

Gregor Schönfelder

The Pen is Mightier than the Sword. The Role of Language in George Orwell's Works

Thesis (M.A.)

YOUR KNOWLEDGE HAS VALUE



- We will publish your bachelor's and master's thesis, essays and papers
- Your own eBook and book - sold worldwide in all relevant shops
- Earn money with each sale

Upload your text at www.GRIN.com
and publish for free



Bibliographic information published by the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the National Bibliography; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de> .

This book is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorized distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author s and publisher s rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Imprint:

Copyright © 2015 GRIN Verlag
ISBN: 9783668395664

This book at GRIN:

<https://www.grin.com/document/353259>

Gregor Schönfelder

The Pen is Mightier than the Sword. The Role of Language in George Orwell's Works

GRIN - Your knowledge has value

Since its foundation in 1998, GRIN has specialized in publishing academic texts by students, college teachers and other academics as e-book and printed book. The website www.grin.com is an ideal platform for presenting term papers, final papers, scientific essays, dissertations and specialist books.

Visit us on the internet:

<http://www.grin.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/grincom>

http://www.twitter.com/grin_com

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
Neuphilologische Fakultät

Masterarbeit
zur Erlangung des Masters *English Literatures and Cultures*
im Rahmen von Lehramt Plus
am Lehrstuhl für Anglistik
im Wintersemester 2014/2015

**The Pen is Mightier than the Sword: The Role of Language in George
Orwell's Works**

verfasst von:
Gregor Schönfelder

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	2
2 Early Novels	5
2.1 Burmese Days	5
2.2 A Clergyman's Daughter	8
2.3 Keep the Aspidistra Flying	11
3 A Turning Point: Homage to Catalonia and Looking Back on the Spanish War	14
4 Theoretical Works	21
4.1 Overview.....	21
4.2 Language.....	22
4.3 Totalitarianism	25
5 Animal Farm	31
6 Nineteen Eighty-four	40
6.1 The Role of Language in Nineteen Eighty-four.....	40
6.1.1 Overview	40
6.1.2 Language as the Ultimate Tool – Why?	42
6.1.3 The Mechanisms of Power – How?.....	47
6.1.4 Conclusion	54
6.2 A Hopeless Fight?	54
7 Orwell Today	57
7.1 The Orwellian Prophecy.....	57
7.2 Examples for Orwellian Aspects of Contemporary Life.....	60
7.2.1 Overview	60
7.2.2 Newspeak and Doublespeak.....	61
7.2.3 Altering the Past and Surveillance	63
7.2.4 Concluding Remarks.....	66
8 Conclusion	66
List of Works Cited	69

1 Introduction

George Orwell was unarguably one of the, if not *the*, most influential political writers in English of the twentieth century, “the cultural icon and mythic figure who is probably more quoted and referenced than any other modern writer” (Rodden, *Preface* x). Today as well as when he was alive, Orwell was more than a novelist and essayist, but he produced writing in every possible form: reportages, poetry, film and book reviews, opinion columns. Yet, Orwell today has become more than a writer: during the seven decades since his death, he has become a cultural icon, a “mythic literary and public personality” (Rodden, *Preface* xi) who is not only canonised in school books but who has also become some sort of intellectual hero. The main reason for this is most probably Orwell’s literary integrity or, what is sometimes called, “a sense of decency,” (Atkins 1) which he displayed throughout his whole life. He was, above all, a moral writer and well aware of that:

My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art’. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. (Orwell, *Why I Write* 424-425)

His natural sphere of activity was hence politics. And indeed, from the very beginning, everything he wrote had a “political slant” (Rees 9); he was “a political animal,” a man “who could not blow his nose without moralising on conditions in the handkerchief industry”, as his friend Cyril Connolly once remarked (345). His topics comprised nearly everything that a writer during the twentieth century could write about: poverty, the decline of the middle class, the clergy, Left-wing politics, Socialism, Imperialism, Britishness, etc.; he even wrote about toads, how to make good tea, and English cooking.

However, the majority of people who know Orwell do so through *Nineteen Eighty-four*, which indeed is by far his most famous and most cited book (McLaughlin 165).¹ But the book did not appear out of nothing, as a spontaneous act, but it was the result of a long and painful process that permeated Orwell’s whole life. He was one of these writers whose

¹ The ranking is based on the number of citations in individual works between 1996 and 2003. *Nineteen Eighty-four* leads with 149 citations, followed by 62 for *Animal Farm*, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* with 49; all other works have not more than 24 (McLaughlin 165). For an exact statistic, see McLaughlin 164-165).

works cannot be understood if the circumstances they were written in are not taken into account, i.e., man and work cannot be separated here. In one of the few essays in which Orwell sheds light on his own approach to literature, he himself justifies this approach:

I do not think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development. His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in — at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own — but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape. (*Why I Write* 421).

Therefore, the concepts and apprehensions concerning language and its potential abuse presented in *Nineteen Eighty-four* will be much better understood when taking into account their development throughout Orwell's life work.

Orwell, then still known as Eric Blair, started out his literature career with social journalism, uncovering and writing against social injustice, according to himself to expiate "an immense weight of guilt" he had accumulated during his work on the oppressors' side as imperial policeman in Burma (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 180). At that time and until he came back from the Spanish Civil war he had joined in 1936, his writing was fully concerned with social evils, such as the rigid English class system, Imperialism, or the effects of poverty. However, the twentieth century soon proved to be dominated by politics rather than social problems. The rising threat of Totalitarianism in particular was of greatest concern for Orwell, and he spent most part of his mature literary years with writing against totalitarian forms of government, notably Fascism and Communism. Orwell would become increasingly aware of the fact that such regimes do not mainly rely on the oft-cited rubber truncheons and prison cells (though these surely do play a part), but that they safeguard their power through manipulating the masses by corrupting language.

Hence, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the role that language as a theme plays in George Orwell's works. It will show that for Orwell the modern totalitarian state reigns not through violence but through the manipulation of language, that is, physical means of suppression become subsided by psychological horror.

The first part will demonstrate this by looking at Orwell's early fictional works and demonstrating that language and its potential abuse always played a role. He did not start