

## 6.2. Fraternal Complicity: The Permeation of Patriarchal Well-Being in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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### **Abstract**

The twentieth century brought a new path full of possibilities of reassuring utopias where human rights are conferred on everyone. However, totalitarian regimes, world wars, and socio-economic crises showed cracks in the discourse of individuals' search for perfectibility. The post-war consciousness of dystopian authors showcases a critical stance on what happens when utopia is conceived as doctrine. However, so rooted is patriarchy as a method to guarantee individuality that many male authors did not question the patriarchal foundations of the utopias they scrutinized. This paper examines the permeation of patriarchal utopia in the antagonistic discourses in the dystopian narrative of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Despite the animosity to the totalitarian regime presented in the narrative, I argue that Orwell depicts fraternal complicity between the systemic oppressor and the male heteronormative oppressed in typecasting women into men's relational identity and exploiting them to bear the continuity of ideal patriarchal states.

**Key words:** George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, patriarchal utopia, gender studies, fraternal complicity

The definition of "fraternity" and "fraternal" is male-exclusive, showcasing how this exclusionary solidarity among men builds patriarchy as the prevalent form of utopia, despite presenting differences in class, race or doctrine. This reductionist understanding of solidarity excludes "that which should be included" (Sargisson, 1996: 14) — that is, women's agency in society's decision-making. In so doing, fraternity does not comply with the necessary conjoining of visions characteristic of solidarity (Boparai, 2015: 5). Eventually, the patriarchal utopia's

communal well-being is illusory as it only benefits a segment of society (Gordin *et al.*, 2010: 1), which is precisely the dominant group. Although a false sense of comradeship is bestowed on women, the rulers eventually flout solidarity's "presumption of reciprocity" (Laitinen & Birgitta Pessi, 2014: 2). Hence, female participation in public life is highly constrained, especially regarding their sexuality and reproductive capacity.

Thomas Horan warns about how Orwell exonerates his male characters from their abuses of women for the sake of the individual's liberation: "this idea of liberation through sex also lends itself to a number of disturbing tendencies, including a juvenile attitude toward the female body, a reliance on sexist stereotypes, and, occasionally, a troubling link between desire for and violence toward women" (2007: 317). Any potential female utopian transgression is filtered, underrated, and even punished by their comrades and creator, Orwell. These forms of affective resistance could dismantle the fantasy of invulnerable masculinity, and so, female corporeality is stripped of any possibility of rationality or personal development to accommodate her companion's utopian design. In this way, patriarchal utopias do not give women genuine opportunities to feel part of the fraternity; they are relegated to act as brothers' wombs. The predicament of women's muted dissidence in classical patriarchal utopias persists.

The Orwellian dystopia breaks from the traditional patriarchal utopia by eradicating the father as the ultimate omnipotent figure. Instead, Oceania's dystopian civilization is controlled by Big Brother. The choice to name the leader of *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* oligarchic regime Big Brother is not accidental, as Orwell defies yet perfects the traditional mould of patriarchal utopia. On the one hand, the procreative complex of fatherhood is overcome by the destruction of perishable family ties. Indeed, not choosing the father figure prevents the risk of generational development or deviation by their progeny, and ensures the statism required in the conceptualization of patriarchal utopias. The father dies and is substituted by his son; the big brother will always remain so. On the other hand, He displays the ironical utopian belief of fraternity and comradeship. The social hierarchy appears horizontal — all parts standing in a relationship of brotherhood — but is ultimately vertical and unalterable, as "the figure of the brother grows with its siblings, and dies with them, regenerating itself with each new generation" (Bouet, 2013: 131). Power is inflicted intragenerationally, and repeatedly — generation after generation of disposable brothers. Big Brother's utopia of terror strikes like a "boot stamping on a human face — for ever" (Orwell, 2000: 307).

Despite the radical unidirectionality of relational bonding between inhabitants of Airstrip One and their icon, the society stratifies similarly to other patriarchal utopias, using an elite as intermediaries between the deity (the eternal) and the citizen (the disposable). O'Brien refers to the Party members

as “the priests of power” (303). Such a condition enacts routine forms of social stratification (Weber, 2013) because the social prestige of the Inner circle enables their people to attain power and lets them create power — a power used to sustain a way of living profitable for their ideological dogmas. Moreover, the maintenance of the family structure as the basis of every household retakes patriarchy’s heteronormative monogamy and delimits gender roles within the family unit in the conventional patriarchal way. Airstrip One’s family rests on the subjugation of the mother, the eradication of her generative power and the removal of parent-child emotions (306), to bestow servitude to Big Brother alone.

Orwell’s dystopia is systemically patriarchal, so female bodies continue being sexually exploited for nationalistic purposes. Chris Ferns affirms how “dystopian fiction effectively rewrites its underlying fantasy of the patriarchal appropriation of the powers of the mother, focusing instead on the dream of the son’s unsuccessful rebellion against the father” (1999: 126). Reproductive issues are central in the policies of the Party in order to guarantee the existence of more disposable (re)productive forces that fuel Big Brother’s almightiness. Jean Baudrillard concludes that “it is that naïve creature, man, who exudes utopias one of these being, precisely, woman. The latter, being a living utopia, has no need to produce any. Just as she has little reason to be fetishistic, being herself the ideal fetish” (1996: 26).

The narrative offers a misogynist portrait of motherhood, objectifying women as satisfiers of men’s longing for accomplished individuality. These social dynamics recall Almudena Hernando’s fantasy of dependent individuality (2018), where men’s identity is portrayed under a delusive idea of self-sovereignty and independence from the rest of the community. This fallacy is possible if female corporeality is examined as a matrixial entity (Aristarkhova, 2012). “Matrixial entities” are generative spaces characterized by a paradoxical position between productivity and receptivity (Aristarkhova, 2012: 11). As matrixial spaces, women will engender men’s utopian projections by becoming a utopian space. This assumed hospitability forces women to adopt a relational role that provokes “the absolute impossibility of conceiving oneself out of these relations” (Hernando, 2018: 77, my translation). Thus, the configuration of the women as utopian matrixial spaces occurs out of necessity: women’s generative hospitability and power is needed and neglected whenever they effect their role as relational identities to sustain the male fantasy of individuality.

The portrayal of female entities as merely matrixial and relational pervades the two ideological extremes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother’s and Winston Smith’s, showcasing how rooted this form of sociability is and how complicit these enemies are to guarantee male fantasy of sovereignty and self-determination. Women’s silence resulting from the state’s verbal censorship and narrative male gaze facilitates this possibility. Except for Julia, female characters in

the novel are speechless, forced to reduce the manifestation of their distress through physical embodiment. Not coincidentally, all these silenced women are mothers or potential maternal figures, namely Mrs Parsons, Winston's wife, his mother, and the red-apron proletarian woman. Their matrixial condition leaves them void of speech, responding to the imagery of empty utopian spaces: the former two women serve the Party's utopian plans, while the latter two embody Winston's utopian dream.

Orwell filters the description of female characters through Winston's emotions or past remembrances. Winston projects his utopian ideals (and frustrations) onto these women, utilizing their matrixial potential just as the Party does with normative motherhood. In the case of Katharine, Winston's ex-wife, we only know that she complies with the female stereotype of a dutiful woman (76). Contrary to Winston's project of personal individuality, her matrixial corporeality has already been conquered by the Party's ideals. The protagonist admits that he is not interested in Katharine's insights and feelings. Hence, despite showing non-conformism against the Party, Winston exerts the same patriarchal force by reducing his companion to mere spatiality to execute his frustrated individuality. Readers notice Katharine's struggle with her condition as a woman in the stiffness of her body and the coldness of the sexual act, depicted as an act of rape (77).

Winston's plea for celibacy seems incongruent as he relates his getaways to the proles to have sex with prostitutes in his diary. Men and women of Oceania do not undergo the same harshness in their sexual conditioning. Permissiveness in male mobility and sexuality is blatant compared to that of women from the circles, who are heavily controlled since birth without the possibility of enjoying themselves sexually or in a way that is autonomous and independent from the Party:

The women of the Party were all alike. Chastity was as deeply ingrained in them as Party loyalty. By careful early conditioning, by games and cold water, by the rubbish that was dinned into them at school and in the Spies and the Youth League, by lectures, parades, songs, slogans and martial music, the natural feeling had been driven out of them. (78)

The later refusal to have sex with Julia during her period implies that his goal is not to confront Big Brother by having illicit sex without reproductive ends. His quest for utopian hope relies on alternative forms of reproductive labour that perpetuate patriarchy as the rule while defying Ingsoc's system. Orwell actually thought that female patriotism should consist in bringing healthy offspring: "the women of Orwell's male-centered world are reckoned with only in their breeding (and in the case of prostitution, pleasure-providing) capacity" (Császár, 2013: 79). The author shows that fraternal bonding with women is preserved as long as they offer their companions offspring. Female individuality is utterly impossible at this point in the Orwellian imagery, where he reduces women to materiality and relational identities.

Winston imagines mothers as selfless beings and conceives maternity as an exclusionary condition that makes women devoid of other interests. Initially, Winston resorts to his past to remember a transgressive form of motherhood with his mother. Those vague memories of the world before the war are willingly repressed insofar as they prove how Winston's selfishness killed his mother and sister, although he describes it as a sacrifice (35). The description of his mother's death is romanticized, for she, as a matrixial entity, provided room to accommodate Winston's requests (35). Moreover, like Winston's mother, the unnamed red-apron prole woman's large body is thoroughly described as the only required aptitude for women to build utopia. Despite coming from the margins of society, the prole woman's potentially transgressive utopianism is engulfed by Winston's self-perception of moral and intellectual superiority, imagining her as a matrixial space devoid of personality, ready to serve his insurgent utopia:

As he looked at the woman in her characteristic attitude, her thick arms reaching up for the line, her powerful mare-like buttocks protruded, it struck him for the first time that she was beautiful. It had never before occurred to him that the body of a woman of fifty, blown up to monstrous dimensions by childbearing, then hardened, roughened by work till it was coarse in the grain like an over-ripe turnip, could be beautiful. ... The woman down there had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart, and a fertile belly. He wondered how many children she had given birth to. ... people who had never learned to think but who were storing up in their hearts and bellies and muscles the power that would one day overturn the world. If there was hope, it lay in the proles! (250-1)

Winston falls into the same error as the dystopian regime he is living in and perceives her potential female allies as hollow utopian wombs where utopia can be founded. Their stillness and domesticity can optimize the chances of mobility and individuality for Winston, as they remain as spaces to deposit relational bonds without them gaining utopian agency. Hence, either coming from the collective oligarchic elite or the dissenting individual, a lack of communal reciprocity and solidarity between them and women is reproduced. Women are trained that, as caregivers, they must first satisfy male necessities to calm their rage.

In Winston and Julia's relationship, the readership witnesses how deceitful and challenging is fraternal comradeship with women for Orwell's male characters. Their illicit sexual affair is described as "a victory[,] ... a blow struck against the Party" (145). This political act of rebellion could suppose transgressive sociability

based on interdependence and mutual congeniality. Nevertheless, the way Julia is described after sexual intercourse as defenceless and drained suggests that such an amorous relationship is not based on egalitarian grounds. Instead, the exact mechanics of the conquered land, or the trophy woman, are preserved:

The young, strong body, now helpless in sleep, awoke in him a pitying, protecting feeling ... He pulled the overalls aside and studied her smooth white flank. In the old days, he thought, a man looked at a girl's body and saw that it was desirable, and that was the end of the story. But you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. (145)

The narrator shows Winston's predisposition to see fraternal complicity as male-exclusive, that is, systemically patriarchal. His impressions of O'Brien — his future torturer — are positive, as if he were also an ally in the dissident thinking. By contrast, Julia's intrepid behaviour is not appreciated as a source of trust but as a menace since her gaze pierces Winston and inconveniences his masculinity. His initial sexual frustration in possessing her leads Winston to fantasize about her annihilation, with Julia's blood coming through her throat simulating his sexual climax (18). However, after she sends the note "I love you" (124), the bravery and affection shown are confused by an opportunity to project Winston's individuality beyond Big Brother's control. Again, Julia is described as pure materiality, a precious space in which to build his patriarchal utopia: "A kind of fever seized him at the thought that he might lose her, the youthful white body might slip away from him!" (126).

Their encounters demystify the idea that the fraternal alliance with women in the resistance relegates them to the sole means of achieving men's liberation. Winston's non-conformist views are the only valid form of utopia, while Julia's carnal revolution is disdained. Her discourse is limited and overshadowed by Winston's ego since, as several scholars (Gleason & Nussbaum, 2005; Firchow, 2007; Horan, 2007) explain, Orwell creates Julia solely to embrace the male fantasy: "The image of Julia trotting through the Golden Country is not that of a liberated woman, but of a woman liberated for men" (Horan, 2007: 327). In their conversations, there is a continuous disdain for Julia's approach to insurrection; hers is momentaneous, practical, naïve, and emotional, while Winston's is logical, rigid, and seeks timelessness. The opposition between utopianism and patriarchal utopia is displayed, and by declaring, "You're only a rebel from the waist downwards" (179), Winston implicitly debunks any emotional attachment with Julia, which becomes evident later during his torture. Patriarchal privilege permeates Winston's

rationality, so that he replicates the patriarchal dehumanizing techniques he was trying to confront. Eventually, the only love that prevails in the novel is fraternal — towards Big Brother. The rupture of emotional bonds with Julia not only supposes a betrayal of all the women he had once loved and put his hopes on. It also means treason to his own longing for utopia.

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