The Absolute Control In George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-four

This essay comes to complete my presentation on the absolute control in George Orwell's "Nineteen eighty-four. I have chosen this topic because the novel depicts a whole brainwashed society and shows what happens when an individual comes against the "natural" order of things.

Orwell's novel presents Winston's radical transformation – from the initial status of awareness of what is actually happening around him into a dehumanized individual whose only desire is to worship Big Brother:" But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother."[footnoteRef:1] – and the means and methods used by the leaders in order to obtain this absolute and irrevocable control of society. [1: Orwell George, 1984, SIGNET CLASSICS, New York, 1961.]

The first episode that has drawn my attention is the one presenting Big Brother's portrait that gives the sensation to follow everything:" On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures, which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran."[footnoteRef:2] [2: Orwell George, 1984, SIGNET CLASSICS, New York, 1961.]

I really do believe that this episode has not only an anticipation role – because as the story goes on it seems that the Thought Police have no clue about Winston's acts of rebellion, but everything is turned upside down when it is revealed the fact that both O'Brien and Mr. Charrington are members of the Thought Police – but also the role to remind the individuals that they are always under strict surveillance.

Speaking of George Orwell's Nineteen eighty-four, we need to understand the fact that the political party wants the individuals to act in a certain way. In order to understand why a citizen of the totalitarian estate acts only this one way and no other and how it is possible that the entire society be swallowed by the regime, we need to understand the nature of the system used by the political party in order to gain control.

Of course, here appears one inevitable question: How is it possible for the political party to dictate even the most insignificant aspects of the citizens' lives and still be in control of everything?

The answer is actually very simple. They manage to keep a strict evidence of every individual's activity because the individuals are brainwashed: they are not able to tell the exact year, they can't remember how were their lives before the installing of the regime and they develop certain automatisms as a result of oppression and control. What describes best this type of system used in order to control everything is its brutality and also its continuity because once the individual enters this system, there is no way out: "'Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."[footnoteRef:3] [3: Orwell George, 1984, SIGNET CLASSICS, New York, 1961.]

As Raymond Williams states:" what is being recorded, in Orwell is the experience of a victim: of a man who, while rejecting the consequences of an atomistic society, yet retains deeply, in himself, its characteristic mode of consciousness."[footnoteRef:4] [4: Williams Raymond, Culture and Society Coleridge to Orwell, The Hogarth Press, London, 1990]

From the beginning of the novel and until the end of it, we encounter various methods through which the party gains control over every aspect of one's life.

I want to draw your attention on the permanent surveillance made with the help of the telescreens which leads to an enormous lack of privacy and, psychologically speaking, this leads to anxiety, fear, anger and frustration. These negative feelings are channeled by the political party into "constructive" hate against the party's enemies. This is the explanation of the fact that even Winston – who knows that the real enemy is the political party – cannot help from yelling and rampage.

The Ministry of Truth is the place where begins the erasing of information: the history is permanently changed in order to correspond to Big Brother's ideology. Here is the place where one individual can be invented in order to serve a certain purpose and he becomes immediately real.

What is very interesting here is the fact that no one ever questions the trueness of the information given – because even if they know that something is not real, there are no means to prove that they are right. This is also happening when Winston finds that scratch of newspaper and again when he notices a switch between the enemy country Eurasia and the allied one Eastasia:

" Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. In no public or private utterance was it ever admitted that the three powers had at any time been grouped along different lines. Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia. But that was merely a piece of furtive knowledge which he happened to possess because his memory was not satisfactorily under control. Officially the change of partners had never happened. Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia. The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible."[footnoteRef:5] [5: Orwell George, 1984, SIGNET CLASSICS, New York, 1961.]

The Ministry of Plenty is the one that has the role of keeping people poor because I do believe that the poorer are the people, the easier to control. This lack of basic things such as shoelaces and razor blades mixed with the lack of qualitative products such as chocolate and coffee, keeps the society in a continuous poverty.

We may imagine the fact that these poor conditions and the constant feeling of being watched leads to physical and psychological collapse but the control upon the individuals goes even beyond these limits and here we identify the role do the Ministry of Love – torture and complete reeducation.

The regime forbids the affairs and intercourse in order to eliminate the only way of relieving stress. The only way the intercourse is allowed is in marriages – also controlled – and in order to get married you had to demonstrate that you do not have any feelings for that person.

This is why the “love story” between Winston and Julia represents an act of rebellion against the party and this is why the Winston’s reformation is complete only when he no longer feels anything for her but hatred:” ‘I betrayed you,’ she said baldly. ‘ I betrayed you,’ he said.She gave him another quick look of dislike.”[footnoteRef:6] [6: Orwell George, 1984, SIGNET CLASSICS, New York, 1961.]

In conclusion, I believe that the motto of the novel may be: knowledge is power, because indeed the totalitarian regime counts on the peoples’ lack of information in order to gain the absolute control over them. In order to erase any possibility of obtaining information, it is introduced the Newspeak which has the purpose to erase the individual’s capacity co thinking: “You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We’re destroying words — scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We’re cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won’t contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050.’”

Bibliography

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