

1984 by George Orwell,
adapted for the stage by Paul Stebbings and Phil Smith.
A synopsis of the TNT/ADGE production.

The performance is framed as a confession of Winston Smith after and during his torture by Officer O'Brien. This allows O'Brien and Winston to comment on the events in the past that led to Winston's arrest and torture (eventually in Room 101).

Scene 1: Winston is tortured in the Ministry of Love. He is unable to answer O'Brien's questions. Finally he is taken to Room 101 which in our production is not a room but a mental state induced by an injected chemical. After confronting his fear of rats the broken prisoner offers his love to Big Brother. He is led to a prison and through the bars answers O'Brien's questions correctly. O'Brien turns to the audience, welcomes them to the Ministry of Love and tells them that now they will witness the confession and punishment of prisoner Smith and the story of how he arrived at his present state. This will be a political education for the audience, a lesson in how important it is to think correctly. The Party does not care what you do, it cares how you think, because if you think correctly you will be unable to act incorrectly.

O'Brien asks Winston to confess using "newspeak", this being the reduced and simplified language that is being developed so no one can create an idea or thought that contradicts the will of the Party (Ingsoc = English Socialism = the Party).

Winston begins his confession, moving from Newspeak to old speak so the masses (audience) can understand. He describes and acts out his daily life before he was arrested.

He lives in a high rise that was damaged in the atomic war but is still comfortable compared with the poverty of the Proletarian districts. He has an apartment on the seventh floor. The elevator is always broken. He is an outer (minor) party member. His apartment has a telescreen that watches him day and night as well as giving him information and propaganda. Big Brother is the dictator of Oceania (which is the country that London is now part of) and is watching everyone. "Big Brother is Watching You". But there is one place that the telescreen cannot see, and there Winston is hiding a diary which he starts to write on this day in April 1984. All he can write is not the party slogan: "I love Big Brother" but his true feelings: "I hate Big Brother".

The telescreen broadcasts a song in praise of Big Brother. Winston has to be seen to join in. Night falls, in the morning the telescreen wakes up Winston and forces him to do group exercises. He dodges out of the apartment at the first opportunity – coughing. He smokes too many low quality "Victory Cigarettes", he is unhealthy and unhappy. He descends the stairs to work at the Ministry of Truth – a skyscraper that produces nothing but lies, propaganda and fake news.

Winston sits at his desk, he is greeted by Parsons (an important character). Parsons is a conformist, terrified of the regime that he will never challenge. He tries hard to believe in the Party propaganda and lies. Winston is cutting out men and women from newspaper photographs that have been "unpeopled" – executed or sent to Gulags and whose identity must be erased from history and memory. Parsons is worried, he has been given a difficult task: to write a newspaper article about the reduced chocolate ration – down from 30 to 25 grams a week. (Chocolate being one of the few legal luxuries in this austere country). Winston understands the State and its machinery better than Parsons so he is able to help: He says: "Write that the chocolate ration has been increased to 25 grams from 20 grams". Parsons is delighted with this "fake news". A woman comes round with a "memory Hole" machine,

which is used to destroy anything that compromises the Party. The past must be controlled or even vanished. Winston drops photographs of the “unpeopled” into the machine. But then Winston spots that Parsons has been saving old chocolate wrappers, - Parsons is terrified. Is this a crime? His solution is to declare that the 30 gram wrapper is a forgery planted by a spy to undermine the Party, the wrapper goes in the memory hole. Winston makes jokes and comments that subtly undermine the Party, and upon which O’Brien comments to the audience.

Parsons and Winston sit at the same table in the Ministry of Truth Canteen, opposite sit two women – one of whom is Julia. (Although Winston does not know her). The food is terrible, but it is washed down by government ration “Victory Gin”, harsh but strong. Winston barely eats, gives his food to Parsons and steals some of Parsons Gin to top up his own. Declaring that the ration must have been increased to poor Parsons who has to agree, even though there is less gin in his cup. “Long live Big brother and the increased gin ration!”

At the other table Julia is speaking to the women in the canteen on behalf of the Anti-Sex League. She is highly motivated and convincing, asking that women stop enjoying sex and choose artificial insemination. “If it’s good enough for cows its good enough for women!”. The woman at the table tries to echo her enthusiasm but is disappointed that this is the Party Policy, even as she praises a sex free Oceania. Winston notices Julia and confesses (in a frozen moment to the audience) that he hates her and all she stands for, but in his passionate hatred there is also something electric.

A siren in the canteen. The ministry workers are called to a public event “Hate Speech”. All rush to obey, but O’Brien now appears in the story not just the confession “frame”. He stops Winston going to “Hate” and offers him a fine cigarette, because O’Brien is an Inner Party Member of high rank. He compliments Winston on his handling of the chocolate Ration issue. Then he mysteriously adds “We will meet in a place where there is no darkness”, and leaves the puzzled Winston to go to “Hate Speech”.

Hate Speech scene. A woman prisoner is dragged to a prison cage. She is addressing the audience (who are lit). A guard holds a microphone. The prisoner confesses to being an agent of Goldstein, once an ally and comrade but now the great enemy of Big Brother. The prisoner says that she has been seduced by Goldstein’s ideas that there is no Revolution without: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of thought, Freedom of the press, Freedom to love how and who you wish, Freedom of conscience. The crowd, led by Julia on a megaphone, shout “Lies! Lies!” The prisoner goes on to say that inspired by Goldstein’s vision of a free world she poisoned the water supply and undermined the War effort. She begs for mercy as she was deceived by the liar Goldstein. But after her confession she is executed in a hail of bullets that the crowd and Julia cheer. Winston stands aside and covers his face, feeling alone amongst the bloodthirsty mob. Once again he sees Julia playing the role of the total Party conformist and hates her.

After “Hate Speech”, O’Brien leads a song of the slogans of the Party:
War is Peace. Love is hate. Ignorance is knowledge. The cast assemble in a Soviet style statue pose. Once again Winston must be seen to participate, even as the machine guns ring out behind the ‘heroic’ song.

Winston returns to his apartment and takes out his diary. He writes about writing, how he enjoys using pen and ink in a world that uses only keyboards and recording machines. He is reminded of his mother who would write beautiful letters to his father. Now both are dead, one

killed by bombing the other on the frontline of the never ending war with Oceania's rival: East Asia.

Winston now decides to visit the Proletarian area of London – a huge area of old houses damaged in the Atomic War that created Oceania. Outer Party members are not supposed to visit the area but the Party turns a blind eye, because they know that there are goods and services there that they cannot provide – wanting objects is not a “Thought Crime”.

O'Brien knows (and tells audience) that Winston is lying to himself when he says he wants razor blades, instant coffee or other black market goods, he really wants Sex. Winston rejects the Black market goods offered and approaches a prostitute. The poor street woman offers him sex against a damp wall for a few dollars. He reluctantly agrees although disgusted to find that she is older than he thought. Just as they argue a rocket bomb lands, supposedly fired by the enemies of Oceania. The prostitute is killed and Winston blown onto the pavement. A street child thinks he is dead and tries to steal his shoes but Winston revives. They realise the Prostitute is dead and the Street child tries to persuade Winston to steal her clothes. The disgusted Winston runs away through the rain sodden streets, the sirens and cries of the wounded. He is at his lowest point.

Then he recognises the run down antique shop where he bought the old blank diary. Winston enters the shop and renews his contact with its owner, a gentle man called Mr Charrington. As usual there is a telescreen on the wall pumping out propaganda and keeping an eye on what happens in the shop. Charrington complains that few people are interested in the past and he has almost no customers for his antiques. Winston admires a coral in paperweight. Charrington carefully suggests that Winston see some special objects in a room at the back of the shop. They go to the room, which has a painting of an old church on the wall and a clock that chimes beautifully. Winston notices there is no telescreen, which Charrington explains is because no one lives in the room now his wife has died, he asks if Winston wants to rent the room but he rejects the offer as it is against the law to be in room with no telescreen.

Suddenly Winston notices Julia on the street out of the window. He worries that she is a thought Police agent and is following him. Charrington helps him run out of the shop by a side door but there is Julia and she crashes into him and falls. As he helps her up she passes a piece of paper into his hand and walks away with a “Long Live Big Brother”. On the paper are written three words: I LOVE YOU. It is a miracle. Winston races home and fills his diary with page after page of I LOVE YOU.

It is days before Julia dares to approach Winston but manages to do so in the Ministry of Truth Canteen by engineering an accident. She then gives Winston directions how to meet at a safe place in the countryside away from London.

Winston takes the train to a small station and walks through a wonderful forest to the meeting point. At first there is no sign of Julia and he suspects a Thought Police trap and imagines killing Julia and running back to London but at that moment Julia appears. They kiss without words. Birds sing and sunlight falls through the trees. She takes him into the dark forest. They emerge into the sunlight after their love and talk. He says he is older than her and not attractive. Julia says that she does not care. She loves him. She describes how she appears a perfect and loyal citizen, energetically supporting the Party even in her spare time but this is all a mask, a deception as she hates Big Brother as much as she loves Winston. She recognised Winston's inner resistance. But her rebellion is personal, sexual and that is how she undermines the corrupt party – sleeping with powerful Party Members to get what she wants. Winston wants her to be corrupt in this way, is fascinated by her double game and sexual honesty. He

walks toward a sunlit pool full of fish, this is a wonderful moment – he sees a possible Golden Country – a place of freedom and true love.

O'Brien freezes the moment, for him "I Love You" is a slogan to undermine the Revolution.

The next scene shows Julia in her work at the Ministry of Truth. She works in Pornosoc section creating government sponsored and approved pornography to keep the Proletarians happy "in their miserable lives". No one can guess that Julia hates her work.

Now Winston has a reason to go back to the antique shop and rent the back room without the telescreen. He does so, lying that it is to have some quiet to work on the new newspeak dictionary. Charrington pauses before the painting of the church and says that there was an old song connected to the place. He sings the melody : "Oranges and Lemons say the bells of St Clemens..." but he cannot recall the whole tune.

Back in the Ministry of Truth Canteen Parsons is boasting that his six year old informed on his Newspeak teacher for doubting Oceania's Victory in the endless War. The teacher received a long prison sentence and the boy an informer's medal. Julia enters and again manages to create a disturbance so she can speak to Winston, she is desperate to see him, hold him. Winston tells her about the secret room and they arrange to meet. Winston covers the moment by giving his Victory Gin to Parsons and calling for a toast: To Informers!

O'Brien calls Winston over and asks him to meet outside away from the telescreens. Winston is shocked and nervous. But O'Brien is reassuring, he asks Winston to assist him with some new words in the latest Newspeak Dictionary. He tells Winston to drop round to his Inner Party apartment any evening. This is illegal and Winston is shocked.

Winston goes back to the Antique shop and when Charrington leaves the room, opens the window and the waiting Julia climbs in. She cannot believe how wonderful it is to be in a room without a telescreen where she can think and speak what she wishes, and where she can be with her lover without fear. But Winston is troubled by O'Brien's invitation and tells Julia, losing the romance of the moment. Julia thinks O'Brien has set a trap and tells Winston not to go. But he wants to go, he believes that O'Brien is part of the Resistance to Big Brother and the Party. Julia says there is no resistance, its an invention of the Thought Police. But Winston holds onto the idea and they argue. At last Julie agrees that Winston can go on condition that she goes with him. If it is a trap let them both die together. She finds this erotic, a modern Romeo and Juliet dying for love in the nest of the enemy.

The next scene is in O'Brien's luxurious apartment. Bach plays. There is a table with wine. Winston and Julia arrive. O'Brien switches off the telescreen much to the couple's amazement. He explains that Inner Party Members have that privilege. He serves wine and asks why they have come. Surely not to discuss idiotic Newspeak? Together Julia and Winston explain that they believe that O'Brien is part of the Resistance and that they wish to join the movement. O'Brien responds by raising a toast to Goldstein, the leader of the Resistance. He explains that Goldstein is real and that the Resistance is known as the Brotherhood. He asks if they wish to join. Julia and Winston say yes. He then tests them with asking if they would commit a series of terrible crimes to further the cause of the Brotherhood, including throwing acid in the face of a child. They agree to everything, including dying for the cause. The one exception is that they will not part from each other. O'Brien explains that their participation in the Resistance will be short, that they will be discovered and killed, that they may achieve nothing but to honour the truth. That has value even when it achieves nothing but suffering. He gives them Goldstein's book which explains the corrupt dictatorship in which they live and how to oppose it. At that moment the air raid sirens wail and O'Brien tells the couple to run as they must not be found in the Inner Party Bunker or they will be arrested. They run from the apartment and

take shelter in a doorway on the street. There they rest, in each other's arms. Winston reads from Goldstein's book. He starts at the chapter on War, how there is no real war, it is Oceania's bombers who hit their own city to terrify and motivate the people to back the party. There are no countries. There are no enemies no allies, just one state, one dictatorship that is at war with its own citizens. Julia falls asleep as Winston reads, his words wash over her.

A poor woman in the yard behind the antique shop is washing clothes and singing an old song. Charrington has already told Winston not to worry about her as she is "a bit of antique herself" - part of the old world that Charrington values. As the woman sings Julia and Winston dance slowly in the secret room. They go to the window, Julia is worried that the Washerwoman may betray them but she laughs at the idea, she might as well inform on those two mating blackbirds on the wall. Julia and Winston are in harmony. They admire the old painting on the wall and their new freedom, they kiss and say how this life allows them to affirm basic truths: grass is green, blackbirds sing and one plus one is two. Winston says he is truly alive and Julia replies that this cannot last that "we are the dead". The painting drops, There is O'Brien. He echoes their words; YOU ARE THE DEAD. Charrington appears in the yard with a megaphone and machine gun. He repeats: "You are the dead". Julia cries out to O'Brien in alarm: "I thought you were the Resistance!" O'Brien replies: "There is no Resistance". They are ordered to part and place their hands on their head. The antique shop owner announces that he is second officer Charrington, Thought Police. This is echoed by the face on the telescreen: First Officer O'Brien Thought Police. Charrington sings an aggressive version of the full Oranges and Lemons children's song, with its violent end: "Here comes a chopper to chop off your head".

We return to the torture rooms at the Ministry of Love. O'Brien holds up four fingers and asks the tortured Winston how many fingers he can see. When Winston replies four he is given more pain for providing the wrong answer. Eventually the "failed" victim is taken to room 101. O'Brien explains to the audience that this is where each person confronts their worst fear. This terror will clean their brain of thoughts that undermine the Party. Julia has told O'Brien that Winston's worst fear are rats, rats that he saw eating his mother's corpse. Julia is being tortured somewhere in the Ministry of Love as well as Winston. Rats are lifted in a sack towards Winston's face to eat into it, he screams for mercy, and then says: "Take the rats, put them on Julia. Put the rats on Julia's face" O'Brien has won.

Winston is released from prison in the Ministry of Love. He is welcomed back to the canteen at the Ministry of Truth. Parsons raises a toast to him in Victory Gin. Winston even has a medal. O'Brien takes Winston aside and tells him he is allowed meet Julia again in the forest where there are no telescreens. Winston goes to the forest, Julia appears slowly as the birds sing. She is cold and distant. They both confess they betrayed each other to their torturers. She is about to go and catch her train when Winston calls her back.

What Winston Smith finally tells Julia is revealed in the stage play, not here.