
1984 and Red Azalea's Illustrations of Totalitarian Technique

In order for one to exist in a totalitarian society whose government is successful in its control, one must deal on a day-to-day basis with strong persuasion and propaganda. These totalitarian societies have an iron grip on their people, leaving their citizens with absolutely no hope or chance of escaping. George Orwell's *1984* blatantly suggests how, with proper use of brainwashing and propaganda, the unrelenting Party can enforce brutal and complete control over its people, and how the protagonist, Winston Smith, is gravely endangered by a mere strand of individual thought. He feels frustrated by the strict boundaries of government control and starts thinking rebellious thoughts, such as sex and any expression of individuality that differs from a regular "puppet" of the Party. Winston's character can be compared to the protagonist, Anchee Min, of the memoir *Red Azalea*. Recalling Winston, Min exists in a totalitarian society under the reign of Mao Zedong in China's Cultural Revolution, a period of time in history where the ideas of communism were enforced in China, resulting in totalitarian methods of control. Both Min and Winston show subtle signs of rebellion in their respective societies; that rebellion eventually grows stronger. The totalitarian societies in Orwell's *1984* and Mao's reign of China indicate the extreme control over their citizens by means of propaganda, hence putting each individual belonging to that society in danger; it is obvious that, absolutely nowhere, does the word "freedom" exist within these forms of government.

The overall techniques and propaganda of Mao Zedong's reign of China are similar to those of Big Brother's control over Oceania. Both totalitarian societies manipulate the mindsets of their citizens psychologically, and utilize language and fear to hold total control over their people. By twisting their words into a form of warped reason, also known as doublethink, these governments manage to persuade their people into worshipping their respective leaders, Chairman Mao and Big Brother. Both Parties are built upon an intricate network of lies; history is constantly rewritten in Oceania, and the false promises of a perfect, equal world reside in the minds of the Chinese citizens. Telescreens are constantly utilized in virtually every nook and cranny to spy on people, and within the minds of every individual – or more appropriately, puppets – there lies the constant fear of being captured and vaporized by the "Thought Police" where the Police constantly monitor one's thoughts; hence their name. Throughout Oceania the slogans of "War is peace", "Freedom is slavery", and "Ignorance is strength" undermine the society mindset as a whole.

In *1984*, O'Brien, one of the Party members, rants about submission to the Party reign under Big Brother, saying, "We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all

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evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him. It is intolerable to us that an erroneous thought exist anywhere in the world [...] no one whom we bring to this place ever stands out against us" (Orwell 255). This passage shows the epitome of the overall mindset in this society within *1984*. When Winston's rebellious actions are finally discovered, he is tortured into submission by O'Brien and the other Party members, until he ends up back where he started: selfless, a puppet of the government, and forever loving Big Brother. His obedience supports the fact that the totalitarian government always wins, and that Big Brother is "always watching you". Similarly, Mao's influence spread largely and created a regime that eliminated opposition in China, much as occurs in *1984*. The communist government controlled all aspects of people's lives. All goods produced are shared equally; in other words, there was a peasant based economy similar to colonial life. This "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" led to a massive personality cult surrounding Mao. For instance, one person per family from the communist society was obligated to work at a grueling labor camp under the impression that all the rumors of the horror and hardships are "monstrous lies [...] made up by enemies who feared the revolution spreading. The Party authorities showed the families pictures of [...] prosperity. The families were convinced and comforted" (Min 44). In essence, by twisting language into another meaning, blatantly stating lies, and utilizing the most extreme form of manipulation, both totalitarian societies are able to effectively hold control over their people.

The powerful forms of manipulation and control within these totalitarian societies are shown clearly through the lives of both the protagonist of *1984*, and the protagonist of *Red Azalea*, a memoir written about survival through China's Cultural Revolution. Winston Smith and Anchee Min both live in totalitarian societies; they both have moments and thoughts of rebellion, though Winston clearly portrays the rebellion more blatantly through his actions, while Anchee goes against the government more subtly. Since *1984* is a work of fiction, the book contains fictional telescreens that are there to constantly monitor one's thoughts. The lack of telescreens or any type of mind-reading and "advanced technology" device enables Anchee to secretly rebel through her personal thoughts. In *1984*, Winston shows his first signs of rebellion when he buys a diary and starts to write in it. This seemingly mundane action gradually leads him into more direct forms of rebellion; falling "in love" with a girl, Julia and having sexual thoughts about her, which is strictly prohibited. The reader observes how the Party does not "merely destroy our enemies; we change them" (Orwell 253). As indicated by the end of the book, this statement is indeed correct. On the other hand, though Anchee does show several acts of rebellion, she remains, throughout the book, a puppet of the government. She is constantly reminded of her duty to fight against anyone who went against Mao's teaching. At an early point of her life, Anchee's actions indicate how she is being controlled by her government. Encouraged by the shouting of slogans, and intimidated by Secretary Chain, a representative of the Party, she publicly denounces and humiliates her favorite teacher and accuses her of corruption by reading fictional story-tales. Secretary Chain exclaims, "Our Party trusts you and Mao would be

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very proud of you" (Min 35). He elaborates how her favorite teacher has been brainwashing her into betraying communism by reading her stories such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Snow White*. Though she doubts his words, she still speaks out anyways as a good role model for the Party, and as a model student. This incident is the first subtle conflict and doubt she has with the government system. Before, she had wholeheartedly believed in and supported Mao's Communism. Eerily similar to the words of Big Brother's society, the Party members under Mao state that "to enemies, we have to be cruel and merciless" (Min 41). Both protagonists are greatly changed and influenced by their societies, the two totalitarian societies attempt and succeed to brainwash them even though they try to go against the government; there is always some sort of obedience that lies within them. For instance, though both characters rebel, they are constantly aware of the limits of what they can do, and are mindful of the extent of their actions. When Winston buys the diary, he is wary of writing in it and is constantly afraid of getting caught by the telescreens. Similarly, even while Anchee is in a relationship with another woman, which is strictly forbidden, she still continues read from the bible of the government, *The Little Red Book*, and retains her belief in Mao. Within these two similar forms of governments, the concept of a totalitarian society being a constant danger to individuals is confirmed.

These two totalitarian societies without a doubt manipulate the mindsets of their citizens and impact the lives of the people who live under their rule. They utilize strong persuasion techniques and propaganda, such as the shouting of slogans, false stories, doublethink, or just extremely confusing language, leaving the individual to agree wholeheartedly with them. Therefore, it would be extremely dangerous for any individual to exist in a totalitarian society, especially since the individual is in constant risk of being discovered. This is depicted by the two protagonists of *1984* and *Red Azalea*. Towards the ending of *1984*, Winston is discovered with Julia, and gets tortured to near death by O'Brien, a Party member that Winston thought he trusted. This shows that it is dangerous to trust anybody in this type of society. Winston narrates, "In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five and you would have to believe it [...] the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy [...] after all, how do we know that two and two make four?" (Orwell 80). The citizens must always accept the words of the Party as truth. In Part Two and Part Three of *Red Azalea*, Anchee finds difficulty retaining her faith in Maoism when she is sent to a labor camp. She witnesses a friend being humiliated and broken after being discovered in a sexual situation with a man, and Anchee herself is abused by the power of her superiors and forms a lesbian relationship with another farm worker. After she is selected to move to Shanghai and become an actress, and she becomes more disillusioned with Mao's system when more abuses of power and relationships form.

While Winston is broken and finally submits to his government and is brainwashed back to normal, Anchee is fortunate in that Mao ultimately dies, leading to the downfall of his totalitarian

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reign. She manages to escape to America in 1984. Within these two forms of government, an individual is hindered from expressing individualism, thus making it dangerous for any individual to exist in these totalitarian societies where the ultimate techniques of manipulation are utilized; both Anchee and Winston ultimately indicate how surviving under totalitarian rule can be dangerous for any individual.

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