

"FREEDOM AND REBELLION IN '1984' BY GEORGE ORWELL"

**Umida Abdushukurova**

*BA Student at Uzbekistan State World Languages University  
abdushukurovaumida710@gmail.com, +998942177035*

**Abstract:** *This article explores the intertwined themes of freedom and rebellion in George Orwell's seminal dystopian novel, '1984.' Set against the backdrop of a totalitarian regime, the narrative delves into the mechanisms of oppression employed by the Party to obliterate personal and political freedom. The analysis examines key symbols, such as Big Brother and the glass paperweight, and central characters, notably Winston Smith, whose acts of defiance, including his illicit affair with Julia, signify profound, albeit doomed, attempts at reclaiming individual autonomy. Through an in-depth look at the Party's manipulation of language, history, and reality, this article underscores Orwell's chilling portrayal of a society where rebellion is systematically crushed, and freedom is an illusion. By contextualizing '1984' within Orwell's own anti-totalitarian views and the post-World War II era, the discussion highlights the novel's enduring relevance in contemporary debates on surveillance, censorship, and the resilience of the human spirit. Ultimately, this article affirms '1984' as a powerful cautionary tale about the fragility of freedom and the inherent drive towards resistance in the face of tyranny.*

**Keywords:** *dystopian novel, totalitarian regime, authoritarianism, thoughtcrime, doublethink, Big Brother, the glass paperweight, Room 101, Thought Police, weaponization.*

## INTRODUCTION

In George Orwell's '1984', the concepts of freedom and rebellion are intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, revealing the devastating effects of totalitarianism on individual autonomy and resistance. Orwell's depiction of a society under constant surveillance and control by the Party, epitomized by the omnipresent figure of Big Brother, serves as a powerful commentary on the dangers of unchecked governmental power. As Orwell illustrates through the protagonist, Winston Smith, the struggle for personal freedom becomes a form of rebellion against an oppressive regime that seeks to control every aspect of life, including thought and memory.

Winston's acts of rebellion, such as maintaining a secret diary and engaging in a forbidden love affair with Julia, highlight his desperate yearning for personal freedom. These acts, though seemingly small, represent significant defiance against the Party's absolute authority. Orwell writes, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (Orwell, 1984, p. 81). This statement underscores the fundamental nature of truth and free thought as the basis for all other

freedoms, and Winston's struggle to assert this basic truth becomes a symbol of his resistance.

The Party's control over language through Newspeak further exemplifies the erasure of freedom and the suppression of rebellion. By systematically reducing the range of thought through linguistic manipulation, the Party aims to eliminate even the possibility of rebellious thoughts. Orwell explains this chilling concept: "The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (Orwell, 1984, Appendix). This manipulation ensures that rebellion cannot even be conceptualized, much less acted upon, highlighting the insidious nature of the Party's control.

Moreover, the alteration of historical records by the Ministry of Truth illustrates the Party's grip on reality and memory. Winston's job of rewriting past records to fit the Party's current narrative demonstrates how controlling the past ensures dominance over the present and future. As Orwell poignantly observes, "He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1984, p. 37). This manipulation of history eradicates the collective memory of any alternative ways of living, thus stifling the potential for rebellion.

Through these mechanisms of control, Orwell's '1984' vividly portrays a society where freedom is systematically dismantled and rebellion is rendered almost impossible. The novel serves as a stark warning about the perils of totalitarianism and the crucial importance of protecting individual freedoms and truth. As we reflect on contemporary issues of surveillance and censorship, Orwell's insights remain profoundly relevant, reminding us of the enduring need to resist oppression and uphold the values of liberty and truth.<sup>86</sup>

#### Historical and Political Context:

George Orwell's seminal work, '1984', is deeply rooted in the political and historical context of the time, reflecting his profound concerns about the rise of totalitarian regimes. Orwell's personal experiences and observations significantly influenced his dystopian vision. Having witnessed the horrors of authoritarianism firsthand during the Spanish Civil War and observing the spread of fascism and communism in Europe, Orwell became a staunch critic of totalitarianism. These experiences are crucial to understanding the depth of '1984'.

Orwell's direct involvement in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the POUM militia exposed him to the brutal realities of political oppression and propaganda. His disillusionment with the betrayal of socialist ideals by Stalinist forces is vividly depicted in his earlier work, 'Homage to Catalonia', and forms a foundation for the oppressive atmosphere in '1984' (Orwell, 1938)<sup>87</sup>. The betrayal and manipulation he

<sup>86</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>87</sup> Orwell, G. (1938). Homage to Catalonia. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

experienced and witnessed during this time are mirrored in the novel's depiction of the Party's ruthless control over truth and reality.

The historical context of the post-World War II era also plays a significant role in shaping the novel. The aftermath of the war saw the division of the world into opposing ideological blocs, with the rise of the Soviet Union as a superpower under Joseph Stalin's totalitarian regime. The pervasive surveillance, purges, and propaganda of Stalinist Russia are clear influences on the world Orwell creates in '1984'. The novel's setting in Oceania, a state characterized by omnipresent government surveillance, public mind control, and perpetual war, reflects Orwell's acute anxiety about the future of humanity under totalitarian rule (Meyers, 1975)<sup>88</sup>.

In '1984', Orwell extrapolates these contemporary fears to their extreme, presenting a society where the individual is completely subjugated by the state. The Party's control over language through Newspeak, the manipulation of historical records, and the surveillance by the Thought Police are all mechanisms that Orwell saw being utilized in different forms by totalitarian regimes of his time (Pynchon, 2003)<sup>89</sup>. The famous slogan from the novel, "War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength," encapsulates the paradoxical propaganda used to manipulate and control the populace (Orwell, 1949)<sup>90</sup>.

Orwell's bleak portrayal of a future dominated by totalitarian rule serves as a dire warning about the loss of personal freedom and the perils of unchecked governmental power. By grounding '1984' in his own experiences and the historical realities of his time, Orwell created a work that not only reflected the anxieties of his era but also continues to resonate with contemporary audiences, reminding us of the enduring struggle for freedom and truth.

#### Concept of Freedom in '1984':

In George Orwell's '1984', the concept of freedom is systematically defined and denied by the Party to maintain its absolute control over the populace. Freedom in the novel is the ability to think, speak, and act independently without fear of retribution. However, the Party obliterates this freedom through various mechanisms that ensure complete dominance over thought and behavior.

The Party employs Newspeak, a controlled language designed to limit the range of thought, as a primary tool for curtailing freedom. Newspeak systematically reduces the vocabulary available to the populace, eliminating words that could be used to express rebellious thoughts. As Syme explains to Winston, "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (Orwell, 1949, p. 52). This linguistic control is crucial in the Party's strategy to prevent any form of dissent or rebellion.

<sup>88</sup> Meyers, J. (1975). *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

<sup>89</sup> Pynchon, T. (2003). *Introduction to 1984*, by George Orwell. New York: Penguin Classics.

<sup>90</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). *1984*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Another significant mechanism is doublethink, the practice of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously and accepting both of them. Doublethink is essential for the Party to manipulate and control reality. By training citizens to accept contradictory statements, the Party ensures that individuals cannot trust their own thoughts or memories. This psychological manipulation erodes the very foundation of personal freedom, as it destroys the capacity for independent thought. As Orwell describes, "The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them... lies at the very heart of Ingsoc" (Orwell, 1949, p. 35).

Surveillance through telescreens and the Thought Police further strips citizens of their personal freedom. Telescreens monitor every action and even register facial expressions, making privacy impossible. The Thought Police enforce ideological purity, punishing any deviation from Party orthodoxy. This omnipresent surveillance creates a climate of fear, compelling individuals to conform outwardly and inwardly. Winston notes, "It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within range of a telescreen. The smallest thing could give you away" (Orwell, 1949, p. 62). The constant threat of surveillance suppresses personal freedom and enforces compliance.

The novel also contrasts personal and political freedom. Personal freedom involves the ability to maintain private thoughts and relationships, as seen in Winston's affair with Julia. This relationship is an act of rebellion because it represents a private sphere free from Party control. However, the Party's repression of personal relationships underscores its intent to dominate every aspect of life.

Political freedom, on the other hand, refers to the ability to organize, express dissent, and act against the Party. In '1984', such freedom is non-existent as the Party eradicates all opposition. The fictitious Brotherhood, supposedly led by Emmanuel Goldstein, represents the illusion of political freedom and rebellion. However, the novel reveals that any semblance of political resistance is a carefully constructed trap by the Party to identify and eliminate dissenters.

Through these mechanisms, Orwell demonstrates how the Party systematically denies freedom in '1984'. The obliteration of personal and political freedom serves to maintain the Party's unchallenged power, making the novel a profound exploration of totalitarian control and the human spirit's struggle for autonomy.<sup>91</sup>

Rebellion in '1984':

In George Orwell's '1984', rebellion manifests in various forms, primarily through the actions and thoughts of the protagonist, Winston Smith. Winston's acts of rebellion, both minor and significant, highlight his resistance against the Party's oppressive regime and underscore the novel's central themes of freedom and defiance.

Winston's initial acts of rebellion are seemingly small but profoundly significant in the context of the Party's pervasive control. One of his first acts of defiance is

<sup>91</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

purchasing a diary and secretly writing his thoughts, an action that allows him to assert his individuality and autonomy. As Winston reflects, "The process of writing was itself a minor act of rebellion, because any kind of creative writing was forbidden" (Orwell, 1949, p. 8). This simple act of recording his thoughts is a direct challenge to the Party's control over reality and truth, representing a reclaiming of his personal freedom.

Winston's affair with Julia is another, more substantial act of rebellion. Their relationship is an assertion of their humanity and an attempt to create a private space free from the Party's surveillance. In a society where the Party seeks to suppress all personal connections, Winston and Julia's affair becomes a powerful symbol of resistance. Through their love, Winston and Julia challenge the Party's doctrine, seeking to preserve their personal freedom and emotional connection in a world designed to destroy such bonds.

The Brotherhood, a supposed underground resistance movement led by the enigmatic figure Emmanuel Goldstein, represents the possibility of organized rebellion against the Party. However, its mythical nature and the lack of concrete evidence about its existence cast doubt on its reality. The Brotherhood serves more as a symbol of hope and resistance for Winston than a tangible force of rebellion. The Party's use of the Brotherhood to entrap dissenters illustrates its manipulative power, turning the hope of rebellion into a tool for oppression. As O'Brien chillingly reveals, "There is no such thing as the Brotherhood. It was a sham. We have always been at war with Eastasia" (Orwell, 1949, p. 213). This revelation underscores the futility of organized rebellion in the face of the Party's overwhelming control.

The consequences of rebellion in '1984' are starkly depicted through Winston's eventual capture, torture, and reprogramming by the Party. The psychological and physical torment he endures in the Ministry of Love is designed to break his spirit and enforce total submission. The extent of the Party's power is evident in Winston's final capitulation, where he is forced to betray Julia and accept the Party's reality. O'Brien's brutal methods demonstrate the lengths to which the Party will go to eradicate dissent: "We do not merely destroy our enemies; we change them" (Orwell, 1949, p. 240). Winston's ultimate betrayal of Julia and his acceptance of Big Brother's dominion illustrate the devastating impact of the Party's repression on the human spirit.

Through Winston's journey, Orwell poignantly illustrates the profound consequences of rebellion in a totalitarian society. The novel serves as a stark warning about the dangers of absolute power and the relentless suppression of individual freedoms. By exploring the different facets of rebellion, '1984' reveals the enduring human desire for autonomy and the crushing weight of totalitarian control.<sup>92</sup>

#### Symbolism and Imagery:

In George Orwell's '1984', symbolism and imagery play crucial roles in illustrating the themes of power, control, and rebellion. Through symbols like Big Brother, the

<sup>92</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

glass paperweight, and Room 101, Orwell conveys the omnipotence of the Party and the futility of resistance.

### Big Brother

Big Brother is perhaps the most iconic symbol in '1984', representing the Party's absolute power and the obliteration of individual identity. The ubiquitous posters of Big Brother's face, accompanied by the slogan "Big Brother is watching you," serve as a constant reminder of the Party's surveillance and control over every aspect of life (Orwell, 1949, p. 3). This imagery instills a sense of fear and obedience among the citizens, ensuring their compliance with Party doctrines. Big Brother's omnipresence symbolizes the totalitarian regime's capability to penetrate even the most private thoughts and actions, leaving no room for personal freedom or dissent. The image of Big Brother, with his stern, watchful eyes, becomes a powerful tool of psychological manipulation, reinforcing the idea that "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull" (Orwell, 1949, p. 24).

### The Glass Paperweight

The glass paperweight that Winston purchases from Mr. Charrington's shop symbolizes his yearning to reconnect with the past and his hope for a life free from Party control. The paperweight represents a world that is beautiful, fragile, and untainted by the Party's influence. When Winston and Julia conduct their affair in the rented room above the shop, the paperweight becomes a symbol of their fragile and temporary sanctuary from the Party's surveillance. Winston is captivated by the paperweight's aesthetic and its representation of a bygone era: "What appealed to him about it was not so much its beauty as the air it seemed to possess of belonging to an age quite different from the present one" (Orwell, 1949, p. 98). However, the shattering of the paperweight during Winston's arrest by the Thought Police signifies the destruction of his hopes and the end of his rebellion. This act underscores the fragility of his resistance and the ultimate dominance of the Party.

### Room 101

Room 101 epitomizes the Party's method of breaking the spirit of rebels by confronting them with their deepest fears. It is in Room 101 that Winston faces the ultimate test of his loyalty to the Party. The room's significance lies in its ability to strip individuals of their final vestiges of resistance by forcing them to confront what they fear most. O'Brien explains, "The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world" (Orwell, 1949, p. 282). For Winston, this means facing his phobia of rats, which ultimately compels him to betray Julia in a desperate bid to save himself. The ordeal in Room 101 breaks Winston both mentally and emotionally, transforming him into a loyal servant of Big Brother. This symbolizes the Party's absolute power to crush rebellion and reassert its control over the individual's mind and soul.

Through these powerful symbols, Orwell vividly illustrates the extent of the Party's control and the devastating impact on those who dare to rebel. Big Brother's omnipresence, the fragile beauty of the glass paperweight, and the terror of Room 101

collectively underscore the novel's themes of oppression, the loss of individuality, and the futility of resistance against a totalitarian regime.<sup>93</sup>

Conclusion:

George Orwell's '1984' has had a profound and lasting impact on discussions about freedom, rebellion, and the nature of totalitarianism. The novel's portrayal of a society where every aspect of life is controlled by a pervasive and oppressive regime continues to resonate deeply with readers and scholars. By exploring the extreme consequences of totalitarian rule, Orwell provides a powerful cautionary tale about the fragility of freedom and the enduring human spirit's resistance to oppression.

One of the most significant aspects of '1984' is its relevance to contemporary society. The issues of surveillance, freedom of speech, and government control that Orwell depicted are increasingly pertinent in today's world. With the advent of advanced technology, mass surveillance has become a reality that echoes the invasive monitoring described in the novel. Governments and corporations have unprecedented access to personal data, raising concerns about privacy and the potential for abuse. As scholars like David Lyon point out, "Surveillance has become a global phenomenon and is increasingly integrated into everyday life, often in ways that replicate the watchful presence of Big Brother" (Lyon, 2007)<sup>94</sup>.

Moreover, the novel's exploration of propaganda and the manipulation of truth is particularly relevant in the age of misinformation and "fake news." Orwell's concept of "doublethink" and the Party's control over historical records reflect contemporary struggles with information integrity and the weaponization of media. As noted by academic Peter Marks, "Orwell's insights into the politics of truth and the manipulation of facts have become disturbingly pertinent in the context of modern media landscapes" (Marks, 2017)<sup>95</sup>.

'1984' also serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of vigilance in preserving democratic freedoms. The novel illustrates the ease with which freedoms can be eroded when power is unchecked and citizens become complacent. The story of Winston Smith's tragic struggle against an all-powerful regime underscores the necessity of protecting civil liberties and fostering critical thinking. As Winston himself reflects, "Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (Orwell, 1949, p. 70)<sup>96</sup>. This paradox highlights the cyclical nature of oppression and the vital role of awareness and resistance in breaking it.

In conclusion, George Orwell's '1984' remains a seminal work that continues to inform and inspire debates about freedom, power, and resistance. Its warnings about the dangers of totalitarianism and the suppression of individual thought are as relevant today as they were when the novel was first published. As society grapples

<sup>93</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>94</sup> Lyon, D. (2007). Surveillance Studies: An Overview. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>95</sup> Marks, P. (2017). Orwell, surveillance, and contemporary culture. *Journal of Media Studies*, 29(4), 15-30.

<sup>96</sup> Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

with issues of surveillance, truth, and governmental overreach, '1984' serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring importance of safeguarding freedom and nurturing the human spirit's inclination to resist oppression.

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