

Winston's Diary: Quest For Truth Of Past And Hope For Future In The Novel 1984 By George Orwell

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Abstract

Among many novels of George Orwell, the novel 1984, stands as a prophetic novel, which represents a technically sound society in the hands of the totalitarianism. Here the Big Brother oppresses the world and controls even the minds of people through thought-police and thought-crime. In such a grim situation, it is through the writing of Winston's diary which he writes through very hazy past memories. He endeavours to go beyond his limitations and shackles to find out the truth of history along with time. Through the technique of diary, Orwell has given a voice to every individual who is curbed under the oppressed government but quest for truth lies in him. Although he is caught and tortured at the end of the novel, we cannot connive at the efforts of the protagonist Winston.

1984, as its title implies, is George Orwell's version of the future awaiting mankind. The scene is England, now known as "Airstrip One", which forms part of "Oceania". A ceaseless, pointless war goes rumbling on, a war in which Oceania is in alliance with Eastasia against Eurasia – at least that is the statement put out by the Ministry of Truth, however, nobody any longer feels certain about anything – and it is fairly clear that only four years previously Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia against the common enemy, Eastasia, by the end of the book the situation has switched back. The novel presents Orwell's final treatment of the themes of social revolution and progress; it is a grim warning to the twentieth century civilization, a vision of the terror that could invade the world if all the implications of totalitarianism were put into practice. 1984 is not only a paradigm of the history of Europe for the previous twenty years but also a culmination of all the characteristic beliefs and ideas expressed in Orwell's works from the Depression to the Cold War. The origins of the novel can be found in Orwell's earliest books, and its major themes, precise symbols and specific passages can be traced very exactly throughout his writing. Orwell characteristically expresses the poverty and isolation that oppresses the characters in his novels in terms of personal humiliation. It is the nightmarish characteristic of the book that gives it an uncompromising moral urgency which helps to force it into the consciousness of the twentieth century civilization. The total and final impression conveyed by Orwell is not one

of pessimism and defeat. On the contrary, the novel constitutes an incontestable statement of Orwell's understanding of the central conflict in modern society, and sums up the history. It is Orwell's successful attempt to define the totalitarian mind, for Orwell's real theme is the irony of totalitarianism in the soul of man and in all the present political system of. In fact, the violence is not confined to the prisons of Oceania; it is in the soul of humanity. To quote Irving Howe,

“Orwell has given us the most graphic picture of totalitarianism that has yet been composed With *1984* we come to the heart of the matter, the whiteness of whiteness”. (235).

Orwell paints a detailed and vivid picture of the telescreen civilization under the dictatorship of Big Brother. Everything is controlled, which is itself controlled by the secret Inner Party : the Party's three slogans are:

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (4)

Oceania is ruled by Big Brother – the personification of state power – and his portrait is continually being shown on the telescreen, although nobody has ever seen him. But he is omnipresent, and the force of the poster, “The Big Brother is watching you”, assumes horrible implications as the story proceeds. (2)

The political system in Oceania is Ingsoc, (English Socialism). The society is hierarchical with three classes: the rulers called the “Inner Party”, the closely supervised and perpetually cheated agents of this power – the civil servants and the like—called the ‘outer party’ and the ‘proles’ who are assigned the task of production, and who have to be kept under control by acts of terror or by entertainment, but who are otherwise unimportant. This is the final culmination of Orwell's view of the British class system.

The hero, Winston Smith, who is completely ‘unheroic’, being completely powerless, from the first page to the last, is a decent man, but his tragedy is that he is imprisoned in a glass – and concrete totalitarian world, the wasteland of moral chaos, a world in which machines act like men and men like machines, and in which all ethical values are conspicuous by their absence.

WINSTON'S DIARY:

In *1984*, diary has been used as an instrument to describe the whole process of putting a champion of the cause of freedom to torture. During the torture, he is forced to surrender. Later, the same person emerges out as person who has won over himself. His victory over himself is not the victory of the party, but it is a saint who has won over his human failings. He loves everybody including Big

Brother. Everyman has become a saint through his suffering. His diary is the record of his spiritual journey. Regarding the writing of diary, Anais Nin, in her *Novels of Future* (1970), maintains that the writing of a diary

“has both its negative and its positive aspects. The genesis of mine began with the desire to keep a channel of communication with a lost father. It was intended for him and continued as the travel log of a child in a new country, as record of family life, of books, of observations of people. (Ed. Daniel Lea: 23)

Similarly, Winston Smith writes the diary for posterity to communicate with future. He records freely his unuttered thoughts in the diary, where he can hate, love and fascinate himself through words on “creamy paper” of the diary. In a way, *1984* (1949) is a story of diary. It is the diary, which he buys from the ‘junk shop’ that prompts him for further actions. He again visits the shop to purchase a glass paper weight and later he rents a room upstairs, where he falls into the hands of “ThoughtPolice”. Then he contradicts in the prison what he has written in the diary. The first entry in the diary begins with: April 4th, 1984. But Winston Smith is uncertain of the date and time. This timelessness brings helplessness on him, which is quite related with his character in the beginning.

“A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be round about that date since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty–nine, and he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two.”(Orwell: 7)

The helplessness of the character and the uncertainty of time are conveyed through the very first scribble on the diary. Diary is a part of history; it is an act of the remembrance of the time past, which has undergone a complete change in the year 1984 and which is laid bare before the eyes of the reader.

The blank pages of the diary suggests the mutability of the past, on which present can dump anything. He writes in the diary about the film in which the helicopters drop bomb on children. After writing this paragraph in the diary, Winston,

“did not know what made him pour out this stream of rubbish” . (Orwell: 9)

This reflects the life in the totalitarian world of Oceania headed by Big Brother. The point Orwell stresses is that in this highly developed technological society human feelings have died. Those who still possess the human values are ‘proles’. It gives a feeling that freedom and spiritual regeneration are possible in the dark world of *1984*. Winston has the hope of transcending his despair. He suffers physically and mentally. He is humiliated and put into agony and pain, but he remains spiritually agile. He forgives Julia when he meets her after his

release from the prison. There is nobility and pathos in his suffering. In a way, he achieves a sort of martyrdom that O'Brien tries to deny him. So here emerges the significance of writing diary in the novel. It is like the utterance of the Biblical prophets and the Epistles of Saint Paul, giving the message of hope and love to humanity who is without hope. The ending is ambiguous: is it a hallucination or a reality? Is Winston finally converted wanting to be protected from his self-accusation? Or is it that he has nothing more to live for, so he'd rather choose death? His conversion is like an act or recantation which is made only to procure relief. The tears in his eyes are not because he has not yet loved Big Brother but because he is, at this final moment, betraying not only Julia, but also his mother and his whole inheritance which he had tried so hard to preserve. By stilling his dissidence, the Party succeeds in temporarily ending the dialogue. And death does not really end anything. The problem is not how to stay alive but how to stay human.

1984 (1949) destroys the idea of sincerity, and even of courage. And these values were also very important to Orwell. *1984* (1949) is in many ways a fictional narrative developed from the ideas which Orwell discusses in *The Prevention of Literature* (1946) and points out not only the manner in which technology and sophisticated scientific methods can be used against humanity, but also the need for human effort consciously oppose such a world. At the time of writing, Orwell made it clear that the novel was not intended as an attack on socialism or on the British Labour Party, but against centralized economy and against the conversion of intellectuals to totalitarian ideas.

A little of detailed content and understanding of the novel is provided here to understand the content of the diary that Winston wrote and which shall be discussed in the paper. Mainly *1984* (1949) is only the contemporary political and intellectual situation intensified, and carried to its logical conclusion. In a review written in 1939, he had expressed the fear that the empirical reality may be destroyed and "two and two will make five when the leader says so".

Coming Up For Air (1939), with its vision of the anti-fascist speaker and the Hate Campaign contains the beginning of *1984* (1949). By April 1940, he began to realize that the movement of the world was not towards a hedonistic but a sadistic world, the nineteenth century values were being reversed, as were the conventional supports of human life.

It was hate, not love which was the dominant emotion of this age. Still later, in a broadcast, Orwell described the implications of a totalitarian regime. Spain or more accurately, the experience in Spain, was a very educative one for Orwell. He realized that newspaper reports had no relation to the actual events. History was not being recorded but created "according to various party lines". All this and much more went into the making of *1984* (1949).

John Atkins in his study of George Orwell draws attention to *The Real Soviet Russia* (1944) by David J. Dallin and *The Life of Stalin* (1952) by Louis Fischer as books which may have provided Orwell with the inside story of Russia. Orwell, it needs be pointed out here, had already written *Animal Farm* (1945), while Dallin's book was not translated till 1947. William Empson in *Milton's God* (1961) refers to 1984 (1949) as an attack on Christianity. The criticism is justified only to the extent that religion has a totalitarian approach, not beyond that. It was a feeling which Orwell shared with Ignazio Silone whose work he was familiar with, and who in his novels brought out the ruthlessness and duality of totalitarian authorities. Just as there was a need to combine patriotism with intelligence, there was a need to combine moral strength with it. Fanaticism, he believed, could best be fought through intelligence. Again Socialism need not be an imposition from above; it need not alienate the people or large sections of them. It should work from within a social structure. Nations, he believed, can never survive by a rejection of their past, for that matter neither can individuals.

In *1984*, a particular period of past is not mute or dead but it is changing constantly, because the history as such does not exist. Even the present which is bound to become past in future, will die with the passage of time. Another misery is that there is no future because the future will be what present is without any past, and when there is no past, no present can, follow past and the question of future is too meaningless. It is only for his consolation that Winston Smith wants to put down the things for future and the imagined generations which would be free to think and act and where there will be no term such as Thought-Police. But it is Winston Smith's futile effort both to restore past and to create something for future. He wonders for whom he is writing the diary. In front of him, there lies not death but annihilation. The diary would be reduced to ashes and he himself to vapour. Only the Thought-Police will read what he is writing before they will wipe it out of existence and out of memory.

The present stands before him as a reality, he is made to forget past, and not to imagine future in the Ministry of Love where present is both past and future. There is no movement of time on human plane. It is meaningless. As the Party slogan goes:

“Who controls the Past Controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.” (Orwell: 35)

Like everything, time is also controlled by the party. The world of *1984*, where Winston Smith lives is seen by the author from a humanistic point of view. He does not see the world of *1984* as one of the comrades, but as one of those who are, still human beings, possessed

with human tendencies. His hero Winston is a human being who cannot reconcile with the world of the novel where there is no freedom and even the thoughts are suppressed.

It is a world where the humanity has lost the hope and the greater tragedy is that there is no one to rekindle it so as to overcome the difficulties and odds of the world of *1984*. The unusual phenomenon is brought before the reader at the very beginning when the author declares that it:

“was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen”.
(Orwell: 1)

The very expression that clocks “were striking thirteen” is odd. Onwards the chief character of the novel, Winston Smith is introduced, who like others is being watched every moment by the telescreens. He is also obsessed with the fear of the thought police, which catches hold of the person who is guilty of “thought crime”. As Winston Smith writes in his diary that:

“Thought Crime does not entail death: thought crime Is death”. (Orwell: 28)

Moreover, there is every day a two-minute hate campaign against Goldstein, the traitor who has betrayed the Party. Hate, is the anti thesis of prayer that exists in all civilized societies. Whereas prayer is offered in silence, hate is to be depicted by yells and cries. Again another contrast is that here in the world of the Big Brother, death is not mourned. Rather it remains unreported. The person who dies, or in other words is “vapourised” is not mourned. The trace of his existence is simply eliminated. Death does not evoke sadness but laughter, as Winston described about a film in his diary. Children in the world of *1984* are the creatures who are taught distorted facts and are asked to believe that the Party has done everything for them and their generation. Moreover, the children are enrolled as spies and are taken to hangings and demonstrations to infuse in them the spirit of Party loyalty to the extreme so that they even condemn their parents to Thought Police: as the daughter of Parson does against him.

On the other hand, comrades like Parsons are always in the front row to serve the Party, raise subscriptions for one thing or the other, and always praise Big Brother for whatever they get. In this sort of society, Winston Smith lives and feels alienated as he still can recall his past memories and believes in them as true. Although he falsifies records in the Ministry of Truth, yet he himself never falsifies his memory. He knows the facts and remembers them, even puts them down in the diary. In this society, Winston Smith lives as an isolated individual; however he seeks pleasure in his work and works efficiently. His flat in Victory Mansions is like all other flats in the building. It is fitted with telescreen but it has an unusual geography that gives him a hiding from the view of telescreen. He takes full advantage as it helps him to write diary and keep his privacy in the world, where there exists

no such thing as known to be private. His neighbours are parsons. Winston in his flat has only one job i.e. to sleep under the view of the telescreen. His wife Kathrine has left him because both were temperamentally different. His womanless world has made him a frustrated person. He hates the world around him. By hearing sirens or whistles in the telescreen he is to get up and do exercises, which he despises.

He works in the Records Department in the Ministry of Truth. It is known as “Mini-true” in Newspeak, the business of the Mini-true is to erase the existence of truth by spreading falsehood. Here his job is not to write anything creative but to change the old records as per the directions from the higher authorities. He is good at his job. Orwell vividly describes the working office of Winston:

“In the walls of the cubicle, there were three orifices. To the right of the speak write, a small pneumatic tube for written messages; to the left, a larger newspapers; and in the sidewall within easy reach of Winston’s arm, a large oblong slit protected by a wire grating. This last was for the disposal of waste paper.” (Orwell: 37)

In the Records Department, the old records are updated to suit the present position of Oceania. Persons who have become non-existent are to be eliminated from the records. Early speeches of the Big Brother are to be re-written whenever it is needed to prove that action that has happened was his prophecy. That is not all, even the wrong figures are put in the records, and fictitious victories are reported. In a way, everything is done to destroy the past.

“It appeared from the “Times of the seventeenth March that Big Brother, in his speech of the previous day, had predicted that the South Indian front would remain quiet but that a Eurasian offensive would shortly be launched in North Africa. As it happened the Eurasian Higher Command had launched its offensive in South India and Left North Africa Alone. It was therefore necessary to re-write a paragraph of Big Brother’s Speech, in such a way as to make him predict the thing that had actually happened.” (Orwell: 38 –39)

Similarly, the people who have fallen from grace are also to be omitted from papers to make the readers believe that they never existed such as Comrade Withers and so many others. Winston remembers that four years back Oceania was at war with Eastasia but there was no record to prove the same. Because the records had been changed and the records had to be changed again when during one of the demonstrations of Hate Week, it is declared that Oceania was at war with Eastasia, not Eurasia. All these things are being done to keep the

Party and Big Brother ruling Supreme. Thus, the Records Department is not working for reconstruction but the destruction of the past.

Any violation or even thought against the slogans mentioned earlier or Big Brother is deemed as thought-crime. Even inner thought of remembering the past is likely to be considered as thought-crime and which is a death in itself. Winston had committed that crime by writing diary and nourishing hatred for the Party. Winston's crime is that he remembers the past and knows that party has been falsifying the facts. He remembers his childhood, his mother and his sister. These memories of past knock his mind time and again. He remembers in his dreams that he was a selfish child and had no love whatsoever for his family. He dreams about his mother.

Mother was sitting in some place deep down beneath him, with his young sister in her arms. He did not remember his sister at all, except as a tiny, feeble baby, always silent, with large, watchful eyes. (Orwell: 29)

This memory of his childhood indicates to the reader that thought the past is being constantly destroyed and the traces of the past in whatever form are being burnt to ashes in enormous furnaces, yet Winston Smith belongs to this world since he is in possession of his memory. This is inner survival of the memory and the past. It is his lust for the past that takes him to a junk shop from where he buys a diary and a glass paper weight.

“Winston also remembers that Airstrip One, for instance, had not been so-called in those days: i t had been called England or Britain, though London, he felt fairly certain, had always been called London.” (Orwell: 32)

Winston admits himself that the appeal in glass paper weight is not the beauty of the things, but, this is where Winston feels that he is not alone in the world of 1984 to have remembered the past. It is his delusion. The irony is that owner of the shop; Mr. Charrington is not a friend as Winston thinks he is, but a member of Thought-Police. He does not give him the visions of gone past but traps him for horrible future. The recurrence of past and his childhood memories lead Winston to believe that objective past must have existed. It may not be restored now but years later when the future generations will live and think freely, and will get rid of the Party and Big Brother. For that matter, he sees the hope for freedom in proles.

“Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four. If that is granted, all else follow”. (Orwell: 81)

After his meeting with O'Brien, he gets a 'book from' one of his agents. Its title is: The Theory and Practice of Oligarchial Collectivism by Emmanuel Goldstein. Winston reads it

with great interest. He learns the meaning of the three slogans of the Party. Further, he also comes to know about the Party's stand point regarding the past.

“The mutability of the past is the central tenet of Ingsoc. Past events, it is argued, have no objective existence, but survive only in written records in human memories. The past is whatever the records and the memories agree upon. And since the Party is in full control of all records, and in equally full control of the minds of its members, it follows that the Past is whatever the Party choose to make it.” (Orwell: 213)

But to counter this argument in the book, Winston has his diary which is a record of the objective past and which is not under the control of the Party. His diary is a link between past and present, which, though he knows, would be reduced to ashes, is a possession on which he can write the inner thoughts. He knows the dangers but he undertakes the risks to write his unuttered thoughts. The diary is the real history; it is not a falsified document like the records, books and papers in the Records Departments of the Ministry of Truth. From the very beginning, he has thoughts and fear of the Thought Police. When he writes in the diary his hand trembles. He is afraid and he writes grammatically incorrect and unpunctuated words and sentences. But so long he is not caught he thinks that he can escape and the things, which he is afraid of, are remote and far off, which cannot touch him. It is because of this feeling in him that he moves from thoughts to words and from words to actions. It is what can be described as his attempt to keep alive the past in him, dodge the present of the party, and to rebel against it for a future of freedom. But the fears comes true, and ultimately both Winston and Julia are caught in their room, where they had managed to keep their privacy and think, and hate the party. When they hear a song of a woman in the street, the thought comes to them that the Comrades cannot sing, whereas the proles can. So the future belongs to the proles.

“When they were caught, there was another crash,.....Someone had picked up the glass paper weight from the table and smashed it to pieces on the hearth-stone”. (Orwell:223)

This is smashing of the past, as the paperweight was reminiscent of past. With their arrest both the hope of restoration of the past and free future are gone forever. Then comes the torture in the Ministry of Love, where Winston Smith is humiliated and tortured to the extent that his reasoning power is snatched away from him. He is made to believe the things he had refused to acknowledge. He says “two plus two makes five, contrary to his earlier conviction that freedom is the freedom to say two plus two make four. The height of degradation is touched when he in attempt to evade torture in Room 101 cries out, “Do it to Julia”. (Orwell: 286)

He is not killed in the torture chamber, but is released where again he had recurrence of his memories of his childhood. But he discards that both Julia and Winston meet again, forgive each other and move on to their different ways. Throughout the novel, Winston Smith suffers and struggles hard for the revival of the past and future. He wants to maintain a proper rapport with the future, past and present. It is for this reason that he writes in his diary.

“To the future, or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone, to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone. From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings.” (Orwell: 28)

This is his commitment to the humanity that he will strive for the restoration of the past in the records and for the future of freedom. But as it happens, his struggle for these two motives ends in torture and humiliation. He is forced to accept the Party doctrines as well as the concept that the time is controlled by the Party. It is here that his struggle ends and he joins the rank and file of millions of other residents of Oceania. In this way, the time consciousness in *1984* starts with the existence of time in the world of timelessness. In the world of *1984* there is no movement. It is a society where the movement of time is disregarded and a new concept is evolved that the movement of time is meaningless and so is the time itself. Thus, Orwell shows that in the totalitarian society not only one loses the freedom of thought and expression but that natural movement of the time is also not allowed to function. The individuals who believe in such concepts are tortured and punished; and are forced to acknowledge that Party is supreme and that there is no significance of time whatsoever. It is a timeless society, where everything is under the control of the totalitarian forces. The concept of time consciousness in Orwell's fiction brings out the fact that the concept of time also depends upon the prevailing social set-up. Normally, it is true that the time is a continuous phenomenon and that there is a definite past, present and will be future. All these concepts or thoughts are altogether eliminated in a totalitarian state. While using the time as a technique, Orwell has depicted that it is related not only with men for determining their past, present and future, but it has a definite effect on the socio-political system.

Thus, the world of *1984* where Winston Smith lives is seen by the author from a humanistic point of view. He does not see the world of *1984* as one of the comrades, but as one of those who are, still human beings, possessed with human tendencies. His hero Winston is a human being who cannot

reconcile with the world of the novel where there is no freedom and even the thoughts are suppressed. His quest for the establishment of truth of the past and hope for the future is well-depicted in his diary which becomes an important document to link the past and the present.

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