

Orwell's 1984

George Orwell, one of English literature's most important and famous writers, draws the picture of a dystopia in one of his best known novels 1984. Being considered as a warning against totalitarianism, it is also possible to say that the novel puts forth a road map on how totalitarian regimes work and how certain ideologies are imposed on nations. Creating a world in which the worst possible totalitarian regime is present, Orwell also takes a very close look at the psychological states of people. The writer doesn't only deeply analyze what a totalitarian regime stands for but also introduces the themes of the importance of language, how certain ideologies can be imposed on people and how physical pain can control the human mind. Putting stress on the dreadfulness and the destructive nature of totalitarianism, and also by pointing out that nations can in fact be forced to admire and support such a regime, the writer makes his reader face the cruelest and most realistic aspects of such a horrific repressive regime.

Before taking a closer look at the novel, it would be helpful to give background information about the era in which Orwell was influenced to create such a hellish world. 1984 was written in 1949, when Fascism was on the rise, right after the Second World War, when Hitler was defeated and Stalin had performed his cruelest acts. Having worked in Spain in 1936 during the Spanish civil war, Orwell witnessed the cruelty of fascist regimes and had already collected his dreadful memories which lead him to write his political novels. Regarding Orwell's intention in writing 1984, Jenni Calder in her book Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four states:

To anyone who was in Britain in the years immediately after the Second World War, and particularly in London, the sights and smell that Orwell recreates will be familiar... In 1984 he translates this situation in to the future by adding details that are unfamiliar (57).

Thus, it becomes possible to say that as a result of the world's existing state at the time Orwell wrote 1984, he was deeply concerned about the future and that his pessimist attitude in his novel acted as a warning and as a criticism of totalitarian regimes. Adriaan

M. De Lange, in his book The Influence of Political Bias in Selected Essays of George Orwell says, “The rise of Fascism, Nazism and Stalinist communism in Europe and the resultant tremors in Britain left an indelible mark on Orwell’s thought and work (1).” At this point taking a closer look at Orwell’s intentions in writing 1984 from the perspective of the Marxist Hungarian critic Georg Lukacs would be convenient. Due to his theory of “Reflection” Lukacs claims that literary works would reflect the hidden aspects of the social and political era in which they are written. Parallel to Lukacs’ “Reflection” theory, Orwell reflects his concerns deriving from the political state in which he lives through fiction. Regarding 1984 Calder states, “Orwell is underlining a psychological as well as a political truth here, which is demonstrated in the kind of mass embracing of authorial influence that came with the rise of Nazism and Stalinism (63).” While the era in which 1984 was written marks itself with political depressions, it also hints that the world was within a phase when totalitarian and fascist regimes were condemned as a result of the devilish acts of Hitler and Stalin.

While taking a closer look at the book and the themes it introduces to the reader, the theme of the importance of language gains significance. “Newspeak”, Oceania’s official language, consists of limited words which are created by party members. The language totally deletes some words which are present in the English language such as “excellent” or “splendid” and replaces them with an extremely plain word such as “plusgood”. Changing the language and limiting it in number of words becomes a matter of importance since language is one of the most important tools of expression and thought for human beings. Deleting complex words and limiting language also limits the thoughts of people and enables the party to delete certain concepts from people’s minds. As Syme explains Winston how important it is to change the language he says, “Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thought crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it (60).” Analyzing Syme’s comment on language, the reader comes to the realization that it is the language itself that makes people think. Hence it becomes understandable that being a totalitarian regime, the party doesn’t want its people to think, since thinking may lead to original ideas and thus to through crime. By lowering the language to a very simple state, the party cleverly paralyzes the brains of its people and

disables them from thinking. As Syme continues to explain the real aim of the party in creating Newspeak, he also mentions one important topic about language forming concepts. He says:

How could you have a slogan like “Freedom is Slavery” when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking-not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness (61).

In trying to understand Syme’s remark on language, it might be useful to think of Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory that discusses whether concepts or objects would really exist if they were not expressed in language. According to Saussure, what makes a concept present is the language itself. He claims that the world is a whole and that the language divides this whole into separate pieces to make it become more understandable. Thus, a concept or an object which isn’t expressed by language wouldn’t exist. When “Newspeak” is concerned, one may claim the same thing. If the word “Freedom” doesn’t exist in Oceania anymore, there wouldn’t be such a concept. Thus, one of the most important problems that threaten the party would be removed. When these facts are concerned, simplifying language and removing words that are used to express threatening concepts, would perfectionalize the regime in terms of the obedience of people. Another remarkable aspect about language is that it is one of the most important things that make human beings privileged when compared to animals. As a result of the ability to think, human beings can speak. Thus, decreasing language to a minimum level in words and expression also means the dehumanization of human beings. Limiting people’s one and very important ability to think and speak, the party tries to dehumanize human beings and make them become animal-like creatures. Hence, it would be far easier for the party to have full control over its citizens.

While language plays a major role in shifting people’s thoughts to fit in the Totalitarian regime, another striking aspect of the novel is the theme of how certain ideologies can be imposed on people. As a starting point, the party chooses to change and destruct the past. Replacing true history with a fictional one which glorifies Oceania

makes the already powerful party become even more invincible. As it is stated in the novel:

And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed-if all records told the same tale-then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: Who controls the present controls the past.' And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered (40).

The party creates a kind of reality by creating a past of its own. Since when there's no one who has any historical documents saying that the party's history is shifted from the truth, the party's recreated history will become the truth. Hoping that there should be more than this in life, Winston tries to find a proof that the past wasn't always like this and that the past was based on a much better world. Winston tries to link himself with the past. He writes a diary using a pen. The pen, being an object belonging to the past, symbolizes Winston's need for the past and trying to find a little something which would connect him the past that he doesn't know about. Thus, the manipulation of history, in this sense, is directly related to the manipulation of people living in Oceania. Thinking that the world has always been like this, people don't have any expectations from the future and they accept the current regime in all its ways, since they don't have alternatives. However, when Winston is concerned, he is one of the rare citizens who think that the past couldn't be like this and that there was a totally different world. Knowing that history has been changed, Winston wants to find out about the true history. Looking at the issue from Winston's psychological perspective, it might be possible to say that Winston, unhappy in the world he lives in, needs hope for the future. Not knowing what the past was like disables Winston to locate himself somewhere in the future. When the theme of history is regarded, the antique shop can be considered as a symbol of the past. Winston gets deeply interested in the shop starting from the first moment he sees it, as it functions as a page from the past, which isn't manipulated and changed by the party. The paperweight which Winston buys from the shop can also be considered as a symbol of the past. Being a long lost object which Winston doesn't know about, the paperweight functions as what is "different" and "unfamiliar" and it gives Winston little hope about a better future.

“Doublethink”, which simply means “telling deliberate lies and believing in them”, also functions as another aspect about imposing ideologies. The slogans, for example, are products of the “Doublethink” principle. Orwell uses binary oppositions that say “War is Peace”, “Freedom is Slavery” and “Ignorance is Strength”. He then places them as the main mottos of the party. As doublethink plays a very important role in conditioning people, it also becomes one of the most important sources which provides the regime with permanence. “Doublethink” marks itself as one of the most important tools of the party, since it’s the basic element that makes people favor war. The reason why the party wants people to be in favor of war is once more related to the power theme. Paras Mani Singh, Nardeep Singh Juneja mention in their book Orwell as a Political Novelist that:

The only way that Oceania can exist as a state is for it to wage a constant war, the whole structure of society and state is geared to wartime economy and austerity. If there should be peace, the citizens of Oceania might reasonably expect better living conditions, better food and less control by the government (123).

Thus, the motto “War is Peace” becomes very important for the party in order to keep the citizens of Oceania satisfied. Making them watch movies of war and manipulating people in such a way to make them laugh when they see a woman hugging a little child to protect it from bullets, shows how a totalitarian regime would succeed in making people become fond of violence and cruelty. The motto “Freedom is Slavery”, on the other hand, is related to the idea of being free both in physical and psychological terms. Since freedom of thought and expression are threats to any totalitarian regime, the party replaces the understanding of the concept of “Freedom” through “Doublethink” and it creates an irrational way of understanding for its people. Due to the fact that the people of Oceania are anything but free, for they are being watched constantly, it also becomes necessary for the party to make its citizens believe that freedom is a negative thing and that it is nothing but slavery. At this point it might be suitable to mention Foucault’s idea of the prison model the Panopticon, that functions as a system that disables the prisoners to know when they are being watched, thus to make them act in proper manners 24/7. Paul Rabinow, in his article The Foucault Reader states:

On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplines society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social “quarantine,” to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of “panopticism (206).

Thus it would be possible to say that Big Brother, in the novel, functions as the Panopticon for the citizens of Oceania, since people never know when they are being watched and due to their fear towards the existing totalitarian power, they act in proper manner when the sanctions of the regime are concerned.

As the last motto “Ignorance is Strength” is concerned, the party makes its final stroke on the big picture by saying that none of these things should be thought through, since ignorance and accepting things just the way they are is a kind of strength. By doing so and by applying these mottos, the party blocks all the ways for its citizens to rebel against the system. The concept of “Thoughtcrime”, gets under the spotlight at this stage, since despite all the cautions taken against any threat or rebellions against the system, the party guarantees its permanence by also limiting the thoughts of its citizens. Having mentioned that the act of thinking itself is an undesirable act for the regime, the party strictly watches people in all their actions. The screens which are placed all over the city and even in the homes of citizens, completely removes the privacy of Oceania’s people. Big Brother’s picture staring at its citizens and controlling them in every action they take strengthens the idea of the totalitarian regime in the novel. Looking at Big Brother’s picture symbolically, it may become possible to say that Orwell draws parallelism between the picture of Stalin and Big Brother. Drawing the picture of a totalitarian regime, Orwell points out the main principles of how such a regime would succeed. As Robert J. Savage, James Combs and Dan Nimmo quote Jane Kirkpatric’s words in their book The Orwellian Moment:

In a recent and well known essay, Jane Kirkpatric describes totalitarian societies as ones which drive to establish comprehensive political control over the lives of individuals, obliterating in both theory and practice the distinction between public and private,

between objective and subjective, claiming for the state the whole life of people (47).

Removing privacy is preventing people from thinking. People mostly think when they are alone and when they are in solitude. For this reason, the party completely removes the chance for its citizens to be alone, thus to think. Thinking is an important theme in the novel since it links the reader to the concept of forming an identity. People who think can have their own views about life and can be considered as individuals. Removing the concept of being an individual is one of the most important goals of the party, since individuality is a threat to any totalitarian regime. As Goldstein lectures Winston in room 101 about individuality he says, “Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is vigor of the organism. Do you die when you cut your fingernails? (302)” Thus, it becomes plain to see that for the party, being an individual isn’t a matter of importance, on the contrary it is something which isn’t favored. Since the party only considers being a whole as something important, individuality is something which it wants to completely destroy.

Taking a closer look at the novel, it can be said that Winston’s ache in his ankle is also a symbol of his individuality. Before meeting Julia, Winston continually mentions an ache in his ankle and when he finally meets her, he mentions that the ache disappears. At the end of the novel when Winston is caught by the party and when he’s being tortured in room 101, he receives blows on his ankle. Being an ordinary Oceania citizen, Winston first lacked his individuality. However starting from the moment he meets Julia and starts to have an affair with her, he regains his individuality, for he becomes able to experience something which is private and individual. Winston’s love to Julia makes him become separate from the crowd and makes him become different from the rest of the people in Oceania, who have no intention to feel love at all and who only consider marriage as a duty which should be fulfilled for the sake of the party. Sexual life, amongst the people of Oceania is seen as a mission to reproduce and create other useful and loyal citizens for the system. However, the theme of love in Winston and Julia’s case individualizes the couple not only in terms of the love they feel for one another, but also in terms of their meetings which they think are in private. Winston and Julia meet in secret places where they think they aren’t watched and they get total privacy. Since lacking privacy also

disables the people of Oceania from becoming individuals, they are also indirectly disabled from becoming human beings. Dehumanizing people by forbidding them to love and killing all their feelings towards compassion, mercy and affection, puts them in an animal-like state. This animal-like state, however, is totally perceived as normal and humane by the party and is presented as something which is favored. Citizens who don't possess this animal-like state are perceived as ill. At the end of the novel Winston is referred to as "cured" when he finally draws $2+2=5$ on the table and perceives the principles which the party imposes on him with torture. Winston is considered as a person with an animal-like state since he felt love for another human being. The party treats Winston as if he is ill only because he questions the party's policies and only because he loves a woman. At the end, when Winston is freed from all the "inhumane" feelings such as doubt or love, he is again regarded as a healthy person by the party. When the theme of humanizing and dehumanizing is concerned, the Proles play an important role. The Proles, symbolizing a rebellion against the party, are referred to as animal-like creatures; however Winston manages to make a distinction between his own people and the Proles by saying, "The proles are human beings. We are not (191)." Winston and Julia's love affair in this sense can be regarded as a rebel against the party and as a struggle to become humans and individuals. As Winston's thoughts about Julia are revealed, it's stated:

In the old days, he thought, a man looked at a girl's body and saw that it was desirable, and that was the end of the story. But you could not have pure love or pure lust nowadays. No emotion was pure, because everything was mixed up with fear and hatred. Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act (145).

As stated, the love affair of Winston and Julia is perceived by them as a rebellion against the party. Since the party is so much full of hatred, love becomes a rebellion against it.

Being an important theme in the novel, Orwell also stresses that physical pain can control the human mind. Towards the middle of the novel when Julia and Winston are having one of their regular chats about the system as they say:

I don't mean confessing. Confession is not betrayal what you say or do doesn't matter: only feelings matter. If they could make me stop loving you- that would be the real betrayal. She thought it over. They can't do that she said finally. It's the one thing they can't do. They can make you say anything- anything- but they can't make you believe it. They can't get inside you (192).

Despite the firmness of Julia saying that nobody can make her feel something or can make her think something, at the end of the novel, the reader comes to the realization that through physical torture, one can be made feel and believe in anything. As Goldstein tells Winston what he thinks about confessions, he says, "All the confessions that are uttered here are true. We make them true (291)." The fact that the party does really make the confessions become true, is based on torturing people. Despite the human mind seems to be far away concealed in the skull, Orwell puts forth that physical pain in fact can rule the human mind. As stated in the novel:

On the battlefield, in the torture chamber, on a sinking ship, the issues that you are fighting for are always forgotten., because the body swells up until it fills the universe, and even when you are not paralyzed by fright or screaming with pain, life is a moment-to-moment struggle against hunger or cold or sleeplessness, against a sour stomach or an aching tooth (117).

The basic human instinct of survival is actually based on physical aspects. Unless the physical wellbeing is fulfilled and satisfied, there's no rest for the human being. Relating this fact to the basic human instinct of survival, Orwell states that although it looks like the human mind is separate from the physical being, they are in fact directly related and that the physical suffering has the power to rule over the mind. As this is the case, the novel also clearly puts forth that at the end, Winston totally changes his thoughts about the system and even about Julia. In the end after being released from torture, Winston draws $2+2=5$ on the table and believes in it. Again, at the very end of the novel Winston says that he has won the battle against himself and that he now finally loves Big Brother (342). Another fact about physical pain ruling the human mind is revealed in the case when Winston and Julia meet again after being released from torture

and when they can't feel anything towards each other. As a result of torture and as a result of their survival being threatened for such a long time, both of these human beings have lost their feelings of love towards another human being. Orwell's message at this point might be based on the theme that after being threatened in existence and after being exposed to a tremendous amount of torture, human beings instinctually come to think of only themselves. As Winston and Julia confess to each other that they have betrayed one another in the novel, the heart breaking truth is being revealed that human beings, in depth, are based on the instinct of survival and that they are unconsciously selfish. The novel states:

I betrayed you, she said baldly. I betrayed you, he said. She gave him a quick look of dislike. Sometimes, she said they threaten you with something- something you can't stand up to can't even think about. And then you say, don't do it to me, do it to someone else, do it to so-and so. And perhaps you might pretend, afterwards, that it was only a trick and that you just said it to make them stop and didn't really mean it. You think there's no other way of saving yourself, and you're quite ready to save yourself that way. You want it to happen to the other person. You don't give a damn what they suffer. All you care about is yourself (336).

The sad fact that human beings do only think of themselves and that they are selfish in nature is once more revealed by this remark. However, it is also evident in the novel that human beings who are exposed to torture lose the ability to love and think of other people. Thus, it becomes a fact that physical pain is so strong that it has the ability to erase all sorts of feelings which are related to the wellbeing of other people. Due to their instinct of survival, human beings become ready to sacrifice even people they love, to save themselves.

Looking at the party from a religious point of view is also a possible theme in the novel. Being free from all the beliefs which are related to God and his religions, people are still in need to believe in something. The party at this point functions as religion for the people of Oceania, since they are blocked in all the ways which lead to a power that is greater than the party. Thus, representing themselves and the divine power, the party

introduces itself as God. The religious motives are present in the novel when Goldstein offers Winston and Julia some wine, and later places a white waffle both on Julia and Winston's tongues so that they don't smell of alcohol. The ceremony which is presented here is similar to the Catholic rituals that take place in church. Believers are offered some wine which symbolizes the blood of Christ and they are placed a piece of bread on their tongues to symbolize the body of Christ. Going through a similar ceremony with Goldstein, Orwell in fact makes a foreshadowing that even the opposition, which stands for Goldstein at the beginning of the novel, is in fact one of the closest persons to the party. Thus, there is no way out of the system. If this theme is compared to the theme of religion, the devil, who is the opposing party to God, is in fact an angel and that it is again strongly related to God. Drawing parallel lines between the party and religion, Orwell states that the Party is God like figure for the people of Oceania and that there's no escape from it.

In conclusion, speaking in general terms, the novel functions as a warning against the totalitarian regime and reveals the fact that such repressive regimes, do in fact have the power to manipulate people and that they do have the power in making people believe things which appeared as totally bizarre at the beginning. Taking physical pain ruling over the human mind as a theme, Orwell states that human beings are selfish in nature, since they possess the basic instinct of survival. Putting also major emphasis on the concept of language and how it functions in people's lives, Orwell states that it is in fact the language itself that shapes the motives of people and that makes some concepts become reality. The lack of expression of some concepts in language would automatically destroy them and make them become nonexistent for human beings. Despite the novel as a whole appears as a pessimist approach to the future, taking it as a warning and looking at our present state in today's modern world, readers can still feel gratitude for the present capitalist system they live in now and they still can preserve their hope for a better future.

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