

# How concept of freedom is integral to a novel (1984) book review sample

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## 1984 - Freedom

In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of literature's most potent and well-known dystopian futures is realized. The Party, a dictatorship that controls every aspect of the world called Oceania, keeps its people in line through the use of surveillance, strict rules about society and behavior, and huge gaps in class and income. Big Brother, the so-called leader of the Party, is always watching - as a result, people are less inclined to rebel or step out of line. Sexuality is repressed, as is religion and free thought. In the midst of all this, Winston Smith wishes to rebel against Big Brother, and does so with the help of his lover, Julia. The freedom to love and be left alone by the government is important to this novel - the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is populated by characters who constantly have to weigh themselves or examine themselves against the rule of The Party, which shows the desire for freedom against a society that forbids it.

The effects of totalitarianism on an individual is shown the most through the eyes of the main character, Winston Smith. Working for the Outer Party, he works for Minitrue, the Ministry of Truth, in charge of rewriting newspaper articles from the past in order to fit into the manufactured news and stories The Party provides the people. This is done to keep the people further in line - people are lied to in order to believe that this oppression is being done for their own good; this speaks to the treatment the middle-class receives from a government that wants to show their goodness (Resch, 1997). As a result, Smith is made complicit in his own reinvention of history and identity - by virtue of his job, he has to lie to himself and to others. He knows the truth of

history, since he sees the articles before he has to change them. However, in changing them, he reforms his own history and the history of others (Sanderson, 2010). This is one of the effects of totalitarianism on an individual - it makes one think that the regime has been there the whole time, and is your friend (Pittcock, 1997).

Despite this oppression and revisionism, Winston is an individual. He constantly strives to fight back against his unmaking, trying to strike out as a person whenever he can. By having so much trouble standing out on his own against The Party, the reader can see just how difficult it is to get out from under their thumb. Instead of remaining docile and thankful for Big Brother's many gifts, Winston just wants to strike out on his own and demand his life back. Winston often reflects on his position in long monologues throughout the book, demonstrating that he remembers the past even if his job makes sure that no one else does (Resch, 1997). By attempting to understand the position he is in, and why The Party would take such steps to control people so absolutely, the reader gets to understand just how confusing and desperate totalitarianism can make a person (Pittcock, 1997).

In order to fight back against The Party, Winston does many acts of vandalism and rebellion over the course of the book. This shows the willingness of the individual to fight back against a system that suppresses him. He writes "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" in his own diary, expressing in real terms just how much he hates the government - a powerful image that shows the start of protest (Varricchio, 1999). He engages in a love affair that is not allowed, and he also joins the Brotherhood, an anti-Party movement.

These efforts are taken both to free others from the oppression of Big Brother, but to prove that the government does not own him. However, Winston's own depression and paranoia is what does him in; while he wants to succeed in defeating Big Brother, he is constantly afraid or certain that he will be caught and killed. This is the totalitarian regime's effect on him; even those who really want to change the world are not fully convinced they can do it (Pittcock, 1997). This is how The Party maintains control - by taking away an individuals' ability to feel like they have the power to change their surroundings (Varricchio, 1999).

The totalitarian regime also has dramatic effects on the ability of an individual to love. The dystopian future of The Party is seen through the eyes of Winston Smith and his lover, the seemingly-prim Julia. Julia is at once attracted to and repulsed by Winston, attempting to find personhood in a very male-dominated state that controls her sexuality (Tirohl, 2010). She is a member of the Junior Anti-Sex League who begins a secret affair with Winston Smith, something that is expressly forbidden by Big Brother.

Julia's role in Nineteen Eighty-Four is that of a romantic foil for Winston; her virginal nature makes her a delicate flower that must be protected. As Julia is a member of the Junior Anti-Sex League, she is thought of as unapproachable and out of Winston's league. Winston, in fact, fantasizes about forcing her to have sex with him, and killing her, due to her apparent fanaticism about how she does about her duties. The Junior Anti-Sex League, a group enforcing chastity and abstinence in the individuals of the world of Oceania, is just a cover for Julia to express her own sense of sexuality,

becoming promiscuous and sleeping with many men, including Party members, as a way of rebelling in her own right against the prudish Party (Tirohl, 2010).

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, even Winston, under the philosophy of the regime, believes that Julia " had become a physical necessity, something that he not only wanted but felt he had the right to" (Orwell, Chapter 2). It is not just Julia that has this problem; Winston's mother has interesting parallels in terms of their relationship and meaning to the main character. Winston's mother experiences quick changes after the loss of Winston's father - his mother " seemed to have become completely spiritless. It was evident even to Winston that she was waiting for something that she knew must happen (Orwell, Book 2, Chapter 7)". The ability of a totalitarian regime to destroy one's sense of purpose and love in order to control them is a pervasive theme in the book, and one which Winston's mother in particular sums up.

Despite the rebellious nature of Winston and Julia, their rebellion is in fact just what the party wanted. As a totalitarian regime, they need an outside enemy to galvanize the people and unite them in order to do whatever The Party wants them to do - in this case, it becomes clear that Winston is a pawn in their game. It is very interesting that Winston shares the same name as Prime Minister Winston Churchill - the world of The Party can be seen to be a treatise on post-war Britain and its effects on the individual (Pittcock, 1997). O'Brien, the leader of the resistance, draws him in with the promise of making his efforts mean more by joining with the Brotherhood in a group. However, this all turns out to be a trick to draw out resistance members, and

Winston is arrested. One wonders what O'Brien's motivation is to fake a rebellion to feed the Party's control - when Winston states that " They've got you too!" O'Brien states that 'They got me a long time ago" (Orwell, Book 3, Chapter 1). It seems as though he once felt like Winston, but soon abandoned his own desire to resist because of pressures Big Brother placed on him.

The effects of The Party on the individual does not extend merely to the main characters of Nineteen Eighty-Four - the minor characters, in playing their part, have already been crushed and are doing the bidding of those who wish to strip away their freedoms. At one point in the book, Winston remembers a trio of former Party members, named Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford, who were the original rebellion leaders before he knew what Big Brother even was. They were widely reported in the media to have confessed to conspiring against The Party with foreign nations, but he saw them after their confessions with broken noses - this was the first clue that The Party had coerced them into confessing. Later, Winston sees evidence in his newspaper articles that proves to him that their confessions were false. This is the first bit of evidence for Winston that The Party is extremely cruel and capricious.

In conclusion, Nineteen Eighty-Four shows the specific and many ways in which totalitarianism can fight against or crush freedom. Winston Smith is tasked with erasing the history that does not fall in line with what people are meant to believe. Nonetheless, he makes often-feeble attempts to stand apart and make himself known as an individual. However, those attempts

are often small, fleeting, useless or fatalistic - Winston seems to always believe his mission will end in failure. His love for Julia, a strong character in her own right, is what helps him to "stay human." However, O'Brien, a shadow of himself, manages to break down Winston into that same pawn of the government, giving up Julia and destroying his love and humanity to boot. These aspects of the book are what make the tale of a dystopian future so interesting: not just seeing how the world works, but how it affects the people. The fight for freedom through the importance of individualism is eventually crushed by a pervasive system that is allowed by the people to do whatever it wants for its own sake. Without rebellion, and without love, we are nothing - Winston, Julia, O'Brien and the other characters in this book show us that.

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