

EXERCISES IN  
**Work It  
Out!**

# Nineteen Eighty-Four

by George Orwell

UPPER INTERMEDIATE **B2**

ON CD 15

## GLOSSARY

- 1 **to grow:** crescere
- 2 **to serve:** lavorare per
- 3 **attitudes:** atteggiamenti
- 4 **to resign:** licenziarsi, dimettersi
- 5 **down and out:** squattrinato
- 6 **to fight:** lottare
- 7 **to wound:** ferire
- 8 **rise:** ascesa
- 9 **dictatorships:** dittature
- 10 **nonsensical:** assurdo
- 11 **to display:** mettere in mostra, esporre
- 12 **thoughts:** pensieri
- 13 **dreaded:** temuta
- 14 **hidden:** nascosti
- 15 **forbidden:** proibito
- 16 **to race:** andare a mille
- 17 **to hand:** passare



George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in 1903. A growing<sup>1</sup> political and social conviction inspired him to become a writer. After servicing<sup>2</sup> in the police force in Burma, today's Myanmar, he became disillusioned with colonialist attitudes<sup>3</sup> and resigned<sup>4</sup>. His first book, *Down and Out*<sup>5</sup> in Paris and London (1933), documented his experiences travelling and living among the poor of Europe. The events of the Spanish Civil War (in which Orwell fought<sup>6</sup> and was wounded<sup>7</sup>) and World War Two, together with the rise<sup>8</sup> of fascist and communist dictatorships<sup>9</sup>, inspired Orwell's most famous novels, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

### BIG BROTHER

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is set in the dystopian world of Oceania in the year 1984. Oceania is a totalitarian state controlled by 'the Party'. Big Brother is its leader. The book's protagonist, Winston Smith,



works for the Ministry of Truth as part of its propaganda machine, rewriting historical events in the service of political indoctrination. Winston is becoming an expert in 'Newspeak', the propaganda language of the Party, and the nonsensical<sup>10</sup> yet persuasive 'doublethink' displayed<sup>11</sup> on posters and screens everywhere:

*"Then the face of Big Brother faded away again and instead the three slogans of the Party stood out in bold capitals:*

**WAR IS PEACE**

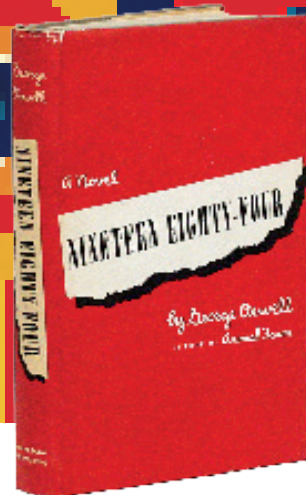
**FREEDOM IS SLAVERY**

**IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"**



# Eighty-Four

L'universo creato da Orwell nel suo brillante romanzo distopico, uno dei testi fondamentali della letteratura del secolo scorso, assomiglia a un inquietante futuro fatto di totalitarismo, manipolazione e controllo.

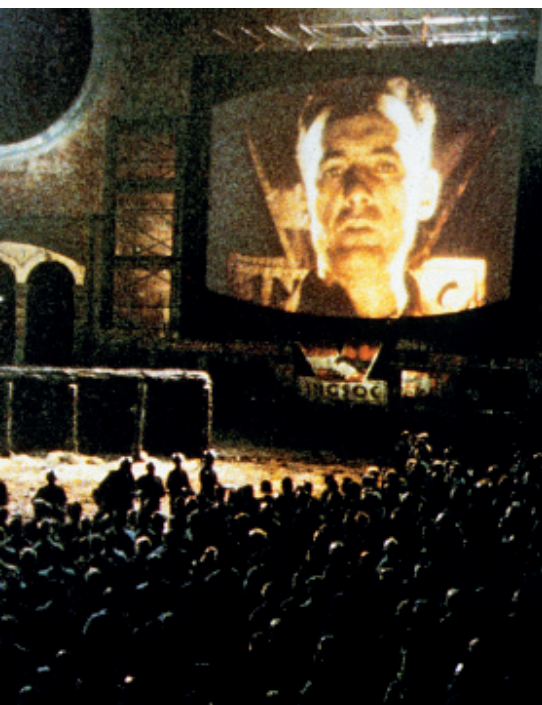


PUBLICATION DATE: 1949  
GENRE: FICTION  
AWARDS: PROMETHEUS HALL OF FAME AWARD 1984

\*Traduzione di Stefano Manferlotti, Mondadori, Milano 2000.

*George Orwell*

Centre page: a still from the film 1984, released in 1984 and starring John Hurt and Richard Burton. Left: a still from the 1956 film starring Edmond O'Brien. Below: Eric Blair, better known by his pen name George Orwell, in 1941.



"Da dove si trovava Winston era possibile leggere, ben stampati sulla bianca facciata in eleganti caratteri, i tre slogan del Partito:

LA GUERRA È PACE  
LA LIBERTÀ È SCHIAVITÙ  
L'IGNORANZA È FORZA"

## PERSECUTED LOVE

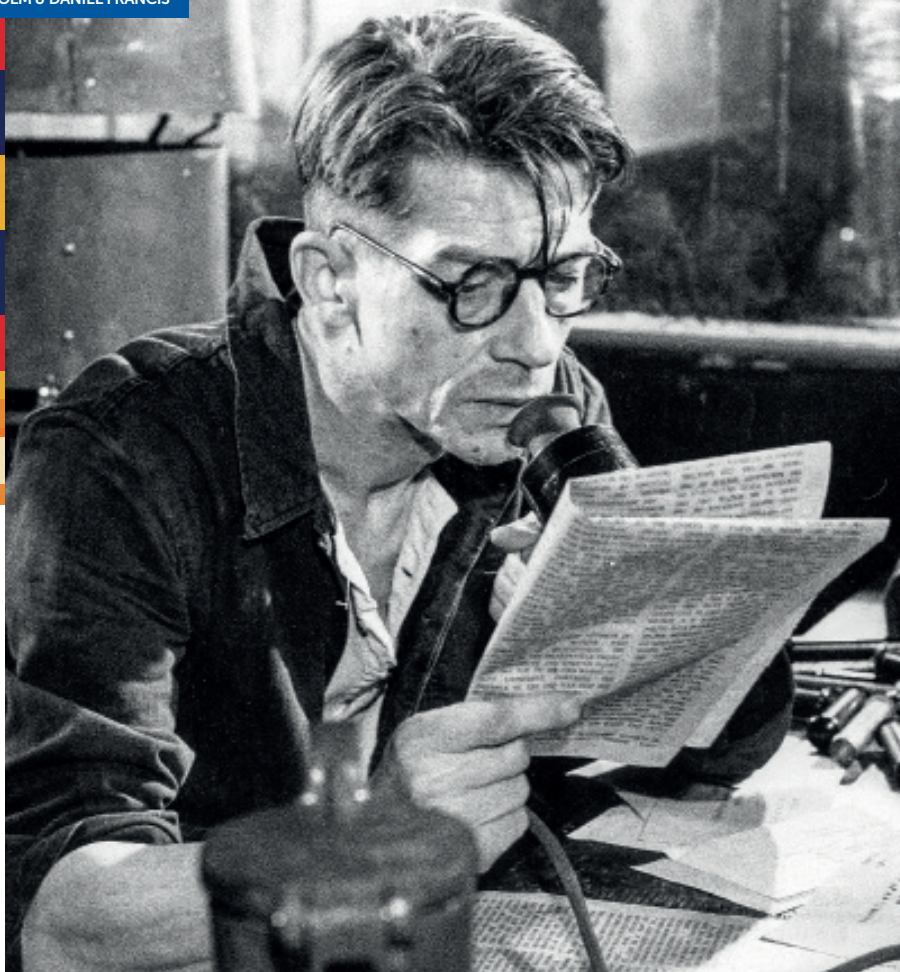
Winston has rebellious thoughts<sup>12</sup>, which are dangerous. Informers and spies are everywhere, reporting to the dreaded<sup>13</sup> Thought Police. Hidden<sup>14</sup> microphones detect every word spoken. Every action is recorded on 'telescreens'. Independent thinking is persecuted. Dissenters disap-

pear without trace. Love is forbidden<sup>15</sup>. And so, Winston's heart is racing<sup>16</sup> when he is handed<sup>17</sup> a small piece of paper by a young, dark-haired woman called Julia who works close by:

*"He re-adjusted his spectacles on his nose, sighed, and drew the next batch of work towards him, with the scrap of paper on top of it. He flattened it out. On it was written, in a large unformed handwriting: I love you."*

"Si riaggiustò gli occhiali sul naso, emise un sospiro e accostò a sé





il blocco di carte successivo, che aveva in cima il foglietto di carta. Lo aprì. Vi era scritto, in grossi caratteri vergati con caligrafia incerta:

TI AMO.”

### RESISTANCE

Despite the risks, Winston and Julia begin a secret love affair. Winston is determined to find ways to fight against the regime and talks about joining<sup>18</sup> a resistance organisation called the Brotherhood<sup>19</sup>. Winston believes that one of his colleagues, a man named O’Brien, could be a contact. But in this world of hate and mistrust<sup>20</sup>, nobody is who they appear to be. Big Brother is everywhere. Winston and Julia know that soon they will be discovered and arrested, and then face<sup>21</sup> the ultimate betrayal<sup>22</sup>:

*“Confession is not betrayal. What you say or do doesn’t matter: only feelings matter. If they could make me stop*

Above: stills from Michael Radford’s film *1984* starring John Hurt as Winston and Suzanna Hamilton as Julia. Below: the Ingsoc political party logo described in the novel and used in the film. Opposite page centre: the statue of Orwell outside the BBC in London. Opposite page right: the author and journalist in 1943.



*loving you – that would be the real betrayal.’*

*She thought it over. ‘They can’t do that,’ she said finally. ‘It’s the one thing they can’t do. They can make you say anything – anything – but they can’t make you believe it. They can’t get inside you.’”*

“«Confessare non è tradire. Non importa quello che dici o non dici, ciò che conta sono i sentimenti. Se riuscissero a fare in modo che io non ti ami più... quello sarebbe tradire.»

Julia restò per qualche attimo a riflettere. «Non lo possono fare» disse infine. «È l’unica cosa che non possono fare. Possono farti dire tutto, tutto, ma non possono obbligarti a crederci. Non possono entrare dentro di te.»”

### ROOM 101

Like other political prisoners, Winston fears imprisonment, beatings<sup>23</sup> and tor-



ture. Re-education involves being brain-washed<sup>24</sup>, individuality lost, leaving nothing but love for Big Brother. Worst of all is the knowledge of what lies ahead<sup>25</sup>, in the dreaded Room 101:

*“You asked me once,’ said O’Brien, ‘what was in Room 101. I told you that you knew the answer already. Everyone knows it. The thing that is in Room 101 is the worst thing in the world.’”*

“«Una volta mi hai chiesto» disse «che cosa c’era nella stanza 101, e io ti ho risposto che lo sapevi già. Tutti lo sanno. Nella stanza 101 c’è la peggiore cosa del mondo.»”

### POLITICAL BELIEFS

Orwell wanted *Ninety Eighty-Four* to reinforce the political beliefs and fears he had so successfully captured in *Animal Farm*. Writing his new novel was difficult, as he

was extremely ill with tuberculosis. He completed his masterpiece in December 1948 and survived to see its publication, but died six months later, in January 1950. Many of the issues he raises<sup>26</sup> in *Ninety Eighty-Four* such as totalitarianism, mass surveillance, media control, ensorship<sup>27</sup> and authoritarian regimes, are as relevant today as they were when he wrote it seventy years ago. As such, it has been adapted for the stage and screen many times, and has had an influence on literature, academia and the formation of public policy. It is a tribute to Orwell’s skill<sup>28</sup> as a writer that the book opens with one of the best-known and most ominous<sup>29</sup> lines in English literature:

*“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen.”*

“Era una luminosa e fredda giornata di aprile, e gli orologi battevano tredici colpi”. ☹

### ↳ GLOSSARY

- 18 **to join:** unirsi
- 19 **brotherhood:** fratellanza
- 20 **mistrust:** diffidenza
- 21 **to face:** affrontare
- 22 **betrayal:** tradimento
- 23 **beatings:** colpi, percosse
- 24 **to brainwash:** fare il lavaggio del cervello
- 25 **to lie ahead:** stare per succedere
- 26 **to raise an issue:** sollevare una questione
- 27 **ensorship:** censura
- 28 **skill:** talento
- 29 **ominous:** infauste