

Simona Sailerová, *Language Thought and Nineteen Eighty-Four*

BA thesis

Supervisor's Report

The thesis examines the role language plays in Orwell's last book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and focuses on three fields with which language is intrinsically connected: memory and records, time and change, and meaning and consciousness. The common denominator of these points of view is political: to show how unrestricted totalitarian power operates to impose desired, artificially created meanings and to erase what results from an individual's natural experience with the world.

The central, recurring idea that seems to dominate the three thematic chapters is derived from the anthropological study *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* by Jack Goody, which examines differences between oral and literate societies and sees a manipulative role both on an individual and society of advanced literacy and technologies connected with it. The basic argument of the student then is that recorded words are objects that are used by the Party as tools to suppress individual memory and thus the sense of reality. This idea applies, I'm afraid, only partly. It is indeed the possession of technology enabling not only to make records but also to change records permanently and to destroy records that significantly helps the Party to control individual minds, but the opposition is not so much between the values of oral cultures and literate cultures but rather between sharing and isolation. Any culture is based on sharing, be it by spoken or written communication, and there is no reason to suppose that the pre-Revolution society of Oceania was oral, lacking in modern technologies. The principle strategy of the totalitarian political power, then, is to remodel the sense of social cohesion by breaking communal units (families are no more based on mutual reliability and emotional intimacy of their members) or by introducing mandatory manifestations of unity (two minutes hate etc.). Under these unnatural conditions, both (failing) memory and record do not guarantee truth. The same concerns the notion of time – while primitive societies were confronted with the concept of temporal linearity corresponding with the linearity of writing, the people in Oceania are forced to understand time as Now isolated from both the actual past and the possible future, i.e. planning, which is another form of isolation.

The basic thesis of the student thus should be modified to apply accurately. On the other hand, there are passages dealing with partial aspects of thinking and consciousness that sound convincing and bring interesting insight. Elsewhere the text tends to ramble somewhat, especially when large sections from critical and theoretical sources are quoted.

I fear the character of the BA thesis results to some extent from the way the work on it proceeded. If there had been a chance to consult the chapters regularly and more frequently, some discrepancies could have been avoided. Nevertheless, I'm convinced that the student is able to analyse literary text with great attention and in interesting contexts (she supports her arguments by quotes from many relevant sources) and this enables me to recommend her thesis for defence. It may be graded either as excellent or very good (**výborně až velmi dobře**), depending on the character of the student's defence.