

1984 lit analysis

Business



A Future of Oppression in 1984 George Orwell's 1984 is a book about an average man and his troubled life in the year 1984. The story takes place not in the 1984 that we know to have come and past, but in sort of communist ruled era that Orwell originally portrayed in 1949. The book centers upon Winston Smith, a simple man who works for the Ministry of Truth, rewriting history as seen fit by the government, or as it is called in the novel, the ' Party.

' 1984 takes place in the city of London, which is now located in a country called ' Oceania'. The residents of Oceania are divided into three main social/economic castes; the ' Inner Party' (upper class government officials), the ' Outer Party' (middle class government workers), and the ' Proles' (regular citizens.) The inner Party rules over Oceania in a shockingly dark and oppressive manner. The Party controls every aspect of life for the residents of Oceania, and they do so in some arguably inhumane ways. Being that Winston is a member of the outer Party, he lives in what would be considered a middle class home. The apartment complex in which he lives is called ' Victory Mansions.

' "... Victory Mansions were old flats built in 1930 or thereabouts and were falling to pieces...there was a smell of boiled cabbage and old rag mats common to the whole building...everything had a battered, trampled-on look..."(Orwell 20-21.) In the home of all Party members, including Winston, is a ' telescreen', " an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror" (Orwell 2.) The telescreen can be compared to a modern day television, with some minor differences. The important difference being the equipment of a camera that sends everything it sees and hears back to the Party for

screening. This meant that at all times, since the telescreen cannot be turned off, that every member of the Party was being watched and monitored. Orwell describes the pressure of constant surveillance through Winston's point of view as such: " 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 3.

" On each landing of Victory Mansions is a nearly meter-wide poster of ' Big Brother' (the leader of the Party,) with a caption under it reading": " BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU," the poster is described as "...one of those pictures that are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move" (Orwell 2.) From Winston's apartment he could see the pyramid shaped building that was the Ministry of Truth; on its walls read the slogans of the party: " WAR IS PEACE—FREEDOM IS SLAVERY—IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH" (Orwell 4.) The Party members of Oceania are subject to strict dress code. They are rarely allowed to wear shorts or any other clothing modern people would deem as comfortable, or fashionable for that matter. Even the children of Oceania, who are enlisted at young ages into a group know was the ' Spies', wear uniform clothing. The job of the Spies is to denounce ' thought-criminals' to the ' Thought Police'.

A thought-criminal is considered to be any person who thinks negatively toward the party; the Spies will go as far as to turn their own parents into the thought police, knowing that it leads to them being ' vaporized'. In Orwell's novel, being vaporized refers to the capture, followed by months or possibly years of torture, of thought criminals. The vaporization of the people of Oceania goes unspoken by the residents, for fear that they themselves will

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be vaporized by speaking about a horrible thing that everyone knows the Party is known to do. In 1984, the Party indirectly abolishes the traditional family that we know today. The marriage and formation of a family, at least for outer Party members, can be seen as a risk to say the least. As previously discussed, the children of Oceania can be all too willing to turn family members into the thought police.

There are other factors in the book that make family life in Oceania quite different than our own. Katharine, Winston's wife, as well as other women of Oceania, think of the act of sex as a duty to the Party, and seem not to perform it for reasons of lust or desire. Sexual desires seem to be generally thought of as impure and unnecessary. Prostitution is seen in the world of 1984, it is not illegal being that there are no laws in Oceania, but it is certainly punishable. To paraphrase a passage from the novel regarding the subject: "...Prostitution is not illegal, but it is forbidden by the Party.

Although not a life-and-death matter if caught, it could mean up to five years in a forced labor camp..." (Orwell 64-65.) Privacy in family life " is non-existent, due to the presence of telescreens in all homes. The real family ties in the novel are between the citizens of Oceania and Big Brother. The rulers of Oceania make sure, by extreme means, that all people love Big Brother and look up to him greatly. While Big Brother was never actually proven to exist in the novel, it is his figure, or the image he portrays, that is important.

" As described in 1984 " Big brother seemed to tower up, an invincible, fearless protector..." (Orwell 15.) The Party in 1984 has control of every aspect of human life. They control what activities people take place in, what

they buy, and even what they know. “ ‘ Who controls the past,’ ran the party slogan, ‘ controls the future: who controls the present controls the past’ ”

(Orwell 34.)