

Soviet Literary Policy, 1945-1989: The Case of George Orwell

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IN MAY 1988 *Literaturnaya Gazeta* [*Literary Gazette*], the organ of the Soviet Writers' Union, published a full-page extract from George Orwell's *1984*. Beneath the excerpt was a stunning half-page drawing of a jackboot stamping on Winston Smith's upturned face.

From a Western standpoint, the appearance of the *1984* extract (and the announcement of a printing of a complete edition of the novel by mid-1989) are, of course, most welcome. Still, they are not without their darker overtones. One of the many cultural initiatives in the phenomenal reform campaign of Mikhail Gorbachev, these publication events do represent a new era for the Soviet Union as well as for Orwell's reputation in the Communist world. But they also possess ambiguous implications for the future conduct of Soviet literary policy—and suggest how far *glasnost* has yet to go before it truly signifies "openness." The Soviet response to Orwell and *1984* remains ambivalent, and in any case it should not be, *à la* Winston Smith's "rectifying" of the past at the Ministry of Truth, "lifted clean out of history."

Indeed the *Literary Gazette* drawing could well have portrayed Orwell's history of reception in the U.S.S.R.: his dissident democratic socialism and anti-communism often earned him *Pravda's* hostile epithet, bandied with special gusto during the Stalin years, "Enemy of Mankind." Until

the early 1980s, it was always Hate Week for Orwell in the Soviet Union. Not the least of the wry ironies of his Soviet reputation has long been that, despite the frequent and loud castigation of his work in party organs, none of his books has ever been officially published in the U.S.S.R. or in any East European nation aligned with Moscow. Numerous references to and even reviews of *1984* have appeared in the Soviet press, but for many years tourists had their copies of his books seized upon entry to the Soviet Union; most Communist-bloc book fairs have long banned Orwell's books from their shows.¹ Like "Goldstein" in Oceania, "Orwell" had long been a bogeyman word in the official Communist press. Communist reviewers of *1984* have therefore been in the curious position, much like Winston Smith, of falsifying history even as they discussed a book about the falsification of history—and of referring to a work which their audiences have surely never read (except as *samizdat*).

References to Orwell have appeared chiefly in the Communist popular press, rather than in literary journals. For "Orwell" has been at least as much a topical political issue as a literary or strictly historical one. Although the militantly hostile Soviet criticism of Orwell during the Cold War persisted into the early 1980s, the Communist press has reinterpreted *1984* in interesting ways during the

last quarter century to fit political exigencies. A look into how Soviet critics have seized upon different aspects of *1984* and applied different rhetorical strategies in their discussion of "Orwell" offers a sharply focused history—from the Soviet side—of the ongoing postwar propaganda battle between East and West. It also illumines the roles of ideology and of immediate political issues in the making of Soviet literary policy and, more broadly, provides insight into the politics of artistic reputation. One can see how a polemical writer like Orwell comes to be used—and abused—by political interest groups in ways he never could have envisioned and, in the process, how his reputation alters accordingly.

Four stages in Orwell's postwar history of reputation in the Communist world are identifiable.

I

THE PUBLICATION OF *Animal Farm* (1945) and *1984* (1949) brought Orwell to the unfavorable attention of the Soviet press. At the request of the U.S.S.R., American authorities in Munich seized copies of a Ukrainian translation of *Animal Farm* in 1947 and turned them over to Soviet repatriation officials in Germany.² Orwell, however, continued his efforts to get his fable the widest possible international audience. Without asking for any fees, he licensed translations and radio broadcasts of *Animal Farm* in Eastern Europe—and encouraged Arthur Koestler and others to do the same with their anti-Communist writings.³

Orwell's and Koestler's names were quickly linked in the Soviet press. In 1948 the literary journal *Oktober* labeled Koestler "a literary agent provocateur" and identified Orwell as a former "police agent and yellow correspondent," a "charlatan," and "a suspicious individual" who passes in England for a writer "because there is a great demand for garbage there."⁴ This harsh language reflected the dawning of the Soviet Union's new, aggressively anti-

Western cultural program launched in August 1946 by unofficial cultural commissar and Stalin's onetime likely successor Andrei Zhdanov (who has "about as much knowledge of literature as I have of aerodynamics," said Orwell.)⁵ *Zhdanovshchina* ("Zhdanovism") put literature in the forefront of the campaign for ideological orthodoxy. "Every successful literary work is comparable to a battle won or to a great victory on the economic front," declared Zhdanov in a celebrated speech. "Literature must be for the Party! . . . Down with non-Party writers!"⁶ In a famous phrase, Stalin called Party writers "engineers of human souls." The language, of course, echoes frighteningly the duckspeak of Party members in *1984*.

By 1949 Glebe Struve, a Russian expatriate and friend of Orwell—whose *25 Years of Soviet Russian Literature* Orwell greatly admired—could write that literature had become a form of "Soviet thought-control." "Rabid anti-Westernism," said Struve, was "the most important characteristic of Soviet letters."⁷ The anti-Western animus manifested itself clearly in *Pravda's* May 1950 review of *1984*, entitled "Enemies of Mankind." In a phrase popularized by Stalin, Orwell became an "enemy of the people."

[I]n describing a most monstrous future in store for man, he imputes every evil to the people. He is obliged to admit that in 1984 . . . capitalism will cease to exist, but only for opening the way to endless wars and the degradation of mankind, which will be brought down to the level of robots called "proles". . . .

But the people are not frightened by any such fears of the instigators of a new war. The people's conscience is clearer today than ever before. The foul maneuvers of mankind's enemies become more understandable every day to millions of common people.⁸

The review coupled *1984* with Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence*, two "monstrous" works of "misanthropic fantasy" that are "fervently advertised and published in every place corrupted by the ac-

tivity of American capitalism." *Pravda* characterized the authors as "Anglo-American cosmopolitans."⁹ (Equivalent in the Party lexicon to treason, "cosmopolitanism" signified the disparagement of native Russian culture and adulation of everything foreign; "rootless cosmopolitan" was often used as a euphemism for "Jew")¹⁰ during the Kremlin's anti-Semitic campaign of 1948-1952, when dozens of Jewish writers were executed.)

Probably the linking of Orwell's name with "America" also anticipated the intensification of *Zhdanovshchina* in Stalin's last years, represented best by the "Hate America" campaign (again, the name inescapably recalls Oceania's "Hate Week" and "Two-Minute Hate"), which began in January 1951. The campaign, which coincided with the rise of McCarthyism and followed the Berlin blockade and the start of the Korean War, introduced a shift in Soviet propaganda tactics, away from mostly general attacks on "the West" and "capitalism" toward exclusive and focused assaults on the United States. Orwell became a prominent target on "the cultural front." *Pravda* saw him as one of "a whole army of venal writers on the orders and instigation of Wall Street." *1984* was "a filthy book in the spirit of such a vital organ of American propaganda as *Reader's Digest*, which published this work, and *Life*, which presented it with many illustrations."¹¹ In the next decade, Orwell was actually misidentified in the *Pravda Ukraina* as an American.¹²

II

BY THE LATE 1950s, Orwell and *1984* had entered a second phase of Soviet reception. Not only had *1984* become "an ideological superweapon," in Isaac Deutscher's phrase,¹³ in the West's offensive propaganda arsenal, but also in the Soviet Union's. Soviet critics had previously described *1984* as an anti-Stalinist polemic and simply damned the book or denied its relevance. In a diabolical example of doublethink, this treatment now gave way to a clever recasting of the book into a

portrait of the American future and a wholesale attack upon present-day American life. A 1959 issue of the Soviet newspaper *Return to the Homeland* referred to Orwell's novel as a picture of "America in 1984." Run by a repatriation organization known as The Committee for a Return to the Homeland and aimed at persuading Russians to return "home," the newspaper twisted *1984* into a tract on the day-to-day horrors of American life. In doing so, it also conflated (or, more likely, confused) details of *1984* with one of its main literary inspirations, Zamyatin's *We* (1924), another terrifying police state dystopia, whose citizenry live without privacy in glass apartments:

Orwell predicted that by [1984] the private life of Americans will be viewed by means of secretly placed television screens. . . . Already today Americans live, so to speak, under a glass cover, and are viewed from all sides.¹⁴

The article, entitled "Under the Hood of Mr. Hoover," claimed that the FBI was the special object of Orwell's satire. The power of "the Hoovers" to tap Americans' telephones and invade their privacy, declared the Soviet newspaper, "has reached fabulous heights."¹⁵ Articles in the government newspaper *Izvestia* during the 1960s repeated these charges against America in general and Hoover in particular, while acknowledging that Orwell was "one of the most vicious haters of communism."¹⁶

The Soviet press also presented *1984* as a model of sexual corruption in class-ridden capitalist society. In this characterization one notices at work not only official Soviet political disapproval. Soviet critics also saw *1984* as a deplorable example of "naturalism"—in Marxist aesthetics, a reactionary mode of art which remains at the level of "appearances," sees things "as they are" rather than as "they should be," does not understand "History" "developmentally," and engages in a "morbid" exploration of what is depressing in order to distract "the people" from the class struggle. And yet one suspects that not only *1984*'s aesthetic "errors" but also its moral

offensiveness—its violation of the respectable Victorian sensibility of post-Zhdanov Russia—evidently accounts for the unusual tirade targeted at the novel in *Kommunist*, the Communist Party's theoretical journal.

Winston's loveless marriage and joyous adultery with Julia, argued *Kommunist* in 1960, typifies "the amorality which flourishes in some strata of bourgeois society. . . , the growth of all kinds of temporary extra-marital and family relations and open prostitution."¹⁷ Not surprisingly, this Soviet critic also coupled Orwell and Huxley, this time pairing 1984 with *Brave New World* (and confusing the two, e.g., in the claim that 1984 portrays reproduction "by artificial means"). 1984 and *Brave New World* reflected family life under American capitalism, said *Kommunist*. "Orwell, Huxley, and their ilk" possess "a primitive understanding of love itself, of motherhood and fatherhood, reducing these lofty and above all moral feelings to the level of animal instincts."¹⁸

Given that the Soviet ideal of anarchistic "free love" in the 1920s following the Russian Revolution and the Civil War had been replaced by rigid laws on divorce and abortion of the 1930s—and the elevation of "Soviet motherhood" to a position strikingly like the spiritualizing of "womanhood" by the Victorians—the Soviet attack on such "bourgeois" habits was most ironic. But in official Soviet eyes 1984 and *Brave New World* were logical extensions of the behavior detailed in the Kinsey reports of the 1940s and 1950s, which horrified Soviet critics as a revelation of the sexual depravity of Americans. By the mid-1930s, as one Russian expatriate put it, "Stalinist Virtue" had supplanted "Communist Free Love." The result was that "love for love's sake" became "treasonable" since such "self-sufficient activities" "detract from the sole purpose of human existence: service to the state."¹⁹ The official view of sexual intercourse was, in other words, not far removed from Oceania's "Our Duty to the Party"—and "love for love's sake" was *sexcrime*.

Despite the Kremlin's relaxation of ideo-

logical standards for literature after Stalin's death in 1953—especially following the period of cultural liberalization ushered in by Khrushchev's 1956 "Secret Speech" at the Twentieth Communist Party Congress denouncing Stalin for his "cult of personality" à la Big Brother²⁰—the assault against anti-Soviet writers like Orwell continued. The new official policy of "peaceful co-existence" allowed for both mild internal criticism and amnesty for certain loyal Communist artists proscribed by Stalin (e.g., Vsevolod Meyerhold and Alexander Tairov), but not for sympathy toward victimized non-Communists or foreign critics of the U.S.S.R. The mid-50s intellectual ferment—which included Yevgeni Yevtushenko's poetry, Ilya Ehrenberg's *The Thaw* (1954), and Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* (1956)—was in any case short-lived. Literary and international affairs—the 1957 attack on *Dr. Zhivago*, the U-2 affair, the erection of the Berlin Wall, the Cuban missile crisis—exacerbated East-West tensions.

After Soviet intellectuals began clamoring for more freedom of expression following the sensational impact of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962), Khrushchev reopened "the cultural front," reintroducing a strict pro-Soviet and anti-American line for literature. With Khrushchev's downfall in 1964 and Brezhnev's accession to power, Soviet cultural controls tightened further, driving dissident literature underground. In 1966 an *Izvestia* article, "For Soviet Means For Oneself," which attacked Orwell ("a disseminator of glaring falsehoods") for suggesting the difficulty of reconciling state collectivism with intellectual liberty, thus ironically confirmed the need for the warning of 1984.²¹

III

THE "COUNTDOWN TO 1984" witnessed a third stage in the history of Orwell's reception in the U.S.S.R. Although Soviet commentators continued to discuss 1984 as a portrait of American society, the interpretations were fuller and more explicitly tied

to current events. For the first time reviews of and quotations from *1984* appeared in the official press. The reading of *1984* in a 1983 issue of the *Literary Gazette*, the weekly newspaper of the Soviet Writers' Union, reflected the rise of a new Cold War era between the Kremlin and the Reagan Administration. The newspaper referred to the Pentagon as the "Ministry of Peace" for its arms build-up and to the Defense Department as the "Ministry of Truth" for its efforts to persuade Europe to accept deployment of middle-range nuclear weapons. While allowing that Americans are "not robots as Orwell predicted," the article noted that "there is a striking similarity between what [Orwell] described in *1984* and what is going on in the U.S.! . . . History frequently jokes. What Orwell predicted as forthcoming in his monstrous *1984* has in many degrees already turned out to be reality in just the same 'free world' to which he himself belonged."²²

Izvestia elaborated in succeeding months on the application of Newspeak and *1984* to America: Big Brother was, of course, Ronald Reagan; "War Is Peace" was embodied in the U.S. Air Force motto "Peace Is Our Profession"; Hate Week was exceeded by the American "month of hate" after the U.S.S.R. shot down a "spy provocateur flight" of Korean Air Lines flight 007 in 1983; Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe were American "radio-sabotage centers" broadcasting Newspeak; and Thought Police surveillance was slipshod when compared with "the real telescreen of Uncle Sam," who "opens your mail, follows your movements, and most important, your thoughts."²³ Reagan is the incarnation of the slogan "Ignorance Is Strength," said the weekly *Moscow News*, citing the American media's own loud doubts about Reagan's competence and about his "strong" defense posture.²⁴ Addressing the Reagan Administration's call, after the 1981 silencing of Lech Walesa's Solidarity workers' movement, for international sanctions against Poland's Communist government, *Izvestia* declared: "Let us hope that experience

and realism will withstand pressure from 'Big Brother.'"²⁵ The Soviet press also attacked America's 1983 "rescue mission" in Grenada and "peacekeeping mission" in Lebanon as transparent examples of Newspeak. The Reagan Administration's proposals for disarmament in 1983 were also "the fruit of doublethink."²⁶ Meanwhile, in a classic instance of "socialist realism," *Izvestia* portrayed the forthcoming utopia of 2084. Headlined "A World That Will Be Lovely," the article depicted a climate-controlled planet in which all people will live to a healthy old age and have plenty of time for creative pursuits. "Naturally the new society will be Communist," *Izvestia* concluded.²⁷

Even Orwell himself underwent "rehabilitation" in some Soviet press accounts during 1984. In a long review in the weekly *New Times*,²⁸ a Soviet critic did what ideologically motivated Anglo-American critics have long been doing with Orwell's work: He quoted selectively from Orwell's corpus, identified Orwell's opponents as the Kremlin's own, and then claimed Orwell for the Soviet camp. Entitled "'1984': Full Circle," the review praised *1984's* artistry and gave a flattering biographical summary of Orwell, casting him as a worker's hero who "shared dry crusts with the clochards of Paris." Orwell saw through "the falsehoods of bourgeois democracy." In *1984* he took "the exact measure . . . of capitalism." Orwell's (remarkably prescient) message, the reviewer concluded, was that "B.B. is R.R." With this review, one might say, the "mutability of the past" was complete. The man who ranked high in Soviet literary demonology was now a candidate for hagiography. The erstwhile Enemy of Mankind had become a Friend of the Common Man.

New Times did acknowledge that it would be an "exaggeration" to say that Orwell was "a convinced adherent of the communist outlook." But the reviewer attacked those who sought to "fit the tight 'suit of totalitarianism'" in *1984* "onto real socialism." Instead, Orwell's harsh criticism of England and bourgeois habits, said *New Times*, proved him a fellow traveller

(a discovery which no doubt would come as a distinct surprise to Raymond Williams, A. L. Rowse, and other British Marxists who were criticizing "ex-socialist" Orwell fiercely in the 1970s and 1980s.)²⁹ This Soviet conversion of Orwell was capped by an astonishingly blatant misreading of Orwell's famous July 1949 letter, published in *Life* and the *New York Times Book Review*, in which he explained that his intentions in 1984 were to "show up" the totalitarian "perversions to which a centralized economy is liable," already "partially realized in Communism and Fascism." But Orwell added that 1984 was set in Britain "in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere."³⁰ The Soviet reviewer seized on this last sentence:

... what Orwell seems to be saying is: "If you don't take care, if you don't wake up, here is what, in caricature form, We run the risk of getting." WE—i.e., the West. We—i.e., capitalism. In a letter to a friend the author himself said that in placing the action of the novel in Great Britain he was prompted, above all, by the desire to emphasize that the English-speaking peoples are no whit better than others, and that totalitarianism, if not fought, may triumph anywhere. He was writing, he said, because there was a lie that had to be exposed.³¹

The Soviet reviewer was drawing most selectively from Orwell's 1949 letter. For the "lie," as Orwell made clear in "Why I Write" and in the Ukrainian preface to *Animal Farm*, was "the belief that Russia is a Socialist country." "[E]xposing the Soviet myth," Orwell wrote, was his goal ever since his return from the Spanish Civil War in 1937.³² Nevertheless, "'1984': Full Circle" fittingly concluded:

Not a single [member of the Western press] has had the wisdom, the courage, or the honesty to acknowledge at long last that George Orwell with his prophetic gift diagnosed the syndrome of present-day capitalism with which we must co-exist today for lack of something better, restraining with all

our might its pathologically militaristic, nuclear-missile ambitions.³³

IV

WITH THE RECENT PUBLICATION in the *Literary Gazette* of the 1984 extract, Orwell's Soviet reputation has entered a fourth and unprecedented stage of official recognition. No longer is he being castigated by the Soviet press as a "troubadour of the Cold War" and his novel treated as a "non-book," noted the anonymous introduction to the excerpt in the *Literary Gazette*. Indeed the introduction not only conceded, if somewhat obliquely, that Stalinist Russia had served as a model for 1984, but also frankly criticized the Party for its long-standing proscriptions against the novel. "Of all the old taboos relating to foreign literature, [the banning of 1984] was one of the firmest and least problematical," said the *Literary Gazette*. The cause of the taboo was not hard to guess: The Soviet censors recognized, as it were, that "B.B." was "J.S."

[O]n the novel's first pages, the reader gets a portrait of a person with a moustache looking at other citizens from each corner. This panicky moment was sufficient to make the book, which was read by the whole world, illegal in our country.

... [S]uggestions to translate the novel (it is reliably reported that there were suggestions [in the 1970s]) were, as before, swept aside without discussion.

And why, exactly? ... It should have been translated and analyzed a long time ago, no matter whether Orwell's dissenting political position was flawed or whether he slandered socialism (this was the most widespread accusation). ... Alas, in the cacophony of the Cold War, the dying voice of the author was not heard. Year after year, his novel became distorted by myths and commentaries to the myths, as if it had fallen into a hall of crooked mirrors. And if one is not afraid to call things by their names, one must admit: By virtue of our biased relationship to Orwell, with all our prohibitions and labels against him, we did not at all hinder—but rather aggravated—this.

Certainly the decision to issue an unabridged, unexpurgated edition of *1984* in the literary monthly *Novy Mir* should further improve the Soviet "relationship" to Orwell. The move follows the serialization in 1987-1988 of several long-suppressed anti-Stalinist novels by Soviet writers, including Zamyatin's *We*, Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, Andrei Platanov's *Chevengur*, and Anatoly Rybakov's *Children of the Arbat*, all of them printed entire as part of Gorbachev's extraordinary crusade to re-evaluate the Stalin era and enlist intellectual and popular support for a systematic revamping of the Soviet bureaucracy and the Communist Party. As of 1989 it therefore seems likely that Orwell's status will alter drastically if the cultural "thaw" in the Gorbachev era of *glasnost* and *perestroika* continues. Unlike the case of Orwell's earlier phases of reception, the Soviet intelligentsia today appears open to approaching *1984* less as a propaganda sheet, simply to be attacked or claimed, and more as a politically committed artwork inviting the Soviet Union to criticize itself along with the novel.

But how thoroughgoing will Soviet self-criticism be? Will this be no more than a partial thaw like that of the 1950s—a jump out of the cultural Siberia of the Brezhnev-Andropov-Chernenko years into a mild Moscow winter? If the case of Orwell is any guide, the answers remain tentative. In the idiom of Watergate Newspeak, the recent Soviet response to *1984* is a limited hang-out, with plenty of expletives deleted.

For example, even as the introduction to the *Literary Gazette* extract, titled "The Ministry of Truth," acknowledged that *1984* bore relevance to Stalinist Russia, it suggested that Orwell's main target was fascism. ("He asked a difficult question: Couldn't fascism find fertile ground in England and, if so, how soon? How will it appear? What shape will it take? Thus arose the form of the novel.") Indeed neither Stalin nor Stalinism is specifically mentioned in the *Literary Gazette* introduction, although—*mutatis mutandis*—Big

Brother is likened to Chairman Mao, Minitru fabrication of national heroes is associated with the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Hate Week is identified with Islam, and the "totalitarian shadowing" of the population by means of "the newest electronic equipment" is called "a reality precisely in the advanced countries of the West, most of all America."

So, old habits die hard. Indeed the case of "Comrade Orwell" is especially significant because it is a site where the anxious jumble of hopes, fears, and tensions pressing upon Gorbachev's attempts at cultural reform converge and convolute. The result is a good deal of strenuously acrobatic doublethinking.

"The time has come," concluded the *Literary Gazette*, "to free ourselves from the stagnant prohibitions, to discard the myths, to shatter the crooked mirrors, and to read George Orwell thoughtfully and without prejudice."

Has it? Or, as Sergei Zalygin, editor of *Novy Mir*, put it: "It's possible that Orwell wrote his book with a concrete address—the address of socialism. But the time has passed when the book, . . . to put it delicately, embarrasses us."

Again, has it?

V

OUTSIDE THE SOVIET UNION, official Communist reaction to Orwell has also varied somewhat over the years, but no deviation from the anti-Western Soviet "line" has been permitted. For instance, radio broadcasts of *Animal Farm* were scheduled in 1948 and 1968, before *Zhdanovschina* was imposed in Soviet satellites and before the suppression of the Dubcek government began, respectively. The fable was never aired. In the 1980s, Orwell has generally been presented in the satellite countries as a vicious anti-Communist, though some commentators have also argued that America is the realization of *1984*. Possibly with this latter strategy in mind, Polish authorities allowed copies of *1984* into book fairs under a "liberalized" cultural policy in 1983, shortly before yet

another crackdown on Walesa and Solidarity. *1984* remains outlawed in East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. In 1984 the East German press charged that *1984*, "the best seller of the Cold War," was gaining renewed attention in the West because "an Orwell renaissance" was being orchestrated "to provide the ideological background for the rebirth of the Cold War."³⁴ The Budapest literary weekly *New Mirror* attacked Orwell's anti-Communism in its New Year issue.³⁵ A Bulgarian journal described Orwell as "one of the intellectual victims of the real Oceania of modern imperialism."³⁶

Among dissident Soviet and East European intellectuals, Orwell has been admired as a brilliant satirist and a courageous artist in the mold of Pasternak, Solzenitzsyn, and Milosz. In *The Captive Mind*, Milosz himself noted that dissident intellectuals are "amazed" that a writer who never lived in Russia should understand the system so well.³⁷ Even though they have been officially banned, Orwell's last two books have been translated into many East European languages.

1984 has been especially esteemed by young dissidents in the Communist bloc. Eugenia Ginsburg, a political prisoner during the Stalin era, has described in her autobiography the eerie resemblance of Stalinist Russia to 1984 Oceania. Andrei Amalrik went to prison in the 1960s for his bitter portrait of the U.S.S.R., entitled *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?* In 1963 a secret circle of dissident students at Moscow University, recalled Lewis Feuer after a visit with them, quietly circulated and treasured copies of *1984*.³⁸ For these dissident intellectuals and many others, *1984* crosses the line from fiction into truth. At a Heritage Foundation conference one Rumanian refugee intellectual made this point forcibly when he explained how, in the mid-1950s, he procured a smuggled copy of *1984* on condition that he read it overnight and pass it on through the dissident underground. Like Milosz and others, he was astounded that an Englishman who had never set foot in Eastern Europe could describe with

such horrifying accuracy the climate of terror which he then felt as a young man in rebellion against the state.

¹A Latvian dissident accused of possessing a copy of *1984* and another banned novel was sentenced to seven years' hard labor in December 1983. Reported in "Soviets use Orwell book to rap U.S.," *Allentown* (Pa.) *Morning Call*, January 17, 1984. ²*The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (1968), volume 4, 379-80. Henceforth this work will be referred to as *CEJL*. ³*Ibid.* ⁴Glebe Struve, "Anti-Westernism in Recent Soviet Literature," *Yale Review* (December 1949), p. 222. ⁵*CEJL*, IV, 266. ⁶*U.S. Department of State Bulletin* (December 3, 1951), p. 897. ⁷Struve, p. 220. ⁸I. Anisimov, "Enemies of Mankind," *Pravda* May 12, 1950, p. 3. Translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (July 1, 1950), pp. 14-5. ⁹*Ibid.* ¹⁰Koestler was half-Jewish. ¹¹Anisimov, *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, p. 15. ¹²Victor Babish, "What Is Flourishing in the U.S.A.?" *Pravda Ukrainy*, August 21, 1962, p. 4. Translated in *Digest of the Ukrainian Press* (October 1962), p. 24. ¹³Isaac Deutscher, "1984: The Mysticism of Cruelty," *Russia in Transition and Other Essays* (New York, 1957), p. 230. The essay was written in 1954. ¹⁴"Under the Hood of Mr. Hoover," *Return to the Homeland* (January 1959). The FBI had obtained a copy of this newspaper, and the quotation is from an FBI memorandum titled "Smear Campaign" (March 31, 1959) referring to it. ¹⁵*Ibid.*, FBI memo. ¹⁶Melor Sturua, "What the U.S. Is Like: Sullen Eagle," *Izvestia*, September 10, 1969, p. 2. Translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (October 8, 1969), p. 19. (Sturua is a well-known Soviet journalist whose first name stands for "Marx, Engels, Lenin, October Revolution.") ¹⁷A. A. Kharchev, "The Soviet Family Now and Under Communism," *Kommunist* (May 1960), p. 57). Translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (July 22, 1960), p. 10. ¹⁸Kharchev, p. 10. ¹⁹Vera Sandomirsky, "Sex in the Soviet Union," *Russian Review*, X (1951), 199. ²⁰The ubiquity of "Orwell" and his catchwords in the mid-1950s is reflected in the response of *The Times* of London to the publication of Khrushchev's lengthy speech about Stalin's "crimes" and his own "recent discovery" of them: "Orwell has just received something like a 600,000-word beating in Moscow." ("Orwell That Ends Well," *The Times* [London], February 29, 1956, p. 9). ²¹"For Society Means For Oneself," *Izvestia*, September 11, 1966, p. 5. Translated in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, (October 5, 1966), p. 18. ²²Reported in "Soviet Compares US to Orwell's '1984'" *New Orleans-Times Picayune*, January 1983, p. 8. ²³Melor Sturua, "An Orwellian America," *Izvestia*, January 15, 1984. (Translated in *World Press Review*, March 1984, p. 53). ²⁴Reported in "Soviets Say '1984' Portrays America," *Florida* (Jacksonville) *Times-Union*, January 18, 1984. ²⁵Reported in "Reagan Called 'Big Brother' in Kremlin Anti-Sanction Bid," *Birmingham* (Alabama) *Even-*

ing News, January 10, 1982. ²⁶*Ibid.* ²⁷Reported in "Soviet Says Vision is Alive in U.S." *New York Times*, January 8, 1984. ²⁸Victor Tsoppi, "'1984': Full Circle," *New Times* (English edition) (December 1983), pp. 22-4. ²⁹See, for instance, Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters* (London, 1979); and A. L. Rowse, "The Contradictions of Orwell," *Contemporary Review*, (October 1982), pp. 186-94. ³⁰*CEJL*, vol. 4, 502. ³¹*New Times*, p. 22. ³²*CEJL*, vol. 1, 8; vol. 4, 504. ³³*New Times*, p. 24. ³⁴Reported in *Addison* (Il-

linois) *Press Weekly*, February 1, 1984. ³⁵Reported in "Communists Criticize Orwell's '1984' Novel," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, January 9, 1984. ³⁶Plamen Georgiev, "'1984': Impudent Speculation with Wild Idea," *Otechestven Front*, June 15, 1984, p. 8. Translated in *Joint Publications Research Service*, July 1984, p. 5. ³⁷Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind*, trans. Jane Zielonko (London, 1953), p. 42. ³⁸Lewis Feuer, *A Conflict of Generations* (New York, 1969), p. 531.

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EMINENT LIVES

Whatever forms biography may assume in the future, it will always be a difficult form of art. We demand of it the scrupulosity of science and the enchantments of art, the perceptible truth of the novel and the learned falsehoods of history. Much prudence and tact are required to concoct this unstable mixture. Carlyle said that a well-written life was almost as rare as a well-spent one, thus showing himself as much an optimist in his criticism as he was a pessimist in his ethics. A well-written life is a much rarer thing than a well-spent one. But, however difficult biography may be, it merits the devotion of our toil and of our emotions. The cult of the hero is as old as mankind. It sets before men examples which are lofty but not inaccessible, astonishing but not incredible, and it is this double quality which makes it the most convincing of art forms and the most human of religions.

—André Maurois, *Aspects of Biography* (1929)

On Biographical Theory

Pure Lives: The Early Biographers, by Reed Whittemore, *Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.* vii + 159 pp. \$15.95.

THIS ATTRACTIVE BOOK comes to us from a member of what appears to be, alas, a vanishing species: Reed Whittemore is a man of letters. In a day when specialization has proved the road to riches and success—even poets are specialized—Mr. Whittemore, politely but firmly, has taken another road. He is a distinguished poet and essayist, and a skillful editor. He is presently editing the new journal of translation and translation studies, *Delos*, and some there be who still fondly remember the irrepressible *Furioso* under his direction. We have seen him also in recent years as a biographer of insight, author of *William Carlos Williams, Poet from Jersey* (1975). From the practice of biography he now turns to its theory, in what one hopes will be the first of two or even three volumes on the subject.

As the subtitle indicates, *Pure Lives* treats the, or some, early biographers. Whittemore early indicates his vexation with biographical theory—mostly academic, but he is too polite to say so—which excludes “broad views” in biog-

raphies but on the other hand demands that every scrap of evidence down to the odd theater stub be included:

Unfortunately, biography now usually walks among us disguised as history, or political science, or psychoanalysis, or just exhaustive scholarship, with little visible shape except chronology.

This is the man of letters, sensing a lack of form in what passes for life-writing today, and deploring it. The early biographers had their faults, he admits, “but these writers were at least aware of biography as a genre, a form of human statement, in a way that too many modern biographers are not.”

The early biographers range from Plutarch to Samuel Johnson and, for reasons which will become clear, Laurence Sterne; biographers, that is, who wrote before the triumph of the scientific and philosophical Enlightenment and its literary corollary, the Romantic movement. Whittemore’s focus is on five collections of biographies: Plutarch’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Aelfric’s *Lives of the Saints*, Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, and Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*.

The first chapter is entitled, significantly, “Plutarch and the Dream of Virtue.” Significantly, because Whittemore demon-