George Orwell’s Experiment With the Ironic Narrative Structure 
in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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This study seeks to establish the major relevance of the ironic vision embodied in the narrative structure in George Orwell’s early novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. After providing a comprehensive satisfying examination of the cultural phenomenon that goes by the name of “Modernism”, the world in which the young George Orwell began his literary career; the study will present a critical analyses exploring Orwell’s novel concerning the past-war ironic dystopian vision, with special reference to his experiment with the ironic narrative techniques and structure.

*Keywords*: modernism, ironic narrative, Winston Smith, romantic quest, politics, doublethink, Big Brother

**Introduction**

Before the detailed analyses of Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it makes sense to turn our attention not only to “modernism”, but also to one of its manifestations that lead to the satirical ironic vision of Orwell’s novels of the 1940s.

Europe witnessed an abrupt break with all tradition. The greatest of all divisions in the entire history of western man, in every sphere, in politics, religion, social values, art, and literature, a chasm lies between the two ages. The First World War, the war that was to end all wars, set the stage for the rise of the Nazis and the fascist who would drag the world to another global cataclysm. Women were empowered with the vote; male chauvinism was finally under threat. In the world of art and literature, no previous age produced work which was as shatteringly and bewilderingly new as that of the cubists, Dadaists, the surrealists, and Picasso. Along with these developments, there came the ideas of Freud and Jung, and Adlor. Traditional notions about the continuity of the self, the stability of the individual identity, were shattered by the psychologists’ probing of the human psyche. The human world that the young George Orwell had to reek on with was very different. The radical quality of the age is expressed by these words of Virginia Woolf:

> On or about 1910 human nature changed ... All human relations shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, Parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature. (Woolf, 1953, p. 85)

There were pervasive aesthetic revolutions that shoot up Europe directing artistic expression along new ways. The humanistic tradition of the west faced a crisis. Human existence appeared to have taken a new form of thinking and feeling. This engendered radical consequence in the realms of politics and in those of art, and literature. Everywhere, and in every strata of society to be self-aware meant to be filled with anxiety. This
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general feeling of angst may be explained as the result of movement of the western world from the Romantic Movement into a new age.

George Orwell’s readers would be familiar with his antipathy towards the growing mass culture of the 20th century, particularly Orwell’s aversion to the forms of mass entertainment. His dismay is explicitly and implicitly aired in the conversation of the characters of most of his novels. At the same time, the novels manifest Orwell’s familiarity with and appreciation of the Avant-Garde artists. The ethos of fracture was aggravated by the passage from one age to another, the surging flow of new inventions and experiments in science and technology, the new means of communication, and most disconcerting of all, the political breaches that were opening up between the modern states. Orwell and his fellow artists would also have realized that change in the literary milieu were not merely an aesthetic phenomenon. It grows from ideological change, changes in beliefs and ways of life. From the first decade of the 20th century, Europe witnessed changes of frontiers, classes, values, and ideas. Every aspect of human existence was being transformed. The changes were most visible in the great cities of Western Europe; and the artists gravitated to these urban centers. Changes in the external ambience were paralleled by startling changes in the inner lines of human beings. All the great works of literature began to be thought of under the rubric of “modernism”, and to be distinguished from the “contemporary”.

Another issue that has to be faced in which Orwell began his career is the relationship of modern art and literature to truth and value in life. The writers and artists of the past had their characters struggling to answer questions, and the answers arrived at were crucially moral answers. The modern artists limit themselves to questions. The above observation boils down that the human condition is problematic, and the modern artist’s contribution to the problematic gave it a special orientation.

One of the most striking features of the literary ambience that George Orwell had to reckon with was the way literary modernism found its natural habitat the metropolitan cities, Berlin, Vienna, Prague, Paris, and London. These polyglot cities which had attained preeminence as centers of intellectual and cultural exchange were the real incubators of the literature of experimental modernism. These cities were always associated with new ideas and new arts and allured young writers. It has to be realized that modernism was a uniquely urban art because the modern artist was thoroughly embroiled in the spirit of the modern city. Indeed, the city itself was the dominant spirit of a modern technological society. The big city became the visible, throbbing, multifaceted embodiment of culture.

By the time George Orwell began to get published, the modernist movement had sealed its special bond with the modern city, which was playing a dual role as cultural museum and hectically novel environment. At the same time, the major cities of Europe had been culture-capitals of the continent, and modernism planted its roots in these fertile centers. It was a time when the intelligentsia was expanding and becoming conscious of itself as a distinct caste, and experiencing separation from the other social orders. Orwell’s involvement in his age was thorough, yet as a satirist the involvement was necessarily abstracted. He developed a flair for getting at the heart of the fashionable life-styles and recreating them in telling images and episodes. Orwell’s satiric narrative stance caused a swing, between involvement and detachment. In keeping with the satiric mode, Orwell steers clear of psychological immersion.

Orwell’s practice as a novelist worked towards a particular aesthetic philosophy for fiction in modern and times. Such a poetics is dictated by the current view of man or the way man is represented as a figure in fiction. Orwell’s novels get under way with the glossy surface presented by the intellectual and social trend setters.
Soon, the action plunges below to the boredoms, discomforts, and animal passions that stir there. His characters are creatures of a sophisticated urban ethos. From their behavior it would become clear that the aristocracy is on the verge of collapse and the middle-class intellectuals, flitting around in an ambiguous landscape, and conducting sexual liaisons of varying degrees of ridiculousness. There is in English fiction a tradition which mixes comedy, a concern for social justice and a more than amateur interest in what philosophers mull over.

The social, political, and cultural scene along with the future of London, after the anxieties of the post-war in modern Britain was unexposed as the nation was attempting to illustrate the miserable transference towards its modern future provides a certain number of tragic critical visions for the city modern future. George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), among many other literary artists who contributed to the crises that rented London and the whole nation, reflects and shows a very clear waypoints in its development. In fact, his writings in a diverse manner were always considered as labels for the frequent feelings of a forfeiture of the terrible concern regarding the future of the modern British society and the national status and power. Remarkably, given the famous liberal credentials of Orwell’s, such terrible concerns have provoked in his novel a preservative fear of change, regardless the fact, if this change displayed by a technological growth, a flourishing youth culture, or socialist government.

**Thematic Concern**

There is no doubt in our minds that the real identity of the leading or the major character in the normal fashion and mode, is not supposed to possess any exceptional or supernatural forces, but usually the protagonist locates his identity in the extra-social circumstance. The major character mostly embodies man as a person who attempts to live in harmony with nature, without intending to dominate it. In fact, the leading character or the hero in the ironic fashion or mode is usually dehumanized physically or psychologically by his own society; the society in which he exists, and this society is usually totalitarian and the character’s behavior and deeds, are usually sterile. In other words, the ironic hero’s always response to a certain call to withdrawal from their society, and this withdrawal usually comes in the form of ironic journey. Orwell depicted this essential quest in his famous novel *1984*.

From a critical point of view, in ironic fable the hero is not single—dimensional, neither is the world in which he lives. In fact, narrative irony might be examined as a “parody” of narrative romance, through the protagonist in ironic and romantic fable examines a journey of a symbolic nature. During this symbolic journey and inception the ironic hero, usually begins to realize and grasp the perplexity that exists in his world, as well as his heroic abilities in a more considerable way. Yet, it is possible to state that the ironic narrative also can be considered a parody, due to the nature of the journey that is usually tumultuous by coincidence, or by arbitrary to the beginners.

Orwell felt that, the ironic protagonist’s quest. Would be the best influential way to reflect and demonstrates the criticism of the doctrinaire and despotism of tyrannical government that hides behind the mask of socialist equality in the miserable civilian slum.

Orwell’s hero, Winston smith, is conscious of the oppression and doctrinaire practiced by the society on the lives of the individuals including his own one and the scarcity of consciousness. Orwell was quite aware to realize that his character Winston would be in need for a certain psychological characteristics to reinforce his growth and to develop his intellectual capacity to be logically able to differentiate between right and wrong, as well as to appraise what he wants to be. Thus, and in order to make it possible for Winston to achieve his desire,
the distance from society was an essential demand, for this reason Winston Smith journey and his withdraw to the country was due to an attempt to work on his human instincts.

Orwell’s hero struggles with sin that has been implanted. In fact, Orwell’s hero struggles more with the appearing restless and remorse, than with his ethical conscience for the unfavorable decision he has made when he decides to respond to his call. But it seems that the hero’s sense of this sin is reduced the more distance he attains from civilizations as well as society. The ripeness procedure and rite of passage permit Winston the independence to be a person. It is really a perfect romantic model that enables the hero to obtain bravery and honor as he finishes his initiation. In fact, the romantic fable is pure and predictable, yet it recognizes the desirable. But, the perplexity in our life and in the human spirit do not constantly permits for such nostalgia, and that the social foe is able to perplex the result. The irony is embodied throughout the narrative because the romantic model doesn’t expose as one might think when the real life and human nature are interwoven. In fact, the ironic narrative is a spoof of the romantic narrative; irony is the structure that emerges when the unconscious and the reality of the world are applied to the hero’s journey. Orwell’s 1984 contains all the elements of an ideal romantic quest; with the fact that in his text, Orwell portrayed a totalitarian central government as evil or the foe and this evil would be defeated and beaten by the romantic hero Winston Smith.

Additionally, Orwell’s novel includes many elements of the Monmouth; which sets the reader to think that Orwell’s protagonists Winston was detached sufficiently from society to recover his individualism, or he could truly be reborn again as a free man.

At the very opening of the novel, in a gloomy April day, Winston is going back to his bleak apartment, while the people of Oceania are suppressed by the permanent war against the other powers and the perpetual observations. Winston is one of the effective members of the Outer Party, yet, he suffers seriously from his reality, and this anxious feeling is popular for a protagonist in responding to his call to adventure. Winston contemplates why the people do not revolt. Winston in his individual revolution against the despotism, he purchases a diary and starts to commit disloyalty by writing “Down with Big Brother” (Orwell, 2007, p. 20) frequently. But when a women namely Julia whom Winston had once worried was employed for the thought police, astonished him when she gave him a piece of paper stating “I LOVE YOU” (Orwell, 2007, p. 113). We are quite sure that Julia is the second copy of Winston’s or Winston’s other. In the novel Julia presents the characteristics such as rebelliousness and sexuality, which had been repressed in Winston. The other or the darker image plays a significant role in the hero’s journey of growth and development, if it is observed by him. Yet, it is also his integral side, and they are interconnected to each other, even if they appear to be diagonally ambivalences. The image usually incarnates everything that the protagonist was unable to recognize or suppress in his personality. In other words, the character will be psychologically weak and infirm, if he is unable to acknowledge the integral interrelated bands that he shares with the other. It was possible for Winston to recognize that he shares Julia many commonalities, with the exception of that she is only “a rebel from the waist downwards” (Orwell, 2007, p. 129)

The way in which Winston transacts with the conflict that forced him to recognize the fact that he needs to change, beat something, or capitulate to a downfall, in Winston’s condition, it seems that he is on the edge of a psychological downfall. In such cases, the hero is usually conscious that he is on the edge of his journey and the call to his journey adventure, always results from within. The events of the story go on, with the secret meetings for Julia and Winston affairs; and with Mr. Charrington, a shop owner Winston sets the dispositions. In the novel Mr. Charrington is presented as Winston’s instructor in his trip. After that, Winston’s dream to
meet O’Brien “In the place where there is no darkness” (Orwell, 2007, p. 178), he is one of the active internal factious members in the Brotherhood confidential revolt party and outwardly. His dream comes true after he was called officially by O’Brien. In the course of their secret meeting, O’Brien hands Winston a script of the original text that explains the strategy the group utilizes to hold the citizens stratified and keep authority. Yet, O’Brien ends his meeting with Winston after he warns him against the consequences that he will encounters in this path. After Winston’s consent to O’Brien’s call he starts reading the script text deliberately, thinking what could he do.

The narrative quest always revolves around a central factor; this factor might be attributed to the fact that the hero in this quest usually searches for a worthy thing, as it is the case with every quest. In fact, it is not a simple task to achieve this worthy thing, and it demands a real protagonist to achieve the prize and to correct the world behind. Winston is searching of individuality; he is in need for more enlighten about freedom from the suppression and manipulation. In this stage, the writer forces and stimulates the audience to think that the tripe of the hero has started; Winston has given his consent to O’Brien call that he is fit for the mission, and he seems initially, to create the impression that he begun to achieve initial success in his journey. With this development, the trip of the protagonist will be rented by difficulties due to the tragic events, or simply the writer might be in need for a timely suitable rite passage. Thus, Orwell’s decision to involve his protagonist Winston in a journey of adventure was very important, to make it possible for Winston to achieve the essential required awareness and vision, concerning himself or the surroundings, despite the sort of this awareness, if it is right or wrong.

The real trials of Winston starts when he was subjected to be tormented into abiding and approving the philosophy of the party; after being ensnared in Mr. Carrington’s room with Julia. Noticeably, Winston, and Julia now are quiet sure that it is impossible for them to renegade and deceive each other; but, with enough adequate physical and psychological torment, they were converted into typical party members. But in a true romantic quest, Winston would have succeeded in declining his distress and trials; yet, he also would have been capable to hold out the torment. Winston, instead, was able to recognize that “the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself” (Orwell, 2007, p. 297).

In fact, Orwell’s decision to utilize and employs the elements of the romantic quest for two purposes. The first one, was to pave the way for the reader to foresee a definite termination and then to let him down. As for the second purpose, it was to demonstrate the damage and the harm of the central government as an evil antagonist, as well as the human capability to impairment. Unlike the romantic protagonist, the hero in narrative irony does not appear converted as a knowledgeable person, and he is not also destructed by a tragic shortcoming. The ironic protagonist is presented as a more dominated and influenced than before he starts his trip. Yet, his experiences are arbitrary, but the tragic shortcoming presented in the ironic quest is depicted with more factual dimension; due to the fact that the story in the ironic quest might be more deeper than the tale in romantic quest. In fact, the hero in narrative irony discovers that he strives with heroism.

It seems that the journey Orwell originated in his book 1984 can be described as both sterile and inverted form other novels belongs to the same period. It is an imitated journey that affects our moral subliminal and terrifies us with the most archetypal vicious status. The ambience and the mode Orwell depicted in 1984 is the negation of the ideal utopian society to criticize the governmental or the political ambience by employing allegorical satire. However, Orwell was very accurate and alert in creating a protagonist that seems to be familiar, but qualified, to make it possible for the middle class readers to believe in and could easily recognized
by replacing the prevalent archetypal persecution, injustice, urban blight, and terror. Through his story Orwell exaggerates in enlarging the societal vices existing in his days, however, he established an extreme text of the sterile romantic quest. In fact, Orwell’s readers were able to observe his themes of the corruption of power and manipulation. Orwell’s dystopian setting serves to reinforce the readers trust and hopes that their protagonist is capable to beat and defeat the tyrannical mind doctrinaire. Regrettably, Winston Smith shows and demonstrates two facts, the first one, that he is a sufferer of the government adversary, as well as an anti-hero. Orwell’s intention was not only to motivate the reader to recognize his ambivalence doctrines regarding the result of the text, but he also expects the reader to recognize the ambivalence doctrines that revolve about his own personality. In fact, if a person doesn’t fight back the corrupt powers, certainly, he will be a victim too.

As it is the case with most of the dystopian narratives that employ the ironic method, the cosmos in which the major characters live in, is a cosmos that is full of despotism and persecution. It is a world in which the major characters endeavor to flee away from the tyrannies of their societies, though it is a tentative effort in order to come back to their natural primitive spirits. In the dystopian genre, the protagonist should possess the least of human instinct left; and he should be capable, on a certain stage, to realize the doctrinaire with a forced or defeated sense to take an action towards it. In addition, it is quite familiar due to the nature of the dystopian genre, that it permits the protagonist to be member of the outside world. Regardless the supporters, the protagonist is eventually and basically beaten due to the archetypal vicious powers override common orders of control.

The supporter or the helper plays a very important role in the dystopian genre. In fact, the actual role and function of the supporter is to provide both the protagonist, as well as the reader with the essentials of political doctrinaire. Yet, feeding the mind of the reader with these essentials is more significant than the protagonist. In the case of Orwell’s character O’Brien, he enlightens the protagonist Winston with a script of a text concerning the political doctrinaire. Even so the case of enlighten seems to be arid and somehow unimportant to the plot, but this act servers and permits the reader to realize and apprehend the nature, the regime, and the post story or the history of the dominant ruling class, a political regime that is similar to the totalitarian antagonist government presented in Orwell’s time; and the process of going through the script text by the protagonist, gives the reader a chance to observe that the evil setting descried in the text encounters the archetypal agenda, yet, it also might encounters the same conditions of his life. Thus, it is possible to regard O’Brien in 1984 as a supporter for the reader, whose duty is to prepare the reader to be more conscious.

However, the notion of doublethink is also proved and suggested in the same chapter, which shows and demonstrates the capacity to handle two paradoxical concepts together. Orwell illustrates that “in spite of education and the vigilance of the Guardians, many of the ancient human instincts are still there” (Zamyatin, 1994, p. 22). Orwell depicted his protagonist in a way to keep these antique old human instincts with the hope that the reader would recognize the humanity of his hero. Regardless the circumstances, this human instinct though it exists, are suppressed by the dominance and psychological doctrinaire foe. It is quite obvious to observe Orwell’s decision to select the archetypal dystopian elements, and the way he depicted his protagonist decorated with human qualities, was to serve the duality doctrines grasped due to a potential romantic or tragic ending, which both are attributed as an outcome of doublethink. Although the reader is quite familiar with the romantic end of the hero’s quest, even so the narrative text doesn’t permit such ending the reader desire for a romantic end is still present. In fact, Orwell wanted the reader to observe this duality in thinking in order to be more sentient and conscious.
Through the ironic techniques embodied in the structure of his novel, *1984*, Orwell was quite aware to implicate the elements of the doctrines that take place during the Second-World-War and the decades after it. Also, Orwell was a quite conscious to involve the motifs and the elements of the dystopian archetypal, but at the same time, Orwell creates his characters with sufficient humanity to motivate his readers to look forward for a romantic ending. In regard to Oceania, the mind dominance of its dystopian society plays a significant role in reinforcing the impact of a total dehumanization. Even so, Orwell’s hero Winston is fatalistic, there were certain moments when he and Julia realizes the doctrines and instinctively for individuality. Winston illustrates that “You were the dead; there was the future. But, you could share in that body, and passed on the secret doctrine that two plus two makes four” (Orwell, 2007, p. 182).

With reference to the above statement, it must be noted that, if history, which is the foundation of political consciousness can be deformed, consequently, the foundation of human identity, the individual memory also can be overcast to the point of defacement. Orwell believed in the existence of objective reality where “two plus two makes four” (Orwell, 2007, p. 164). In fact, this objective reality has been effaced in Orwell’s portrayal of the archetypal “hell”.

**Conclusion**

In his novel *1984*, Orwell was mainly concerned to intensify and asserts individualism and liberty and their significance. Orwell’s protagonist Winston explains, “[If] you can feel that staying human is worthwhile, even when it cannot have any result, whatever, you’ve beaten them” (Orwell, 2007, p. 138). Eventually, towards the end of the story, Winston recognizes that he “loves” Big Brother due to the personalized torment he undergoes. Though the end of the story was a melancholic one, Orwell did not intends to portray or even to draw a predictable imagined future that might really occur, as has often been supposed and understands, but in fact, it is another different exemplary warning story about recognized distinguishable orientations in the neoteric contemporary world. Orwell utilized stylistic model and narrative displacement to make it possible for the reader to realize the totalitarian doctrinaires, corruption of power, and the mind control. It seems that, a portion of Orwell’s Catalanian experience, is evidently generated and motivated increasingly by new modern ways of mass communication, of deformed and even falsifying actual facts to suit the purposes of those in power.

Winston Smith restless neural state is a result of his continuous anxiety concerning the Big brother and the thought police; that he tentatively beats and controls his lack and deficiencies; his human spirit appears to be ineffaceable. The love affair between Winston and Julia reinforces feelings to realize that he is a live again, and it was considered as a good indication of Winston new rebirth as the readers expected, but finally Winston ratifies that he loves Big Brother. Thus, Orwell protagonist journey come to a certain end and failure, when Orwell decides to blend the political and the psychological doctrinaire with the weakness of the human beings.

At the very opening of the novel in early stages, Orwell’s intention was obviously stated for the reader about the kind of the world presented in the story, that it is not a normal common world; with the fact that romantic quest has no place in. The story starts in a shining, cold day in April and the urban dirtiness is evident, this prototype vicious setting might be modified by the hero or the hero might be modified irreversibly by this setting. Smith, the protagonist last name, is a popular, common name; that does not suggests any sign of greatness, however, it is not also a catastrophic shortcoming or blemish that drives and procures to Winston’s demolition.
If one reading narrative irony procures to boost the predictable romantic result or conclusion, one must also be able to recognize and to expect the ironic letdown. One recognizes that they grasped duplicitous credence concerning the text all along. Orwell utilizes his ironic narrative structure, along with his ironic techniques and his notion of “doublethink” that he collected from varied dystopian sources. In fact, Orwell’s ironic narrative techniques oblige the reader to expect the duplicity in the story. Yet, this expectation obliges also the reader to contemplate about the certainty of the romantic quest and the genuine factual powers that influences the quest. The satirical allegory incarnated in Orwell’s novel permits the reader to realize the relevance to his own life. Thus, it is possible to state that Orwell’s essential purpose is obtained in converting political writing into art through the ironic narrative technique.

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