Orwell's 1984

Eleven years prior to the beginning of the action in 1984, Winston Smith accidentally comes across a photograph of three men: Jones, Aronson, and Rutherford. The “party” had contrived a plot to prove the three guilty of treason. The picture, however, because of its true location and date in relation to the party’s false scenario, shows the men’s innocence. The picture provides Orwell’s protagonist, Winston Smith, with “concrete, unmistakable evidence of falsification” of the past (64). Winston finally realizes, eleven years after the fact, that he held in his hands a document that could “blow the party to atoms” (67). For thirteen seconds before sending the picture into the memory chute, Winston Smith had in his hands the fate of Oceania. Winston latently wants that power again, and the novel is propelled by that desire.

Winston’s entries in the diary that he bought from Mr. Charrington provide the first signs of his desire to regain that power. However, writing what he can remember as the truth in his diary does not release him from the control of the inner party, from his pigeonhole of mental duress. The party controls every facet of his being, including his dreams, in which the only remnants of his past surface. Therefore, to realize the truth about his past, in his time away from work, he must physically remove himself from anything that represents the party. He must leave the alcove in which he writes; he must leave the Victory coffee, cigarettes, and gin, and he must escape at least the idea of the tele-screen in his apartment to know what is truly happening around him. As O’Brien says, “Who controls the present controls the past” (204). In the room above Mr. Charrington’s shop, Winston finds a way to leave the party mentally, to control the present, and to consequently control his past.

One focal point of Winston’s journey and a symbol of, among other things, control over the present, is the paperweight. Prior to his purchase of the paperweight during his second visit to Mr. Charrington’s shop, Winston’s only memories come in dreams. He often dreams of his mother and his family, but those memories are all disjointed speculation and offer no concrete focus. When he takes a closer look at the antique objects in Mr. Charrington’s shop and realizes that the past is concrete, Winston gains a
focus. He purchases the paperweight as a memento to remind himself of a concrete past. Also, Winston’s relationship with Julia gives him the hope and inspiration to live in the present in a way that he had not during most of his life. The fact that their affair takes place mainly above an antique store brings together the idea of past and present in relation to control. Winston has the elements of revelation here, as he finally escapes, at least mentally, the control of “Big Brother.”

The paperweight symbolizes escape from a self-defeating and unnatural routine, as it represents the suspension of time. Literally, the characteristics of the paperweight suggest suspension. Winston compares the glass to rainwater, which implies purity and rebirth. The coral and the objects that Winston guessed that the glass contained—a rose or a sea anemone—are all living things, suggesting that the paperweight symbolizes the suspension of life. Again, Winston must suspend or capture the present outside of the party’s agenda to unravel the past.

With perceived distance from “Big Brother,” Winston’s memory becomes clear and untainted, and the paperweight seems to encompass it. For example, Winston awakes in bed with Julia and begins to describe to her

\[
\ldots \text{a vast luminous dream in which his whole life seemed to stretch out before him \ldots} \]

It had all occurred inside the glass paperweight, but the surface of the glass was the dome of the sky, and inside the dome everything was flooded with clear soft light in which one could see into interminable distances. (134)

In this dream he saw the true past, the way the inner party tore his family apart, instead of the distorted past, where he feared he may have murdered his mother. He awakens from this dream crying, having recovered a memory and a truth that set him free. His affair with Julia and their time above Mr. Charrington’s shop give him control over his present, with which he finally achieves control over his past.

With the wonderful tenacity for truth that he has stored after seeing the photograph, Winston begins to work on the next part of the party’s mantra about control: “Who controls the past controls the future” (204). Winston tells Julia that the paperweight is “a message from one hundred years ago, if one knew how to read it” (121). It is a message because Winston wants it to be a message. From the very beginning, he wonders if one purpose of writing in his diary might be to appeal to the future (26). He is miserable, and he hopes for a better future where, as in the past, “[\ldots] truth exists and what is done cannot be undone” (27). Also, just before they realize that they have been caught together in Mr. Charrington’s room (conveniently after Hate Week, when their services to the party were essential), Winston believed that one could share in the idealized future he had for the Proles “[\ldots] if one passed on the secret doctrine that two plus two make four” (182).
The secret doctrine is partially a reference to Goldstein's book, which was given to him by O’Brien, in whom Winston mistakenly places confidence. This confidence stems from a dream Winston had seven years prior, in which O’Brien tells him, “We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness” (24). Winston continues to believe in this dream and in O’Brien, more so after he reads Goldstein’s manifesto. However, O’Brien could have actually said this to him, not in a dream, but through the telescreen. The reality of this materializes when we realize “The place where there is no darkness” is doublespeak for the “Ministry of Love,” where we first find O’Brien and Winston in part 3. This would mean that O’Brien had recognized Winston as a threat for at least seven years.

Because O’Brien was aware of Winston’s intentions, his hope for the future, the Proles, and his love for Julia seems to be in vain. When the paperweight smashes on the floor, Winston realizes “how small it always was!” (184), as if recognizing that even his biggest dream—to overcome the party’s control—is not enough. The smashing of the paperweight represents the destruction of the world he and Julia had created and begins the end of the consciousness for which he had worked. However, Winston’s vision is not necessarily special or singular, but it is human. The picture that he found, which motivated him to become fully conscious, was a wonderful glitch in the system. There shall be many more.

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Salinger’s THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

From the time of its original publication, many critics have acknowledged the Odyssean nature of Holden Caulfield’s wanderings in J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye. In addition, much has been made of the importance of Holden’s younger sister Phoebe, who serves him as, among other things, an ideal of innocence and honesty in contrast to the corruption and phoniness of the adult world. In one of the densest and most frequently analyzed episodes in the novel, narrated in chapters 21–23, Holden goes to his family’s apartment hoping to talk to Phoebe before he confronts his future. Although her name (from the Greek phoibus, meaning “radiant”) has led critics to link her with the sun goddess (Miller 136–37) and the moon (Glasser 101), the details of this