

Strange Intimacy: Intersubjective Relations in Orwell's *1984*

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Introduction

Before he has the chance to read the note that is slipped to him by Julia, Winston Smith, the protagonist of George Orwell's *1984* (1949), is sure that the message "must have some kind of political meaning" (Orwell 123), and he is not wrong inasmuch as in the world of Oceania "I love you" is in fact a political message (and later Winston himself has no doubt that their lovemaking is a "political act" [145]). The reading of Orwell's novel that follows is political in this very general sense, thereby departing from the dominant strategies of interpreting *1984*, which are political in the more traditional sense of trying to describe the political ideology of the Party—usually by comparing it to 20th century totalitarian systems, with or without relating it to Orwell's own, often strongly expressed, political views (see David Dwan, Dorian Lynskey and John Newsinger).¹ This essay will explore an aspect of Orwell's novel which, in contrast, appears to have received less attention: the dynamics of the two relationships that play defining roles in Winston's life: his relationship with Julia and O'Brien, respectively. These relationships might be imagined as a triangle, with Winston as the centre point of contact between the other two main characters. The textual dynamics of the novel can be analysed in terms of the interplay of symmetry and asymmetry of these two relationships, which, as I shall argue, is also relevant to the broadest political stakes of the novel. Ultimately, the relationship between Winston and O'Brien enjoys primacy, both in terms of Winston's emotional investment and narrative time. I shall explore the way in which this asymmetry is established, as well as its—broadly understood—political stakes.

One consequence of this approach is that the essay shall be concerned with the spiritual and religious aspects of *1984*. Michael G. Brennan asserts that *1984* is "rich in implicit religious references and associations" (144), while A. J. West likens Big Brother to Christ (27). For Orwell, the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church is not different from that of totalitarian regimes (Brennan xvi).² While Brennan considers several key aspects of the novel from a religious point of view (129-154), his analysis is based on the parallels between the Party's ideology and organised religion. Departing from the dominant line of reading *1984*, this essay will take a different approach and address other dimensions of religious and more broadly spiritual aspects of Orwell's novel—those that contribute to the understanding of the two

¹ Another dominant direction of analysis is concerned with genre and style, in particular the novel's effectiveness as a dystopia or satire (cf. Marks; Moylan; Petro).

² Brennan also writes that even though Orwell was a "self-professed atheist" (x), a "sense of the spiritual to the human condition" did matter greatly to him (xi), which explains why his references to religion are often characterised by either comedy or sarcasm (xvi).

relationships that define Winston's fate. I shall argue that several of those aspects which suggest the primacy of Winston and O'Brien's relationship can be seen to have a religious dimension. This is part of a larger theme: Winston's counterparts might be said to embody the primacy of one of side of the dichotomy of the body versus the mind respectively. This dilemma, at the centre of the torture scenes, also contributes to the erotic undertones and the eschatological dimension of the two relationships.

Winston's two relationships begin simultaneously, when one day he sees both Julia and O'Brien enter the room during the Two Minutes' Hate. This irreversibly changes the course of Winston's life, propelling him to his first outward act of rebellion—starting his diary. The asymmetry³ of the two relationships is installed simultaneously with the symmetry: while Winston feels no commonality with Julia, a secret bond already ties him to O'Brien, whom he regards as a potential ally after the first eye contact. Winston believes he is writing the diary to and for O'Brien (Orwell 92; 117), while he has no such fantasies regarding Julia. As it has been noted, for example by Graham Good (50), Winston's first impressions are mistaken in both cases. He is certain that Julia is an enemy, possibly even an agent of the Thought Police, while O'Brien's figure is enigmatic for him. "Winston's true alliances are clear from the beginning of the novel: he hates, fears and desires Julia and is unambivalently drawn to O'Brien" (Patai, *Mystique* 227). Winston dislikes Julia "from the very first moment of seeing her", and "continued to feel a peculiar uneasiness, which had fear mixed up in it as well as hostility, whenever she was anywhere near him" (Orwell 12-13).⁴ In contrast, Winston immediately

felt *deeply drawn to* [O'Brien ...], because of a secretly held belief – or perhaps not even a belief, merely a hope – that O'Brien's political orthodoxy was not perfect. Something in his face suggested it irresistibly.⁵ And again, perhaps it was not even unorthodoxy that was written in his face, but simply *intelligence*. But at any rate he had the appearance of being *a person that you could talk to* if somehow you could cheat the telescreen and get him alone. Winston had *never made the smallest effort* to verify this guess: indeed, there was no way of doing so. (13-14—italics mine)

³ A small detail that already suggests the asymmetry of the two relationships is that Julia has only a first name, while O'Brien has only a last name.

⁴ Winston's initial dislike of Julia culminates in his fantasy of torturing her and raping her (Orwell 18) or hitting her with a cobblestone (116). In contrast, at no point during the narrative does he wish to inflict any kind of harm on O'Brien.

⁵ "[S]omething in [Winston's] face" (140) is also what prompts Julia to approach Winston "As soon as I saw you I knew you were against *them*", she tells him (140—italics in the original).

This early scene highlights several crucial aspects of the Winston-O'Brien relationship. Firstly, in 1984, "[c]omradeship, if it could exist, would exist between men" (Patai, "Gamesmanship" 868), and Winston's preference for homosocial relationships is made clear accordingly. He feels "deeply drawn" to O'Brien (Orwell 13), but "disliked nearly all women, especially the young and pretty ones" (12), like Julia, because of a sense of sexual inferiority (18) and also because he considers them to be the most fervent followers of the Party (12). Although Winston is impressed by O'Brien's physical prowess, his obsession with O'Brien seems to be primarily intellectual. His praise of O'Brien's supreme intelligence is a recurring element of the novel, and intelligence will ultimately prove to be a more important attribute to him than affection. For Winston, O'Brien is "a person you could talk to" (13), and it does not seem to matter greatly to him "whether O'Brien was a friend or an enemy [...] There was a link of understanding between them, more important than affection or partisanship" (30).⁶ O'Brien refers back to these thoughts of Winston's when he states that he enjoys talking to him and that Winston's mind appeals to him and resembles his own (296). At the Brotherhood meeting "[a] wave of admiration, almost of worship, flowed out from Winston towards O'Brien. [...] it was impossible to believe that he could be defeated" (202-203), while during the torture scenes "[t]he peculiar reverence for O'Brien, which nothing seemed able to destroy flooded Winston's heart again. How intelligent, he thought, how intelligent!" (313). O'Brien, who is working against Winston all the time, appears to be consciously encouraging Winston's trust of him from the beginning: he "lay[s] a friendly hand for a moment" (181) on Winston's arm so they can walk by side by side before he passes him the note. At the Brotherhood initiation, he makes Julia leave first and lets Winston ask questions, like he will during their torture sessions, realising Winston's fantasies of private conversations.

The symmetry is established by the parallels between O'Brien and Julia. In both relationships, the first contact is initiated by the other, which establishes a pattern where Winston is the passive party—he needs Julia and O'Brien to make the first step, which they do in the same manner and in the same place (181; Easthope 278), by passing him a note in a corridor in the Ministry of Truth. Winston's passivity culminates in the torture scenes: at one point, he "clung to O'Brien like a baby, curiously comforted by the heavy arm round his shoulders" (Orwell 287). Julia and O'Brien seem to affect Winston on an unconscious level, both appearing in his dreams: Julia's removal of her clothes in the Golden Country foreshadows

⁶ In contrast, the word "admiration" is used to describe Winston's feelings for Julia only once, when he dreams of her throwing her clothes aside: "What overwhelmed him in that instant was admiration for the gesture with which she had thrown her clothes aside" (Orwell 36).

their first date in the countryside, while O'Brien's dream voice informs Winston that they will meet "in the place where there is no darkness" (29; 118, 205; 263; 280). Winston, at this point, does not know that O'Brien's cryptic words—which are in fact Winston's own—refer to the torture chamber in the Ministry of Love, but he is certain that "some way or another it would come true" (30). Orwell has Julia and O'Brien use almost the same words when talking about rats with Winston (166; 328),⁷ just as they both contribute to the rhyme on London churches started by Mr Charrington. The room Winston and Julia rent above Mr Charrington's shop has been frequently identified as the precursor and antithesis of both O'Brien's torture room and the infamous Room 101. Graham Good writes that "[t]he room over the shop is usually taken as the antithesis of Room 101, but actually it is an antechamber which *prepares* Room 101: Winston's bed of love with Julia prepares for his bed of pain with O'Brien" (52—italics in the original).

O'Brien's trajectory is different: his roles as ally and later enemy for Winston unfold in the opposite order. Also, compared to Julia's role as a love interest who seeks pleasure rather than participation in political and philosophical discussion, his function is more complex. The asymmetry becomes most marked in Part Three, dominated by O'Brien, while Julia is absent until a brief appearance in the concluding chapter. Richard Rorty writes that "[a]fter Winston and Julia go to O'Brien's apartment, *1984* becomes a book about O'Brien" (171). As I shall argue, the torture sequence can be seen as the climax not only of the Winston–O'Brien relationship, but also as the sequence that settles the dynamics of the two relationships, especially if we interpret them in the context of the Foucauldian understanding of confession as well as in that of theories of torture (Adriana Cavarero, Elaine Scarry, Jean Améry among others). The relationship between Winston and O'Brien has been called "conflicted" (Stewart 125), as well as "long, close and intensely felt" (Rorty 187); Antony Easthope characterises it as "ambivalent love" (276). Some interpreters, for example Paul Robinson and Robert Currie, have suggested that there is something sexual in Winston's infatuation with O'Brien, while according to Thomas Horan, "the sexual component of Winston's relationship with O'Brien, [...] manifests itself most clearly during the latter's torture of the former" (20). In Jacqueline Foertsch's words, "[...] the romantic union of Winston and Julia is interrupted by the triangulating character O'Brien, who functions not as a competing suitor for Julia's attention but as a powerful intellectual distraction for Winston, a source of intense emotional release that eventually challenges and destroys the foregrounded heterosexual affair" (57). I want to

⁷ As O'Brien is aware of everything that has been said between Winston and Julia, it is probable that he is referring to and finishing her statement. See Smith 431.

suggest, however, that these scenes are not sexual in the sense in which we normally understand this word, and that they might be interpreted in the context of Georges Bataille's concept of eroticism, which is concerned with erotic experience in the broadest possible sense, including religion—therefore, the sexual aspects of this relationship are inseparable from its spiritual dimension. It is possible to establish a conceptual connection between a narrower definition of the erotic as symbolised by Julia, and the broader interpretation of the erotic O'Brien stands for—an under-explored aspect of the main homosocial relationship. Torture might be, thus, read as a kind of (perverse) sexual act as well as a religious rite of confession.

I shall argue that what clinches the primacy of O'Brien over Julia are a set of motifs that might be called eschatological. "Eschatology is the doctrine of the 'last things' or, more accurately, of the occurrences with which our known world comes to its end. It is the doctrine of the end of the world, of its destruction" (Bultmann 23). In the New Testament, for the "new people of God", eschatology means "the consciousness of being the eschatological community [, which] is at the same time the consciousness of being taken out of the still existing world" (36). In *1984*, it is not only the Party that seems to be thinking in terms of this timeframe, but the eschatological framework is also present in the two relationships that define Winston's fate. The novel suggests that, for Winston, both his life and his relationship with O'Brien unfold on this heightened plane. On the other hand, as I shall argue, Winston refuses to involve Julia in this higher world that he inhabits with O'Brien—she, at least for Winston, lives in the here and now of secular historical time.

The interconnectedness of the qualities O'Brien is responsible for—the annihilation caused by torture, the confessional situation, the heightened sense of physicality and the eschatological understanding of time—results in an intensity that, on the level of the plot, cements the primacy of the homosocial Winston-O'Brien relationship over the more conventional, unambiguously romantic affair between Winston and Julia. On the broadest political level of the novel, Winston's unconditional adulation of O'Brien, his ready acceptance of the superiority of the spiritual and intellectual over the everyday and the physical make him complicit in what happens, participating in his own annihilation.

The “strange intimacy” of torture and confession

The climactic scenes of torture in the Ministry of Love can be seen as the crystallisation of the two major relationships which determine Winston’s life throughout the novel, while it is also here that the relative importance of these two relationships is clarified, while not least in the way they handle the opposition of body and mind. Torture, defined by Adriana Cavarero as “an intensely malign form of human relationship, its most radical perversion” (114), is, for Winston, an experience that makes the profundity of his relationship with O’Brien eclipse his relationship with Julia. Julia—physically absent because she is undergoing torture in another cell—is betrayed by Winston and thus is fading out of view, whereas O’Brien’s importance is reinforced: “Nothing that I can do or say, or stop myself from saying, will put off your [Winston’s] death for as much as five minutes. [...] We shall be utterly without power of any kind” (Orwell 192). From the moment of their capture, Winston and Julia’s relationship is completely subordinated to the other major relationship, and neither of them can do anything that is in any way relevant to the other’s life.

There are two aspects of these scenes that seem to be particularly important for the purposes of my inquiry. First, they are presented as the continuation of an already existing interpersonal relationship rather than simply as Winston’s confrontation with the impersonal cruelty of the Party, thus, they are the climax of Winston and O’Brien’s “strange intimacy” (175). Winston identifies the first blow as the start of the nightmare-like torture (275; cf. Améry 27), however, “later he was to realise that all that then happened was merely a preliminary, a routine interrogation to which nearly all prisoners were subjected. There was a long range of crimes – espionage, sabotage, and the like – to which everyone had to confess as a matter of course” (Orwell 275-276).⁸ During the preliminary interrogation of the torture routine, Winston duly confesses to crimes he never committed, and implicates everybody he ever knew (278). The subsequent brainwashing is carried out by O’Brien rather than by his underlings or other employees of the Ministry of Love. The first type of torture Winston undergoes is described in significantly less detail, in contrast to his time with O’Brien, which not only differs in its torture methods but also spans several chapters, suggesting the primacy of the Winston-O’Brien scenes in narrative terms, as well as on an interpersonal level. O’Brien emphasises the significance of his personal involvement: “I am taking trouble with you, Winston”, he tells Winston soon after

⁸ Interrogational torture means that the torturer inflicts pain on the tortured person to acquire information (Wisniewski 7), such as the name of the accomplices. Dehumanising torture, in contrast, is not interested in any information that might be extracted: it aims to degrade the victim to a level where they do not consider themselves human beings anymore.

the latter comes to himself, “because you are worth trouble” (281). The second key aspect of these scenes is that their intersubjective dynamics are inseparable from the fact that O’Brien places them in the context of confession, consciously exploiting and manipulating many of the institutional and discursive traditions surrounding confession—therefore, a thorough analysis of these episodes has to take account of these traditions as well as of how they are manipulated by O’Brien. It is these two aspects that shall take centre stage in the discussion that follows.

While it has been observed that the Party’s rhetoric resembles that of religious discourse (see Brennan 171)⁹ and that “political and religious orthodoxy are woven together” in O’Brien’s “authoritarian denunciations” (149-150), I would argue that the torture scenes of *1984* can be literally interpreted in the context of the long-standing religious practice of confession. According to Michel Foucault, “[s]ince the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth” (58), and it is for this reason that “torture has accompanied [confession] like a shadow” (59). It is in the torture scenes that O’Brien’s power is fully manifested, especially in his ability to assume a number of different roles. His shape-shifting ability means that, in addition to his permanent role as propagandist, in the Ministry of Love scenes he acts torturer, father confessor and a priest conducting a sacrifice and an initiation, encapsulating and consummating the duplicity of his role in Winston’s life.

It is important for acknowledging the significance of these scenes that the word “confession” has two meanings: it refers to the speech act of revealing information as well as the entire act of confession, including what the confessor says and does. In the scenes where torture is carried out by others, confession is present as a speech act, while when O’Brien is present, largely due to the fact that it is inscribed into an already existing relationship, torture as a whole approximates a confessional situation. Thus, when O’Brien tells Winston that he is not there for confession (Orwell 289), he is referring to confession as a speech act.¹⁰ The ritualistic confessional situation is reinforced by O’Brien’s tone and manners: “When he spoke, his voice was gentle and patient” (281). This gentle coercion, encouraging Winston to reveal what is on his mind, contrasts the “fists”, “truncheons”, “steel rods”, “boots”, “merciless

⁹ An example of this is that the narrator uses the phrase “sacred principles” to refer to key concepts such as doublethink (Orwell 31).

¹⁰ There are scenes featuring Winston and Julia which can also be viewed as confession, although in the sense of a speech act only. For example, Winston confesses his fear of death (156) while they are talking in a church tower, which can be interpreted as confession both because of the location and because he is admitting a secret. Other instances of confession include when Winston tells Julia about his previous fantasy of raping her (139), when he confesses his love for her in the form of shouting her name after having a vision in the Ministry of Love (321) and when they admit betraying each other (336).

questioning” and “nagging voices” (276-278) with which the others extract true (or false) facts from Winston: moments when “[t]he question, whatever its content, is an act of wounding; the answer, whatever its content, is a scream” (Scarry 46).

O’Brien, despite the doublethink-regulated moments of cruelty when he denies Winston’s pain, *is* able to put on a compassionate appearance and in this way maintain Winston’s oscillation between pain and comfort—“wounding and caring”, which, according to Adriana Cavarero, are what the defenceless body is able to respond to (20-21): Winston “had the feeling that O’Brien was his protector, that the pain was something that came from outside, from some other source, and that it was O’Brien who would save him from it” (Orwell 287). Thus, the idea is that Winston’s pain is caused predominantly by a device, while all of his moments of comfort stem from O’Brien’s physical touch¹¹. The strategy of alternating between these two extremes—pain and comfort—not only allows one to avoid reaching the boundary¹² that death represents, but also allows torture and confession to continue indefinitely.

Torture seems to resemble confession in the sense that the production of truth can be regarded as the end goal of both, although the meaning of truth is different in either case. This doubleness is particularly obvious in the narrator’s claim: “The confession was a formality, though the torture was real” (Orwell 276). It could be suggested that the different meanings of “truth” are related to the multivalence of “formality”, which, in an obvious sense, refers to this being a conventional procedure of the Party’s, something like a ritual: a word with religious connotations, which Foucault does use to describe confession (62). In this way, *1984* also anticipates Cavarero’s insight: she implies that what Foucault identifies as the fundamental quality of confession—the production of truth—is also what motivates the “task of extracting information” during the torture scenario (114). According to Brennan, during the first kind of torture he undergoes, Winston confesses his crimes “in a grim parody of the Catholic [s]acrament of [c]onfession” (150).

Confession and torture alike are concerned with what is difficult to utter, for instance, someone’s greatest fear, which O’Brien forces Winston to face in the Ministry of Love’s infamous Room 101. In general, “[t]he most intimate and private parts of a victim’s life and body become publicly available tools for the torturer to exploit as he will” (Sussman 7; Scarry

¹¹ The only exception to this is when at the end of the mirror-scene O’Brien forcibly removes one of Winston’s teeth.

¹² Relying on Primo Levi, Cavarero identifies the creation of the Muselmann among the possible limits of torture (34-35). Orwell’s description of Winston’s physical and mental annihilation during the scene when O’Brien forces him to look at himself in a mirror (310-312) closely resembles Levi’s and Améry’s descriptions of the likewise doubly broken and dehumanised Muselmänner at Auschwitz. Cf. Améry 9; 40 and Levi, *The Drowned* 84; 98; 113-114 and *If This*, 96.

27), parts which are often the “most difficult to tell” (Foucault 59). According to Foucault, “[o]ne confesses—or is forced to confess. [...] the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or *extracted* from the body” (59—italics mine). One of the most private aspects of Winston’s life is his subversive relationship with Julia, the particulars of which Winston is made to confess during the preliminary torture: “He had told them everything he knew about her, her habits, her character, her past life; he had confessed in the most trivial detail everything that had happened at their meetings, [...] their adulteries, their vague plottings against the Party – everything” (Orwell 313). One key moment during Winston and O’Brien’s confessional torture scenes comes when O’Brien agrees with Winston that he has not betrayed Julia (313).

Unlike his henchmen, O’Brien is not interested in factual details of Winston’s deviation. While Winston still has to present falsehoods as true facts, now he is also required to experience them as truth on the inside—essentially how the Oceanian press works. However, and in contrast to confession, which, in Foucauldian terms, might be claimed to contribute to the construction or production of the subject, torture aims to break the tortured person’s integrity: “Never again will you be capable of [...] integrity” (293), O’Brien warns Winston. Breaking the tortured person’s integrity—extinguishing the spirit of the tortured (Améry 35)—is, in fact, more important than the physical, tangible results or the information(‘s truth value) that can be extracted via inflicting bodily pain: in fact, it destroys the part of one’s personality from which any kind of truth could emerge. According to Elaine Scarry, “the need for information” (35) is a “false motive” for torture (28; 57-58). She goes on to point out that the purpose of interrogation is “not to elicit needed information but to visibly deconstruct the prisoner’s voice” (20), and, by extension, the prisoner’s self, as “the ‘self’ or ‘me’ [...] is ‘embodied’ in the voice, in language” (49; cf. Wisniewski 40-41)—which is precisely what happens in *1984*.

The sentence about the formality of confession and the reality of torture might be understood in yet another way. Scarry writes that “physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of ‘incontestable reality’ on that power that has brought it into being” (27). This applies to the interrogation that takes place during torture as well, in the sense that “the pain is so real that ‘the question’ can feel “unreal, insignificant” (48) to the tortured. Therefore, despite its choreographed artificiality, torture can be identified as the moment of the Real, the irruption of absolute reality. Besides highlighting the fundamental metaphysical or ontological superiority of acute physical suffering in contrast to the actual words uttered in confession, the sentence also refers to the heightened sense of reality that characterises all the key moments of the Winston-O’Brien relationship. The objectification in the torture scene can

thus be read as the culmination of the “asymmetry of power” (Sussman 7) that is present in the relationship, where the intensity of Winston’s defencelessness is the counterpart of the absoluteness of O’Brien’s “perfect control” (7).

Despite the confession of secrets during interrogation, torture reveals no new, “real” knowledge. Formality, therefore, might also refer to the fact that, by the time of the torture scenes, O’Brien knows everything that could potentially be extracted from Winston—the details of Winston’s rebellion and the extent of his knowledge about Oceania—partly because this subversive content has been injected into him by O’Brien himself via Goldstein’s book (Orwell 229; 247). “O’Brien was a being in all ways larger than himself. There was no idea that he had ever had, or could have, that O’Brien had not long ago known, examined, and rejected. His mind *contained* Winston’s mind” (293—italics in the original). As there is nothing Winston can say that is not already known by O’Brien (Horan 155)¹³, the torture scenes cannot truly be interrogational. The relationship is also characterised by an “asymmetry of knowledge” (Sussman 7), which is evident from O’Brien’s confident remarks—“It was when you [Winston] thought about ‘why’ that you doubted your own sanity” (Orwell 300)—and his knowledge of the most personal details of Winston’s life. This explains why in Room 101, O’Brien is able to exploit Winston’s love for Julia through his greatest fear. O’Brien is omniscient, and therefore the only new “knowledge” produced by torture is that of torture itself. As O’Brien puts it in what Rorty refers to as “the central sentence of *1984*” (180): “The object of torture is torture” (Orwell 302).

The pointlessness as regards the information value of Winston’s confession is particularly important as it indicates the extent to which these scenes bear out what Foucault says about the asymmetry that characterises confession. For Foucault, confession is one of the primary technologies of pastoral power, present in situations characterised by the presence of a party who is doing the talking and of another party who is by definition listening. These two acts are invariably caught up in the power dynamics of a situation or a relationship:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the

¹³ We might also suppose that whatever is extracted from Winston will appear to him as something he *wanted* to confess. The father confessor is in this sense the person we have always been waiting for as the receiver of our innermost secrets—as someone who we assume already knows what we want to confess (Žižek 28). O’Brien is thus a perfect instance of what Jacques Lacan calls “the subject supposed to know” (*sujet supposé savoir*), the listener who elicits truth simply by their presence.

confession, prescribes and appreciates it and intervenes in order to *judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile* [...] (62—italics mine)

Foucault's theory of confession evokes the description of O'Brien's various roles during the torture sessions. "It was [O'Brien] who asked the questions and suggested the answers. He was the tormentor, he was the protector, he was the inquisitor, he was the friend. [...] He had the air of a doctor, a teacher, *even a priest*, anxious to explain and persuade rather than to punish" (Orwell 280–281—italics mine): roles, all of which are mentioned by Foucault in his account of the practice and institution of confession: "[...] doctors, educators, psychiatrists, priests, and pastors, to all the 'experts' who would listen" (111; cf. Wisniewski 31–36). Foucault also states that "[during confession] the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing" (62). In this way, the speech act of confession in a religious—or psychoanalytical¹⁴—setting is not unlike the interrogation during torture, as they all share an asymmetrical distribution of power and agency. Since the content of Winston's confession is worthless, he is deprived even of the minimal agency that victims of interrogative torture possess (in the sense that the extent of the importance of the information they withhold is the extent of their agency). Since there is no secret that can be extracted from Winston's wrecked body, the only purpose of the continued wrecking (torture) is the crushing of his integrity and agency, and the sheer assertion of power.

The torture scenes are also climactic in terms of a dichotomy that is crucial in Winston's two major relationships: that of the body or the mind. In important ways, this dichotomy is translated in the novel into the dynamics of these two relationships. Julia might be associated with the former, while O'Brien stands for the latter. This dichotomy, in light of Winston's two relationships, also manifests itself in the dynamics of both torture and confession. According to Scarry, "[...] what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but [...] latent distinction between a self and a body" (48). For Scarry, the tortured prisoner becomes a "colossal body with no voice" (57), a claim confirmed by Holocaust survivor Jean Améry: "[...] the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that" (33).

O'Brien has Winston acknowledge that asserting one person's power over another can be attained by making the other suffer, which ensures that the tortured is obeying the torturer's will and not their own (Orwell 305). In other ways, however, O'Brien's reasoning drastically

¹⁴ The intersection of confession and curing gives rise to a dynamic which very much resembles that of psychoanalysis: the patient's condition can improve by talking about their mental struggles. For a psychoanalytical reading of the torture scenes, see Paul Roazen.

differs from what seems to be both the theoretical consensus and the framework of Orwell's scenes. During his conversation with Winston, O'Brien urges for a stance¹⁵ which sees the hierarchy between body and mind in terms of the mind's primacy: "The second thing for you to realise is that power is power over human beings. Over the body, but above all, over the mind" (303). Having power over the body alone does not seem to be enough for the Party, as "[p]ower is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing" (306), which is possible because "[m]en are infinitely malleable" (309). What O'Brien is suggesting here is confirmed by J. Jeremy Wisniewski, who, relying on Foucault's concept of pastoral power, writes that since the 18th century human beings have been viewed as malleable, and that controlling the body has not been enough: torture now aims to control the subject's agency and subjectivity itself (42). This deconstruction and reconstruction of the mind is precisely what happens to Winston in the Ministry of Love, ultimately leading to his mental surrender and acceptance of Big Brother.

¹⁵ Naturally, O'Brien is a politician and a propagandist, saying what is most likely to bring him closer to his goal rather than what he considers to be "the truth".

“Deeper than friendship”: The eroticism of *1984*

There is yet another important sense in which the torture scenes represent the ascendancy of O’Brien over Julia, while also indicating Winston’s collusion in his own annihilation. However surprising it might seem at first sight, this sense is the erotic. On the level of the plot, sexuality seems to belong to the transgressive and illicit Winston-Julia relationship¹⁶, yet, as I shall argue in this chapter, the Winston-O’Brien relationship is also erotically charged. The central moment and culmination of Winston’s feelings for O’Brien during torture in this respect is the following:

At sight of the heavy, lined face, so ugly and so intelligent, *his heart seemed to turn over*. If he could have moved he would have stretched out a hand and laid it on O’Brien’s arm. *He had never loved him so deeply as at this moment*, and not merely because he had stopped the pain. The old feeling, that at bottom it did not matter whether O’Brien was a friend or an enemy, had come back. O’Brien was a person who could be talked to. Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood. [...] It made no difference. *In some sense that went deeper than friendship, they were intimates*: somewhere or other, although the actual words might never be spoken, there was a place where they could meet and talk. O’Brien was looking down at him with an expression which suggested that the same thought might be in his own mind. (Orwell 288-289—italics mine)

As Horan has noted, “[t]hough Winston suffers physical torture at the hands of O’Brien, he responds with overwhelming feelings of desire” (154). I propose that the torture scenes might be seen as erotic in a Bataillean sense, which makes them perhaps even more sexually suggestive than those between Winston and Julia, whose physical relationship begins with a “political act” (Orwell 145).

According to Georges Bataille, eroticism is a special form of sexual reproductive activity, one that is unique to human beings and not aimed at reproduction (11). The key concept for Bataille’s philosophy of eroticism is continuity, defined by Bataille as the opposite of discontinuity, that is, the difference that makes every being (including human individuals) distinct from all others (12). For Bataille, eroticism is whatever drives us to find “the pathway into unknowable and incomprehensible continuity” (24), which means that his broad concept

¹⁶ In Oceania, “[m]ere debauchery did not matter very much, so long as it was furtive and joyless and only involved the women of a submerged and despised class. The unforgivable crime was promiscuity between Party members” (Orwell 75)—Outer Party members like Winston and Julia. The illicit affair between Winston and Julia is clearly “promiscuous” in terms of the Party’s nomenclature, thus, it is erotic in the most obvious sense.

of eroticism includes all those human pursuits that seek continuity, including violence and death (violence is inevitable because, while we desire continuity, we also hold on to our discontinuous existence). In this sense, death means the end of discontinuity, the “continuity of being” (13). As the individual ceases to be, life for everyone else goes on regardless (21; 90; 141).

Torture, in the vein of Bataille, is erotic in the sense that its essence is transgression and violence. For Bataille, the domain of eroticism is the “domain of violence” (16) and the transgression of taboos (256), which the individual is tempted to perform due to the element of fear and horror that are also present in eroticism (144). “Desire in eroticism is the desire that triumphs over the taboo” (256), which includes deviances like incest. In torture, the taboo has to do with the violation of the other’s body and the infliction of pain. There is, however, another element of the torture scenes that links it to the erotic as Bataille defines it, which has to do with the strange presence of the spiritual in the Winston-O’Brien relationship. For Bataille, the religious impulse is quintessentially erotic as it seeks to transcend the discontinuity of being. Thus, eroticism encompasses not only sexuality and death, but also religious experience, as “all eroticism has a sacramental character” (15-16). The eroticism of religion culminates in sacrificial rituals, primarily sacrificial killing (90). Bataille also talks of the erotic feeling’s ability to overwhelm everything else (24) and the pleasure’s intensity being more like suffering (19), the counterpart of which in torture is the all-encompassing pain. The end of discontinuity that death brings is similar to how in torture the uniqueness of the human being is destroyed (Arendt paraphrased in Cavarero 43-45). Finally, Bataille says that eroticism “destroy[s] the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives” (17), similarly to how in torture the integrity and selfhood of the tortured person are destroyed (Scarry 35) and the torturer might also lose themselves in the process.

The real, if perverse, erotic intensity of the torture scenes¹⁷ is not entirely surprising in the world of Oceania. Totalitarian regimes expect a level of devotion from their followers that is not unlike religious zeal. The Two Minutes’ Hate “rises to a communal climax” (Brennan 149)¹⁸, followed by “self-hypnosis” (Orwell 19) via chanting Big Brother’s name. The concept of climax here invokes eroticism—possibly even the eroticism of orgies, “in which the continuity of beings beyond solitude is most plainly expressed” (Bataille 129)—, while the hypnotic state resembles Bataille’s description of mystical experience (246-247). This is the context in which Winston catches O’Brien’s eyes:

¹⁷ “[...] what was there that they had not *screwed out of him* under the torture? (Orwell 313—italics mine). The vulgarity of such expressions further contributes to the possibility of viewing torture as an erotic act.

¹⁸ Orwell himself also uses this word: “The Hate rose to its climax” (18).

[...] Winston knew – yes, he *knew*! – that O’Brien was thinking the same thing as himself. An unmistakable message had passed. It was as though their two minds had opened and the thoughts were flowing from one into the other through their eyes. ‘I am with you,’ O’Brien seemed to be saying to him. ‘I know precisely what you are feeling. [...] But don’t worry, I am on your side! (Orwell 20—italics in the original)

This “momentary contact” and exchange of an “equivocal glance” is a “memorable event, in the locked loneliness in which one had to live” (21). In Bataille’s eroticism, there are three ways of ending the isolation that is present in discontinuity and causes suffering (Bataille 20): the sexual act (having “a sense of the existence of others” [102]), “an inner compulsion to get out of the limits of individual discontinuity” (103), for instance, in the religious ecstasy of sacrifice, and, finally, death. The flow of ideas as a result of the opening up of two minds that Orwell describes might be seen as a variation on the second.

In this context, the difference between the first-contact scenes that establish the two major relationships becomes even more meaningful. The first contact between Winston and O’Brien—an exchange of looks and ideas—is transmitted on a spiritual level, while Julia’s message, in line with how she can in general be identified with the body, takes a physical form. From the beginning, Winston and O’Brien have a more intimate connection, which, contrary to what John O. Lyons suggests, is not limited to Winston’s political fascination for O’Brien (42) like it is in the case of Julia—engaging in sexual acts for their political value. This also suggests a curious inversion: while Winston’s sexual acts are a matter of the mind, his abstract political discussions with O’Brien have an erotic charge. This inversion is reinforced by another motif: both Julia and O’Brien see Winston naked. While Winston and Julia’s nakedness in the English countryside and the rented room is explicitly erotic, the eroticism of Winston and O’Brien’s scene is implicit. In the case of the couple, nakedness is reciprocal, consensual and occurs during lovemaking or moments of lounging around. In contrast, O’Brien exploits nakedness during torture to further his agenda of Winston’s dehumanisation: he forces Winston to remove his clothes before looking into a mirror. The most defining characteristic of these two kinds of eroticism, however, is that in Winston and Julia’s scenes the emphasis is on the undressing of bodies, in contrast to the Winston-O’Brien scenes, where the important revelation occurs upon uncovering the contents of Winston’s mind. Winston himself talks about his connection with O’Brien to Julia: “He told her of the *strange intimacy* that existed, or seemed to exist, between himself and O’Brien, and of the impulse he sometimes felt, simply to walk into O’Brien’s presence, announce that he was the enemy of the Party and demand his help” (Orwell 175—

italics mine). Winston's impulse to reveal his dissent is surprising, as he has seen O'Brien less frequently than Julia, they have barely talked and only made eye contact this one time. In contrast to Winston and O'Brien, for Julia, eroticism manifests itself primarily in the form of bodily sexuality and takes place in ordinary, physical time.

The intensity of the Winston-O'Brien relationship, as well as several motifs, enable us to read it in terms of Bataille's theory of eroticism, seeing the torture scenes as a sacrificial rite¹⁹ where the tortured person is the one being sacrificed, and the annihilation caused by torture can be equated with the ecstasy that accompanies sacrifice. "[...] [I]f [the human being] can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can *merge himself in the Party* so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal" (303—italics mine, italics in the original). "Can you not understand that the death of the individual is not death? The Party is immortal" (308), O'Brien tells Winston. For Bataille, sacrifice entails not only coming to stand outside ourselves, but also ecstatic integration into a community. Thus, O'Brien is not simply a father confessor but also a priest who is conducting human sacrifice.

This allows us to see the trajectory of Winston and O'Brien's relationship as the steps of an initiation ritual: initiation into the love of Big Brother. The torture scenes themselves—the climax of the whole relationship, and what O'Brien terms "re-integration" (299)—might also be conceptualised as an initiation ritual, one that has been foreshadowed by the Brotherhood's explicit initiation ceremony (Brennan calls the "re-integration" a "quasi-spiritual journey or pilgrimage" [152]). O'Brien identifies three stages to this process: "[...] learning, [...] understanding, and [...] acceptance" (Orwell 299). He also asserts that Winston will "become part" of the world the Party is preparing (308). One of the aims of mystical initiation and experience is *kenosis*—the complete emptying of the self before it is filled with the new, more valuable, larger-scale content—in this case, the Party's ideology. This enables us to reinterpret the annihilation of the self by torture, O'Brien's claim that conforming with the Party's views "needs an act of self-destruction" (285), as well as his threat that "[w]e shall squeeze²⁰ you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves" (293). In most cases, initiation into the mysteries also involves the denial of the "real world" (including excruciating pain) and the acceptance of a non-empirical higher order, which, in the world of *1984*, is represented by the all-seeing Big Brother. The stages of spiritual initiation are often accompanied by physical trial, which often involve some kind of torture, for example as with the Freemasons. For

¹⁹ "Torture is, first of all, a form of sacrifice that inscribes on the body a sacred presence" (Kahn 25).

²⁰ O'Brien's description can be linked to the etymology of the word "torture". It is derived from the Latin verb "torquere", which translates as "to twist", meaning that "to torture is to twist and distort the body" (Cavarero 32).

Winston, these trials include the attempt to see five fingers instead of four, and, naturally, the horrors of Room 101. According to Scarry, “pain is [...] frequently used as a symbolic substitute for death in the initiation rites of many tribes” (31). “We are the priests of power, [...] God is power” (Orwell 303). As O’Brien projects the choreography of the initiation rite onto torture, he is also a *sacerdote* (high priest), someone who has already been initiated and can take Winston through the necessary steps. As he tells Winston: “They got me a long time ago” (273). The context of sacrifice and initiation is an important aspect of O’Brien’s insistence on the primacy of the mental and spiritual sphere.

Winston has several hallucinations in the Ministry of Love—some of which are caused by drugs or hypnosis. While these can be considered as further examples of the mystical and erotic experience that Bataille describes, they also allow us to go further in exploring the dynamics of the two relationships. The most important such vision is the one featuring the sunlit corridor where Winston expects to be hit by the bullet, a vision which makes Winston cry out Julia’s name. This causes him to reveal his love for her—his “sin of non-conformity” (Brennan 153)—and results in him being taken to Room 101. In the dream, Winston enters “an almost heavenly state in which all doubts, arguments, pains and fears have been purged” (153) and walks down a corridor to enter the Golden Country, the place where he and Julia first made love as a “political act” (Orwell 145). After he shouts her name and wakes up, Winston feels as if Julia were not simply present next to him, but inside him, “as though she had got into the texture of his skin” (321).²¹ He also thinks “[i]n that moment he had loved her far more than he had ever done when they were together and free” (321).

The passage might be read as referring to a form of sexual union and the kind of continuity that, according to Bataille, discontinuous beings are looking for in eroticism. Yet, it also implies the primacy of the mental or spiritual for Winston: this ultimate union takes place outside or beyond the physical world. “The fusion of lovers’ bodies persists on the spiritual plane because of the passion they feel or else this passion is the prelude to physical fusion” (Bataille 19). This is also reinforced by the word “ecstasy”. Ecstasy refers to a trance-like state, however, it also means to “stand beyond oneself”. It is a fusion, a blurring of the boundaries of the self(s) that comes about because of the intensity of the experience (275). In Bataille’s words, it is a “a total blending of two beings” (20) that puts us “beside ourselves” (260), however, one which is an “illusion” only (262), because after the erotic act, individuals return to discontinuity.

²¹ A similar moment is when Winston cannot decide whether he is drugged, asleep or awake, but has the feeling that “O’Brien was at his elbow” and believes he hears O’Brien whisper “Don’t worry, Winston; you are in my keeping” (Orwell 279-280).

Bataille writes that “trances” and “states of rupture” (246) are crucial for the mystic’s “non-attachment to ordinary life, indifference to its needs, anguish felt in the midst of this until the being reels, and the way left open to a *spontaneous surge of life* that is usually kept under control but which bursts forth in freedom and infinite *bliss*” (246-247—italics mine). Winston shouting Julia’s name could be interpreted as such a “surge of life”, or as Brennan puts it, “a cathartic sense of spiritual release” (153). In the context of eroticism, Winston proclaiming his love for Julia could also be an exclamation of pleasure brought on by the culmination of the sexual act, because, as Bataille also notes, it is possible for some forms of mystical experience to be accompanied by arousal (247-248).²² “We can only reach a state of ecstasy when we are conscious of death or annihilation, even if remotely” (267), therefore Winston’s ejaculation might also be explained by his unconscious awareness of the annihilation Room 101 will bring. Another such moment of climactic bliss and annihilation is when Winston, sitting in the Chestnut Tree Café, realises that he loves Big Brother: the “long-hoped-for bullet” (Orwell 342)—the symbol of his fatalism and surrender to the Party—finally enters his brain. Winston’s experience is not only mystical, but also eschatological, in the sense that on these occasions, he is both space- and time-wise removed from the secular history (Dailey 31), which the text indicates by the upsetting of coherence. Although generally Julia is excluded from mystical and eschatological temporality, here it is her memory that brings about such an experience. By shouting her name, Winston wakes up from the hallucination and is forced to re-join the earthly, oppressive reality of the Party.

In the concluding chapter, Winston recalls Julia saying that “[the Party] can’t get inside you” (Orwell 334), but realises that this is exactly what has happened, perhaps remembering when during the torture O’Brien told him “[w]e shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves” (293). The crushing of Winston’s subjectivity means that O’Brien’s goal is to turn him into an empty shell, however, this is an ambiguous utterance which has further, ideological and sexual, connotations. As Horan has noted, “Winston is figuratively penetrated by the Party and becomes a receptacle for its dogma” (156), however, I would argue that the Party is not satisfied by filling Winston with some particular content. Rather, it wants to reduce him to a state where he will absorb and internalise any content whatsoever. This is done through mathematical problems such as the equation of two plus two, which exemplifies the very lack of content or concrete referential value the Party desires: the content is always relative to what the Party’s ideology requires in a given moment.

²² “[...] a mythical impulse of thought may always set off involuntarily the same reflex that an erotic image would” (Bataille 247-248).

O'Brien's statement also evokes Améry's comments on the experience of the tortured party at the moment of the first blow: "The other person [...] forces his own corporeality on me with the first blow. He is on me and thereby destroys me. It is like a rape, a sexual act without the consent of one of the two partners" (28; cf. Horan 156)—an act that is frequently regarded as a type of torture (Wisniewski 46). While Orwell's description of the events does not suggest actual rape, Winston's collapse is not unlike that of rape victims. The helplessness of the tortured means that the "physical overwhelming by the other" becomes an "existential consummation of destruction" (Améry 28). Améry also talks about the torturer "expanding into the body of his fellow man", thus breaching the boundary between the body and the self (35; 28), just like Scarry, who points out the "self-extension" (57; 36) of the torturer at the expense of the tortured, like when the voice of the torturer is doubled (36). Scarry also uses the image of extension to describe what intense pain feels like for the person undergoing torture: "It is the intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as *the body swelling to fill the entire universe*" (35—italics mine). Orwell uses the same words to describe torture: "[...] in the torture chamber [...] the issues that you are fighting for are always forgotten, because *the body swells up until it fills the universe*" (Orwell 117—italics mine). The phrasing in these cases suggests the violation and transgression of personal boundaries, which, in the case of torture, is always carried out with the aim of inflicting pain.

Orwell's novel suggests a secret link between Bataille and Améry: the ecstatic fusion and a blurring of the boundaries of the self that Bataille describes resembles how Améry defines transgression during torture as "[...] the border violation of my self by the other" (Améry 33) that happens because "[t]he boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self" (28). O'Brien cannot be seen as a true sadist, however, as the text does not suggest that he is deriving physical pleasure from torturing Winston. Instead, it seems that enjoyment is present on a spiritual level.

“What happens to you here is *for ever*”: The eschatology of *1984*

There is yet another sense in which the torture scenes can be seen as the climax of the Winston-O’Brien relationship, asserting its primacy over Julia. This is the temporal dimension of torture, at least as it is understood by O’Brien and Winston. Winston ponders about a remark of O’Brien’s after his release. “‘What happens to you here is *for ever*,’ O’Brien had said. That was a true word. There were things, your own acts, from which you could never recover. Something was killed in your breast: burnt out, cauterized out” (Orwell 334—italics in the original; 293). This recalls O’Brien’s statement about the hollowness that would follow after Winston has been “crush[ed] down to the point from which there is no coming back” (293). These remarks can be interpreted in terms of the disintegration of the self as a result of intense pain (Scarry 35), the refusal of the traumatic experience to become past. Améry writes that to be subjected to torture means that “a part of our life ends and it can never again be revived” because “whoever was tortured, stays tortured” (29; 34). In Orwell’s novel, however, this timelessness has another meaning, too, which is related to the spirituality of the Winston-O’Brien relationship.

According to Rudolf Bultmann, “the eschatological event”—personified by Jesus Christ—“will ever again become present and does become present ever and again in [preaching and] faith” (151).²³ Therefore, the eschatological view presupposes that what happens in the present moment is happening continuously and forever, in the “history of salvation” (153, cf. Löwith 182) and the “realm of eternity” (Bultmann 153). This is in sharp contrast with the way time passes on the secular plane and the temporal process that is usually called “history” (153)—events happening chronologically and moving towards an end point in time. This means that there is a paradox for the Christian believer: they are an “eschatological unworldly being”—someone who is, in their faith, “above [and overcoming] time and history” (153)—and a “historical being” at the same time (154; 152). In *1984*, particularly in the torture scenes between Winston and O’Brien, the worldly kind of history is overwritten by the eschatological one, leading to the narrative primacy of their relationship.

Again, the eschatological dimension of Winston’s relationship with O’Brien does not come as a surprise given the temporality of Oceania: the way the Party treats time through rewriting history can be seen as a grotesque or distorted version of eschatological temporality. As Winston explains to Julia, “[...] the past, starting from yesterday, has been actually

²³ This event is not the kind of historical development or established fact that historians are able to confirm (Bultmann 151-152).

abolished. [...] Every record has been destroyed or falsified [...] And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an *endless present* in which the Party is always right” (Orwell 178—italics mine). The elimination of secular history through the destruction of objects is a straightforward enough business. In the case of people, the Party resorts to what it calls “vaporisation”: deleting all evidence that a person has ever existed. As O’Brien tells Winston during torture, he will be “lifted clean out of the stream of history” (190; 291). The second quality of the temporal dimension of eschatology, the “forever”, is also pronounced in Oceania. “And what way of knowing [did Winston have] that the dominion of the Party would not endure *for ever*?” (31—italics in the original), Winston wonders while writing his diary. This is confirmed by O’Brien during torture: “The rule of the Party is *for ever*. Make that the starting point of your thoughts” (300—italics mine).²⁴ By lifting him out of history, O’Brien himself appears to be trying to place Winston in eschatological temporality: “What happens to you here is *for ever*” (293—italics mine). He tells Winston that “[n]othing will remain of you [...] You will be annihilated in the past as well as in the future” (291) and that “[y]ou are outside history, you are non-existent” (309). Torture is one means whereby the Party creates a temporality that resembles that of eschatology, and torture itself can be regarded as an eschatological phenomenon inasmuch as the temporality of the annihilation caused by torture is eschatological.

The eschatological dimension is likewise powerfully evoked by the leitmotif-like claim “[w]e are the dead” (156; 203; 252) that recurs at various points of the narrative. Although it is first used by Winston to refer to himself, it later extends to Julia, and, at one point, includes O’Brien as well. He uses this phrase at the Brotherhood-initiation without prompting from either Winston or Julia: “We are the dead. Our only true life is in the future” (203-204).²⁵ While the sentence is a foreshadowing element and the primary expression of Winston’s fatalism, the way it is used by O’Brien evokes a kind of waiting for the end that resembles the eschatological mindset of the early Christian communities.

The first reference to Winston’s being already dead occurs in the scene when he is writing his diary: “[Winston] was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. [...] *He was already dead*, he reflected. [...] Now that he had recognized himself as a dead man it became important to stay alive as long as possible” (32-33—italics mine). Steven Connor

²⁴ One of the most quoted sentences of *1984* also uses this eschatological phrase: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – *for ever*” (Orwell 307—italics mine).

²⁵ As Winston has been under surveillance for seven years, O’Brien’s familiarity with the phrase comes as no surprise.

writes that throughout the novel, Winston has the “sensation [...] that his life is in fact already over” (210). Winston later reiterates this idea while conversing with Julia: “[...] from the moment of declaring war on the Party it was better to think of yourself as a corpse. ‘We are the dead,’ he said [to Julia]” (Orwell 156). Winston’s realisation at the beginning of the novel of the importance of staying alive is suggestive of how later it is revealed that this is the central element of Julia’s life philosophy: “[...] stop talking about dying” (156), she retorts.

This passage might also be understood as Julia’s refusal of Winston’s proposition to get herself involved in eschatological time²⁶ and her attempt to make him return to historical time: “And now listen, dear, we’ve got to fix up about the next time we meet” (156). On another occasion, she expresses her disinterest in the next generations, saying she is interested only in herself and Winston (179). Her concerns are the present, staying alive and living life to the fullest within, or without, the constraints imposed by the Party.²⁷ Julia exists in historical temporality, which is also the time of the body. The eschatological imagery adds important nuances to the fact that, in the novel, she is repeatedly associated with the body, as opposed to O’Brien, who—by way of the traditional gendered binary opposition—might be said to stand for the mind. What the eschatological, the Foucauldian and the Bataillean context make clear is that the novel is far from unequivocal in assigning meaning to either pole of the dichotomy, and this has to do with the ultimate issues addressed in *1984*.

During their clandestine meeting in the church tower, Julia suggests that a physical, erotic connection—the transmission of her life force—between herself and Winston will enable him to stay alive: when she presses up against Winston in the church tower, “[h]er body seemed to be pouring some of its youth and vigour into his” (156). With this, in unambiguous terms, Julia promises Winston life—however, this is not the eschatological life promised by O’Brien and the Party. Julia’s association with the body is not merely sexual: she embodies ordinary human life, vulnerable and frail, but this life is not devalued by the novel—which questions the primacy of the O’Brien relationship. Julia’s vitality is emphasised when Winston would like to encircle her waist with his arm at the Two Minutes’ Hate (18), and when he notices the softness of her waist before they sleep with each other for the first time (141; 143). When they meet again at the end of the novel, “[w]e are the dead” momentarily seems to come true in a literal, physical way: “He remembered how once, after the explosion of a rocket bomb, he had helped

²⁶ Just before their arrest, Julia “echoed [...] dutifully” (Orwell 252) that they are the dead, therefore her singular attempt to join eschatological temporality is stopped by the Party.

²⁷ As it has been frequently noted, Julia’s practicality (Orwell 157; Stewart 139; Tyner 143) contrasts Winston’s “idealism” (Tyner 134; 143), as well as Winston and O’Brien’s preference for abstract thinking. According to Beatrix Campbell, “Julia appears to lack any intellectual curiosity” (Campbell paraphrased in Stewart 138).

to drag a *corpse* out of some ruins, and had been astonished not only by the incredible weight of the thing, but by its rigidity and awkwardness to handle, which made it seem *more like stone than flesh*. *Her body felt like that*" (335-336—italics mine). If Julia offers Winston real, physical life, O'Brien might be said to stand for eschatological life, which is, for what Julia represents, death: he is described as the one who kills something in Winston's breast (334), which makes it impossible for Winston to reunite with Julia in any way beyond a final but inane conversation in the streets of London.

The first contact between Winston and Julia is based on the frailty of her body. She pretends to fall on her injured arm to be able to secretly pass the note saying "I love you" to Winston. The fundamental feeling with which their relationship begins is the need for physical help—the Christian agape exemplified in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The moment Julia falls, Winston "felt the pain in his own body" (122), which foreshadows a similar moment of frailty during their arrest (255). Therefore, establishing a physical connection is what triggers their relationship, similarly to how later their relationship develops through sexual intimacy rather than through feelings (Crick qtd. in Horan 149). This, as I have argued, is in contrast with the first contact between Winston and O'Brien, where a shared look develops into a mental and spiritual bond. On the whole, O'Brien's character serves as a direct contrast to Julia: if she stands for earthly, physical life and the mortal, vulnerable body, he might be said to stand for eschatological life and temporality.

The supposition that, for Winston, O'Brien represents eschatological temporality is reinforced by another leitmotif-like recurrent sentence: "[w]e shall meet in the place where there is no darkness" (Orwell 29; 118, 205; 280). According to Graham Good, this sentence has "religious and prophetic associations" and it "gives Winston a feeling of not being alone, of being guided by some higher agency" (56). In the context of the present inquiry, it is important because the "we" in it *connects* Winston and O'Brien, leaving out Julia altogether. The sentence works on two dimensions. Winston understands it in a sense that can be called eschatological: the room is "the imagined future, which one would never see, but which, by foreknowledge, one could mystically share in" (Orwell 118). Thus, from the beginning of the narrative, Winston is hovering on the edge of mystical experience. This will be realised in O'Brien's harshly lit torture chamber in the Ministry of Love, during what Antony Easthope terms a "long-promised rendezvous" (278). As Winston thinks: "In this place, he knew instinctively, the lights would never be turned out. It was the place with no darkness: he saw now why O'Brien had seemed to recognize the allusion" (Orwell 263). Another possible meaning of this prophecy is

Winston's recurring idea that he will meet his death while walking down a bright corridor, during which he will be shot from behind (279; 320-321; 322; 342).

Julia is, at times, associated with the proles, the "swarming disregarded masses" Winston believes might hold the hope for a better future (80) but at the same time feels disgusted by. For instance, she uses makeup and perfume to step outside her role as a Party member (164). The possibility of a prole uprising is a recurring idea he has, however, one that deep down, he does not believe in: "The words kept coming back to him, statement of a mythical truth and a palpable absurdity" (95). Instead, Winston wants to believe in O'Brien, which ultimately leads to his complete annihilation: "[h]e knew sooner or later he would obey O'Brien's summons" (183-184). He does not care whether O'Brien is a friend or an enemy (13; 289), and when the latter proves to be the truth, he agrees with O'Brien that he has always known it (274). He likewise agrees when O'Brien says that he has told Winston that if they met again, it would be in the Ministry of Love (280). As Winston starts "re-educating himself" (317), he thinks that "[i]n reality, as he saw now, he had been ready to capitulate long before he had taken the decision" (317). Winston recognises the lack of evidence he has for trusting O'Brien on one occasion (195-196), however, for the majority of the novel his love for O'Brien is "abiding and constant" (Rorty 186), as this feeling of not caring resurfaces even during torture. "O'Brien tortures Smith but still he loves him" (Easthope 279). Daphne Patai writes that "[t]he smallest expression of interest on O'Brien's part makes Winston blossom into a conspirator, in full defiance of all common sense and caution" (*Mystique* 227). "[W]hat [Winston] is after is recognition and affirmation from O'Brien, the most powerful man he knows" (*Mystique* 233) and "in some sense Winston deserves his fate, for he is drawn to O'Brien, admiring precisely the power and domination that O'Brien will, of course, ultimately use against him" (234). According to Horan, "Winston's interest in O'Brien is fundamentally irrational" (155).

While writing his diary, Winston thinks about the continuity of human heritage (Orwell 32). This is the kind of continuity that stands outside the eschatological workings of time, and which might be likened to Bataille's concept of continuity. Winston is aware that his life will end with vaporisation and that the same fate also awaits his diary (32), but still decides to make the attempt of communicating with a future that is not under the Party's rule. Winston's diary is confiscated, thus, he is not allowed to step outside eschatological temporality, while Julia and the proles are not allowed to join him, the Party and O'Brien in the eschatological time.

Winston believes that "[t]he proles were immortal [...] [T]hey would stay alive against all the odds, [...] passing on from body to body the vitality which the Party did not share and could not kill. [...] You were the dead, theirs was the future. But you could share in that future

if you kept alive the mind as they kept alive the body” (252). Winston thinks this immortality comes about as a result of the body, through reproduction. As the body is generally conceptualised as vulnerable and mortal, the proles must be like that too, making this a failed thought experiment of Winston’s. O’Brien, conversely, asserts that the Party—a collective like the proles—has a mind that is immortal (285). Brennan puts this in the following way: the Party pursues the “uniformity of the soul rather than merely the body” (152). Additionally, the Party is immortal because, unlike the proles, it is based on the mind. Before Room 101, Winston debates what O’Brien told him, and comes to the same conclusion. “He could not fight against the Party any longer. Besides, the Party was in the right. It must be so: how could the immortal, collective brain be mistaken?” (Orwell 318). O’Brien’s claim that the Party is bodyless, collective, and therefore immortal, is yet another reason why Winston does not admit Julia into the Party’s eschatological timeframe.

In this context, the contrast between Julia and O’Brien might be seen in terms of another dichotomy: Julia’s agape might be juxtaposed with the Platonian eros that O’Brien represents. While with Julia it is always the vulnerable body that dominates, O’Brien represents the attempt to surmount the physical sphere. This is why, throughout the torture scenes, he negates the body, including its suffering, claiming that the mind is more important than the body—a view that is, essentially, ascetic: the mind is able to make the individual forget and control their physical suffering. Julia takes care of Winston’s bodily needs—having sex, bringing him chocolate, coffee and other forbidden goods—while O’Brien sees to his spiritual needs. Winston identifies with the theoretical and spiritual frame created by O’Brien and the Party—the primacy of the mind and of eschatological time.

Julia can be associated with the proles, and her actions suggest that she would like to join this vulnerable collective of bodies in the historical time they inhabit, whereas Winston leaves behind his bodily connection with Julia in favour of a similarly sexually suggestive, but essentially mental and spiritual bond with O’Brien. Like an ascetic, he wants to deny physical pleasures and the physical level of existence, and, instead, participate in the sacred union that O’Brien offers him through the collective mind of the Party and Big Brother (and which, in its perverse way, is achieved in the climactic torture scenes). This can also be understood as the eschatological equivalent of Bataille’s sacrifice or an initiation ritual. The beginning of the novel marks the beginning of his deadness, and throughout the novel, with the help of O’Brien’s influence, he reiterates his wish to remain dead. The novel, however, does not reject what Julia stands for: while the primacy of the spiritual (eschatological, religious, political, intellectual) sphere serves only to perpetuate the existing power structure, *1984* appears to warn the reader

through the character of Julia—the individual who has no choice but to remain in historical time and is reduced to the fragile body—about the importance of the contingent and fragile body and lifeworld, and the constant risk of its being stifled by the unconditional belief in the supremacy of the collective, spiritual and ascetic life of which the hallucinatory world of the Party is an extreme manifestation.

Room 101 is perhaps the most eschatologically secluded setting within the whole novel. The queer subtext of this scene has been noted by Easthope: “regression from self-identity and heterosexual love for Julia is not completed until [...] Room 101” (279). Fittingly, this is where the final stage of Winston’s annihilation takes place: he renounces his love for Julia and becomes incapable of feeling any kind of love except love for Big Brother. During this process, he goes from the agape Julia symbolises to the body-negating eros of O’Brien: “Winston moves through love of Julia, through O’Brien, to love of Big Brother, like a novice moving from love of lower to love of higher things” (Good 52). This love gradually becomes eschatological—is continually being recreated, evoking O’Brien’s hint that everything that happens to Winston in the Ministry of Love lasts forever. In a sense, the novel is not about Winston’s intersubjective relations but about their annihilation. Winston has no intersubjective relationships at all after the torture: there is no longer any “Winston” whom anyone else could relate to. Eradicated, intersubjective relations all melt into the one permitted relationship: the collective love for Big Brother.

Conclusion

At the centre of the Ministry of Love scenes, which are the key to understanding the way the symmetry and asymmetry of Winston Smith's two relationships unfold, stands the shared experience of inflicting and enduring pain. *1984* suggests that there is no such thing as exclusively interrogational torture, and that torture, whatever its alleged purpose, is intent on crushing the integrity and subjectivity of the victim. It is in this context that O'Brien, the torturer, overpowers Winston, the tortured, both mentally and physically in what is the climax of the novel's most intense intersubjective relationship. Through torture, paradoxically, he elevates his relationship with Winston to a mental and spiritual level—the level of confession, Bataillean eroticism, mystical ascesis, and eschatology. As a result, O'Brien's prediction about Winston—"Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything will be dead inside you" (Orwell 293)—seems to come true. Something similar is recognised by Wisniewski and R. D. Emerick, who write that "[torture] is by no means a temporary ailment: it *kills* the person subjected to it by fundamentally altering the way the person experiences the world around them" (122—italics in the original).

The all-encompassing intensity of pain obliterate the person who is experiencing it and the love they are capable of feeling is restricted to their tormentor who both inflicts and terminates the pain. Lines such as "O'Brien was a person who could be talked to. Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood" (Orwell 289) and "there was a place where they could meet and talk" (289) suggest that the torture makes Winston find a kind of communion with O'Brien that he was unable to have with Julia. As a result of torture, Winston and Julia both renounce and disown the other and their relationship. Therefore, by the end of the novel, she can only be present in Winston's life as the negated other.

Within the Foucauldian confessional framework of the torture scenes, O'Brien is able to intensify the relationship that began at the Two Minutes' Hate. He is cast as a priest-like figure, whose presence creates circumstances which are similar to those of confession, sacrifice and initiation, distinguishing his torture scenes from the preceding interrogational torture Winston has to face. For Winston and O'Brien, confession during torture is present in the sense of comprising the whole confessional situation, not only the speech act of admitting facts or secrets. The annihilation and loss of world (Scarry 37) caused by the pain of torture seem to go hand in hand with Winston's initiation and purification, which are orchestrated by O'Brien and lead to his conversion from heretical thought criminal to the crimetop-practising subject of the Party. After his temporary stay in the Ministry of Love, during which O'Brien "takes over every

aspect of Winston's physical and mental existence" (Brennan 150), Winston "[wins] the victory over himself" (Orwell 342), thus achieving salvation, and making the Ministry resemble the purgatory of Catholic doctrine (Brennan 150).

What is perhaps more important than Winston's confession, conversion and the intensity of bodily pain he has to endure is that this intensity is also to be found in the identity of the tormentor. Winston and O'Brien's relationship is characterised by an intimacy which the link between Winston and Julia can never approach in intensity. In this essay, I have explored the reason for the intensity of the Winston-O'Brien relationship referring to Georges Bataille's conception of eroticism: a way of ending the discontinuity of every being, a quest that is closely related to ideas of transgression, death, and religious ecstasy. Eroticism enables Winston's trust in O'Brien to reach religious, unconditional and suicidal levels. While both relationships have moments of physicality, Winston's life seems to be defined more by his moments spent in sexually-charged agony experienced at the hands of O'Brien than by his experience of more conventional pleasure with Julia. Thus, torture can be understood as a kind of perverse erotic experience, one that is not limited to space, time or gender.

As I have argued, eschatological imagery in *1984* is significant in terms of the dynamics of Winston's intersubjective relationships: it places the relationship between Winston and O'Brien on a higher, divine plane, associating O'Brien with the spiritual and the mystical. Throughout the novel, O'Brien reinforces this view by adopting a religious-mystical rhetoric. The two male characters claim to exist in eschatological time, which enhances the primacy and intensity of their relationship. Although Julia offers the possibility of existing in the present to Winston, and he likewise invites her to the eschatological timeframe where the annihilation caused by torture lasts for ever, neither character is able to accept the offer. The truly important relationship for Winston proves to be the spiritual, homosocial, and potentially homoerotic relationship he forms with O'Brien, which makes Winston accept the Party's views and learn to love Big Brother. In contrast to Julia, he wants to become involved in the world the Party is building, accepting its fundamental hierarchies. This entails his participation in his own annihilation, in which, thanks to his belief in the primacy of the mind, he is also able to find an ecstatic kind of enjoyment. Orwell's novel offers the counterpart of what O'Brien offers to Winston in the figure of Julia: her presence serves as a reminder of the importance of fragile, earthly and everyday human life. However, on the level of the narrative, in the climactic scenes of Winston and O'Brien's relationship—acting on the superior position granted to him by the torture situation—O'Brien is able to disrupt Winston and Julia's relationship, in contrast to Julia's failure of doing the same.

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