

NORTH COAST

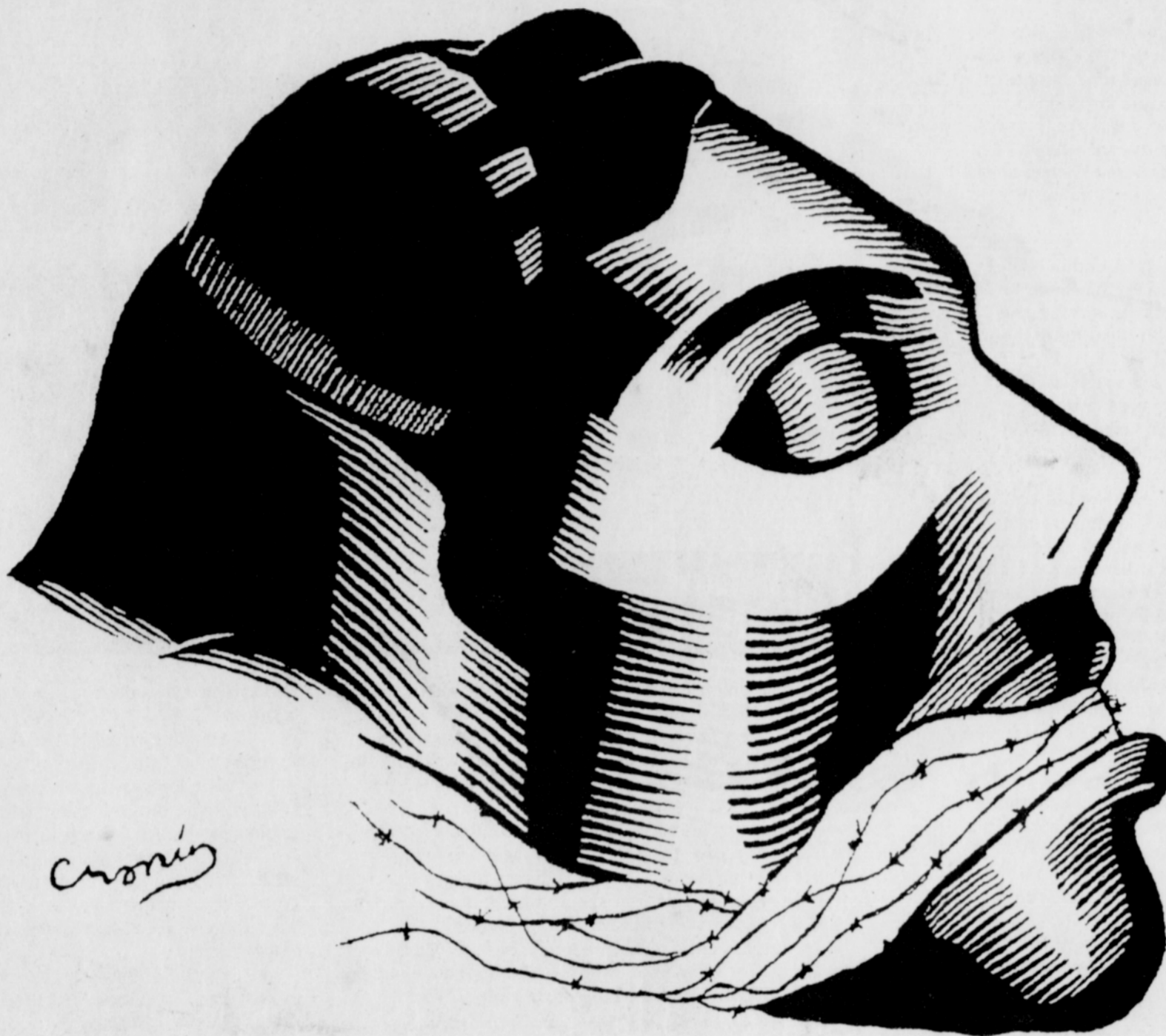
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In a dark time the eye begins to see.
- Theodore Roethke



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BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"The capacity of the human mind for swallowing nonsense and spewing it forth in violent and repressive action has never yet been plumbed."

—ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

"If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping a human face -- forever."

—GEORGE ORWELL

GOD IS WATCHING YOU!

The apparition appeared suddenly in front of Winston Smith at his computer in the Ministry of Truth. As often as he had been confronted with the specter, he cringed inwardly as the brief flash of light disappeared. Holographic bursts appeared everywhere in the city like dust devils at any time day or night, inside or outside, office or home. Each time a sudden swirl of bright silver and gold lights from which boomed a sepulchral voice warning of eternal celestial surveillance.

Everyone in Evangelica, which was shorthand for the Holy Evangelical Empire, was watched all of the time, or at least thought they were, which was much the same thing. Every personal computer was hooked to a empirical net which was capable of monitoring everyone without human observation. Television was the main spy, however. More to the point, the masses who were terrified of the Grand Inquisitor's thought police were pacified by media control. The omnipresent screen looked back at its viewers who maintained perpetually pious expressions lest they be suspected of mental impurity.

Winston Smith lived in a world of the ever recurring present. The past was evil; the future belonged to God. Life was immediately now, everlasting, occupied in service to God's Holy Order, the high priests who ruled Evangelica. There were contradictions of course, corporeal aging for one, but only a very few were close enough to the heart of the Order's

administration to realize it, and at that point doublethink was a necessary reflex, the mental agility to make oneself believe that the most blatant lie was not only truth but had always been true. Doublethink prevented heresy and subsequent liquidation.

Winston was an auxiliary member of the priestly Order that ruled, a lay functionary equivalent to a Catholic altar boy. The Ministry of Truth in which he held a minor post controlled every bit of information disseminated within Evangelica and was responsible for external propaganda as well. (The use of the word ministry was itself recaptured from its former bureaucratic misuse and reapplied for the same purpose.) There were millions like Winston, antlike creatures who carried out the will of the Order, not allowed to think or feel for themselves, subjects of an iron theocracy that tolerated no question of its authority or power.

If Winston had a window in his airless cubicle in the Ministry of Truth he would have seen the large city massed below, delapidated hovels that surrounded for miles each of the four huge ministries as were cathedrals in medieval times. (The other three ministries were Peace, Love and Joy, successively headquarters for the armed forces, thought police and social administration.) The streets swarmed, with police particularly evident, though as usual priestly limos carried important clerics about their sacred duties. Buried deeply within the giant cathedral of the Ministry of Truth, Winston was shielded from the incessant shrieking of sirens as the Grand Inquisitor's thought police swept down upon heretics, blasphemers and traitors, raided homes and suspected meeting places of outlawed sects.

His thoughts were interrupted by a loud fanfare of trumpets followed by an excited voice shouting from video screens positioned on every wall of the huge room. The hosts of God had smitten the forces of evil a mighty blow. Video visions of gleaming missiles shot from shining white jet bombers filled the screens. The evil strongholds appeared to be nondescript shanties from which erupted fleeing darkskinned persons,

many of whom fell or were vaporized in explosions. Following that announcement the voice said that the wine ration at daily compulsory worship services, the only alcohol consumption allowed, was cut by a third. A tremendous hosannah of trumpets and voices ended the newflash. Winston knew that by tomorrow the media would proclaim that wine rationing had been increased instead of decreased. Winston might himself be given the assignment to revise the numbers.

Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth was to slightly alter selected portions of holy scripture, in particular to ensure past prophecies be brought into line with contemporary reality, itself subject to perception and change. His job was reality control. At all times the Order was to be perceived as the rock of absolute truth and clearly the absolute could never be different from the present. The concept of divinely inspired gospel had been altered to fit evangelitical needs, which made it critical to present each scriptural revision as if it were truth evermore until replaced by another temporarily operable truth. The unchanging truth adhered to as gospel by the reigning theocrats was that whoever controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present controls the past.

Knowledge of history was confined to what appears in the Bible, though it had been so tampered with Winston was unaware both of its original gospels and that they had been altered, though he made small changes everyday.

Winston knew that in the 5th century BC the citizens of Athens deposed a tyrant and set up what was considered the world's first democracy. A few years later the deposed tyrant returned with a large army of mercenaries. The tyrant was welcomed back by many of the same citizens who deposed him and they cheered as he executed members of the democratic government.

Winston was not supposed to know this. He was not certain why he knew it. History was portrayed as perpetual

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