

Title:

Nineteen-Eighty-Four: Anxiety, Control and Big Brother

Word Count:

545

Summary:

The classic novel "Nineteen-Eighty-Four" is among the literary world's most enduring stories done in the dystopian style, stirring up the reader's feelings of anxiety with relative ease. The world presented within the novel, one that noticeably lacks privacy and personal freedoms, is bleak and dark by modern standards. It is therefore no surprise that any aspect of a government that observes every little detail that the people do is referred to as "Big Brother," in homage to the novel's most enigmatic figure.

Keywords:

anxiety

Article Body:

People have always felt more than a touch of anxiety at the thought of being observed and watched at all times, even in one's most private moments. For the most part, this sort of constant and unrelenting surveillance has been limited to fiction and, theoretically, the countries that were once behind the fearsome Iron Curtain of the Soviet Union. There are a multitude of examples that could be used to show the potential choking and chilling effect, the crippling anxiety, and perhaps even the futility of resistance when one is faced with a society where everyone and anyone is being watched. Still, only a very few literary examples could pull it off quite as well as George Orwell's classic novel, "Nineteen-Eighty-Four."

The novel takes place in a fictional setting in the year 1984, a time when England is ruled by a group known as "the Party" and headed by a man known only as "Big Brother." The anxiety comes from the fact that everything is constantly being observed by a variety of means, not the least of which are the various multitudes of screens that allow party members to watch anything and everything that people do. The government also has departments involved in rewriting history, administering all manner of propaganda, controlling various goods, and even dictating the most private details of a person's life. In essence, the England of the novel is almost completely devoid of privacy. This is best exemplified by what might be the most famous words of the novel itself: "Big Brother is watching you."

In the midst of this anxiety-filled environment is a small resistance movement that, as implied in the ending, is unlikely to get anywhere. The constant threats of a war against one of two other major powers, and hints of corruption at the very heart of the ruling party. The entire novel narrates the attempts of two people to have a clandestine, hidden affair from the ever-watchful eyes of the government. The whole thing inevitably ends in failure, as both of them are caught and subjected to various tortures and brain-washing techniques to make them renounce their misgivings about the ruling party.

The novel, a grossly inaccurate a portrayal of the then-future, endures because it evokes some truly timeless feelings among its readers. The ruling party of Orwell's masterpiece controls everything and enforces an unyielding loyalty to their cause, to the point that nobody questions even the most ridiculous changes to history. This is best exemplified by the constantly shifting alliances of the party in the wars that it fights against the other powers of its time. People in the novel literally assume that they have always been at war despite the fact that, just the week prior, they were being told to lend their support to that country because it is an ally of the party.

The near-religious focus of loyalty and devotion to the enigmatic, possibly non-existent, figure known as "Big Brother" was, according to a theory put forth within the novel itself, fueled by sacrificing a fundamental human desire. In the novel's case, it was a "redirected" sexual desire that fueled the obsessive devotion. In some ways, this apparent ability to suppress something fundamental to the human psyche is a major part of the novel's appeal.