

Research Title: The influence of propaganda on truths and the psyche in totalitarian regime as portrayed in 1984 by George Orwell

Research Question: How does the use of propaganda in media and speech influence the manipulation of truths and influence the psyche when in a totalitarian regime, as reflected in George Orwell's 1984?

Subject: English A Language and Literature, Category 1

Word Count: 3986

I. INTRODUCTION.....	3
II. METHODOLOGY.....	5
III. ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH.....	7
1. Propaganda Through Media.....	10
2. Propaganda Through Speech and Language.....	14
IV. CONCLUSION.....	18
REFERENCES.....	20

I. INTRODUCTION

The early 19th century was a time of depression and of war. During the time, many countries were under the ruling of solely the government alone. Countries, such as Germany and Italy, were under a totalitarian and tyrannic leadership that utilized master manipulations and machiavellian tactics to control the masses (Levitsky & Way, 2010). As mass control rose through the media, others resisted to proclaim against the idea of overall authority through stories that contained messages on the horrors of war, and the total impact of it all.

George Orwell exhibits this by commenting on the crazed nature of totalitarianism within the second world war, and by replicating it into a dystopian future in his book published in 1949, 1984. As he states, “A totalitarian state is, in effect, a theocracy, with a ruling caste thought as infallible” (Orwell, 1946), implying how repressive states satiate the idea of viewing these officials as divine, and need not be questioned as they are just and righteous. Totalitarian regimes such as these often inhibit a sense of no individuality and freedom, strict by the requirements of the state. They utilize a strong central rule that controls every aspect of life of a certain individual (Arendt, 1951).

Set in a year believed to be 1984, Oceania (Formerly known as Great Britain) is a superstate led by “Big Brother” that rules many under governmental control and surveillance. As Oceania is within a perpetual state of war against the two other superstates that rule the world, the government prosecutes anyone who thinks critically by their own volition, as to promote a sense of “one-ness”, so no one would go against the state. To achieve this, they utilize manipulative tactics such as targeting the young, controlling all sorts of *thought* through the existence of the “thought police”, changing the *language* into “newspeak” (a type of language that only uses words that aligns with the party), and most importantly,

propaganda (Edelman, 1971).

This analysis explores Big Brother's manipulation and the diversion of intellectual thought through the media, allowing the state to input false narratives, or specific information that actively proclaims the divinity of the government's choices. As one of their party's slogans states, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949). While it may seem to be just a slogan, it may also question the politics involved and the ideology, (in this case, INGSOC, which aims to prioritize total control over society,) highlighting the nature of their state. This form of propaganda can also be seen by the rest of the media that the party creates, or the language that is manipulated and regulated, which thus influences the rest of the state collectively, manipulating universal truths into conforming to the state's ideologies and beliefs (Parenti, 1993).

Orwell reflects on the real world impacts of propaganda in his application of it in *1984*, showcasing how the party influences their citizens to submit to them by utilizing manipulation techniques and the media in recreating revered truths and knowledge that align with INGSOC, or the party's ideology. Big Brother's implementation of propaganda therefore embodies control that strips away an individual's psyche of freedom of thought, replacing truth with only what appeals to the state.

II. METHODOLOGY

Approach towards tackling how propaganda impacts the psyche as well as how it manipulates universal truths requires a comparison between different types of effective propaganda within the book. The use of propaganda in *1984* can be

separated into two parts: (1) propaganda in media and (2) propaganda through speech and language, with a strong emphasis on how information such as statistics and devices of communication impact the mass population and their own critical thinking. With the analysis of propaganda including but not limited to the news, party slogans, the revisioned diction and history within the novel, this essay attempts combine real-world propaganda tactics in conjunction with analyzing Orwell's fictional-techniques to provide a perspective on how propaganda precipitates cognitive thought in the attempt of limiting individual freedom for the masses within the party, as well as how 1984 remains relevant in the attempt of commenting on the real world manipulation within the media and speech as we see today.

Additionally, each section of the analysis will comprise two underlying frameworks which are The Propaganda Model and The Marxist Lens, used in analyzing the influence of propaganda and its power towards the public. The Propaganda Model for example gives insight on the effectivity and reach that propaganda has on the masses, while the use of the Marxist Lens allows a further understanding on who exactly is in control, who has the power, and who doesn't, as well as how propaganda's reach exert power over them. Using these frameworks will allow a psychological and philosophical understanding of concepts that are based on behavior, and how individuals respond to objects like propaganda they are presented with.

PROPAGANDA AND THE PROPAGANDA MODEL

Propaganda is a form of information that reflects upon the high status of certain ideologies, which in this case are political ideologies, that appeal to masses. To analyze the impact of propaganda in the media towards the public masses, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky created "The Propaganda Model"

(Herman & Chomsky, 1988). It is a conceptual model that elaborates on the functions of propaganda within the scope of corporate mass media, and how media are filtered to manipulate and influence a population. This model works the same way a simple grade school geo water filter does. It has five (5) main filters that work together: ownership (who owns the propaganda and ideology), advertising (the funds collected from advertising), sourcing (what are the sources of information), flak (the possibility of backlash against the media), and ideological control (how well are they able to utilize tactics to conforming to the ideology). Starting from ownership filtering all the way to ideological control, the propaganda model attempts to filter out and determine what information is presented to the public. This will be utilized in explaining the influence of all forms of propaganda that the party makes and how effective it is in the story of 1984.

THE MARXIST LENS

Developed by Karl Marx, the Marxist Lens is a literary and analytical framework that impedes on the social concept of power (Marx, 1867). The literary theory emphasizes on roles of social hierarchies to reveal themes of conflicts or exploitation that it reveals superstructure. Marxist Theory's concept of society contains two parts: the base, which is the mode or means of production (e.g., human labor and means of production) and those related to it (e.g., bourgeoisie, employer-employee work conditions), and the superstructure, which refers to society's ideologies such as culture, media, and politics. Marx argues that civilians are the economic base, while political society is the political superstructure (Easy Sociology, n.d.). The Marxist Lens is used to expound on the power dynamics of propaganda or the government in the book 1984, by explaining concepts that ultimately allow a further understanding.

III. ANALYSIS

1. Propaganda Through Media

1984 is set in a dystopian world, where London is ruled under a totalitarian regime that controls everything. However, the methods of controlling minds vary differently from controlling physical objects. In the real world, governments are able to accomplish this aspect by influencing the news and media. As quoted by Malcom X, an African American revolutionary, Muslim minister and human rights activist that spoke on the use of media: “The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” (Al Jazeera., 2022)

This is what the Ministry of Truth, one of the four sectors of London’s ruling party, does, holding the power to control news, entertainment, education, and fine arts. Each passing stream of information is shoved down their throats through the use of the telescreen. Telescreens are screens that showcase news or entertainment that the ministry presents to the public. Plastered on each and every corner from city to each citizen’s room, the telescreens act as a way for the party to attain total surveillance and complete grasp on the citizen’s psyche (Lyon, 2001). However as the first filter of the Propaganda Model explains, while the creation of said propaganda and its ideologies are owned by the governing party, the propaganda is produced and filtered by the Ministry of Truth, the ministry which handles everything related to the presentation or dissemination of information to the public, is owned by the government it is ruled by.

Propaganda in media therefore comes in the essence of providing information that strengthens the party’s narrative, and what they want their audience to take as fact despite being misinformation, in order to divert their thoughts and only

believe what is presented to them. An excerpt in the story showcases this utilization of manipulation through the media alone, where as Winston puts it, *“Day and night the telescreens bruise your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations... than people of fifty years ago.”* Orwell utilizing hyperbole to exaggerate the claims of how the telescreen bruises ears allows the reader to convey how constant and oppressive the telescreens would deem the information to be, showing how Winston, the main character of the story, as a member of the Ministry of Truth, does know that it is wrong. Despite knowing it is, he can do nothing about it but accept the truth and its intrusive nature, given the state of the government controlling him.

There are three total sectors that divide the people: the Inner Party who are of the highest class, Outer Party or those of the middle class, and the Proles of the lowest class. Those of the outer party are deemed as but subordinates to those who are of the inner class who in reality control everything. The protagonist of the story is a member of the outer party, and therefore he has knowledge on the treatment that the inner party has in comparison to those of the outer party.

The marxist lens satiates the idea that the outer party never had any privilege to begin with, nor were they equal to those who were of the inner party. Instead, the oppression towards those of lower classes reinforces the truth that to manipulate the future to conform to the party's ideologies, the inner party must exploit the information being fed by presenting false narratives of what the past was like in correlation to the present, and how without the party, the old system would fail them. By doing so, they rewrite history and erase all forms of critical thought against the party, and they also prohibit the ability to question or criticise the party and their authority by instilling fear and loyalty towards the ordinary citizen.

Another evidence of how the Ministry of Truth diverts these statistics to propagandize media can be seen in this quote: *“But actually, he thought as he re-adjusted the Ministry of Plenty's figures, it was not even forgery. It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for another..... Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version”* (1984, P. 68). The recreation of present statistics and destruction of all forms of the past allows the party to recreate the present as shaped by nothing but lies conjured up, forcing the people to accept, which therefore manipulates the psyche into believing it as the truth.

Sourcing, the filter in the Propaganda Model provides a perspective that information is derived from the other 3 Ministries of the government: the Ministry of Plenty, the Ministry of Love, and the Ministry of Peace. For example, through inference, we can concur that the one that provides the information on chocolate rations going down may come from the Ministry of Plenty, given that they are incharge of rationing and supplying citizens of Oceania. Knowing where information is sourced from allows us to know the authenticity behind the information. As information is passed down from ministries owned by the government, there is the possibility of bias in what's provided, and could be altered by the Ministry of Truth, which is openly admitted as true (1984, P. 74).

Propaganda through the use of telescreens not only targets the susceptible into manipulating the psyche into believing lies as nothing but the truth, but it is also used in order to surveil anyone who may go against them, instilling fear through propaganda as a way of controlling their minds. For example, as a part of the programs in the telescreen, confessions of “traitors” of the state are shown, in which Winston states how *“All the confessions that are uttered here are true. We*

make them true” (1984, P.320). The use of paradox where the statement is self contradictory emphasizes on a point that even if the traitors confessed, it does not necessarily mean that it is true. The technique of propaganda used is known as testimonials, where if in real life context it is used by respected people that claim something is good or bad, it is used by examples of the criminals that the party frames to showcase the criminals as bad, attempting to atone for their actions against the states.

In addition to this, another technique used is the appeal to fear. By scapegoating and pointing a finger to a common “pseudo-enemy” of a state, it allows the masses to feel anxious and scared of doing wrong. For example, this can be seen in the event known as Hate Week, where they all collectively hate on traitors similar to Emmanuel Goldstein, who is the rebel and an “enemy of the state” (1984, P. 15), instilling the idea that if they also followed along to what those “traitors” did, then their lives could also be put at stake, which not only changes their behavior, but also allows them to conform to what the party wants, making them more obedient in the process. As Machiavelli puts it, *“it is much safer to be feared than loved”* (Machiavelli, 1532).

Thus, even if each class convinces themselves that the party’s ideology is corrupted, propaganda of the higher class renders them unable to prove their claims that there was a life of freedom before the party ever existed, by utilizing fear, confusion and trust as strong forms of control. As the protagonist says, “The past was dead, the future was unimaginable” hinting at Winston’s reflection of the party’s success at killing what remained of what the past originally was, commenting on the party’s overall impact, power, and control over those of the middle and lower classes.

2. Propaganda Through Speech and Language

Speech is a powerful object of influence and manipulation. Propaganda's roots stem from the fact that it attempts to communicate ideas by presenting "facts" as a form of persuasion to push a specific agenda. By utilizing specific diction and loaded language, forms of speech and dialect can be counted as propaganda as long as it attempts to spread information with the purpose of influencing the people. Hence it is why politicians utilize emotionally charged words, rhetorical devices, or loaded language to convey their intent as justifiable towards the audience, without making it seem like propaganda.

This also highlights the importance of words, and how powerful of a tool it can be when attempting to elaborate on a meaning. However, because it is such a powerful tool, there is a necessity in attempting to control what people say. Hence, in the pursuit of removing all words that sound controversial to the party, they created their own form of language: Newspeak. Newspeak is separated into three (3) classes: CLASS A, being censored words, CLASS B, being words that have been distorted to fit the political ideology and strip the people of power, and CLASS C, being words that are used for scientific terminologies. B vocabulary are distorted words focusing on censoring modern English, and creating a new word with a changed meaning. For example, the word sexual intercourse, is replaced with "artsem", or artificial insemination. As the government argues, part 1 chapter 6 page 84 explains how their whole plan of revision was to either kill or distort sexual instinct, thus changing the word, along with the name. The manipulation of words and meanings can therefore be counted as semantic propaganda based on the fact that it manipulates the meaning, which creates influence on the thought process of how people think, therefore affecting the populus and their consensus.

Another example can be seen in the *Principles of Newspeak* by George Orwell, where an excerpt states how although the word free still exists, politically or intellectually free cannot be used as it doesn't exist as a concept. This textual evidence supports the fact that each and every individual that utilizes the word "free" have forgotten the concept of "free will", given that because the word no longer exists, so does the concept (Orwell, 1949). This therefore entails just how much influence words have on perspective and cognitive thinking. In addition to this, propaganda may exploit language and thinking to make their propaganda more effective. The Aristotelian two-value system argues that any statement with a strong stance can either be true, or false (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.). In this logic, everyday language that uses this binary approach may either view words as good or bad. Though it can be said differently based on complex queries, many propaganda exploit this ambiguity and complexity of language by applying it to propaganda techniques. For example, the party in 1984 has three slogans:

"WAR IS PEACE"

"FREEDOM IS SLAVERY"

"IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"

In these slogans, Orwell's application of literary devices can convey such language into a form of propaganda. For example, his use of juxtaposing two words with opposite meanings may give the effect that the subject noun, (which is supposedly thought of as either good or bad) is, in the party's eyes, the opposite. This exploitation of syntactic ambiguity alongside the use of oxymoron through the presentation of opposing ideas can create the effect of doublethink. This allows the exploitation of the person by making them accept contradicting ideas. It is why you can see in a section of part 3 chapter 6 where Winston's

torture persists as he states how $2+2=4$, which is correct, however he continues to punish until he goes against what he thinks is correct which later on you can see him unconsciously write on a dusty table $2+2=5$, showing the success of torture on conformity. Despite knowing it is factually incorrect, it forces them to reject what is true to only base off what the party sees as true.

As Winston conforms, Associations can be made this with the flak filter in the propaganda model, in the sense that given as to how Winston rebelled in earlier parts of the novel and then later accepts his fate, the same could be said for the masses in the story. Given that there is the fear of becoming a traitor to the party knowing that if they do could be either their last day on earth or be tortured into oblivion and conformity, therefore possibly minimizing any thought of backlash when propaganda or ideologies are exposed.

By taking this into account while comparing it to the context of newspeak, revising the English dictionary not only reforms the meaning of it, but as discussed above, can cause the same effect as doublethink. Take the word “joycamp” for example, where the original meaning refers to labor camp. While labor camps maintain an association of work, harsh conditions and suffering, replacing the labor with joy can act as a euphemism in an attempt to propagandize and portray labor camps as soft and chill, despite the total opposite. Despite the irony, it can also cause doublethink, accepting the contradiction and taking the word, as well as the meaning, for what it is.

This act of exploiting words is not far from our real world counterparts of totalitarian regimes over time. The Soviet’s rebranding of the word *Labor Camps* into *gulags*, then framing it as a “rehabilitative” place, despite having the opposite connotations can also act as an example of the manipulation of language as

propaganda in history (Re: Russia, n.d.). Another would be Kim Jong Il of North Korea who also utilized this means of euphemism and irony by creating propaganda films that present the ordinary North Korean citizen as dedicated to the labor they are put through with joy arising from their commitment and service to the country (Kim Jong Il. 1973). The Marxist perspective therefore comments and reflects upon the social institutions of not only 1984, but the book's portrayal of real world events and their pursuit to engrave their power to the ordinary citizen and justify their means based on the ends.

In the Propaganda Model, ideological control is a filter that exploits public fear and hatred of perceived threats to conform to those in power. Known to be anti-communism during the Cold War, ideologies that are controlled through fear creates a common enemy shaping public opinion (McChesney, 1999). Because of how strong the party's influence is, the party can then point any issue that they make on Goldstein, who stands for freedom and liberty, which is why hate week exists– to hate on someone who only fights for the people and not the party. Even then, it is apparent that Goldstein doesn't exist, and was only created to root out traitors. The propaganda in posters such as “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU” and any other propaganda becomes the reality, allowing the common civilian to either perceive the propaganda with glory or with fear.

By utilizing the propaganda through speech and language, this limits thinking (due to doublethink forcing them to accept the generalized concept despite maintaining opposing ideas from one another), and acts as a form of oppression. Aside from how the party manipulates words, their utilization of carefully choosing specific diction with opposing concepts in their slogans such as “WAR IS PEACE” creates an effect of syntactic ambiguity, ultimately succumbing to doublethink, never to think any more of it. Consequently, the oppression of the

mind benefits the party by not only pushing their agenda towards the general populous, it also benefits the party in the sense that the more words they censor or the more words they change, the less people are going to talk negatively about them given that there are less to no words to describe the party, restricting any form of intellectual and critical thinking.

IV. CONCLUSION

The manipulation of mediums as a form of propaganda allows the party to solidify their ideologies towards the masses, for both the proles and the outer party. According to the Propaganda Model, the government, or rather the party, owns, controls, sponsors, and advertises all propaganda that is presented to the public. There is freedom in presenting information to them, without having to worry about backlash for the reason of utilizing scare tactics as a form of control, which is also shown in their propaganda in media like the showing of traitors as scapegoats for the party's issues. In addition to this, the party uses techniques of syntactic ambiguity, euphemism, appeal to fear, and other propaganda techniques that reform and remove the idea of critical thinking against the state, for the benefits of safety and utter control. In addition to this, the party pursues the idea of doublethink with their slogans as a form of manipulating not just the people, but also what they perceive as a universal truth, or rather something that is true to everyone. Overall however, comparing how Orwell utilizes propaganda in *1984* and how history went out in totalitarian regimes can allow the reader to reflect on just how effective the methods are in influencing people to think differently, but the same in the sense it benefits the party.

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