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《1984》中的警示和乌托邦元素

The Warning and the Utopian Elements in 1984

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Abstract

George Orwell is one of the outstanding figures in the twentieth-century English literary history. His last novel *1984* is his most influential work and can be regarded as the pinnacle of his literary creation. As a dystopian classic, *1984* has not only been well received in Britain, but also caused a great sensation among readers all over the world. Applying the utopian and dystopian theories, this thesis examines the dystopia portrayed in *1984*, which takes the form of totalitarianism. By revealing the essence and danger of totalitarianism, the thesis emphasizes the warning given by the novel. Based on the analysis of the details that reflect people's wish for a better future, the thesis aims to prove that although *1984* is a typical dystopian novel, Orwell's critique on totalitarianism and his allusion to a better society in the novel endow *1984* with utopian elements. *1984* shares the same ultimate concern over human destiny with utopian literature.

The introduction summarizes Orwell's contribution to English literature and the strong influence that *1984* has exerted on literary criticism and politics alike. It also points out that *1984* as a political novel outshines the other works of the same kind in its perfect combination of political writing and literary creation.

The first chapter analyzes the influence of utopian literature upon the development of dystopian literature, and explains the reason why dystopian literature thrived in the twentieth century. By comparing varying definitions of the concept of utopia, the chapter reveals the contradictions in utopian thought. Through the study of the history of utopian thought, it reveals that utopian literature gives birth to dystopian literature. Dystopian literature thrived in the twentieth century, because utopian literature's critique on the reality has weakened and individual well-being has taken the place of collective interests to become the major concern of utopian literature.

The second chapter explains the reason why totalitarianism became one of the important themes of the dystopian novels in the twentieth century. The chapter studies the totalitarian strategies of control depicted in *1984*, reveals the characters' deprived

freedom and alienated human nature under the totalitarian rule, and emphasizes the significance of the alarm issued by *1984* on totalitarianism.

The third chapter examines the utopian elements in *1984*. The chapter expounds the forms of expression of the utopian elements in the novel, and probes into their function. Originating from people's hope for a better future, utopian elements have an important influence on Orwell's creation of *1984*. The utopian elements strengthen the novel's alarm on the dystopia in the form of totalitarianism. The alarm plays a positive role in people's struggle against totalitarianism.

The conclusion sums up the warning against totalitarianism in *1984*. The novel's vivid portrayal of a totalitarian society deepens people's understanding of its detriment, and sharpens their vigilance against totalitarianism. The utopian elements in *1984* strengthen the effect of the alarm issued by the novel, increase the artistic glamour of the novel, and reveal the common objective of utopian and dystopian literature: to express the author's hope for a better future.

Key Words: *1984*; totalitarianism; warning; utopian elements

摘要

乔治·奥威尔是二十世纪英国文坛中一个不可忽视的名字。在奥威尔的诸多作品中，他的最后一部小说《1984》无疑最具影响力。作为反面乌托邦小说中的经典之作，《1984》不仅在英国文学史上有着举足轻重的地位，而且在全世界也有着广泛的影响。本文应用乌托邦及反面乌托邦理论，对《1984》中以极权主义为具体形式的反面乌托邦进行深入的研讨，全面揭示了极权主义的本质和危害，强调了小说的警示效应。本文分析了小说中反映人们对美好未来寄望的细节，在此基础上论证了《1984》虽然是一部典型的反面乌托邦小说，但书中奥威尔对极权主义的批判和对美好社会的暗示赋予了《1984》乌托邦元素，书中所蕴含的对人类命运的终极关怀与乌托邦文学是一致的。

引言部分概述了奥威尔对英国文坛的贡献，以及《1984》在文学批评界乃至政治领域的深远影响。同时指出《1984》作为一部政治小说，有别于其他同类作品之处在于它极好地将文学的政治性和政治写作的艺术性结合在一起。

第一章分析了乌托邦文学对反面乌托邦文学发展的影响，并解释了 20 世纪反面乌托邦文学兴盛的原因。本章通过对比不同学者对乌托邦这一理念的定义，揭示出乌托邦思想中存在的矛盾。通过考察乌托邦思想的发展历程，得出反面乌托邦文学是由乌托邦文学孕育而生的。反面乌托邦文学于 20 世纪兴盛的原因在于乌托邦文学中原有的批判现实的功能弱化，以及个人利益逐步取代社会整体利益成为乌托邦文学关注重心。

第二章阐释了极权主义成为 20 世纪反面乌托邦文学重要主题的原因。本章分析了《1984》文本中极权主义者的统治手段，揭示了极权主义统治下小说中人物自由的丧失和人性的异化，强调了《1984》对极权主义警示的重要性。

第三章对《1984》中存在的乌托邦元素进行了研究。本章阐述了这些元素在小说中的具体表现形式，深入探究了它们所发挥的作用。乌托邦元素出自人们对美好未来的期待，对奥威尔创作《1984》产生了重要的影响。乌托邦元素强化了小说对以极权主义为形式的反面乌托邦的警示。这种警示在人类社会战胜极权主义的斗争中发挥了积极的作用。

本文结论部分总结了《1984》针对极权主义向人类社会发出的警示。小说中

对极权社会惟妙惟肖的描写加深了人们对其弊端的认识，有利于人们对它的防范。小说中存在的乌托邦元素强化了警示的效果，增加了小说的艺术魅力，同时揭示出存在于乌托邦文学与反面乌托邦文学之间共同的创作目的，即表达作者对美好未来的寄望。

关键词：《1984》；极权主义；警示；乌托邦元素

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Introduction

George Orwell's last novel, *1984*, has been described by Gorman Beauchamp as "one of the half dozen most important books of this century, arguably – for all its artistic and ideological limitations – the most influential one" (1984:82). As an attack on totalitarianism, it warns that "absolute power in the hands of any government can deprive a people of all basic freedoms" (Garipey, 1980:339). The novel is based in part on Stalin's totalitarian regime, but it also points out the dangers of unchecked power that Orwell perceived in many Western democracies. Because of the political insight embodied in the novel, *1984* soon became a phenomenal success. Ever since its publication, *1984* has been translated into more than sixty languages, and sold millions of copies around the world. Many universities have listed it as a required reading for students majoring in English literature. The vivid portrayal of a future world dominated by totalitarianism has aroused wide public attention. The specially designed terms about totalitarianism, such as Big Brother, Newspeak and doublethink, have become new entries in the authoritative English dictionaries. Moreover, nearly every year academic seminars about Orwell and academic activities like the memorial week of Orwellian films are held around the world. All of the above constitute the unique "Orwellian phenomenon" in the world of letters.

1984 has aroused wide public attention because of its alarm on totalitarianism and the incorporation of the utopian elements into the novel. The value of the book not only is restricted to the domain of literature, but also extends to politics. The horrible scenes depicted in the novel are prophetic. While sounding the alarm for the reader, they once again prove that no extreme will hold long. Mankind has been constantly striving for perfection in their pursuit of the ideal kingdom of the future. However, there is usually a gap between ideals and reality. The setback that people have encountered during the construction of utopian communities proved that utopia might be a beautiful trap, and the failure of utopian experiment shifted the utopianists' focus

from the perfection of the society to the critique of the reality, which led to the formation of dystopia. Although dystopia provides people with a formidable picture of the future, it warns them of the impending crisis so that what is depicted in dystopia may be prevented. Even if some countries in the human history might have a tendency to deteriorate into a dystopian state, they have been brought back in time by human rationality to the right track of development. In a sense, George Orwell is not only an outstanding author, but also a farsighted political prophet. Many of his viewpoints on totalitarianism have been tested by time. While making a great contribution in the literary field, Orwell set an example for his successors. His unpretentious self-examination and his ability to perceive the social effects of political theories inspired Irving Howe to call him “the greatest moral force in English letters during the last several decades” (1969:100). And V. S. Pritchett succinctly summed up Orwell’s position in contemporary literature when he designated him the wintry conscience of his generation.

Orwell’s works are famous not only for his sharp political perception but also for his unique style of writing. Orwell’s prose style, especially that of his essays, has become a model for students of writing because of its “precision, clarity, and vividness” (Garipey, 1980:339). Irving Howe reflected upon the critical consensus when he called Orwell “the best English essayist since Hazlitt” (1969:100). Orwell’s literary gift is thoroughly reflected in the creation of *1984*. Although as a dystopian classic *1984* is full of political flavor, it differs from other political novels in its high artistic quality, which makes it better received by both the reader and the literary critic. On the other hand, the political implication sharpens the author’s satire in the novel, thus increasing its artistic glamour. Lawrence Malkin has noted that “no political book, whether fiction or nonfiction – and the essence of Orwell’s success is that no one is ever sure whether *1984* is one or the other – has passed more thoroughly into the English language and the popular consciousness of the Western world than Orwell’s dark masterpiece” (1970:36). The perfect combination of political prophecy and literary creation enables *1984* to become an immortal literary classic.

When writing *1984*, Orwell had a clear purpose of warning the reader against

totalitarianism. He admitted in a public announcement that “the moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don't let it happen. It depends on you*” (1997-8:134). By incorporating utopian elements into the novel, Orwell increased its artistic appeal and strengthened the effect of its alarm. In *1984*, Orwell closely relates the text to reality. His intention of writing the novel came from his own experiences, because he came from a poor family, and his preparatory school life was filled with the snobbish headmaster's scathing censure and the rich classmates' taunts. The humiliation he received in his boyhood left a shadow in his life and unconsciously influenced his writing. In his essay “Such, Such Were the Joys”, Orwell “explained the guilt and shame he felt throughout his school years and how those experiences fostered his extreme sensitivity to social victimization” (Garipey, 1980:339). In 1936 he left England to fight for Republicans in Spanish Civil War. During his six-month stay in Spain, Orwell witnessed the faction within the camp of the International Brigade, which laid bare people's greed for power and their intolerance of different opinions. The brutality of the Fascists during the Second World War deepened his understanding of the potential cruelty of human beings and their desire for power. In Orwell's opinion, the centralization of power in the hands of any government or human individual may lead to dictatorship. Since absolute power corrupts absolutely, totalitarianism has become the greatest enslavement for mankind. Furthermore, Orwell's working experience at BBC enabled him to see through the British government's manipulation of media, and made him realize the danger of governmental control over the mass media. Political events exerted a much stronger influence on Orwell's writing than his daily life did. His later works were greatly inspired by the dark regime of Nazi Germany and the merciless Great Purge in Stalin's Soviet Russia. Using the totalitarian societies in reality as a model, Orwell provided the reader of *1984* with a panorama of a society dominated by totalitarianism, and accurately prophesized the rules that people must follow in a totalitarian world. By shaping *1984* into a textbook on totalitarianism, Orwell intended to make the reader fully understand the danger of totalitarianism so that they could prevent it from reappearing.

Dystopian novels are characterized by bloody scenes, absurd plot, a cruel ending and gloomy mood. In order to arouse the reader's interest, Orwell adopts an original writing technique of incorporating utopian elements into a dystopian novel. The reader can perceive Orwell's ingenuity from his choice of the title of the novel. When he was writing his last novel in 1948, Orwell initially named it *The Last Man in Europe*, but before its publication he changed its name into *1984*. Taking into account of the plot while comparing the two titles, we can see that if Orwell had chosen the original title, the novel would have ended in despair, because Winston, the "last man in Europe" by name, cannot escape the destiny of being assimilated by the totalitarian system. When the title was changed into *1984*, the effect of alarm was greatly strengthened. The new title endowed the novel with "an urgency that the same book under its first title could never have achieved" (Shklar, 1985:5). It made the reader feel the imminence of the totalitarian disaster so as to urge them to take immediate actions in order to prevent the tragedy from happening.

Orwell designed the love story between Winston and Julia, and made it a significant part of the whole plot. Orwell realized that in people's mind love is always something sacred; any act that aims to destroy true love will arouse public wrath. In the novel, Orwell vividly portrays how Winston and Julia are brave enough to pursue true love in a world dominated by totalitarianism. Their tragic ending reveals the terror and cruelty of totalitarianism, and warns the masses of its impending danger. On the other hand, the reader will be interested to know how young men and women are able to fall in love with each other in the special totalitarian social environment. Taking into account of the reader's psychology, Orwell gave full play to his imagination while depicting the love affair between Winston and Julia, which to a great extent increased the novel's appeal. In order to ease up the suffocating atmosphere of the novel, Orwell blended a trace of hope into the darkness of totalitarianism. While vividly portraying the horrifying totalitarian society, Orwell did not leave out the bright side of human nature. He also enlivened the novel by incorporating people's yearning for freedom and a better future into the novel. All the above reflects Orwell's originality and realizes his aspiration to "make political

writing into an art” (Orwell, 1954:318).

When researching on the warning of the dystopian classic *1984*, this thesis first focuses on the relations between utopian and dystopian literature. Then, the thesis researches the author’s incorporation of utopian elements into a dystopian novel. By synthesizing the studies of the novel’s objective and its special writing technique, the thesis aims to study *1984* from a new perspective, and tries to explain the reason why *1984* has attracted widespread public attention since its publication.

The body of this thesis includes three chapters. The first chapter analyzes the influence of utopian literature upon the development of dystopian literature, and explains the reason why dystopian literature thrived in the twentieth century. This chapter first reviews the history of utopian thought, and reveals the contradictions in utopian thought. The contradictions lead to the transformation of utopian thought and help bring about the formation of dystopia. Entering the twentieth century, mankind experienced two consecutive world wars. Fascism and other forms of totalitarianism brought unprecedented disasters to mankind while crushing their hope for a better future. People’s mounting resentment towards social reality and their deep anxiety over the future helped dystopian literature reach its pinnacle in the twentieth century. Since dystopian literature is the outcome of the development of utopian thought, it shares the same ultimate concern over human destiny with utopian literature. Therefore, dystopian literature contains utopian elements.

The second chapter makes a systematic study of the warning against totalitarianism that *1984* has given to the reader. Because totalitarianism is one of the most dangerous political systems of the modern age, it became one of the major forms of dystopia in the twentieth century. As a literary masterpiece with anti-totalitarianism as its theme, *1984* plays an important role in people’s struggle against totalitarianism. Relating to the details of the novel, the chapter analyzes the characteristics of totalitarianism, and probes into the mechanism of the totalitarian regime. The chapter also reveals how totalitarianism distorts human nature and leads to political corruption, which makes people realize the peril of totalitarianism and helps them understand the importance of the warning issued by the novel.

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