

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Research

Totalitarianism is a form of government or political system that bans opposition parties, restricts the nation's opposition, and enforces control over public and private life to an utmost high degree. Nobody is completely free from the prying eyes of the government. According to Arendt (2017) in her book entitled *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, totalitarianism is a form of government or political system that possesses absolute control that replaces propaganda with indoctrination and violence to make people submit to realize its ideological doctrines frequently (390).

Totalitarianism is the complete form of authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is a form of government characterized by the renunciation of political plurality, the use of strong central power to preserve the existing state of political affairs. Cerutti (2017) in his research book entitled *The Concepts of Politics: An Introduction to Political Philosophy* claims that authoritarianism is one of the many forms of government characterized by a strong central authority, making a single person having the supreme power, rejecting the plurality of politics, negations of law, power-separating, and vote-based democracy (17).

There are quite a handful of countries that are using totalitarianism or authoritarianism as their form of governing. Such countries include North Korea, China, and the State of Eritrea. These countries' governments exercise a practice of extreme control over their people. There is no such thing as freedom of speech nor the other types of freedom within the countries that has a totalitarian or

authoritarian regime and thus the society of those regimes is typically stagnant and depressing.

In literary works, using topics of totalitarianism and authoritarianism can make said works to be categorized in the dystopian genre. Famous works such as *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, and *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin have one thing in common that makes them have one underlying element. All of these mentioned books have one thing in common: all of them are books with a dystopian genre. Books with the dystopian genre are characterized by a bleak future of the world, heavy and dark themes, and the destruction of humanity's conscience. Another famous literary work that has the dystopian genre and the totalitarianism topic is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, commonly written as *1984*, is a fictional dystopian novel with a subject of social science published in the year 1949 and was written by an English novelist named George Orwell. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a novel about a dystopian alternate reality of Great Britain, later known as Airstrip One, governed by a totalitarian regime known simply as The Party. Airstrip One exists in Oceania, one of the totalitarian super-states that exist in the near future in the year 1984. Airstrip One, which is currently at perpetual war with the other two states, is in constant government surveillance as well as having historical negationism, and is constantly bombarded with propaganda. The main character, Winston Smith, is one of the members of the Outer Party. Constantly overworked and discontented with his life under the Party's regime, he started to have doubts for the Party. Winston then tries to covertly overthrow Big Brother, whom he

hates, with the help of the people that have the same idea as him regardless of how the Thought Police may already be hot on his trail.

George Orwell was an English writer, an essayist, a journalist, and also a critic. He was born in Motihari, Bengal, India, in the year 1903 as Eric Arthur Blair. Orwell was known for producing many works that related to social criticism; stating his strong support for democratic socialism and his disagreement of the totalitarian regime in many of his works. Besides his famous fiction works like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and *Animal Farm* (1945), he also produced non-fiction works, namely *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Furthermore, Orwell's works are still relevant even in today's modern popular culture and in political culture. His influential works created the adjective "Orwellian", which describes social practices of totalitarian and authoritarian.

One example of the Orwellian case exist in this modern day can be seen in the electronic devices that we use, as in particular big technology company and some social media. Vena (2021), in his article titled, *Are We Entering the Orwellian Era of "Nineteen Eighty-Four"?* argues that the world might look like in a near state of totalitarianism but only in the area of technologies produced by big companies. Vena's argument can be supported considering that many smartphones and social media nowadays are always pestering their users to allow their products access to their users' private information. Furthermore, there are also some cases where those big technology companies steal their users' data and then use them for their gain.

I argue that there are some influences of totalitarianism as based on the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that exist among various Andalas University students and I wish to know how the reader perceives those influences of totalitarianism in today's society as based on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. To analyze the depiction of said elements, the writer applies reader-response criticism to know what the readers of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* think about that matter. I hope for this research to make a valuable contribution to today's concern regarding the literary study.

### 1.2. Identification of the Problems

Totalitarianism has become popular again even long after the estimated year in the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* written by George Orwell and the novel itself never lose its popularity since its publication in the year 1949. I would like to explore the readers' perception after reading the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to have a better understanding of the said novel and to build awareness of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. As the writer of this research, I observe and discuss how the readers perceive *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the context of totalitarianism and authoritarianism as based on the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* written by George Orwell.

### 1.3. Review of Related Studies

George Orwell is a famous writer who has produced many great works that are widely researched by various critics and literary scholars. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in the year of 1949 and it is Orwell's ninth and final work before his death in the year of 1950. Due to its controversial content, such as social and political themes as well as sexual themes, the novel itself has been

banned in several countries. The *Nineteen Eighty-Four* novel's plot tells a story about a dystopian future set in the year 1984 had received many theories and speculations that are partially plausible for its readers. Moreover, there are a handful of researchers that are amazed by the story of the novel and thus made it the object of their research.

I found research written by Gindho Rizano (2005), in his undergraduate thesis titled *Imagery and Symbolism in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Formalistic Reading*, that examined the novel's depiction regarding every part of the main character's struggle, fear, hope, and finally his defeat symbolized in many major symbols. Every part of the novel has its own symbols that represent the condition of Winston Smith, the main character of the novel (40). For example, desperation and defeat are symbolized by the torture room that exists in the Ministry of Love that Winston entered nearing the final part of the story. Another symbolization of the movement in the novel can be read in the tones of the novel, which alternates between hopeful to fearful and then the submissive tone that signifies the bitter ending of the novel. This thesis also covered the symbolism of imageries that are related to each other, such as the symbolism of beauty (paperweight) and horror (rats).

On the other hand, humanism is a philosophical stance that focuses on human beings' value and agency. Humanism is another topic that is prominent in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Therefore, Nabila (2016) in her diploma thesis titled *The Structure and World View of George Orwell's 1984: A Genetic Structuralism Application*, argued that the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has Humanism as its world view and is deeply concerned about it (57).

Finally, Amundsen (2015), in her master thesis titled *Language and Human Rights in Nineteen Eighty-Four and Never Let Me Go*, argued that the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell informs its readers about the importance of language and human rights while also warns its readers about the dangers of limiting human rights (58). The novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* itself also teaches the readers that using slogans and limiting human interaction to abolish human rights can also cause social atrocities.

#### 1.4. Research Questions

In this research, I propose three research questions:

1. How do the readers understand the terms totalitarianism and authoritarianism after reading George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?
2. Why is *Nineteen Eighty-Four* relatable or not relatable to the readers' life today?

#### 1.5. Scope of the Research

This research focuses on the reader's responses to the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* novel by George Orwell. I then limit the discussion to two questions. Firstly, I elaborate on the readers of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s understanding regarding totalitarianism and authoritarianism after they finish reading the novel. Finally, I scrutinize whether George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is still relatable or not relatable to the readers' life today.

#### 1.6. Objectives of the Study

In this research, I have revealed how twenty-eight Andalas University students (as the readers) understand the term totalitarianism and authoritarianism after reading George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. I have also elaborated on the

reasons why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is relatable or not relatable to the readers' life today. I hope for this research to be useful in analyzing the upcoming related studies and to be a good source for the people who are trying to understand the influences of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell on its readers better.

