BOOK REPORT I

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1984

George Orwell

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**About the Author *(199 words)***

George Orwell is the alias for Eric Arthur Blair, born 25 June 1903 and died 21 January 1950. His father was a British official in the Indian civil service. His mother, an unsuccessful teak merchant in Myanmar. Orwell was an intellect at a young age, gaining a scholarship to Eton, a leading school in England, attending from 1917-1921. In 1922, he became an assistant district superintendent in Burma’s Indian Imperial police. When he realized how much the Burmese were forcefully ruled by the British, he became ashamed of being a colonial police officer, and later realizing his dreams from boyhood of becoming a writer and a literary and political rebel. Orwell writes many novels and autobiographical essays like *Such, Such Were the Joys (1953)* which reflect his misery in his childhood, or his experiences in Burma in the novel *Burmese Days (1934)*, or other experiences like those in London, culminating with his literary revolution against imperialism through his beliefs in communism and his other literary works that reflect this. Some novels include *The Road to Wigan Pier (1937)* and *Coming Up for Air (1939)*. *1984* and *Animal Farm* reflected the menaces of Nazism and Stalinism but made Orwell famous.

Source:

Woodcock, George. “George Orwell.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 6 Feb. 2019, www.britannica.com/biography/George-Orwell.

**Summary and Main Theme**

*1984* is a novel set in the dystopian society of London, Oceania. Society is ruled and watched by the figure “Big Brother” who is the ruler of the Party. The Party is the only class in society and control everything from history, privacy, expression, education, to even love and other basic human needs and desires.

Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, is a low-ranking member of the party who is works as a servant of the party tasked with “rewriting history” in the literal sense as he rewrites the historical records in the Ministry of Truth, changing facts and the language into Newspeak which seems to be a tool by the party to reduce the capability for thought and therefore *thoughtcrime* (which is the crime of thinking about rebelling against the Party). Winston notices that a man, Syme, is “vaporized” for what Winston believes is “being too intelligent.” Winston records his thoughts in secret in a diary throughout the story which he bought and keeps hidden from the telescreens which monitor everyone in an effort to express his hate for the Party and to sort of give himself meaning -- a legacy. This lack of a legacy is emphasized by Winston’s feelings about the proles being the (farfetched) future of society who live in slums that are relatively free of the party’s monitoring but are still its uneducated backbone. At work one day, Winston notices two other characters, Julia, who Winston believes it “trouble” and will turn him in for *thoughtcrime*, and O’Brien, who Winston believes is a member of the Brotherhood, the group opposing the party.

Winston notices the truth in how the Party manipulates the past, present, and (therefore) future, and builds his suspicions against the party culminating in his progression of hate throughout the story. Winston, realizing that he is “a dead man anyways,” begins to show a progression of emotion, which is emphasized by his concern when he receives a note from Julia reading “I love you,” but juxtaposed by his newfound desire to live. Winston finds a way to meet Julia in a public mass hidden from the telescreens, planning to meet later. Winston then finds a way to meet with Julia by meeting in the country and having a sexual encounter with Julia, curbing his fear of her being a spy for the Party. Julia and Winston continue their affair for a while, reinvigorating his desire to live through his increasing hate for the party, but still aware of their impending “death” as Winston still believes that they will be caught.

Upon their return to London, Winston is contacted by O’Brien who is a member of the inner Party and plays as a member of the Brotherhood, letting Winston and Julia become prey O’Brien’s scheme to expose them betraying the Party. O’Brien gives Winston a copy of Emmanuel Goldstein’s book and assures that they will be safe from the party. As Winston and Julia meet later in the room above Mr. Charrington’s shop, the Thought Police barge in, tearing the two apart, and smashing the crystal paperweight which was a symbol for Winston’s hope. It is revealed that both Mr. Charrington, who rented the room to Winston without a telescreen, and O’Brien are members of the Thought Police and have been watching Winston and Julia all along.

Winston and Julia are taken to the Ministry of Love and are separated and tortured for a while, believing that the fables Room 101 is their resting place. Being confronted with his worst fears, Winston renounces his love for Julia and begs that they torture her rather than him, breaking his spirit and removing his desire for her and replacing it with his delirious newfound love for Big Brother.

One of the main themes in this book is the futility of an individual to create change without power. This is illustrated in through the portrayal of Big Brother and the quote, “If one controls the past, they control the present. If one controls the present, they control the future, and the future, the past.” By securing control of privacy, information, money, and political forces, the inner Party or the “omniscient” Big Brother becomes a figure that cannot be contradicted or fought from the inside. This is reinforced by the metaphor “So long as human beings stay human, death and life are the same thing,” which illustrates Winston’s feelings of despair and how being ‘free’ is only done by succumbing to a higher authority. In Winston’s reality, being ‘free’ is a sweet way of portraying the slavery to the system.

**Societal Similarities and Differences (Book vs. Today)**

In *1984*, privacy is almost negligible, but is present to an extent today. Much like the proles, we have people in today’s society that are both the backbone of our social structure but are treated as insignificant as dirt in some cases. The biggest risk factor today is those of middle and higher class not having as much privacy as there are communication technologies like Facebook and Google and other social media platforms where people try to put their “best face forward” since they have an online presence. This is similar to how Winston performs in and out of sight of the telescreens.

Another similarity between our world and the world of *1984* is the use of government to regulate resources. In *1984*, the various ministries control knowledge, privacy, military and government, and the flow of money. Today, we have legislation to moderate content like the books put in our education system and how software and other information can be used or distributed. Our government and military are controlled by various systems like the House of Representatives, Electoral College, etc., and the distribution of money and resources is moderated through systems like Obamacare or welfare, and the performance of competing companies in the free market (where one recent example could be the drastic rise in GPU prices since the cryptocurrency boom). Similar to how Orwell intended, this could be a sign for the rise of a totalitarian government -- a warning for the future.

One difference between *1984* and today’s society is the perception of emotions and concepts like tragedy. In *1984*, the Party uses Newspeak which is Oceania’s official language which removes words that signify emotion or deep thought. This is to sort of “breed out” these traits to make people succumb willingly to the Party. One instance can be seen in how Winston struggles to use proper, interpretable English when writing in his journal or when he is seen modifying records in the Ministry of Truth. This is also enforced by Winston’s feelings of “love” for Julia, who in today’s society could be seen as someone prostituting herself for satisfaction rather than monetary gain.

Another difference is the use of communication technologies. In *1984,* communication technologies are used as a tool against the people, keeping them in line and ensuring the signs of a rebellion -- thoughtcrime or doublethink -- are rooted out via the ‘vaporization’ or breaking of individuals. In society today, these technologies are used in favor of the people as much as they are used against them. Through militarization, our government tracks “high-risk individuals” or terrorists, but at the same time, people can locate their iPhone with the same technology.

**Main Points in the Book**

The major points in the novel can be derived from the slogans of the party:

“WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH”

These are the signs of a totalitarian society which Orwell warns the readers of throughout *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Orwell uses Winston as a character that represents himself and as a relation to the reader. Winston has the same struggles and frustrations as anyone else in society today, but his problems are magnified by the presence of the Party. The slogan is a signature for the Party’s goal to destroy the sense of individualism through fear. It is a staple to the Party’s use of psychological control. The biggest point in the book is inferred for the reader to keep an open mind -- to be free of propagandas or skewed perceptions based in media, and to look for oneself at the “true” facts and create their own opinions -- to realize fact and create their own truths. “Freedom” is a human right taken away by the Party in *1984*, and Orwell uses this idea to demonstrate the need for freedom of expression, knowledge, and other rights or entities like the free market to help society grow in the future.