

# The Discourse of Historicity in George Orwell's 1984

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## ABSTRACT

The issues of historicity, the Party's control over memory and history, and the effect of Newspeak on historical consciousness are all covered in this in-depth analysis of George Orwell's dystopian classic 1984. This study explores the ways in which the Party manipulates historical records, the importance of comprehending historicity, and the ways in which language and memory are shaped and controlled within the novel's totalitarian society by drawing on the theories of New Historicism, including authors like Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher, Hayden White, and Louis Montrose. By carefully examining these ideas, this analysis illuminates the complex relationship between language, memory, power, and historical interpretation, underscoring the perils of authoritarianism and the necessity of keeping a range of viewpoints and critical thinking.

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, Control, George Orwell, History, Historicity, Language, Memory, Manipulation, New Historicism, Party, Power, Totalitarianism.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

English novelist, essayist, and critic George Orwell was born in 1903 as Eric Arthur Blair (Crick, 2004). He is well known for his enlightening and dystopian writings, with 1984 being one of his most significant works. In 1984, which was first published in 1949, a totalitarian society headed by the repressive Party and starring the mysterious Big Brother is depicted (Orwell, 1949). The book examines issues like censorship, governmental surveillance, psychological trickery, and the loss of personal freedom.

The themes and motifs in 1984 were greatly influenced by Orwell's own encounters with and views of totalitarian governments, particularly those of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Orwell wanted to warn people about the perils of dictatorship and the potential repercussions of unfettered state power through his writing (Hitchens, 2002).

Because 1984 explores how historical narratives may be manipulated and controlled in a totalitarian state, understanding the discourse of historicity in this novel is of utmost importance. In order to preserve its dominance and control over the people, the ruling Party in the novel's dystopian future modifies and destroys historical documents.

We learn about the power relationships between the state and its people, the effect of propaganda and false information on forming collective memory, and the possible risks of a society lacking in true historical knowledge by analyzing the discourse of historicity in 1984.

The way Orwell depicts historical revisionism serves as a caution against the rewriting and distorting of history for political ends. It pushes the readers to consider how crucial it is to maintain independent thought in the face of totalitarian governments. Orwell emphasizes the vulnerability of societies without a trustworthy historical record and the potential effects of such manipulation on individual and collective identities through the concept of historicity in 1984.

Through a thorough study of the discourse of historicity in 1984, one may find tangible examples of revisionism and totalitarian regimes. This helps us to navigate through the hidden motivations of these regimes at forging history and knowledge for the sake of power. We may think critically about the power relations at play in the construction of historical narratives.

The discourse of historicity is used by the governing Party in George Orwell's 1984 as a potent instrument for manipulating and controlling the collective memory of the society, illuminating the grave repercussions of historical revisionism and the demise of individual agency under a totalitarian dictatorship. This research paper aims to expose the dangers of historical manipulation and emphasize the importance of maintaining an accurate historical record as a defense against authoritarian control through an analysis of the Party's control over history, the role of protagonist Winston Smith, and the more general socio-political commentary embedded within the novel.

In the dystopian future depicted in 1984, there are three superstates that are at war with one another all the time. Winston Smith, a middle-aged party member who lives in Oceania under the Party's totalitarian control, is the main character of the novel. Big Brother and the Party have total control over every aspect of residents' lives, including their memories and ideas.

Winston is employed by the Ministry of Truth, where he tampers with the past to support Party propaganda. As a result of his growing disillusionment with the harsh system, he discreetly rebels by engaging in an illicit romance with Julia, a fellow Party member. Winston also grows to have a keen interest in the past and looks for secret information.

Winston runs into O'Brien, a high-ranking Party member who he thinks is a part of the Brotherhood, a covert resistance group, as he engages in illegal operations. Winston and Julia are eventually apprehended by the Thought Police, tortured horribly, and brainwashed.

The abuse and exploitation of authority by the ruling Party is one of the main themes of 1984. The story describes a society in which the Party uses monitoring, propaganda, and psychological blackmail to exert complete control over its population. The Party's motto, "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength," highlights the Party's obstinate desire of power, according to Orwell (Orwell, 1949, p. 4). This contradictory slogan exemplifies the Party's capacity to manipulate language and the narrative in order to strengthen their hold on power.

The concepts of reality, truth, and the malleability of history are further explored in 1984. The Party practices historical revisionism, tampering with documents and eliminating any proof that conflicts with its interpretation of events. Winston Smith, the main character, holds a position at the Ministry of Truth where he is tasked with editing historical records to support the Party's viewpoint. The Party's attempt to dominate not just the present but also the past in order to ensure their domination over the future is reflected in their manipulation of history and truth. The theme of surveillance is also present throughout the entire novel. Telescreens, concealed microphones, and the ever-vigilant Thought Police are symbols of the Party's pervasive monitoring regime. This ongoing surveillance fosters fear, stifles criticism, and invades personal privacy, adding to the novel's repressive tone.

Another important theme in 1984 is resistance, as well as the human spirit's indomitable spirit. Characters like Winston and Julia oppose the Party's authority in search of freedom and real human connection, despite the Party's efforts to put an end to independent thought and put down a revolt. This cautionary novel 1984 by George Orwell warns against the perils of dictatorship, linguistic manipulation, and the loss of personal freedom. It continues to be a potent and timely work that inspires thought about the precarious balance between authority and individual rights. The Party's massive surveillance is one example of how it controls its citizens. As Winston Smith, the protagonist, reflects, "There was, of course, no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment (...) You had to live(...) in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard" (Orwell, 1949, p. 3). By assuring conformity and stifling opposition, this extensive surveillance fosters a culture of perpetual dread and helps the Party keep its hold on power warns against the perils of dictatorship, linguistic manipulation, and the loss of personal freedom. It continues to be a potent and timely work that inspires thought about the precarious balance between authority and individual rights.

The Party's massive surveillance is one example of how it controls its citizens. The protagonist, Winston Smith, muses, "Of course, there was no way to tell if you were being watched at any particular time. Living on the presumption that everyone could hear everything you said was necessary" (Orwell, 1949, p. 3). By assuring conformity and stifling opposition, this extensive surveillance fosters a culture of perpetual dread and helps the Party keep its hold on power.

The Party manipulates history and truth in addition to surveillance to control the narrative and uphold its authority. As a Party member named O'Brien put it, "to know and not know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies... to hold simultaneously two opinions which canceled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them" is the definition of doublethink (Orwell, 1949, p. 35). This distortion of reality eliminates personal responsibility and promotes cognitive dissonance, which makes it simpler for the Party to impose its ideology on the populace. The degradation of one's right to privacy and the destruction of uniqueness characterize the society portrayed in 1984. The protagonist's illicit relationship with Julia evolves into a metaphor for resistance against the Party's hold on intimate relationships and feelings. As Orwell writes, "Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act" (Orwell, 1949, p. 132). The Party's aim to govern its citizens' private and emotional life as well as their outer behavior is demonstrated by this act of disobedience. Orwell's dystopian imagination is clearly a mirror of the time's historical context. Orwell intended to decode the very world he lived in, warning his readers from falling into the same trap again. Robert A. Lee notes, "The society portrayed by Orwell is a logical extension of trends that were only beginning to be observable when the book was written, and it remains a thought-provoking reminder of the potential abuses of authority" (Lee, 2009, p. 93). The writer sought to annoy his readers by giving them the feeling of unfreedom and showing the horrible scenarios that they may experience.

## II. UNDERSTANDING HISTORICITY

Historicity is a concept that does not simply mean construction, interpretation, and comprehending history. This concept has gone through extended studies and attention by great theorists in this field.

Foucault's view of historicity is unique. He tends to focus on the power dynamics that sustain the construction of history. He believes that there is a power exchange and roleplay throughout history. He also proposes that history is not a neutral unbiased knowledge that reflects past events, but a set of narratives that undergo the impact of the mainstream authorities. He believes that "History is not a science that reconstructs the past for its own sake; it is a practice of power that shapes the present and the future" (Foucault, 1977, p. 139). He also adds that historicity is part of the power exercise and process of power creation.

Hartog investigates historicity via the prism of memory. He contends that the context in which historical awareness is created, and a society's remembering practices have a significant impact. Historical awareness, according to Hartog, is an active and deliberate process of remembering and forgetting rather than a collection of facts or a straightforward portrayal of the past (Hartog, 2003, p. 25). This viewpoint emphasizes how memories shape historical narratives and how historicity is a subjective concept.

The importance of narrative in aiding historical comprehension is emphasized by White's idea of narrative historiography. He contends that historians create stories to give the past context and logic. White states, "History is not the givenness of events themselves, but the givenness of texts, the construction of stories about the events" (White, 1978, p. 2). According to White, historicity is closely related to the decisions historians make when choosing and interpreting events to tell a whole tale.

The "hermeneutics of suspicion" theory, developed by Ricoeur, examines the complexities of interpretation and significance present in historical texts. He contends that a critical analysis of underlying ideologies and covert motives is necessary for historical comprehension. Ricoeur states, "To understand the past, we need to unveil the hidden meanings, ideological biases, and cultural assumptions that shape historical texts" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 52). This viewpoint emphasizes the significance of connecting with historical sources critically in order to find various layers of historicity.

Hartog investigates the idea of historicity by analyzing the connection between memory and history. He proposes that memory practices and how societies remember and forget the past have a significant impact on how we view history. Historical consciousness is dependent on a society's remembering practices and the discourses that organize them, according to Hartog (Hartog, 2003, p. 20). This viewpoint emphasizes how memory impacts our perception of history, underlining the dynamic and subjective element of historicity.

The idea of historicity is highly relevant to both literary and social analysis because it sheds light on the complex relationships that connect the past, present, and future and offers insights into societal dynamics and individual experiences.

By examining the effects of historical circumstances and events on people's lives and society institutions, literature frequently engages with historicity. As Hayden White suggests, "Narrative is the primary way in which historical consciousness is organized" (White, 1978, p. 2). Through their tales, literary works capture the historical zeitgeist by illuminating the complexity and nuances of the past and their effects on the present. Literature sheds light on the human experience during certain historical eras by fusing real and fictitious components. This illumination provides insightful information about how individuals negotiate and make sense of their lives in connection to greater historical forces.

Additionally, historicity is essential to social research because it offers a framework for comprehending the creation and evolution of societies over time. Fernand Braudel argues, "The long duration (la longue durée) is the foundation of any historical understanding" (Braudel, 1958, p. 29). The ability to recognize trends, pinpoint structural changes, and comprehend the ingrained mechanisms that mold civilizations depends on historical perspectives in social analysis. The causes and effects of social events can be ascertained, the underlying power dynamics can be identified, and social structures and institutions can be critically analyzed by looking at historical contexts.

The genealogy idea put out by Michel Foucault emphasizes the importance of history to social understanding even further. According to Foucault, historical research should concentrate on the emergence and evolution of power relations and discourses over time. He states, "My objective(...)is to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault, 1977, p. 149). Social analysis can better comprehend the dynamics of dominance and resistance within societies by tracking the historical development of power structures and looking at the ways in which people are constituted as subjects.

### III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF 1984

To fully understand "1984", it is essential to consider the political and social setting that George Orwell's book was influenced by. The dystopian future Orwell envisioned in the book was greatly influenced by his personal experiences and opinions about the political milieu of his time.

The development of authoritarian governments in the 20th century had a significant impact on Orwell. In particular, the rise of fascism in Europe and Joseph Stalin's totalitarian reign in the Soviet Union had an impact on Orwell's depiction of oppressive regimes. Orwell, who took part in the Spanish Civil War, saw the rise of dictatorship firsthand. He wrote, "I have seen British imperialism at work in Burma, and I have seen something of the effects of poverty and unemployment in Britain. But...I should say that the horrors of the Russian régime have far exceeded them" (Orwell, 1946, p. 7). Orwell voiced tremendous concern about the implications of totalitarianism on individual freedom and human rights in the excerpt above.

Throughout Orwell's political age, propaganda and mass surveillance were frequently used as tools of control. The widespread use of propaganda during World War II and the Cold War increased Orwell's awareness of how governments might sway public opinion. He wrote, "Political language...is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (Orwell, 1946, p. 180). This sentence exemplifies Orwell's suspicion of deception and the use of language as a tool of oppression.

Additionally, the social inequities and class distinctions of Orwell's day strongly influenced his image of a stratified society in "1984". The widening gap between the rich and the poor as well as the struggles that the working class faced had an impact on Orwell's portrayal of the Party's control over the proletariat. According to Orwell, the vast majority of people are kept in a state of ignorance and subjection so that they can be used whenever their rulers feel their collective body essential (Orwell, 1946, p. 162). This statement perfectly captures Orwell's concern about how the ruling class exploits and controls the working class.

George Orwell's book "1984" was greatly influenced by the real events of his time. The dystopian society that is depicted in the novel was significantly affected by the political climate that Orwell encountered and observed in the middle of the 20th century.

Two significant influences on Orwell's writing were the rise of authoritarian governments and the horrors of World War II. In "1984", Orwell contrasts his depiction of a brutal and oppressive state with the totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. The evils of the Russian regime, according to Orwell, "have far surpassed them [British imperialism and poverty in Britain]" (Orwell, 1946, p. 7). The totalitarian Big Brother regime in his novel serves as a vehicle for Orwell's deep concern about the destructive implications of totalitarianism on individual freedom and human rights.

Additionally, Orwell's writing was significantly influenced by the propaganda and information manipulation of the war. Orwell has firsthand knowledge of the impact of propaganda and the politicization of the truth. Political language, according to him, "is meant to make lies sound true and murder respectable" (Orwell, 1946, p. 180). In the novel, Orwell depicted the distortion of reality and language manipulation through the Party's control of the media and the concept of "Newspeak," and this quote captures his skepticism about those practices.

Additionally, the social and political climate of post-war Europe, which featured escalating Cold War tensions and the rise of communism, had an impact on Orwell's portrayal of a surveillance state in "1984". Because of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War and his fervent dedication to socialist ideals, Orwell's evaluation of authoritarian governments was impacted by both of these factors. Since 1936, every sentence in my serious writing has been either directly or indirectly intended at dictatorship, the author stated (Orwell, 1946, p. 7). This section demonstrates Orwell's commitment to educating readers about the dangers of dictatorship and how they influenced the themes and plot of 1984.

### IV. THE PARTY'S CONTROL OVER HISTORY

The events of his time in history had a big impact on George Orwell's novel "1984". The political climate that Orwell encountered and witnessed in the middle of the 20th century had a significant impact on the dystopian world that is depicted in the novel.

The rise of totalitarian governments and the horrors of World War II had a significant impact on Orwell's writing. In "1984", Orwell contrasted the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia with his vision of a merciless and authoritarian government. Orwell claimed that the evils of the Russian regime "have far surpassed them [British imperialism and poverty in Britain]" (Orwell, 1946, p. 7). This passage exemplifies Orwell's deep concern for the terrible implications of tyranny on human rights and individual freedom, which he turned into the totalitarian Big Brother regime in his novel.

Orwell's literature was also greatly influenced by the propaganda and information manipulation of the war. Orwell had firsthand experience with the power of propaganda and the twisting of the truth for political ends. Political terminology "is created to make lies sound true and murder respectable," he claimed (Orwell,

1946, p. 180). This quotation captures Orwell's skepticism towards the falsification of the truth and the linguistic manipulation that he depicted in the book through the Party's control over the media and the concept of "Newspeak."

Orwell's portrayal of a surveillance state in "1984" was also influenced by the social and political climate of post-war Europe, which included escalating Cold War tensions and the rise of communism. Orwell's perspective on authoritarian governments was shaped by his personal involvement in the Spanish Civil War and his fervent dedication to socialist ideals. The author asserted that since 1936, every sentence of my serious writing has been either directly or indirectly aimed at dictatorship (Orwell, 1946, p. 7). This passage demonstrates Orwell's commitment to informing readers about the dangers of dictatorship and how they influenced the themes and plot of "1984" in his writing. The Party in George Orwell's book "1984" has complete control over memory and history and uses them as a tool of power. We can examine the methods and ramifications of the Party's control over history and memory in the dystopian society portrayed in the book via the glasses of theorists like Hartog, Foucault, Ricoeur, and White.

François Hartog's concept of regimes of historicity provides insights into the Party's manipulation of history. According to Hartog, different historical periods have distinct ways of relating to the past. In "1984," the Party establishes its own regime of historicity by constantly rewriting history and altering past events to align with its current objectives. The Party's motto, "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past," exemplifies this manipulation (Orwell, 1949, p. 37). By controlling the narrative of history, the Party maintains its authority and perpetuates its control over the present and future.

Michel Foucault's concept of power and knowledge sheds light on the Party's control over memory. Foucault argues that power operates through the production and control of knowledge. In 1984, the Party employs tactics such as Newspeak and Doublethink to manipulate and control memory. Newspeak, the Party's language, limits the range of thought and erases critical thinking by eliminating words and concepts that challenge the Party's authority. Doublethink encourages citizens to hold contradictory beliefs, effectively distorting their memories and rendering them susceptible to the Party's propaganda. As Foucault suggests, "Power(...)is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class" (Foucault, 1977, p. 141). The Party's control over memory enables its dominance and sustains its oppressive regime.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach contributes to understanding the Party's manipulation of history and memory. Ricoeur emphasizes the interpretive process involved in understanding and reconstructing the past. In "1984," the Party's Ministry of Truth serves as a symbol of historical distortion and manipulation. Winston Smith, the protagonist, works at the Ministry of Truth, altering historical records to fit the Party's narrative. Ricoeur's perspective helps us see how the Party's control over history and memory denies individuals the opportunity for genuine understanding and interpretation of the past. It further reinforces the Party's control by eroding individuals' sense of reality and historical truth.

The Party's skewed use of historical narratives is revealed by Hayden White's theories on the formation of historical narratives. According to White, storytelling strategies and narrative frameworks naturally affect historical writing. The Party's revision of history in "1984" is consistent with White's view of historiography as an artistic endeavor. The Party creates a story that advances its objectives and uses a skewed account of the past to influence the present and the future. This narrative manipulation is exemplified by the term "doublethink," in which the Party concurrently fabricates incompatible historical versions without hesitating or acknowledging them. The Party has power over the communal memory and sense of reality by controlling the narrative.

Understanding the Party's influence over history and memory requires an understanding of Stephen Greenblatt's notion of cultural poetics. Literature is just one of the cultural practices that are studied in terms of how power structures influence and are influenced by it. Cultural poetics is demonstrated in "1984" through the Party's control over historical narratives, as the Party chooses the interpretations and meanings of historical events. Greenblatt argues that "meaning and value are created and modified in specific historical contexts" (Greenblatt, 1990, p. 18). The Party fabricates history and falsifies documents in order to support its rule and stifle any competing viewpoints.

The Party's control over history and memory is further explained by Michel Foucault's concept of discourse. Systems of knowledge and power that influence how we perceive the world are referred to as discourse. The Party's discourse in "1984" imposes a single, totalitarian account of history and squelches all competing accounts. Foucault states, "Discourses are practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1977, p. 49). The Party controls language and information through tools like Newspeak and the Ministry of Truth, which in turn controls memory and historical interpretation.

The idea of discourse as developed by Michel Foucault helps to further explain how the Party controls memory and history. Systems of power and knowledge known as discourse influence how we perceive the world. In "1984," the Party's rhetoric enforces a solitary, totalitarian interpretation of history and squelches all competing accounts.

Foucault states, "Discourses are practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1977, p. 49). The Party has control over language and information through the use of tools like Newspeak and the Ministry of Truth, which also has a direct impact on memory and historical interpretation.

New Historicism also places a strong emphasis on how literature interacts with and reflects the social and political environment of its time. George Orwell uses political ideas and historical events from his time to construct a dystopian future in "1984." It is possible to interpret the Party's control of history and memory in the novel as a critique of historical revisionism and the shaping of popular memory for political purposes.

Analyzing how the Party manipulated history and memory in "1984" using New Historicism theories demonstrates the complex interrelationship between authority, knowledge, and literature. The molding of historical narratives by the Party and the repression of alternative interpretations highlights how power molds and regulates how society views the past. New Historicism offers important insights into the Party's totalitarian control and the ramifications of historical manipulation in "1984" by exploring the interaction between literature and historical context.

Catherine Gallagher, in her work on counter-history, sheds light on the suppression of alternative narratives by the Party. Gallagher argues that counter-history examines marginalized voices and alternative interpretations of the past. In "1984," the Party's manipulation of historical records serves to erase counter-histories and maintain its version of events as the sole truth. As Gallagher states, "By recovering marginal voices, counter-history makes us aware of the necessary ideological preconditions of all historical truth" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 22). The Party's control over history erases dissenting viewpoints and reinforces its ideological hegemony.

Hayden White's concept of employment helps analyze the Party's control over memory in the novel. White argues that narratives are structured through specific plot devices, influencing the way events are interpreted. In "1984," the Party employs a specific employment that portrays itself as the ultimate authority while vilifying its opponents. This narrative structure shapes collective memory, ensuring the Party's control over interpretations of the past. White asserts, "Historical narratives are, after all, verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found" (White, 1987, p. 7). The Party's manipulation of memory through narrative employment reflects its desire for total domination.

Additionally, Louis Montrose's emphasis on the historicity of texts contributes to our understanding of the Party's control over history and memory. Montrose argues that texts are embedded in historical processes and reflect the socio-political context of their creation. In "1984," Orwell draws on historical events and ideologies of his time to create a dystopian world. The Party's control over history and memory mirrors the historical circumstances of oppressive regimes. Montrose explains, "Works of literature are historical practices and bear the traces of the circumstances that produced them" (Montrose, 1989, p. 22). The Party's manipulation of historical narratives reflects its desire to maintain power and suppress dissent.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the examination of the Party's control over history and memory in George Orwell's 1984, through the lens of New Historicism and the theories of various scholars such as Catherine Gallagher, Hayden White, Louis Montrose, and others, reveals the profound impact of power, language, and memory manipulation in a dystopian society.

The Party's control over history, exemplified by the manipulation of historical records, serves as a mechanism for maintaining its authoritarian rule. Through Newspeak, the Party restricts language and narrows the range of thought, effectively erasing dissenting voices and alternative interpretations of the past. This suppression of counter-history reinforces the Party's version of events as the only acceptable truth.

Additionally, the Party's manipulation of historical records influences collective memory and historical consciousness. By selectively altering or erasing information, the Party shapes the perception of the past, reinforcing its authority and consolidating its power. The Party's employment of history through Newspeak constructs a narrative that perpetuates its dominance while marginalizing opposing viewpoints.

The application of New Historicism allows us to critically analyze the Party's control over history and memory, highlighting the intricate relationship between power, language, and historical interpretation. The theories of Gallagher, White, Montrose, and others offer valuable insights into the mechanisms through which the Party shapes historical consciousness and maintains its ideological hegemony.

Ultimately, the examination of the Party's manipulation of history and memory in 1984 serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of authoritarian regimes and the importance of preserving diverse perspectives and critical thinking. By understanding and questioning the manipulation of history, we are better equipped to safeguard against the erasure of truth and the distortion of collective memory.

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