

*1984* Literary Essay: Winston Smith, Hero or Not?

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Most probably, *1984* is the most famous work by George Orwell. Written as a warning to show where communism is leading the world, it remains one of the most interesting and relevant books of our time. The protagonist of the story Winston Smith is a complex and contradictive person just as the book itself. One of the main questions with Smith is whether he can be considered a hero regarding the author's definition. George Orwell defines heroism taking into consideration ordinary people who are doing whatever they can to change social systems that do not respect human decency, even with the knowledge that they cannot possibly succeed. The main character of *1984*, Winston Smith, is a hero in the term of the Orwell's definition.

Many of Winston's choices and actions go against the party and its rules. His revolt starts from small acts of rebellion such as collecting things from the past. The party does not allow people to keep anything from the past. However, Winston constantly seeks to know the truth. He often visits the antique shop that is like a museum of the past and buys paperweight there. This paperweight is his connection to the past. Later, when he visits a pub when he is the proles' part of the city, he sees an old man who may remember how the life was before the party came. Winston immediately tries to talk to the man and asks him questions about the past. Winston hates the party, and he finds even this small act of rebellion enjoyable.

Moreover, Winston goes against the party when he starts the journal. This is the beginning of the novel. Winston knows that he is not allowed to keep things such as diaries and journals, because any form of self-expression is forbidden. He knows that if somebody finds that a diary he will die. Nevertheless, he writes his thoughts down. Winston describes the film he watched before, his hate for a girl that works at the Ministry of Truth and about the Two Minutes Hate when he realized that he hated Big Brother. At the same time, he realizes that he has written

“Down Big Brother” in the journal. Starting a diary itself is an act of rebellion, and now, he clearly goes against the Party and Big Brother. When Winston wrote that he committed thoughtcrime, which is the most terrible and unpardonable crime. He knows that the police will come after him sooner or later. Moreover, Winston does not simply keep the diary to himself; Winston dedicates it to the future or the past:

“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, 1992, p. 32)

This dedication shows that he wants a big rebellion, the one that will eventually overthrow the party. The diary is Winston’s first act of rebellion against the party. The desire to keep the journal illustrates that he wants to be free from the party’s control. Winston realizes that from that moment on he is no longer a typical citizen of Oceania. The journal changed his life, and he is now a criminal, whose life is doomed because he will be punished for his actions: “Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed forever . . . Sooner or later they were bound to get you” (Orwell, 1992, p. 22). Therefore, Winston consciously opposes the party realizing that his chances of survival are very low.

Furthermore, another act of rebellion Winston commits when he starts a love affair with Julia. The party prohibited emotions and feelings. Moreover, sex was obligatory only to create new party members, and people were not supposed to pleasure from it. Winston sees the sex as another act against the party. He had sex with an old prostitute in the proles’ district. However, Winston desperately needs an enjoyable sex, which for him is an act of rebellion and another form of forbidden individualism. As Winston himself puts it: “And what he wanted, more even than to

be loved, was to break down that wall of virtue, even if it were only once in his whole life. The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thoughtcrime” (Orwell, 1992, p. 76)

That is why he starts a relationship with Julia. He desperately needs to break the rules. Moreover, when he finds out that Julia had sex with many party members, he is not jealous, because he sees it as another act of rebellion. Starting an affair with Julia Winston again goes against the party rules. He enjoys the time he spends with the woman, having pleasure from sex and breaking the rules.

Probably the biggest act of rebellion against the party happens when O’Brien approaches Winston and invites him to join the Brotherhood, a group of rebels against the Party and Big Brother, and Winston agrees. When Winston gets O’Brien’s address, and he suspects that O’Brien will invite him to join the group, he understands that this path will lead him to death. Nevertheless, he is thrilled and excited to get the address. When Winston receives the Goldstein’s manifesto, he is excited about it too. Of course, that is a lie and O’Brien works for the party, but Winston does not know that. He decides to join the rebellious movement and read the Goldstein’s manifesto, another act against the party. Moreover, Winston understands that he cannot win, and the party will catch, torture, and kill him. Furthermore, when even the party’s agents catch him, and he is imprisoned in the Ministry of Love, it takes him a long time to break up. He goes through the physical and psychological torture. When O’Brien admits that he works for the party, he also says that Winston already knew it, and Winston agrees with him. This means that Winston knew that he will die because of his rebellion and that the chances that O’Brien was a spy were high; however, Winston hated the party so much that he desperately wanted to believe everything O’Brien told him. Furthermore, when O’Brien torture him Winston

agrees to everything O'Brien wants him to believe. However, Smith has a plan he wants the party to believe that they break him and when they kill him he will die still hating the party and Big Brother. Therefore, he will die as a winner. When he starts his fight against the party Winston knows that it will lead him to death; however, he starts it and continues until the end.

All things considered together, it can be assumed that by Orwell's definition Winston Smith is a hero. He is an ordinary man who fights against the social and political system. He starts from small acts of rebellions such as buying forbidden items. Then, he buys a journal and commits a serious thoughtcrime. Moreover, later, he starts a relationship with a woman and enjoys having sex with her, what also goes against the rules of the party. Finally, he becomes a real rebel when he joins the Brotherhood, the legendary group of rebels against the Party and Big Brother. From that moment, Winston starts a journal and he knows that he will die when the police catch him, and he is sure that the day will come soon. However, despite this, he continues to break the rules. Even though his fight is not a successful one, he tries as hard as he can knowing that he cannot possibly succeed.