

**The TAMARITANS THEATRE COMPANY**  
**1984 By George Orwell. Adapted by Nick Hern**

Performed at The Drum Theatre, Theatre Royal, Plymouth  
As seen by Nina Jarram, NODA SW District 3 Representative on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2026

***Directed by Steve Baker***

From the moment the audience entered the auditorium, an atmosphere of intimidation was expertly established. Two policemen strode along either side of the stage, their threatening stance and stern facial expressions silently monitoring audience members as they entered, batons clutched menacingly in hand. Flashing red lights flickered from cameras while a central projection of the all-seeing eye of Big Brother pierced the space, immediately immersing us in a world of surveillance and control.

Tension was superbly sustained as we were introduced to the protagonist, Smith, portrayed with compelling physical precision. The actor demonstrated a clear understanding of victimised behaviour and a worn-down spirit, communicating far more through physicality, nuanced movement, and sustained eye contact than through speech alone. His brooding reactions to having his life played out before him offered an intense and affecting portrayal of existence under the dictatorship of Big Brother, conveying a broken spirit that resonated powerfully with the audience.

The actor playing O'Brien delivered a masterclass in narration and facilitation, seamlessly guiding us between the present moment and flashbacks. Through carefully crafted mannerisms—the tilt of his spectacles, rubbing of his nose, rolling of his Rs, jutted chin and exaggerated mouth shapes—he captivated the audience. Despite the barbarity of his actions, his powerfully executed prose was strangely seductive, underscoring the terrifying allure of authority and control.

The ensemble was consistently strong, clearly understanding and embracing the Director's non-naturalistic approach. Costume changes and character switches occurred seamlessly in full view of the audience, yet never disrupted the credibility of the naturalistic narrative. This resulted in a compelling “play within a play,” where flashbacks explored the past while simultaneously exposing the consequences of the present and future. There were no weak links in the company; each actor owned their role and skilfully brought both light and shade where required.

One particularly effective moment saw the ensemble transform into a Greek Chorus, repeatedly chanting the word “Hate” as both tone and volume built to a spine-tingling crescendo. The sequence was well-drilled and achieved its intended effect with striking impact. Elsewhere, the ensemble's use of physical theatre—most notably when embodying bushes—was subtle and assured, avoiding any sense of amateurism. Even a non-speaking actor present during the torture sequence conveyed immense emotional

weight through silence alone, proving that physicality, stance, and stage presence can be just as powerful as dialogue.

The actors portraying Julia and Smith in the flashbacks shared a comfortable and believable chemistry, effectively contrasting the oppressive present with moments of love, lust, and fleeting freedom. A hauntingly beautiful song, performed from the balcony, provided a moment of reflection that gently interrupted the severity of the themes, offering the audience a necessary pause for thought.

Lighting design played a crucial role in reinforcing the bleakness of the world, with harsh white lights eliminating any sense of warmth. Clever blackouts allowed Smith to be revealed in different contemplative positions, suggesting the fragmentation of his future. Music used to introduce new scenes was suitably impactful, evoking a cult-like atmosphere through angelic chanting, while sound effects depicting electric shocks intensified effectively—even as Smith's restrained reactions suggested his growing desensitisation to pain.

The set design reflected a clinical and oppressive environment, with adaptable furniture that was moved fluidly by the actors and used with impressive versatility. Costume provided uniformity and carefully placed colour, while propaganda posters, large-scale props, and sensitively applied stage makeup demonstrated exceptional attention to detail. It was clear that this production was a genuine company effort, with every element working cohesively to enhance the Director's vision.

This was an exceptional piece of theatre, directed with intelligence and creativity, and thoroughly deserving of performance in a high-profile venue such as the Drum Theatre. Thank you also for the warm welcome and superb hospitality.

*PLEASE NOTE: Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what he sees at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is*

*inevitable that his assessment will be affected by that knowledge.*

*The N.O.D.A. Representative's intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.*

*It is hoped that the audience's appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.*