

## **Totalitarianism in Reality and Fiction: A Comparative Study**

حكم الحزب الواحد في الواقع وقصة (دراسة مقارنة)

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### **الملخص**

احتل نظام شمولي جديد العالم العربي خاصة الاراضي العراقية و السورية منها بعد الدمار الذي الحقه الربيع العربي بعد عام ٢٠١٠. بلاد في العالم العربي تركت لهذا السبب في اضعف حالاتها عندما سيطرت هذه القوة المجهولة على الكثير من المدن العربية بسهولة كبيرة. و بعد فترة وجيزة، اعلنت هذه القوة عن تشكيل خلافة في ٢٠١٤ تحت مسمى "الدولة الاسلامية في العراق و الشام" او المعروف ب (داعش): و هي عبارة عن قوة خطيرة، شمولية الطبع، قاسية السلوك. عند النظر الى وجود هكذا نظام استبدادي، يمكن الملاحظة بانها تشبه الى حد كبير المجتمع الذي كتب عنه جورج اورويل في روايته الشهيرة ١٩٨٤. في ما يخص اوجه التشابه بينهما، هذا البحث سيناقش معنى الشمولية و يحلل التشابه بين مجتمعي الواقع و الخيال. الغاية هو الكشف عن فكرة بان رواية اورويل يمكن قراءتها تحت مفهوم التحذير التي بدورها يمكن ان يؤدي الى تقييد حرية الفرد في حال استمرار سيطرة هكذا انظمة.

### **Abstract**

The invasion of a new totalitarian regime struck the Arab world especially the lands of Iraq and Syria after the great damage the Arab Spring left behind after 2010. Countries in the Arab world were therefore left at their weakest when this anonymous power quickly controlled many

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Arabic states with great ease. Not too much later, this power made its declaration as a caliphate in 2014, under the name of "The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria," famously known as (ISIS); a dangerous power, totalitarian in nature, violent in attitude.

Looking at the existence of this state of oppression, it highly resembles the society the British novelist George Orwell depicted in his famous novel *1984*. As far as the similarities go, this research is going to depict the means of totalitarianism and analyze the similarities found between both societies of reality and fiction. The purpose is to unfold the idea that George Orwell's novel can be read in terms of being a warning to the restriction of man's freedom if such regimes continue their control.

## **1. Totalitarianism: Definition and Meaning**

The notion 'totalitarianism,' a rather modern term, was first coined in 1923 by Italian politician and journalist Giovanni Amendola (1882-1926). He phrased the term for the first time to show his stand against the infamous Italian Mussolini Fascist Party and thereby revealed that this party follows a dictatorial regime that is different from any other dictatorship history has known. Considering totalitarianism on general terms, it reflects the means of "total political power" (Todd, 2002: 2) and can best be defined as "the belief that the government should have unlimited power". (Keneth, 2008: 20) This means that the described government has complete control over all society's major and minor aspects like education, culture, laws, controlling thereby the fate of that entire society and every including individual. The aim behind such a control is to serve a selfish master plan to have absolute power covered up by the idea that it is done for the so-called 'general good'.(Ibid.)

Although the Fascist Party did not have a complete control over all of the Italian society's strands, the term was slowly developed to be used for fear of this party as well as the regime of the Soviet 'Stalinism' to develop into powers that would enforce a total domination on their societies and their people. In 1929, the term appeared in the London newspaper *Times* that called both these movements of Stalinism and Fascism as totalitarian regimes. This led to the consideration of these two movements as depending totalitarian ideas. That is why, the Second World War started with a war against Fascism in Europe. Stalinism on the other hand was not classified as a Fascist regime at that time and was thereby excluded from being taken down. It was believed that totalitarianism could only be applied to Fascist societies in which capitalism was in decline. After the Second

World War had ended, the term was applied not only to refer to fascist regimes, but also to socialist systems and therefore it came to include the Stalin's Soviet Union again. (Gregor, 2009: 12-14) Shedding light on the nature of such parties, the Fascists for instance spoke about the complete control of politics over economics. The leadership should be handed in a complete way to a single party. They claimed the aim was for sake of creating a new society that would make humanity as its main concern and should therefore be controlled by an ethical state. They formed the belief that it is the new and modern way of creating a perfect society in the modern age.

Opinions of what a totalitarian government includes differ from one thinker to another. However, general characteristics of a totalitarian regime can be summarized within the following points:

- 1) It is an ideology that is after the restructuring all aspects of a society.
- 2) It is a political system ruled by a leader. This leader is in control of a party, the whole parliament and the entire state as a whole.
- 3) It makes a wide use of propaganda for the sake of controlling all cultural aspects and specifies its control especially on the young members of the society.
- 4) The application of strict rules and terror to enforce people's total obedience and loyalty to the system and its leader.
- 5) Taking complete control over the state's economic system as a major part of control. (Todd, 2002: 12)

Aside from the different opinions of whether Fascism and Stalinism could be considered as being totalitarian regimes or being near to it, a good example in history of a regime that has followed many of the totalitarian characteristics mentioned might be the way Germany forced its citizens to have the behavior of hating the 'Russian Bolshevism'; one of the central Russian parties during that time. It was easy to adjust people's minds towards despising this party by propaganda. Even in literature, this change was clearly reflected. However, literature itself has had its limitations within such a regime as well, because all writers were only able to write about matters that supported the dictator. In the twentieth century, totalitarianism was shaped into including concerns of societal and scientific development. Scientifically, everything changed with the continuous shaping of weapons of mass destruction. These weapons greatly influenced not only the means of society but influenced the psyche of every human being. To human minds, safety lays in the well-being of the military forces. That is why the government led by the German dictator Adolf Hitler

is considered by many as a totalitarian regime that took its control over the whole society affecting the lives of every single individual. (Ibid.)

In the modern world of today, the so-called "Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham" that started its terror in many different Arab nations, has also many common characteristics that include the idea of being a totalitarian regime.

## **2. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as a Totalitarian Regime**

The Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (ISIS), The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or the Arabic term 'Daesh,' is a terrorist organization that appears to have come from out of nowhere in the Middle-East to proclaim a state within its borders starting from Iraq and Syria. They quickly became well-known for their barbaric acts against the citizens of provinces they controlled. Their sudden appearance around 2013-2014 raised a series of questions of how this organization was created suddenly and where its origins had come from. It is such a powerful organization that implants its bases with fierce with many questioning of whether it is ever possible to take such an organization down. It is therefore important to shed light on how this organization was formed and how it came to be known for its cruel strategic policies of trying to control a society on both individual and social levels. ISIS can generally be defined as "the outgrowth of broader global trends of Islamization that stress the tensions between religiosity and modernity, compounded by an increase in Islamic militancy." (Oosterveld and Bloem, 2017: 5) Because of the continuation of war and damage in Modern Middle East, it has become a fertile ground in which any organization can easily implant their roots. The war in Iraq that started in 2003 with the American intervention caused this country to be left with nothing but destruction and complete weakness creating a wide vacuum for all evil to be created. The Arab Spring that broke out in 2010, which included a series of revolutions against many Arab governments, also left an open space for terrorist organizations to take hold of large areas. These revolutions which looked after the reestablishment of their government ultimately left entire Arabian societies in chaos and complete disorder, causing a fracture in the Arab world. One of these major revolutions that is still going on till this day is the Syrian civil war that is still tearing the country into parts. That is how the region of Syria and Iraq and all the other countries were easily to be occupied by forces of terrorism and radicalism. (Ibid.)

ISIS, taking advantage of such weaknesses, started to fulfill their wish to organize what is known as a 'caliphate' announcing its policies to follow the 'Sharia law' or the original Islamic law. This law started out from Iraq and Syria and attempts its aim to spread the law all over the world. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 2014, ISIS announced its official leader named 'Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi'. He established a powerful state based on Sharia law and it was for all people in this newly established state to follow all rules set by force. The origins of this state may be dated back to 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq. Around that time, an extremist group named 'Al-Qaeda' started to form and their reign of terror quickly spread over the lands of Iraq and many other countries of the Arab world. Many believed therefore that the basic roots of ISIS come from the terrorist organization 'Al-Qaeda'. What made this project successful was the financial support they continuously received from what many believe to be from countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. Technology has also had a major influence on the development of this state, for it not only gained many supporters and fighters to join their state of terror, but were also able to receive many donations online allowing them to continue their totalitarian control over Iraq and Syria to spread even further. (Ningthoujam, 2014: 3-5)

This organization is known for its brutal policies claiming to follow Islamic laws. They showed a violent reaction against any of their rivals executing them in the most cold-blooded ways. Defining themselves as a Sunni organization, they spread the idea of segregation in every way possible. They mercilessly executed thousands of Iraqis from the Shia section considering them as the corrupted part of Islam. They also executed many foreign activists, journalists and simply showed no pity for anyone who opposed their static rules they claimed to be based on Islamic laws and even punished citizens for normal things they considered to be strictly forbidden, like smoking a cigarette or listening to music, interfering thereby on the smallest details of people's freedom and choice. (Ibid: 4)

People who lived within the ISIS region as well as outside the region who did not follow the Sharia law and other set-up rules put by ISIS were considered to be infidel known by the overly-used term 'kafir', or an apostate known as a 'murtad'. Such titles created the idea that such innocent people are viewed as being bad people associating the idea that it was fine for devotees of ISIS to kill and ban them from any human rights. Their lust to enforce their unjust laws and controlling power grew greatly by time. The origin of their ideologies can be summarized as followed:

The first and now dominant strand is the fundamentalist canon of Islamic opinion that stretches from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century scholar Ibn Taymiyya through Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab, who died in 1792, to modern day salafist ideologues. Essentially their interpretation of Islam demands the harsh and absolute rejection of any innovation since the times of the Prophet. They argue that any diversion from puritanical precepts that they draw from a literal reading of the Quran and the Hadith is blasphemy, and must be eradicated. It follows therefore that Shi'ism, Sufism or essentially anything - and anyone - that does not conform to their interpretation of Islam, should be destroyed. <sup>(2)</sup>

So summarizing the characteristics of this terrorist organization according to the five characteristics that were introduced earlier in the chapter it is truly one that is after restructuring all aspects of society; demolishing history and the ancient civilization of Iraq in order to reframe the society. It also includes the regime set up by a leader of a single ruling party governing all people. It is after capturing the ignorant minds of the young to join them for the sake of empowerment and self-protection. Also a bundle of strict rules was enforced on people restricting them from their freedom and rights. They also had their hands on the economic aspects capturing as many oil reserves as they possible could. So it meets many aspects of a totalitarian system.

From a literary perspective, this state clearly reminds one of the famous novel *1984* written by the British George Orwell in 1949. It is said by many critics that Orwell saw that future societies will leap into entering a dark age where totalitarian regimes will be in control. They are regimes of one political power being in command taking advantage of any weakness a society may include.

### **3. George Orwell's Life and Career**

Eric Arthur Blair, today known under his pen name "George Orwell," was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, 1903 in India. (Quinn, 2009: 3-4) Eric showed signs of interest in literature from very early on. He is said to have recited a poem for his mother as early as the age of four. His mother also implanted the idea of the British class division into her son when she rejected the idea of her son being friends with children of a plumber. Orwell's education started with joining a convent school run by French Catholic nuns. This might have had an impact on Orwell's later negative

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2- Barrett, 2014: 18-

insights against Catholicism. At the age of eight years, Orwell joined a preparatory school and after suffering from this school's strategic policies, his interest in writing developed. He composed two poems and published them in a local newspaper. His poems slowly came into sight and started to win awards in public schools in Eton and Westminster. He is well known for his novel *Animal Farm* published in 1945 and the novel he wrote thirty years later, specifically in 1949 named *Nineteen Eighty Four* later written as *1984*, would be composed as an attack on the British social community and its policies based on the idea he had formed ever since his days on the boarding school. (Ibid: 5)

In this novel, Orwell portrays the city of Oceania as being a totalitarian society. The entire city suffers from overall fear and hatred because of the controlling power that limits their freedom and rights. 'Big Brother', the leader of this society is shown to be controlling all aspects of people's life as individuals and as a society as a whole. This society is therefore a society filled with social disease causing a continuous threat on all people. (Tulski, 2014: 9)

#### **4. George Orwell's 1984: A Brief Summary**

Winston Smith, the major character of the novel, is a common citizen in the totalitarian city of London in the imaginary part of England named 'Oceania'. From the beginning of the novel, Winston, as well as every other citizen in Oceania, seems to be followed everywhere he goes by the eyes of the ruling party and its headmaster known under the name of 'Big Brother'. Telescreens (devices that look like televisions with attached microphones and cameras) are found in every corner to monitor every movement people make. Rules set by Big Brother and his party have come to control not only the present, but even the past and future in all aspects. Furthermore, the language used in this city is shown to be restricted by time, omitting every word that might be used to make calls of rebellion against this totalitarian regime. This language is called 'Newspeak' and even thinking to be against the party is strictly prohibited. This is phrased in the novel with the term 'thoughtcrime'. Being a member of this society, Winston follows what 'Big Brother' and his party have to say, but deep inside reveals an intense disgust against the party. He buys a diary to express his anger and is also seen to have an extreme interest in the character of O'Brien, whom he believes to be a member of a secretive party planning to take the current regime down. (Sparknotes, 2007: 3)



This state has a declared enemy known under the name 'Emmanuel Goldstein'. He is portrayed to be the most dangerous man alive and being the leader of a movement that seeks to overthrow Big Brother's party. He is looked for to be executed and telescreens and posters are spread all over the town to remind people of their full-time enemy. Winston later starts a secret affair with a black-haired woman named Julia. Both fear of being punished as romantic relationships are forbidden under the laws of Oceania. Winston goes for it anyway, for he believes that he will be dead anyway since the moment he bought a diary and committed 'thoughtcrime'. As the novel develops, Winston finally receives a message from O'Brien who invites him to his extravagant apartment. O'Brien openly claims to Winston that he opposes the ruling party and that he is on a mission to take them down. He encourages Winston and Julia into joining the party against it as members of the Brotherhood. After getting them into the idea of opposition, it is shockingly revealed later in the novel that O'Brien is nothing but a spy who works for Big Brother. His real mission is to spy on people whom he believes to have opposing thoughts against Big Brother and trap them into showing their real feelings. Trapping Winston and Julia into his trust, he takes them to a place where they are considered as being disloyal followers and betrayers to the systems. Punished aggressively, Winston is eventually released being loyal to Big Brother and has learned to love no one, not even Julia, but Big Brother and his totalitarian system. (Ibid.)

## **5. A Comparative Study of Totalitarianism in Reality and Fiction**

The novel 1984 can be described as a "depiction of the struggle of the lone individual against an omnipresent, omnivigilant state that conducts a systematic and relentless assault against truth, against history, against normal human relationships, and, above all, against the very existence of the individual will." (Gleason, Goldsmith and Nussbaum, 2005: 1) The novel starts with explaining a dead-like environment, foreshadowing the nature of the fictional society of Oceania. He says:

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The blackmoustachio'd face gazed down from every



commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own.<sup>(3)</sup>

Oceania is a modern state that Orwell creates to be a possible representative society of the future. It is a pale world ruled by one party under the lead of a character named 'Big Brother'. He seems to follow with his malicious eyes the lives of every living human, controlling thereby their daily routine under strict rules. The novel is given from the perspective of its hero Winston Smith who slowly unfolds to be a revolutionist against this controlling power. This is a strong reminder of how ISIS made their state to look like. With their black banners and their leader Al-Baghdadi, Mosul and their then on-growing state was a somber place under the demand of strict rules. (Walker, 2009: 10)

In later pages, Orwell reveals that Oceania has a language that must be spoken and known by all citizens phrasing it as the language of 'Newspeak', like mentioned earlier. He introduces the word 'Minitrue' for example to refer to The Ministry of Truth: "The Ministry of Truth – Minitrue, in Newspeak." (6) This reminds of terms that appeared with the formation of ISIS, like the terms and 'kafir' and 'murtad' mentioned earlier. Such terms and many other terms entered the dictionaries of people who became by will or force part of a totalitarian regime of ISIS. The appearance of London in the novel also seems to be unattractive and very limited. He says:

Scattered about London there were just three other buildings of similar appearance and size. So completely did they dwarf the surrounding architecture that from the roof of victory mansions you could see all four of them simultaneously. They were the homes of the four ministries between which the entire apparatus of government was divided.<sup>(4)</sup>

It seems that no tall buildings were allowed to be built to have overall control of the lands and its people. Associating this idea to the state ISIS created, they also showed their destruction of buildings to have overall control over the lands they have in possession. Even architecture of the ancient civilizations was coldly taken down considering them symbols of disbelief and corruption. Only buildings that fit their state would be covered with their black banners to stand as a symbol of their control and

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3- Orwell, 1949: 3

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domination. The novel also includes a declared enemy. Big brother reveals that the enemy is Emmanuel Goldstein. Everyone is set to have the same feeling toward hating Goldstein. No place is left to have any personal feelings. He reveals:

As usual, the face of Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People, had flashed on to the screen. There were hisses here and there among the audience. ... Goldstein was the renegade and backslider who once, long ago (how long ago, nobody quite remembered), had been one of the leading figures of the Party, almost on a level with Big Brother himself, and then had engaged in counter-revolutionary activities, had been condemned to death, and had mysteriously escaped and disappeared. The programmes of the Two Minutes Hate varied from day to day, but there was none in which Goldstein was not the principal figure. He was the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party's purity. All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies, deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching. <sup>(5)</sup>

Comparing this idea to the idea of ISIS, they have also declared the enemy of their state clearly. They have distant enemies, which are the state of 'Israel' and the West and have also declared that their enemy is the entire Shiite-community and their regimes that rules Baghdad and Damascus. (Rashid, 2015: 67) They have spread the idea of disgust among their people in many different ways, making them believe that both these enemies were defiers of Islam. That is why ISIS is seen to have carried out many horrible acts of executing people from these communities many of which were continuously televised and posted on social media, for the sake of spreading fear as well as capturing people's minds into believing they are the enemies of ISIS and Islam as a whole, which is obviously nothing but an invention of their own minds to cover their intention of total domination. The novel reveals how totalitarian Big Brother's regime is, by unfolding how it controls even the smallest butts of every man's psyche. He narrates how the so-called Thought Police can interfere and 'plug into' people's lives whenever and wherever they want. No place is safe, only darkness could possibly be safe:

The Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live

-did live, from habit that became instinct- in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.<sup>(6)</sup>

ISIS has followed the same order of control in the areas they have controlled. People's activities are followed in every way possible. This includes trailing every citizen with their eyes or using technology of nowadays, like social media to understand how every individual thinks. Severe punishment is their only answer when any rule is defied. Because of the fear and the on-going pressure, whether in the world of fiction and reality, citizens can do nothing but find themselves cheering with all other citizens supporting the controlling leader and the speeches delivered. In 1984, Winston is shown how he rather unconsciously finds himself cheering for big brother who has made his appearance on the telescreen. He is cheering not out of complete support and devotion, rather it is an act carried out by intense fear and pressure: "Of course he chanted with the rest: it was impossible to do otherwise. To dissemble your feelings, to control your face, to do what everyone else was doing, was an instinctive reaction." (22)

Later, Winston is shown to not being able to bear the hatred he has held secretly for too long within every part of his heart. He grabs a pen and with great anger drives out this anger into capital words of wrath and opposition against big brother: "His pen had slid voluptuously over the smooth paper, printing in large neat capitals —DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER over and over again, filling half a page." (23)

ISIS is also known to have a special interest into controlling the young minds of the society. Even children and teenagers were to join in their military and think differently, being thereby deprived from living a normal childhood and future life. Orwell, in his novel also shows how Big Brother managed to take away the innocence of a normal childhood from the children of the society. Winston's neighbors are seen to have children who are playing as if they were spies performing duties under the command of Big Brother:

'Up with your hands!' yelled a savage voice. A handsome, tough-looking boy of nine had popped up from behind the table and was menacing him

with a toy automatic pistol, while his small sister, about two years younger, made the same gesture with a fragment of wood. Both of them were dressed in the blue shorts, grey shirts, and red neckerchiefs which were the uniform of the Spies. <sup>(7)</sup>

Later on in the novel, Winston goes from writing his thoughts from his diary into directly declaring his and Julia's revolt against Big Brother's party in front of O'Brien by saying: "We believe that there is some kind of conspiracy, some kind of secret organization working against the Party, and that you are involved in it. We want to join it and work for it. We are enemies of the Party." (215) Hearing this, O'Brien asks whether they are prepared to be fully devoted and committed to the so-called Brotherhood that is led by Emmanuel Goldstein. Winston confirms that he is ready to kill, hurt, sabotage, betray, cheat, forge, blackmail, corrupt, lose identity and even commit suicide just to join the Brotherhood led by Goldstein. However, when it comes clear that O'Brien is in fact a spy who works for none other than Big Brother himself, Winston and Julia are imprisoned and punished for being traitors of the system. It does not take long when Winston is ready to sacrifice his love for Julia to save himself from torture and punishment: "Do it to Julia! Do it to Julia! Not me! Julia! I don't care what you do to her. Tear her face off, strip her to the bones. Not me! Julia! Not me!" (362). Betrayal is clear and revolting against the system is no longer the case for Winston and even Julia. They have given up and so it has been proven that severe punishment makes most people give up their opposing intentions to avoid punishment and the loss of their lives. Similar betrayals are evident with ISIS members. Many people joined ISIS to save their lives from any danger and declared their opposition against the Iraqi government, their forces and people. When Iraqi forces started recapturing the overtaken cities, the same people gave up resisting the Iraqi forces and declared their opposition to ISIS again. Such life-threatening cases cause people to betray any authority when they lose control, because life is not able to be compensated once being lost.

Revealing all these totalitarian similarities between ISIS and the fictional society of the novel *1984*, it can clearly serve as a warning to people when returning back again to the five major parts of any totalitarian regime. It shows a regime that is after restructuring all aspects of Oceania. Big Brother, just like Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi, is the solitary demanding leader of

the ruling party, who has clearly crushed man's freedom during his reign of terror. He is after capturing the young minds of Oceania and succeeds throughout the novel to spread fear using the most strict policies and dictatorial acts to enforce obedience and loyalty to his system. Big Brother has also complete control over Oceania's economical system just like ISIS has over many of the oil resources to enforce their power and military.

## **6. Conclusion**

With the presentation that totalitarianism is the demand of a single party controlling all of society's aspects and its citizens' psyche, ISIS is presented in this research to have been a modern organization that terrorized many areas in the Middle East using many totalitarian strategies. This destroyed not only the minds of people at the moment they forced their strategies, but have heavily destroyed even the history, religion and culture of the people involved. This unjust organization has been associated to the idea of George Orwell's 1984.

Orwell is said to have written a novel as a warning to his country. Citizens should not live under the demands of one party led by an oppressive leader, otherwise a society will be created like the one he has shaped in his novel, Oceania. It is therefore a political novel that conveys this message not only at the moment Orwell published the novel but can as well be read today for totalitarian governments or at least several characteristics of the whole totalitarian idea are still followed in today's modern world. That is why this research has connected the two worlds of reality and fiction together as a warning that such regimes should have their stop in today's world, perhaps by citizens' most powerful weapon; their voice.

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