

Winston's Redemption in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four

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Abstract

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a political satire against the totalitarian government by the famous British writer George Orwell, one of the "Anti-Utopia Trilogy." It depicts the destruction of Winston's personality under the violence of war, lies, government surveillance, and physical restraint, and satirizes the dark and fearful totalitarian government. This paper will briefly elaborate on the previous studies on the novel. Then, the paper will explore Winston's attempts at various forms of redemption in a society, resisting totalitarian oppression and ideological control. The far-reaching social and political significance of his redemptive acts will also be discussed.

Keywords

Orwell; Nineteen Eighty-Four; Redemption; Winston.

1. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the outbreak of an unexpected epidemic swept the entire world into a vortex afflicted by the virus. The medical system was challenged as never before, economic development was brought to a standstill, and people were caught in an infinite cycle of panic. The masks not only isolated the virus but also subjected people's hearts to unprecedented stress and gloom. In this depressing environment, redemption was a hot topic. Those who are depressed hope for spiritual redemption, so that they can escape from the strange circle of self-hatred, denial, and longing for death; those who are poor and desperate hope for economic redemption, so that food and warmth will no longer be a daily problem; those who are displaced hope for the redemption of home, so that they will no longer be displaced and have a shelter to protect themselves from the wind and rain, and experience the warmth of having a family and home. Minorities, people with a sexual orientation that is contrary to the world, no longer want to be looked at and scorned by others and want to be respected as heterosexuals, which is gender redemption. Redemption, which can take many forms, can be spiritual, material, intellectual, emotional, social, national... so to speak, because of redemption, a person, a society, a nation, a world can have the possibility of sustainable development and can continue to burst forth with vitality.

The theme of redemption is also implicitly and profoundly presented in George Orwell's masterpiece, the political satire Nineteen Eighty-Four. Translated into 65 languages and sold more than 50 million copies worldwide, the novel is one of the world's trilogies of anti-utopian novels and has been called "the greatest moral force in English literature." In the novel, the main character Winston is mind-controlled and deprived of his personality in Oceania, and is a puppet under the totalitarian rule of Big Brother. But as he awakens to his independence, he strives for redemption in thought, love, and affection. Although Winston's rebellion fails, his struggle for self-redemption is indelible. Orwell suffered from the disasters and hardships brought by World War II, and also received a huge blow from politics. Like Winston, Orwell's political path failed. But their efforts to fight the war were timeless. Orwell also turned his political setbacks into a sword with pen and paper, giving birth to several political literary

masterpieces, giving warning to future generations, gaining victory on the literary road, and achieving self-redemption.

Concerning Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there are many studies on anti-utopia and totalitarian oppression, however, fewer studies have been conducted on the value of personality and individualized destiny. In this paper, based on overview of the theme of redemption, the author will analyze Winston's resistance to totalitarian oppression and thought control, while redeeming himself and at the same time probing the behavior of others. Through the exploration of Winston in the textual world, as a microcosm of our real life, we can bring useful inspiration and profound reflections to ourselves, awaken people in the contemporary repressive society, and help them to seek how to properly realize self-redemption and establish a correct concept of redemption.

2. Overview of the Studies on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Since its publication, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been the focus of literary criticism, and its literary value has been praised by academic circles around the world. Foreign scholars have long analyzed it from the perspectives of character analysis, thematic analysis, totalitarianism, dystopia and evil utopia. In the critical circle, many critics, based on Orwell's innuendo and criticism of Soviet socialism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, assume that Orwell must support capitalism. Orwell has been labeled as an "anti-Communist writer" in Europe and the United States, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has thus been used as a weapon to spread liberal ideology. During this period, many critics pointed out that the real significance of the novel lies in its warning effect, but the situation that criticism was limited to its ideas and themes and biased did not improve comprehensively until the end of the Cold War. In the past 20 years, with the change of the world situation, studies on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are no longer limited to the analysis of its political thoughts and themes, but more from the perspectives of literature, feminism, the negative effects of science and technology, post-colonialism and other aspects.

E. Pankowski (2018, p. 4) states that the goal of his study is "to explore the question of whether there is a correlation between major world events and the public reception of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*." His study examines the critical, popular, and scholarly reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* since its publication 1949. Reviewers' and commentators' references common ideas, themes, and settings from the novel will be tracked using narrative theory concepts in order to map out an understanding of how the interpretations of the novel changed over time relative to major events in both American and world history. The article dissects Orwell's life and his work *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

H. B. Mohammad, M. Golnar, and M. A. Sayed (2017) consider Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a satirical work which moves against Wells' utopian toward the reflection of a distorted technological society. Undoubtedly, satire is the best literary mode for dystopic depiction of the world specifically the one portrayed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston Smith, the central character of this novel, is lower from his society in terms of intelligence and power of action. Therefore, he is put under rigid controls and brainwashing. And at last, he awfully rejects his love in favor the principles of the Party.

I. Stephen (2019) points out in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* clarifies that Orwell's goal is to attack the powerful and totalitarian state, not just the Soviet Union. The setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is post-war Britain, but this must not be read as a criticism of the Labour government, but rather as a warning that totalitarianism can emerge even in societies founded on Western liberal values. No one would warn against the unlikely.

On the theme of redemption, C. Bernard (2020) emphasizes in the field of consumption how the pursuit of leisure as redemption is painful enables consumers to reconnect with their own bodies, provides them with a moment to escape from other saturated selves, and shows how

the concept of self-escape is important for envisioning the possibilities in the painful experience of marketing. R. David (2022) explores the idea or representation of themes of redemption in contemporary popular cinema. Redemption is divided into redemption which is external to man but affects man's existence and environment and redemption which is internal to man. Redemption is widely seen as a journey from brokenness to wholeness, from imprisonment to release, or from some form of slavery to freedom.

In his book, J. Rodden, (2017) elaborates on Orwell's life experiences and the personalities shaped by his characters, and explored the commonality between Winston Smith and his concept of redemption in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by combining Orwell's personal experiences. However, as M. Kenneth (1991) argues, "Current events would appear, on the surface at least, to place George Orwell's reputation as a prophet in some jeopardy and to destine *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for the top shelf an interesting but irrelevant Cold War period piece" (p. 157).

3. Winston's Redemption in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

3.1. Redemption of Winston

The original basis of the word "Redemption" comes from the Christian text "Original Sin and Redemption" in the Bible. Redemption has also been a popular theme in literature in recent years. For example, *The Shawshank Redemption*, a film adaptation of Stephen King's *A Different Season*, is one of the most outstanding film and television works on the theme of redemption in the 21st century; *Moby Dick*, written by the famous 19th-century American novelist Herman Melville, also presents the theme of redemption; *The Scarlet Letter*, written by the famous American romantic novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne, also profoundly describes the redemption of American society. The distinguished English novelist Ian McEwan, the English poet John Milton, and the English poet T. S. Eliot all have profoundly explored the theme of redemption in their poetic novels.

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reveals the "existence" of the human self in such an environment with its striking images of totalitarian rule. The novel adopts the perspective of Oceania - Oceania's four departments, the ministry of truth, love, peace, and prosperity under the authoritarian rule of the form of "big brother" constantly, all the time to infiltrate every cell of human social life, devouring everything free, the good of humanity. Science and technology have become the dominant means of power, and humanity and even human beings themselves have fallen into a bottomless abyss. In such a country, the human self does not exist, is not allowed to exist, and only exists as a body at the mercy of Big Brother. Winston, the hero of the novel, lives in this unreal country of Oceania. There are ubiquitous video screens, hidden microphones, and helicopters on patrol at all times, monitoring every move and controlling every word. "The screen can simultaneously receive and transmit any sound made by Winston, just a little higher than a very low whisper," and "Every sound you make will be overheard, except in the dark, when your every move will be observed." It is in this desperate situation without any freedom that Winston awakens his self-consciousness, begins to doubt the rule of Big Brother, and begins to seek spiritual redemption.

Redemption, in general, refers to self-redemption. For example, in *The Shawshank Redemption*, there is a famous line "Some birds are't meant to be caged, that's all. Their feathers are just too bright." The redemption mainly refers to "self-redemption", which implies the meaning of saving oneself. In comparison with the concept of redemption and rescue, redemption contains rescue, not only rescue but also the connotation of atonement, which has a richer meaning. Winston's actions are redemption rather than rescue, precisely because he is not innocent. The novel repeatedly implies that Winston has committed many faults before, for example, his mother died for him, he betrayed his original wife, and cheated on his lover, and eventually turned his back on the heroine, Julia, under the persecution of Big Brother, etc. Therefore,

Winston has to not only save his corrupted mind and body but also atone for before the foolishness and numbness for atonement.

3.1.1. The Spiritual Redemption of Winston

The first part of the novel is a detailed description of Winston's life, from which we can capture what the so-called "freedom" is. Not surprisingly, the ubiquitous slogan "freedom is slavery." People in Oceania were not allowed to be free. They were not even allowed to write diaries. They live under a pervasive, centralized control. "On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran" (Orwell, 2013, p. 487). As for the hero, he can only hide in a depression on the side of the screen, and only by doing so can he keep his diary outside the screen's visual range. But surveillance is everywhere. "You had to live - did live, from habit that became instinct - in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized" (Orwell, 2013, p. 487). If found, he could face the death penalty or at least 25 years in a labor camp. Living in such a society of extreme freedom and restriction, people have gradually lost themselves, lost their memories. In addition to pervasive surveillance at work, people are also restricted in what they can do in their free time. The party often carried out compulsive group activities through the screen. People were forced to attend what was called a two-minute "hate session." At the meeting, people would shout at the face of a so-called "enemy of the people". In addition, people must get up at 7:15 every day and take part in exercises three minutes later. However, this seemingly meaningful activity did not bring health to people. "Thus, at one moment Winston's hatred was not turned against Goldstein at all, but, on the contrary, against Big Brother, the Party, and the Thought Police" (Orwell, 2013, p. 491). On the contrary, the hero Winston coughs every day after getting up, and his veins are swollen due to the exertion of coughing. The varicose ulcers are getting worse. What does all this mean? Totalitarian demand devoid of individual "humanity", erases individual "existence." "Thought restraint" is Big Brother's other weapon to consolidate his rule. In Oceania, heterodox thoughts were condemned to death or a painful process of brainwashing. Ideas for people, not their thought but the party's ideology, the party decides everything. So people live in it, with no thoughts of their own in their heads, just a body that carries the ideas of the party. Big Brother invades people's minds mainly in special ways. Let's start with Winston's work. His job at the Ministry of Truth was to tamper with the paper trail. According to the instructions, he changes a few files every day and sends those to be destroyed into the accessible "memory hole." Rewriting history is a covert operation. In a nutshell, his job was to "simply substitute one line of nonsense for another": to constantly fabricate information consistent with the party's thinking, feeding it into the brain via electronic screens to correct the information they received and ensure that people's "thinking" was consistent with the party. In a word, everything is lost in the mist, the past is erased, the act of erasure is forgotten, and the lie becomes the truth.

Language is a tool of thought, and to eliminate thought crime, it is necessary to eliminate the old language and create a new one, to control the human mind through total control of language. Therefore, the "experts" in the party organization compiled the "New Language Dictionary" to gradually and systematically eliminate the vocabulary, making New Language the only language in the world whose vocabulary was decreasing year by year. By adopting the new language and forgetting the old one, heretical ideas were fundamentally eliminated and unorthodox ideas could not be expressed at all. Only in this way can the Party easily manage people "who are often thoughtless and blind followers". These people very easy to serve as tools of totalitarian rule gradually make the loss of humanity. It is conceivable that a person cannot be called human in the true sense of the word if he has no ideas. This in turn echoes what Sartre refers to as "mental existence". Thought can be said to be the pillar of one's spirit, and when

thought ceases to exist, the spirit naturally perishes with it. By this reasoning, the human ego naturally ceases to exist.

As an awakened and rebellious person, Winston is not confused by the subtle mind control but redeems himself in a desperate situation. He wrote down "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" (Orwell, 2013, p. 496). Winston's fate is very difficult, not only suffering from the traumatic memories of his early childhood but also living under the oppression of totalitarianism in his adulthood externalization. But Winston is resilient, and Winston does not lose himself completely. "He wrote: Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious" (Orwell, 2013, p. 513). Winston repaired his traumatic memories, shaped himself, redeemed himself, and defined the meaning of his existence by keeping a diary, an intimate narrative of self-talk, to repair his trauma and recover his deprived spiritual world.

The self-redemption of Winston's spirit is the desire for freedom, the need for nature, the pursuit of truth, and the questioning of totalitarianism.

3.1.2. The Emotional Redemption of Winston

Nineteen Eighty-Four is a subtle but profound discussion of emotions, especially love. The protagonist, Winston, is a small man in the middle of the "Ocean State" society. He is lonely, and his relatives have been "disappearing" one by one since he was a child. Although he has a wife, but only to complete the "obligation", and finally also parted ways. His career was not good, and his job as a peripheral member to correct the "wrong" statements week after week. But he was barely paid for his work, and even had to sleep "naked" to save cloth. His work is a tool of totalitarian rule, "Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street and building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And that process is continuing day by day and minute by minute" (Orwell, 2013, p. 546).

The embarrassment of life and spiritual emptiness made Winston fall into an emotional circle. He can be selfish and indifferent, can have no compassion to take away the last little piece of chocolate from his seriously ill sister, but also can not change the face of the broken hand on the roadside kicked into the street ditch. But in the soft depths of his heart, Winston is very resistant to the "loss of self", the recurring nightmare is actually a reflection of his inner struggle. He begins to redeem himself in some extreme ways, resisting in his own way: "Consorting with prostitutes was forbidden, of course, but it was one of those rules that you could occasionally nerve yourself to break" (Orwell, 2013, p. 511), he has sex with prostitutes and approaches old proletarians in an attempt to find the difference between the past and the present. Winston's experience of resisting and redeeming himself is, in fact, a process of searching for himself, seeking the approval of others, and resisting his fate. He believed that "There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad" (Orwell, 2013, p. 571).

Winston and Julia's love is destined to be a tragedy in the context of the totalitarian oppression of the times. Orwell's book constructs an anti-sexual era, where the party severed the emotions and desires related to sex from people, confined them in a cage or even eliminated them. In this prohibition of the existence of personal emotions in such an era, there is no existence of love, not to mention the marriage based on love. Here, all unions of men and women were for the party and the state, not about individual spirit, but about the so-called political act, reproducing for the society, adding new laborers and enslaved people.

The young, beautiful and energetic Julia inexplicably and deadly falls in love with him and becomes his lover. When he sees the words "I love you" written on Julia's big note to Winston, it is the beginning of hope in Winston's gray life, the end of his lonely thoughts, the beginning

of crazy love, and the switch to his self-redemption. Winston not only obtained physical pleasure from Julia, but also completed the redemption of his soul. Winston lost all his family members in childhood and grew up alone. He longed for the warmth of family in his heart, but this was almost impossible to achieve under the dictatorship. Winston feels guilty for his mother and sister, believing that he indirectly killed them, and is haunted by nightmares. Winston's relationship with Julia is initially based on desire, but once he establishes his masculine dignity in Julia, he sets out to realize his family dream. He rents an attic cottage in old Charrington and tries to live an ordinary life with Julia as a couple who have been married for more than ten years. This inexplicable love is undoubtedly a heartfelt redemption of his barren world of love and emotion.

At the same time, in Winston's emotional world, the desire and pursuit of maternal love never stopped. Family affection is the most basic emotion to maintain human society, love and attachment to parents is our instinct since birth. The warmth and love between parents and children should be the purest and warmest emotion in the world. It not only describes the government's bloody repressive authoritarian rule, but also depicts its distortion and destruction of human nature. In the novel, it is through Winston's pursuit of family love and truth, as well as his reflection on history and reality, that the author expresses his thoughts on human nature and human dignity. Family affection is the most basic emotion to maintain human society, love and attachment to parents is our instinct since birth. The warmth and love between parents and children should be the purest and warmest emotion in the world. But when Winston was ten, his parents disappeared in the first purge, first his father, then his mother and his sister after a period of starvation. And as Winston fell in love with Julia, his previously half-suppressed love for his mother gradually became clear. The awakening of affection in his heart deepened his awareness of the harsh reality. It was also a kind of redemption for Winston.

3.2. Revelation of Winston's Redemption

The implications of Winston's redemption extend far beyond the power of the text. It also has enlightenment significance for individuals and society. From Winston's small role to the wider realm, the idea of redemption to explore meaning.

The political significance of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as of Orwell's earlier political satire, *Animal Farm*, is to depict with riveting clarity the logic of totalitarianism-not its practice or its prospects, but the carrying of its inner logic to extremes that are sometimes almost comic, though darkly so. (Posner, 1999, p. 200).

Born in India under British colonial rule, Orwell had heard and witnessed the deep suffering of the colonized since he was a child. He was forced to exile in France and worked at the bottom of society, engaging in anti-fascist propaganda during World War II. Orwell lived a troubled, itinerant life, plagued by illness. But with keen insight, a clear-headed, forward-thinking mind and a sharp writing style, he surveys and records those dark days to alert the world. This is because Orwell experienced the suffering brought about by the French war, so he turned his anger into words, with a sharp and biting touch to complete *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Winston in the novel is a trivial little person, ordinary ordinary, into the crowd will disappear in a moment. But in such a society devoid of humanity, his insistence on love and beauty, his desire for truth, freedom and human dignity make this figure shine and full of the light of humanity. It's full of humanity.

Gomez characterized the mood of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as "Near despair about the future of man" (Gomez, 2013, p. 38). The implication of authorial intention lies in the interpretation of Orwell himself and whether he breathes his own worldviews to life through protagonist Winston Smith. And at the end of the novel, Winston is finally destroyed by the autocratic machine, he believes that "2+2=5", he loves "Big Brother", he turns his back on his love. Perhaps,

Orwell is using such a tragic ending to warn future generations that under the evil authoritarian power, although human nature will shine its inherent brilliance, in order to protect the light of human nature needs to be very strong and brave. As though the overall tone of the novel is oppressive and dreary, the love between Winston and Julia is like a beautiful flower in this dark and barren wasteland, weak but unyielding. "If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are ALONE? You are outside history, you are non-existent" (Orwell, 2013, p. 593). Winston is Orwell, but also like all the awakening in the war of resistance individuals, although the power of the individual is weak, but a single spark can start a prairie fire. Break out of the abyss with redemption, still hope in despair, do not give up, do not yield to fate.

Winston, who was chosen to be the protagonist of the novel from the beginning, is a rebellious awakener in his image and quality. O'Brien's described him as "YOU have not controlled it. That is what has brought you here. You are here because you have failed in humility, in self-discipline," Winston is special, "You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity. You preferred to be a lunatic, a minority of one", "You believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right. You also believe that the nature of reality is self-evident" (Orwell, 2013, p. 585).

George Orwell's 1984 is the expression of a mood, and it is a warning. The mood it expresses is that of near despair about the future of man, and the warning is that unless the course of history changes, men all over the world will lose their qualities, will become soulless automatons, and will not even be aware of it. (Gomez, 2013, p. 38).

Thus, personal awakening alone is useless in the face of a powerful enemy. As in the ending, Winston gives in to totalitarianism and "Big Brother," and his revolt ends in failure. So everyone can't just sit back and wallow. Should know how to save oneself, like the most beautiful flower in the wilderness.

One critic called the atmosphere of the novel desperate, "a work of courage, but weighed down by its breathless atmosphere of despair." However, this view is limited to the personal fate of the hero, and they do not pay attention to Winston's personal redemption, the development of his rebellious thoughts from over-emphasis on reason to the combination of reason and intuition, and the sublimation process of his understanding of proletarian class. Although Winston and Julia's personal resistance within the 'party' had failed, the proles' revolutionary potential was as strong and immortal as their vitality; Winston's historical pursuit of the proles was unsuccessful, but the way in which it was pursued was partially dissolved by the limitations of his own cultural identity. Whether the true face of history survived among the proles remains a mystery, but at least they retained normal humanity and eternal vitality. Society needs people like Winston to wake up and fight to make history right and bright. Only in this way will truth recover, "Sooner or later it would happen, strength would change into" (Orwell, 2013, p. 572).

4. Conclusion

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, with its Winston tragedy, shows the struggle of the individual against the dictatorship. The pity and fear of the tragic outcome also provides guarantees for the future of democracy, freedom and humanity. It also shows the necessity of redemption. Redemption can permeate everyone's life from all aspects and dimensions, saving a fallen soul and freeing the most sincere desires of the soul. It shows the greatness of human beings - the pursuit of eternal infinity and the unyielding spirit of resisting fate with the finitude of life. In this novel, love, thought and freedom are all strangled. Winston Smith is a microcosm, the embodiment of every ordinary and small human being. Everyone has the ability to save, but not necessarily have the courage to rescue. There may be many awakening people like Winston who eventually repeat the fate of Winston's final failure, but only if you try hard, whether the

result is successful or not, as long as you set out with the confidence that you want to save, this is a kind of redemption. Although the novel is fictional, it also reminds us that we must know how to save ourselves, do not bow to the power, be a person with self-thought, become a real person, so as to realize the real value of self-existence.

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