

Powerplay

By Dan Nguyen

Powerplay involves the interplay of different types of power relationships between the powerful and the oppressed, and the extent to which power resides in individuals. There are an abundance of themes and issues explored in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (hereafter “1984”) that relate to the object of power and its representation through the political state of “the party”, rebellion and language. Similarly, these themes of the use, abuse, and manipulation of power are used in the Peter Nicholson *Cartoon* in the Daily Telegraph (1/03/03), and the film *Enemy of the State* directed by Tony Scott.

Orwell begins *1984* with an introduction to the responder of a bleak world where individual freedom and personal civil liberties are non-existent; a world where absolute obedience to totalitarian rule is demanded. Contextually, at the time of Orwell’s writing, Hitler and Stalin’s division of humanity was at its peak, encompassing Orwell’s fear of the ultimate suppression of humanity. In writing *1984*, Orwell attempts to discuss fraud, dishonesty, and immoral behaviour within politics, and in conveying these ideas, uses a variety of literary features to convey to the responder the extent of the abuse of power.

Setting and placement plays an integral role in *1984*, as it has been exaggerated to reveal to the responder that the dystopian world of 1984 is definitely not ‘right.’ for example the responder learns that in this world the “clock strikes thirteen.” Orwell continues to describe the setting through clever irony, especially in relation to the ministries of Oceania. The ministry of truth concerns itself with the manipulation of history, and the ministry of love “was the really frightening one.” These paradoxical concepts are a satirical comment upon the manipulative power that humans possess with the underlying discourse of power in *1984* being that power is an omnipresent force that corrupts all things associated with it. Orwell successfully overwhelms the responder with the description of setting that parallels the notion of the individual, Winston, shrinking under the weight of authority. This representation is successfully displayed because it disgusts the responder with an austere world, which unfortunately for the fate of humanity, Orwell surmises is entirely plausible.

The structure of power through different classes of society is a feature of an oligarchical society, where hierarchy exists to determine the methods of power used to keep society under control. The proles represent society’s lowest class of citizens, kept insignificant through poverty

and denial of resources necessary for them to develop into a threat. Yet, the proles are significant for society, as Winston points out “if there is hope... it lies in the proles.” For Winston, they stand as a symbol of the warmth of humanity, able to think naturally. Moving up the hierarchy, Big Brother represents the highest class in the party’s ultimate rule. Symbolism is significant to convey the importance of these elements, where Big Brother is the symbol of complete control, along with the slogan “Big Brother is watching you.” However, perhaps a most significant symbol is that of the paperweight, with its soft beauty that symbolised fulfilment, “a little chunk of history that they’ve forgotten to alter.”

Another representation of the power of the state, are the telescreens which are used to monitor the activities of citizens such as Winston, depriving them of all their personal liberties and privacy. A similar technique is used in the film *Enemy of the State*, where the protagonist, Robert Dean, unknowingly comes into the possession of a videotape tying the deputy director of the NSA (National Security Agency) to a political assassination. Dean is hunted by the enormous human and electronic capabilities of the NSA. Scott portrays this through the thoughtful use of camera angles, panning and visual special effects to show the level of surveillance and monitoring of Dean through surveillance camera and telephoto imagery from geostationary satellites. Scott also employs a clever pun on the American cliché to depict this event – “In God we Trust, all others we monitor.”

The perversity and hypocrisy of power is represented by actions of groups of power in both *1984* and the Peter Nicholson *cartoon*. In *1984* this is specifically represented by the doctrine of doublethink, where the party deems it acceptable for people to hold contradictory ideas and opinions simultaneously. Clearly, in reality this notion is completely illogical and unorthodox. Yet, the populace of Oceania (and presumably Eastasia and Eurasia) have been so successfully brainwashed that they hold the doctrine of doublethink to be both true and acceptable. The hypocrisy of power is evident to a lesser extent in the Peter Nicholson *cartoon*, which depicts Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-il as gorillas in a zoo, being observed by John Howard and Alexander Downer. It represents the situation earlier in 2003 where world leaders stressed the impending danger of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, and that unilateral military action was the imperative step to disarm Iraq. The irony of the text is that whilst the Saddam Hussein gorilla is locked in a cage, with a sign saying “Danger”, a larger gorilla, Kim Jong-il, walks past the Saddam cage, with human bone and ice-cream cone in hand leaving a trail of blood, unnoticed by Howard and Downer. It represents the government’s hypocrisy in dealing with almost identical situations. Whilst Iraq and North Korea were supposedly both of immediate threat

to world security, the world's attention was focussed on Iraq, whilst North Korea posed and identical if not greater danger. The government hypocritically declared it would support military action in Iraq, but chose to support diplomatic action in North Korea. Again, the extent to which the state holds power over its citizens is repulsive to the responder, successfully representing a situation which despite its improbability, is still somewhat possible.

The inevitable rebellion to power becomes a dominant theme as *1984* progressed, paralleling with Julia and Winston's gain of power through continual defiance of party codes. Their sexual encounters had "been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the party." Nevertheless, Winston and Julia's rebellious attempts against the party proved to be futile, as Orwell demonstrated ultimate power through the symbolic role of O'Brien, representing mistrust and guiltless enforcement. The ending of *1984* contains a dianoetic irony, which Orwell uses to show power by reason, specifically as O'Brien forces Winston to believe that "2 and 2 makes 5." At that stage, "O'Brien contained Winston's mind", demonstrating an undenyng power that was constant and never-ending.

Power is represented in these texts as a corrupting force through a particular group's abuse of power to gain complete and utter control of everything within their context. *1984* showed this absolute sense of power over individuals by essentially removing their personal liberty, creating a shift of power towards the state. Through representations such as surveillance by the state, hypocrisy of power, and inevitable rebellion, the composers of the above texts successfully demonstrate the use, abuse, and manipulation of power.