



Newspeak

Winston joins his colleague, Syme, for lunch in the Ministry of Truth's cafeteria where they discuss Syme's progress writing the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak dictionary.

'Just the man I was looking for,' said a voice at Winston's back.

He turned round. It was his friend Syme, who worked in the Research Department. Perhaps 'friend' was not exactly the right word. You did not have friends nowadays, you had comrades: but there were some comrades whose society was pleasanter than that of others. Syme was a philologist, a specialist in Newspeak. Indeed, he was one of the enormous team of experts now engaged in compiling the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. He was a tiny creature, smaller than Winston, with dark hair and large, protuberant eyes, at once mournful and derisive¹, which seemed to search² your face closely while he was speaking to you.

'I wanted to ask you whether you'd got any razor blades³,' he said.

'Not one!' said Winston with a sort of guilty haste⁴. 'I've tried all over the place. They don't exist any longer.'

Everyone kept asking you for razor blades. Actually he had two unused ones which he was hoarding up⁵. There had been a famine of them for months past. At any given moment there was some necessary article which the Party shops were unable to supply. Sometimes it was buttons, sometimes it was darning wool⁶, sometimes it was shoelaces; at present it was razor blades. You could only get hold of them, if at all, by scrounging⁷ more or less furtively on the 'free' market.

[...]

'Did you go and see the prisoners hanged⁸ yesterday?' said Syme.

'I was working,' said Winston indifferently. 'I shall see it on the flicks⁹, I suppose.'

'A very inadequate substitute,' said Syme.

His mocking eyes roved over¹⁰ Winston's face. 'I know you,' the eyes seemed to say, 'I see through you. I know very well why you didn't go to see those prisoners hanged.' In an intellectual way, Syme was venomously¹¹ orthodox. He would talk with a disagreeable gloating¹² satisfaction of helicopter raids on enemy villages, and trials and confessions of thought-criminals, the executions in the cellars¹³ of the Ministry of Love. Talking to him was largely a matter of getting him away from such subjects and entangling him¹⁴, if possible, in the technicalities of Newspeak, on which he was authoritative and interesting. Winston turned his head a little aside to avoid the scrutiny of the large dark eyes.

'It was a good hanging,' said Syme reminiscently. 'I think it spoils it when they tie their feet together. I like to see them kicking. And above all, at the end, the tongue sticking right out, and blue a quite bright blue. That's the detail that appeals to me.'

'Nex, please!' yelled the white-aproned prole with the ladle¹⁵.

Winston and Syme pushed their trays beneath the grille¹⁶. Onto each was dumped¹⁷ swiftly the regulation¹⁸ lunch – a metal pannikin¹⁹ of pinkish-grey stew²⁰, a hunk of bread, a cube of cheese, a mug of milkless Victory Coffee, and one saccharine tablet.

'There's a table over there, under that telescreen,' said Syme. 'Let's pick up a gin on the way.'

[...]

'How is the Dictionary getting on?' said Winston, raising his voice to overcome the noise.

'Slowly,' said Syme. 'I'm on the adjectives. It's fascinating.'

He had brightened up immediately at the mention of Newspeak. He pushed his pannikin aside, took up his hunk of bread in one delicate hand and his cheese in the other, and leaned across the table so as to be able to speak without shouting.

'The Eleventh Edition is the definitive edition,' he said. 'We're getting the language into its final shape – the shape it's going to have when nobody speaks anything else. When we've finished with it, people like you will have to learn it all over again. You think, I dare say²¹, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're

George Orwell
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Part 1, Chapter 5

The Proles represent the lowest working classes of society (the proletariat). Winston hopes that they might rise up against the Party and restore freedom for all citizens. But the history of Oceania argues that Proles throughout history have rebelled against the state only to recreate the same class structure and oppress new generations of Proles. So in the novel they represent the lack of hope.

- 1 mournful and derisive. Malinconici e beffardi.
- 2 search. Passare in rassegna.
- 3 razor blades. Lamette.
- 4 guilty haste. Fretta colpevole.
- 5 he was hoarding up. Aveva messo da parte.
- 6 darning wool. Lana da rammendo.
- 7 scrounging. Scroccandole.
- 8 hanged. Impiccati.
- 9 on the flicks. Al cinegiornale.
- 10 mocking eyes roved over. Occhi beffardi scrutarono.
- 11 venomously. Velenosamente.
- 12 disagreeable gloating. Sgradevole e perversa.
- 13 cellars. Sotterranei.
- 14 entangling him. Impegnarlo.
- 15 yelled ... ladle. Gridò alzando il mestolo la proletaria con il grembiule bianco.
- 16 trays ... grille. Vassoio sotto lo sportello.
- 17 dumped. Scaricato.
- 18 regulation. Regolamentare.
- 19 pannikin. Gavetta.
- 20 stew. Stufato.
- 21 I dare say. Oserei dire.



50 destroying words – scores²² of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Eleventh Edition won't contain a single word that will become obsolete before the year 2050.'

[...]

55 'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course the great wastage²³ is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of²⁴ as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take 'good', for instance. If you have a word like 'good', what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well – better, because it's an exact opposite, which
60 the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good', what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? 'Plusgood' covers the meaning, or 'doubleplusgood' if you want something stronger still. Of course we use those forms already but in the final version of Newspeak there'll be nothing else. In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be
65 covered by only six words – in reality, only one word. Don't you see the beauty of that, Winston? It was B.B.'s idea originally, of course,' he added as an afterthought.

A sort of **vapid eagerness flitted across**²⁵ Winston's face at the mention of Big Brother. Nevertheless Syme immediately detected **a certain lack of enthusiasm**. 'You haven't a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston,' he said almost sadly. 'Even when
70 you write it you're still thinking in Oldspeak. I've read some of those pieces that you write in the *Times* occasionally. They're good enough, but they're translations. In your heart you'd prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades²⁶ of meaning. You don't grasp the beauty of the destruction of words. Do you know that Newspeak is the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year?'
75 Winston did know that, of course. **He smiled, sympathetically he hoped, not trusting himself to speak**²⁷. Syme bit off another fragment of the dark-coloured bread, chewed it briefly, and went on:

'Don't you see that **the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?** In the end we shall make **thoughtcrime** literally impossible, because there will be no words
80 in which to express it. **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 out²⁸ and forgotten. Already, in the Eleventh Edition, we're not far from that point. But the process will still be continuing long after you and I are dead. Every year fewer and fewer words, and **the range of consciousness always a little smaller**. Even now, of course, there's
85 no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of **self-discipline, reality-control**. But in the end there won't be any need even for that. The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc²⁹ and Ingsoc is Newspeak,' he added with **a sort of mystical satisfaction**. 'Has it ever occurred to you, Winston, that by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could
90 understand such a conversation as we are having now?'

[...]

'By 2050 – earlier, probably – all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. **The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed.** Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron – they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something
95 different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be. Even the literature of the Party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like 'freedom is slavery' when the concept of freedom has been abolished? **The whole climate of thought will be different.** In fact **there will be no thought**, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.'

100 One of these days, thought Winston **with sudden deep conviction**, Syme will be vaporized. **He is too intelligent. He sees too clearly and speaks too plainly.** The Party does not like such people. One day he will disappear. It is written in his face.

22 scores. Dozzine.

23 wastage. Spreco.

24 that can be got rid of. Di cui si può fare a meno.

25 A sort ... across. Una specie di tiepido interesse attraversò.

26 shades. Sfumature.

27 not trusting himself to speak. Non volendo correre il rischio di parlare.

28 rubbed out. Cancellati.

29 Ingsoc. Parola del Newspeak che significa *English Socialism*, il credo politico del Partito.



VISUAL ANALYSIS

1 READ the text and write a caption to describe the content of each section.

- Part 1 (Lines 1-34):
- Part 2 (Lines 35-39):
- Part 3 (Lines 41-77):
- Part 4 (Lines 78-103):

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.



3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 What are personal relationships like in the Ministry of Truth?
- 2 How does Syme describe the destruction of language in lines 54-65?
- 3 What does he consider Winston guilty of in lines 73-79?
- 4 How long will it take to complete the project?
- 5 What does orthodoxy mean for Syme?

➤ COMPETENCE: PRODUCING A WRITTEN TEXT ON A GIVEN SUBJECT

4 WRITE a 10/12-line paragraph about the following topic: 'Language is one of the major themes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. What message was Orwell trying to convey?'

5 WRITE a 10/12-line paragraph to compare Huxley's *Brave New World* (→ Text Bank 104-105) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as two major examples of dystopia.