

**THE FREE CHOICE FOR ABSURD REBELLION IN *NINETEEN
EIGHTY FOUR***

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Abstract:

Underneath the heavy political cover, which *Nineteen Eighty Four* was written to criticize, there is an image of a man living in an absurd world. Winston, the protagonist, finds himself in a situation he did not wish to be in and with no way to get out. He lives in an absurd world that defies his common sense every day, so he decides freely to challenge the situation by rebelling against it. Even though he knows that his decision will take him to his doom, Winston chooses freely to do what is forbidden to justify his existence and individuality as a human. While the whole novel has a political atmosphere, the philosophy behind Winston's actions is on the same stance as that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. These two philosophers have identified the individual's need for feeling his/her existence against the absurdity of his/her situation in life. Thus, this paper aims to examine the novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* in the light of selected concept from Sartre's philosophy (freedom of choice and bad faith). And two concepts from Camus' philosophy (absurdity and absurd rebellion).

Key words: *Nineteen Eighty Four*, existentialism, freedom of choice, bad faith, absurdity, absurd rebellion.

1.Introduction

Nineteen Eighty Four is mainly considered as a dystopian novel written by George Orwell to criticize totalitarian regimes, mainly the Soviet Union's under Stalin's rule. Through years of literary criticism, critics saw that the novel captures not only a specific regime, but also the basis and essence of every totalitarian regime and ideological dictatorship.

Aside from politics, however, looking at the protagonist, Winston, we can see that he finds himself in an absurd situation that he cannot make sense of. He decides to defy the most powerful force that controls the country even though he knows that this will lead to his death without achieving anything.

And he makes this decision by relying on his subjective judgment freely and commits himself to it.

Hence, by taking a closer look at Watson's situation, his choices and concerns, one can find underneath his obvious political revolt a similar concerns and ideas that have been dealt with by existential philosophers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. This paper, therefore, aims to examine the novel under the light of existentialism, focusing namely on the major concepts of the freedom of choice and bad faith from Sartre's philosophy and absurdity and absurd rebellion from Camus'. The paper first explains each concept and then analyzes the novel in light of these concepts.

2.The philosophical concepts of existentialism

2.1. Freedom of Choice

Sartre was interested in the subjective experience and conscious as opposed to the objective thing (Sahakian, 1968. p. 353). For Sartre, man is free to choose his nature, because there are no objective values, and there is nothing objective to justify man's choices except man himself. Therefore, man makes himself and makes his values. And this process of making is never finished until death (ibid, 1968. p. 355). Man's freedom of choice involves other people too, since he is not the only person in the world. Man is part of a huge social web of human relationships, and 'He needs other persons for the sake of his own self-realization' (Sahakian, 1968. p. 356). Therefore, this freedom brings with it 'social responsibilities' (ibid, 1968. p. 355) and ethical commitment.

Since man is free, then the responsibility and commitment of his choices cannot be denied. And when man does deny his responsibility, then he is living in 'Bad faith'. Among the existentialists, Sartre emphasizes on freedom the most "I am indeed an existent who *learns* his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalises itself as freedom, ... I am condemned to be free" (qtd. in Blenkinsop, 2004. p. 162). For Sartre, whatever we do is an act that demonstrates our freedom, a freedom that we cannot evade, that is why he reaches the conclusion that we are 'condemned to be free'. Sartre considered freedom as an essential part of human existence. Nevertheless, he also considered the other factors that may affect this freedom, he called these factors 'facticity'.

However, acknowledging this 'facticity', for Sartre, does not make the individual less free. Race, class, history and heredity may affect the individual's choices in a certain way but they do not deprive him/her from his/her freedom to choose. The situation that the individual finds

himself/herself in is something given, and he/she must acknowledge it. But it is only a starting point and it is up to the individual how to deal with it. According to Kaufmann:

I [man] must acknowledge the “facticity” found in existence. I cannot change the fact that this tree in front of me or that I cannot walk through it. But even here my freedom still prevails. I freely create the *meaning* of this tree as an object to climb or as a source of limber or as a thing to be preserved ... In creating these meanings, I create the world in which I live. (Kaufmann et. al. 1994. p. 454-455)

According to Sartre, since there is no God, it follows that if God does not exist, that man cannot find any higher source of values that he can turn to guide him in this world. Since most values come from religion, the absence of God from this world means the absence of divine values ‘Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse’ (Sartre, 2001. p. 32). This means that man is left alone in this world without guidance or sense of direction, he is ‘...forlorn. For he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself’ (ibid, 2001. p. 32). Hence, Sartre says that man is free because man can do whatever he chooses, and it is only he that can decide what is the appropriate thing to do because ‘one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words ... man is free, man is freedom’ (ibid, 2001. p. 32), so the absence of God results in man’s freedom. In every situation that man faces, he has the freedom to choose, and the only ground for his choices is his subjectivity, there is no escape from taking choices and the liberty of taking choices is simply unavoidable. Sartre goes to say that ‘...man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does’ (ibid, 2001. p. 32).

This brings us to the principle of responsibility, which is inseparable from the principle of freedom in existentialism. Sartre says that ‘...the very heart and center of existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment’ (Sartre, 2001. p. 40), meaning that the idea of freedom in existentialism does not mean chaos. The idea of responsibility and commitment is so important to Sartre that he says ‘There is no difference between free being—being as self committal, as existence choosing its essence—and absolute being’ (ibid, 2001. p. 40).

As mentioned before, that since there is no God or a higher being to determine man’s essence; man is free to define his own nature according to his own concept of himself, by choosing the actions that he thinks suitable to his chosen nature and situation. But as long as it is man who determines what

and how to act according to his subjective judgment, that means he is the only responsible being for his choices, Sartre says 'In any case, and whichever he may choose, it is impossible for him...not to take complete responsibility' (Sartre, 2001. p. 41). Man is responsible of creating his own values, and therefore he has to be committed to what he chooses. Instead of being responsible towards God, man is responsible towards himself and towards humanity in general, as Sartre puts it 'he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being' (Sartre, 2001. p. 194) because 'What happens to me happens through me...Moreover everything which happens to me is *mine*...for what happens to a man through other men and through himself can be only human' (ibid, 2001. p. 194).

The idea of freedom in Sartre's philosophy is inseparable from responsibility. Sartre's emphasis on freedom is an emphasis on responsibility at the same time. As Sartre sees it, freedom and responsibility are two faces for the same coin, we can not take one side only and ignore the other. Since there are no objective or absolute values, the individual has to contemplate on which one to choose for his/her own project. By examining the possibilities and then deciding upon a certain choice, the individual has preferred one possibility over the other. When an individual decides upon a certain action, he/she weighs and considers different possible actions and then chooses one of them to perform. The individual decides upon this particular action because he/she thinks it is the best action suited for the situation and for him/her. So with every action taken, the values of the individual are asserted. Sartre says "... in this world where I engage my self, my acts causes values to spring up like partridges" (qtd. in Blenkinsop, 2004. p. 187).

2.2. Bad Faith

Bad faith means 'loose subjectivity, freedom and responsibility for decision. Bad faith means treating oneself as an object, rather than as a person' (Sahakian, 1968. p. 355), by living as member of the group one tries to avoid his/her responsibility by accepting a certain social value as an objective value.

Therefore man tries to escape his responsibility by deceiving himself that there are deterministic forces that compel him, and he assumes a hypocrite attitude towards himself and others to avoid making free choices. This self deception is what Sartre calls 'bad faith' and he simply defines it as 'a lie to one's self' (Sartre, 2001. p. 207). Sartre explains 'Since we have defined the situation of man as one of free choice, without excuse and without help, any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passion, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a self-deceiver' (Sartre, 2001. p.

42). If the individual tries to find excuses for his/her actions or beliefs in anything outside himself/herself, then he/she is trying to deceive himself/herself. Therefore such things as history, heredity, race, class, etc, according to Sartre, are not 'causes' or explanations to the actions or the values that one take, but they are excuses. By relying on the explanations and causes that these excuses provide, the individual tries to escape his/her responsibility and submits to his/her freedom to be determined by these excuses. But, according to Sartre, these deterministic excuses do not provide a legitimate enough excuse for evading our freedom. And any value is subjective and it is up to the individual to choose and hence make it a value, therefore, what he/she chooses is cannot be an excuse or a justification. However, people do rely on pre determined excuses to justify their actions and to evade their responsibility and to have an excuse for not practicing their freedom, and therefore, according to Sartre, they adapt 'bad faith'. A simple example would be when someone takes a certain belief, whether religious, political or a certain social value, just because everyone else does, he/she convinces himself/herself that it is better to believe in this or that idea because it is a good thing, since everyone else think so, in other words he believes in it out of conformity, not out of his/her individual judgment.

2.3. Absurdity

Camus was set to examine this absurdity and meaningless of life, he defines the absurd as 'confrontation of this irrational [world] and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart' (Camus, 1981. p. 26). For Camus, the human life is absurd because man tries to understand the world but fails because of his limited reason (MacDonald, 2000. p. 148). The human individual tries to understand the world, how does it work, his/her place in it, and why is he/she situated there. But the world around the individual does not provide any answers, it is dumb and unsympathetic. Camus says:

This heart within me I can feel,' Camus writes, 'and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define it and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers... Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. (Camus, 1981. p. 24)

The individual is sure that the world around him/her exists. He/she is also sure that he/she exists too. But beyond this there is nothing to know, explain or understand. When the individual can find no explanation or reason for neither for his/her existence nor for the world around him/her, the idea of

absurdity begins to rise. In this absurd world, the individual can see no direction or hope and there is no clear path to follow. Everything is confused and confusing, 'all would be saved,' Camus says 'if one could only say just once: 'This is clear'' (Camus, 1981. p. 31).

More important, the existence of death makes the world even more absurd. It is death that renders life absurd because it puts an end to all human efforts. Death puts an end to the individual's life too soon, and while one is alive, he/she has to suffer all the way to his/her inevitable end. Donald Lazere says that there are several factors that render life absurd, "the brevity of life and inevitability of death, the indifference of the natural universe to human existence and of men to one another's existence, and the absence of a God and an afterlife that would give this life a transcendent purpose or universal system of moral values" (qtd. in Bowker, 2008. p. 79). The individual has to go through all this and then instead of being rewarded for his/her struggle by a hope of a better life (the afterlife), he/she gets nothing but death. Camus could accept no justification for the fact that death will render all human efforts to nothing (Oaklander, 1992. p. 384). Hence, Camus approaches human existence through the questioning of the meaning of life and death and whether the world can be intelligible (ibid, 1992. p. 385), and whether one can gain happiness from a meaningless world (ibid, 1992. p. 386).

Camus tries to capture this absurdity by using his mythical hero in *The Myth of Sisyphus* as an example. Camus begins his argument with a question; if life is absurd, why bear it to the end? Why not commit suicide and end one's life, since it is going to end by death anyway? In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Sisyphus is condemned to push a big rock up to the top of a mountain only to see it rolls back to the bottom, and Sisyphus has to repeat the whole thing all over again forever. However, Sisyphus does not commit suicide nor does he gives up pushing the rock and resigns his task. Moyler says that 'the central message is that the true revolt against absurdity of existence consist, not in suicide, but in continuing to live' (Moyler, 2001. p. 25). And Germaine Brée concludes that "Sisyphus is now a moral hero, a stoic, convinced that, in spite of the gods, man's dignity requires him to "struggle toward the summit" (qtd. In Bowker, 2008. p. 90). For Camus, life and suffering come as a package, we cannot have life without suffering and if this makes life absurd, then we must face the absurd instead of running away from it. As Sisyphus revolts against the absurdity of life by continuing to live, his revolt leads us to the second idea which Camus examines in his writings, namely the concept of revolt or rebellion.

2.4. Absurd Revolt

Drawing a lesson from Sisyphus, Sleasman says that 'Sisyphus met life on its own terms and found meaning for life within the limits of his existence' (Sleasman, 2007. p. 46). When facing the absurdity of life, the individual should not despair and retreat but he/she should 'seeks to encounter life on its own terms and respond in an ethical and productive manner without falling into a perpetual state of despair' (ibid, 2007. p. 16), therefore, rebellion is directly linked to the absurdity of life. Camus says in an interview:

Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful. An analysis of the idea of revolt can help discover ideas capable of restoring a relative meaning to existence, although a meaning that will always be in danger. (Sleasman, 2007. p. 16)

For Camus, to create meaning for the individual's existence and life, one has to rebel. Camus says 'I rebel – therefore we exist' (Camus, 2000. p. 28). If there is no meaning and no hope, the rebellion will create hope and it will give the individual something to live for; Camus says "Within the limits of the human condition, what greater hope than the hope that allows an escape from that condition?" (Sleasman, 2007. p. 45).

According to Camus, what he calls the 'absurd rebel' is a person who rejects his/her situation in order to affirm a life which has a meaning, the absurd rebel is 'A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself'(Camus, 2000. p. 19). The rebel revolt because he/she does not resign to live as an insignificant individual (as the part of the 'herd' or the 'they' as Nietzsche and Heidegger call it), the individual rebels because he/she want to find a meaning for his/her life beyond what others are contented with. According to Camus:

Revolt is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it. (Bowker, 2008. p. 215)

The individual revolts because rebellion heightens the awareness of his/her existence. Revolt provides hope even though the individual knows that he/she can achieve nothing. Like Sisyphus, the absurd rebel revolts for

his/her own existence affirmation against his/her fate and the absurdity of life. Camus says that the reasons which absurd rebel revolts are:

The rejection of death, the desire for immortality and for clarity, are the mainsprings of all these extravagances, whether sublime or puerile... The rebel does not ask for life but for reasons for living. He rejects the consequences implied by death... To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity. (Camus, 2000. p. 72-73)

The absurd rebel is someone who is seeking a meaning, he/she knows that life has no meaning but this does not stop him/her from seeking it. The absurd rebel is 'seeking, without knowing it, a moral philosophy or a religion' (Camus, 2000. p. 73). In this context, 'religion' here can mean certain values that can give the individual certain meaning to life. Camus was an atheist and he shares Nietzsche's stand against religion.

It is the absence of an absolute value like religion that makes life absurd. And Camus insists on the absurdity of life and that life cannot be lived without suffering and death. But it is not the suffering, it is this unexplained suffering that makes the rebel revolt, Camus says that 'It is not the suffering of a child... but the fact that the suffering is not justified' (Camus, 2000. p. 73). Thus the rebel is an individual who is rebellious against everything that deprives him/her from his/her value of existence, his/her revolt is an absurd revolt for freedom, a revolt against death, the meaninglessness of life and even life itself, as Camus says 'man is nothing... if he does not obtain from history, willingly or by force, unanimous approval' (Camus, 2000. p. 216). And the absurd rebel is willing to continue rebelling till death to defend his authentic existence. Just like Sartre's idea of the values that springs up from the actions and choices that one makes, according to Camus, absurd rebellion: opened the way to a morality which, far from obeying abstract principles, discovers them only in the heat of battle and in the incessant movement of contradiction. Nothing justifies the assertion that these principles have existed eternally; it is of no use to declare that they will exist one day. But they do exist, in the very period in which we exist. (qtd. in Bowker, 2008. p. 292)

By rebelling against something, the individual creates values and morality. The individual rebels against what he/she decides is bad to achieve what is good. Since there are no absolute values in the world, the rebel knows that the values which he/she aspires for are not absolute either, and that their meaning depends on the individual's choice. And since nothing is absolute including the individual who chooses the values, it is enough to achieve these values as long as the individual exists. For the absurd rebel, the chosen values that are worth the revolt are existential values. He/she

identifies himself/herself with these values and they, in return, will be identified with him/her. Because the chosen values give meaning to the absurd rebel's life, he/she is committed to the chosen values and willing to fight till death to preserve them, as Camus explains 'As a last resort, he is willing to accept the final defeat, which is death, rather than be deprived of the last sacrament which he would call, for example, freedom' (Camus, 2000. p. 21).

But it is important to understand that the rebel does not revolt for revenge or to destroy the oppressor or to humiliate him. The rebel revolts because he/she wants to achieve what is better and not to be the oppressor himself/herself. Camus explains that the absurd rebel 'on principle, persistently refuses to be humiliated without asking that others should be' (Camus, 2000. p. 24). As the rebel rejects and revolt against his/her situation, at the same time, he/she refuses to let others suffer or to be submitted to the same situation, according to Sleasman 'The bonds of humanity served as a call to responsibility to take action on behalf of those who were suffering' (Sleasman, 2007. p. 180).

3. Analysis of the text

3.1. Freedom of Choice in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Orwell's novel depicts a dystopian future where there is a totalitarian party which governs and controls the state. The thorough watchful eye of the Party, represented by Big Brother, leaves no place for the individual to hide 'Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed—no escape. Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull' (Orwell, 1984. p. 38) and the only place the individual has is inside his own mind. The watchful eye of the Party demands full conformity in the public sphere and what goes inside the individual's own mind is the only place for the spark of freedom. This makes freedom a subjective matter and it is entirely up to the individual to choose working on it or rejects it for the sake of conforming with the majority of citizens.

When Winston looks for objective records he can find none, because the Party destroyed all records that do not fit with their plan. And when he tries to search for records, all that he can find is 'delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc [the Party] and estimate of what the Party wanted you to say' (Orwell, 1984. p. 55) and he has to depend on his individual knowledge to guide him through these forgeries. And 'When there were no external records that you could refer to, even the outline of your life lost its

sharpness' (Orwell, 1984. p. 43) Winston has no memory of the past, he has nothing good to remember about his childhood life either: 'He tried to squeeze out some childhood memory that should tell him whether London had always been quite like this ... But it was no use, he could not remember: nothing remained of his childhood except a series of bright-lit tableaux, occurring against no background and mostly unintelligible' (ibid, 1984. p. 15), this lack of childhood memory deprives Winston of a comparable situation; he does not have a memory of something better to compare with the present situation that he lives in. So he has no bases to judge whether the present situation is good or bad, compared to a previous situation.

Winston's choices have no objective grounds, so he wonders 'But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth' (Orwell, 1984. p. 46) if the knowledge that he has is completely subjective and comes only from his own consciousness, how can it compare to the knowledge of the Party and the majority of the citizens? And if he and what knowledge that he has will be gone and forgotten, then what is the significance of him and his knowledge? Winston has no correct answer for this except that he choose to believe in something that the others do not, and that in spite of his inevitable death, he is willing to commit himself to what he chose to believe in because for him it is the right thing to do.

The Party's demands represent the demands made by society on the individual to conform. They represent the conformation with cultural laws and social customs and habits. Society demands from each individual to abide by its rules and act like everyone else. And by doing so, the individual is supposed to ignore his own judgments or what he/she conceive as right and follow what the society tells him/her is right:

The Party told you to reject the evidence of your own eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command ... And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's center ... *Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.* (Orwell, 1984. p. 92-93)

But Winston derives his existence from what is obviously silly for him. He relies on his own 'silly' judgment and what he believes is true, even though the whole world tells him that is not so. Winston knows that his existence comes from following his own free choices, not someone else's, and that in order to exist authentically he has to defend his freedom of

choosing to live according to what he sees fit. It is 'the freedom to say two plus two make four'. And to say what one feels right for himself is in spite of what the Party or society tells him to do is rebellion against the demands of conformity, a rebellion to maintain one's freedom and be true to his own existence.

Like Sisyphus, when Winston recognizes that death is the inevitable end for him, he does not surrender to his fate: 'Now he had recognized himself as a dead man it became important to stay alive as long as possible' (Orwell, 1984. p. 39) Winston chooses to stay alive as long as possible even though he knows that death is near and that there is no way of cheating it. As absurd as his attempt to prolong his life in the face of death might seem, Winston chooses to do so because he recognizes his freedom is at stake if he does not.

Winston is left alone in a situation where there is no one to offer him any help. He does not have any objective reference to depend on and the Party's manipulated history of the country is not to be trusted. Moreover, he has no one else to ask or to share his views and opinions with, because there is no one else who can remember the past: 'The older generation had mostly been wiped out in the great purges of the fifties and sixties, and the few who had survived had long ago been terrified into complete intellectual surrender' (Orwell, 1984. p. 98). Whether by death or otherwise, the fact still remains that Winston is alienated from his society and his fellow men, he stands alone facing a situation which he found himself existed in without choosing to be there. He cannot depend on what the majority accept and he cannot follow the path that the others have chosen for him. All he knows is that he must make his own choices freely regarding the situation which he exists in and he has only himself to depend on.

For Winston, there is no definitive ground on which he stands upon to measure things. He has no proof of anything that can help him to make his decision, 'There was no evidence, only fleeting glimpses that might mean anything or nothing: ... It was all guesswork: very likely he had imagined everything' (Orwell, 1984. p. 29) Winston depends entirely on his own subjective judgment even though he knows that his subjective judgment might deceive him, nevertheless he prefers to follow his own individual judgment rather than follow what the majority of the people do. What the majority is doing does not give him comfort as his subjective judgment.

3.2. Bad Faith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Big Brother, the Party and the whole totalitarian situation represent and demand conformity. What Big Brother says to the people is what they are supposed to follow without thinking 'Nobody heard what Big Brother was

saying. It was merely a few words of encouragement, the sort of words that are uttered in the din of battle, not distinguishable individually but restoring confidence by the fact of being spoken' (Orwell, 1984. p. 27). What is being said by Big Brother restores confidence in the people not because it is wise or intelligent, on the contrary; what is being said is not necessary intelligible but nevertheless people follow it because it tells them what to do and it gives them confidence because they know that everyone is following these words. Thus it is a sign of conformity with others. It is easier for the citizens not to question what they hear and conform with other citizens just because everyone else is doing so.

The Party convinces the citizens that the lies that they repeat are truths. And that the only truth is what the Party tells them, even though the information and records are changed constantly, the citizens ignore what they used to know as soon as the Party gives them new information. Winston contemplates what the Party calls doublethink:

His mind slid away into labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy ... (Orwell, 1984. p. 46)

This is exactly what Sartre calls bad faith, a lie to one's self, to choose to believe in something even though it contradicts our own judgment just because everyone else believes in it too.

The Party imposes on the citizens new ways of conformity from time to time, one of these ways is Newspeak, which is a new language the Party designed for insuring the conformity and narrow the scope of the citizens. As one of Winston's friends explains:

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thought crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. ... every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. (Orwell, 1984. p. 64)

Here the Party manipulates the language too. The Party imposes the new language on the citizens and they have to accept it to be able to communicate. And since everyone has to speak the same language then they have to conform to the same rules and grammar. And by narrowing the language scope, the Party makes sure that the scope of thinking is also

narrowed. Therefore, conformity means a limited way of thinking, as he continues to explain “In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.” (Orwell, 1984. p. 65). Winston, therefore, by depending on his individual thinking and refusing to conform has a wider scope of thinking than the rest of the citizens, which makes him see things in a different way and hence not satisfied with what he sees. For Winston, a person who conforms with the Party’s methods and accepts the limited scope which the Party offers is ‘not a real human being but some kind of a dummy. It was not the man’s brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. The stuff that was coming out of him consisted of words, but it was not speech in the true sense: it was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quaking of a duck’ (Orwell, 1984.p. 66). This person has neither individuality nor even humanity, he is reduced to an animal, a duck. This is why Winston prefers to die choosing what he believes in and is willing to face the absurd situation of making no difference, but at the same time remains an individual human being, rather than living as just another member of the species. For Winston, only an animal can forget so fast what has just happened. When he looks on the events and the way the citizens swallow the lies that the Party feeds them he cannot help wondering:

It appeared that there had been even demonstrations to thank Big Brother for raising the chocolate ration to twenty grams a week. And only yesterday, he reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be *reduced* to twenty grams a week. Was it possible that they could swallow that, after only twenty-four hours? Yes, they swallowed it ... with the stupidity of an animal ... Was he, then, *alone* in the possession of a memory? (Orwell, 1984. p. 70)

And although he is not sure whether the citizens are right or he is, he chooses to go after what he thinks is right setting himself outside the circle of his own fellow citizens. Because confirming with others makes the individual just a member of ‘a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting—three hundred million people all with the same face’ (Orwell, 1984. p. 85) and Winston does not want to be like this, he does not want to have the same face, the same thought and ideas or the same life like everyone else. He wants to have his own individual face and his own life that can be called his own because it is different from everyone else’s life.

By acting individually and separating himself from the conformity which the Party demands of its citizens, Winston also knows that he is

risking his life and that the consequences that he will face will be no less than death:

In the vast majority of cases there was no trial, no report of the arrest. People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten. You were abolished, annihilated: *vapourized* was the word. (Orwell, 1984. p. 31)

More important than death, is that he will be 'vapourized' and his whole existence will be erased. Not only he will cease to exist when he will be caught but any record of his existence will be erased too, and there will be nothing to point out that he has ever existed.

For Winston, choosing to do what he believe is true is more important than death 'the frightening thing was that it might all be true. If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, it never happened—that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?' (Orwell, 1984. p. 46) because conforming with the others makes the individual a speck of dust among many, he becomes as good as dead as an individual. Only by choosing freely what he wants to do the individual stays alive, subjectively speaking, he becomes someone significant rather than insignificant citizen.

3.3. Absurdity in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The Party uses the latest technology to keep an eye on every citizen in the country. Winston knows that he and everyone else are being watched by the Party:

The tele-screen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard.... It was even conceivable that they [the Party] watched everybody all the time. (Orwell, 1984. p. 14-15)

And Winston, like every other citizen, knows this fact clearly, so there is no way that Winston would do anything without being found out by the Party and the matter of being found out is only a matter of time.

Winston's rebellion is completely absurd by any standards. He cannot bring the past or turn the situation to resemble something in the past. He has no hope for the future and nor he can bring any change to make it better 'He was alone. The past was dead, the future was unimaginable. What certainty had he that a single human creature now living was on his side? And what way of knowing that the dominion of the Party would not endure *for ever*?' (Orwell, 1984. p. 38), and he knows that no single human being will ever

stand by his side in what he is doing. He is completely alone in his rebellion and he is not sure that the domination of the Party will last long after he has gone. And if the Party will last forever and Winston cannot change anything alone what is the point of rebelling? He does not have the answer to this question either.

Not only the act of writing a diary is useless, it is also absurd because there is no hope that the diary will reach anyone since the Party will destroy it and burn it. All hope that the diary might survive is absurd. Winston knows how the Party destroys any documents or even the smallest pieces of paper to change historical records because he has worked with the Party: He wondered again for whom he was writing the diary. For the future, for the past—for an age that might be imaginary. And in front of him there lay not death but annihilation. The diary would be reduced to ashes and himself to vapour ... How could you make appeal to the future when not a trace of you, not even an anonymous word scribbled on a piece of paper, could physically survive? (Orwell, 1984. p. 39)

And then there is the matter of his own existence, if he is going to be 'evaporized' how can he appeal to anyone in the future if all records of his existence are erased? How can he make any appeal if he does not exist anymore? Yet Winston chooses to continue with his defiance against all these odds, he realizes the absurdity of his futile actions and continues with them, and he does not look for reasonable causes for his rebellion to justify it. Winston knows from the beginning that he is definitely going to be killed by the Party when he is caught, 'He was already dead, he reflected' (Orwell, 1984. p. 39) but still he chooses to continue with his acts and take the full responsibility of their consequences. Thus he does not escape the responsibility of his choices.

Winston realizes that his rebellion will change nothing and he realizes the absurdity of his acts against the immense power of the Party is like 'a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on human heritage' (Orwell, 1984. p. 39). Although he knows that no one will hear him, he still does it because it matters to him, more than anyone else, to say what he feels and to do what he thinks is right. His reasons for his rebellion are utterly subjective and meaningless, he does what he does because he chooses to do so, not because it will make any difference.

3.4. Revolt in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The conformity which the Party imposes on the citizens deprives them from their freedom, even the basic acts of individual freedom become acts of

servitude and public matter. The Party interferes even with the purposes of marriages and the sexual activities of the citizens to ensure loyalties:

The aim of the Party was not merely to prevent men and women from forming loyalties which it might not be able to control. Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. Not love so much as eroticism was the enemy, inside marriage as well as outside it. All marriages between Party members had to be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, and—though the principle was never clearly stated—permission was always refused if the couple concerned gave the impression of being physically attracted to one another. The only recognized purpose of marriage was to beget children for the service of the Party. (Orwell, 1984. p. 77).

Sexual activities are private matters for the individual but the Party manipulates these and the marriages and diverts them to the Party's service. The citizens become producers of children and future citizens who will serve the Party, their private lives have been converted to the sole purpose of serving the Party. This makes the citizens like animals again, chickens that produce eggs for the consumption of others or like machines that produces goods to be used by the Party. 'The Party was trying to kill the sex instinct, or if it could not be killed, then to distort it and dirty it.' (Orwell, 1984. p. 77).

By killing the sex instinct, the Party manages to suppress the basic instincts that keep an individual uncontrollable. 'The sexual act, successfully performed, was rebellion. Desire was thought crime' (Orwell, 1984. p. 80) The Party ensures that there are no unexpected causes for rebellion and if there are no causes then it will be easier for the citizens to conform. Conforming with the Party makes the individual loses any desire for an independent private life, and without private life there can be no individual feeling of uniqueness.

For Winston, he has to do these useless acts that he does; writing a diary, renting the room and making love with Julia. They represent for him acts of rebellion against the conformity of the Party 'Rebellion meant a look in the eyes, an inflection of the voice; at the most, an occasional whispered word' (Orwell, 1984. p. 81), these small acts are small individual differences that register a refusal or an accepted norm of the imposed order. And by performing these acts, however absurd they might be, Winston is assuring his individuality and his freedom to revolt and to do otherwise.

A person who does not act according to what the society demands might be called a rebel or a lunatic. He either does not want to conform with society's norms and rebel against them, or he does not think right and there is something wrong with his intellect that prevents him from seeing the benefits of following the norms of society. Either way those who do this consist of a

very small number compared to the majority that constitute society, 'Perhaps a lunatic was simply a minority of one. At one time it had been a sign of madness to believe that the earth goes around the sun: to-day, to believe that the past is unalterable. He might be *alone* in holding that belief, and if alone, then a lunatic. But the thought of being a lunatic did not greatly trouble him' (Orwell, 1984. p. 91). But Winston is not bothered by the labeling of being a lunatic or mad, he is completely willing to be called mad or crazy as long as he is doing what he sees to be right and what he chooses to be.

The concern of the Party is to crush all individuality and any individual thinking. The Party has the police watching every citizen in order to make sure that everyone is conforming to the Party's demands, and therefore obeying it, and no one does any individual act 'even to go for a walk by yourself, was always slightly dangerous. There was a word for it in Newspeak: *ownlife*, it was called, meaning individualism and eccentricity' (Orwell, 1984. p. 93). Having an 'ownlife' or a private life or doing any individual action is considered dangerous because this means that this person has his/her own thinking and not conforming with the rules of the Party, and therefore he/se is rebelling against the authority of the Party. And sexual activities are certainly a private matter, an 'ownlife' or a 'sex crime,' they are crimes which the party forbids. This is why Winston's sexual relation with Julia is considered an act of rebellion against the party.

4. Conclusion

Aside from the political aspect of the novel, Watson is actually facing an existential situation. He finds himself in a world that he cannot understand, a world that he did not choose to be in. he has no objective reference to measure or to guide him, since he does not believe the party, and all his decisions spring out from himself subjectively. He decides to rebel and practice his own freedom against the party's demands even though he knows that this will lead to his inevitable death. Thus, makes his rebellion for his freedom absurd. Yet he freely commits himself to his choices because he feels that his whole situation and existence are absurd since the beginning.

Winston rebels for his existence more than he rebels for a political reform. His choices and decisions are that of an individual who is trying to preserve his individuality from being smothered by the party and its demands for conformity. His choices set him as an existential being rather than a mere "citizen" who obeys the party's rules blindly.

This shows that the novel has more layers to look at than just the obvious. It is a study of the human existential choices as well as criticizing political regimes. And Winston can be considered as another existential character that can be added to the existential literature.

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