

1984 Summary

Nineteen Eighty-Four, sometimes published as **1984**, is a [dystopian](#) novel by English author [George Orwell](#) published in 1949.^{[1][2]} The novel is set in [Airstrip One](#) (formerly known as [Great Britain](#)), a province of the superstate [Oceania](#) in a world of [perpetual war](#), [omnipresent government surveillance](#) and public manipulation, dictated by a political system [euphemistically](#) named [English Socialism](#) (or Ingsoc in the government's invented language, [Newspeak](#)) under the control of a privileged [Inner Party](#) elite, that persecutes [individualism](#) and independent thinking as "[thoughtcrimes](#)".^[3]

The tyranny is epitomised by [Big Brother](#), the quasi-divine Party leader who enjoys an intense [cult of personality](#) but who may not even exist. The Party "seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power."^[4] The protagonist of the novel, [Winston Smith](#), is a member of the [Outer Party](#), who works for the [Ministry of Truth](#) (or Minitrue), which is responsible for propaganda and [historical revisionism](#). His job is to rewrite past newspaper articles, so that the historical record always supports the party line.^[5] Smith is a diligent and skillful worker but he secretly hates the Party and dreams of rebellion against Big Brother.

As literary political fiction and dystopian science-fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a classic novel in content, plot and style. Many of its terms and concepts, such as [Big Brother](#), [doublethink](#), [thoughtcrime](#), [Newspeak](#), [Room 101](#), [telescreen](#), [2 + 2 = 5](#) and [memory hole](#), have entered everyday use since its publication in 1949. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* popularised the adjective [Orwellian](#), which describes official deception, secret surveillance and manipulation of recorded history by a [totalitarian](#) or [authoritarian](#) state.^[6] In 2005, the novel was chosen by [TIME](#) magazine as one of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005.^[6] It was awarded a place on both lists of [Modern Library 100 Best Novels](#), reaching number 13 on the editor's list, and 6 on the readers' list.^[7] In 2003, the novel was listed at number 8 on the [BBC's](#) survey [The Big Read](#).^[8]

History and Title

[George Orwell](#) "encapsulate[d] the thesis at the heart of his unforgiving novel" in 1944, the implications of dividing the world up into *Zones of influence* that had been conjured by the [Tehran Conference](#) and three years later he wrote most of it on the Scottish island of [Jura](#), from 1947 to 1948, despite being seriously ill with [tuberculosis](#).^{[9][10]} On 4 December 1948, he sent the final manuscript to the publisher [Secker and Warburg](#) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published on 8 June 1949.^{[11][12]} By 1989, it had been translated into sixty-five languages, more than any other novel in English at the time.^[13] The title of the novel, its themes, the [Newspeak](#) language and the author's surname are often invoked against control and intrusion by the state, while the adjective [Orwellian](#) describes a totalitarian dystopia, characterised by government control and subjugation of the people. Orwell's invented language, [Newspeak](#) satirises hypocrisy and evasion by the state: the [Ministry of Love](#) (Miniluv) oversees torture and brainwashing, the [Ministry of Plenty](#) (Miniplenty) oversees shortage and famine, the [Ministry of Peace](#) (Minipax) oversees war and atrocity and the [Ministry of Truth](#) (Minitrue) oversees propaganda and historical revisionism.

The Last Man in Europe was an early title for the novel but in a letter dated 22 October 1948 to his publisher [Fredric Warburg](#), eight months before publication, Orwell wrote about hesitating between *The Last Man in Europe* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.^[14] Warburg suggested changing the main title to a more commercial one.^[15]

In the novel [1985](#) (1978), [Anthony Burgess](#) suggests that Orwell, disillusioned by the onset of the [Cold War](#) (1945–91), intended to call the book *1948*. The introduction to the [Penguin Books](#) Modern

Classics edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, reports that Orwell originally set the novel in 1980 but he later shifted the date to 1982, then to 1984. The final title may also be a permutation of 1948, the year of composition.^[16] Throughout its publication history, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been either banned or legally [challenged](#), as subversive or ideologically corrupting, like [Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*](#) (1932), [We](#) (1924) by [Yevgeny Zamyatin](#), [Kallocain](#) (1940) by [Karin Boye](#) and [Fahrenheit 451](#) (1951) by [Ray Bradbury](#).^[17] In 2005, *Time* magazine included *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in its list of the one hundred best English-language novels since 1923.^[18] Literary scholars consider the Russian dystopian novel [We](#) by Zamyatin to have strongly influenced *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is set in [Oceania](#), one of three inter-continental [superstates](#) that divided the world after a global war. Most of the plot takes place in London, the "chief city of [Airstrip One](#)", the Oceanic province that "had once been called England or Britain".^{[27][28]} Posters of the Party leader, [Big Brother](#), bearing the caption "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU", dominate the city, while the ubiquitous *telescreen* ([transceiving](#) television set) monitors the private and public lives of the populace. The class hierarchy of Oceania has three levels:

- (I) the upper-class [Inner Party](#), the elite ruling minority, who make up 2% of the population.
- (II) the middle-class [Outer Party](#), who make up 13% of the population.
- (III) the lower-class [Proles](#) (from *proletariat*), who make up 85% of the population and represent the uneducated working class.

As the government, the Party controls the population with four ministries:

- the [Ministry of Peace](#) deals with war and defence.
- the [Ministry of Plenty](#) deals with economic affairs (rationing and starvation).
- the [Ministry of Love](#) deals with law and order (torture and brainwashing).
- the [Ministry of Truth](#) deals with news, entertainment, education and art (propaganda).

The protagonist [Winston Smith](#), a member of the Outer Party, works in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth as an editor, [revising historical records](#), to make the past conform to the ever-changing [party line](#) and deleting references to [unpersons](#), people who have been "vaporised", i.e. not only killed by the state but denied existence even in history or memory.

The story of Winston Smith begins on 4 April 1984: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen" yet he is uncertain of the true date, given the régime's continual rewriting and manipulation of history.^[29] Smith's memories and his reading of the proscribed book, [The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism](#) by [Emmanuel Goldstein](#), reveal that after the [Second World War](#), the United Kingdom fell to civil war and then was absorbed into Oceania. Simultaneously, the [USSR](#) conquered mainland Europe and established the second superstate of [Eurasia](#). The third superstate, [Eastasia](#), comprises the regions of East Asia and South-east Asia. The three superstates wage perpetual war for the remaining unconquered lands of the world, forming and breaking alliances as is convenient. From his childhood (1949–53), Winston remembers the Atomic Wars fought in Europe, western Russia and North America. It is unclear to him what occurred first: the Party's victory in the civil war, the US annexation of the British Empire or the war in which [Colchester](#) was bombed. Smith's strengthening memories and the story of his family's dissolution, suggest that the atomic bombings occurred first (the Smiths took refuge in a tube station), followed by civil war featuring "confused street fighting in London itself" and the societal postwar reorganisation, which the Party retrospectively calls "the Revolution".

Winston Smith lives in Airstrip One, the ruins of an England ravaged by war, civil conflict, and revolution. A member of the middle class [Outer Party](#), Winston lives in a one-room London apartment on a diet of black bread, synthetic meals and "Victory"-branded gin. [Telescreens](#) in every building, along with hidden microphones and cameras, permit the [Thought Police](#) to identify anyone who might

endanger the Party's régime. Children are indoctrinated to inform on suspected thought criminals, especially their parents.

Winston works at the [Ministry of Truth](#), or "Minitrue", as an editor responsible for historical revisionism. He rewrites records and alters photographs to conform to the state's ever-changing version of the truth, rendering the deleted people "unpersons"; the original documents are incinerated in a "[memory hole](#)". Winston becomes fascinated by the true past and tries to learn more about it. In an alcove beside his flat's telescreen where he believes he cannot be seen, he begins writing a journal criticising the Party and its enigmatic leader, [Big Brother](#), which, if discovered by the Thought Police, warrants certain death.

At the Minitrue, Julia, a young woman who maintains the novel-writing machines and whom Winston loathes, surreptitiously hands Winston a note confessing her love. Winston realises she shares his loathing of the Party. Winston and Julia begin a love affair, at first meeting in the country, and eventually in a rented room atop an antiques shop in a proletarian neighbourhood of London where they believe they are safe, as the room has no telescreen.

Winston is approached by the Inner Party member [O'Brien](#), whom Winston believes is an agent of the Brotherhood, a secret organisation that intends to destroy the Party. O'Brien gives Winston the "Book", [The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism](#) by [Emmanuel Goldstein](#), the publicly reviled leader of the Brotherhood. The Book explains the concept of [perpetual war](#), the true meanings of the slogans WAR IS PEACE, FREEDOM IS SLAVERY, and IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH, and how the régime of the Party can be overthrown by means of the political awareness of the proles.

The Thought Police capture Winston and Julia in their bedroom and deliver them to the [Ministry of Love](#) (Miniluv) for interrogation. Mr. Charrington, the shopkeeper who rented the room to them, reveals himself as an officer of the Thought Police. O'Brien is also a Thought Police agent, part of an operation used by the Thought Police to root out suspected thoughtcriminals. O'Brien tortures Winston with [electroshock](#), showing him how, through controlled manipulation of perception, Winston can "cure" himself of his "insanity" – his manifest hatred for the Party. O'Brien explains the Inner Party's motivation: complete and absolute power, mocking Winston's assumption that it was somehow altruistic and "for the greater good". Winston confesses to crimes he did and did not commit, implicating anyone and everyone, including Julia; but O'Brien understands that Winston has not betrayed Julia as he had not stopped loving her. O'Brien sends him to [Room 101](#) for the final stage of re-education, the most feared room in the Ministry of Love, which contains each prisoner's worst fear. As a wire cage holding hungry rats is fitted onto his face, Winston shouts "Do it to Julia!" thus betraying her.

After being reintegrated into Oceania society, Winston encounters Julia in a park. She reveals that she was also tortured, and each admits betraying the other. Later, Winston, now an alcoholic, sits by himself in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, troubled by memories which he is convinced are false. A news bulletin announces Oceania's "decisive victory" over [Eurasian](#) armies in [Africa](#). A raucous celebration begins outside, and Winston imagines himself a part of it. As he looks up in admiration at a portrait of Big Brother, Winston feels he has at least ended his "stubborn, self-willed exile" from the love of Big Brother – a love Winston happily returns.