

## The Relationship among the Past, the Present and the Future Scenario: A Critical Study of George Orwell's *1984*

Dr. Muhannad Rushdi Nimer Sabha

College of Sciences and Humanities Ghat, Majmaa University P.O.Box: 445, Al-Ghat 11914, KSA

### Abstract

The relationship among the past, the present, and the future has interested writers in all ages everywhere. The present paper focuses upon such a relationship in George Orwell's Futuristic novel *1984*. All the time, the protagonist is preoccupied with the past, as he is cut off from the present. The novel talks about totalitarianism, the most significant ism of the 20th century. It has been critically reviewed from the present day perspective. The miserable condition of England due to war is portrayed. Orwell himself directly participated in the Spanish Civil War. The setting is not so charming, but ideal alternatives are portrayed. Orwell has soft corner for the working class. The novel hints at the power enjoyed by the Party, how It imposes its attitudes upon the civilians. It even breaks the relationship between Winston and Julia. He loses faith in humanity and deserts all principles. The novelist shows that the Party can even devoid people of their souls. Suffering is shown here. This paper reanalyses this control.

An attempt has been made to see how the past, the present and the future are interwoven wonderfully. Viewing the work from a realistic point of view, it has also been praised as fiction.

**Keywords:** Totalitarianism, Novel, *1984*, George Orwell

### INTRODUCTION

*1984* is one of Orwell's prominent works, and to present time it can be viewed as one of the most distinct works raised against the horrors of totalitarianism. It can be considered as a portrayal of negative utopia as it makes an effort to let the readers not to imitate any way that might lead toward such societal degradation.

Capalbo says:

"Dystopian Novels are usually set in the future; they warn man to change his attitude to society. A Dystopia is the opposite of a Utopia: while a Utopia is a dream of a better future, a dream of a land of peace and brotherhood, in contrast to the corruption and tyranny of the contemporary political situation, a Dystopia is the dream of a future society which turns into the nightmare of a worse world than the present one"

(Capalbo 2015).

The novel has made a place for itself among one of the most important works, both for its resistance against the brutal nature of dictatorial governments, and also for its deep evaluation of the psychology of power and the methods that twisting of language and history can be used as mechanisms of power.

The writer's main purpose is to show the terrifying limits of totalitarianism, most recognised of the last century. The reader travels through the horrifying world that Orwell sees through the eyes of the protagonist, Winston Smith.

Shelby and Berkow comment:

"In writing *1984*, Orwell's main goal was to warn of the serious danger totalitarianism poses to society. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate the terrifying degree of power and control a totalitarian regime can acquire and maintain. In such regimes, notions of personal rights, freedoms and individual thoughts are pulverized under the all-powerful hand of the government" (Shelby and Berkow 2015).

Totalitarianism is a concept of many meanings. "Totalitarianism is defined as absolute control by the state or a

governing branch of a highly centralized institution. Totalitarianism in George Orwell's *1984*, Winston, as well as all of Oceania, is under the continued tyranny of The Party. As the Thought Police could be anywhere or anyone, people are continuously being taken away in the night for questioning the amount of control the Party really has. In this thrilling novel, you journey with Winston through his so-called rebellious phase as he finds love, engages in Thought crime, and secretly defies the government he was raised under”

(Valerie and Elaine 2013).

Another meaning of totalitarianism that it is “a system of government and ideology in which all social, political, economic, intellectual, cultural and spiritual activities are subordinated to the purpose of the rules of the rulers of a state. Several important features distinguish totalitarianism, a form of autocracy peculiar to the 20th century, from such order forms as despotism, absolutism, and tyranny. In the older forms of totalitarianism, people could work and live on their own as long as they didn't try to enter the political state of the society in any way. In the newer forms of totalitarianism, the people of the society are dependent on other people that are higher than them in everything they do in everyday life” (123HelpMe 2015).

One of the most forceful aspects of the novel is the way in which Orwell comprehends a clear display of a totalitarian world in a mysterious aura.

It is a political satire framed with the purpose of warning the Western readers of the harmful notions of totalitarian regime. The title was meant to give clue to its readers in 1949 that Orwell foreseen an actual possibility for the coming days; if there was no resistance against totalitarianism, the title hinted, the world would be somewhere near to the circumstances reflected in the work within just thirty- five years. Orwell portrays a state in which government has a total control over every area of human life, to the extent that even having a disloyal thought is abusing the law.

The massive telescreen in every room a blazes a stable stream of propaganda planned as an evidence for the failures and shortcomings of the Party as glorified achievements. The Party not only controls their minds, but also their bodies. It keeps a strict vigilance over every outlet of information and employs complicated mechanisms.

Searle comments:

“Their totalitarian order, he thought, would likely be enabled by new technologies of surveillance and control. Technologies: such as the aforementioned ubiquitous telescreens and microphones, but also neuro pharmacology, and mechanisms such as novel writing machines. Indeed, because it aimed to destroy independent thought and empirical science, Orwell's dystopia is a world of technological decline and endemic scarcity; the only areas in which it excels being that of manipulation and control” ( Searle 2012).

The omnipresent telescreens are the most obvious symbol of the Party's continuous control over its subjects. They also reflect how totalitarian government makes misuse of technology for its selfish interests without paying any attention to develop civilization.

One of Orwell's most valuable messages in the *1984* is that language is very important to human thought. The idea of "doublethink" competence to keep two opposing ideas in a person's mind at the same time emerges as an important outcome of the Party's huge campaign of large-scale psychological manipulation. As a result, a person is not able to think freely and believes anything that the Party tells him.

Searle adds:

“One of the ultimate goals of the Party is to destroy the meaning of language itself- to fully institute the use of “Newspeak” so that all reference with the past and the truth has been destroyed. The Party then becomes the sole arbiter of what is real and what is fiction” (Searle 2012).

Urban decay in London is an important reminder of the notion that totalitarian authorities are violently competent at enhancing their control and absolutely incapable of providing for their citizens. Throughout London, the hero sees banners portraying a man gazing down over the words "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (1984, 1992). Big Brother stands for the Party. The nationals are told that he is not only the head of the nation but, also the Party. Planning to fade people's memories and filling their minds completely with propaganda the Party enables itself to replace individuals' memories with its own version of the truth.

"Big Brother represents the totalitarian government of Oceania, which is controlled by the Party and therefore synonymous with it. Winston learns in Goldstein's book that Big Brother is not a real person but an invention of the Party that functions as a focus for the people's feelings of reverence and fear. Worship of Big Brother also provides a substitute for organized religion, which has been outlawed by the Party" (Florman and Kestler 2015).

From the very outset till the end the hero has a fantasy of meeting O' Brien (the antihero) in "the place where there is no darkness" (1984, 1992) which stands for his approach to the future: maybe because of his strong fatalism (he believes that there is no redemption for him whatever he attempts).

The red-armed prole woman whom the hero hears singing through the window stands for his hope for the future: the chances that the Proles (citizens of Oceania) will finally come to see their plight and stand against the Party. From time to time, he fantasises her delivering to the coming generations that will eventually stand in defiance of the Party authority.

"The prole woman symbolizes fertility and reproductive capacity, and represents the strong and vital lower classes. She is compared to an animal (a mare), a fruit (a rose-hip), and an overripe turnip. Winston feels a "mystical reverence" toward her. Just before the lovers are arrested, the sight of her hanging laundry in the courtyard convinces Winston that the proles are "immortal" and will someday awaken and rebel against and overthrow the Party" (Florman and Kestler 2015).

Most of the people live in congested, small flats; live on very little and tasteless food; and generally lead charmless, restricted lives encircled by global war.

Love, authority, and the shattering of the past are reflected in the novel. The hero loves a woman denied to him. He had loveless relationships earlier that lasted only for a while. The Party desires chastity from single citizens, and of course Winston and his beloved Julia are not practicing chastity, and no way would be allowed to unite. The Party is against personal relations as they take loyalty from the Party. 1984 ends on a very pessimistic note. When Winston is threatened with rats, he betrays his love as he himself had been deceived in the past.

"The ultimate psychological torture comes at the end of the novel when Winston, whose greatest fear is rats, has a cage of starved rats attached to his face. Under the extremist of fear he betrays Julia not in the sense of turning her in, but in asking that she be put in his place. It is a real rather than a feigned request, and with it Winston has lost both his mind and his soul to the evil of the Party" (Searle 2012).

People in authority misuse their power for wrong doings, and the good heroes are without authority, Winston is part of the evils of his world. Winston Smith is the weak character in the 1984, and the control rests with the Party, specially, Big Brother represented by O'Brien. Also Smith last name stands for his ordinary nature. He is not even active and is afraid of the Thought Police. O'Brien is bent upon making Winston love Big Brother as a substitute for Julia.

Here, the past does not change; the Party plays with history so that the past suits its present strategy. Winston's job is to "day by day and almost minute by minute" to bring the past "up to date" (1984, 1992). "Who controls

the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (1984, 1992). Newspapers, textbooks, and people's memories all reflect lies ---the past is altered.

"The slogan is an important example of the Party's technique of using false history to break down the psychological independence of its subjects. Control of the past ensures control of the future, because the past can be treated essentially as a set of conditions that justify or encourage future goals: if the past was idyllic, then people will act to re-create it; if the past was nightmarish, then people will act to prevent such circumstances from recurring. The Party creates a past that was a time of misery and slavery from which it claims to have liberated the human race, thus compelling people to work toward the Party's goals"

(SparkNotes Editors 2007).

The novelist displays futuristic society as horrible dystopias in which individual relations can be extremely political. *1984* was mostly a product of the writer's political experience. He seems to have suffered a type of cruelty at his preparatory school, St. Cyprian's. His biographer Michael Shelden tries to see its potential effects on *1984*:

"It is not the case by any means' he writes, 'that these relatively mild forms of tyranny are worthy of any close comparison with Big Brother's nightmarish rule, but all of these elements helped to give Orwell a certain feel for the life which he describes in the novel, a life which is ultimately the work of his imagination, but which is based on real experience'" (Bloom 2004).

101, is the number of the room in which there is the presence of the "worst thing in the world"(1984, 1992). In the novel was the number of the room in which Orwell met with the BBC's Eastern Service Committee. After experiencing room 101 the citizens in *1984* will be entirely different: "Never again will you be capable of ordinary human feeling. Everything will be dead inside you. Never again will you be capable of love, or friendship, or joy of living, or laughter, or curiosity, or courage, or integrity. You will be hollow. We shall squeeze you empty and then we shall fill you with ourselves" (1984, 1992).

Capalbo comments: "ROOM 101: It is the place where the torture and the horror are 'ad persona', that is individual. In this room every person finds what he fears more. Winston finds his own personal nightmare and to stop the nightmare he is ready to reject and to denounce everything. Winston's nightmare is the mice. He is frightened by them and when he finds them in room 101, to stop the nightmare, he rejects Julia and denounces her. After room 101 the treatment is complete, the Party has won and the 'persona' is annihilated" (Capalbo 2015).

He assumed that Nineteen Eighty-Four was not a prediction for the future; instead, he wished to warn society against the extreme corruptions of administrative class and the state, the corruptions of authority that he had seen over the past 10 years, in many forms, in Spain and England too.

The novelist intensely viewed the novel as a warn against extortion as a whole, not taking into consideration the vicious political system.

*1984* is rich of strangeness and contradictions. The movement itself shows the protagonist leaving hatred for loving Big Brother finally. It shows the living picture of the novel, the year in which the novelist was writing the *1984*. We might question to what extent the novelist was actually trying to make forecast or to what extent he was just employing 'the future' as an implied comparison for his present. Of course, the answer is vague. Winston Smith's flat stands in contradiction to the love-nest over the antique shop. The value of his work at the Ministry is viewed in opposition to its basic pettiness. The very large number of shoes prepared on paper by the state looks to make fun of the fact that 50% people of Oceania are deprived of shoes. When O'Brien raises four

fingers, Winston sees five, in the final offensive victory of doublethink.

Capalbo comments:

“THE DOUBLETHINK: this new term was introduced by Orwell in *1984*; “it is the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously and accepting both of them as truth” according to the State’s need. It helps the totalitarian State to control the thoughts of its citizens: through the manipulation of the mind the “persona” is no longer saying the opposite of what he thinks, but he really thinks the opposite of what is true; so white is black, slavery is freedom, war is peace, ignorance is strength and two and two is five” (Capalbo 2015).

The living pictures of our thinking in everyday life catch our attention to the utmost. We do not agree with such expressions as 'ignorance is strength' or that 'freedom is slavery' in spite of the story reflecting clearly how these things can be. Our expectation that peace is the actual norm and war is the exception is not according to the belief of the rulers of Oceania.

The work really reflects the day to day life of the civilians during World War II. It shows a real portrayal of the conditions in which people in England, Germany or somewhere else lived. Here are the bombs dropping now and then and the hatred of a common enemy. Descriptions of everyday experience in the forties are depicted wonderfully through art. For example, it gives a picture of the rationing, the propaganda, and the life in camps, the cigarettes which must be laid not in a particular position so that their tobacco does not fall out, the restricted supply of razor blades and use of bad quality gin. Speaking on personal levels, Smith's work at the Ministry of Truth reflects the writer’s own work at the BBC.

At the offset, when Smith and Julia meet for the last time, they are ruined by both age and suffering: "her thickened, stiffened body was no longer recognizable from behind" (*1984*, 1992).

“*1984* operates beyond the realm of the ordinary realistic novel. As a political novel - that rare thing, an English political novel - it has more dimensions to it than the physical. Its principal preoccupation is with betrayal, betrayal through words. In this respect, it is a sibling of *Animal Farm*. 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others' is a step, or rather a long stride, towards duck-speak, and the betrayal of the deepest intentions of a revolution” (Aldiss 1984).

Right from the beginning, the hero of the novel, is not just a hidden enemy of his Party. He even deceives himself by getting pleasure out of serving it. Smith's utmost joy was in his work, and his work is to distort the truth by altering old records even when these records are themselves already not correct.

*1984* seems to be obliged to G. K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and certainly goes beyond its contradictions. For example, when Smith asks O'Brien whether Big Brother exists "in the same way as I exist," O'Brien replies instantly, you do not exist" (*1984*, 1992). Here the contradiction is that no contradiction is there, for, in Newspeak terms, Smith has come down to the level of UN person and does not exist.

To see *1984* as a set of contradictions is not to reduce its significance. Of course, it may be to a large extent to accept that to make an effort to narrate the future using the past tense is itself a contradiction. "But *1984* is a more humorous novel than is generally acknowledged, though admittedly the humour is decidedly noir” (Aldiss, 1984).

Smith fabricates a tale about an imaginary character called Comrade Ogilvy, "At the age of three, Comrade Ogilvy had refused all toys except a drum, a sub-machinegun, and a model helicopter .... At nineteen, he had designed a hand-grenade which ... at its first trial had killed thirty-one Eurasian prisoners in one burst" (*1984*, 1992). This clearly is a kind of science fiction story.

Aldiss comments, "O'Brien and the Party members are Orwell's ghoulish mirror image of Wells' Samurai in *A Modern Utopia*, while at the same time representing the new totalitarianism rising to threaten the post war world" (Aldiss 1984).

The novel mirrors the past. The past is more significant, agreed O'Brien seriously, admitting the way of constructing utopias; but this is constructed about a point of futurism, that point in which Orwell brings about the scene of England under a totalitarian rule, a rule in which science is going to assist a new atrocity, and in which the world is surrounded by a kind of apprehensive compactness through the war that is peace. By making use of the past, the future is treated in a realistic way.

*1984* mirrors the novelist's own life and the works by which he was inspired. What is different about the novel is that it locates the events it depicts ahead of us, and so yet to go through them, instead of behind us in the past.

Faithful members of the Party have insufficient benefits other than power which is seen as an end in itself. Readers are told that the real unannounced objective of the Party is to forbid sexual act of all enjoyment. Orwell does not follow this prospect in a reliable way. It reflects the contrary side of power. Big Brother's actual existence is doubtful, where as persons like O'Brien are clearly investigators with some new and some old anguishes at their removal.

Wealth and influence have no significance unless there is something to spend them on. It is a fact that 'purges and vaporizations' are a part of the strategy of the Party, but this is scarcely sufficient to satisfy a Party member. They get nothing more than Puritanism. Orwell was properly dissatisfied with this regime. O'Brien's apartment is presented as sophisticated and luxurious and he is found still working in these locations. The Proles, he helps to abuse, enjoy greater freedom.

For them, there are worthless newspapers, astrology, movies 'oozing with sex', pornography, drinks, thrillers, sport and gambling in a great amount. Readers are astonished into seeing how Orwell got a pleasure out of creating *1984* for its own sake. Aldiss comments:

"I believe the prophetic elements to be only part of its attraction and in any case prophecy was apostrophic, intended to warn. Thus, the more it succeeded in conveying its warning, the less likely was its picture of the future to become reality. Its success is that it fails to paint a true portrait of the true 1984. However grim we may hold our 1984 to be, it is not Orwell's grimness. We perhaps owe Orwell some gratitude that his widely influential *1984* is not our 1984" (Aldiss 1984).

The novelist's sanctity is in the seditious remark when Julia slips Smith in the corridor, just saying "I love you" (*1984*, 1992). And utopia, rather than extended throughout the world, has focused itself on a disarranged small room over a shop, with an agreeable girl, a double bed, and secrecy.

The real enemy here is ultimately words themselves, those betraying words which will serve any wicked intention to which they are used. Although three words of Julia's note have the most important one in common with that other well known three-words, the much-feared Ministry of Love. Of course, in Smith's estate, one takes almost straight to the other.

Objects replace words, and the faltering life of proleedom, personified in the old washerwoman singing as she puts her clothes under the lovers' window. It is a notably nostalgic substitutive.

Stating on a paperweight, a piece of gem studded in glass, Smith comments, and "If the past survives anywhere, it's in a few solid objects with no words attached to them, like that lump of glass there (*1984*, 1992) Words associate with doublethink.

## Conclusion

The Novel depicts darkness and a condition of despair in a totalitarian society that founds for the sake of its leaders and does not even pay attention to provide the contentment for any of the senses that are seen even in some anti-utopias.

We view the novel transforming with the passage of time: from prediction of the future to a story of our materialistic existence, 1948-84.

## References

- Aldiss, Brian W. *The Downward Journey: Orwell's 1984*. Kent State University Press, spring 1984, Vol. 25 Issue 1.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Story Behind the Story*. Bloom's Guides: 1984, 2004.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) London: Everyman Library, 1992.
- Shelby, Christina. Berkow, Jordan ed. "1984 Themes". *Grade Saver*, 19 September 2007 Web. Retrieved June 15, 2015 from <http://www.gradesaver.com/1984/study-guide/themes>.
- Capalbo, Rosariomario. "George Orwell: Dystopian Novel -1984 – Animal Farm". [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com), 10 April 2011. Retrieved August 10, 2015 from <https://rosariomariocapalbo.wordpress.com/2011/04/10/george-orwell-dystopian-novel-1984-animal-farm>.
- Searle, Rick. "Utopia or Dystopia, 1984". 09 Sept. 2012. Retrieved July 5, 2015 from <http://utopiaordystopia.com/2012/09/15/1984>.
- Valerie Brenda and Janice Elaine. "Transcript of Totalitarianism in Orwell's 1984". 23 April 2013. Retrieved August 20, 2015 from <https://prezi.com/7br-nq7leoat/totalitarianism-in-orwells-1984>.
- 123HelpMe. "George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four 1984." 123HelpMe.com. 12 Nov 2015  
<http://www.123HelpMe.com/view.asp?id=49043>.
- Ben Florman and Justin Kestler, LitCharts Editors (2015). LitChart on 1984. Retrieved Nov 19, 2015 from <http://www.litcharts.com/lit/1984>.
- Spark Notes Editors. (2007). Spark Note on 1984. Retrieved December 14, 2015, from <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/1984>.