Class 11 VCE comparing texts: Nineteen Eighty-Four – the film (1984). Dir: Michael Radford

PART 1 of 3: Notes, Quotes and Questions

Students: while you watch, take time to pause on key scenes (especially ‘busy’ scenes, with many characters or props) and observe the details of the mise-en-scene. This can be very interesting and rewarding.

I will ask you to write answers to questions, often describing/explaining the use of **film language** (mise en scene, sound, cinematography, editing, lighting, acting, etc.) because you will need to discuss these elements in an essay (compare how Huxley uses language techniques, versus how Radcliffe uses film techniques to both explore and present similar themes and similar and different ideas).

I will also try to give many of my own notes (**rather than asking them all as questions**) so please read these carefully.

Remember the **evidence** you need to write your essay will be discussion of film-techniques (using quotes from the film is an example of both dialogue (sound) and script (whoever wrote the dialogue in the script). So your answers to these questions will be the sort of analysis you can use in an essay.

Furthermore, don’t just rely on my questions for your notes – if you have your own observations of film techniques and ideas about what the director is trying to communicate (VVCs), or otherwise – **take your own notes!**

As with any text, the opening sentence, paragraph, chapter or scene, require close study. For this reason, Scene 1 has many questions, after which there become less.

Because I have also asked you to watch some YouTube video/s and read some documents, I have only supplied questions for the first 30 minutes of the film. The next two weeks will have ~40 minutes to study each week.

PRE-WATCHING TASKS:

1. Go online and lookup/google “1984 the film cover” - and then click on “Images”  
     
   Based on your observations, what are your predictions about the film? What themes or issues are suggested? Is a mood or tone conveyed at all? How do the colours influence the viewer to feel? Anything else?
2. Watch the film 1984. I have emailed you all a link to it – if you have not received it, please email me ASAP [jkirov@lyss.vic.edu.au](mailto:jkirov@lyss.vic.edu.au)
3. Once you have watched the film through once, **before** watching it a second time and doing the questions, please go to YouTube and search “1984 summary analysis” and watch **one or more** of the videos (the Sparknotes one is good, and I also like Thug Notes (a faux-ghetto ‘G’ who has a passion for fine literature – very funny – his video on Brave New World is worth a watch also. You may need to search youtube for “1984 Thug Notes”).  
     
   **This will REALLY HELP you to understand the text better. Pay special attention to Doublethink , Newspeak and Thoughtcrime – as understanding these terms will help you to understand HOW Big Brother’s system maintains control (compared to BNW).**

Read the documents (on the website):  
- 1984 Background & Context  
- 1984 Genre & Structure  
  
If you want, you can also read the documents “1984 Characters” and “1984 Themes” now – this will only help you to understand the text better and write better responses that are more likely to be able to be used in an essay; if you are too busy however, then you/we will come back to these documents when preparing for the essay.

*Now to the film…*  
  
**SCENE 1: up until the start of the introductory credits**

1. Comment on the opening shot (like a ‘slide’ – that begins “WHO CONTROLS THE PAST…”)  
     
   What themes, ideas, or feelings does this encourage in the viewer? How might it set a tone or mood from before we are introduced to any characters?
2. Write an analysis/reflection on the second shot; consider: the lighting, the music, the people and the focus of the frame (i.e. what are viewers encouraged to focus upon).
3. Watch the whole introductory propaganda film and write a **film review:**

What is being conveyed?   
How do the visuals and the narration work together?   
How is this film supposed to position the watching crowd to think/feel?/ **Or**: why do you think Big Brother has chosen to show this clip (propaganda) to its citizens?   
*Being as specific as you can.*  
  
**75+ words**

1. How would you describe the faces of the watching crowd (when they are shown)?
2. Who are ‘the enemy’? ( important bit of information)
3. Why might some of the crowd rise (almost involuntarily) with their arms crossed at the wrists?
4. When the camera begins a long tracking shot left, revealing more and more faces in the crowd, note that there are a group/line of men who seem to have different expressions on their faces (and perhaps are dressed in a slightly darker colour?):  
     
   Any thoughts as to who they might be, or what this could be about?
5. What are your first impressions of Julia? Do these seem consistent with, or contradict who we learn Julia to be?  
     
   **Note: that Julia’s ‘over-the-top’ actions/(acting?) attract the attention of O’Brien. This is a clever bit of filmmaking; we are shown that *any* ‘abnormal’ behaviour in this society does not go unnoticed (**even if it’s being *too good* of a citizen)…

Extension 1.1  
Do you think that viewers (you) are encouraged to think/feel the same as the people in the crowd? If not, how might the audience (you) be encouraged to think or feel about this introduction?

Thinking question only: *any thoughts about what “INGSOC” could mean/refer to?*

1. What is your first impression of Winston? Does he seem to be as hate-filled as the others? If not, then what is it that first prompts him to start yelling?

**Comparison Point:** *(The last bit before the red credits start, and which continues through the credits)* Note the looks of deep emotion/reverence on the crowd following the ‘two minutes of hate’ introduction, as they seem to almost pray to, or worship ‘Big Brother’; this is a relief, a cathartic outpouring of emotion following the intense two minutes of hate. It is very deliberate mass-psychological manipulation/pacification. It helps to fill the voids left by religion, and a lack of sex.  
  
This can be compared to the use of sex to relieve tension/emotion in BNW. It is a challenge for the rulers of Oceania – how to harness the destructive and aggressive capacity of peoples’ sexuality (especially as they repress sex and become almost ‘puritan’ in their values and attitude towards sex  
  
Keep watching to see how else the rulers try to get around ‘the problem of sex’, seeing as they are taking an **almost oppositional approach than the World Controllers of BNW.**

**SCENE 2: *The Credits***

2.1 Write down some observations on the credits; e.g.  
- what does the music remind you of? / What effect does it (intend to) have on the crowd?  
- What do they seem to be chanting?  
- How do their faces appear?

**Note**: how the credits continue briefly after the anthem and chanting, as the citizens begin filing out, walking uniformly through hallways, and to their jobs. It seems a ‘common practice’ – encouraging the audience to feel that this may be a daily event for the citizens of Oceania.

2.2 **Comparison Question: Comparing Introductions:** compare 1984 and BNW: How are the first glimpses given of the worlds similar and/or different?

**SCENE 3: Winton’s work, Winston’s walk home** **& Winston’s apartment**

* 1. The first shot is a high angle forwards tracking shot that reveals the working environment of (we assume) many citizens.   
       
     What are you observations of mise-en-scene (consider the colour scheme)? (dot points fine)

**IMPORTANT NOTES & IDEAS:**  
Note the shot of Winston’s computer screen, with the face of Big Brother staring at viewers, with the words:  
  
“OLDTHINKERS UNBELLYFEEL INGSOC  
  
THINK IN NEWSPEAK  
  
IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM CONSULT 10TH NEWSPEAK DICTIONARY”  
  
This is an example of **Newspeak** – the new, ‘revised’ language that Big Brother is implementing in Oceania.  
  
Here ‘OLDTHINKERS’ are people who do not conform, and who are therefore enemies of the state (although do they even exist, or does Big Brother just ‘make them up’ to create an enemy and so give the people something to hate?)…

OLDTHINKERS UNBELLYFEEL INGSOC means that people who do not use NEWSPEAK are OLDTHINKERS who do not believe (UNBELLYFEEL) in **INGSOC** (**English Socialism** – this is the term that the rulers of Oceania have used to turn their whole political ideology (a warped form of socialism, just like Nazism was) into a catch-phrase/slogan (similar to BNW and how they use slogans to condition).  
  
Therefore, as the underlined command commands, everyone must THINK IN NEWSPEAK – meaning, they are trying to manipulate their citizens to not only speak in newspeak, but think in newspeak, which would effectively give them control over how, and what, people think.

*Please be aware that at times it will be necessary to really pick apart certain shots (like this one); because the film has to convey a whole complex novel’s worth of ideas in under two hours, the director has to pack a lot of information in, with the understanding that many viewers will have read the book; because we have not read the book, I will have to explain some of these concepts to you, such as I have above.*

* 1. Describe (and explain if you can) what Winston is doing (and therefore what his job is)?
  2. As Winston walks from work to home, how would you describe the diegetic background sound (what sound/s can you hear within the world of the film)? *Dot-points fine*

Note: if you listen carefully to the background diegetic propaganda, it contains text from the original novel, and if listened to carefully, is a good way of deepening your understanding of the text.

* 1. Describe Winston’s state of health:

**Note**: That as Winston arrives back to his apartment, he is never alone – he seems to ‘watched’ in every shot, while the constant voice of the ‘radio’ – means he is never alone (**similar to BNW).** Even when he arrives back at his apartment, the sound continues, this time accompanied by a BIG tv screen (especially big in these historical times), as an unknown person (at this point) seems to be confessing to a list of sins committed “I had sex with a prostitute” – which, on one level **foreshadows** part of Winston’s own narrative.

* 1. Describe the mise-en-scene of Winston’s apartment (dot-points fine).
  2. **Comparison Question:** Compare how the average citizen (Winston) seems to live, compared with how the average citizen (all/any castes) seems to live in BNW.

**Comparison point: Similarity**:Big Brother supplies citizens with cigarettes (and “Victory” Gin), like BNW supplies its citizens with Soma (to pacify them). **Difference**: The cigarettes and gin are very cheap/poorly made, and would seem to be much worse for the (physical) health of its citizens than Soma (although Soma would be perhaps worse for the health of their minds or souls)…

**Chapter 4: Winston starts a diary**

**Key Quote/s**: *As Winston contemplates writing a diary…*  
“Thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thought-Crime is death.” … “I have committed, before even putting pen to paper, the essential crime that contains all others in itself.”  
  
*Here, we see what Winston has been conditioned to believe (although we are not sure the extent to which he believes this) – but it is a chilling idea – that simply by thinking something, he is guilty of committing it; this is the ultimate removal of freedom: the freedom of thought (which is what Newspeak and Thoughtcrime aims to do) – for me at least, having one’s mind imprisoned is a worse deprivation of freedom than being physically imprisoned.*

4.1 Why do you think writing a diary is such a crime in this system/world? Why might the government of Oceania (Big Brother) have banned personal/private writing (or, wow might writing a diary be seen as destabilising act)?

Note the **symbolism** of the wall with the missing brick (Pink Floyd anyone?) – Winston here, as just ‘another brick in the wall’ – has temporarily removed himself from ‘the wall’ (the system), symbolic of the act of defiance to the system he is currently committing (writing a diary).

He signs the diary “from a dead man” – acknowledging that, as he has already committed thoughtcrime, he is already ‘dead’. This sets a strong **tone** or **mood** of helplessness and inevitability that pervades the film (and which makes it a hard film to watch for some people).  
  
**HOWEVER – there is SOME HOPE in the actual book (that not everything does turn out hopelessly)** – I will upload you a document explaining it at some stage. I don’t think the film manages to convey this hope… as it is a very subtle and clever symbol/sign that Orwell gives that many readers miss (and which would be hard to do in a film… *more to be explained about* ***The Appendix*** *later*). I will be watching very attentively as I write these questions to see if the film manages to convey this hope in some way.

4.2: **Key film scene:** this next two shots, of Winston going ‘outside’ into nature and of him as a young boy are not in the book, but is an artistic adaptation made by the director:  
  
Describe/explain the sequence of shots (is it of Winston’s imagination? And/or memory? Or is it just symbolic?) Thinking forward to what you know happens in the film, what might be the purpose of these two shots?

**Comparison Point**: Winston is awoken from his ‘reverie’ by a siren – such sounds are common as part of the diegetic sound of the film (as well as bombs exploding); just like Huxley makes technology appear part of the natural world, Radcliffe makes the sounds of war and chaos part of Winston’s (and the citizens’) natural worlds.

**SCENE 5: Mandatory Exercise Scene**:

5.1 Describe/explain the exercise scene. What is the point/function of it? Why might Orwell/Radcliffe have included it? Might there be a VVC (view, value or concern of the director) expressed in some way?

**SCENE 6: Cafeteria/Lunchroom scene** (please read all of my notes)

**Note**: Parsons’s comments that the chocolate rations going up is “double plus good” (Newspeak for “very good”, I guess). But have they actually gone up at all… ?

**Comparison**: whereas BNW citizens are supplied with everything they (think they) need, citizens in Oceania are struggling to find necessities (razor blades); life for the average person indeed seems very grim.

**News as propaganda**: the way the radio constantly blares out economic figures – these figures are, of course, entirely fabricated, and serve to make the population **feel** informed and that things are ‘under control’ when clearly, we can see by the way they are living, they are not. **Is this much different to the constant feed of commercial news we receive which is only ‘true’ insofar as it supports the point of view of those supplying the news?**

**Compared** with BNW – who use news as entertainment.

6.1 **Compare** the way each system deals with ‘death’ (consider that in 1984 citizens are made/encouraged to watch executions, whereas in BNW they are also made to confront death from an early age, just in a very different way).  
  
What might be the advantages/purpose of each system?

**Quote:** Syme: “It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words”  
  
Syme works in the department of Newspeak. He seems truly sincere in what he says. In this way, he is similar to a BNW citizen as he believes in the rightness of what he does, *although perhaps different in that he shows conviction and passion…? Not sure…*

**Cinematography** the placement of the telescreen above and behind Winston’s shoulder, an ever looming presence , here very symbolically positioned in the frame, almost like his conscience.

Extension 6.1 Listen closely to Syme’s explanation of how and why they are reducing the size of the dictionary, and take some notes (interesting stuff!).

**Important:** The Government is divided into **three** **Ministries**:

1. **The Ministry of Truth**: which is where they write propaganda, re-write history and reduce language (Newspeak).  
     
   It is here that Winston and Syme (and Parsons, Winston’s mildly overweight neighbour), work, and where the cafeteria in which they now eat, is.
2. The **Ministry of Peace** (Newspeak: Minipax) serves as the **war** **ministry** of Oceania's government, and is in charge of the armed forces, mostly the navy and army.
3. The **Ministry of Love** (Newspeak: Miniluv) serves as Oceania's **interior** **ministry**. It enforces loyalty to Big Brother through fear, buttressed through a massive apparatus of security and repression, as well as systematic brainwashing (it is enforced by the secret police and a network that encourages citizens to spy and report on each other’s behaviours.).

**Textual Feature**: **Humour** – there is a dark irony in the names of each of the three Ministries, as the means they use to achieve what they claim to achieve, contradict the required outcome (e.g. they use war to attain peace).

**Comparison**: Similarity: Both Huxley and Orwell (& Radcliffe) use irony as dark humour.

**More irony**: Syme: “It’s an encouraging thought that by 2050 no one will even be able to have a conversation such as this.” (The irony being that he actually believes this is a good thing, while the audience do not.)

**Theme comparison:** Parsons calls the “proles” (a.k.a the “proletariat” a.k.a the lowest class workers in Oceania) “animals” – which is kind of how Huxley describes the Epsilons; **however: difference** is that Parsons is prejudiced about the lower classes (they’ve been taught to hate them) whereas in BNW the upper classes respect them (to some extent) for the duties they perform for the social body.

6.2 Describe Parsons as he extols the virtues of the food (when he says how good the food is) – because there is hardly, if any, real meat in it “double plus good” – **why do you think he acts this way? Is he ‘acting’?**

6.3 **Compare:** At this point, how would you compare Winston to how Bernard is initially presented in BNW?

**Thinking question**: Do you think living standards have really improved 20% over the last year (as the voice on the loudspeaker claims)? How many fewer razor blades and less meat must there have been then! Note also the shot of the masses “cheering” in the propaganda video which, of course, could have come from anywhere, and at any (other) time.

**SCENE 7: (short scene of O’Brien reading or writing while looking in a mirror):**

O’Brien seemingly talks to himself while looking in a mirror (**he is actually ‘reading’ from Emmanuel Goldstein’s manifesto** – but, as we find out later **he is actually probably *writing* it himself, not reading it! (**hence why the director has framed it in this unusual way, so that we cannot see exactly what he is doing…).  
  
Extension 7.1: write a quick analysis of this scene – what is the function of the mirror?

**SCENE 8: Winston writing memories in his diary about a sexual experience**

**Editing:** Note the way the last scene with O’Brien (reading/writing) is immediately juxtaposed with a shot of O’Brien writing (subtle and clever filmmaking).

8.1 How would you describe this scene (don’t need to be too graphic); as in – how is the scene presented? How are viewers encouraged to feel about this memory of Winston’s? Why has it been included (what is its purpose)?

**SCENE 9: back at work – Winston uncovers something important**

Note: Winston goes about his job, of re-writing “unwrite” history. He uncovers something important here about Rutherford, that will be revealed later.

9.1 How do you think it would feel to have a face (the face of Big Brother) constantly staring at you?

**SCENE 10: The Chestnut Tree Cafe**

Note that as Winston looks in, these men appear to be dressed darker, and perhaps drinking better quality alcohol (which the waiter seems to spike/add something to…). The suggestion is that they are **Party Members** (the privileged elite who are politicians amongst the inner circle)… *at least I think this is what is suggested…*

**Background sound & Foreshadowing**: we hear the confession of another criminal. This subtly, cleverly foreshadows the eventual ‘confession’ of Winston.

**Interesting**: The sign for “The Chestnut Tree” appears the right way around, where the letters should be spelled backwards, because signs for shops are usually for those on the outside.  
My guess: this is symbolic that for those on the inside (the party members) everything is the right way around (it makes sense) whereas for those on the outside (everyone else) things are ‘backwards’ and nonsensical.

**(perhaps) Very Interesting:** The poem Winston begins to recite “Under the spreading chestnut tree / I saw you and you saw me” seems to ‘foretell’ his experience in the country, under the tree, with Julia. This suggests a powerful potential undercurrent: that the government/Big Brother is so powerful and controlling that they control the future, not only the past; and that perhaps Winston’s whole experience was manipulated and one giant mind-screw. While this is never actually clearly stated, it is a question that looms behind the text.

**SCENE 11: Mr. Charrington’s Antiques Shop**

**Note** the girl standing in the road; with what we learn later about Charrington being a spy, it is highly likely the girl is a spy as well (just like Parsons daughter who was watching Winston on the stairs earlier in the film), working for Big Brother. The children attend weekly/bi-weekly camps & events where they are trained to be good future citizens (conditioning from a young age), which includes them being encouraged to spy on their parents, and to report back each week if they, or their friends, have been saying or doing anything suspicious.

This is based on true history: This is what the Hitler Youth were all about. It is also, funnily enough, similar to what President Joseph McCarthy did in the 1950s in America (although not with kids) – but encouraging people to spy on their neighbours, because they were so afraid of Russian spies.

It is also very similar to what our government did after the recent terrorist attacks.

* 1. Which antiques seem to interest Winston, and why do you think Winston is so interested in antiques? (think about what an antique is, what it represents; think also about Winston’s own job – re-writing history, and slippery the whole notion of truth, and ‘what is real’, and how this might have drawn him to the antiques shop…)
  2. Why do you think Big Brother has chosen an antiques shop as a spy-operation to catch people?

Note the way Charrington deliberately shows him the ‘private’ room with a bed in it – enticing any potential customers with (anti-social, haha) sexual feelings or desires, claiming he is just selling “the beautiful bed”, but really he is entrapping Winston.

**Note** that we see Julia in the street looking at Winston – she seems to be around him a lot.  
  
11.3

a) when you first watched the film, did you doubt Julia and her intentions at all?

b) After watching the film, what are your thoughts on Julia – is she genuine, or was she working for the Party the whole time?

**CHAPTER 12: The destruction of the orgasm**

**Editing:** after the shot of Julia, the next shot/scene begins with the line “War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength. A triumph of willpower over the orgasm” with a shot of determined looking women marching together.  
  
12.1 record these three slogans

12.2 Write a summary and analysis of this scene, that considers:  
- why would they want to abolish the orgasm?  
- why is this directed by, and at, females (rather than men)?  
- why would they want women to pledge to be celibate (and becomes vessels for artificial insemination… *there’s a bit going on here! Could be an allusion to trying to create super soldiers…) ?*  
- Why might women’s sexuality be a threat to stability/control?

**Character Note:** Winston’s first thought when he suspects Julia is that “I should kill her”; our protagonist/hero’s first thought is to murder a woman because he is paranoid she might report him for visiting an antiques store – this shows the power of fear, and how such a totalitarian system influences the nature of its citizens – this is deliberate by the rulers of Oceania – they are aware of how powerful fear can be in keeping people in line. And they are not just afraid of the government – because then there would be a common enemy, but instead afraid of one another… this would make it very hard to plan an uprising.

**SCENE 13: The woman being eaten by rats:** This is a very messed up, and psychologically complex piece of filmmaking (try and stick with me here). The dead woman being eaten appears to be the prostitute that Winston remembered having sex with. This shows that Winston has started to doubt the veracity (truth) of his own memories (which is exactly what Big Brother is trying to do; stop people thinking backwards, making them not trust their own memories, because their own memories clearly contradict the lies/propaganda that they spread.); on a Freudian level, the connection between the dead woman being eaten by rats (which I think *is* a true memory, whereas the prostitute may not have been – OR – they both were real, but the details – the person, has become ambiguous (Winston has conflated his memories)), he has connected a traumatic incident with another traumatic incident (sex with the prostitute), as Freud believes – all of our traumas are sexual on some level (bloody Freud).

So why is O’Brien there with him? Great question: another complex answer – this is part of the looming uncertainty behind the film: that the whole thing might have been orchestrated by BB, **OR, another way to think about it:** the director deliberately wants the viewer (**YOU**) to feel similarly confused like Winston, to start doubting what is possible, and to what extent everything is controlled and constructed. We are invited to question our own understanding of ‘what is real’, and how ‘real’ are our own memories?

The fact that O’Brien is finally able to find the one thing that will break Winston (the rats), and embedding him here in Winston’s initial memory, serves to highlight (symbolically) the unstable nature of memories, and how they can be manipulated = **Director’s view / concern**

It is these elements that gives the film a surrealist element, rather than being strictly realist. Interestingly, George Orwell kind of did the same thing in the original, with his inclusion of the **Appendix** (more on that to come).

**Note:** the helicopter hanging about in the street (more to create fear and a sense of being watched than for any practical purpose). Helicopters have a different function in BNW.

13.1: Even though the film/text claims to be in the future (1984, when it was written in 1948) – would you consider it a science fiction film? Why/why not?