

**POWER FOR THE SAKE OF POWER:
REBELLION IN GEORGE ORWELL'S
*NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR***

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Introduction

“Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious,” writes Winston Smith in his diary in April 1984. He looks up and realises that this observation could very well fit into a textbook, published by the Party itself (*Nineteen* 217). Indeed, the Party is doing everything to prevent the people from gaining consciousness: a disappointed memory experienced at a proletariat market urges Winston to take control instead of waiting for the working class to act. He sees rebellion as the only possible (or rather only effective) solution to overthrow the regime. The reader, however, never gets to see the aftermath of this rebellion: even though there are attempts, in the end, the rebellion itself fails.

Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell was published in 1949, right after World War II, and at the beginning of the Cold War. It shows us a possible future, which was inspired by Orwell’s predictions and anxiety of the Stalinist regime. The novel follows Winston Smith, a worker of the Ministry of Truth, who is supposed to be an antagonist for the system, and at the same time a protagonist from the readers’ perspective: this image, however, gets more complicated along the way. In this paper, I focus on the predetermined fall of rebellion in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the context of game theory, based on the works by such cited scholars like Johan Huizinga, Michael Holquist, Zolt Czigányik, and Károly Pintér. For this reason, I analyse the leaders of the Party, namely Big Brother, and of the Brotherhood, Goldstein, and the power dynamics and relations of/between the other major characters in the novel. Furthermore, I argue that the actions and imagery of the leaders of the Party (Big Brother and O’Brien) can be analysed in the context of game theory, and that the characters are participating in what can be considered a game set in a dystopian world.

In the first chapter, I situate Orwell’s views on Socialist theory and analyse his disillusionment in (radical) Socialism. For this reason, with the help of his essays (to mention some, “Notes on Nationalism,” and “The Sporting Spirit”), and his personal experiences in Burma and the Spanish Civil War, I argue that game theory could indeed provide possible means through which Orwell could present his disillusionment, and it further provides a possible answer to the extremities manifested in the novel. In the second chapter, applying game theory I attempt to prove my claim that the leaders of both sides (Big Brother and Goldstein) are just puppets and symbols of the regime whose image is sustained only for the sake of power – and play. Moreover, I also explore game theory applied on the level of individuals: I argue that O’Brien, Winston, and Julia are all participating in what can be called

only a game, not a real rebellion. To further demonstrate this, I introduce some aspects of Sandra Newman's *Julia*, a 2023 novel retelling *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from the perspective of Julia, approved by the Orwell Estate. Newman brings up some fresh ideas which can be analysed in the context of game theory on a deeper level, and tinges Julia's complex personality. Finally, I study the ending of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and interpret the game of chess as a symbol of power.

Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one of the most well-known dystopian works of the twentieth century (alongside with Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*), it is much more than a novel simply depicting a shattered, disillusioned world: Orwell flawlessly combines the genres of utopia/dystopia, and game theory, offering a wide range of interpretations for scholars and general readers alike. Before delving into the possible relations of these terms, it is necessary to clarify them. The term 'utopia' was created by Thomas More, and his most significant book, *Utopia* (1516) bears the same neologism. As Fátima Vieira elaborates on, "More resorted to two Greek words – *ouk* (that means not and was reduced to *u*) and *topos* (place), to which he added the suffix *ia*, indicating a place" (4), thus explaining that a utopian place and society cannot exist. Vieira continues by stating that "[a]nother characteristic [of a utopian society] is that it is human-centred, not relying on chance or on the intervention of external, divine forces to impose order on society. Utopian societies are built by human beings and are meant for them" (7). In this quote, Vieira answers the question why utopian societies cannot work: because they are created by people and exist for people who are mortals, make mistakes and, despite all efforts, an error slips into the system, which include, among others, desire for power, ruling over certain classes, or greed. As a result, a utopian world turns into dystopia.

Utopia and dystopia share certain features, one may be derived from the other, thus these terms can be used interchangeably, as recent scholars do so as well. Some of these similarities include somewhat equal prosperity for the upper social classes; although there is equality between the genders, the lower classes are still exploited; new inventions appear, and science and technology develop – according to Claeys, both Stalinism and More's *Utopia* share these features ("Rethinking" 7–8). Lastly, as David J. Lorenzo emphasises, "[b]oth [utopia and dystopia] have strong roots in their author's contemporary society. Both act as critiques of existing institutions and generally call for changes in social relations, economics, and politics" ("Introduction" 7) – which, for Orwell is the disillusionment in Socialism.

Analysing the novel in the context of game theory offers a different perspective. Instead of focusing on the bigger picture – collectivist ideas, environmental and social issues,

mirroring unattainable ideals and theories, for instance –, with the help of game theory we can analyse the relationships between, and conflicts of certain groups of people, or even individuals. Therefore, analysing human interactions within the context of game theory contributes to a deeper, and more thorough understanding of the motives and personalities of people (or in the case of literature, fictional characters). Moreover, since game theory can be applied to both fictional and real elements, analysing literary fiction in the context of game theory might partially reflect the real world, thus making it easier for readers to somewhat grasp the meaning behind the operation of the world and human nature – and offering answers to why people instinctively want to participate in games.

Play, as Huizinga notes, is “older than culture” (1) – it is innately biological, for humans and animals alike. In spite of being a major subject of philosophy throughout the centuries, Huizinga highlights the flaws of former definitions: “they all start from the assumption that play must serve something which is *not* play, that it must have some kind of biological purpose” (2). But games do not have this so-called “biological purpose” – they are played only for the sake of playing, for being fun, out of enjoyment. As Huizinga continues, “[p]lay can be deferred or suspended at any time. It is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty. It is never a task. It is done at leisure, during ‘free time’” (8). In this regard, it shares some common features with utopia, which are emphasised by, among others, Pintér and Holquist.

As Pintér reflects on Huizinga’s ideas, “[i]magining and writing about a utopia is definitely not a necessary human activity in the strict sense; one may well consider it ... superfluous, idle daydreaming, satisfying Huizinga’s first and foremost criterion about a freely undertaken activity” (“Utopia” 41). Therefore, according to Pintér, the essence of utopia is play (or, in other words, utopia *is* play), which is “located on distant continents, faraway islands, in valleys hidden by tall mountains, other planets, or in the future or the past” (41). This description leads to the next similarity – both utopia and play have temporal and spatial limitations. In the early utopian stories (for instance, in More’s *Utopia*), the traveller takes on a long journey to remote lands, and he spends a certain amount of time there – similarly to games, which also have a beginning and an end.

Another significant similarity lies in the concept of replayability: as Huizinga states, “[i]n this faculty of repetition lies one of the most essential qualities of play” (10) – still, it might be hard to notice some aspects of replayability in certain utopian works. Holquist shares some concerns people might express regarding this characteristic of utopia, but then he continues by explaining that it can be achieved through the writer’s participation in the game:

by creating open-ended stories, which “may be ‘played’ again as often as they are read” (144), the readers have the opportunity to examine the actions of the characters, and “to decide who lost, who won” (144) – nothing describes better the ambiguous fate Winston Smith has met.

As Holquist explains, both utopia and play (he mentions the game of chess as an example) are separated from the real world by certain borders, “two of which are especially defining: setting the imaginary society in a distant time or place, or both” (136). These borders are necessary to create a new, safe reality, free from any conventions, and participants are more than welcomed to imagine a magical world – by stepping within these borders, they respect the rules of that game. In the case of utopian fiction, these rules are set by the “utopist,” the creator of that given utopian game who, according to Pintér, “invites readers to join in, to play with him/her and enjoy themselves” (“Utopia” 42). Of course, readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might not find the fictional world appealing at all, but then again, games are not necessary played for fun (one should just think of *The Hunger Games*).

Previously, I have mentioned some similarities between utopia and dystopia, however, the most striking difference between utopia and dystopia is how they provide a solution or offer compassion: “where utopias point to the future as potentially providing a better way of life, dystopias argue that we may face a future in which life is much worse than is currently the case” (7). What is more, utopia/dystopia can be connected through politics, as Gregory Claeys implies in his definition of dystopia: “Most commonly, from both literary and historical viewpoints, dystopia is identified with the ‘failed utopia’ of twentieth-century totalitarianism” (“Rethinking” 5). Interestingly enough, totalitarianism was heavily despised by Orwell. Claeys’s remark embodies Orwell’s brilliance, and sheds light on how these dots can be connected within one single novel.

Chapter 1. Power in Play – Orwell and Totalitarianism

Socialist theory and utopian Socialism are concepts which are both explored by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars and philosophers. I would not like to delve into the differences between these notions due to their philosophical depth, however, Kurt Bayertz's and Robert Conquest's essays were of great help in my research. According to Bayertz, Socialism in theory is "generally called utopian, that is [it] posit[s] an ideal future in which all the evils of early industrial capitalism would be overcome and all the social conditions necessary for the happiness of mankind would exist" (94). This description usually refers to the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, where the industrial revolution made many people (even children), exploited by capitalists, work in horrible conditions. We are finally living in better conditions than our ancestors, with more freedom and opportunities in life – there are, of course, exceptions, but it is generally true in many countries. As we are living a somewhat comfortable life today, it is quite incomprehensible for us that people used to live in such awful conditions.

As Conquest states, Orwell's view was that "the poverty and distress he saw in England was attributable to capitalism and would be cured by the socialist state. So, he was indeed a keen advocate of Socialism – though definable (as he put it) as justice and liberty" (126). This quote explains that Orwell indeed saw an escape in Socialism, he truly believed in it, however, his novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* gives voice to a disillusionment caused by the Stalinist deformity of Socialist theory, as well as radical Communism. The novel was banned in several countries, therefore Orwell's aim was not to open the people's eyes living in those specific countries ruled by a Communist regime, but, as Conquest writes, "the really extraordinary thing was not that Orwell was essentially right but that so many Westerners were so spectacularly wrong" (129). The goal to achieve with his novel was to show this part of the world rather than convince people to take part in a possible revolution.

While reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is evident for every reader that the political system presented in the novel (with the Party and its two branches, and Big Brother himself) very much resembles certain ideologies, and real-life political systems. Most people might find it hauntingly identical to Communism (or one of its most known form, Stalinism), but interestingly enough, Lorenzo expresses that through the utopian "magic mirror", in Pintér's words ("Utopia" 13), "everybody sees in it what they desire to see" (13), thus other anxieties and troubles of Orwell's era can be applied to the novel as well: "Big Brother is just as much Churchill as he is Stalin" (Lorenzo "*Nineteen*" 157).

Still, it might be quite challenging to understand why utopia and totalitarianism might be related to some degree. Both utopian (in the philosophical, not necessarily in literary sense) elements, and some aspect of game theory can be discovered in political ideologies, and these are perfectly mirrored in Orwell's novel. To refer to the distorted, broken version of utopia, dystopia is often defined as "the 'failed utopia' of twentieth-century totalitarianism" (Claeys "Rethinking" 5). Based on this quote, totalitarianism and dystopia share a common origin – utopia. Czigányik confirms this chain of thought that "Modern dystopias often reflect on the great dictatorial regimes and ideologies of the twentieth century—fascism, Nazism, and communism—all of which have a utopian ideology at their respective roots" (9). According to Claeys, the common theme of utopia/dystopia and totalitarianism is possibly collectivism, since "both utopias and dystopias normally, though not universally, exhibit a collectivist ethos. People sacrifice their individual interest to the common good. Social solidarity trumps selfish individualism" ("Rethinking" 8). Although collectivism is originally a positive, utopian goal (yet in this positive form it is unattainable, hence the 'utopian' mark), totalitarian regimes misuse it, and thus it becomes one of their weapons they might be armed with in a game – the weapon of hatred, and paranoia. As Claeys notes, "hatred, functioning to unite the group, can be more easily manipulated. Wielded properly, however, any such hatred can be therapeutic and cleansing. It can provide intense bonds of fellow feeling, as many studies of combat fraternity affirm" ("17).

Claeys's remark offers a new perspective when *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is analysed in the context of game theory. As he continues, "[paranoia] may occur when a frightened group of people exaggerates the size and strength of its enemies. They thus displace their anxieties onto another group (e.g. Jews or witches) which embodies their fears" ("Rethinking" 18). In the novel, it is not a group (such as the Jews or the witches Claeys mentioned) but Goldstein who is at the centre of the hatred. Moreover, this process can be seen in the operation of the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and how it creates everyday (Two Minutes Hate) and annual (Hate Week) rituals and ceremonies which, according to Huizinga, play a significant role in game theory (15). Ritual, as he argues, is loosely connected to play since the participants of this ritual must pretend to be someone else or behave in certain ways – or they will be "spoil sports" who shatter the idea of illusion (Huizinga 11).

On the other hand, players do not participate in these games of their free will, as their lives depend on it – these rituals are only performed so that players do not question this artificial reality, not because it provides fun and enjoyment for the participants. Therefore, as Huizinga notes, these rituals cannot be considered fully as games, as they lack the most

essential component of a game: the element of fun. Drawing a similar analogy, Huizinga also poses the dilemma of whether war can be considered a game at all, since for the participants (“for the aggressed, the persecuted, those who fight for their rights and their liberty,” as he puts it [210]) it is far from being “just a play:” but, as it can be observed in the novel (and similarly in real-life totalitarian regimes), the regime engaged in a corrupt gamesmanship: the Party looks at people as toys which they can toss around. It is also important to emphasise that, like the Party in the novel, real dictatorships own and distribute all the goods, and wealth, thus it has power over the people – and whoever owns the power, is in the position to control people, create the illusion of freedom and destroy it, to “play games” with the most vulnerable citizens, and prevent the organisation and execution of a rebellion.

Since established totalitarian regimes already own everything, and they regulate every aspect of people’s lives – from distributing material goods to offering employment –, the only goal for them to achieve/exercise is sheer power. As O’Brien explains to Winston,

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power ... Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (*Nineteen* 386)

In this desire for power, a certain image of play is embedded: not as evidently as in sports or board games per se, but, as O’Brien continues, “[w]e are different from all the oligarchies of the past, in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives” (*Nineteen* 386). This context makes it apparent that there is a level of competition with former dictatorships. Although this competition might not be called fair since neither of the opposing teams exist anymore (neither in real life nor in the novel’s fictional history), the element of fun, and of fabricated tension. The members of the Inner Party believe that they are the absolute winners, no one can defeat them: they have perfected the game of power. As Huizinga points out, in game theory victory itself is not the only thing which should be achieved, but a recognition by the collective: “In all games it is very important that the player should be able to boast of his success to others” (50), which contributes to a feeling of superiority. Huizinga connects victory to superiority as such: “Winning means showing oneself superior in the outcome of a game” (50). In addition, O’Brien thus not only explains

the operation of the totalitarian system (by using real-life examples) to Winston but also reveals it to the readers.

Game theory does not affect the course of history or politics, but applying this theory to the mentioned aspects helps us to better understand the way the world (i.e. the forces of power) works around us, and to provide some explanations about underlying motivational forces, in the case of real (communist, totalitarian) and fictional (Orwell's Party) powers alike. But game theory offers more than that: applying game theory to the political forces presented in the novel, as well as analysing it in a utopian context might provide a possible answer to why Orwell presented his own disillusionment in the novel in such a pessimistic way.

Nineteen Eighty-Four works as a statement of Orwell's opinion on both politics and game (in the image of sports). As Czigányik points out, however, the somewhat contemporary reception of the novel could have been quite different: since the influential literary movement of the 1930s and 1940s, New Criticism "regarded the interpretation of a work of literature based on its author's intentions as misguided" (6). Still, in the case of a utopian (or even dystopian, since Czigányik emphasises their similarities instead of differentiating the two) fiction, the historical and political context of the novel (and the author) often cannot be overlooked. As Czigányik explains, "[t]he narrative, either in the case of a utopia or a dystopia, reflects on the present social-political context of the author, yet in a fictional reality that is isolated from the actual historical context" (8). Based on this quote, it is safe to say that although Orwell's disillusionment might have been an influential factor in the writing process, most of the elements are exaggerated, which might project a rather satirical or critical voice not directly predicting a possible future, but rather the present of the writer (Czigányik 8).

Orwell experienced Socialist theory first-hand, and, as Claeys expresses it beautifully: "Orwell had glimpsed utopia, and he liked it. He embraced the group of humanity wholeheartedly" ("Vaporizing" 399). Orwell, who saw the financially struggling working class in Paris, London, Spain, or in Burma, and sympathised with all those who were just scraping by, truly believed in a greater good. Although in his childhood, the student Eric Arthur Blair could not really connect with his peers, among the oppressed he gained friends. Claeys notes, "[w]hat socialism meant was the real brotherhood of those bonded by a recognition of mutual humanity. This belief was fused and driven by an intensely emotional experience. In a few key moments of quintessentially utopian personal intimacy, Orwell found that complete strangers were suddenly friends" ("Vaporizing" 398–399). After this personal experience of comradeship, the disillusionment in not just radical, but other, less-extreme political movements grew even greater after he participated in the Spanish Civil War:

according to Claeys, “[i]t took the Spanish Civil War to turn Orwell away from modernity as such and towards practical politics” (398) and, as Lorenzo adds, “[Orwell’s] association with socialist movements and participation in the Spanish Civil War likewise has made him suspicious of the Soviet Union and contemptuous of avant-garde radicals. ... His disillusionment with both ordinary and radical politics was reinforced by his most recent experiences” (“*Nineteen*” 157).

In the age determined by capitalism, Orwell truly believed in the reformatory power of Socialist theory, but his war-time experiences in Spain convinced him otherwise, realising what sort of a threat was starting to take a form in Soviet Russia: “[Orwell’s] Spanish experience thus simultaneously had an immense impact both on Orwell’s sense of what socialism promised and what Soviet domination of international communism threatened” (“*Vaporizing*” 400). Although Socialist theory promoted an equal society, when it was actually materialised in the form of Socialism, it has not abolished class differences: which was, for Orwell, the most important one above everything, as Lorenzo states: “Another central problem Orwell attacks is hierarchy and the persistence of class” (“*Nineteen*” 158).

Lorenzo continues, “One lives at the expense of others, gathering power and wealth to the self even to the point of killing fellow citizens. Hierarchy and class mark tyranny; large inequalities of wealth and power are both the result of tyrannical action and tools by which tyrannies attain and retain control” (158). Nothing can show this kind of exploitation better than a game in which the parties are unequal: thought police, proles, the Inner and Outer Parties – the concepts behind all these terms are not fictional, they reflect reality. Although not intentionally, but with the help of game theory, Orwell illustrates the horrors of totalitarian dictatorships. Every game, as Huizinga and Holquist have mentioned, has strict rules that all participants must obey, and the parties must be equal. But this is impossible to achieve in a system of such an unbalanced power dynamic.

Moreover, according to Orwell’s 1945 essay, “Notes on Nationalism” a certain similarity can be drawn between nationalism and games – or to be more precise, a nationalist might be a typical participant of this game of power. As Orwell writes, “[a] nationalist is one who thinks solely, or mainly, in terms of competitive prestige. He may be a positive or a negative nationalist ... but at any rate his thoughts always turn on victories, defeats, triumphs and humiliations” (“Notes” 3). Although it is not necessary to analyse in-depth the concept of nationalism in his context, this thought might reflect Orwell opinion about playing games with the oppressed. As Claeys studies Orwell’s essay, he notes that the “[nationalistic] ...

power hunger tempered by self-deception” (“Notes” 4) “would define the mental world of Oceania’s rulers” (“Vaporizing” 405).

Orwell also dedicated his essay “The Sporting Spirit” (1945) to expressing his thoughts on games. Interestingly enough, in this essay, Orwell not only describes and criticises the sporting habits of the British working class but also considers the essence of play to be meaningless since it is no longer about playing simply for fun, but about triumphing over others – similar to Orwell’s description of the characteristics of a nationalist. As he expressed his concerns regarding the dangers of nationalism, or the permeation of Soviet influence in “Notes on Nationalism,” Orwell takes a similarly, almost identically pessimistic tone in “The Sporting Spirit” about the radical change of the essence of sports. As he states, “[s]erious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence” (“Sporting” 153).

All these elements which Orwell highlights can be identified in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: ceremonies organised around expressing hatred (Two Minutes Hate, and Hate Week), public hangings, snitchings, manufactured tension between the social classes, torture in Room 101; but at the same time, being loyal to the Party and the oppressing regime, praising them above everything else (which, according to Orwell, characterises nationalism) – it further reinforces the idea that by applying game theory, we might realise that those in power are very likely to treat people as their toys, and play with them as they like, without any rules established. Orwell notes, “[a]s soon as strong feelings of rivalry are aroused, the notion of playing the game according to the rules always vanishes” (“Sporting” 153). Both rivalry and equality are more likely to be identified within the relationship of individuals rather than a whole nation, therefore in the next chapter, I analyse O’Brien, Winston, and Julia as participants of a game created by the Party.

Chapter 2. The Leaders of the Party in the Context of Game Theory

2.1 The Façade of Big Brother and Goldstein

In the previous chapters, I applied game theory to certain literary genres (utopia/dystopia, for instance), and political ideologies (totalitarianism, and radical Communism), as well as analysed Orwell's view on play in/of culture. All these aspects define the literary, historical, and political background in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written. In this chapter, I continue by exploring the plot/game and characters/players (including leaders/game masters as well) of the novel in the context of game theory. Moreover, based on these observations, I argue that, as in literary genres or historical events, the communication, relationships and behaviour of the characters (primarily focusing Big Brother, Goldstein, O'Brien, Winston, and Julia, but I include some other, minor characters as well) can be examined using game theory. It is important to analyse them separately as they carry different roles, and different levels of authority and control.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, the main goal of an already established totalitarian regime is simply to maintain power, and to exercise control. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this process of exercising power can be considered a game, set up by the symbol/image of Big Brother – and as a game, there are certain steps to take before the “fun” can start. In order to play a political game, it is crucial to create effortlessly distinguishable and oppositional parties, to make a moderate, in the middle position impossible for those who are undecided, or do not wish to take sides: this contrasted power structure helps power to situate people on the scale of unreliability or dangerousness more easily (as several political slogans might have claimed, “whoever is not with us is against us”), and it also contributes to more heated argument between the participant sides. The first step to establish a dictatorship, and afterwards to maintain power might be to appoint/create a leader and at the same time fabricate our own enemy-figure. It is also the first step to prevent the organization of a rebellion, and for this reason we must think in extremes: the leader must be very good and kind to the people, who saves us from the evil enemy. So, in the following, I take a closer look at the image of the novel's two polar opposites: Big Brother and Goldstein.

Analysing the figures of the two leaders in the context of game theory might help us to realise that neither of them exist, they are just fabricated symbols of the principle the Party formulates. Big Brother is the main figure – or, so to say, manifestation – of the Party itself; we never get to see him in person, but he is the face of every act of the Party, and that

distinguishes him from being a traditional “cult leader” or dictator. He neither appears in public, nor gives public speeches on national marches, moreover, there are no pictures published of him in newspapers, which would usually be favoured by a dictator to appear as a loving father-figure and a generous leader – Big Brother does not need this strategy.

According to Lorenzo, Orwell’s intention was not to portray Big Brother as a living-breathing leader, but his “persona has been constructed to provide a human focus for fanatical devotion, providing a face that can be associated with guidance, assurance, knowledge, a plan, surveillance, and ultimately certitude and security” (“*Nineteen*” 169). As I have touched upon this aspect in the first chapter of my paper, Huizinga also emphasises the significance of rituals and considers them related to games – Big Brother functions as an emblem to these rituals. Lorenzo adds, “[Big Brother] functions publicly as the touchstone of all important things. He is depicted as the font of orthodoxy. He is said to watch over everyone continuously. He grants awards, punishment, and provides all material goods” (169–170).

The participants, therefore, understand that “There is something at stake” (Huizinga 49), and they play accordingly. Huizinga links ancient rituals to religion, stating that “the ceremony—be it sacrifice, contest or performance—by representing a certain desired cosmic event, compels the gods to affect that event in reality. We could well say, by ‘playing’ it” (15). In this context, Big Brother is the deity¹ (or, by drawing another example, the ancient Roman emperor looking over the arena of gladiator games), whom the “players,” the citizens of Oceania must satisfy by sacrificing other humans (those who committed *thoughtcrimes* against the Party in the name of Goldstein, or the Brotherhood); and who decides who has won, or lost, thus having control over the people’s lives. This religious, ritualistic element of playing is also highlighted by Claeys: in the manuscript of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in a deleted passage O’Brien defines a certain “religion of power ... the last religion, which destroys all others” (qtd. in “Vaporizing” 416). What is more, these rituals contribute to a sense of safety both on material, and social levels, as highlighted by Huizinga:

Every ceremony well performed, every game or contest duly won, every act of sacrifice auspiciously concluded, fervently convinces archaic man that a boon and a blessing have thereby been procured for the community. The sacrifices or sacred dances have been successfully executed; now all is well, the higher powers are on our side, the cosmic order is safeguarded, social well-being is assured for us and ours. (54)

¹ The connection between rituals and utopia in relation to the ancient Roman Saturnalia is also a well researched topic within utopian studies, as Robert C. Elliott describes in *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genres* (University of Chicago Press, 1970) (esp. ch. 1.).

His timeless image is necessary for establishing some sort of security and consistency, and this mysticism around his figure benefits the Party. The only thing left is to alter the image of Big Brother to fit into the idea of the middle and working classes – he thus surpasses the person, the human: he becomes an idea and an ideal leader, unshakable, unchangeable.

Big Brother, as a concept, is immortal – as long as someone believes in him, or there is one member of the Inner Party to represent the ideas he symbolises (as O'Brien contributed to the writing of Goldstein's book [*Nineteen* 384], it might not be denied that he, or other Inner Party members could have been behind some of Big Brother's manifestos) through propaganda, his figure lives on. As it is reflected by a dialogue between Winston and O'Brien,

“Does Big Brother exist?”

“Of course he exists. The Party exists. Big Brother is the embodiment of the Party.”

“Does he exist in the same way as I exist?”

“You do not exist,” said O'Brien. (*Nineteen* 383)

As long as the Party lives, the image of Big Brother cannot be destroyed or forgotten – his existence is a personification of the Party itself, and in this sense, in comparison, Winston's life is not long-lasting. His life, as well as the lives of the majority, can be erased, therefore they do not exist. O'Brien could erase Winston's life in a moment, and no one would notice that he does not exist anymore. Moreover, the point of this dialogue is not whether Winston really lives or not, but the fact that to trust the Party and Big Brother you have to question even your own existence, you have to lie to your own senses. Winston did just that: he accepted what O'Brien stated, therefore Winston lost his ability to perceive reality as it is. This chain of thought further affirms the fact that Big Brother, due to his perception as a god, not only decides over fates, but also claims certain sacrifices which must be made during a game (or ritual) in order to save the citizens of Oceania from the terror of Goldstein's army.

In the past, Emmanuel Goldstein, one of the former leaders of the Party, used to be “almost on a level with Big Brother himself” (*Nineteen* 166). Although he never appears in the novel, one might even assume that, similarly to Big Brother, he is only the fabricated symbol of the resistance, the Brotherhood (nothing proves this better than the fact that O'Brien claims to have written Goldstein's book). In the case of such an indestructible party lead by an immortal symbol, why is it still crucial to facing enemies (including the other hostile nations, Eurasia and Eastasia, and the Brotherhood), participating in wars, and “appointing” a non-existent enemy figure in charge of the opposing forces?

The reason might be that the Party uses Goldstein as a scapegoat, party members point a finger at him, and he is blamed for every inconvenience that the people must deal with. If Goldstein did not exist, then the Party would have to take all the responsibility for their

actions. As Daphne Patai puts it, “in [the Party’s] pursuit of power [it] is not wholly independent, for it depends on a supply of opponents. Power requires resistance: We do not speak of power over others when resistance is not present” (“Gamesmanship” 223). The presence of Goldstein is needed to create an illusion of resistance that people can collectively hate. And another thing: hate brings people together. They feel united in turning against a common enemy.

Furthermore, this analogy can be discovered in how groups of people relate/react to each other while participating in a game. Huizinga mentions that the German political theory calls this concept the “friend-foe principle” (209): based on this idea, in order to make a game work, two opposing parties are needed, and the participants must choose a side to identify with. As Huizinga elaborates on, “[a]ny ‘other’ group is always either your friend or your enemy. Enemy, of course, is not to be understood as ... a person you hate, let alone a wicked person, but purely and simply as ... the stranger or foreigner who is in your group’s way” (209). These polarised conflicts are essential to manipulate and control people more easily: in the novel, the Party uses the hatred against Goldstein and his army to convince people that they are safe under Big Brother’s rule, therefore people do everything to stay in the Party’s favour and do as the Inner Party members please just to keep the enemy away.

In the novel, the way in which power manipulates people, and makes them think in extremes, all contribute to the element of play – a game only those who are in power might enjoy playing. Similarly to a game, the process of manipulating people is not cruel, it does not need any blood spilled, but it successfully prevents them from ever daring to think about a rebellion. The foundation of all this is the removal of people’s own perceptions and thoughts, while the Party feeds them its opinion. The Party takes away all their confidence and belief in their own senses, making them feel like they are worthless and insignificant (see again the dialogue between Winston and O’Brien). In a world like this, it is hard for the people to even form the question whether organising a rebellion would be possible.

2.2 Self-Interest and Illusion in a Game of Power

Winston Smith, a member of the Outer Party, and worker in the Ministry of Truth starts to notice the shattered world around him; when he sees the true colours of Big Brother, he seeks the attention of a possible ally, O’Brien to organise a rebellion: “‘I am with you,’ O’Brien seemed to be saying to him. ‘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!’” (*Nineteen* 171). Little does Winston know about O’Brien’s true intentions – but, in Winston’s insatiable

desire to contributing to the creation of a better world, O'Brien sees a potential (although not truly equal) competitor in a game. To set up this game, O'Brien chose Winston as his opponent: Winston is hauntingly mediocre, has no family or true friends (roughly speaking, it would be easy and unproblematic to vaporise him, as he is rather forgettable), he is willing to abandon his morals, values, or even his lover, Julia without a second thought (even before his torture, when he was still be able to make rational decisions) – he is neither a tragic hero, nor wishes to be, but at the same time he is not frightened to sacrifice his life for the non-existent revolution. Therefore, Winston proves to be the most competent and promising candidate.

But before the game can actually start, there are certain steps to take, which, according to Daphne Patai, are crucial: "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" (222). Patai also emphasises that to gather as much information about Winston as possible, the Party/O'Brien had kept him under surveillance in the last seven years which means that they know about his secret diary, his dreams, and his relationship with Julia (226–227). O'Brien uses this information against Winston, and he blackmails him into thinking that he has no other way to survive but to participate in his game. To set up the game, O'Brien assures the room above Mr. Charrington's/Weeks's shop for the lovers (which serves as a "field," "ring," "board," etc. where the actual play takes place), and he also provides Winston a "handbook" (Goldstein's *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, written partly by O'Brien) which contains all the background knowledge to start the game. Now the players are ready, the game can start.

Until this point, Winston's role has been analysed in the game. But we might ask: how does Julia come into the picture? Unfortunately, Orwell does not devote much significance to her, nor to other female characters.² To answer this question, we should look elsewhere: the novel *Julia*, written by award-nominated American author Sandra Newman in 2023, and approved by the Orwell Estate, is worth a mention here. In this novel, Newman retells the story *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from Julia's point of view, offering a unique, new perspective of female citizens of Oceania, a portrayal from the harsh lives of prole women to the heavenly image of Inner Party ladies. Her inclusion of taboo topics, and character-building makes the

² Interestingly, although some people might see Julia as a character a victim of misogyny, her depiction in the novel is often seen as rather positive. See, e.g., Gregory Claeys, "Vaporizing the Soviet Myth: Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*." *Dystopia: A Natural History*, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 412–413.

world Orwell envisioned even more brutal, but at the same time, more believable, and tangible.

Due to its controversial subjects, and turning away drastically from the original work, *Julia* has received mixed reception both from critics and the general reading public. Still, in this novel, it is much more obvious that the characters are simply participants of a game than in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, therefore it stands as a perfect example to which game theory can be easily applied. Julia steps into O'Brien's game as a spy (or simply as a "whore", as O'Brien states to humiliate her [*Julia* 149]), a player on both sides: she becomes a member of the Thought Police and seduces certain targets in order to prove that they have committed a *thoughtcrime*. As opposed to Winston, whose main motivation was to fight for the truth (an act considered to be chivalrous, and for which he must be eliminated), Julia has a different interest: her motives are solely personal (still, for which Julia cannot be blamed, and which are of no less importance than Winston's), she simply wants to provide a better future for herself, and later for her unborn child. What more clearly differentiates Julia from Winston and any other Outer Party member is, according to O'Brien, that "[she] can safely commit the crimes of pleasure—in [her], they are even healthy. That is the mark of *Homo oceanicus*" (147). Here is a new type of human emerging who has the ability not just to enjoy killing, but to kill out of enjoyment, who considers murder a game. Mr. Charrington/Weeks, the middle-aged shopkeeper, is given greater significance in Newman's novel: he is portrayed as a spider who lures his naive victims into his lair, and plays with them before death arrives, believing that he has the authority to do so. As Mr. Charrington explains,

This shop is a haven for spiders. You'll see them lazing about in their webs, and they seem such idle, harmless fellows. But only let a beetle lay a foot on that web, and Comrade Beetle is doomed. Our spider cares for his victim, however. He swaddles him in silk and even administers a drug to ease his passing. ... That brief interlude in the web—those are the criminal's sweetest hours. (*Julia* 179–180)

In this way, a new layer of playing is introduced in the novel, which is addressed by Huizinga, as well as mentioned by Orwell in "The Sporting Spirit".

As mentioned in the first chapter, according to Huizinga, any action that has a purpose other than leisure, fun, and enjoyment (wars, for instance) are quite controversial to be considered a game. However, O'Brien creates a false identity (takes on the façade of a secret member of the Brotherhood, the main body of resistance) just to toss Winston around like a toy, and torture him in Room 101 not only because the Inner Party commands him to do so, but rather for his own "sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence" ("Sporting" 153). Despite all

this, in the context of game theory, O'Brien's actions indeed resemble a game since it is all about the enjoyment – the enjoyment of exercising control over an individual.

As Patai's essay confirms, the game O'Brien plays with Winston is exclusively for power; not for the Party's sake, but himself, to feel that he stands above Winston, that he has more authority, and he is in a position to do anything that he wants to do with him. The only notion which deters O'Brien from taking Winston's life earlier than he planned is the euphoria of enjoyment: Patai notes, "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" (232). Torturing out of enjoyment, for O'Brien, is of only personal matter; he seeks opportunity to exercise power, and "when power is pursued for its own sake, it becomes a game" (222) – because then the main goal of the game is not wealth, goods, or territory, but rather the satisfaction power and victory might offer.

And, in zero-sum games, as Patai emphasises, there is only one winner (228). Winston loses to O'Brien, the Party, and Big Brother – he becomes only a shadow to his former presence, as in the last scene in the novel, he, as an emotionally broken man is playing chess in the Chestnut Tree Café which previously motivated him to fight for the truth. This scene bears a symbolic meaning. As follows,

White always mates, he thought with a sort of cloudy mysticism. Always, without exception, it is so arranged. In no chess problem since the beginning of the world has black ever won. Did it not symbolize the eternal, unvarying triumph of Good over Evil? ... White always mates. (*Nineteen* 408–409)

This game of chess represents the predestined fate of the characters. Whatever they try to achieve, they cannot succeed, because there are greater forces who/that control everything from the background – Winston tries to convince himself thusly. Furthermore, this scene provides the story with a positive ending as well, meaning that the war between the Party and the people is not over yet, because *good always wins*: it is only a matter of time, and a few more brave souls, and the regime falls. And, as Patai concludes, "[Winston] notes that in an ideal chess game white always wins and white symbolizes the good, and he then inverts this observation and concludes that whatever wins must be the good, by virtue of its victory. Since Big Brother clearly always wins, as he has over Julia and Winston, Big Brother must be good" (235). Therefore, since Big Brother is good, as he always wins over evil forces, what else can an ordinary citizen, like Winston do, other than loving him?

According to Huizinga, who draws a similarity between dystopia and playing chess, one of the most important rules of any game is to preserve the illusion, but there are certain "spoilt-sport[s]" (11) who "[shatter] the play-world itself" (11). Moreover, as Huizinga

explains, “[b]y withdrawing from the game [the spoil-sport] reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion. ... Therefore he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community” (11).

In Newman’s *Julia*, this “spoil-sport” is Diana Winters, a former Inner Party member who reveals its chaotic operation. Although she has a famous history as a fighter, her only role in the novel is to shatter the seemingly flawless illusion created by the Party, revealing the secret persona of “Big Brother,” and also uncovers the real man behind O’Brien. Her character as a “spoil-sport” is necessary in the novel not only to open Julia’s eyes, but also to reveal the Party’s true colours to the readers: because the façade of the Party is a fragment of the illusion, a part of the game. On the other hand, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston takes the role of the “spoil-sport:” as a participant of the game set up by the Party, he violates the rules (although in a different way compared to Winters in *Julia*) – he gains consciousness, realises the flaws of this “bad place,” and tries to revert this dystopian image (he often dreams of a utopian world, namely Golden Country) by organising a rebellion.

This chain of thought is also emphasised by Pintér: “in the case of utopias it means that its human beings are literally mere pawns, they are custom-made robots obeying the rules of the game without qualms” (“Utopia” 42). Based on this analogy, in a perfect dystopian world Winston should have stayed silent and blindly follow Big Brother. However, he knows too much, he is too much aware of the operation of the world around him, therefore, to keep the illusion of power alive, he must be silenced. He violates the rules set by the Party (or Orwell himself, if we refer to Holquist or Pintér), thus he must suffer – hence the horrible fate he met. Although he is not physically killed, his mind has been shattered, and he becomes just another soulless piece on the Party’s chessboard.

Conclusion

Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell is indeed a shining example of twentieth-century dystopian fiction, its significance is proved by award-winning film adaptations (including the one written and directed by Michael Radford in 1984), and its world inspired many dystopian writers: the most prominent writer being Margaret Atwood, who references *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, or even Sandra Newman's *Julia*. Another testimony to the timelessness of Orwell's writings is the survival of the term "Orwellian", which is still used to this day to describe dystopian worlds and elements in literature, while at the same time, even the common reading public could grasp something of this term, as they often describe the exploitative power or unscrupulous governments as such. It further proves that Orwell intended his novels not only for literary scholars, but also for ordinary people – his literature is inclusive, accessible to all, because he envisioned a world that exists to this day in certain, often totalitarian countries. He combined history, politics, and philosophy to create a society that was almost real.

The novel fits all kinds of societies: the meaning of the novel has been altered many times to fit into the ideologies of certain nations (for instance, in the Soviet Union, where the novel was read as a propagandistic piece written about the United States), because regimes with a propagandistic agenda can be found anywhere in the world. It does not offer a solution but gives a warning and a description about the possible future. Individually, people are powerless, and as the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* works according to collectivist ideas, which emphasise the importance of communities, the individual is left alone and deprived of any kind of relationship, which further hardens the ability to rebel and find people who share your beliefs.

Since it was published, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (which just celebrated its 75th anniversary last year) has been in the centre of literary attention. The novel has countless interpretations: it has been read as a political/ideological satire, as a prophecy, a warning against radical Socialism and Communism, a dystopian piece – and by applying game theory (based on such remarkable literature as Huizinga's, Holquist's, or Pintér's works) to the novel, these aspects are put in their places perfectly, combined as puzzle pieces. Analysing the novel in the context of game theory not only puts the (in)famous characters into other perspective, but it also helps us to understand how the world of the novel, and the characters in it work.

The paper analysed the illusion of power in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and how this illusion is embodied in a game. For this reason, I analysed different types of games the

novel depicts: in the introduction, I analysed the utopian/dystopian literary genre in the context of game theory by highlighting some similarities and exploring the reasons why game theory can be meaningfully applied to the novel. In the first chapter, I focused on Orwell, and his disillusionment in radical ideologies, and how his views are portrayed in the novel – moreover, with the help of game theory, I attempted to bring utopia/dystopia and politics to a common ground. Last, but not least, in the second chapter, I argued that Big Brother and Goldstein are simply symbols of the Party, not real leaders, and that Winston and Julia are just participants of a game created by O’Brien solely out of enjoyment, in order to exercise power. To tinge this argument, I mentioned Newman’s *Julia* as a brief excursion, and I analysed Julia’s role in this newly formed power dynamic.

In conclusion, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* works as a critique of political ideologies and figures, while maintaining a dystopian worldbuilding. By applying game theory to the novel, the readers might discover the true nature of seemingly powerful figures – hiding behind the mask of fragile illusion, we find only humans who violate the sacred, instinctive act of play. As Patai comments, this violation is not only present in the act of play, but can be applied to all the inherently positive aspects negatively depicted in the novel:

This imperfect fit points to a significant feature of the game pursued in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. 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. (237)

By implementing Patai’s words, in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this “perversion” of values originates from the only remaining, yet negative, and sinful characteristic of human nature: the endless desire for power, for which those who are in control wade through everything and everyone. Although pleasure is present in a dystopian, and highly perverted version, sadism (as in the case of O’Brien), in which people use power as their personal weapon to control, and torture others, the true goal of playing, the notions of fun, and innocent enjoyment, get lost. Orwell could turn a so hopeful dream like utopia to dystopia and distorted a beautiful and innocent human activity like play into a nightmarish vision.

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