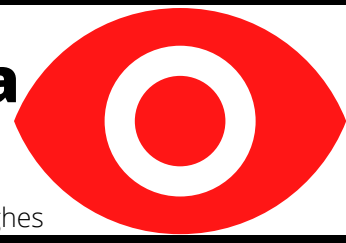


1984: A Prophecy Becoming a Pathetic Reality?



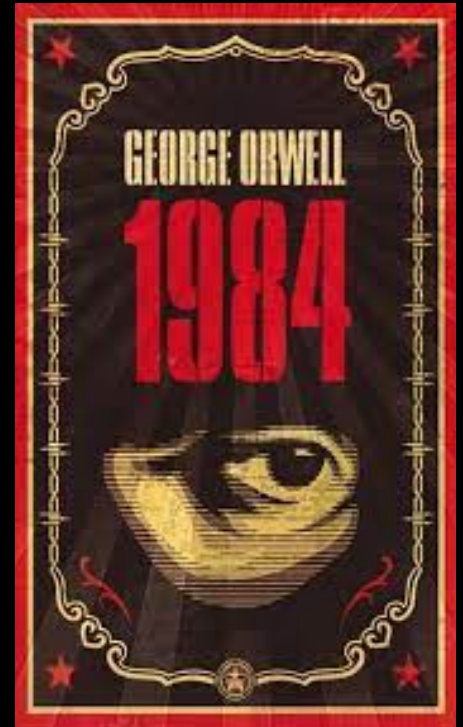
By Iwan Hughes

George Orwell's 1984 focuses on themes of totalitarianism, technology, and censorship, but why has this inspired musicians that produce an audio art form to cite this visual art form as an influence?

Eric Blair, more commonly known by the pen-name George Orwell, is a name much loved by the literary world. He represented both the left and right sides of the political spectrum, with his advocacy of socialism throughout his works inspiring those seeking a social revolution, and his renouncing of the names of British communists while on his death bed; the latter causing him to be nicknamed a 'good leftie' by those who sway right. It is his prophetic novel *1984* that has left the most notable impression on society and within the realms of popular culture. This was a work from which the man himself never saw the effects it had on society, as he died only six months after its publication.

While writing his dystopian novel, on the remote Scottish Isle of Jura, the year was 1949 just four years after the defeating of the totalitarian Nazi party, and with the Soviet Union being fully formed in now modern-day Russia. It is argued that this novel was written to deter people from ever succumbing to the type of totalitarian government that is seen within Oceania and was being seen in some communist states in the real-world Orwell lived. So, with the Soviet Union falling in 1991 and ideas of Communism being constantly frowned upon in 21st-century society, why has this novel provoked so much love from millennials?

Unknown to many, the singer-songwriter David Bowie unsuccessfully attempted to adapt the novel into a stage play during the '70s, however, could not receive permission from Orwell's widow, Sonia Brownwell. She believed this attempt at a musical adaptation to be in poor taste and it was only after her death, in 1980, that the rights to adapt the novel into visual media was allowed. This did not deter Bowie from releasing a song titled *1984* in his 1974 album *Diamond Dogs* which charted at number one in the same year's album charts. The themes represented within Bowie's song, also appear later in his career, through his 19th studio album titled *Outside*. Throughout this album, Bowie presents characters in, with it being a 1994 release, a futuristic, dystopian land on the eve of the 21st century.



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A more recent example of the intertwining of music and Orwell's fiction is the Arctic Monkeys 2006 hit song *I Bet You Look Good On The Dancefloor*, where lead singer and lyricist Alex Turner mentions 'dancing to electropop like a robot from 1984'. Furthermore, Turner hints at another reference to the land of dystopias in the Monkey's most recent record, *Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino*. Within the song *Star Treatment*, there is an online debate as to whether the lyric, '1984,2019', is a reference to Orwell's novel reflecting the world in which the record was written. This is with the latter date being the year in which it was released. It is up for debate why have successful artistic creators such as Bowie, and Turner, have been so fascinated by Orwell's themes?

The grave warnings of extreme governmental control and technological advancements are dramatized for the effects of entertainment, yet with the invention of Social Media, it is not entirely fictional. An ever-growing consciousness of our lack of freedoms is constantly questioned within a millennial society. This is exemplified with location trackers such as Snapchat's 'maps', released in 2017, allowing a person's location to be seen at the touch of a button. For this reason, I expect Orwell's novel to continuously be rebirthed into different forms of media in the coming decades as future generations get to grips with the submission of Winston and the desires of freedom represented through Julia and the Proles.

