a sense of manhood. We can view this weakness as part of Orwell's strategy in depicting the nightmare of a society like that of 1984. This interpretation is certainly valid in part, for Orwell could not have intended Winston Smith to be uncritically viewed as a hero, a man who is not compromised by the society in which he lives. But there is also the disturbing possibility that Orwell has inadvertently revealed some of his own implicit values. If he conceives of the struggle for power as a typically masculine pursuit, then some reflections of this idea should be evident in his portrayal of female characters.

Let us note initially that Julia, who is also opposing the Party, receives no attention from O'Brien. Her rebellion against the Party has no ideological or theoretical foundation; rather, it is grounded in her desire for pleasure and for the pursuit of a personal life. She is not “heroic,” and she capitulates at once to O'Brien's methods, or so O'Brien tells Winston (213–14). These three central characters in Orwell's novel form an interesting group, and the ways Orwell names them reflect their status within the novel. Julia has only a first name; she is an insignificant female, and Orwell in this respect follows his society's convention of considering a woman's last name a disposable, because changeable, element in an uncertain social identity. O'Brien, at the opposite pole, has only a last name, in typical masculine style. And Winston Smith, halfway between the powerless personal feminine and the powerful impersonal masculine, has a complete name, albeit an ironic one in that it combines the legendary with the commonplace.

Julia's lack of participation in the game makes sense when we consider that domination and competition are stereotypically masculine characteristics. Little girls have tea parties; little boys play competitive games. Orwell's other works, too, suggest his attraction to a conventional definition of masculinity. In Homage to Catalonia (1938), this attraction is reflected in his sensitivity to the excitement of war and his occasional expressions of disappointment when his experiences fall short of what he expects from a "real" war. In The Road to Wigan Pier (1937) it appears as "envy" of the coal miners for their toughness and the concern that socialism will lead to "human softness" (32, 163). And in Coming Up for Air (1939), George Bowling rhapsodizes about fishing, a masculine rite that marked his transition from being a "kid" to being a "boy." The first-person narrative declares:

And it's a wonderful thing to be a boy, to go roaming where grown-ups can't catch you, and to
chase rats and kill birds and shy stones and cheek carters and shout dirty words. It’s a kind of strong, rank feeling, a feeling of knowing everything and fearing nothing, and it’s all bound up with breaking rules and killing things. The white dusty roads, . . . the stamping on the young birds, the feel of the fish straining on the line—it was all part of it. Thank God I’m a man, because no woman ever has that feeling. (52)

And again, “Killing things—that’s about as near to poetry as a boy gets” (59). Although Orwell here may simply be characterizing George Bowling, he also shows a persistently deprecating attitude toward women in his letters and journalism, as well as in his novels. In *The Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), for example, Orwell’s strong narrative voice breaks through the feminine center of consciousness on the very first page of the novel: “The alarm clock continued its nagging, feminine clamour . . .” (5).

Orwell was certainly aware of the special oppression that women are subjected to: his portraits of Ma Hla May in *Burmese Days* (1934) and of Dorothy Hare in *The Clergyman’s Daughter* attest to this. Many passages throughout Orwell’s writings touch on the inevitable sacrifice of the interests of daughters to those of sons (as in Winston Smith’s family in 1984 or in Gordon Comstock’s recollections of his sister in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* [1936]). But Orwell treats the injustices he observes as merely unfortunate incidents, demonstrating a somewhat regrettable lack of fair play, and these sympathetic accounts are quickly overridden in his works by a quite conventional misogyny and even antifeminism. His first published novel, *Burmese Days*, introduces both themes. In this novel, filled with ironic misanthropy, he portrays the female protagonist, Elizabeth Lackersteen, with unusual severity. Orwell’s treatment of her has a hard edge lacking in his portrayal of the comparable (but far more dangerous, because powerful) male characters. And his capsule portrait of Elizabeth’s deceased mother makes her seem totally superficial and reprehensible, as is revealed in part by her having “ messed about for years in such things as Women’s Suffrage and Higher Thought” (89).

Throughout Orwell’s work there is a tension between his occasional appreciation of women and his dislike of them, especially of the abstraction that is usually referred to as the “feminine.” In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, for example, Orwell contrasts his lack of physical revulsion for the Burmese with his feeling about the “lower classes” at home. He writes: “One looked down on them as ‘natives,’ but one was quite ready to be physically intimate with them [i.e., allow oneself to be dressed and undressed by a Burmese servant boy]. . . . I felt towards a Burman almost as I felt towards a woman” (123). The white male, that is, does not relate to women and natives as he does to real people; a certain intimacy is possible but not respect or recognition. Orwell repeatedly backs away from confronting the full meaning of male domination. His portrait of imperialism puts equal blame on women, as the closing lines of *Burmese Days* reveal, and Orwell avoids noting the special status of the Englishwomen relative to the natives they oppress. Indeed, he ridicules Mrs. Lackersteen’s reduction of the problem of a native rebellion to her fear of rape and seems to consider her concern parochial. In the world of 1984, although men fear women because they may be spies, in general the assumptions of male centrality and female “otherness” have survived intact. Julia’s love for Winston makes him healthier, whereas O’Brien’s attentions destroy him physically; but Winston’s true alliance, as we have seen, is with O’Brien, who engages him in combat and recognizes him as a worthy opponent—a recognition that means more to Winston than Julia’s love.

Only in a culture that habitually disparages the female and accepts the male as the model for the human being could it ever have gone unremarked that 1984 is above all the story of two men’s interactions and that Julia, who is not a participant in the game of domination, presents an alternative mode of behavior. Essentially anarchical, she does not seek to dominate; she does not take the Two Minutes Hate seriously (although Winston gets caught up in it); she falls asleep while Winston reads to her from Goldstein’s book. Her aim is to get as much genuine pleasure as she can out of the oppressive world in which she finds herself. Given the constraints the novel presents, this approach begins to look positive; certainly Julia’s pleasure seeking harms no one, and she is willing to undergo considerable risk for it.
In the revealing scene in O'Brien's apartment, O'Brien assumes that Winston speaks for both himself and Julia (indicating, as do many of the other details of the novel, that male domination of women has not changed by 1984), and indeed Julia says nothing until O'Brien asks if she and Winston are willing to be separated for the sake of destroying the Party; but then, as I mentioned earlier, she is the first to speak up. She says no (143), and Winston echoes her. Here it is Julia who is taking the position Orwell would surely support: there is no cause that can justify the sacrifice of everything that matters to one, and a cause that requires this must be self-defeating.

Despite this favorable presentation of Julia and the few other positive portrayals of women in the novel (the singing prole woman, who endures; the protective actions of Winston's own mother and the mother in the film he sees), most of the women in Orwell's narrative hardly figure except as caricatures: they are Party secretaries, Party fanatics, Party wives like Katharine—whom Winston judges to be the emptiest person he has ever known—or Mrs. Parsons; they are also antisex freaks or prole prostitutes. Even women's voices (as in Orwell's other writings) are represented in a consistently negative way: the "piercing female voice" of the exercise leader who yaps and barks on the telescreen in the morning, the "silly feminine voice" that Winston hears in the canteen, the screeching of the woman on the telescreen when he gets home. Women are not individuals, as the men are—there is no woman like Syme or Charrington or O'Brien. Women are as clearly "other" in the world of 1984 as in Orwell's own society, and Winston relates to them as such. Comradeship, if it could exist, would exist between men. Thus Winston attempts to question the old man in the pub but has no patience and quickly dismisses him. That the old man seems hopeless for Winston's purposes shows only that Winston no longer knows how to talk to most human beings.

All these features lead us back once more to an awareness of the essentially masculine ideology (of domination, violence, and aggression) that finds expression in the gamesmanship of 1984. Orwell made the common error of confusing culture with nature. What we know of power is linked to the male domination of society. We do not, cannot thus far, know what kind of society we would have if it were not dominated by males. The totalitarian nightmare, from this perspective, is neither merely a particular political configuration nor an inevitable human construct but rather a possibility inherent in the cultural polarization of superior male and inferior female and in the cultivation of a notion of masculinity dependent on domination. Inasmuch as 1984 carries to a logical extreme this view of what is erroneously called human nature, it still has a positive import for us today, for in it we find a compelling portrait of the dehumanization to which these values can lead.

Orwell never seems conscious of the strongly masculine narrative voice evident in so much of his writing; similarly, he does not seem aware that his indictment of human behavior is in fact an indictment of male behavior. Gamesmanship is the epitome of male behavior, for it involves domination pursued for its own sake, not for any practical or material objective. Orwell could not name the ideology of which his own views were a part, but his novel has much to contribute as an allegory of hypertrophied masculinity. Because of his habitual disparagement of the female and his acceptance of a male model of behavior, Orwell could not analyze the dynamics of the pursuit of power. Although he called into question many social, political, and economic conventions, he ultimately despaired because he accepted learned male behavior as the human norm. We should clearly recognize that his novel is no indictment of how human beings behave but only of how men in a particular tradition behave. No novel with female protagonists could ever have been so readily accepted as describing the generally human, but the identification of the male with the human norm is among the conventions of a male-dominated society that is only now being seriously challenged.

Orwell's despair is a sign of his moral sensibility, of his awareness that the (androcentric) values of his time presented a great danger to humanity, and we can respect the clarity with which he drew his conclusions about the culture of which he was a part. The developments of the twentieth century clearly led to bigger and better killing machines. Orwell saw what men everywhere were doing—"socialist" men, capitalist men, fascist men; he saw that new technologies
and centralization made domination ever easier, and he despaired.

The new concepts and new models of our own time throw light on Orwell’s concerns in 1984, so that today we can both appreciate his responsiveness to the alarming trends in society and understand his inability to see a solution to the conditions of life implicit in a sexually polarized culture that regards masculine destructive patterns as facts of nature. Given this situation, despair was an appropriate response. Orwell’s uncritical acceptance of a conventional misogyny and his tendency to trivialize feminism are among his most serious shortcomings as a moral witness to his times. But they explain his despair. Clinging to an inherently dangerous and presumably inescapable notion of the masculine, yet aware of its deadly potentiality, Orwell could see no way out. He could not name the problem, but in his own manner he followed through. In the end Orwell’s despair does him honor. 10

University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts

Notes

1 For a schematic discussion of Dostoevsky, Zamiatin, Huxley, and Orwell, see Richards. Of greater interest is Andrew Hacker’s critique of contemporary liberal theorists’ assumptions about individual autonomy.

2 This section and the following one owe much to Bernard Suits’s Grasshopper, a delightful and thought-provoking book.

3 In Darkness at Noon Koestler comments ironically that soon the Party would even “publish a new and revised edition of the back numbers of all newspapers” (96), in addition to the new histories and even new “memoirs” of dead heroes that were already appearing in Stalinist Russia. But Orwell also drew on his own experience of intentionally dishonest journalism during the Spanish civil war, as recounted in Homage to Catalonia.

4 The literature on game theory is vast. For the purposes of this paper, works by Davis, Schelling, and Shubik were helpful. Howard uses game theory to analyze Pinter’s play The Caretaker and comments that this approach makes no sense for symbolic or otherwise unrealistic actions since “game theory is about real people” (146). Brams’s interesting application of game theory to literary texts also reveals its limitations.

5 Much of the pioneering work on social roles in game situations has been done by Goffman; see esp. his chapter “Fun in Games.” There is an interesting but so far insufficient literature on sex differences in game playing and decision making. Vinacke, for example, concludes his study on the subject by suggesting that ‘males are primarily concerned with winning, whereas females are more oriented towards working out an equitable outcome, as satisfactory as possible to all three participants” (359). In studying female pairs involved in negotiations, Kelley concludes that typically at least one member of each pair is reluctant to maintain the “tough, competitive stance” characteristic of male bargainers (92). Stoll and McFarlane examine the ways in which external characteristics (one’s real life situation and social role) impinge on game activity.

They conclude that the “expression of masculine role behavior [militated] against taking a cooperative stance in the game, even though the game highly rewarded cooperation” (270). Brenner and Vinacke’s article on sex and managerial stereotypes also concludes that males are exploitative but that females are accommodative—at least as far as reported behavior is concerned (289). It should not be thought that I am arguing here for the notion of inherent behavioral differences between the sexes. The growing literature on gender roles and on the formation in early childhood of distinctively masculine and feminine modes of behavior supports the view that these behaviors are learned.

6 This theme appears first in Burmese Days, in which the Burmesse men, like all women, are generally not worthy of respect or fear. The apparent dependence of “respect” on fear is something Orwell does not examine.

7 Julia’s anarchism, like her concern for material pleasures, is another female stereotype. Whatever we may say about the stereotype, how it comes into being and how it is used to keep women in their place, it is nevertheless a model of behavior that is far less destructive than the male stereotype of what it means to “be a man.” For this reason, to study the behavior of women is to realize that there are alternatives to the traditional male patterns. For a study of male thinkers’ views of the female as chaotic and (ironically, in my view) lacking in civic virtues, see Pateman.

8 Not only do these attitudes recur throughout Orwell’s writings, they even on occasion distort his appraisal of other writers. In an article on George Gissing written in 1948, Orwell sees Gissing’s portrayal of female characters as more unsympathetic than it is. Orwell refers to Amy Reardon in New Grub Street as Gissing’s “odious heroine”—a description that tells us more about Orwell than about Gissing. Orwell writes: “If one [i.e., a man] wants to marry a woman who is intelligent and pretty, then the choice is still further restricted, according to a well-known arithmetical rule. It is like being allowed to choose only among
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albinos, and left-handed albinos at that." Orwell asserts that "in his heart Gissing seems to feel that women are natural inferiors," a view Orwell himself evidently holds. (See Collected Essays 4:428–36.)

9 This identification shows that newspeak and double-think are not necessary to make certain things unthinkable or unsayable. Ideology need only pass itself off as reality, and contrary perceptions can be occluded for long periods of time.

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Works Cited


