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The Style of George Orwell's *1984*

A huge part of what causes *1984* to leave such a profound impact on the reader is in the way George Orwell chose to tell the story. Orwell could have chosen to write the story in the form of a documentary that used facts and in-depth descriptions to explain what he believed to be the future of the world. Instead, he chose to explain his vision through a first-person narrative using “unadorned and simple picture-painting (Paine).” In doing so, Orwell created a horrifying world that not only presents a very clear image of his fears for the future, but also allows the reader to experience this world through the protagonist Winston Smith. This choice of writing style is the reason why *1984* has remained so painfully relevant in the world today.

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During the last three years of George Orwell's life, he lived on a small island called Jura located off the west coast of Scotland in the Inner Hebrides. This is where he wrote *1984* (Brown). The island was beautiful and rugged; Orwell had a love for the rural life. It's not the kind of place one would imagine writing a dystopian novel. One of Orwell's insights was, “There's no best place in which to imagine such a world, so you might as well do it where you want.” (Brown).

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Despite the many other ways Orwell could have chosen to write *1984*, It's likely he chose to write it in first person because he knew the kind of impact it would leave on the reader. Writing the story in first person made every bad thing that happened to

Winston feel personal to anyone who read it. Orwell knew that for a story with such an important message to leave a lasting impression, it must feel personal. To further the sense of reality in the story, Orwell gave the protagonist, Winston Smith, many similarities with himself during his time on Jura. For example, when Winston helps Mrs. Parsons fix her sink, he's afraid to bend over out of fear of breaking into a fit of coughing. Orwell had this same problem while tending to his garden (Brown). Winston also strongly dislikes the smell of cabbage, as did Orwell (Brown). By taking these as well as other characteristics of himself and giving them to Winston, Orwell made the world of *1984* feel not only very real to himself, but also to the reader.

Orwell's decision to construct realistic characters in *1984* allowed him to create powerful scenes throughout the entire novel that resonate with the reader. One example of a powerful scene is early in the novel during the Two Minutes Hate. The Two Minutes Hate is a regular event in which the citizens of Oceania come together to spew hatred and disgust at the enemies of The Party. Orwell describes the feelings taken on by the citizens of Oceania during the Two Minutes Hate as being, "A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one's will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic (Orwell 14)." During the Two Minutes Hate, Orwell also gives insight into what Winston is feeling. At first, Winston spends the first thirty seconds or so watching everyone else. He later finds that he is unwillingly participating in the Two Minutes Hate by screaming and kicking his heel against his chair (Orwell 14). By using horrifying descriptive words and the personal

experience through Winston, Orwell forces the reader to be a part of the Two Minutes Hate and sets the tone for the rest of the novel.

By the end of book two, Winston and Julia are both captured by the Thought Police and separated from each other. This scene, due to the first-person narrative style and Orwell's use of simple yet powerful words, is both chilling and horrifying to the reader as much as it is to the characters. The chapter begins by slowly building up hope that Winston and Julia may find a way out of their corrupt society after Winston finishes reading the book given to him by O'Brien. The hopeful feeling is then crushed when a hidden telescreen starts speaking to Winston and Julia and says, "You are the dead (Orwell 221). George Orwell's writing has been regarded as, "Typically short and to the point (Examination). This scene is a perfect example of how Orwell used simple words, phrases, and images to create feelings of complexity within the reader.

One final example of a powerful scene brought on by the first-person narrative style of *1984* is the torture session Winston experiences in room 101. During this scene, O'Brien finally pushes Winston to his breaking point by using caged rats—Winston's greatest fear—against him, causing him to betray Julia. The scene is intense and designed to make the reader cringe in horror at every spoken word while also experiencing the same helpless feeling as Winston. Before O'Brien releases the caged rats onto Winston's face, He cries out, "Do it to Julia!" in a final effort to save himself (Orwell 286). Winston's betrayal of Julia is one of the most powerful scenes in the entire novel. It leaves the reader feeling hollow inside, like something was taken out or destroyed. Orwell uses the first-person narrative to target the emotions of the reader in

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a personal way, guaranteeing that a lasting impression of every scene is forever left behind.

When *1984* was first published in 1949, it sold 50,000 copies in Britain during its first year as well as hundreds of thousands in the United States (Luckhurst). In 2017, a full sixty-eight years after its initial release, *1984* rose to the top of Amazon's best-seller list (Freitas-Tamura). Clearly, despite the age of the novel, it still manages to stand out and stay relevant in the modern world due to the relatability of Orwell's first-person narrative. Orwell wrote *1984* with the intention of warning future generations about what could happen if the citizens of the world allow themselves to be subjected to an excessive amount of governmental control. The style of writing Orwell chose to use in *1984* will continue to keep the story relevant for every new generation.

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