

Living Under the Eye: A Review of George Orwell's 1984

Introduction

First published in 1949, George Orwell's *1984* remains one of the most widely discussed novels of the 20th century. Set in a future totalitarian society, the story presents a world where freedom of thought is a crime, language is controlled by the state, and surveillance shapes daily life. Orwell's novel wasn't meant to predict the future with precision, but to warn readers of what unchecked power could turn into. Many of the ideas explored in the book still feel eerily relevant, which is why this novel continues to appear on school reading lists, academic syllabi, and banned books lists around the globe. Orwell didn't just write about political systems; he showed what it feels like to live inside one that has swallowed truth whole.

Summary

The story follows Winston Smith, a middle-aged worker living in the nation of Oceania. His job at the Ministry of Truth involves rewriting historical records to fit the changing narrative of the ruling party, known as the Party. Every citizen is expected to follow its ideology without question. The face of Big Brother watches from every corner, and even facial expressions are monitored. Privacy doesn't exist, and history is rewritten so frequently that the past becomes impossible to trace.

Winston becomes increasingly disillusioned with the world around him. He starts to keep a journal - a quiet act of rebellion - and eventually begins a secret relationship with Julia, a young woman who shares his desire to resist. Their bond grows in the shadows, but the reach of the Party proves impossible to escape. What follows is a descent into fear, betrayal, and psychological breakdown as Winston is caught, interrogated, and forced to face the terrifying power of the system that surrounds him.

Analysis

Orwell's writing in *1984* is stripped down and direct, which gives the novel a certain cold clarity. There's no flourish for the sake of beauty, no romanticizing the world he builds. Everything feels sharp, efficient, and bleak. That suits the story. The world Winston lives in is built on control: control of facts, emotions, even language. Orwell's invention of Newspeak, a reduced form of English designed to eliminate unapproved ideas, shows how language can become a tool of oppression. Words are not only used to express thoughts; they can shape and limit what thoughts are possible. This concept stays with the reader long after the final page.

The pacing of the book follows a slow but steady rhythm. At times it feels deliberately heavy, almost suffocating, but that seems intentional. Orwell wants the reader to feel the weight of Winston's world. Daily life is repetitive and emotionally drained. Even love becomes a dangerous act, not a source of hope. The plot doesn't aim for surprise. It follows a path that feels inevitable, and that's part of the horror. The lack of any real sense of escape reflects the system Orwell set out to expose.

Winston is not a traditional hero. He doubts, he fails, he fears. His rebellion is not grand but rather personal and fragile. Julia, his companion, adds another layer. She's practical, determined, but never painted as an ideal figure. The strength of their connection doesn't lie in their romance; it lies in their shared refusal to surrender entirely to the system. Still, Orwell doesn't give them a way out. There's no last-minute victory, no secret resistance strong enough to fight back. That choice makes the story hit even harder.

Critique

Some readers might find the book's lack of emotional variation difficult. The tone remains heavy throughout, which can create a sense of emotional numbness over time. Moments of human warmth are rare and short-lived. The characters don't evolve in the traditional sense. Winston's journey doesn't lead to growth; it leads to defeat. That's part of the message, but it also makes the reading experience mentally draining.

Orwell's world-building relies more on concepts than on visual description. While that works for many, those who prefer richly detailed settings might find the scenes in 1984 a little sparse. Most locations are functional and vague - hallways, canteens, offices - designed more to serve the Party's structure than to give readers a sense of physical space. The strength of the novel lies more in what it makes readers think about than in what it allows them to picture.

The book can also feel dated in some ways. The technology imagined in 1949 no longer matches the world we know. Telescreens and printed records have been replaced by digital surveillance and algorithmic tracking. Still, the ideas hold up. The focus on psychological manipulation, forced conformity, and loss of individual thought remains disturbingly relevant.

Conclusion

1984 isn't an easy read. It's not meant to be. Orwell crafted a novel that strips away comfort and leaves readers face-to-face with systems that erase identity, alter truth, and break the human spirit. The story doesn't offer hope, but it offers something else: clarity. It names the tools of authoritarianism. It shows what it feels like to live under constant control.

And it forces readers to consider how much of that still echoes in modern life.

This book is best suited for readers who are open to discomfort. It doesn't deliver entertainment. It delivers impact. For those interested in politics, psychology, or language, 1984 offers a kind of insight that's rare in fiction. It's a book worth reading, not because it feels good, but because it leaves you thinking in a way that few others do.