

Jorslem, Tomis is reunited with his flyer, Avluela. She and Gorman had tired of each other shortly after the invasion. Tomis is accepted for renewal, and the process is successful. Upon completion of his renewal, Tomis is invited by Avluela and others to join the new guild of Redeemers, a group united by a limited telepathy and an almost religious fervor, that hopes to create the Fourth Cycle of human history. As the story closes, Tomis and the other Redeemers experience what flight is like through a telepathic link with Avluela. They lend her the strength through this link to overcome the limitations of her nightwings, allowing her to fly in sunlight. She travels to invite others to join them in the Redeemers guild.

#### ANALYSIS

Robert Silverberg won a 1969 Hugo Award for a novella, also titled “Nightwings,” that was incorporated into the novel *Nightwings*. The novel focuses on plot and message, and Silverberg’s lyrical writing style makes for enjoyable reading, though the author can be faulted for his lack of character development.

Using the main character as a voice for the author, the novel warns of the faults and foibles of humanity while holding out the hope that humans may someday transcend current human nature. Even though the novel follows the main character throughout his journeys around Europe and Africa and the story is told through him, Tomis is a victim of circumstance throughout the novel. Tomis gets back together with his love interest, Avluela, as part of his fate rather than as a result of any action on his part. Even his one interesting moral dilemma, in which he faces the

decision of whether to trade information he has stumbled upon for his and the Prince of Roum’s futures, positions him with insufficient knowledge to understand the choices he makes. By portraying Tomis as a basically well meaning but passive person, Silverberg creates a character with which readers will have difficulty sympathizing. He succeeds in focusing interest on humanity as the true main character of the plot.

Coming close on the heels of his more action- and adventure-oriented works of the late 1950’s and 1960’s, *Nightwings* is a departure into a new stylistic mode for Silverberg, one that he continued in later writings. The novel is rich in description and explanation of the future Earth depicted. Silverberg describes in detail the accomplishments of Second Cycle Earth and what Earth has deteriorated to in the Third Cycle. He explains and warns of the two mistakes Second Cycle humanity makes: first, collecting non-starfaring alien races and confining them in compounds or zoos for study on Earth, and second, using the technology of weather machines that change the location of Earth’s poles. The final sequence of events in the novel calls for the transcendence of the human race. In that, it is reminiscent of Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1953).

A prolific writer and editor, Silverberg tentatively explores several themes in *Nightwings* that he goes on to explore in more detail in later novels. *Dying Inside* (1972) explores the negative aspects of telepathy, *Tower of Glass* (1970) explores religious themes, and *Son of Man* (1971) is another novel of transcendence.

—B. Diane Miller

## NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR

*Winston Smith struggles unsuccessfully to preserve his individuality against the brainwashing efforts of O’Brien, Big Brother’s representative*

**Author:** George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair, 1903–1950)

**Genre:** Science fiction—dystopia

**Type of work:** Novel

**Time of work:** 1984

**Location:** London, England (Airstrip One, Oceania)

**First published:** 1949

#### THE STORY

Winston Smith begins a diary, an act tantamount to signing his own death sentence in a ruthlessly totalitarian state bent on eradicating individuality. He is determined to stay alive—and “human”—

as long as he can. To do so, he must escape the all-seeing eye and all-hearing ear of the Thought Police behind the omnipresent telescreen.

Winston and Julia, who work in the Ministry of Truth, become lovers and find an illusory haven above Charrington's shop in the district of the "proles," or masses outside the Party. Earlier, the lovers revealed themselves to O'Brien, allegedly a member of the "Brotherhood" intent on toppling Big Brother. O'Brien sends them "the book," supposedly written by Goldstein, Big Brother's enemy. The Thought Police smash into the lovers' refuge and drag them away to the Ministry of Love. As he expected, Winston is tortured, but to his surprise his torturer is O'Brien, a self-styled therapist, determined to return Winston to "sanity." Winston masters "doublethink," or the capacity to believe that two plus two equals five, or any other number suggested. Confident that he has satisfied O'Brien's insane demands without betraying the self that loves Julia, Winston is totally unprepared for the horror of what awaits him in Room 101. Knowing that Winston has a phobia of rats, O'Brien has devised a wire mask to fit over his head with a door his tormentors can open into a cage of starving rats. Winston in mindless terror screams, "Do it to Julia! Not me!" Internally devastated by the horrible recognition of his betrayal, Winston accepts self-annihilation as a "victory over himself." The last sentence confirms his conversion: "He loved Big Brother."

#### ANALYSIS

Few novels have had the impact of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Even those who have not read the novel are familiar with terms such as "Big Brother" and "doublethink." Although the novel may be read as a grim political satire on George Orwell's time—the horrors of the modern totalitarian state, whether Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union in the 1930's or Adolf Hitler's Third Reich in the 1940's—it easily qualifies as a dystopic vision of a nightmarish future awaiting the world if it ignores modern assaults on human freedom. Its warning of a negative utopia has not diminished with the passage of the year 1984, for its menace is just as possible for 2084 or 2184.

Clearly, Oceania, like the other superstates of Eurasia and Eastasia, is an extension of twentieth century totalitarianism's efforts to eradicate indi-

viduality. Orwell's analysis of the planned exhaustion of excess economic productivity on military expenditures to preserve the inequities of a traditional class system is brilliant. In fact, "the book" that O'Brien claims he coauthored with the Inner Party reads like the secret history of twentieth century political economics.

Unlike other classics of speculative or science fiction such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's science fiction lacks much of the advanced technological hardware readers associate with the genre. That lack, however, is justified within *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Oceania's spokesman, O'Brien, who tells Winston that science and technology persist only as weapons of oppression. These weapons include use of psychology to engineer pain or technology like the telescreen for surveillance.

Weaponry itself has retreated to pre-Hiroshima levels, nuclear weapons having been eliminated as threats to the status quo of the three superstates. Science and technology, Orwell suggests, had to be curtailed because in their purest forms they are grounded in the spirit of innovation and free inquiry. As O'Brien brags, Big Brother could rewrite astronomy to make the stars mere miles away from Earth if such a "truth" accorded with unrestrained exercise of power by the Party.

It is no coincidence that Winston works in the Ministry of Truth. Like other totalitarian leaders in the twentieth century, "Big Brother," or the Inner Party collectively, knows that truth is textual. The most successful dictators control their subjects through propaganda and the manipulation of history. Winston wanders through the proles' district hoping to find some corroboration of his own recollection of life before Big Brother but discovers the unreliability of the proles' memory and returns to his own job of rewriting history, a job he finds so stimulating that he passes up the opportunity to fade into the proles' world with Julia. Besides, in this hierarchical system, Winston prides himself on his superiority to these "masses."

Winston envisions his experience in the novel as a tragic contest with the state to demonstrate his own superiority as an individual. Time and again, he boasts to Julia that although they will inevitably be tortured and killed, they, or at least *he*, will never surrender his humanity. Love, loyalty, decency, and nobility represent "humanness" to

Winston and also to Orwell. Tragedy, the narrator indicates, may no longer be possible because the privacy and family loyalty on which it depends are under threat. Winston casts himself in the role of a traditional tragic hero, flaunting his pride in the individual's capacity to suffer all yet maintain dignity. When Winston proclaims the "spirit of Man" and O'Brien tells him to look in a mirror, Winston sees an image chillingly like those that confronted the liberators of the Nazi concentration camps.

Winston embodies the tragedy of liberal humanism, naïvely confident that it could withstand any suffering without the surrender of a quintessential "humanity." As a vision of a dystopic future, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is grounded in a psychology Orwell both fears is valid but hopes is not. First, the novel asks whether a state con-

structed on terror and unrestrained power can survive without a collective "mental breakdown." O'Brien's insane lust for the sadistic exercise of power has seemed to some more terrifying than his menacing rats. Another question on which the novel's psychology rests is whether the "spirit of man," or faith in the individual, can be destroyed by torture and brainwashing such as Winston's in Room 101. How responsible are individuals for what is beyond their control? Finally, the novel poses the question of the individual's ability to stay sane in an insane world, where all the texts that might confirm reality are manipulated by a state intent on serving its mad religion of power. Readers must answer these profound questions for themselves.

—Earl G. Ingersoll

## THE NITROGEN FIX

*In engineering microbes for agriculture, future science "fixes" all free oxygen into nitric compounds, with disastrous ecological results that eventually are ameliorated with the help of strange aliens*

**Author:** Hal Clement (Harry Clement Stubbs, 1922–2003)

**Genre:** Science fiction—cautionary

**Type of work:** Novel

**Time of work:** About c.e. 4000

**Locale:** Near Boston, Massachusetts

**First published:** 1980

### THE STORY

Set in the Blue Hill area near Hal Clement's home, this novel recounts the effects of catastrophic changes in the environment after two thousand years of scientific tinkering with genetic engineering in order to increase the number and quality of nitrogen compounds. The result is a major energy crisis. By the time of the novel, the process has produced large concentrations of nitric acid in the ocean and numerous new compounds that behave unpredictably and explosively. The only native life species that has survived on Earth is a remnant of nomadic humans who must wear breathing apparatus because only traces of oxygen remain in the atmosphere. These small human bands distrust

science for obvious reasons, and all of society has reverted to a sort of Huck Finn adolescence. The most interesting member of the nomadic family whom Clement follows in the story is an eager boy named Fyn.

Alien on their own planet and in their worn-out society, the protagonist family begins to communicate and make friends with the strange, nitrogen-life aliens that appear on Earth. Unlike the fierce and angry humans, the Observers, as they are called, are a hive species with no need of or possibility for self-reliance. Each unit of the Observer species can share communication and memory with all other units following tactile contact. They have no language and no gender, and because their skeletons are very soft, the humans give the name Bones to the unit that becomes their large, floppy friend.

In a juvenile-oriented plot typical of Clement's work, the nomadic family of humans teams with Bones to unravel and ultimately work for a reversal of the Earth's nitrogen dilemma, after which the Observers will move on to other nitrogen environments. What seem to fascinate Clement most as the story unfolds are matters of knowing, communicating, and problem solving. It becomes clear that the prime motivation for the Observer species (apparently their only motivation, consid-

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