

OPPONENT'S REPORT
BA THESIS
Language, Thought and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Simona Sailerová

The present thesis considers how the superpowers in George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “establish[...] and maintain[...] their dominance” (6). It is argued that “[l]anguage is one of their main tools, as well as a major concern in the novel” (6), and therefore, in three chapters, Ms. Sailerová “focuses on the following aspects and their relation to language: memory and records, time and change, and meaning and consciousness” (6). “Memory and Records” offers an analysis of the role literary and other texts have in the process of manipulating memory in Orwell's dystopian society; “Time, Change and Language” focuses on the control of time and automatization of thought and action; finally “Meaning and Consciousness” for the most part discusses Winston's consciousness. Throughout, the thesis returns to a discussion of oral vs. written language and “explores how the very nature of writing and written records, alongside their advantages, has introduced a certain divergence in human perception, thinking and knowledge and their relation to the external and internal world” (6). The last sentence of the thesis then sums up Ms. Sailerová's central argument aptly: “Language, and any kind of system, model or belief, is a prism (or a sheet of glass, in Orwell's “prose like a windowpane”) through which one can try to understand the world. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows how easily a common, simple, barely perceptible linguistic change can turn *prism* into *prison*” (43, original emphasis).

On the whole, the thesis is well-written and eloquent although some formulations are rather vague and dense, for example for following passage that concludes the third chapter:

Nineteen Eighty-Four shows the danger of objectifying and patterning habitual thought on the outer world, as the outer world continuously changes and is being changed. When the perception and admission of change depends on external, observable difference, implying a requirement of being different enough, it suppresses subjective recognition of change (and its speed) as an essential feature of all things. Then, if observable plurality is forcibly eradicated, one is deprived of the means of noticing change subjectively. The linking of change to physical or mental space also limits the possibility of (and ability to imagine) change as the physical and mental space gradually (and therefore unnoticeably) becomes more and more controlled and limited. (31)

Could Ms. Sailerová reformulate this passage?

Orwell's essays are brought to the discussion, which enriches the text; however, further secondary sources (particularly literary criticism of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) could have been employed. At the same time, I would suggest summarizing and paraphrasing criticism rather than inserting long block quotes (which happens too frequently—e.g. on pages 15, 16, 17, 21, etc.). Ms. Sailerová's voice is often muted here by the critics and philosophers.

One obvious question for the defense is the historical as well as contemporary relevance of Orwell's novel. Can Ms. Sailerová add a few words on this topic? What motivated her to discuss language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?

Proposed grade: 2 (velmi dobře) or 3 (dobře)

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