

Trevor Durbin

Mrs. Rutan

AP Literature and Composition

2016

Foster is Watching You

Thomas C. Foster's book, How to Read Literature Like a Professor, offers excellent analysis of numerous literary techniques that writers use for deeper meanings in their works. Foster also repeatedly proposes the idea that no piece of literature is purely original. Foster's book is comprised of many theories that can apply to any piece of literature. George Orwell's allegory about the Soviet Union, 1984, demonstrates many of these theories.

In 1984, Orwell often uses the seasons and weather to symbolize major points in the book. Orwell is able to create a perfect mood for different points in the story. Orwell often uses seasons as a symbol to show life of lack thereof. In the beginning of the book, Orwell sets the story on a "cold day in April" (Orwell, 1) using season ironically. Spring is typically a symbol of new life, but Orwell uses this juxtaposition to set the mood that life is horrible for Winston; Foster claims that contrasting against a season works so well since everyone has distinct seasonal associations (Foster, 183). Orwell also uses the weather in the story to symbolize life. When Winston and Julia are released from questioning and torture the weather is "vilely cold" and windy (Orwell, 291). Orwell supports Foster's claim that "weather is never just weather" (Foster, 75) by using the cold to show that Winston and Julia's liveliness is dead. Orwell excellently uses weather and season as a way to set the mood and symbolize life.

Foster's theory about vampires seems like a great exaggeration for an ordinary human character or group of people, but the Party and O'Brien definitely fit his characteristics. The party and O'Brien—just like Foster's idea of a vampire—prey on weaker people, leave a mark, and create a very attractive illusion as bait (Foster, 16). Just like Foster's claim that vampires are attractive to their victims, Winston was attracted to O'Brien for no reason beyond his own imagination. Winston describes his attraction to O'Brien as "a link between them more important than affection or partisanship" (Orwell, 25). O'Brien is much like Foster's idea of a vampire in the fact that he is "alluring, dangerous, mysterious" (Foster, 16) and Winston takes his bait. Just as Foster claims that vampires leave a mark on their prey, O'Brien leaves a mark on Winston after the torture and questioning. At the end of the book, after O'Brien had spent so much time convincing Winston that the Party's lies were the truth Winston realized that "he loved Big Brother" (Orwell, 298). O'Brien leaves his mark on Winston emotionally as he defeats his stubbornness to believe the Party's lies and made him "love Big Brother" (Orwell, 298). O'Brien and the party bait Winston in and suck the life out of him throughout the course of the book, proving them to be vampires.

In 1984, O'Brien's interrogation of Winston is a baptism for Winston. Prior to his interrogation with O'Brien, Winston hates the Party and wants to destroy it. Afterwards, Winston is so mentally deteriorated that he loves the Party and believes it's lies. The torture and investigation changes how Winston views his battle with the Party which is shown by Winston's inner dialogue:

“‘They can’t get inside you,’ she had said. But they could get inside you. ‘What happens to you here is *forever*,’ O’Brien had said. That was true word. There were things, your own acts, from which you could not recover” (Orwell, 290).

Foster claims that baptism can mean literal rebirth such as a life threatening situation (Foster, 159); Winston’s interrogation with O’Brien was exactly that and Winston came out completely changed—rebirthed.

George Orwell writes *1984* out of fear and criticism of the Soviet Union and mainly the overwhelming power and control of Stalin. Foster claims that readers can understand a writer’s piece if they know about the place that the author was writing from (Foster, 116). It is quite easy to draw parallels from characters in fictional Oceania to the Soviet Union. Some similarities include the location, leader, and government—even as specific as Oceania having three-year plans like Stalin’s five-year plans. Based on the Soviet Union during the time Orwell wrote *1984* and the nations’ similarities, it is clear that his motives for writing it were purely political.

Overall, Orwell’s *1984* proves that Foster’s theories can be applied to all works of literature—even those as inventive and classic as *1984*. Through Foster’s theories, it is very easy to see the literary excellence of George Orwell’s writing. Orwell’s use of many literary techniques explained in Foster’s theories prove that even the best literature is never 100 percent original.

Works Cited

Orwell, George. *1984*. New York: Signet Classics, 1977.

Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.