OCEANIA'S TOTALITARIAN TECHNOLOGY: WRITING IN *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

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I

Nineteen Eighty-Four opens with an elaborately staged scene of writing: Winston begins his diary. We meet Winston at home from work for his lunch hour. He hides himself in a corner and takes out pen and ink, and a "blank book with a red back and marbled cover."[1] Some weeks before, he had bought the book from a junk shop, because of a certain nostalgic appeal: the book is "of a kind that had not been manufactured for at least forty years past." Winston had been "stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess" the book, even though "he was not conscious of wanting it for any particular purpose" (8). We're also told that he took the risk of buying a fountain pen "simply because of a feeling that the beautiful creamy paper deserved to be written on with a real nib instead of being scratched with an ink pencil" (8).

Winston's nostalgia occurs in the context of an almost complete mechanization of writing. A machine, the "speakwrite," produces everyday writing from the dictated words of the "writer." "Novel-writing machines" compose novels (11). Song lyrics are "composed without any human intervention whatever on an instrument known as a versificator" (145). And Winston experiences the mechanization of writing every day in his job, which involves "rectifying" documents written in the past so that they will conform to whatever is happening in the present (46). He uses his dictionary of approved words (Newspeak) to decode instructions from above, creates changes composed in imitation of "Big Brother's familiar style" (49), and then dictates the changes into his "speakwrite." Winston's work is entirely involved with writing and written documents, but he in fact never does any actual writing, instead always speaking his writing into a "dictaphone."

So Winston is nostalgic for the one form of writing that remains, in a way, closest to speech. When we read handwriting, we get not only the

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content of a particular person's thoughts, but we also get a quality not found in any other kind of writing: the sense of a singular, living hand. We can see signs of an individual physical being in the letters and words. This means that handwriting more than any other kind of writing comes closest to the embodied expressivity of a speech act. Individual acts of speech always consist of both verbal content and the non-verbal visible and audible elements of the speaker's physical being. Our unique, individual scripts preserve at least some of the non-verbal quality of a speech act. We can conclude, then, that handwriting occurs at a midway point on a continuum running from mechanized print on one end to everyday spoken words on the other end. The same holds for handwriting considered in relation to the history of writing in general. The centuries of manuscript literacy separate primary orality on the one side from print literacy on the other. All of this will matter for understanding Winston's nostalgia in the context of the ultra-literate world of Oceania.

Now, no one need argue in general that Orwell was concerned with totalitarianism and technology. Like other dystopian writers, Orwell "selects the elements in his own world that seem to pose the greatest threat to liberty and dignity and then extrapolates these factors into a future where they are completely triumphant."[2] He was imagining the possible consequences of political totalitarianism in his own time and taking especially into account how modern technologies would make such totalitarianism more possible than ever before. Orwell saw the totalitarianism of Ingsoc as "the logical consequence of the Modern/Enlightenment project that gave scientific and technological rationalization" a kind of "religious status."[3] Ingsoc and advanced, science-fiction style technologies go hand in hand. But if we look closely, we will see how Orwell's dystopia in fact extends the totalitarian consequences of a much more elemental technology, one that had much to do with the making of Modernity: alphabetic writing.[4]

How can something as ancient and un-science fictional as writing turn out to be the totalitarian technology of Oceania? To see this, we need first to understand what it means that writing is any kind of technology at all. In literary studies we have had serious, well-known investigations of writing since the 1960s. Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and other poststructuralist scholars have made elaborate arguments about the nature and effects of writing in relation to speech and to literature.[5] But another take on writing has evolved in historical tandem with poststructuralism. This one, based on the works of such scholars as Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and Eric Havelock, explains writing, especially alphabetic writing (alphabetography), as a technological invention that involves a specific array of important practical causes and consequences.[6]

The two understandings have their similarities and their differences, but clearly enough, at least in literary studies, the poststructuralist school has been the more influential. The "other," more empirically and historically oriented take on writing has been more commonly used by historians, often in explaining large-scale changes from oral culture to literate culture. This has been true, for instance, with studies of ancient Greek literature,[7] the Bible,[8] and medieval literature.[9] I will work with the idea of writing as a technology here, in part because I feel it has been unjustly neglected by literary scholarship but also because it gives us intriguing insights into Orwell's great novel.

The nature and effects of writing considered as a technology have been well established. Along with the works of Ong, Goody, and Havelock, we have had studies by scholars such as Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Marshall McLuhan, Ian Watt, Elizabeth Eisenstein, David Olson, and others. And the roots of this research go back even earlier, to the Soviet psychologists Lev Vygotsky and A. R. Luria. Simply put, spoken language is our evolutionarily endowed, species-specific means of communication. Unlike writing, we learn it with astonishing ease. As David Morris has written: "Genetics alone assures that children learn to talk simply through exposure to spoken language, but all readers need a written alphabet or its equivalent in nonalphabetic language."[10] Speech has the special qualities of being: invisible, since we can't see sounds, and ephemeral, since it is extinguished as soon as it is uttered. But in spite of its immateriality, it is an essential, constitutive element of our individual minds and bodies. Writing, in contrast, is an invented technology, requiring tools and systematic instruction over many years. Writing takes speech—what we normally experience as simply an element of our everyday embodied being—and removes it from its bodily home by rendering it into a visible, relatively permanent set of material marks. Unlike speech, which emerges from within us, these marks, no matter their specific form, stand apart as separate from our embodied selves.

The consequences of the differences between speech and writing are hard to overstate. Very often the differences are not even noticed. We regularly tend to conflate speech and writing as if they were simply different versions of the same thing. But they are, of course, radically different systems of signs. As for the consequences of the differences, we tend to think mainly in terms of print. Historically, the effects of print on human life have been well established. But the scholarship on writing as a technology has revealed that print extends the effects of writing. Alphabetic writing in any form takes elements of language and memory, such as storage capacity, preservation, and accuracy, and amplifies their possibilities

exponentially in certain specific ways. And then the transformation of writing into mechanically or electronically standardized forms amplifies these effects once again.

Of the many profound effects of writing, anthropologist Jack Goody makes the case that "the very nature of formal reasoning as [literate cultures] understand it (that is, in terms of Aristotelian 'logical' procedures) is not a general ability but a highly specific skill, critically dependent upon the existence of writing and of a written tradition" (1987, 256). Writing has been put forth as one explanation for the foundations of modernity (Eisenstein [1979]; Olson [1994]). Ong has argued that one "consequence of [writing] was modern science" (1982, 127). Historian Henri-Jean Martin has explained how by the time of the Enlightenment the spread of writing had lead directly to "the unleashing of mechanisms that prompted a new view of self and a spirit of abstraction," both hallmarks of the modern era (345). One of the most famous historians of the book, Roger Chartier, has argued for the intimate connection between writing and such fundamental modern concepts as individuality and privacy (1994, 2002). And the linkage of writing and the emergence of modern concepts of law has been well established (Clanchy, Green, Goody [1986]). From all this, we may conclude that alphabetography has been an essential generator of the modernity from which Orwell was extrapolating Oceania.

Like any technology, though, writing must have its negative effects. As we shall see, Orwell explores the extreme negative possibilities in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. But I do not claim that Orwell thought of his project this way. He did not. Reasonably enough, he was concerned with much higher-level technologies, beginning with print. At one point Winston is reading from "*The Book*," the revolutionary underground treatise that lays out the history and nature of Ingsoc.[11] Earlier attempts at totalitarian control had failed, we read, because "no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance. The invention of print" and then radio and television changes that (214). But as it turns out, handwriting rather than print is the featured form of writing that actually shows up in the novel. As is commonly the case, Orwell doesn't necessarily think of writing itself, and certainly not handwriting, as an invented communications *technology* at all. Most of us readily understand print as an "invention," but we have, as Walter Ong puts it, "interiorized writing" to the point that we don't usually see it for what it is (1982, 80). And yet writing is not only "a" communications technology; in many ways it is *the* communications technology. If writing, print, and computer-digital displays are the three great innovations (so far) in the alphabetic representation of speech, then writing stands out as "the most drastic of the three

technologies. It initiated what print and computers only continue" (Ong 1982, 81). Writing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is just this kind of unnoticed but "drastic" technology.

We need to consider one last property of writing before returning to the novel: writing's "conscriptive" nature. Etymologically, "conscription" means simply the act of writing together, as in compiling items in a list. But that meaning has long since given way to the idea of compelling someone to be enlisted, most commonly for military service. In a very real way alphabetography is a conscriptive technology. Once it gets a foothold, it tends to transform many of the basic operations of life and therefore to become, over time, all but universally necessary. This can easily be seen by considering the spread of writing around the globe over the centuries. From the literate perspective it can seem just obvious, natural even, that all people ought to be brought into (conscripted into) the literate fold; or else on the negative side that, as Henry Louis Gates (1988) has argued, certain people (such as slaves) should be explicitly kept out. But unlike speech, writing is not natural at all. We must assume that human life could have gone on perfectly well, though quite differently, without it. Nonetheless, it has inexorably become more and more universally required, to the point that practically no one, individual or culture, can choose not to enlist. Orwell takes this property of writing to its negative limit. Oceania is on its way to becoming what we might call a regime of absolute alphabetic literacy.

II

Nineteen Eighty-four tells a story of the final conscription of our built-in, species-specific means of communication—spoken language—by our invented technology for representing language—writing. The novel imagines this conscription occurring through advanced technological forms of writing, but the process must necessarily be a bleakly imagined endpoint of the original technology: alphabetography. Since spoken language is an essential element of both our cultural and our individual psychological being, it follows that the conscription of speech by writing also entails the conscription of human beings. Like many science-fiction, and especially dystopian, stories, the novel has to do with an otherwise useful, invented technology that one way or the other ends up destroying or usurping the inventors. To explore this in detail, we'll first consider the lunchroom scene with the Newspeak dictionary worker, Syme. This scene operates as a kind of catalogue of the various positions on the continuum from speech to writing in Oceania. It enables us to isolate

Winston's unique place. And with that place established, we can explain in detail the significance of the "decisive act" of writing that begins the plot of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Within the world of Oceania, the continuum of language runs from Oldspeak, or every day verbal communication on one end, to the Party-prescribed Newspeak on the other. Now, Newspeak is a form of vocal speech, but on the continuum that runs from everyday speech to mechanized writing, it is a version of speech that is most like writing. Said another way, Newspeak involves a fundamental reversal in the relationship between speech and writing. Instead of writing being a representation of speech, speech is a representation of writing. Language itself gets conscripted by writing.[12]

At the time of Winston's story, Newspeak is still being perfected and implemented. Syme, who works on the current and final edition of the Newspeak dictionary, most succinctly explains its nature. (The appended "Principles of Newspeak" explains Newspeak in great detail.) Syme appears as a kind of foil character for Winston. Like Winston, he works for the Ministry of Truth. They are what counts as "friends" in the alienated world of Oceania. And they both understand certain truths about Ingsoc and Newspeak. At lunch with Winston, Syme brags about how he is helping to get "the language into its final shape—the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else" (53). This will be accomplished by steadily reducing the number and kind of words in the dictionary and, of course, enforcing the dictionary as the source of speech. With Newspeak, Syme proclaims, every "concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten . . . . The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect" (55), which is to say when the dictionary determines speech, rather than the other way around.

The idea of creating a dictionary as a means to constrain the ever-changing vagaries of spoken language has a long history. In Western culture, Samuel Johnson's dictionary project is surely the most famous example. In the introduction to that work, he wrote that before writing, language, which was

> unfixed by any visible signs, must have been spoken with great diversity, as we now observe those who cannot read to catch sounds imperfectly, and utter them negligently. When this wild and barbarous jargon was first reduced to an alphabet, every penman endeavoured to express, as he could, the sounds which he was accustomed to pronounce

> or to receive, and vitiated in writing such words as were already vitiated in speech . . .[13]

In a stereotypical litero-centric way, Johnson sees spoken language without writing as "wild and barbarous." Without a governing, written dictionary, writing merely imitates the savage diversity of speech.[14] To Johnson, these seem simple, unarguable facts: it may be that spoken language can't be saved from its own diversity, but surely writing can. Johnson's prescriptive dictionary is the means to that end. The Newspeak dictionary is a limit-case extension of this old idea, for the Newspeak dictionary explicitly sets out to make literacy absolute. It will strictly govern *spoken* language, not just writing. It will bring about the era in which "nobody speaks anything else."

Unlike Winston, Syme fully, mindlessly supports the Newspeak project. At one point Syme chastises Winston for "still thinking in Oldspeak" even when Winston is translating documents into Newspeak (55). But still, Syme is not yet fully conscripted. To say that linguistic variation in general will be "rubbed out" is to think of Newspeak in terms of handwriting, the writing that is most like speech (Oldspeak). Only writing can be rubbed out. But Newspeak will remove all traces of individuality. Its determining model will be the printed or electronic word.

At one point, again stressing that the dictionary will govern spoken language, Syme says that "by the year 2050 . . . not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now" (55). Winston begins to object by bringing up the Proles, the great mass of people whom the Party doesn't much care about. In Oceania the Proles occupy the Oldspeak end of the continuum of literacy. Historically, the speech-writing continuum often involves a scale of value with higher literacy always being valued positively in relation to lower or non-literacy. As David Olson has written, we in the West have for several centuries "rested our beliefs in our cultural superiority over our pre-literate ancestors as well as over our non-Western neighbors, on our access to a simple technological artifact, an alphabetical writing system" (Olson 2). Oceania depends on this system of value. The Proles, whom we might see as "non-Ingsoc neighbors" to the Party, do have a form of literacy. But it is only rudimentary, not widespread, and of course entirely controlled by the state (46). The Party sees the Proles as "natural inferiors to be subjected like animals" (74). A Party slogan declares that "Proles and animals are free" (75). Though Winston sometimes thinks that the Proles will be the only possible way that the Party can be undone, no one else thinks so. Syme shrugs off Winston's objection about the Proles because, he says,

the "proles are not human beings" (56). O'Brien will have much the same opinion about Winston's belief that the Proles will sooner or later rebel. "Put [that rebellion] out of your mind," he says. The Proles "are helpless, like the animals. Humanity is the Party. The others are outside—irrelevant" (282). Oceania is a literate culture in which those on the far verbal-speech end of the continuum simply hold no serious value.

The lunchroom scene also gives us the novel's definitive example of the end of the continuum opposite to the Proles: someone already fully conscripted into Newspeak. Winston notices a man sitting at a nearby table. He appears to Winston to have "two blank discs instead of eyes." A "stream of sound" pours continually out of his mouth, but his words come out "all in one piece, like a line of type cast solid" (48). Even without actually understanding any specific words, Winston knows just from the sound that the man speaks "pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc." He begins to see the man as "not a real human being but some kind of dummy." The form of the man's speech has become indistinguishable in a key way from print ("line of type"), the archetypal mechanized form of writing.

The content is also a limit case of speech that is most like writing. We may compare this imaginary extreme to an actual situation in which writerly constraints govern speech: testimony in a court of law. On the witness stand our spoken words are treated much like writing. As we speak, we must be constantly aware of an institutionally sanctioned, legally empowered set of critical listeners who studiously examine virtually every word we speak. Unlike nearly any other speech situation, our words are recorded, exactly, in writing so that they may be re-examined later. In short, we cannot speak with anything like the liberty or ease of everyday speech, but only according to the precise (established by written rules) constraints of the courtroom. On the continuum from everyday speech to writing, courtroom speech is a paradigmatic case of speech that is most like writing. Its opposite counterpart on the continuum is handwriting: the writing that is most like speech. But in Oceania the possibility of speech that is most like writing has been taken as far as it can go. What Winston calls "pure orthodoxy"—the content of Newspeak—is a kind of running testimony to Big Brother, the Party, and the principles of Ingsoc. To speak Newspeak is to speak as if always on trial in a court of law.

When Winston describes the man's speech as "uttered in unconsciousness," he means spoken like a machine or imitation human ("dummy"), rather than by an individual psychological identity. From this, we can see that unlike Syme, Winston still values "speech in the true sense," which would be Oldspeak. But he does not seem nostalgic for the loss of this speech in the way that he is plainly nostalgic for the blank diary and the

pen. Unlike writing, speech typically depends on an interaction between two living human beings in the same space. We usually write and read in private. As a kind of communication writing is, compared to speech, fundamentally non-social. But it does provide a kind of virtual interaction on a purely private level. After all, our words become materially separate from our minds and voices, so we experience a kind of interaction with our own words as if they were another's. Writing appeals to Winston for just this reason. Besides, even if Winston were nostalgic for verbal speech, he has no one—until he begins the relationship with Julia—whom he could possibly trust as an interlocutor. So writing, by hand, words in a private diary becomes the one way he can have at least a virtual exchange of true speech.

Anthony Stewart has written that Winston is a culminating example of the "in-betweenness" investigated by Orwell in much of his fiction: in-between "Inner Party and the Proles, the present and the past, the idealist and the realist, the public and the private."[15] As manuscript literacy falls historically in-between orality and print literacy, so Winston, the lone handwriter in Oceania, falls just in-between the two end poles—Oldspeak and Newspeak—on the continuum of literacy. Syme helps us understand Winston's exact place, for Winston understands both Newspeak and Syme. Just after Syme has finished explaining the dictionary, Winston thinks: "One of these days . . . Syme will be vaporized. He is too intelligent. He sees too clearly and speaks too plainly" (56). Winston's prediction about Syme comes true. For three days no one sees Syme. Then Winston checks the "printed list of the Chess Committee, of whom Syme had been one. It looked almost exactly as it had looked before—nothing had been crossed out—but it was one name shorter. It was enough. Syme had ceased to exist; he had never existed" (154). The language of handwriting has disappeared. The "printed" list shows no signs of pen or pencil: "nothing had been crossed out." The language of forgetting has disappeared as well. Syme has "never existed." Syme, then, is also a mixed case, caught up in the conflicted transformation from basic literacy to the absolutized print literacy of Newspeak. But he falls more toward the Newspeak end of the literate continuum than does Winston.

III

Having situated Winston in-between the extremes of Oldspeak and Newspeak, we now look in detail at the act of writing his diary. This act brings him to his conflicted middle position on the literate continuum, and as a result he becomes distinctively interesting to the Party.

The diary-writing scene reads as its own mini-drama, with its own beginning, middle, and end. Winston begins because he evidently wants to make permanent his own words in a form that, though necessarily disembodied, nonetheless will still carry some signs of his individual self. A handwritten diary is just this. Above we have discussed speech that is most like writing. If from the other direction we look for kinds of writing that try to be most like speech, a personal diary will be a likely example. An especially intimate sense of audience typically guides such writing. In the act of writing we "hear" in our minds the words we write, and with a diary we "hear" ourselves write to ourselves. Though in general writing makes public our privately produced words, these particular words nonetheless strive to be as private as possible. And writing by hand makes these qualities all the stronger. In a land where writing as a form of communication is universally mechanized, and where the Party controls the content of all communication, a private handwritten diary falls just in the middle of our continuum from vocal speech to print.

But writing a diary entry turns out to be fraught with unexpected difficulties, one of which is the need for a date. The diary as a genre assumes that the future self will want (or need) to know what he or she was thinking and doing at specific times in the past. As soon as Winston writes the date, he feels beset by "complete helplessness" because he has no way to be sure of the date he has just written (9). The problem of the date throws Winston into a crisis of literacy. He intends only to "transfer to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years" (9–10). But he can't begin, at least not as an act of conscious will. Beset by a steadily building anxiety because of "the blank page in front of him," he finally begins "writing in sheer panic, only imperfectly aware of what he was setting down" (10).

Orwell directly shows us Winston's first, panic-stricken entry, offset and italicized. Before getting to it, though, we read that his "small but childish handwriting straggled up and down the page, shedding first its capital letters and finally even its full stops" (10). This value judgment ("small but childish") depends on another effect of the technology of writing: the institutionalization of mechanical uniformity. Spoken words, even within the same language dialect, vary in the countless ways that all individual bodies and minds vary. But an alphabet, once it gains power, establishes the same small set of marks for vocalizations that, strictly speaking (i.e., by alphabetic standards), rarely if ever sound the same. As children, repetitive exercises teach us to emulate a standardized model of script. We know we are succeeding when our script most closely matches the standard and so carries the least sign of our individual hand.

(Ultimately, print comes in to carry this to an extreme.) Not surprisingly, children always begin writing in large script and then over time learn to write smaller. Winston's writing looks both childish, because it strays so far from a proper model of script, and also not quite childish, because it is so small. The visual appearance of the writing, then, carries material signs of Winston's unique hand and therefore material signs of his unique being. Equally important, the "handwriting," not the writer, is the agentive subject. Like a child, it begins throwing off ("shedding") its proper clothes ("capital letters . . . full stops") as it moves. It is as if, in spite of being forty years old, in order to make this beginning he has had to become like a child again.

As for the content, Winston simply records his experience at some "war films" the night before:

> *Last night to the flicks. All war films. One very good one of a ship full of refugees being bombed somewhere in the Mediterranean. Audience much amused by shots of a great huge fat man trying to swim away with a helicopter after him, first you saw him wallowing along in the water like a porpoise, then you saw him through the helicopters gunsights, then he was full of holes and the sea round him turned pink and he sank as suddenly as though the holes had let in the water, audience shouting with laughter when he sank. then you saw a lifeboat full of children with a helicopter hovering over it. there was a middle-aged woman might have been a jewess sitting up in the bow with a little boy about three years old in her arms. little boy screaming with fright and hiding his head between her breasts as if he was trying to burrow right into her and the woman putting her arms round him and comforting him although she was blue with fright herself, all the time covering him up as much as possible as if she thought her arms could keep the bullets off him. then the helicopter planted a 20 kilo bomb in among them terrific flash and the boat went all to matchwood. then there was a wonderful shot of a child's arm going up up up right up into the air a helicopter with a camera in its nose must have followed it up and there was a lot of applause from the party seats but a woman down in the prole part of the house suddenly started kicking up a fuss and shouting they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of kids they didnt it aint right not in front of kids it aint until the police turned her out i dont suppose anything happened to her nobody cares what the proles say typical prole reaction they never . . .* (10)

This content hardly seems worthy of being thoughtcrime and, consequently, hardly seems to express panic. And yet it does. A state of panic momentarily suspends our everyday rationality. In this case Winston's conscious mind has been taken over by "handwriting" (not just writing in general) for the time it has taken to write out the memory of the night before. As mentioned above, the nature of writing tends to subordinate any individual "hand" to a prescriptive set of uniform characters. But Winston's panic works in an opposite manner. His hand seems just to leap into action, and he can only stop when his hand finally begins to physically "cramp."

When the panic subsides, he realizes he had been only "imperfectly aware" as he wrote and now does "not know what had made him pour out this stream of rubbish" (11). We must assume that he sees the content of the passage as rubbish in comparison to the "interminable" revolutionary monologue that he had consciously planned to transcribe into writing. Ironically, what he actually writes (the rambling memory of the movie he saw the evening before) *is* a stream of inner monologue. But of course the stream of our consciousness veers off against our will constantly. Writing typically forces the stream of thinking into relatively rigid channels, governed by a large array of prescriptive rules. So this content in general must look like "rubbish" because it reads too much like the reality of embodied thought: it is more "hand" than "writing," we might say. As the passage progresses, the phrasing becomes steadily less constrained by the usual rules of writing, and steadily more like running thought. At the same time the formal mechanics become less standardized. By the end we have a case of writing that comes unusually close to the actuality of interior "speech."

Rubbish or not, this panic-writing has been therapeutic, causing another memory to be clarified in his mind "to the point where he almost felt equal to writing it down. It was, he now realized, because of this other incident that he had suddenly decided to come home and begin the diary today" (11). Winston has passed from an inability to write what he consciously wanted to write, to a panic-stricken writing of a harmless memory, to a consciousness of what had, until this realization, been an unconscious motivation for all that we have seen of him so far in this novel. The act of writing has caused him to discover something about himself that he had not quite known before.

The "memorable event" had taken place that morning when Winston had made eye-contact with O'Brien, the Party official whom Winston mistakenly suspects of being unorthodox (19). Since Winston is only "almost equal" to writing this down, we get his recollection rather than the diary entry we might expect. But when the recollection ends, he finds

that as he has been thinking, he has been "writing, as though by automatic action" (20). Moments before, his writing was automatic, written in a panic, with a clumsy and childish-looking script, and contained innocuous "rubbish." Now he again writes automatically, but without any sense of panic. He doesn't mention his hand this time. "His pen," we read, "had slid voluptuously over the smooth paper, printing in large neat capitals—DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER . . . over and over again, filling half a page" (20). The pen has become the active agent, and it takes sensual pleasure in generating the textbook kind of script—overly large, very neat, print, and repetitious in drill fashion—we might expect of the top student in a first-grade writing exercise. Writing itself ("His pen"), apart from his conscious will, has enabled him to materialize the core desire of his repressed political identity.

Having written out such blatantly heretical words, Winston begins to think of the inevitable. He will, he assumes, be "*vaporized*" (Orwell's italics). This thought causes him to be "seized by a kind of hysteria," as a result of which he begins writing again, in an "untidy scrawl" (21). Like his first entry, this one ignores the formal rules of writing, but like the second entry, this one expresses what he really wants to write: "*they'll shoot me I don't care they'll shoot me in the back of the neck . . . down with big brother*" (21, Orwell's italics).

After an interruption by his neighbor, Winston tries to think of "something more to write in the diary" (27). He experiences some moments of uncertainty (this entire scene involves only an hour and ten minutes of clock time), but then the "chiming of the hour" gives him a "new heart." It's as if, utterly confounded by the loss of calendar time at the beginning, he latches on to the only temporal certainty available to him. This moment of good feeling enables him for the first time to write fully consciously. No longer a child-writer or in a state of panic, he consciously turns outward, away from himself, and writes in proper script a short greeting "To the future or the past," when things will (or at least may) have changed. Writing, his hand, and his conscious will finally all work together. This leads him to think that it was only "now, when he had begun to formulate his thoughts, that he had taken the decisive step" (30). Over the course of this little scene, Winston has "grown" from his new beginning as a child-writer to this moment of political self-identity. The technology of writing, then, has been the means by which the heretofore vague, impotent, "restless monologue" gets transformed into something coherent, decisive, and therefore revolutionary.

The attention to the writing materials, to the act of writing by hand, and to the physical appearance of what Winston writes have all

foregrounded the practical material nature—which is to say the technological nature—of writing. Foregrounding the technological nature of writing this way helps explain why Winston gets singled out for special treatment by O'Brien and the Party. For the diary appears to be the original act that most secures Winston's fate. Late in the novel Winston wonders why O'Brien takes so much trouble with the interrogation if in the end Winston will be vaporized. O'Brien explains that Winston is a special case, "a flaw in the pattern" of the usual thoughtcriminal (267). "I am taking trouble with you, Winston, because you are worth trouble" (258). Winston doesn't interest the Party simply because he's a thoughtcriminal. Thoughtcriminals, like Syme, are simply vaporized. Winston matters because he's a thoughtcriminal who writes by hand. During the interrogation, O'Brien, who knows Winston's diary well enough to quote from it, will accuse Winston of having brought about his own degradation in the Ministry of Love. "This is what you accepted when you set yourself up against the Party. It was all contained in that first act" of beginning the diary (286). Winston thinks of the diary this way as well. When he decides to secretly meet O'Brien, he realizes that "The first step had been a secret, involuntary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words," and the formulation of his thoughts into written words enables him to take action (166).

Though Winston can't know it as he begins to write, the handwritten diary turns out to be a truly powerful form of rebellion. We have seen that Newspeak involves the elimination of the differences between speech and writing, until at the extreme, speech becomes a form of mechanized writing: print. Individual identity depends in many ways on speech, so if speech is transformed into mechanized writing, then individual speaking beings become more or less mechanically uniform. In the hands of an absolute dictatorship, the uniformity that is an element of all alphabetography gets taken to such an extreme that the invention takes over the inventor. In direct opposition to this, Winston's original transgression occurs when he uses or, more accurately, conscripts the regime's own totalitarian technology into the service of his individual self-discovery. It's not just that he produces revolutionary content. He could possibly do that simply by speaking. And it's inaccurate to claim that "the use of language in the act of self-creation" is Winston's "most serious crime" against the Party.[16] Winston becomes worthy of the Party's special interest specifically because he uses handwritten language as a means of generating a concrete sense of his individual identity. This makes clear the significance of Winston's peculiar place on the continuum from Oldspeak

to Newspeak. In both form and content the mixed case of a handwritten diary (writing most like speech) very directly threatens the regime of absolute literacy.

After this, we will have two more acts of writing before Winston's capture. In the first he attempts to use writing as a means of personal therapy. The memory of a night with an aging prostitute is "tormenting him" with shame, and he feels the need to confess it in writing (66–72). In the end the therapy fails, but this appears to be because what really torments him is not the one guilty night with the prostitute, but the systematic ruination of sexual desire in Oceania. Another scene of writing immediately follows, in which he finally writes out some of his personal political thoughts (72–84). These two scenes, then, validate the revolutionary use of the technology of writing as a means of individual self-exploration.

IV

In one of the many black ironies in this bleakest of novels, to be fully conscripted into Newspeak is to cease any actual writing, apart from speak-writing for the Party. If speech and thought have become just another form of writing, then to speak is already to write: writing itself, then, is redundant. This is why we have the term New*speak*, and why Syme makes so much of the fact that the Newspeak dictionary will control verbal speech and thought. Winston's conscription will be finalized when he no longer writes at all.

After torture brings about Winston's first capitulation, his jailers supply him with "a white slate with a stump of pencil tied to the corner" (288). Given the singular importance of writing in Winston's case, this appears to be a kind of test. When Newspeak has fully conscripted Winston, he will have no need to write because, again, his speaking and thinking will already be of a kind with writing. At this point he believes that he has "accepted everything" that the Party espouses, but still he feels the need to "write down the thoughts that [come] into his head" (290). No longer the mature writer he had earlier become, torture and defeat have reduced him once again to the status of a little child just learning to write. The pencil feels "thick and awkward in his fingers," and he writes "in large clumsy capitals" (290). He begins writing Party slogans and gets as far as writing "TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE." But then he can continue "only by consciously reasoning out" what the next slogan should be. This automatically means that his thinking and his writing have not merged into one

activity. He has not been conscripted into Newspeak. And for this reason he must go through the final torture, the famous scene with the caged rats.

After this, the Party no longer concerns itself with Winston because, though not yet fully conscripted, he has no chance of recovering himself. Ironically, he works on the Newspeak Dictionary, and, more ironically, he works on answering the "question of whether commas should be placed inside brackets, or outside" (307–308). There could be no more purely writerly task. Such rules tend only to maintain the efficient functioning of the technology itself, rather than to represent living speech. He becomes a drunken regular at the Chestnut Tree Cafe. And yet still he has an occasional "spasm" when his thoughts wander (239). As this happens, he writes for the last time in the novel: "Almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table: 2 + 2 = 5" (303). The difference between the rebellious diary-writer and alphabetic totalitarianism grows smaller and smaller. He does still write, but now his own body has become the incorporated instrument of writing. This content (2 + 2 = 5) most directly defies Winston's understanding of truth and the real, but the "almost unconsciously" matters. If he were truly operating unconsciously, which is to say truly conscripted, he would have no need to write at all. He has one more "spasm." An "uncalled for" memory "[floats] into his mind," of a happy childhood day before the revolution (308). But this leads to no writing. He simply rejects it as false. And at the last, fully conscripted, he loves Big Brother.

To conclude, by thinking seriously about writing as a technology, we have revealed an otherwise not-quite obvious element of Orwell's dark vision. The totalitarian political triumph occurs when the conscriptive nature of this ancient technology finally reaches its maximum. This is hardly to suggest that Orwell himself was somehow anti-literate or anti-print. Of course he was not. And yet this underlying wariness about writing is clearly present in this novel. To read the novel in the way that I have, places Orwell in a long tradition of, often not-fully conscious, ambivalence about alphabetography. Writing has often instilled an uneasiness in the creatures who have come to depend on it. We may go all the way back to Plato for the first case against writing, most famously in the *Phaedrus*. As I have argued in detail elsewhere, we regularly find signs of this unease in the history of the most writerly kind of story: the novel.[17] For all the monumental benefits that have come with alphabetography, we appear to worry that there is something just not quite right about disembodying our native speech into an invented system of visible signs. If we take *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an example, we are right to worry.

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NOTES

1. George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. *Complete Works of George Orwell, Vol 9*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1987), 7.
2. Gorman Beauchamp, "*1984*: Oceania as an Ideal State," *College Literature* 11, no. 1 (1984): 4.
3. Marion Dalvai, "Utopianism Parodied in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: An Intertextual Reading of the 'Goldstein Treatise'," *Orbis Litterarum: International Review of Literary Studies* 65, no. 5 (2010): 389.
4. For other discussions of language and writing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, see F. W. Bolton, *The Language of Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell's English and Ours* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984); Jean-Jacques Courtine and Laura Willett, "A Brave New Language: Orwell's Invention of "Newspeak" in *1984*," *SubStance* 15, no. 2 (1986): 69–74; Lillian Feder, "Selfhood, Language, and Reality: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*," *George Review* 37, no. 2 (1983): 392–409; Walker Gibson, "Truisms are True: Orwell's View of Language," in *Beyond Nineteen Eight-Four: Doublespeak in a Post-Orwellian Age*, ed. William Lutz (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1989); Alok Rai, *Orwell and the Politics of Despair* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Raymond Williams, *George Orwell* (New York: Viking Press, 1971); John Wesley Young, *Totalitarian Language: Orwell's Newspeak and Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991). However, none of these scholars specifically considers the technological nature of writing.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). See also Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays of Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973); Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
6. At this point the consideration of writing as a technology in relation to orality has grown quite substantial, though it remains relatively unexplored in literary studies. Among others see: Roger Chartier, *A History of Private Life, Volume 3: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989); Chartier, *The Order of Books* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); Jack Goody, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1963); Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and Its Cultural Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1982); Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: From Its Shadow in Homer to Its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making Of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 1962); David Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word; Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971); Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Metheun, 1982); Ong, "Writing Is a Technology That Restructures Thought," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 23–50; Henry Louis Gates, ed. *"Race," Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Gates, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Walter Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Tony E. Jackson, *The Technology of the Novel: Writing and Narrative in British Fiction* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

7. As for instance Egbert J. Bakker, *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Havelock 1963, 1982, 1986; John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The "Odyssey," "Beowulf," and Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Foley, *Homer's Traditional Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Jeffrey Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

8. Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

9. As for instance Mark C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); David E. Bynum, *The Daemon in the Wood: A Study of Oral Narrative Patterns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); H. J. Chaytor, *From Script To Print; An Introduction To Medieval Vernacular Literature* (Cambridge, England: W. Heffer, 1950); John Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Intepretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Jesse M. Gellrich, *Discourse and Dominion in the Fourteenth Century: Oral Contexts of Writing in Philosophy, Politics, and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

10. David B. Morris, "Reading Is Always Biocultural," *New Literary History* 37, no. 3 (2006): 541.

11. *The Book* as it turns out has been generated by the Party, as has Winston's rebelliousness. But this fact does not discount the validity of either the book's theoretical account of things or Winston's visceral sense of things. In fact it validates both. The Party, in order

to ensure its own dominance, willfully produces its own quite real opposition precisely in order to stamp it out and thereby keep itself in total control.

12. This will no doubt remind some of my readers of Jacques Derrida's claims about the relationship between writing and speech, most famously made in *Of Grammatology*. But my argument depends on the empirical fact that verbalization in general occurs independently of the act of writing. Non-literate people think and speak perfectly well with no writing at all. Both intuitively and empirically we must take it that in the history of human being we first had verbal language, and then alphabetic writing was invented as a representation of that language. Derrida's deconstruction of the opposition between speech and writing, culminating in claims about the trace or archi-writing, etc., aren't relevant to a discussion of writing as a historically occurring, invented technology.

13. Samuel Johnson, *Johnson on the English Language*, eds. Gwin J. Kolb and Robert De Maria, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 75.

14. This idea is a misunderstanding of the nature of writing as a system of representation. Johnson like many others here conflates writing and speech as if they are simply different versions of the same thing. Also like many others (including Orwell), he sometimes does this and sometimes does not. For further explanation of this, see Havelock 1982, Jackson 2009, and Walter Ong, "Hostility, Literacy, and *Webster III*," *College English* 26, no. 2 (1964): 106–11.

15. Anthony Stewart, *George Orwell, Doubleness, and the Value of Decency* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40.

16. Lillian Feder, "Selfhood, Language, and Reality: George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*," *Georgia Review* 37, no. 2 (1983): 392.

17. See Jackson 2009.