1984: Setting As A Stylistic Device In Novel

“1984” by George Orwell is a novel which he wrote in 1948, a time when war was waging and tensions amongst countries were high. It is clear while reading “1984” that the extreme political ideologies, like fascism and communism, were leading to totalitarian governments, such as Hitler, Mao, and Stalin, thus influencing Orwell’s purpose and general theme of “1984”- the risk of a totalitarian government and the oppression that comes with it. This theme played a large role in the setting employed in “1984,” as one reads that Oceania, more specifically Airstrip One, is a war-torn area, with a constant watch of their leader, Big Brother, and constant control of every action by the Party. One follows the main protagonist Winston through his life in Airstrip One, under the constant watch of the telescreens and control from the Party. Orwell effectively uses the setting to demonstrate the oppression felt by the citizens of Oceania, especially through Winston, thus allowing a further understanding of the power of the Party.

Orwell’s description of Winston’s apartment is one that makes the reader understand the situation in Oceania and the life of a citizen living in Airstrip One. The first look at Winston’s apartment is in the first few chapters of the novel. Orwell uses imagery to describe the smell and orientation of the apartment- it reeked of cabbage, and the telescreen was positioned in such a way that it covered most of the room, except for a small nook in the wall where Winston would write in his diary and commit thoughtcrime. His neighbors down the hall often experienced plumbing issues, to which he would need to help maintain, and was described in such a way to evoke feelings of disgust in the reader. There was a large window opposite of the telescreen, which Winston was able to see the Ministry of Truth, his workplace, and the lane below. He was able to see the broken pavement and mess from bombs, and posters draped from every building with the face of Big Brother. This is significant as it immersed the reader in the life of Winston- a life where living conditions were neglected in order to remain under the complete control of the Party. In a war-torn state, it was important to focus solely on the duties and responsibilities of the Party, thus making the visibility of the posters of Big Brother and the positioning of the telescreen significant. All of this is significant, as Orwell’s ability to describe the setting of Winston’s apartment not only how the oppression of the citizen's rights to a decent living space, but also the extent of the importance of the Party’s rule over Airstrip One and Oceania as a whole.

In part two of “1984,” Winston visits a shop in the Prole area, which belongs to a man called Mr. Charrington, thus the reader recognizes this shop as Mr. Charrington’s shop. This shop was full of old-world items, which intrigues Winston, a man of the Outer Party who is sworn to remain thoughtless, thus ambitionless and disinterested in the history of the world. The act of rebelling against the Party not only leads to his demise, but it leads him to buy a diary, an old glass paperweight ornament, and renting the room above the store. He takes his love interest, Julia, to this “sanctuary,” which turns out to be quite the opposite, but Orwell does not reveal that until the end of part two. Orwell describes this room as a room full of old-world items, although not in the best condition. Winston imagines that someone perhaps lived in the room at one point, but was abandoned once the Party came into power. The bed was filled with bugs, and there was a small fireplace in the corner, but it was enough for the two of them. They retreated to this place to make love, and relax in a place, which Orwell described, was telescreen-free and completely isolated from the inner part of the city. This was almost euphoric

for Winston and Julia, as they were able to escape the eyes of Big Brother, and essentially the control of the Party for short periods of time. Later, we discover that this is not the case- Mr. Charrington was actually a member of the thought police, and the room had a telescreen behind a painting of an old church that stood in, what they knew, as Victory Square. This is significant because it shows that citizens in Oceania could not escape the Party- they were constantly under watch, no matter where they were. Yes, the Prole area was less heavily watched, but they still were, making it especially dangerous for Outer Party members to be in the Prole area. Furthermore, this is important as it shows the extent of the Party's power- they were able to hide a telescreen and disguise a member of the thought police in order to catch potential threats to their system. This shows how Orwell's ability to describe the setting proved the extent of the Party's power.

Following Winston and Julia's arrest in the room above Mr. Charrington's shop, they were sent to the Ministry of Love, the building where Room 101 is located. The Ministry of Love's purpose was to ensure that the citizens of Airstrip One were following the protocol and laws in Ingsoc and abide by the Party's rules. If they did not, they were sent to the Ministry of Love. In almost all cases, as the reader observes, every person there was sent to Room 101, a room full of terror and horror as the reader soon learns. Conditions in the waiting cell were bad enough as is- Orwell describes the room as a cubic room, with white walls, slim benches, and bright white lights, with a massive telescreen positioned on the wall, overlooking the entire cell. If they did something that the Party did not like, for example, talk to another cellmate, they were screamed at by the person behind the telescreen. The people that cycled through the room were often roughed up emotionally hysteric or physically injured. This is important because Winston becomes curious about Room 101, which is seemingly elusive for him. He wonders if it can get any worse because the holding cell was bad enough. He soon finds out for himself. Room 101 was the place where he was tortured by O'Brien, a man who supplied him with a copy of Goldstein's book, and was permanently in his dreams. This was the room that O'Brien described in his dreams- it had a long table, where Winston was shocked for hours, and a hall with mirrors lining the walls. It was dark and musty, implying that it was often used for its purpose of torture. Throughout part three, readers watch as Winston's body and mind begin to deteriorate due to the Party, and in the end, he is pushed so far that his love for Big Brother reignites. This room is extremely significant to the end of "1984." It is the room that pushes Winston so far into madness that he becomes numb and succumbs to the Party. This shows the life of a citizen living in Oceania who tries to be independent of the Party, and also shows the extent to which the Party will go to ensure that all of its citizens are abiding by their rules and are completely under their control.

Orwell effectively uses the setting to demonstrate the oppression felt by the citizens of Oceania, especially through Winston, thus allowing a further understanding of the power of the Party. As mentioned before, Winston's life soon becomes one assimilated with every other person in Airstrip One- one devoted to the love of Big Brother and loyalty to the Party. The last scene was set in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, which was, arguably, one of the best places to end the novel. It was the cafe which Winston saw three rebels sitting once, but their demise was imminent. This may indicate to the reader that since no one really escapes Room 101, that his demise was near, but Orwell did quite a good job of leaving it open-ended. Orwell was able to use imagery to describe his setting to leave his readers on edge and make this unexpected ending worthwhile.