### Candidate 10

Advanced Higher	English		

Writer:

George Orwell

Texts:

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Down and Out in Paris and London

The Road to Wigan Pier

#### Title:

An analysis of how Orwell's portrayal of social injustices, in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, resonates with his fictional dystopian world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

### **Central Question:**

How does Orwell's portrayal of social injustices, in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, resonate with his fictional dystopian world in *Nineteen Eighty-Four?* 

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Word Count: 3297

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In his 1946 essay Why I Write George Orwell claimed that writers write for four reasons: sheer egotism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose. Orwell's own motivation to write appears to be for a mixture of these reasons. Just before his death, on the remote Hebridean Island of Jura in 1948, he finished writing Nineteen Eighty-Four [1984]. Many believe that this is his 'masterpiece', a culmination of his literary career, where Orwell (originally Eric Blair) returns to themes that he grappled with in his earlier publications. For example, Orwell appears to draw upon his real world research expressed through both Down and Out in Paris and London [DOPL] (1933) and the first half of The Road to Wigan Pier [RWP] (1937) to help create the recognisable but imaginary, fictional, dystopian world of 1984. This essay will explore how elements in these earlier works anticipate aspects of his later fantasy.

Orwell's writing sheds light on cramped living spaces, urban decay, and poverty. In some cases, 'the most significant British political writer of the twentieth century', offers a way out of these prisons. This short dissertation is structured around a trio of urban spaces: Wigan (representing northern industrial England), Paris, and London. At each location I analyse the resonances of these earlier texts with his portrayal of life in Dystopian London, in 1984. I consider how this 'angry old Etonian's' representations of the 'ordinary worlds' of social injustice in his two earlier works resonate with his troubling visions of the future. Unlike his explicit critique of colonial justice in Burmese Days, and his allegorical critique of the sleepwalk into communist tyranny in Animal Farm, the three books at the heart of this study offer different kinds of social critiques, while also employing vivid descriptive language. My central question is: How does Orwell's portrayal of social injustices, in DOPL and RWP, resonate with his fictional dystopian world in 1984? In order to answer this question, I carefully examine how his portrayals of space and his use of vivid language in parts of these two earlier books resonates with his later writing in 1984.

In a letter to Henry Miller (26 August 1936), Orwell asserted that the American writer had 'moved too much away from the ordinary world into a sort of Mickey Mouse universe where things and people don't have to obey the rules of space and time', admitting that by contrast: 'I have a sort of belly-to-earth attitude and always feel uneasy when I get away from the ordinary world'. In his earlier works of non-fiction Orwell clearly obeys the rules of space and time, but twelve years later he would perhaps bend these rules to create the extraordinary world of 1984. In each location, I

George Orwell, Why I Write, (London: Penguin, 1946), p.4-5

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Robert McCrum, 'The Masterpiece that Killed George Orwell', *The Observer*, 10 May 2009. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/10/1984-george-orwell (accessed 6 January 2017).

Robert Collis, George Orwell: English Rebel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> George Orwell, *Burmese Days*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1934). See also: George Orwell, 'A Hanging', in *The Adelphi* (1931).

George Orwell, Animal Farm, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Cited by Robert Collis, George Orwell: English Rebel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.ii.

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therefore consider the way Orwell uses vivid representations of space to persuade the reader of both the reality of contemporary social injustices in pre-War 1930s and the dangers of 'bureaucratic totalitarian super-states' in the post-War 1940s.<sup>9</sup>

In the first half of *The Road to Wigan Pier (RWP)*, George Orwell draws upon his own experiences of living in Sheffield, Barnsley and Wigan in early 1936, to describe and reflect upon the bleak lives of everyday working class people in 'the ugly' 10 urban industrial north. The opening chapters are full of memorable detail. In his first chapter he recounts lodging with the Brookner family. He describes their home as a 'beastly place' that was 'not serving its rightful purpose'. 11 This 'defiled', 'hideous', and 'squalid' house is made memorable by descriptions of grime-stained bread, untouched, greasy marmalade pots, ever-present crumbs and an unemptied bedpan under the breakfast table. 12 The Brookners' home resonates with Winston's block of flats, where in 1984 'pipes burst', 'the roof leaked' and 'plaster flaked constantly from ceiling and walls'. 13 Both are foul places to live in. Orwell appeals to the reader's senses, not by telling us that they live in disgusting spaces, but by painting sensory pictures that reveal revolting environments.

The 6 foot 2 Orwell sleeps with his 'legs doubled up' because if he 'straightened them out' 14 he would kick the person sharing his room. The lack of space in his room reflects the cramped conditions of the entire house. Too many unemployed or incapacitated lodgers are squashed into this dwelling. The claustrophobic quality of Orwell's description is heightened by the landlady's repetitive complaints. Her constant moaning, and the house's beetle infestation, are too much for Orwell. His vivid descriptions reveal his outrage that people are forced to live in such environments. Later Orwell uses a fragmented list to highlight how all across industrial northern England these cramped, filthy and decaying conditions are replicated, house after house, street after street. 15 While the Brookners are physically constricted by a lack of space, in 1984, Winston is psychologically constricted by the telescreen that forces you to live 'in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard ... every movement scrutinised'. 16 Winston hides in a 'shallow alcove', that is obscured because 'the telescreen in the living room was in an unusual position', to write a journal that protests against 'Big Brother'. 17 Although Winston manages to break free from the state's attempts to psychologically control him, he is still physically constrained by the room. Orwell effectively describes situations where

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> BBC Radio 4, *The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 8 February 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ghb8b (accessed 6 January 2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> lbid p.3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p5.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.8.

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characters are cramped physically, in Wigan, and psychologically, in 1984's London where you are under constant surveillance.

After visiting a mine Orwell comments that it is his 'own mental picture of hell'. 18 is a place filled with: 'Heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and above all, unbearably cramped space'. 19 Orwell's appeal to the reader's senses is reminiscent of Émile Zola's 'devouring' mine in Germinal, conveying how terrible it is to work in the mine.<sup>20</sup> For Orwell, 'the conveyer belt' is a deafening din that sounds like 'the rattle of a machine gun' as the sound ricochets off the coalface to intensify the noise. 21 The heat in the mines is 'suffocating' and 'the coal dust stuffs up your throat and nostrils'.22 The noise and the coal dust almost asphyxiate both the weak-lunged author and by extension the reader.

Furthermore, in the mine the miners must combat hunger and thirst: for lunch they survive on a 'hunk of bread and dripping'23 and they 'chew tobacco'24 to combat thirst. Orwell describes their underground journey to work, often over a mile with head bent, squatting or even crawling. He underlines his admiration for these herculean miners, 'splendid men', who have to climb a 'small mountain' daily just to get to the coalface.<sup>25</sup> Once there, they 'are not only shifting monstrous quantities of coal, they are also doing it in a position that doubles or trebles the work'. 26 Margery Sabin argues that 'Orwell's skilled agility as a writer allows him to keep shifting angles', highlighting the contortions of the miners. 27 Orwell shows the reader how the miners' bodies are indeed contorted, as they must dig for over seven hours in a kneeling position under low ceilings.

Orwell highlights that the 'world apart' in which the miners live and work is terribly unjust.28 They live in cramped squalor, a tiny living room with no space for a bath, and they do back breaking work in inhuman conditions - extreme heat, noise and dust - without adequate nourishment or appreciation. Orwell imagines those who drive around on the surface, not aware of the miners labouring a mile below. He salutes the miners for their strength, but exposes the abominable treatment of the men who, he argues, hold up this industry, the wealth of the wealthy, and therefore the entire Empire.

<sup>18</sup> George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Émile Zola, *Germinal*, translated by Roger Pearson, (London: Penguin, 2004 [1885]), p.28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> lbid., p.20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Margery Sabin, 'The Truths of Experience: Orwell's non-fiction of the 1930s', in John Rodden, editor, The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.47.
<sup>28</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.20.

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Likewise, in 1984, Orwell exposes the injustices that the Proletariat are subjected to. They are the backbone of Oceania's society - the inner party would starve without them - yet they live and work in abysmal conditions akin to the miners of Wigan. In these fictional and non-fictional worlds Orwell highlights the injustice of those who have to do essential jobs, while living and working in degrading conditions and ugly urban spaces. Arguably the vivid opening two chapters are the most memorable of RWP, which in the second part moves beyond documentary description to a critical reflection upon certain kinds of socialism and its failure to alleviate suffering, the injustices heightened by industrialisation and, more briefly, the dangers of fascism.<sup>29</sup> In this critical manifesto for the mid-1930s Orwell suggests that repair may be possible. By contrast 1984, emerging out of the ruins of post-war Europe, ends far less hopefully, with the apparent total victory of Big Brother.

In Down and Out in Paris and London (DOPL) Orwell goes beneath the surface spaces of these apparently thriving capital cities. He opens with a vivid description of the people who live in his Parisian quartier. 'The sour reek of refuse carts', 30 the 'long lines of bugs'31 marching across the bedroom ceiling, and the cracks in the walls offer insight into Orwell's world. This graphic description of vile living conditions has echoes of the Brookner's 'squalid'<sup>32</sup> house, in RWP, and also Winston's flat, in 1984. that is 'falling to pieces.'33

At the opening of DOPL Orwell becomes unemployed: now almost penniless, life 'is a complicated business'. 34 His time is consumed by trying to live cheaply, and he is surprised to realise that poverty is not 'terrible; it is merely squalid and boring'. 35 Orwell argues in the first section of the book that the worst elements of poverty are hunger and boredom. Too scared to steal, Orwell retreats to his room where he hallucinates about food. Poverty leaves him powerless. Orwell's personal experience of near-starvation in Paris allows him to describe vividly the pangs of extreme hunger. In 1984 Winston encounters a man whose emaciated face looks 'like a skull', and realises that 'the man was dying of starvation'. 36 He is shocked. This image has a powerful effect upon Winston - it is the beginning of his psychological torture, and a sign of his dysfunctional society.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), especially pp.149-204. See also Margery Sabin, 'The Truths of Experience: Orwell's non-fiction of the 1930s', in John Rodden, editor, The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) pp.43-58.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.21. <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.13.

<sup>35</sup> lbid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.269. <sup>37</sup> Ibid.

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When Orwell finally finds work as a plongeur, in *DOPL*, washing dishes, his life becomes so busy, and he is so tired he 'could have slept on the cobblestones'.<sup>38</sup> He slaves away doing endless menial jobs for hours. He cleans filthy pans, prepares food and tidies the kitchen, but never has a moment's rest. His life accelerates as the hours pass. His job becomes a prison, as he does not have time to look for other employment. The weekly life for people in menial jobs is: work, sleep and a 'routine which makes thought impossible'.<sup>39</sup> Likewise in *1984* many of the workers at the Ministry of Truth and the Proles are so busy with their menial labours and party activities that they do not have time to think, let alone critique 'newspeak',<sup>40</sup> 'doublethink'<sup>41</sup> or 'Hate Week'.<sup>42</sup>

Due to a lack of sleep that leaves Orwell 'neurasthenic with fatigue', <sup>43</sup> the cook and he exchange vicious insults and quarrel 'over things of inconceivable pettiness'. <sup>44</sup> Similarly in *1984* Winston's work is a far from welcoming space. On the walls of are the 'slogans of the Party: WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH'. <sup>45</sup> Inside the workers must participate in the 'Two Minutes Hate' and act with care as they are under constant surveillance from telescreens. Even if not being watched by 'Big Brother', <sup>47</sup> this hostile workplace reverberates with the harsh working conditions of the plongeur, buried in the bowels of the hotel or trapped in a tiny restaurant kitchen. In *DOPL* and in *1984*, Orwell uses a similar technique, creating vivid images of slow starvation or immense fatigue, to shock the reader. This effectively highlights the injustice of living and working in such squalid conditions.

After Paris, London offers the reader a different space and vivid set of experiences to reflect upon. On his return to London Orwell's job falls through. Left unemployed, without money, Orwell is disconsolate. He loafs around London, lost in his own thoughts. After a few nights in hotels, his lack of money forces him to become a tramp. He moves with the tramps from one lodging place to another. They stay in 'spikes', the lodgings of a workhouse, however, a tramp cannot 'enter any one spike, or any two London spikes, more than once in a month, on pain of being confined for a week'. Thus 'a long slouching precession' of tramps is forced to make its way interminably across the country. Without a place to call home the tramps live a meaningless life. We are reminded of Winston and Julia's first rendezvous, outdoors

 $<sup>^{38}</sup>$  George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollanez, 1933), p.112.  $^{39}$  Ibid., p.34.

<sup>40</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.113. <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p114.

<sup>45</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.145. <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.194.

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in the quiet countryside. This unimportant, natural place should be a place of freedom, yet it turns out only to be an unliveable, unsustainable glimpse of liberty, as from a cell window the tramps (in DOPL) look out of to the rest of the world. Furthermore in 1984 the purposelessness of the characters' lives is exemplified by a Prole lady who hangs up her washing day after day, singing the same song. This mundane repetition highlights the apparent futility of her existence, as with the trapped and dehumanised tramps who appear to wander relentlessly without a purpose.

After walking for miles across England the tramps are forced to wait hours until the spike opens. When it finally opens, it is more prison than hostel. At night it is so cold that every few minutes the tramps would 'wake up shivering'. After a day in their cell the tramps are now 'half mad with boredom'. These tramps would happily work; in fact they want to work. In one spike Orwell is given the coveted job of helping the cook, so this time he is not forced to spend an entire day locked up in a cell. Orwell believes that the 'great evilness of a tramp's life is enforced idleness'. While the tramps cannot work freely, move about freely, or use their time freely, in 1984 it is the screens and microphones that imprison people. In 1984 Winston cannot talk freely, act freely, or even think freely: 'Winston kept his back turned to the telescreen. It was safer; even a back can be revealing'. Orwell protests about people being imprisoned: the tramps simply for falling on hard times, and in 1984 by the state.

Orwell wants to see tramps liberated. At the end of the book he suggests a solution. 'Each workhouse could run a small farm or at least a kitchen garden, and every ablebodied tramp could be made to do a sound day's work'. <sup>55</sup> A smallholding would free the tramps from multiple societal prisons. It would allow the tramps to do 'something comparatively useful' and live a 'settled life'. <sup>56</sup> This solution could bring an end to these injustices and free the homeless population of Britain from the prison of a tramp's miserable life. By contrast in 1984 there is no way out for Winston and Julia, who try to escape by having have an illegal affair. They rent a room that becomes their perceived haven of safety, representing their ultimately doomed small-scale rebellion. Enticed and betrayed by both O'Brien and Mr Charrington, they are caught by the Thought Police, tortured and punished.

While the Northern miners are trapped by the mine, as there is no alternative work, and the London tramps are controlled by not being allowed to stay in one spike, Oceania's dystopian government attempts to control every individual's private spaces so that it can exercise full power and control their minds. Orwell exposes the dangers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.159.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.199.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.207.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.19.

<sup>55</sup> George Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p.208.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.209.

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of over-controlling governments. He extrapolates this nanny state control to the worst-case scenario, where in 1984 Winston is tortured so much that the government have altered his mind and 'almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table: 2 + 2 = 5'. From 101, in the Ministry of Truth, represents an unforgettable space, a place of nightmares. There Winston's deepest visceral fear, hungry caged rats, push him to betray the one he holds most dear: Julia. In all three books Orwell exposes many injustices, though arguably breaking into someone's mind, crushing their personality, is the worst injustice of all.

Orwell describes seeing a young woman in *RWP*, from the comfort of his train, with an 'exhausted face', a 'desolate, hopeless expression', 'kneeling on stones', well aware of her predicament, 'poking a stick up a foul drain pipe'. <sup>58</sup> This resonates with his description in *1984* of Winston's neighbour: 'Mrs Parsons, a woman with lined face and wispy hair, fiddling helplessly with a blocked waste pipe', though she was probably unaware of how London under the Party was a 'vast and ruinous, city of a million dustbins'. <sup>59</sup> While less personally immersed as he was in *DOPL* Orwell uses a striking image of a blocked drain in both *RWP* and *1984* to bring injustice to life. There is a sense that Orwell is attempting to unblock the drains of injustice within his society, through his writing.

Orwell, described by one biographer as 'the wintry conscience of a generation', creates vivid and often painful descriptions throughout his writing. In many cases his haunting pictures of injustice appear to be designed to outrage the reader. While he generally does not tell his readers what to think, he does graphically demonstrate the suffering caused by both inequality and the unjust use of power. Some readers interpreted 1984 as a criticism of the then Labour government, and others as a more universal attack on totalitarianism, particularly as embodied by Stalinist Russia. His shrewd use of space and vivid language, in both real and dystopian worlds, aims to persuade the reader that they should protest fervently against such present suffering and future injustices. This short dissertation has identified resonances between two early works of non-fiction and one novel, showing how Orwell employs similar techniques to convey and interrogate the injustices and suffering that he encountered in his own life.

There are obviously dissimilarities between these genres of Orwell's writing. Nevertheless, his vivid language and graphic descriptions of different kinds of constricted space combine to shed light upon different social injustices, and this allows him to recreate his characters' real societal prisons. In his works of non-fiction

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.334.

<sup>58</sup> George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p.16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), p.85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Jeffrey Meyers, Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation, W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> BBC Radio 4, *The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 8 February 2013. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01qhb8b (accessed 6 January 2016).

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his characters are all ultimately trapped and cannot break free from the injustices to which they are subjected. Orwell's pessimistic view of our world means that since his characters are based on real people they cannot escape the injustice or spaces that snare them. By contrast, in 1984 Winston and Julia escape to rendezvous in both the countryside and their secret flat. They are ultimately separated, tortured and reprogrammed by the State. Like Winston's prized glass paperweight that is smashed into smithereens by the Thought Police, their love and lives are shattered. This depressing tale reveals Orwell's hostility towards, and his warning to the reader against an omnipotent, totalitarian government. 62

In *DOPL* Orwell exposes the injustice of hunger, poverty, squalid living and working conditions, as well as homelessness, boredom, and purposelessness. He does this through describing his own immersion in a variety of dilapidated or confined spaces in Paris, as well as the tedious and transient world of being a tramp in London. Four years later in *RWP*, he once again, though less immersively, experiences the detrimental effects of squalid living conditions and inhumane working environments. Again he devotes over thirty pages to describe cramped life and work, both overground and under-ground in controlled spaces. Finally, in *1984*, he reveals the dangers of the State's attempts to control thoughts, speech and deeds. Across space and time he conveys the depth of human suffering. He seeks to stir the reader's feelings, extend their empathies, and to further his political purpose of fighting social inequalities. His writing is ultimately crafted less 'to produce a work of art', to satisfy his 'aesthetic enthusiasm', or 'historical impulse', but more because of his deep political desire 'to expose' the lies of the State and the suffering caused by injustice.<sup>63</sup>

63 George Orwell, Why I Write (London: Penguin, 1946), p.8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, (London: Penguin, 1982), p.568. For Crick *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is 'a long pre-meditated, rational warning against totalitarian tendencies in societies like our own rather than a sick and sudden prophecy about Soviet or neo-Nazi takeover'.

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