1984 Essay, Research Paper

1984

The story 1984, by George Orwell, is set in the fictional country Oceania, in what is thought to be the year 1984, which consists of the Americas, the British Isles, Australia and part of Africa. The part of Oceania in which 1984 takes place is referred to as Air Strip One and is formerly England. Winston, the protagonist of the story, is faced with a conflict of extreme hatred against the ultimate antagonist, Big Brother. Big Brother is the leader of the political party of Oceania who controls not only actions, but also thoughts through the thought police and what are called “telescreens.” Winston falls in love with a girl by the name of Julia, and the two of them must decide on who to trust and who not to trust and eventually realize their ultimate fate for their unorthodox acts punishable by death. The two of them decide to trust a mysterious character by the name of O’Brien, who turns out to the an agent of Big Brother, and betrays the both of them by pretending to be their allies in an organization against Big Brother called the Brotherhood.

Winston Smith is the protagonist of the story 1984. Winston is a man who seems to be an ordinary man in a world filled with corruption and evil. Winston is a round character in that he is a very fearful and ordinary man that the reader can relate with easily. Yet Winston is strong willed enough to try to make his situation better in a totalitarian society. In comparison to Winston’s outlook on life at the beginning of the story, his character traits are developing, changing due to torture by the Party to force him to conform to the system of totalitarian government lead by Big Brother. In the beginning of the story, Winston strongly opposes the Party and their anti-memory tactics used to better control the population. Although Winston opposes the Party, he is still fearful of their power and this causes him to view the world from an extremely paranoid point of view, suspecting everyone and trusting no one. Upon seeing a particular girl, who later becomes his lover, he thinks of her, “… that she even might be an agent of the Thought Police. That, it was true, was very unlikely. Still, he continued to feel a peculiar uneasiness… whenever she was anywhere near him.” By the end of the story, Winston has been completely brainwashed and is now a strict conformer of the Party and, “He loved Big Brother.” Winston was no longer concerned with the unseen injustices of Big Brothers leadership, and to him, “everything was alright. The struggle was finished.”

There are a number of ironies in the story 1984. One example of an irony is who turns out, in the end, to be trustworthy and who is eventually going to betray Winston and lead him to his ultimate fate. Winston does not in anyway trust Julia. When she is first introduced as a “girl he often passed in the corridors. He did now know her name, but he knew that she worked in the Fiction Department,” Winston is very suspicious of her and sees her as “being more dangerous than most.” A little bit into the story, Julia slips Winston a note saying “I love you,” and their ultimately crushing love affair begins. Another ironic thing in the story is not another situation, but rather the language of Oceania, Newspeak, is ironic in itself. Newspeak is the official language of Oceania, and thus the basis of communication throughout the people. But Newspeak is unique in that it is the only language that regularly loses words rather than gains them. The Party has formed this language in order to decrease the amount of brain activity, thus narrowing the range of thought. Sociologist, Dr. Murphy, continually says, “We think as we speak, and we speak as we think.” This suggests that language, which is also the basis of communication, is directly related to the thought processes in the human mind. So, ironically, Newspeak ultimately brainwashed the citizens rather than, as all other languages do, increase the amount of expression and creativity.

Throughout the story, 1984, there are a number of different items and occasions that either existed or occurred with significant symbolic meaning. For instance, the room in which Winston is tortured, room 101, is symbolic of the fearfulness and helplessness a person experiences when faced with their greatest fear. To the characters of the story even, room 101 is symbolic to them as being the one thing that person fears the most. O’Brien explains to Winston, “The thing that is in room 101 is the worst thing in the world.” Another symbolic object in the story 1984 is the chess game. The game is symbolic of the political game throughout the story. The white pieces are a representation of the Party and is shown never losing, thus suggesting, in themselves, ultimate power and control.

There are quite a few themes within the story 1984, but one in particular seems to recur throughout. This is the theme of the horror of a totalitarian society. The story suggests that under a government of complete control, all human understanding is lost. In this story, the suppression of language as communication is recurring throughout the story. This creates a less thoughtful society which makes the people more easily influenced and through this narrowing of the mind, the people are easier to control due to ignorance. One of the Party’s slogans is “Ignorance is strength.” This slogan is written from the viewpoint of the Party itself. It ultimately suggests that the more ignorant the people of Oceania are, the easier it is for the Party to remain in control and continue to withhold its extreme power.