

Director's note for George Orwell's *1984*  
Washington and Lee University, November 2017

When George Orwell composed his masterpiece *1984*, he was not only suffering from severe illness, but many close to him believe that the writing of this novel was his final creative act and that it literally killed him. As a commentary on the totalitarian Eastern Bloc regimes settling in over Europe in 1949, he was writing a warning to the world that the fight against the falsehoods of official governments and the swarming of surveillance mechanisms was a distinct threat to freedom. But what does Orwell ask of us, his audience?

First, he is asking us to read, and to value the freedom of information to the point that we fact-check and seek out the truth that is beyond our screens. Somehow, prophetically, he saw that the telescreen was about to take over our lives. He asks us to "look up and out" from our screens to see the truth. "Objective truth," he asks, "is it possible?" The journalist in him says a resounding "yes."

Second, he is asking us to value relationships, to seek for intimacy and truth in our closest bonds. We witness this in Winston Smith's encounter with Julia, as they seek to know one another's darkest secrets and uncover their pasts together. We are to value relationships beyond everything and fight against easy losses. Orwell saw that we were entering an age where the individual would be nearly worshipped; conspicuous individualism separates us from one another, divides, and then conquers us into a state of lonely apathy. Orwell wanted us to fight against this.

Third, he is asking us to heed his warning and call upon our governments to change not only to ruling that values the "inner party," but one that sees all peoples as equals with the rights to tell their stories, to live in freedom, to raise families and to seek justice. The Dystopian landscape of *1984* reveals to us a bleak place where the party of Big Brother dictates every aspect of their lives. And today, we are dangerously close to such realities.

In this adaptation of Orwell's *1984* we hold hope for the future, in the people, like us, who find ourselves in Winston's struggle and long to escape the strangleholds of oppressive surveillance and media domination. We are Winston.