

# Symbolism and imagery in 1984 essay sample



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1984 is, without doubt, a very complex novel. The subjects tackled by Orwell in the novel are indeed complicated and dangerous. To get these across to the reader, Orwell often uses symbolism and imagery. In order to completely investigate this, it is necessary to look at the main characters, names, places and the various symbols that pop up throughout the novel. This will help to give a better understanding as to why and how Orwell uses these.

Some of the most obvious symbolism comes in the names of the main characters. [It is worth noting that there are only a few characters named in the novel; this helps to give the air of a distant and private society]. Our hero, Winston Smith, provides some useful insights. The name Winston was probably picked with Winston Churchill in mind. This would symbolise Winston's fight against the Party, just as Winston Churchill fought his country's enemy [fascism] in WW2. His surname, Smith, can be interpreted as Orwell trying to convey to the reader that Winston is simply an ordinary man [who simply dared to think]. It could also be seen as representing a link to the proles that Winston finds himself drawn to at various points in the novel. It is clear that this name was chosen for a reason, and overall it helps the reader relate to the themes and the character a little better.

Emmanuelle Goldstein is also a name that has symbolic value. It becomes clear from this name that Orwell is relating the political situation in the novel to that of Nazi Germany. This is because the name chosen for the sworn enemy of the Party is a Jewish one. This links directly to the anti-semitism of Nazi Germany. This is an example of Orwell using symbolism to refer to one of the main themes of the book, propaganda. All over Oceania there is Party slogans and propaganda [“ On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the

poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall". Also their slogans [War is peace et al.] along with the concept of doublethink fit in well with the wall of propaganda that hit the residents of Germany under Hitler. This shows how Orwell uses a single name to convey the complex themes of the novel.

There are also other names that have a slightly hidden symbolic nature. Room 101, for example. 101 is the code for basic information, which links into the point of the room. Room 101 takes you back to one of the very simple aspects of human character, fear. This shows Orwell putting across the message that in the end it's the simple things that will make you crack. This could be linked with his experience in the Spanish Civil war, and what he saw there. Also, when contemplating names, it is also worth noting the name Big Brother. It was chosen because of the parental nature. The citizen in Oceania need something to look up to and protect them, and the name "Big Brother" does all this. These two names once again show how Orwell uses a seemingly simple thing, such as a name, to put the themes of the novel across to the reader.

The paperweight that Winston buys is also rich with symbolism. It represents a lost link to the past. The coral is the beauty that one was about, before the days of the party. Now it is encased in crystal, a reminder of the past. The coral can also represent the love that Winston and Julia have for each other. In the times they live in, a love like theirs is strictly forbidden, and is essentially a thing of the past "just like the coral. "The coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity in the heart of the crystal". This links directly to the themes of totalitarianism and oppression. Both the love

between the couple and the paperweight are the last remnants of the lost age, and eventually, the Party destroys them both.

Orwell also uses the Golden Country as a symbol. The old pastoral landscape is a clear link to the old European land. This link to the past is the first place that Julia and Winston really talk, and it seems to be the safest place that they could possibly go to. The fact that they are being monitored even there shows, once again, Orwell putting across the theme of totalitarianism.

The nursery rhymes that appear in the novel are an interesting use of symbolism on Orwell's part. They provide a link to the past, just as the Golden Country and the paperweight do, but they also hold a more sinister twist. The rhymes are distorted and manipulated by the party, to suit their way of thinking ["I sold you, and you sold me"]. This change by the Party is also a prediction of what actually happens to Julia and Winston in the end. Also, Winston's search for the end lines of the poem could be interpreted as mirroring his quest for a better life. The actual ending, where a beheading takes place, is also representative of his fate. Again, Orwell is using the symbols to link to the themes of the past and the destruction of.

There is a sense of decay running through the entire novel. One of the ways in which Orwell puts this across is using the image of dust at various points throughout the novel. It starts with "A swirl of gritty dust" at the start of the novel. Later on Mrs Parsons' wrinkles are likened to creases of dust and when Winston closes his diary he puts dust on top, so that he knows if anyone reads it [the past is protecting the diary, itself a thing of the past]. Orwell uses these images throughout the novel and it creates the sense of

erosion that would be associated with this world. It also runs parallel to the theme of bleakness that Orwell is constantly building in various ways in the book.

Orwell's imagery in 1984 is characterised by his use of “~exact concrete similes. “ Boot stamping on a human face forever”. The dominant imagery in the novel is connected with decay and filth. Places such as Victory Towers are good examples of this. It is also worthwhile to note the irony Orwell uses in the naming of many items, and how it actually adds to the bleak imagery [no hope, false victory]. The dreary and colourlessness provides an interesting contrast between the Golden Country that Winston dreams about. When this is considered, it is clear that he is at odds with the world he lives in from the very beginning of the book, and that his rebellion is the natural process for him.

After looking through all the symbolism and imagery that Orwell conjures up in the novel, it is apparent that 1984 is full of different themes that run parallel to each other throughout. Different symbols like the character names, the paperweight, and the rhymes add a complex but rewarding aspect to the novel. They do this by providing symbols but also by conveying the underlying themes of the novel. This is also there in the imagery that Orwell uses. The constant use of dust, for example, shows how a simple thing can be used to put the themes of the novel across to the reader. This is Orwell's crowning achievement. 1984 contains complicated themes, but he still manages to use effected symbolism to portray them.