

St. andrews school for girls literary essay topic dystopian

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Topic: Dystopian fiction allows for us to understand reality and the need to challenge injustices. To what extent is this true in the novels 1984 by George Orwell and Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury?

Both 1984 and Fahrenheit 451 reflect a dystopian future where information is tightly controlled and the populace seems to care little for the fact that they are being lied to and manipulated into working for the ambitions of their government.

Both governments in the story have taken control of the media, and thus the population and both characters are a part of agencies that help keep the government in control of the people. The novels explain how when a large number of people become complicit within the system they are ruled over it results in a society of followers who are not capable of thinking for themselves and can even take away a person's humanity in some cases.

The way in which the government in 1984 maintains control over its citizens is through a combination of manipulation and fear. As well as the ever-present threat of discovery by the Thought Police, which Winston illustrates in the beginning of the novel, who are able to observe everyone all the time and see into their minds. In addition, there is the way in which the Party turns families against each other, with children denouncing their guardians to the police for the most negligible wrongdoings. The Party's attack on families does not solely aim to separate guardians from children, but moreover spouse from spouse, because it chastises sex itself, making individuals think it is only a functional necessity instead of a physical act of joy and love. Lastly, the most vital aspect perhaps, highlighted through

Winston's work within the Ministry of Truth, the crucial way in which the government keeps control through its iron-grip of what happened in the past.

When looking at the quote: " And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. " Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, " controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. " Reality control," they called it: in Newspeak, " doublethink.""

This highlights how the Party ensured complicity through their control of the " truth" of what happened in the past by constantly shifting historical realities and the various " unending series of victories over your own memory." It is this that enables the Party to change allegiance during the war without anyone realising, and immediately to have forever been opposed to the opposite side. The title that is given to this operation, " Reality Control," indicates how through this strategy the Party is able to literally control reality and people's discernment of it, which is the foremost viable strategy of keeping control over its masses.

In Fahrenheit 451 the government gained and maintained control by giving people the illusion of free thought while simultaneously indoctrinating the population to think in a manner that suited the government. The government believed that people when left to their own devices would become out of

control, whereby said government would be unable to direct the thought processes of the masses. Thus they began a procedure of introducing total conformity which was enforced brutally. In their greed and arrogance for power the government further ensured complicity through the elimination, over time, of literature and media which could be deemed offensive or containing messages which were not profitable. The government was aware that people would choose the path of least resistance as opposed to facing punitive discipline. Therefore, they maintained control over the population through the removal of individual thought and playing on people's fears.

Both Winston Smith and Guy Montag desire to break free from their respective systems and thus rebel. However, it is clear from the start that Winston Smith and Guy Montag have completely different personalities, jobs, social networks, and thus potential resources available to them in their liberating action.

Winston Smith can be seen as pitiful and longs to liberate himself, however is unable to do so. Occasionally he is represented in this manner and lacking in confidence, lending itself to feelings of sympathy by the reader. One such example is the scene following Winston's torture when he notices his reflection: " a bowed, grey-coloured, skeleton-like thing was coming towards him. Its actual appearance was frightening...The creature's face seemed to be protruded, because of its bent carriage. A forlorn, jailbird's face with a nobby forehead running back into a bald scalp, a crooked nose, and battered- looking cheekbones above which his eyes were fierce and watchful."

It is clear that although Winston wishes to change the system, the chances of him succeeding in doing so are near impossible. Even being a member of the Outer Party does not facilitate him to achieve success in his resistance, as he lacks the necessary resources. Were he perhaps a member of the Inner Party, his likelihood of success would greatly increase. One can argue that Winston is cognizant of the indestructible power of the system and thus its infallibility. Winston's habit of expecting negative outcomes is shown on numerous occasions: " Folly, folly his heart kept saying. Conscious, gratuitous, suicidal folly." Or similarly: " The Thought Police would get him just the same." His internal belief that he cannot win, results in his own destruction.

Moreover, he is not sensible enough to organise any acts of rebellion. His inability to manage practicalities forces him to depend on Julia and later O'Brien which highlight his gullible and all too trusting nature. His intellectual ability leads him to ponder the how's and whys pertaining to the system, however this does not result in success. He thinks theoretically, but in order to further his cause it is necessary for him to make practical arrangements, which he fails to do. Winston's error in putting his hopes outside of his control lead to his life continuing to be driven by the constant worry of being caught.

In comparison, Montag's personality seems to allude to a potential success as well as he has many more resources at his disposal. As can be seen during a conversation with his wife where he says: " I'm going to do something.... I don't even know what yet, but I'm going to do something

big.” Although it may not yet be conscious the grounds for his acts of rebellion to come are clearly laid out. Montag’s wilfulness and stubbornness are demonstrated throughout the novel, such as his refusal to give up after being stung by the Mechanical Hound, “Faber’s would be the place he might refuel his fast-draining belief in his own ability to survive,” thus although injured, he continues in his quest to find a solution and follow his goals. Similarly he uses his position of authority to his benefit, “I’m a fireman. I can burn you.” This position gives him access to necessary information and resources which he uses to further his revolt. Thus, both Winston and Montag are endangering the lives of those around them and use violence, however only Montag has the resources in order to enable him do so effectively.

Another aspect is, the relationships they form with people around them which have contradictory impacts on their lives. Winston finds himself isolated in his strife as he does not have any trustworthy allies apart from Julia who does not believe in the rebellion. In direct contrast to Montag, ultimately Winston’s relationships lead to his downfall. Montag meets Clarisse who represents true reality and a perspective on an alternate way of life, and her death results in Montag feeling compelled to fulfil her message. Moreover, he has other people who help him in his quest with Faber facilitating his action, and Granger and other members of the group assisting him in finding liberation. Thus although both characters revolt against the various oppressive systems prevalent in their lives, the scope of their rebellions differ considerably.

Winston is watched throughout his revolt and what first appears to be his liberation is merely a part of the systematic process leading to his failure. In fact his rebellion begins by writing a diary which he views as concrete evidence of the falsification of facts by the Inner Party: "It was enough to blow the party to atoms if in some way it could have been published to the world and its significance made known" His naivety is clearly highlighted here through the use of this fallacy as he believes the system can be overthrown by a single piece of contradictory paper. Thus the scope of his rebellion is hardly impressive. No matter how illegal his writing of the diary and extra-marital affairs really does little to affect the well-established system in place, even if the Thought Police were not on the lookout. Ultimately he suffers the same fate as the rest of Oceania as unknowingly he becomes a function of a process he is never allowed to understand or control. His diary which begins as a means to document his protests, ends up as a vocalisation of adoration for Big Brother. Thus, he is crushed by a system which controls and watches his every step, while he dreams secretly about the fall of the establishment.

At the start, the scale of Montag's rebellion is in many ways very similar to that of Winston's. He begins to think for himself and conceal books, however these offences will still be forgiven if he makes amends. Later on, however, Montag eventually makes an open declaration of war against the government by killing Beatty. Through clever use of resources available to him and his natural abilities he escapes the Mechanical Hound, joins a legion of exiled rebels, memorises books and continues to plan the building of the mirror

factory. Henceforth he begins as a loyal supporter of the system but ultimately ends up as a member of the intellectually elite who are to build the future for mankind, his metamorphoses is complete.

Therefore, different approaches are taken by the two governments in order to ensure complicity and keep control over its citizens. In Fahrenheit 451 this occurs through the removal of information in its entirety in comparison to 1984 where the government rewrites history itself. Both methods, however, result in people remaining complicit within their various oppressive systems and enabling the government to dictate the thoughts of the masses and what they believe to be reality and fact. Thus, when looking at Winston and Montag it is evident that although the individual himself may be able to escape from the tyranny of an oppressive government, the power of the individual it is not enough to change the system in its entirety.