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A Fatalist Visionary

Visionaries walk among us—people who have insight, people who see something wrong in society, or something that could be done differently, better. Nevertheless, many times, the people who can see something wrong where no one else does are often riddled with self-doubt and cynical attitudes, believing they can do nothing to change the course of the society in which they live. In George Orwell's novel *1984*, protagonist Winston Smith is part of a minority that feels his government is amiss in how it operates, that there is more to life than mindless obedience.

On the one hand, Winston is individualistic, refusing to conform to what Big Brother preaches, finding joy and passion in his rebellion. The first thing Winston does to rebel against the Party is to buy a journal from the proletarian market, and even more risky, write in its old pages, "Down with Big Brother" (20) multiple times. He does not mean to write those words, it happens as he recalls that day's Two Minutes Hate where he ironically realizes that he hates Big Brother and not the enemies the Party invents to unify the people against some other enemy instead of their government. The journal is his first step in rebellion, his first step to individualistic thinking that separates him from the drones that follow Big Brother mindlessly. Later, Winston takes joy in his sexual escapades with the dark-haired girl Julia and is excited that she has had sex with many other men because it means that other Party members are dissatisfied with Big Brother and the Party as well. Over the years, Big Brother has turned sex into an act used only for procreation of new Party members, not for pleasure or for love. When Winston partakes in his rendezvous, it is at first more out of a desire to rebel and fulfill his dream of a

satisfying sexual experience than love. Though later he claims to love Julia, it is hard to tell if their love can be real since their personalities and approaches to rebelling against Big Brother are so incredibly different. The main thing that holds the two together is that both are rebelling in some way. To contrast Winston's disparate thinking from the rest of the population, "it appeared that there had even been demonstrations to thank Big Brother for raising the chocolate ration to twenty grammes a week. And only yesterday, he reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be *reduced* to twenty grammes a week" (61). While others in the complex are ecstatic about the supposed increased rations, Winston seems to remember that it was actually a reduction from the day before. He has begun to more openly, albeit only to himself, question Big Brother's words if they seem incongruent with his past and memories, he is not so quick to accept everything he is told as absolute fact. This development in thinking is monumental since he, like everyone else, has been conditioned his whole life to forget what he knows and trust what Big Brother says. Clearly, everyone else around him still follows that rule while he has begun to think differently. Winston, though not aggressively pursuing rebellion and widespread change, has begun a personal journey to change himself, which is the first step to accomplishing anything in this governmentally mind controlled society.

However, Winston's fatalistic attitude prevents him from doing anything truly positive for the long term and does not believe that his rebellion can ever be successful. For example, "he could not help feeling a twinge of panic. It was absurd, since the writing of those particular words was not more dangerous than the initial act of opening the diary [...] whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same" (20-21). Though he takes the step to rebel and develop his anti-Big Brother thoughts, from the moment he writes in the journal he worries that he will be caught.

The whole time that Winston's relationship with Julia continues, he knows that Big Brother will find out and therefore takes actions that could be done without. For instance, he rents an apartment in the proletarian district for his affair with Julia. Had he chosen to not rent the apartment and instead continue arranging discreet rendezvous, he would have reduced the opportunities the Party had to catch him. However, he knows that he will be found out; he knows the power of the Party and Big Brother so he takes no protective measures over his life or Julia's. Winston is paranoid that Big Brother knows about his thoughtcrimes, and after the incident with the chocolate and all of his subsequent questioning of the regime, he notices a woman watching him. He found himself wondering, "why was she watching him? Why did she keep following him about? [...] Quite likely her real object had been to listen to him and make sure whether he was shouting loudly enough [at Two Minutes Hate]" (64-65). Even though Winston has begun to think differently, he is held in line by the power and pervasive control of Big Brother. He does not do anything radical out of fear of the Party. Though his thoughts might have begun to be liberated, Winston is far from it. Instead of taking personal responsibility to take action to change society, he looks at the proletarians and believes that "if there was hope, it lay in the proles!" (229). Winston transfers the responsibility to another class and away from himself. Winston is a weak man, allowing his pessimism and paranoia to prevent him from taking any real definitive action against what he knows is wrong. He expects and hopes for another class, another people, whom he does not even talk to or attempt to educate, to take the valiant steps to save them all instead of embracing the power he holds from his simple realization that there is more to life than blind obedience.

In truth, Winston is Orwell's depiction of humans acting in modern society. He can see what is going on around him; he notices that something is amiss, that his government is taking

away more than it should. However, he feels he can do nothing, he is already doomed, that one individual cannot make a difference and so, like Winston, he always looks to others in hopes that they will bring revolution. Orwell tells a cautionary tale of what happens when one takes this route—compliance, acceptance and even love for what we know is wrong. Through his dark picture of a bleak future and his anticlimactic ending, Orwell hopes to push his readers into assertive action against any encroachments governments make upon civil liberties, because without them, we lose our humanity and fall prey to the oppressive regimes we try to guard against.