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Language and Media Practices Prevalent in *1984* and *Lolita*:
Contemporary Problems Require Literary Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Propaganda, misinformation, unreliable sources...all three of these and other mass media practices are as prevalent in the digital age as they were 50 years ago. While they may wear a different guise, news and media literacy are sorely needed to maintain the protection of a democracy or one's personal sphere. This is found especially in the books *1984* by George Orwell and *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov. Both novels explore the real power of language and media to control entities such as the news, the public, or a nation. Propaganda and disinformation strategies similar to those used by the Party in *1984* have been used in past elections and regimes, such as the 2016 American presidential election. Narrative control and the issue of morality in media and entertainment align very similarly to the themes in *Lolita* utilized by Humbert Humbert. Consider the #metoo movement and the narratives that men portrayed prior to the demand for them to be held accountable. The more things have changed and time has passed, the more things stay the same. With their emphasis on the importance and maintenance of language, the two novels remain relevant well into the 21st century through the rise of mass media and the digital age.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What is the role of mass media within society? It consumes all daily activities, whether at the forefront or in the background of modern consumption. Whether you are driving to work or eating your lunch, messaging is all around. There are billboards high in the sky, vying for your eyes, and commercials interspersed between music on the radio station. When taking a break from work, you may instead watch a YouTube video or read an article on your phone. Modern Western require some constant stimulation, and the screens sitting in one's back pocket are the fastest and best way to get that.

Society is so inundated with media and its messaging in the twenty-first century that it is almost impossible to avoid it. Times Square in New York is applauded as a beautiful tourist trap, but what is it beyond a swamp of advertisements and bright lights? Nothing but a block full of screens, each one trying to capture your attention away from the others in the field of competitive media. It's like one's cellphone and all of its apps multiplied by 100!

According to Our World in Data, a nonprofit research publication, at least 3.5 billion of the world's 7.7 billion people are online: "This means social media platforms are used by one-in-three people in the world, and more than two-thirds of all internet users...[and] the percentage of US adults who use social media increased from 5% in 2005 to 79% in 2019."¹ In a room full of American adults, those who are not on social media fall within the minority. But what does this

¹ Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban. "The Rise of Social Media." Our World in Data, September 18, 2019. <https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media#:~:text=Probably%20the%20first%20recognizable%20social,make%20friends%20with%20other%20users.>

mean? It means that the information received comes from a variety of sources, not all necessarily true and not all benevolent.

Literature, especially the modern novel, is one form of mass media that has taken the problem of media as one of its themes. George Orwell's *1984* predicted the rise of screens in modern day life, though perhaps not to the extent that they have become dominant in 2022. Every part of the novel's dystopian world features something called a "telescreen", a two-way screen that both displays propaganda and serves as a surveillance tool for the government. This is intended to hold members of the public accountable should they decide to go against authority and prevent critical thought of governmental leaders and the society they live in. Screens maintain the power that the ruling body holds over its populace.

How is critical thought possible in a world in which the inundation of media has led to a lack of news and media literacy? As notorious politicians, such as Donald Trump, have frequently declared, "fake news" is a constitutive part of modern media. Disinformation campaigns and simply incorrect social media posts float around platforms, oftentimes spreading like wildfire. The Brookings Institution, an American think tank, conducted a research study into disinformation campaigns and their evolution in recent years. From 2018 to 2020, Facebook and Twitter had taken down 147 total influence operations, with approximately 76% of takedowns in 2020 accredited to specific operation actors. This was a 29% increase from 2018 in specific takedowns from these platforms, and it attests to the significant growth that platforms have experienced with combatting malicious campaigns and maintaining truthful content on those sites.²

² Goldstein, Josh A., and Shelby Grossman. "How Disinformation Evolved in 2020." Brookings. Brookings, January 4, 2021. <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-disinformation-evolved-in-2020/>.

While *1984* is explicitly about misinformation, a more complex interrogation of delusion and corrupted thought is Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*. Is there not something inherently political about Humbert Humbert's agenda in *Lolita* as well? Nabokov brings a charismatic and eloquent man into the fray, who protests his innocence in committing pedophilia as an act of pure love and weakness to young girls' wiles. Humbert is a predator, but because the readers hear the story from his point of view, they can be convinced otherwise. In this way *Lolita* places the burden of discerning truth upon the critical acumen of the reader.

In this project, I will examine the relevance of both *1984* and *Lolita* in the context of the twenty-first century contemporary media landscape. This includes propaganda, disinformation campaigns, degradation of language, and narrative shaping. Literature, as one form of media within this landscape, still has a place in society and, in an era of constant barrages of true and false information, its role in teaching critical thought and theory is more important than ever. Following the motifs of political control of free speech and expression as well as power in language and narrative, I aim to bring to life the classic stories through the lens of media's power and effects.

Background

1984 and *Lolita* are now literary classics, often included in syllabi for introductory literature courses. Why? They have an enduring relevancy in society, even as the media evolve beyond what both George Orwell and Vladimir Nabokov have likely ever imagined. With the rise of prominent figures and movements such as Donald Trump and his followers as well as the

#MeToo movement, the use of media has become not only an everyday but an almost necessary part of 21st century society.

George Orwell's *1984* is a dystopian novel that portrays future England, now known as Oceania, as a surveillance state that restricts freedom of speech, controls knowledge, and generates politically corrupt ideas of what it means to be a good citizen of a nation. Winston Smith, the protagonist of the story, creates propaganda for the country's population to consume and believe as news. As he continues his work, however, he finds himself tempted by free thinking and illegal desires, such as a physical relationship with a younger woman. These lead him into the beginning of his rebellion, where he dreams of fighting back against the Party (Oceania's governing body) and even dismantling it. But unfortunately, it is not to be as returns to being a cog in the government's machine.

Then there is *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov's most well-known novel, which deploys framed narration, thereby producing a tale that is ethically ungrounded. It tells the story of Humbert Humbert, a sexually predatory older man who engages in a furtive relationship with his young stepdaughter Dolores, whom he affectionately refers to as "Lolita". The story winds through his childhood, adulthood, and eventual death. However, because of Humbert's unreliable narration and circuitous method of storytelling, many events are near impossible to tell if they are chronological or even 'true': did they actually happen in the world of the story, or are we reading Humbert's fantasy? Humbert frequently daydreams of killing the women who have betrayed him or kept him from his "nymphet" ideals, and although he says that they died of other means, it is difficult to take him at his word. Although, the fascinating part -- for my argument -- is that readers will want to believe him due to his sympathetic prose and twisting narration.

Who are Orwell and Nabokov?

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair, and is best known as the author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*. He grew up in colonial India, then later moved back to England with his family. After graduating from Eton, he took a job in Burma with the Indian Imperial Police. In his work, he witnessed the negative impact that Britain's colonialism and personal agenda had on the Burmese population. Deeply dismayed by the country's racial and class segregation, he purposely put himself into poverty, dressing in rags and living in the slums of both London and Paris.³ Living in a destitute state allowed Orwell to better write his essays and novels on classism and hierarchical society by understanding the root issues existing within European society in the late 1920's.

Meanwhile, Vladimir Nabokov was born to a wealthy family in Imperial Russia, later fleeing to Europe with them as refugees after the Bolshevik Revolution. When he was a young man, he wrote his first 9 novels in Russian while living in Berlin. After displacement from Berlin and Paris due to dictatorships and the Nazi regime, he later moved to America and began writing in English, achieving international claim and prominence. His most notable works include *Lolita*, *Pale Fire*, and *Speak, Memory*.

Robert Alter from the Princeton Press notes Nabokov's clever use of play in all that he writes. "The playfulness, very often enacted through gorgeous prose, is surely essential to the delight of reading... But...the playfulness is finally a means to make us understand more deeply and more subtly a whole range of moral, emotional, and political challenges that may confront us

³ Crick, Bernard R. "Early Life." Essay. In *George Orwell: A Life*. London: Penguin, 1992.

in the consequential realm beyond words and books and writers.”⁴ Nabokov’s writing was designed to evoke a deeper understanding and appreciation for the stories that questioned the deep human truths and conflicts such as love, loss, and morality using a metaphorical and ironic method.

Orwell and Nabokov could not be two more different men and writers in terms of their life values and prose. Orwell writes with a political agenda—he seeks to open society’s eyes to the dangers of fascism and a tyrannically controlled society. He believed all writing to be unequivocally political, as there was no part of human society left untouched by politics. Meanwhile, Nabokov focused more on the art of storytelling. He wanted to tell the story of a deeply problematic man and make him empathetic to the readers. Completely contrary to Orwell, Nabokov believed that a “higher” aesthetic enjoyment was more important than a novel with the goal of teaching. He was staunchly against the idea that novels should teach. According to his students, “instead, Nabokov emphasized actualistic qualities in the fiction he taught. He suggested that realism misunderstands the true nature of reality; fiction cannot dispense with real life, but ‘Life is the least realistic of fictions’” (Strehle, 38). However, both provide valuable insight into language and how it can be weaponized on different levels of society and interpersonal connections.

⁴ Alter, Robert. “Nabokov: When Playfulness Is Serious.” Princeton University Press. The Trustees of Princeton University, March 22, 2021.

Chapter 2

1984 and its Political Relevance

Misinformation, Disinformation, and Propaganda

There is a distinct difference between misinformation and disinformation beyond their first letters. The distinction between these two words lies in one very important thing: intent. Misinformation is simply false information that is passed around due to ignorance or inaccessibility. Disinformation is deliberate in its intention to mislead with inaccurate information—typically it is used as a political tool in authoritarian regimes. Propaganda is also a tried and true tool of totalitarianism. It pushes forth information to the public that is usually biased in favor of a special interest with the intent to promote a political cause or side. All three will be covered in this section regarding their role in *1984* and current media.

For readers in the United States, Russia may still immediately come to mind with the phrase “authoritarian regimes”. That thinking would have been incredibly appropriate for Orwell: Dorian Lynskey’s *The Ministry of Truth: The Biography of George Orwell’s 1984* tells the story of Orwell’s progress towards writing his famous novel. Orwell traveled to Spain in 1936 to fight in the Spanish Civil War out of a sense of obligation to fight fascism in the name of democracy. As Lynskey notes, “[Orwell’s] introduction to totalitarianism came in Barcelona, when agents of the Soviet Union created an elaborate lie to discredit Trotskyists in the Spanish government as fascist spies.”⁵

⁵ Packer, George. “Doublethink Is Stronger Than Orwell Imagined.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, May 23, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/07/1984-george-orwell/590638/>.

Once he returned to England, relieved from duty because he was shot in the throat by a stray bullet, Orwell wrote his views and experiences with the Spanish Civil War. Unlike the other left-wing journalists, Orwell exposed the facade by providing an eyewitness account in journalism. This condemned him from the left, with many communist publications rejecting him for refusing to accept the Soviet Union's lie. This shook him to his core, threatening Orwell's sense of self and purpose. Lynskey writes, "History stopped and *1984* began."

Since Orwell wrote *1984*, disinformation has been a continued problem in the United States today. The U.S. Department of State has a page on their website⁶ dedicated to "disarming disinformation" specifically directed from the Kremlin, or Russia. The department has regularly published news releases, reports, fact sheets, and other resources for the general public to educate themselves on the false information being fed to them. Everything publicly known about the Kremlin's lies from Russia's disinformation campaign about the US and Ukraine's creation of chemical weapons to false information about the state of Russia in its international affairs is documented on that site.

As an example of contemporary disinformation as an active threat to democracy, during the 2016 election, Russia was found interfering with American politics. Robert Mueller, special counsel for the Department of Justice and former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, published a report on his investigation into any Russian connections to then-President Donald Trump's election campaign, as well as any other possible findings of corruption. This report was known commonly as the "Mueller Report", and it is how it will be referred to in this essay as well. While it is heavily redacted due to the sensitive information it contains, the Mueller Report

⁶ "Disarming Disinformation - United States Department of State." U.S. Department of State. U.S. Department of State, November 18, 2022. <https://www.state.gov/disarming-disinformation/>.

explains the crafting and execution of the Kremlin's intelligence operations into systemically controlling the American public via social media.

The Mueller Report found that the “first form of Russian election influence came through principally from the Internet Research Agency, LLC...[it] conducted social media operations targeted at large US audiences with the goal of sowing discord in the U.S. political system.”⁷ IRA employees opened social media accounts using fictitious personas, falsely claiming to be activists in the United States. The disinformation campaign began as early as 2014, when IRA operatives traveled to the U.S. on an intelligence-gathering mission for further information and pictures for social media. Through the 2016 election season, IRA employees posted derogatory remarks about other candidates, posted messages in support of Donald Trump, bought political social media advertisements, and even communicated virtually with individuals associated with the Trump campaign to plan political activities such as rallies. IRA Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts and groups garnered hundreds of thousands of U.S. participants and followers, some even including multiple U.S. politicians. According to representatives from Facebook and Twitter, they identified “470 IRA-controlled Facebook accounts that collectively made 80,000 posts between January 2015 and August 2017...[reaching] as many as 126 million persons... [Twitter] identified 3,814 IRA-controlled Twitter accounts and notified approximately 1.4 million people Twitter believed may have been in contact with an IRA-controlled account.” The findings in this 448-page document, combined with hearings of political figures involved with the Trump campaign, has led to the finding of Donald Trump innocent of collusion and conspiracy, but guilty on multiple accounts of obstruction of justice due to his interference in the

⁷ Mueller, Robert S., III. “Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference In the 2016 Presidential Election.” Washington, District of Columbia: U.S. Department of Justice, March 2019.

department's investigation. 13 Russian nationals and 3 Russian entities, including the IRA, were indicted by a U.S. grand jury for intent to interfere with the U.S. election process.

In 1984, the threat of disinformation comes from inside the nation rather than an external entity. That is not the story that the Party puts forth. Rather, it blames every other country to create public enemies for the populace to hate rather than themselves. "At this moment...in 1984 (if it was 1984), Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. In no public or private utterance was it ever admitted that the three powers had at any time been grouped along different lines...Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia. The enemy at the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible" (1984, 34).

Winston, as a worker in the Ministry of Truth where they produce propaganda and create and delete words from language, can only put forth the language and knowledge that the Party wants its population to know about. Although he knows for a fact that only 4 years ago Oceania was at war with Eastasia, it is a dangerous "thoughtcrime" to give any basis to those contradictions. "Thoughtcrime" is an offense committed when one has a thought contrary to the Party's teachings and beliefs. It's never explained how the Party knows, but "thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed forever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you...You were abolished, annihilated: *vaporized* was the usual word" (1984, 19). The sheer power they hold over the populace and terror they wield over their heads is astronomical, quite literally brainwashing people into believing everything they put into the telescreens for consumption.

Similar to the IRA's interference with the 2016 election, the Party creates two figures: one to love and one to hate (essentially, an "us" versus "them" rhetorical strategy). The IRA

chose Donald Trump to love and Hillary Clinton to hate, and that drove their online content and huge ascension to a multi-million follower base. The Party has Big Brother as their idol and Emmanuel Goldstein as the proclaimed Enemy of the People. Big Brother is the benevolent, faceless leader of the Party who strikes both fear and respect into the people of Oceania. Goldstein was one of the leading founders of the Party alongside him, before his participation in counterrevolutionary activities and subsequent narrow escape from execution. In the Two Minutes Hate, the people of Oceania gather to watch a projected video of Emmanuel Goldstein, the “primal traitor” of the Party, denouncing the Party and its doctrines by crying for end of war and freedom of expression and speech. Within 30 seconds, people begin screaming obscenities at the screen, throwing items, and condemning Goldstein. Winston, who has no strong feelings towards Goldstein, begins shouting and partaking in the madness as well. This is the effect of mob mentality. The daily “Two Minutes Hate” serves as a reminder to the people that the only real enemies must be the ones outside of their walls. Of course, the Party serves in nothing but their best interest—it is only those who go against the Party that truly harm the people.

Does this sound familiar to another event that has occurred in recent years? The January 6 Capitol Attack may ring a few bells. On January 6, 2021, a mob of thousands of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol building after his loss in the 2020 presidential election. Their goal was to stop an electoral college vote count happening in a joint session of Congress, thereby forcibly keeping the president in office. The rioters vandalized and looted official Capitol offices and spaces and assaulted police officers protecting the building. They even attempted to capture and harm legislators and placed explosives at the Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee headquarters.

Trump's followers subscribed to an "us versus them" rhetoric that characterized the citizens of Oceania. That is what works about propaganda for a Goliath of a political figure. He has managed to make himself akin to a deity in their eyes, similarly to Big Brother. But figures like Trump and the Kremlin's IRA forces are not the only things to look out for in media today.

Social Media and Surveillance

"Big Brother is watching you." Orwell accurately predicted that with the rise of technology, the sense of privacy would gradually diminish or even be eliminated entirely. While he may not have been accurate about TVs being the main surveillance devices, he's not far off. Cellphones now are smaller TVs that allow you to stay connected with the rest of the world even when apart, but they are also a great wealth of personal information and sensitive data to any who may be searching for it.

The Privacy Project was a 2019 endeavor run by the New York Times, dedicated to exploring the ever-changing technology of businesses and how users' privacy can be protected in the rapidly growing digital age. Of course, when talking about digital privacy and surveillance, *1984* is almost always brought up in discussion. Every move of the citizens of Oceania is watched like a hawk, with the Party and its followers lying in wait until one person slips up and commits thoughtcrime or betrays the Party in another way. The telescreen monitors their every move, and there is one in every home, every building, and everywhere outside as well. They watch and wait for every move. *The New York Times* argues that today's surveillance state is even worse than Oceania's.⁸

⁸ Kelley, Lora. "When 'Big Brother' Isn't Scary Enough." The Privacy Project. The New York Times, November 4, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/opinion/surveillance-big-brother.html>

Lora Kelley has argued that “in Orwell’s Oceania, citizens don’t also face the threats of privately funded drones, for example, or apps that spy on them, or police lineups containing their driver’s license photos. In the real world, we face a panoply of surveillance threats that go beyond even the most frightening coordinated government surveillance. Big Brother captures only a slice.”⁹ With *1984*, the threat comes from a singular source: the governing body. In the twenty-first century, surveillance has multiple faces and names. Homes have Amazon Alexas listening constantly; skies have drones flying overhead with cameras strapped to them; and websites equip cookies to learn about search habits and patterns. While perhaps the threat is not so much as you will be dragged away for thinking something that does not align with the values of the government, your personal data is being sold to third parties for their own benefit. This is usually so that they may appeal their products to you, in the hopes that you will purchase them and then become a loyal, repeat customer to them.

When it comes to third party data, companies use cookies and other targeting methods to surveil people. Cookies are small files of data that identify you as a specific user; they also personalize your browsing experience based on your past habits. Google Analytics and other platforms gather data on users to help companies build campaigns focused on their target audiences. For example, a sporting goods company may want to target their new product line to 18-30 year old users that play soccer and are located within 20 miles of one of their retail locations. Utilizing data, they are able to appeal to that hyper-specific demographic. There are three main types of data that companies can gather: first party, second party, and third party. First party data is data that the company collects itself, typically from its website or social media

⁹ Kelley, Lora. “When ‘Big Brother’ Isn’t Scary Enough.” *The Privacy Project*. The New York Times, November 4, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/opinion/surveillance-big-brother.html>

pages. Second party data is data collected and shared by a partner company, such as through that other company's website or app. Lastly, third party data is data about online users collected from other parts of the web, such as user attributes for advertisement personalization.

Large companies typically may utilize all three types of data to gain a holistic view of their consumers and accurately target their products and services to them. In *1984*, the Party is constantly gathering data on the citizens of Oceania to ensure that they do not act out of line of the Party's ideals and laws. The key thing about data for surveillance is control. Due to cybersecurity and data privacy laws, companies are not able to exert total control over Internet users. Instead, they use algorithms to encourage users to consume goods and services that are tailored to their browsing and shopping habits. How does that work? After a company retrieves your data, they don't know your name or address or social security number. Depending on what companies pay for, they may know your geographic data (such as your state) and the last five things you bought on Google Shopping. For companies doing digital campaigns, they want to target audiences that they believe will buy or know will buy their products, become loyal customers, and spread word of the brand to other potential customers.

Google, the world's most popular search engine, actually has plans to phase out third-party cookies in 2024. This is due to rising concerns about consumer privacy and the use of personal data. Hubspot, a marketing and sales platform, found that Google Chrome holds more than half of all global web traffic out of all search engine platforms, including Mozilla Firefox and Safari. The "death" of cookies will lead to new challenges for digital marketers and advertisers, who relied on that data to target their specific consumer audiences. However, it does not mean that Google will completely stop tracking people. Instead of monitoring on an

individual basis, it will track users in groups of shared interests, removing a bit of the extremely accurate personalization of the search engine algorithm.

While there is not as controlled surveillance over users as there is in *1984*, personal data is still being collected and used online by larger entities. There are movements being made to further protect the privacy of individuals who use the Internet and its services, but in the world of digital marketing, that data is invaluable to data analysts in building strong online campaigns and making money for their brands.

Desecration and Degradation of the English Language

Perhaps the best way to introduce *1984*'s masterful depiction of the degradation and violation of the English language is through the Party's slogan: "WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH." It's an oxymoronic slogan that makes no sense, but in Newspeak, the official language of Oceania, it is all that they see plastered across the walls and surfaces of Airstrip One (formerly London) surrounding them.

Their slogan outlines the principles of INGSOC, which is the political/ideological system that Oceania follows. The Party maintains control over the Oceanian citizens through this system, exercised through Newspeak, doublethink, and the changeability of the past to fit the needs of the present.

With the term "Newspeak", Orwell intentionally leaves an ambiguity within the novel with the definition as either "news speak" or "new speak". However, he does clarify that it is the latter and meant to supersede "Old Speak, or Standard English...Newspeak isn't the just a set of

buzzwords, but the deliberate replacement of one set of words in the language for another.”¹⁰

With the constant of evolution of language to fit daily societal changes, Orwell introduces the devolution of language to fit the needs of a totalitarian political system. This new language of Newspeak was designed to prevent freedom of expression or choice of alternative thought processes that could be used against the will of the Party.

Ironically, Orwell also used The Declaration of Independence as an example to portray Newspeak and its way of thinking. “‘*All mans are equal*’ was a possible Newspeak sentence,” but only in that “it expressed a palpable untruth—i.e. that all men are of equal size, weight, or strength.”¹¹ Rather than acknowledging “equality” in terms of treatment or receipt of rights such as voting or expression, Newspeak reads and thinks literally. How foolish one could be! No man is created equal—there are big men and small men, and men born with more hair than others. Newspeak takes away the depth of meaning in language, as well as the multiple meanings. By shrinking down the lexicon of Oceania citizens, the Party is systemically taking away one of the most powerful weapons that could be used against it.

Although Winston is tortured with rats in the end of the novel in the Ministry of Peace, all of the citizens of Oceania are unwittingly suffering from the loss of language freedom and critical thought. The Party enforces a practice called “doublethink”, in which people accept contrary beliefs simultaneously. Doublethink is unquestioned—of course, if the Party says something is true, it must be. The idea of free thought does not exist—is not allowed to exist—in

¹⁰ Jones, Josh. “George Orwell Explains How ‘Newspeak’ Works, the Official Language of His Totalitarian Dystopia in *1984*.” Literature. Open Culture, January 25, 2017. <https://www.openculture.com/2017/01/george-orwell-explains-how-newspeak-works.html>

¹¹ Same source as above.

Oceania, for even just briefly thinking that the Party may be wrong or may be acting contrary to the best interests of its citizens is thoughtcrime and treason, deserving of “disappearing”.

In an article published to the BBC, writer Jean Seaton professes, “The greatest horror in Orwell’s dystopia is the systematic stripping of meaning out of language. The regime aims to eradicate words and the ideas and feelings they embody. Its real enemy is reality. Tyrannies attempt to make understanding the real world impossible: seeking to replace it with phantoms and lies.”¹² The Party takes away the variety in words and convinces the citizens of Oceania that everything they say in the present has always been correct.

Winston receives Emmanuel Goldstein’s, the traitor and common enemy of Oceania, book titled *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*. In it, Goldstein recollects the splitting of the world into different superstates as well as the true intentions behind the Party’s ruling. He writes about doublethink,

“The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of *doublethink* he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring with it a feeling or falsity and hence of guilt. *Doublethink* lies at the very heart of Ingsoc, since the essential act of the party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty...Even in using the word *doublethink* it is necessary to exercise *doublethink*. For by using the word one admits that one is tampering with reality; by fresh act of

¹² Seaton, Jean. “Why Orwell’s 1984 could be about now.” BBC. BBC, May 7, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180507-why-orwells-1984-could-be-about-now>

doublethink one erases this knowledge; and so on indefinitely, with the lie always one leap ahead of the truth” (1984 214).

To have doublethink integrated into regular societal practices prevents any questions from arising from the citizens. The Thought Police instill a strong sense of fear and duty into the people in Oceania. Doublethink completely overrides one’s sense of reality and trust in their own minds, meaning people can only put their full trust into the Party and what the Party tells them. This creates a reliance and development of unconditional faith in the government and the news that it gives its citizens—similarly done to autocratic governments.

Language is no longer in the power of the people, as all of the news, thought, and knowledge comes from the various government ministries that rule it all with an iron fist. There is no allowance of free speech or expression without the risk of disappearing from the face of the earth. Ingsoc does not allow any free room to act against the Party, and that has led to a complete degradation and destruction of language as we know it.

Chapter 3

Lolita and Media Storytelling

Public Relations and Narrative Control

Humbert Humbert is perhaps one of the most masterful story spinners in literary history. It is a widely acknowledged and accepted truth that pedophilia is a heinous offense, worthy of great degrees of condemnation and punishment. However, Humbert describes his relationship with his stepdaughter Dolores, whom he refers to as Lolita, as a beautiful, whimsical thing to be admired and adored. He flips the power dynamic around: rather than him being the powerful and older man controlling her, she is the seductive young nymphet who toys with his heart and feelings of desire:

As she strained to chuck the core of her abolished apple into the fender, her young weight, her shameless innocent shanks and round bottom, shifted in my tense, tortured surreptitiously laboring lap; and all of a sudden a mysterious change came over my senses...What had begun as a delicious distension of my innermost roots became a glowing tingle which *now* had reached that state of absolute security, confidence and reliance not found elsewhere in conscious life” (*Lolita* 59-60).

Nabokov deployed the techniques of unreliable narrator in *Lolita*, rather than offering a psychological or scientific explanation. Rather than applying a Freudian or diagnostic approach to Lolita and Humbert, he expertly crafted an aesthetic that creates a rosy glow around their relationship. Even in the above quotation, where Humbert is inappropriately rubbing himself against Lolita, he frames it as an innocent act between two lovers or even as a seductive young girl tempting a tortured man. Readers are tempted to empathize with Humbert and believe Lolita

to have power over him and us, as opposed to the other way around. Even the current definition of the term “lolita” means “a precociously seductive girl”¹³ in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, which completely misses the intended point of the novel.

The grip that Nabokov has on language is beyond mesmerizing, to say the least. His use of language can be considered in contemporary terms through the lens of a public relations professional, even though he would likely have a disdain for the business style of writing that most PR professionals employ. According to the communication theory of “narrative persuasion”, people are more easily persuaded by information delivered via a narrative.¹⁴ It outlines the impact that narratives can have on the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of those affected by story-telling. In current practice, narrative persuasion is used to convince consumers to trust a brand and understand its messaging—an important part of communications and marketing as a whole.

Where public relations differs from marketing/advertising is not where one might think.. While the lines of marketing and communications continue to get blurred with each passing day, PR consists of different strategies, practices, and deliverables than its advertising counterpart. There is a saying in the industry that, “advertising sells products. Public relations sells ideas.” The Public Relations Society of America, a national organization dedicated to connecting communications professionals and students, defines public relations as “a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.”¹⁵ Note the key word in that definition: relationships. The most important factor in

¹³ “Lolita Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster, n.d. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Lolita>.

¹⁴ Flynn, Terence. “How Narratives Can Reduce Resistance and Change Attitudes: Insights From Behavioral Science Can Enhance Public Relations Research and Practice.”

¹⁵ “About Public Relations.” The Public Relations Society of America, n.d. <https://www.prsa.org/about/all-about-pr>.

a successful relationship is trust. Humbert makes his attempt at building trust with the reader at the very beginning of the novel: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, exhibit number one is what the seraphs, the misinformed, simple, noble-winged seraphs, envied. Look at this tangle of thorns" (*Lolita* 9). By referencing the reader immediately, he makes a connection that he is sustained and intensified throughout the course of the novel. He also connects, although somewhat satirically, with a Christian audience by making Biblical allusions—the tangle of thorns that he mentions portraying him as a martyr, sacrificing himself for the sins of another. Humbert successfully plays himself as a victim, twisting the narrative to portray himself in a positive and even empathetic light to his audience and imaginary jury.

Morality in Media

Who should be given a platform in the media? Who is given a platform? What are the modern-day effects of media on people, especially on young girls?

Lolita is arguably Nabokov's most controversial novel due to the nature of its subject. He has also criticized readers and critics for misinterpreting the work. In an interview with Herbert Gold from *The Paris Review*, the interviewer broached the topic of Nabokov's sense of immorality regarding Humbert Humbert and Lolita's relationship and how it may contrast with Hollywood practices of older men dating younger women. Nabokov responded,

No, it is not *my* sense of the immorality of the Humbert Humbert-Lolita relationship that is strong; it is Humbert's sense. *He* cares, I do not. *I* do not give a damn for public morals, in America or elsewhere. And, anyway, cases of men in their forties marrying girls in their teens or early twenties have no bearing on *Lolita* whatever.

Humbert was fond of “little girls”—not simply “young girls.” Nymphets are girl-children, not starlets and “sex kittens.” Lolita was twelve, not eighteen, when Humbert met her. You may remember that by the time she is fourteen, he refers to her as his “aging mistress.”¹⁶

Some critics mentioned in the above interview believed that an author’s, particularly Nabokov’s, work necessarily correlated with their personal beliefs and views on topics. And for those who have read *Lolita*, they decided that Humbert was a reflection of Nabokov’s perspectives—that he was allowing incestuous, pedophilic relationships and even displaying them as things of beauty. This could not be further from the truth. And when he heard that people either took personal offense to Humbert or took his behavior to mean that theirs was acceptable, he treated their commentary with great derision. Humbert is a groomer and pedophile who stole a girl’s childhood away from her because of his sexual urges and desire to control and own her.

In *Lolita*, when Humbert and Lolita first engage in sexual intercourse, he gives a suspenseful lead up to the event before stating that he does not wish to soil Lolita’s innocence by giving details about the act that occurred between them. There is a perverse sense of disappointment that many readers may have experienced, a desire for Humbert to share the illicit affair between him and his “nymphet”, that he does not meet. Instead, he expresses her childish desire as an innocent and fascinating secret to be shared only between the two of them:

However, I shall not bore my learned readers with a detailed account of Lolita’s presumption. Suffice it to say that not a trace of modesty did I perceive in this beautiful hardly formed young girl whom modern co-education, juvenile mores, the campfire

¹⁶ Gold, Herbert. “The Art of Fiction No. 40.” *The Paris Review*, June 24, 2021. <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4310/the-art-of-fiction-no-40-vladimir-nabokov>.

racket and so forth had utterly and hopelessly depraved. She saw the stark act merely as part of a youngster's furtive world, unknown to adults...I am not concerned with so-called "sex" at all. Anybody can imagine those elements of animality. A greater endeavour lures me on: to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets. (*Lolita* 133-134).

Youth, particularly in girls and women, is highly valued in Hollywood and society to the point of overt sexualization. UNICEF, through a study conducted by Wesleyan University, found that "in a study of print media...on average, across 58 different magazines, 51.8 percent of advertisements that featured women portrayed them as sex objects. However, when women appeared in advertisements in men's magazines, they were objectified 76 percent of the time."¹⁷ This visible sexualization of women has a noticeable negative effect on young girls' emotional and physical health. The consequences of hypersexualization contribute to body images issues that can range from eating disorders to depression to lower self-esteem in girls as young as 10 years old. With the rise of social media and greater exposure to hypersexualization, the ages of girls' first exposure to these hypersexualized, unrealistic body images of women continue to dip lower and lower.

Nabokov, a Cornell University professor, was once interviewed by a student about his literary process, inspirations, and beliefs. That student, Alfred Appel, Jr., ended up writing an annotated version of *Lolita*, published with new notes and an introduction written by him. Appel, perhaps predictably, asked about the similarities between *Lolita* and Freud's work. In response, he stated: "Oh, I am not up to discussing again that figure of fun. He is not worthy of more

¹⁷ Swift, Jaimee, and Hannah Gould. "Not an Object: On Sexualization and Exploitation of Women and Girls." UNICEF USA, January 11, 2021. <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/not-object-sexualization-and-exploitation-women-and-girls-0#:~:text=A%20report%20by%20the%20American,expressions%20that%20imply%20sexual%20readiness.>

attention than I have granted him in my novels...Let the credulous and the vulgar continue to believe that all mental woes can be cured by a daily application of old Greek myths to their private parts. I really do not care.”¹⁸

The oversexualization and mistreatment of women in the media industry has spanned over decades and decades. In 2006, survivor and activist Tarana Burke founded the “me too” movement. This movement was built to bring awareness to the sexual violence being committed against women, particularly by men in positions of power. In 2017, actress Alyssa Milano helped bring the #metoo movement to the global stage through Twitter virality and gathered millions of survivors together to hold past abusers and assaulters accountable. Currently, #metoo is still thriving, and the movement has created a broad portfolio of resources for survivors, such as a Survivor Healing Series on the me too website.¹⁹

Glancing back at *Lolita*, Charlotte Haze, the mother of Lolita and wife of Humbert, discovers Humbert’s secret journal containing his lustful desires towards Lolita. In the scenes leading up to Chapter 22, Humbert describes her as an easily jealous woman who threatens to kill herself if he does not identify as a good Christian man, demands to know his past love affairs and relationships, and creates the unrealistic fantasy of a domestic American household with her daughter and husband. These actions all come to a head when she finds his journal detailing his lust for her daughter and she is furious. However, her anger does not come in the form of a protective mother but from a wronged wife who caught her husband having an affair. She expresses jealousy over Humbert’s love for Lolita and threatens to take her daughter away as a punishment for him, rather than to shield Dolores.

¹⁸ Appel, Alfred, Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov. “An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov.” *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Spring, 1967, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 127-152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1207097>

¹⁹ “Me Too. Movement.” me too. Movement, February 13, 2023. <https://metoomvmt.org/>.

Charlotte says to Humbert, “You’re a monster. You’re a detestable, abominable, criminal fraud. If you come near—I’ll scream out the window. Get back! ...I am leaving tonight. This is all yours. Only you’ll never, never see that miserable brat again. Get out of this room” (*Lolita* 96).

Consider this, however: is this true or retold to fit Humbert’s perspective? As mentioned earlier, Humbert has proved himself to be an unreliable narrator who twists the story to fit his version of events. This is not an out-of-date or unrealistic phenomenon—it happens frequently in daily life for women. The #metoo movement exposed the abusive habits of men in powerful positions to the world that were brushed under the rug or just accepted as the norm, such as Harvey Weinstein’s sexual assault and harassment of women. Since then, the movement has taken down hundreds of powerful men in power and held them accountable for their actions for the first time in years. Pew Research Center found a cultural change due to the movement as well. In a study published in September of 2022, Pew found that “seven-in-ten U.S. adults...say that, compared with five years ago [at the beginning of #metoo], people who commit sexual harassment or assault in the workplace are now more likely to be held responsible for their actions. And about six-in-ten say that those who report harassment or assault at work are now *more likely* to be believed.”²⁰ There is change being made—it will remain gradual but the power imbalances in media and society between powerful men and young women and girls are shrinking as time passes and society changes.

²⁰ Brown, Anna. “More than Twice as Many Americans Support than Oppose the #MeToo Movement.” Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. Pew Research Center, October 6, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/09/29/more-than-twice-as-many-americans-support-than-oppose-the-metoo-movement/>.

Chapter 4

Orwell vs Nabokov: Different Yet the Same

Orwell and Nabokov According to Critics

The two men have faced no shortage of criticism over their works, both during their lives and posthumously.

Regarding *1984*, George Orwell was famously lambasted by Aldous Huxley. Huxley, author of the dystopian fiction novel *A Brave New World*, wrote to Orwell saying, “The nightmare of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is destined to modulate into the nightmare of a world having more resemblances to that which I imagined in *Brave New World*”²¹. Huxley interpreted the novel to be more of a prophecy than a veiled metaphor for the current state of global politics. Many people misunderstood the novel and were kicked up into a frenzy over what its true meaning and intentions could be that Orwell had to issue a statement that his book was not an attack on the British state, socialism, or the Labour Party (of which he was a member).

Critics also tore down Orwell because they believed that he was being unpatriotic, and falsely accusing the state of tyranny.²² *1984* is a dramatized version of the world in a future devoid of privacy and an authoritative, total surveillance country. While he may not have explicitly called out a country for its governing style, Orwell still brought the warnings of propaganda and authoritarian governments to the forefront of minds.

²¹ Saunders, Loraine. “George Orwell's Critical Reception.” *Salem Press*, n.d., 95–114. <https://salempress.com/Media/SalemPress/samples/Orwell%20Sample.pdf>

²² Same as above source.

Nabokov's critics were many, and they were largely those who misinterpreted his work. He held general disdain for critics, especially those who did not actually understand the depth of meaning behind his work.

When asked if he thought literary criticism was at all purposeful, Nabokov replied: "My advice to a budding literary critic would be as follows. Learn to distinguish banality. Remember that mediocrity thrives on 'ideas.' Beware of the modish message. Ask yourself if the symbol you detected is not your own footprint. Ignore allegories. By all means place the 'how' above the 'what' but do not let it be confused with the 'so what'. Rely on the sudden erection of your dorsal hairs. Do not bring Freud in at this point. All the rest depends on personal talent."²³

What Nabokov wanted to see was literary criticism given with beyond surface-level attention given to it and that actually listened to the author's messages. "Ask yourself if the symbol you detected is not your own footprint" indicates to critics that they ought not to interpret text to satisfy their own ideas of the writing.

The threat of misinterpretation and fear come with any popular works that contain social commentary—*Invitation to a Beheading* and *Lolita* are far from exceptions to that. Both authors provide insight into the dangers of sociopolitical climates (regarding misinformation, unreliable narration, and more) but have been accused of exactly what their novel warns against.

²³ Appel, Alfred, Jr. and Vladimir Nabokov. "An Interview with Vladimir Nabokov." *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature*, Spring, 1967, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 127-152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1207097>

The Power of Nabokov and Orwell in the 21st Century

Two novels, two authors, and two interpretations of literature and writing practices. George Orwell argued that literature was a tool that could be weaponized politically, both for good and bad causes. Vladimir Nabokov, meanwhile, insisted that literature served aesthetic rather than political purposes. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to which of the two literary fiction giants is correct in the purpose of their writing. Both have made enormously significant contributions to the world of literature, especially as social critique.- Reading both *1984* and *Lolita* provide unique insight into the role of literature as both a reformist weapon and a tool of critique.

In the 21st century, we are still engaging with the same problems that Orwell and Nabokov address. The United States faced digital disinformation campaigns created and sent by the Kremlin to interfere with the 2016 election results, which had eerie parallels to the telescreens and propaganda in Oceania. Orwell has said himself that “the novel was not an attack on any particular government but a satire of the totalitarian tendencies in Western society and intellectuals: ‘The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don’t let it happen. It depends on you.*’”²⁴ *1984* is intended to have enduring relevance by serving as a reminder and a warning of what the world can become with authoritarian regimes and a government led by one sole entity as opposed to the people. The people are far more powerful than they may think, and Orwell professes a rather overt plea throughout the novel to not let the world get to the state that Oceania is in. The world of constant false propaganda, threat

²⁴ Packer, George. “Doublethink Is Stronger Than Orwell Imagined.” *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, May 23, 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/07/1984-george-orwell/590638/>.

of thoughtcrime, and purposeful degradation of language is one without the freedom the Western world so deeply values—he warns all away from this future.

Looking at *Lolita*, men in power are still in positions to exploit and sexualize young girls and women, creating a great disparity in narrative. Humbert Humbert's story of grooming and sexually exploiting his step-daughter is not a one-off, unique story. As evidenced by the #metoo movement, there has been a lot of work done in exposing abusive men in power and believing survivors' stories since *Lolita*'s publication but there is always more to be done. Nabokov challenges readers to think critically and not just take the first thing thrust in front of them. By sifting through Humbert's story and determining the gaps in retellings and chronology, readers can take his unreliable narration and work to piece together the truth of Humbert Humbert and *Lolita*'s tale. That critical thought is especially important in the digital age with the inundation of information and brand voices.

Readers ought to use these classics to examine the 21st century world and know how to recognize the mass media practices such as propaganda, disinformation, narrative control, power imbalance in voice, and more. Literature provides that value to readers no matter their background. Critical thought and reading of context clues surrounding language should be standard for all, as it is applicable regardless of the medium in which one is consuming information, news, or other writing.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In his essay *Politics and the English Language*, Orwell writes, “But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought.”²⁵ Language is power—the Party in *1984* knows that incredibly well, which is why the Ministry of Truth maintains such an iron grip over Newspeak and the dissolution of wide vocabulary. Controlling language and connectedness is one of the key practices of totalitarian regimes—it can be compared to some countries’ restrictions of certain social media platforms in the 21st century. Propaganda to drum up support for the ruling government and hatred for any enemies also allows the government to exert control over its people by creating a sense of community amidst the “Two Minutes Hate” and constant content stimulation from the telescreens located in every room of every building of every corner of Oceania. Orwell warns his readers against this future surveillance state of a world without freedom of thought or expression or truth, and indicates that only we the people can prevent it from becoming a true reality.

Vladimir Nabokov once said, “Curiosity is insubordination in its purest form.”²⁶ He challenges readers in his novels, especially *Lolita*, to be curious and read beyond the words right

²⁵ Orwell, George. “Politics and the English Language.” *Horizon: A Review of Literature and Art* 13, no. 76 (April 1946): 252–265.

²⁶ Nafisi, Azar. “Why We Read.” Yale University Press, April 12, 2022.
<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/2019/08/08/why-we-read/#:~:text=As%20Vladimir%20Nabokov%20said%3A%20%E2%80%9Ccuriosity,within%20each%20one%20of%20us.>

before them. Reading between the lines and maintaining critical thought as they are given some of the most unreliable narration literature has ever seen is crucial. PR professionals employ narrative control and can make language flexible to fit the tone of voice they're looking to express. Humbert Humbert also showcases an expert control over the language by making readers want to believe and side with him and his side of the story regarding Lolita and his other crimes. Nabokov warns readers that not everything may be as it seems at first glance, and provokes them to realize the truth behind the sugary language and beautiful prose.

Both Orwell and Nabokov have produced novels that maintain enduring relevancy well into the 21st century. They inspire and remind readers that they need to keep sharp and respect literature as the vehicle it is towards maintaining literacy beyond the page. Literacy has since extended to the digital world and has become increasingly importance with the increased access of information and communication at people's fingertips. *1984*, *Lolita*, and literature will continue to maintain an important role in academia and society to serve as a voice for critical thought for the world.

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University University Park, PA
Schreyer Honors College, Paterno Fellows Honors Program May 2023
Bachelor of Arts in English, Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations
Minor in Digital Media Trends & Analytics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Penn State Learning Writing Center University Park, PA
Peer Tutor & Workshops Peer Coordinator December 2020-Present

- Serve on a team of Peer Coordinators to maintain and update work schedules and tutoring resources, coordinate class workshops and special projects, and lead group discussions and staff meetings
- Assist undergraduate students on developing their writing skills and knowledge as a leader in the writing community

The Lincoln Financial Group Radnor, PA
Corporate Brand Strategy Intern June 2022-August 2022

- Conducted and presented research into the competitive marketing sphere on topics including the metaverse, online quote tools, and influencer marketing to 50+ stakeholders and attendees
- Learned and integrated SEO and data analytics strategies and programs, such as BrightEdge and Datorama, to organize Lincoln's Newsroom and optimize paid and organic search results
- Cataloged Line of Business resources and campaign social and paid assets using Excel and Workfront to target messaging for different audience segments in digital media

Corporate Communications, Marketing, and Brand Intern June 2021-August 2021

- Integrated organizational databases for ad campaign messaging and social media audience analysis
- Developed and presented a group stretch project proposal on program growth to 40+ employees
- Authored articles, social media and blog posts, and ADA accessible text within corporate channels

Penn State Office of Strategic Communications State College, PA
Social Media Intern November 2021-May 2022

- Created online content for the university's Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter accounts through Canva
- Retrieved and presented data analytics to the team, using Hootsuite and Iconosquare

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Lion Ambassadors Penn State Student Alumni Corps University Park, PA
Committee Director January 2021-Present

- Serve as a student representative and leader for Penn State University and its Alumni Association for prospective, current, and alumnus students and affiliates through tours, campus events, and organization-led projects
- Co-led Lion Ambassador Recruitment, a semester-long project that entails creating recruitment events, marketing materials, and budgets while managing 27 committee members and collaborating with the Alumni Association

Penn State International Affairs and Debate Association University Park, PA
PUNC XIV Chief of Staff April 2021-March 2022

- Co-led a 10-person secretariat with the Secretary-General on projects such as conference registration, social planning, committee development, fundraising and sponsorships, social media, crisis management, and more

Fundraising Chair May 2020-May 2021

- Coordinated fundraisers, philanthropic efforts, and merchandise sales for 90+ members and alumni
- Spearheaded digital fundraising initiatives and the first annual club philanthropy, raising over \$1,300 for charity through email marketing, alumni outreach, online events, and peer-to-peer fundraising

CERTIFICATES AND HONORS

Most Promising Multicultural Students (MPMS) Class of 2023 November 2022-Present

- Selected for the American Advertising Federation's class of the top multicultural advertising students in the nation

PR Council Agency-Ready Certificate June 2022-August 2022

- Completed an online 20-hour program on integrated marketing communications, including courses on crisis communication, influencer marketing, strategic planning, project management, and client service

SKILLS

- Computer: Adobe Creative Suite (Photoshop, Premiere Rush, Acrobat), Microsoft Office 365, G Suite, BrightEdge
- Social Media: Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Canva, Iconosquare, Hootsuite
- Certifications: Google Ads, Google Analytics, Muck Rack