

1985

Anthony Burgess

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In characteristically daring style, Anthony Burgess combines two responses to Orwell's 1984 in one book. The first is a sharp analysis: through dialogues, parodies and essays, Burgess sheds new light on what he called 'an apocalyptic codex of our worst fears', creating a critique that is literature in its own right. Part two is Burgess' own dystopic vision, written in 1978. He skewers both the present and the future, describing a state where industrial disputes and social unrest compete with overwhelming surveillance, security concerns and the dominance of technology to make life a thing to be suffered rather than lived. Together these two works form a unique guide to one of the twentieth century's most talented, imaginative and prescient writers. Several decades later, Burgess' most singular work still stands.

1985 Details

Date : Published 1978 by Hutchinson & Co (Publishers) Ltd

ISBN : 9780091360801

Author : Anthony Burgess

Format : Hardcover 240 pages

Genre : Fiction, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Politics

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Bluecityladyy says

If you have a bookshelf of books to read, put this one on the bottom shelf.

Brent Legault says

A sloppily-written, half-assed, woefully-conceived agenda piece. Burgess should have been publicly shamed for writing such vomit. And maybe he would have been, had he but lifted his nose out of his typewriter.

Gemma Williams says

This is Anthony Burgess' response to 1984. The first half is made up of critical essays dealing with the themes of the original and is fascinating. I especially liked the way Burgess takes on Orwell's portrayal of the proles as an inert mass and the way he sentimentalises them. But this isn't an attack on 1984, its a good indepth critical discussion.

The second half is Burgess' short novel 1985 - his version of the story. This view of the future involves a tyranny of trade unions, and enforced equality which involves bringing all down to the lowest level: consequently no art or culture and the most basic education (dumbing down) lest anyone excel at anything. So there are vicious street gangs roaming about sharing their subversive knowledge of Shakespeare and Latin.The oppression in this version is insidious and cloaked by talk of democracy and the greater good. He tends to the reactionary at times but it's a great and witty story about the need for humans to maintain their inner lives, and for those to be rich and unconstrained. As you'd expect from the author of A Clockwork Orange, Burgess argues passionately that it's better to choose evil than not to choose.

Stuart Chambers says

I wanted to read something completely different. I wanted to read something British. I wanted to read something political and thought provoking and in its own way radical. A comparison between 1948 and 1984 seemed a good choice, but isn't because I'm only 50% enjoying what I'm reading. Essentially, this is two books: A critique by Burgess of George Orwell's "1984"and a short story. Having said all of that, it is interesting, it is British, it is two distinctly different writers. Its also sadly 50% way too much literary masturbation for my liking !!!

Rand Suleiman says

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Corey says

Half of this odd hybrid is an exegesis on Orwell's 1984. The 2nd half, a speculative novella, is almost as polemical as the exegesis. Yet it is entertaining in its way.

Mohamed Elsonpaty says

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Rex Cherry says

Right-wing garbage. The loathsome politics seem to have adversely affected the quality of Burgess' writing as well.

Derek Baldwin says

A kind of pastiche/homage to Orwell's 1984. It doesn't bear the comparison too well but it's an interesting book. However I think that the thrust of Burgess's satire was already made far more potently in A Clockwork Orange and this doesn't add all that much.

Greg says

I came across a reference to this book while thumbing through a biography on Anthony Burgess about five years ago. Since then I have kept my eyes opened looking in used book stores and those kinds of places for a copy of the book. I could have probably found the book to buy online, but I rarely ever do that kind of thing for myself. Last week though in a semi-ironic act I actually went to a library and saw that they had the book, so I took it out and finally got the read it.

The structure of the book is a little weird. The first hundred pages are a collection of essays and a faux-interview with the author on George Orwell's much misused utopian novel. The gist of the first hundred pages is that Orwell's book was grossly misunderstood by many and that it's really a bleak picture of London in 1948 and also at heart a comic novel. It's also according to Burgess the culmination and defeat of a lifetime of a conflicting belief in the working class by Orwell. After getting through this part of the book is a novella by Burgess where he presents his own possible future for England, one which he sees I'm sure as

equally comical but also also a little less naive to the state of the world (why Orwell's naivety is difficult to explain here). Basically Burgess' version of a horrible future is taken from the idea that the bombs never did end up falling that everyone thought would in the post-war era, and instead of bombs there were even greater horrors to the killing of humanity present.

Burgess wrote his book in the late 1970's. The book came out in 1978, a time when England was in a lot of trouble. Wide-spread unemployment, striking unions, inflation and general civil-unrest were present. This is the stage that would bring Thatcher and Reagan to prominence, and their own anti-labor acts would put a stop the basic premise of Burgess book, but that was still in the future.

Burgess saw a world destroyed by the power of unions, where strikes were a common thing and they were always held for more money-something that was quickly losing it's value. In Burgess world everyone went on strike, firemen, the army, chocolate makers, train-operators, anyone you can think of. And if a building burned down, it was the fault of someone who didn't give into the strike. It's kind of a conservative horror show here, but there is still something subversive underlaying Burgess story. More than just the awfulness of syndicalism, Burgess also saw a general dumbing down of the culture taken beyond being just the norm but to the regulated norm. Language decided upon the majority usage, if most people misuse words then the misuse must be correct etc., (he called this Workers English, and he saw it as something even worse than Newspeak, or Doublespeak). He also saw a bleak pragmatic future where culture was left behind because it had no market value. As a result only the hooligans, or maybe droogs and the old resisters to the new world knew things like Latin or Greek, or the works of Plato and Shakespeare, or cared about history.

The book has something reactionary about it, and it is certainly an elitists nightmare of a possible future but it's also a warning cry against the leveling a dumbed down consumerist culture could possibly create. Some of the premises of the book have essentially been destroyed by the actions of Thatcher and Regan in the early 80's but there is still something to be read in this forgotten book.

Matyáš says

It would be hard to describe how disappointed I was by the author of Clockwork Orange when I heard his actual views on politics and government. First half of the book – the reflections on 1984 and Orwell – is mostly a collection of conservative right-wing half-truths like: state helping the poorest = killing the beauty of charity, workers in unions = state economy destroyed etc. What is saddening the most is the fact that one can actually find some interesting insights about (for example) the post-war British experience and Orwell's place in it. Also the author proves that he is well educated and read. But that doesn't change the fact that most of the book (the story itself including) is just notes-from-the-underground-like rambling of a dissatisfied conservative. The story itself is an anti-utopia, where union strikes lead to deaths of people (Wage increase for the working class? How dare they!) and loss of values leads to chaos. But in reality (in my opinion) it's just an internal dialogue of the author, continuation of the previous parts...

Raimo Wirkkala says

It was a nice try at the time but, in retrospect, Burgess' vision of trade unions taking over England looks a little silly today. All in all, Orwell's harrowing fascist world of "1984" is the more compelling and, even today, the more plausible.

That being said, the novel is a good read and the preceding material about "1984" is very interesting.

Kaethe says

I think I'm the only one who's ever read this, but I loved Burgess' effort and his essay on 1984. I found it on the new books shelf at the UNCG library, where, geek that I am, I was hanging out with my boyfriend in high school. We'd just go and sit and read, or look up old Rolling Stones on microfiche. I picked a lot of random books off the shelf then and sat there, reading them. Come to think of it, I probably spent more time just hanging out there in high school than I did in college, when I could check out the books and take them somewhere else.

MJ Nicholls says

The first half contains provocative essays and self-interviews, waxing Burgessly on the parallels between 1948 London (the original title for the novel was *1948*) and the famous ur-totalitarian state familiar to most literate mammals, making the case for the humour in Orwell's vision. The second half is a ludicrous and offensive comic send-up: Burgess repositions the novel from a right-wing perspective, spoofing the vituperative trade union movement of late 1970s Britain (UK is now TUCland), a world where mindless work and strikes are the oppressor, and art and education are the providence of the outcast proles, some of whom speak perfect Latin. As with most Burgess satire, his stance as an old Thatcherite curmudgeon tends to diminish the social comment, and nix the serious intentions. And as with most Burgess works, the end product is bursting with erudition and entertainment regardless. Scholars seeking to fact-hoover might wish to read the first half and skip the head-scratching politics of the second. Daniel was not pleased: "Geesus Christ!! Was that a richful Fucking waster. This Book has nothing, i repeat, NOTHING to do with 1984. [sic]" Nor was Brent: "A sloppily-written, half-assed, woefully-conceived agenda piece. Burgess should have been publicly shamed for writing such vomit. And maybe he would have been, had he but lifted his nose out of his typewriter. [sic]"

Hodgesensei says

Burgess successfully predicts what Orwell cannot: the hyper-sexualization of youth and the breakdown of family, the unionization of governmental agencies, and the Islamization of England. Sound familiar? And yet this was written in the 1970's!

The question is, is America next?

Matthew says

It is always interesting to see one good author's take on another. In this case Anthony Burgess, author of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Wanting Seed*, evaluates and criticizes George Orwell's 1984. After extensive interviews and essays on the nature of Orwell's seminal work, Burgess pens his own short novella, entitled 1985 (to avoid plagiarism, so he says.) Burgess's view of the cacotopian future is much closer to his own

vantage point in strike plagued late 70's Britain, than was Orwell's in the immediate post WWII era. Orwell had originally envisioned calling his novel Nineteen Forty Eight such was the perceived similarity between his own environment and that of Winston Smith's, but the publisher persuaded him to set it in the future. Burgess, living through that era as well remembers clearly the chronic shortages of razor blades and soap, the pervasive smell of boiled cabbage, the ubiquitous rubble and the slogans emblazoned on walls and billboards. Burgess even suggests that 1984, rather than a dark forecast of a dystopian future is actually a satirical stab at socialist England in 1948. In his essays, Burgess addresses questions such as these: As a devoted lifelong Socialist, what made Orwell cast INGSOC in such horrific terms? Why does an author and novelist distrust words so much that he would create Newspeak? How does the rise of the Labour Party and the British trade unions foreshadow the real loss of personal freedom that underscored the horror of the totalitarian Big Brother? What is it about revolutions that are inherently progressive? If you loved 1984, read this and find out one man's answers to these and many other questions.

Christian D. Orr says

Essentially, two books in one: (1) A thought-provoking and intellectually-stimulating critique & analysis of George Orwell's "1984" and (2) a mini-novel that's not so much a sequel as a re-write of "1984" With both segments, Anthony Burgess (of "A Clockwork Orange" fame) has the benefit of 30 years of hindsight that Orwell did not have, i.e. 1978 vs. 1948 (remember, Orwell originally intended to title his most famous work "1948," and only changed it to "1984" as the last minute after a suggestion from his publisher--or was it his editor?).

In the fiction segment, while there is no Big Brother or Thought Police per se, nor are there superstates like Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia, i.e. the UK, USA, Australia, etc. still exist as independent countries, the unions have totally seized power (the cynical joke goes "TUK = TUC," in other words, The United Kingdom is the Trades Union Congress, and England is often informally referred to as Tucland), the State is the employer for something like 99% of the workforce, and the unions basically hold governments and individuals alike by the bollocks. The unions (or Syndicates, as they're also called in the novella) don't have quite the total physical and mental control of the people that Big Brother's Ingsoc does, but it's plenty nightmarish. Instead of Orwell's "Newspeak," there is "Worker's English (WE)," which is also a highly dumbed-down version of the language. The only groups with any sense of intellectual and economic freedom are gangs of thugs and petty thieves....or, dare I say, landlocked pirates?

The novella portion starts off with the protagonist's wife dying in a hospital fire due to the firefighters being on strike and refusing to attempt to put out the fire.* An ominous start to an even more ominous story. (*Later on in the novel, there is a reference to an incident where thousands freeze to death in the American Midwestern winter, specifically Minnesota, because the public utility workers are on strike and thus refusing to turn on the heat.)

WARNING: SPOILER ALERT!!!!

While "1984" doesn't exactly have a "happy" ending, at least the protagonist, Bev Jones, doesn't go down without a fight, and while he is tortured at a re-education camp, the tortures aren't quite as horrific as The Ministry of Love or Room 101 from Orwell's "1984," and at least Jones doesn't go out like a totally brainwashed meek little wussy the way Winston Smith does in Orwell's book, i.e. Jones dies, but he doesn't

die loving the State or the unions.

Daniel Moskowitz says

Geesus Christ!! Was that a richful Fucking waster. This Book has nothing, i repeat, NOTHING to do with 1984. It's a dystopian, or a Burgess wants it to be called Cacotopian, novel like 1984 and that's about it.

The book spends the first half, HALF!!!, in a review/critique of 1984 and how in the years since its inception, things have changed and how Orwell would change his vision. If Orwell wrote 1984 in '75 or whenever this book was written how would he go about it. But it doesn't even do that well.

Burgess just rambles about the times during which the book was written and how that was different from Orwell's time. Much like the rambling I am doing here. Until you later find out that Burgess' intentions were just to explain why he wrote the novella to follow.

Then you get to the Novella. WHICH HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ORWELL OR 1984!!!! And you realize the first 100 pages were just a sneaky ass way to try to convince you that 1985 is practical and plausible and NOT 1984. Burgess' egotism wanted a way to write a dystopian novel without it being a sequel or and without having to justify it as an Orwellian themed novella that isn't ripping of Orwell. What an ass.

The Novella was pretty good for 60 pages or so, then just fucking ends. The ending up and vanished like a fart in the wind from a speeding motorist with the top down. And cruelly I didn't say thank goodness. Instead I just wished it did that 252 pages earlier.

verbava says

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Saddam Bouchaib says

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