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Solving Truth and History with Numbers and Violence

In the works *1984*, *Watchmen* and *Lathe of Heaven* there are two truths, two histories. When it comes to history and cultural memory in general, its existence is created. In this case, when there are multiple histories, both were created by people, creating a relationship between the peoples who know both histories. This is due to how there is always one party who was responsible for deciding what the newer history will be. While this character decides what the new history is, another character, who has no say in what the new history is, has a role in its establishment. This type of dual-party relationship is most noticeably similar between *1984* and *Lathe of Heaven*. O'Brien, in *1984*, is part of the inner party who creates the new history, while Winston creates and enforces it through his career. Meanwhile in *Lathe of Heaven*, Haber uses technology to design a new history and uses Orr's dreams to create it. When these two works are compared it makes it seem as though the human process is simple and streamlined, with the party which is deciding the new history controlling the party who creates the new history. However, there is one scene almost the same, including motives and factors, across all three works. It is where a new history is created where there is another enemy and it is created for the purpose of peace. In this instance *Watchmen* shows additional perspectives, being the two additional passive parties, with one who knows both histories but chooses the new one to be true and one who only knows the new history. This fact being explicit in *Watchmen* hints their existence in the other two works. In the end, there is more than just the designing and creating of newer histories. For which history is true is actually a statistics game, including only how many people know

multiple histories and out of the people who know multiple, which history they choose to be the truth.

In *Lathe of Heaven*, the protagonist, Orr, is able to change both the past and present. He is the only character in the entire story to have this ability and during the beginning of the story, he was also the only one known to be able to remember what the past and present used to be like before he changed it. However, he is incapable of controlling what the timeline is being changed into, “it is [his] unconscious mind that changes things, without any intelligent control” (Le Guin, 14). This results in, in the context of the changing of history, Orr himself being a tool he has no control over. This is mirrored, in a way, in *1984*, where Winston’s job was altering “news items” which makes him also a tool in history changing he has no control over (Orwell, 51). In terms of physical conscious power to actually change the state the world is in, both these characters have zero power, just like most of everyone else. The difference between them and most other people comes from how they also know the previous version of history. Orr knows what the world was like before his dreams changed it and Winston knows what parts of the information he is publishing was self-invented, but who else does? The world was destroyed in *Lathe of Heaven* before Orr’s dream created a new world with a new history, but Orr is the only known person know about the previous iteration of history. Meanwhile in *1984*, Winston invents Captain Ogilvy (Orwell, 60). He is also the only known character to know about the previous version of history in which Captain Ogilvy did not exist. It will not by free and conscious will Orr created a new reality and Winston created a new person, so they are not different in terms of power from everyone else. The only thing they have which others do not is knowledge of what things used to be.

The actual ability to create new reality actually belongs to characters such as Haber and O'Brien. Haber has his hypnosis and augmentor, which is able to control Orr's dreams. O'Brien has his position in the inner party, which is able to control Winston's job in the records department. Since their ability to control and create history depends on the existence of Orr and Winston for neither Orr's dreams or Winston's job can exist without them, the argument can be made Orr and Winston share a portion of the power to command history. However, O'Brien has full control over Winston shown over and over again and "Haber had [Orr] hooked" (Le Guin, 74). Orr and Winston, as devices instead of people, belonged to Haber and O'Brien, who are able to control both the creation and direction of the new histories. Characters like Winston and Orr have non-existent control and their knowledge is insignificant enough for both of them being vulnerable to being considered mad; "[Orr] was sick, [Orr] must be cured" was the general consensus of all who knew the situation and O'Brien refers to Winston's memories as "hallucinations" and "delusions" (Le Guin, 25; Orwell, 323-324).

The most similar situation between the three works is the foreign invasion. In *Lathe of Heaven*, an alien force was created in a new reality for the purpose of world peace between the countries on earth with the obsolete reality being the one without aliens (Le Guin, 83-86). In *1984*, the war against Eastasia was created for the purpose of peace within Oceania with the obsolete reality being them being at war with Eurasia (Orwell, 235-236). In *Watchmen*, an alien attack was created in a new reality for the purpose of peace between the western and eastern superpowers with the obsolete reality being the attack actually being an event staged with Ozymandias (Moore and Gibbon, 372-374). This makes Ozymandias, in relation to the process of creating multiple histories, the equivalent of Haber and O'Brien, as he created and owned the tools necessarily to stage the attack and decided himself how to use them.

Other roles in the creating and maintaining of new histories were also introduced. Instead of only one party who knows the past history and one party who creates the present history, there is now also a party who accepts this new rendition of history as the preferable one. While almost none of the characters were necessarily supportive of Ozymandias' plan to kill half of New York, the two histories here are not whether or not Ozymandias' attacked New York or not. The attack happening is the truth and it is the truth in all versions of the truth. The only difference in the possibilities of the history of the future in this instance is whether the attack was caused by aliens or whether the attack was staged by Ozymandias or whether the attack was caused by something different altogether. There was no instance in which it was possible to prevent the attack as Ozymandias left not "the slightest chance of [them] affecting its outcome (Moore and Gibbon, 375).

The characters Dr. Manhattan, Dan and Laurie all agree the on the reality where the attack was caused by aliens on being preferable. This creates a new party and new factor on what history means which wasn't explicitly shown in neither *Lathe of Heaven* nor *1984*. Despite knowing what both realities are, they have chosen to choose the reality which the creator of the reality had chosen. This is not comparable to a speculative situation where either Orr decides to agree with Haber's methods or one where Winston decides to agree with O'Brien and the inner party. It is instead, when compared to the two works, more akin to a situation in which an unrelated third party in either work is aware of both versions of history and chooses to believe the new one is the real truth. The fact both Haber and Lelache at different relations with the event were shown to have retained some past memories of other histories proves it a possibility. Meanwhile in *1984*, the fact Winston is not the only person with a job in the records department proves the same.

Expanding further on the original responses of the characters in *Watchmen*, Rorschach refused to compromise with Ozymandias, which Ozymandias considered it “blotting out reality” (Moore and Gibbons, 403). This is a fair statement as Rorschach is choosing to blot out Ozymandias’ reality in favour for a different one. The result was Dr. Manhattan killing him to prevent him from sharing his knowledge. If the reality where Ozymandias attacked New York is the reality A and the reality where aliens attacked New York is the reality B, Dr. Manhattan’s killing of Rorschach resulted in all of the people being left being either people who are only aware of the second reality or people who are aware of both realities but chose the second one to be the truth. In the equation of multiple histories and multiple truths, this adds the function of a party or person enforcing the existence of one reality by removing people who want to inform or establish the existence of another reality.

There are equivalents in both *Lathe of Heaven* and *1984*. In the ending of *Lathe of Heaven*, Heather remembers bits of multiple realities and Orr reassures her the current reality is the true one (Le Guin, 182-183). Here, Orr, as a person who is truly aware of multiple realities, convinced Heather, who is semi-aware of multiple realities, to also choose the one he has chosen. As a result, there were no characters left who believed or preferred any reality other than the one Orr chose, the same result as Dr. Manhattan’s actions. Also, in *1984*, Ampleforth kept the word ‘god’ in a poem, resulting in him and the poem he published being deleted (Orwell, 303-304). The action led to the same result, there were now no possibility of a person who preferred the reality in which the word ‘god’ existed in the poem could share the reality with others, potentially creating more people who are aware of and prefer the reality in which the word ‘god’ existed.

While it was originally stated *Watchmen* made the relationships more complicated, things are still reasonably simple at the end. It would appear what reality is is nothing more than a version of history and a version of the truth which, not only is everyone aware of, but the people who want it to be true are able to suppress the people who do not want it to be true. Thus, in a way, reality is dependant on who has what knowledge and who has what power, those two factors are rarely separable. To establish a new reality, one must own the power, ability and tools to create it and also the power, ability, tools and allies to suppress counter-believers. In *Lathe of Heaven*, Haber eventually lost the ability to establish realities because he lost control of the power to make one. In *1984*, O'Brien kept his reality by changing Winston from someone who believed in a different reality into someone who believed in his reality. Ozymandias from *Watchmen* established his reality because other people who agreed with himself removed the people who did not.

Truth would have to be both subjective and objective, not both at once, but subjective first and objective after. During the period in which different people have knowledge of different versions of history and different opinions on which one is true, truth is subjective. Eventually, as shown, one will rise above the rest and remove them from existence, in which case truth has become objective, because there is only one truth left. It is exceedingly common to see one person suggest another is brainwashed by propaganda while they themselves believes absolutely in all the propaganda they consume because their propaganda is the one they hope is right. There is no truth there yet. When all propagandas but one is gone, there will be truth.

Works Cited

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