"It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words" The Function Of Language In The Contemporary Dystopia

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"It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words"
THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY DYSTOPIA

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements for Graduation with Honors to the Department of English

Colleen Kennedy
March 29, 1993
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of English.

Director

Reader

Reader

31/29/93

Date
I would like to express my most sincere thanks to my director, Dr. Ron Stottlemeyer, without whom this thesis would not exist, and to my readers, Kay Satre and Dr. Phil Wittman, whose time and insights were invaluable.

I would also like to thank my friends who continued to ask "how's the thesis," even when they knew I'd never give a simple "fine" in return.

This thesis is dedicated to the many outstanding teachers I've had the privilege of working with in my four years at Carroll, and especially to the memories of Father Bob Butko and Professor Al Murray.
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The first time I read George Orwell's 1984 was in 1984. I spent my allowance on the Commemorative Edition after hearing Walter Cronkite on the evening news comment about how close we'd come to Orwell's predictions. That's enough to entice any 13 year-old, but, unfortunately, the novel was a disappointment; I was expecting the amazement of Nostradamus and found a story only slightly more interesting than my math book. Four years later, 1984 was required reading for senior English, and by that time I had learned to appreciate the gruesome plot and recognize the boring interruptions as political satire. I didn't realize how genuinely profound Orwell's vision of the future was, though, until our class began discussing Orwell's observations about language.

By imagining a fitting language for his fictitious future world, Orwell isolated the interdependent relationship between deteriorating communities and the aberrant language their people use—or, in essence, the ability of the two to reflect each other's health. This notion of language struck me as particularly insightful, but it wasn't until I read Anthony Burgess's A Clockwork Orange and Russell Hoban's Riddley Walker that I truly began to understand what political statement Orwell was attempting to make with his satire: namely, the necessity of clear language for a community's political well-being.

Like Orwell, Hoban and Burgess have created dystopias as vehicles for particular satiric messages. And like Orwell, both have realized the potent role language must play in their fictional worlds, but they've also taken Orwell's observations one step further. A Clockwork Orange and Riddley Walker do not openly discuss language within the narrative (as 1984 does); instead their
authors invent narrative languages that make their satiric points through narrating voices with original vocabularies, syntax, rhythms, and tones.

As contemporary writers, all three authors explore one of the main intellectual concerns of the Twentieth Century, analyzing language to understand culture. And in doing so, each, in varying degrees, has redefined and reinvented language to construct and reflect his own dark vision of the future.
1984 is perhaps one of the most widely read novels of our time, but not just because it is an absorbing story complete with everything from sympathetic characters to the tastes and smells of Orwell's bleak and discontented vision of the future. 1984 also remains a relevant political commentary and a symbol of humanity's worst fears. Set in the grim future world of Oceania (formerly England), Orwell's novel unfolds a political and social nightmare of totalitarianism in which even the citizens' language works to oppress them. And it is within this inhuman world that Orwell places the hero, Winston Smith, a modern-day Everyman who helps us to understand the spiritual consequences of totalitarianism.

The story opens with Winston beginning a diary, attempting to create a history for a past or a future "when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone" (26). Winston, in particular, recognizes the urgency of this task because his official work demands him to do quite the opposite. Employed at the Ministry of Truth, he's charged with the duty to change obsolete government documents so that they conform with the State's account of what is happening in the present. Winston systematically obliterates old headlines, destroys photographs of newly confirmed "unpersons," and realigns numbing reports of a world war that rages on distant battlefields, against an everchanging enemy. Winston writes each of these recreations of the past in Newspeak, a perverted form of English concerned with brevity and so loaded with internal contradictions that the resulting report is immune to protest or refusal. As a Party member, Winston must also attend mass rallies to worship the State's figurehead, Big Brother, and absorb propaganda concerning everything from the war to chocolate rations.
It is at one of these rallies that Winston first notices Julia, the woman who will soon enter his life with stunning force and irreversible consequences. In a chance meeting, Julia coolly slips Winston a note. The note reads, "I love you." Since their government prohibits sexual relations for pleasure, Julia and Winston's subsequent affair makes them revolutionaries. Soon after, O'Brien, a high-ranking official of the "inner party," who also seems to be a revolutionary, summons Winston to his home and presents him with a copy of the banned writings of a well-known enemy of the State. Later, Winston realizes that O'Brien was merely setting a trap and assumes that the punishment for his disloyalty will be death. Unfortunately for Winston, however, the state spares his life at the cost of his soul. O'Brien, on behalf of the State, tortures Winston until he has truly forsaken all feeling, except love for Big Brother.

Orwell never intended his characters' fate to be a prophetic vision, but only wished to wrap his very realistic fears in an extreme narrative to give them audience. When Orwell wrote 1984 in 1948, leaders like Hitler and Stalin and notions such as centralism and conformity were more than threatening possibilities; they were part of Europe's reality after World War II. The totalitarian, prison-camp atmosphere of Oceania was not an enormous leap from the poverty and hunger of Orwell's England. But Orwell's true concern was not with a specific new regime; Stalinism and Hitlerism would inevitably fail and be replaced with others. He feared that eventually one of these political presences would recognize how power could be maintained and perpetuated indefinitely. Orwell knew that this permanence could not be accomplished merely through strong-arm tactics, but could only be achieved through what has proven to be the most potent political weapon in human history: the word.
Two years before *1984* was published, Orwell uncovered what he thought to be a dysfunctional trend in contemporary political language. This trend, outlined in a critical essay entitled "Politics and the English Language," would later serve as a basis for the satiric language Orwell creates for his dystopic world of Oceania (Howe, 60). In "Politics" Orwell asserts that contemporary English no longer functions as a vehicle for its speakers' thought, but that it increasingly frustrates personal and social expression.

The essay opens with the bold assertion that "our civilization is decadent and our language--so the argument runs--must inevitably share in the general collapse" (111). Orwell then goes on to argue that because "political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible," their language must adjust "to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (118; 121). According to Orwell, this adjustment usually takes form through stale imagery, pretentious diction, preference of phrases to single words, and/or an affinity for hollow buzzwords. Cliched phrases (i.e. *toe the line*), verbs stretched into padded phrases (i.e. *exhibit a tendency to*), and meaningless words (i.e. *freedom* or *justice*), are as politically safe as they are unclear.

Orwell's primary concern with this essay was not, however, the increase of the cloudy rhetoric in political language. Politics, by its nature, has always demanded, he maintained, an element of intentional vagueness. Instead, the real target of Orwell's criticism is the public's increasing adoption of these tendencies in daily speech and thought. Orwell feared that by forfeiting clarity in our daily language, we were forfeiting our consciousness. As he put it epigrammatically, if "thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (119). Language could then eventually cease to be a
means of communication and become merely a tool to distract, conceal, and prevent thought.

His conclusion, however, is hopeful. By recognizing that our language reflects our political and social tendencies, Orwell believes we can prevent aberrant language practices from gaining momentum. This belief encouraged him to issue a warning by constructing a satiric world, with its own horrifically appropriate language, to illustrate the fragile interdependency between clear language and clear thinking. This world was Oceania, and the language was the Newspeak of Winston’s reports. Just as “Politics” traced the current function of language in relation to political health of a state, 1984 examines the same relationship in a fictional reality of the future.

Early in the novel, Winston discusses the theoretical implications of Newspeak with other characters. Winston’s friend Syme, who is working on the eleventh edition of the Newspeak dictionary, comments over lunch what “a beautiful thing” the “destruction of words” is (45). Syme also proudly adds that Newspeak is the only language that gets smaller each year and admits that soon free thought will soon be impossible, as the necessary words will no longer exist (45). It isn’t until the appendix of the novel, however, that Orwell outlines what, specifically, the controlling party has in mind for the language of Oceania.

The appendix to the novel, entitled “The Principles of Newspeak,” explains in very detailed terms, how language alone can make Oceania’s terrifying political ideology acceptable to its citizens. “The purpose of Newspeak,” Orwell tells us, “was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc [Oceania’s English Socialism], but to make all other modes of thought impossible” (246).
Or, to put it another way, Newspeak would not only reflect the values of its world, it would also help construct that world.

Like Orwell's perception of the effects of contemporary English, the perverted English of Oceania mirrors its own unsavory political agenda. In the course of the action, Winston's world is rapidly contracting. Human pleasures are getting fewer and fewer. Travel is unheard of. Living quarters are cramped and bug-ridden. Gray, tasteless food is rationed out. And sex for enjoyment is a crime and will eventually be abolished completely with the perfection of artificial insemination. The past has disappeared, even from memory, and as Orwell outlines in "Principles," language, and therefore thought, must also contract. Newspeak will eventually eliminate all politically "dangerous" thoughts from the lexicon. Since Oceania's citizens have never been taught the word "freedom" or "rebellion," each has been effectively removed from the realm of possible thought. One can't yearn for something unknown or fight for an unnamed option.

In this appendix, Orwell unfolds the strategy of the Newspeak creators, whose ultimate intent is similar, although far more extreme, to the politicians of Orwell's time—to "prevent and conceal thought" ("Politics," 121). He begins by explaining Oceania's "A" vocabulary, which would eliminate the majority of the English vocabulary by discarding all words that differ only slightly from words being retained. The concept "house," for instance, would cover everything from "hovel" to "mansion" to "ranch." Synonyms and antonyms would no longer be needed; only one word per concept. For example, the word "knife" could be used as noun, verb, adjective, or adverb; it would no longer be merely an instrument used to cut, but would replace "to cut" and even "to mend" ("unknife"). Adjective and adverb could be formed by adding the suffixes "ful" and "wise," respectfully. To make a word stronger, prefixes like
"double" or "plus" could be added, not only making it a doubleplusunbig vocabulary, but very applicable to Orwell's observations in his essay "Politics." The "A" vocabulary of Newspeak satirizes how language can "prevent" thought through the loss of linguistic precision, and in the process, effectively arrests a community's social and intellectual development.

Orwell's next division in the appendix deals with a "B" vocabulary, designed by Oceania's dictating "inner party" to systematically "conceal" meaning in all speech, leaving their policies immune to protest or refusal. Consisting of compound words--words "intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them"--this vocabulary was "deliberately constructed for political purposes" (249). Translating any of these words into Oldspeak (current English) generally "demanded a long paraphrase" (249). For instance, the entire Declaration of Independence could be summed in only one Newspeak word, "crimethink." Likewise, Orwell notes that a Party member's sex life could be described in either one of two words: "sexcrime" (any sexual activity) or "goodsex" (chastity) (251). Often, words were shortened before they were combined (i.e. Minitru, thinkpol, Ingsoc), giving most a common length of three syllables, which would encourage "a gabbling style of speech, at once staccato and monotonous" (253). In fact, the ultimate use of Newspeak was called "duckspeak," or speech originating only from "the larynx without involving the higher brain centers" (254). In essence, language itself would forclose on alternatives of thought, all "unorthodox" thought.

For Orwell, this trend in language wasn't part of some prophetic dark fable with funny two-way televisions and torture chambers; it was a cancer in current politics, multiplying and devouring all areas of freedom. He was keenly aware that language functioned as more than a just collection of
audible signs, but also as a powerful weapon which could be irrevocably manipulated by dangerous political machines to control the thoughts of its subjects. Without words, human beings are unable to organize, unable to rebel. The strategy that Orwell outlines in his “Principles” proves that a state, at least theoretically, can render itself immune to rejection by destroying its people’s language.

Throughout 1984, and particularly in “Politics and the English Language,” Orwell constructs not only a warning about aberrant political motives, but also discloses two very influential ways language functions with communities in general: linguistic trends can both guage the present state of a community and help determine that communities future.
Chapter 2: Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*

In 1962, another English satirist, Anthony Burgess, created a fictional dystopia of his own, complete with an appropriate language. Like Orwell's Newspeak, the language of *A Clockwork Orange* both reflects and helps to construct his future world, proving again that corruption in human nature is inevitably exposed in our language. Burgess, though, has elevated the role a fictional language can play within his novel by constructing the narrative in the "Nadsat" dialect of his first-person narrator. Thus, *A Clockwork Orange* does not need to discuss its language in the same theoretical manner that *1984* does in its appendix. Burgess does not need to explain how Nadsat *would function*, because it *is functioning* within his novel already. His narrator's unique vocabulary and syntax develop their own rhythm and tone, creating an independent language that both reflects the crumbling fictional civilization and promises to further the decadence as only a community's language can.

The story itself is a frightening political allegory about a charmingly despicable anti-hero in a futuristic welfare state, where criminal behavior is reformed by "converting" perpetrators into "clockwork oranges"—human mechanisms. The "orange" in the title refers to the root "orang," which translates to "human being" in the language of Mayala, where Burgess taught for a number of years (Coale, 55). In essence, Burgess wishes to warn his audience that government, in general, "has a considerable interest in dehumanizing" its citizens (1985, 57). So *Clockwork* is very much in the tradition of *1984*—in both, an unsavory government systematically destroys the individual spirit to achieve a conformity, thus perpetuating its own power.
To set his warning in motion, Burgess presents us with a first-person narrator destined to become a "clockwork orange," complete with his own hauntingly symbolic vernacular. The anti-hero and voice of *Clockwork* is Alex de Logo. As Burgess explains, he names his main character "Alex," because the name is short for Alexander, which means "defender of men."

Alex has other connotations—a lex: a law (unto himself); a lex (is): a vocabulary (of his own); a (Greek) lex: without law (*1985*, 95).

Likewise, the "Logo" of Alex's last name has its etymological roots in Greek for "word," "reason," "speech," or "account" (*Webster*, 1331). And currently, "logo" has evolved to mean a personalized motto, or symbol of sorts. So Alex, in a very basic sense, can be seen as the symbolic "defender of men." More importantly, though, the unique slang, through which Alex narrates his story, reveals itself as a perfectly apt symbol for both Alex and his "ultraviolent" world.

As the novel begins, the foreign vocabulary sprinkled through a familiar English structure is initially unsettling for the reader, and Burgess admits that this subtle intimidation is intentional (*Churchill*, 103). While the savage world of Alex unfolds, Burgess creates an instinctual fear in the reader with Alex's grunting, jagged speech that is both beautifully poetic and appropriately anti-social.

We enter into Alex's world on what we are led to believe is the beginning of a typical night for him and his pack of "droogs" [friends]:

This evening I'm starting off the story with . . .

Our pockets were full of deng [money], so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting [stealing] any more pretty polly [money] to tolchock [strike] some old veck
[man] in an alley and viddy [see] him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultraviolent on some shivering starry [old] grey-haired ptitsa [woman] in a shop and go smeking [smiling] off with the till's guts. (1)

But it's not just another night of robbing, raping, and killing for the young group of street predators; Alex's luck has just run out. After rejecting his leadership, Alex's gang abandons him at a murder scene, sacrificing him to the police. Fairing little better in prison, it isn't long before Alex murders a cellmate. Believing he is beyond rehabilitation, the State then begins experimental "reclamation" treatments on Alex, which promise his freedom in just two weeks. These "treatments," however, are not the easy way out of prison. They are designed to systematically condition Alex against all violence by overpowering him with a drug-induced nausea while forcing him to view horrific films. Or in short, the state's "treatments" seek to make him "a little machine capable only of good" (122). When the state succeeds with its horrific therapy, it releases the new, vulnerable Alex into the unrestrained violence of the streets. Eventually, though, when Alex's plight is made public, the State is forced to remove the conditioning. Our narrator returns briefly to his old hobbies--raping, robbing, and killing--but ultimately decides to "settle down" and have a little "malchick" [boy] of his own.**

Before the plot begins to surface, however, the reader must grapple with the language. Nadsat itself works on a very practical level to distance the reader from Alex's beastly actions. If this sentence from a rape scene:

** I am using the original Clockwork that was published in England with 21 chapters; the Americanized Clockwork ended with the 20 chapters, and Alex was never morally redeemed.
Plunging, I could slooshy [hear] cries of agony and this writer [husband of the victim] bleeding veck [man] that Georgie and Pete held on to nearly got loose howling bezoomy [mad] with the filthiest of slovos [words]. (29)

appeared in the reader's English, the effect would most likely be one of pure revulsion. Instead, though, the rape seems to be merely another strange incident in an alien world, evoking little sympathy for the victim or hatred for Alex. Thus, the foreignness of his language allows both Alex and the reader to gain a sense of cool objectivity about the most repellent of scenes. This objectivity is part of Burgess's satiric strategy. In an essay also entitled "A Clockwork Orange," Burgess admits that Alex had "to be sympathetic, pitiable and insidiously identifiable with us, as opposed to them [the State]" (1985, 96). If we were allowed to view each of his "horrowshow" crimes through the clarity of our own language, Alex would quickly become a hateful character, and one we very well may be tempted to hand over to the state for "Reclamation." Had this been our response, Burgess would have failed as a satirist.

Apart from this rhetorical benefit of Nadsat, the language also functions on another level, similar to that of Orwell's Newspeak. Although it contains "odd bits of old rhyming slang . . . a bit of Gypsy talk, too . . . most of the roots are Slav . . . Propaganda . . . Subliminal penetration" (115), Nadsat is functioning as any other language: reflecting both the state and direction of its society.

Contrary to Orwell's vision of the future, the fictional world of Burgess is deteriorating through expansion, not contraction. Although both satirists feared that governments would eventually abolish human freedom, Orwell has his political machine methodically eliminating choices, while Burgess merely
shows a state taking advantage of an existing anarchy. In Alex's world, the "millicents" [police] are as despicable as the vicious street gangs; peaceful citizens are imprisoned in their own homes; and bars eagerly serve drug-laced milk to young hoodlums like our narrator. And little by little, the language begins to scatter as well, matching the chaos of the streets.

As Alex and his droogs barrel through their last night together, their slang reveals itself as not just harmless jumble of words, but also as a means of isolating them from other groups in the community. Teenage slang is far from unusual in any community, and is generally a harmless means of revolt, an assertion of freedom by calling things by more fitting names. But Nadsat goes beyond clever schoolyard phrases. As it develops into an independent language of its own, Alex's slang begins to perpetuate the chaos in the culture of its users. When the boys attack an intellectual, and later an old man, communication eventually breaks down. The victims speak of "law and order," but Alex can't make sense from such "slovos" [words] (20-21). Likewise, when Alex seduces two young girls, he can't understand the "weird slovos that were the height of fashion in that youth group" (48). The Nadsat that Alex speaks in, thinks in, and narrates in has literally began to hinder communication between generations, much like Orwell's Newspeak.

To pervert the English of Alex, Burgess adopts and creates an abundance of new words to reflect the confusion within the social and political institutions of his fictional world (Churchill, 108-109). The social and political situation in 1984 was under extreme oppression, so Newspeak took the opposite direction—a decreasing vocabulary. Whether through expansion or contraction, though, both Orwell and Burgess recognize the metaphorical role a fictional language has in any dystopic world.
Consequently, it is necessary to be aware of Burgess's philosophical strategy in developing the novel and its language to understand completely the unconscious implications that Nadsat has on the reader (Churchill, 108-109). Anthony Burgess approaches his fiction with the underlying idea that all stories are allegories which should reflect the theology or metaphysical beliefs of the author (Coale, 55). He describes himself, in the very broadest sense, as a Manichean, or one who believes the ultimate reality is found in clashing dual forces (Coale, 56). Burgess holds that the earth is the center of constant battling between these opposing forces and that the human struggle is to create myths which would unify these absolute dualities in our world and existence (1985, 57). Ironically, though, our attempt to merge these forces is hindered by our own nature. Humanity, according to Burgess, is itself "both gloriously creative and bestially destructive"; even our free will is something we both yearn to possess and wish to be rid of (1985, 56). And the forfeiture of free will is at the heart of the unifying myth that is A Clockwork Orange (Coale, 58) because Burgess felt "choice is all that matters, and to impose the good is evil, to act evil is better than to have good imposed" (Churchill, 110).

Nadsat, if it is to fulfill its function as a plausible language, must also reflect this struggle between the individual desire for freedom and the government's desire for conformity.

Just as the plot pairs the problem of evil with the equally powerful human desire for political and social harmony, the components of the language also need to represent and compliment the resulting clash. To embody this confrontation, Burgess sought to combine the opposing Eastern and Western ideologies in a "single persona" who would be represented by a "composite dialect that is Russian and English" (Churchill 109). Writing from a Western perspective, for an audience educated primarily in the Judeo-
Christian tradition, Burgess knew that the concept of free will was, at least theoretically, already part of our ideology (Coale, 55). To threaten this ideology with "propaganda" and "subliminal penetration," he polluted his Western language with that of the Eastern enemy, Russia.

In 1962, when *Clockwork* was published, communist Russia was the antithesis of what the Western European nations (as well as America) were striving for. The Cold War was reality, and Senator McCarthy had demonstrated the hysteria evoked by the notion of communism. To use Russian in Nadsat was to use the language of the enemy; it was, at once, the language of rebellion against republican governments and representative of the totalitarianism many Eastern European states had achieved. Russian communism, through popular Western perceptions, intentionally sacrificed the individual spirit to enhance the collective good (not unlike the worlds of both Winston and Alex). By injecting Alex's speech with Russian vocabulary, Burgess captured his clashing ideologies within the language as well as the plot.

*Clockwork* critic, Stanley Edgar Hyman, compiled an unauthorized dictionary of Nadsat and traced approximately 80% of the non-English vocabulary to Russian origins (Hyman, 185). Through his casual translation, Hyman realized that Burgess did not use his Russianate vocabulary in a mechanical way, by simply substituting Russian for its corresponding English word (180). Instead, Nadsat reveals a greater ingenuity. Alex's word for "head," for example, is "gulliver." "Gulliver" sounds remarkably like the Russian equivalent for "head," which is *golova*, and also suggests an appropriate reference to Swift (Hyman, 180). When Alex describes the "reclamation" films as "horrorshow," he means the Russian *khorosho* (good or well) (Hyman, 180), but ironically, the films are truly horror shows. And
other Nadsat vocabulary are translations of English slang: *soomka* (bag) indicates an ugly woman in Nadsat; *koshka* (cat) and *ptitsa* (bird) are the equivalent of "cat" and "chick" in English slang (Hyman, 180).

Much of Nadsat's original vocabulary also works to create a more playful tone than wouldn't be possible in BBC English. Alex endears himself to readers, as best he can, by referring to us as his "brothers." His child-like charm is rooted in his language; he doesn't go to school, but "skolliwoll," and only after he's eaten an "eggiweg" and "jammimam" with his "pee an em" (dad and mom). Words like these, and strung together in untraditional syntax, infuse a musical rhythm to Alex's narration, contributing to his paradoxical nature.

Alex, as a character, is both charming and repulsive, both sympathetic and threatening, both violent and sensitive to the arts. His language is the same. The same crude Nadsat that defines sex as "the old in-out in-out," is also full of the classical "thee" and "thou" pronouns. And the rhythm these very contradictory components create is similar to the music of a carousel: beautifully exotic sounds, but out of control, anxious. When Alex recalls his arrest, for example, he tells us:

> And then we arrived at the stinking rozz-shop [police station] and they helped me get out of the auto with kicks and pulls and they tochocked [punched] me up the steps and I knew I was going to get nothing like fair play from these stinky grahzny bratchnies [dirty bastards], Bog [God] blast them. (67)

It is emotionally charged and typical of his normal speech. Likewise, it is typical of Alex's usual narration: long strings of phrases, that alternately speed up or slow down the momentum within a given sentence to reflect whatever emotion he is feeling. In the above sentence, he is angry, and the
anger couldn't be missed even if the vocabulary remained completely foreign to the reader. The sandpaper sound of phrases like "stinky grahzny bratchnies" shows his irritation, as does the runaway rhythm that doesn't bother much with thoughtful pauses. The chaotic tone that such a fittingly punctuated rhythm can create is not only appropriate for Alex, but also for the state of his entire world.

Although Burgess has since labeled Nadsat as "too gimmicky" and "too linguistically exhibitionist" (1985, 94), his reinvention of the English language embodied the brutalized perspective of his future world where evil is the last indication of individuality. And although Burgess's vision of the future, and his fictional language, are markedly different than Orwell's, each indicate the profound spiritual impoverishment of the individual through language. While the language of 1984 grew smaller, and that of Nadsat more unstable, the linguistic and satiric results are the same. Both Orwell and Burgess clearly make the point that humanity is becoming so increasingly decadent, that soon we will have little left to communicate and an inadequate language with which to do it with.
While George Orwell and Anthony Burgess speculated on how decadent political, social, and linguistic trends could be exposed through fiction, Russell Hoban created a similar dystopic world, but with a difference in perspective. As the linguistic worlds of Alex and Winston rapidly decline, those of Hoban's narrator, the adolescent Riddley Walker, begin budding after 2000 years of decay. Like his predecessors, Hoban recognizes the undeniable role language must play in any community. The "nukespeak" through which Riddley narrates his story, illustrates again how closely a fictional language can mirror its world, and, also, how extremely influential a decadent language can be in the future of its people. In fact, Russell Hoban describes his dialect as "one of the protagonists of the story" (Maynor & Patteson, 19).

Hoban's vision takes place 2347 years after the nuclear holocaust of 1997 and sets us in a wasteland named Widders Dump, a village in what was once southeast England. The Dump is inhabited by an odd collection of human scavengers who have suffered through generations of radiation poisoning and who are constantly threatened by rival tribes and wild dogs. We meet them in what might be seen as a renaissance of sorts—as a society, they are trying to unearth the secrets of their ancestors (us), both literally and figuratively, to recapture "what we ben." Work crews slave to pull ancient silver machines from the muddy terrain, and a fragment of a saint's biography becomes a basis for their entire myth system. Our St. Eustace is, for them, Eusa, the god-like figure who pulled "the Littl Shynin Mah the Addom" in two (implying both the atomic split and the Biblical story of Adam).

In this England, both civilization and Christianity are long since defunct. The state religion has evolved into a series of puppet shows, carried
on by the tribe's "connexion men." They attempt to connect their own reality to their misunderstood past through stories and surprisingly find "metaphysical truth . . . concealed within the webs of historical error" (Maynor & Patteson, 19). The connexion men are also primitive politicians in that they are the only real leaders within the existing chaos; each is a possible messiah who might interpret the community's riddles (Dowling, 182).

The 12 year-old hero, and narrator of the novel, is Riddley Walker. After inheriting the position of tribal connexion man, Riddley embarks on a bizarre quest to rediscover gunpowder, but through his strange adventures, discovers only that he wants no part in "such destructive 'clevverness'" (Maynor & Patteson, 19). He and his puppets return to Widders Dump to tend to the spiritual health of his people.

Hoban warns that our sophisticated technology might very well lead us to Riddley's existence, instead of the glamorous future depicted in Star Trek. Subsequently, there is an enormous sense of frustration and loss throughout the novel. Riddley wants only to regain his humanity, but finds out that his deteriorated vernacular is the only thing that is preventing him from becoming "what we ben." As we discover that Riddley's situation is our future, Hoban's message becomes increasingly potent. We are frightened into questioning the long-term implications of technological progress. But it is the plausibly distorted English of Riddley Walker that makes this dark fable as effective as 1984 and A Clockwork Orange.

From Riddley's opening sentence we get a sense that the reader, too, will be "riddley walker":

On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the
Bundel Downs any how there hadn't ben none for a long
time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen (1).

This is a language to be decoded, a mystery in itself. When Riddley explains
that he is walking his "riddels where ever they've took me and walking them
on this paper the same" (8), he is describing his journey within the plot, as
well as his journey through the confusing maze that is our English. Just as his
quest is to understand the past in order to understand himself, ours, as readers,
is to decode his strange vernacular to better understand our own possible
future.

The language itself, which one critic has dubbed "nukespeak" (Dowling,
182), is initially a bit difficult to understand. Quickly, though, its child-like
qualities become charming. We read through the missing punctuation and
awkward syntax to find a playful, poetic rhythm and revel in the profound
puns Riddley's misspellings create. And, above all, we discover a language in
renaissance, reflecting its world. As Hoban looks toward the future to a
humanity that's regressed, he suggests that the primary means to reagin
civilization is through the usual stages of social, political, and linguistic
evolution.

In fact, according to critics Maynor and Patteson, "the phonology and
syntax in Riddley Walker are at times suggestive of early stages in language
acquisition of a child" (21). Because the "nukespeak" of Riddley's narrative
appears to be at the rediscovery of writing, it remains an oral language. The
speakers' linguistic pattern is simply transferred to the page--clumps of
clauses, inconsistent or absent punctuation, and words spelled precisely how
they are pronounced, like a first-grader might write. Out of seven identifiable
"phonological processes common in young children," six can be found in
Riddley’s vernacular (Maynor and Patteson, 21). These six were isolated in Maynor and Patteson’s study:

1. reduction of consonant clusters (*dint* for *didn’t*, *hisper* for *whisper*)
2. deletion of final consonants (*leas* for *least*, *trubba* for *trouble*)
3. devoicing of final consonants (*behynt* for *behind*, *ternt* for *turned*)
4. substitution of stops for fricatives (*diffrents* for *difference*)
5. fronting of consonants (*teef* for *teeth*)
6. phonological assimilation (*minim* for *minute*) (21)

The sounds of Riddley’s English imply a very young, primitive, culture.

As Maynor and Patteson also point out, Riddley has a preoccupation throughout the novel with naming things, much like any young child has (20). When the people of Riddley’s world begin to rebuild civilization after 2347 years of “stannin in the mud,” and begin to write again, it becomes necessary for places, persons, and concepts to have distinguishing names of their own. “Words!” Riddley writes, “Theywl move things you know theywl do things. Put a name to some thing and youre beckoning” (122). The names assigned to a community’s objects, though, inevitably reflect its stage of social evolution.

In fact, virtually all of the language of Riddley’s narrative is very literal. There are few abstract concepts, and when Riddley tries to express ideas about such things as death, god, or the human soul, he finds “you try to word the big things and they tern ther backs on you” (Maynor and Patteson, 161; Hoban, 21). So his language develops concrete symbols “to word the big things.” Death for Riddley’s people, for instance, has little to do with the
relocation of the soul; it's just the time when old "Aunty" with her "Stoan boans and iron tits and teef be twean her legs" comes to fetch you (90).

Likewise, Hoban changes the names of the former English towns of Riddley's area to reflect both the world's crudeness and the absence of abstractness. Southeastern England's Herne Bay becomes Horny Boy, while Dover becomes Do It Over. And when Riddley arrives in Cambry, he shouts the old name, Canterbury, as a homage to the past that he's lost. The names of Hoban's other characters, like Riddley's, also seem to be very literal and in keeping with their position in the tribe (Maynor and Patteson, 20). The rival connexion man, and "Pry Mincer Inland," is Abel Goodparley, while Riddley's fellow foragers have such names as Follery Digman and Fister Crunchman. Maynor and Patteson have also identified several very literal terms assigned to the concrete objects remembered, but which no longer exist; to Riddley, our airplanes were "boats in the air" and our television was "picters on the wind" (20).

The sentence structure, as well, reflects that of a child still learning the language. Riddley's syntax is loaded with double negatives ("Dint say nothing," 122), errors in verb tense ("he done it befor," 122), misused pronouns ("Dad and me we jus come off," 8), and virtually every sentence is either a run-on or a fragment. Aside from the occasional comma or period, the only consistently helpful bits of punctuation are quotation marks. But remarkably, the overall effect isn't confusion, or at least not confusion alone; the uncivilized sounds, peppered with onomatopoeia, and strange rhythm become almost poetically hypnotic:

I cud feel the goast of it hy over me farring roun and out of site going roun that circel and coming back and roun agen EEEeee.
Black sky. Wite broakin teef. 'SPIRIT OF GOD,' I yelt. Becaws
that where Goddparleyd said the 1 Big 1 come out of. (155)
Riddley's language, like his world, is barbaric--both crude and magnificent.
The vivid texture it creates, like Burgess's "grahzny bratchnies," makes our
standard English seem dry and lifeless:

Nex morning I woak up it wer stil smoaking and the
dew on the bernt brung the smel up strong. Some of
the dogs wer a sleap and others crunching boans. Emty
skuls and bits of boan all roun I wunnert which of them
myt be my dad. (133)

The obscurity of the dialect doesn't prevent the story from occurring, but is,
like Nadsat and Newspeak, a reflection of its world: both brutal and alluring.

Although this deteriorated English may occasionally throw a shadow
over the plot, it is the "only intricate structure linking Riddley's tribe,
however tenuously, with the dim past, with us" (Dowling, 182). Our frustration
with sentences like, "Thinking on that other thing that with the stoan men I
cud see it in my mynd so plain that face with the vines and leaves growing out
of the mouf" (165), is inevitable; determining what is occurring in this
narrative is often guesswork. And Riddley's quest as a connexion man,
whether attempting to make meaning out of the Legend of St. Eustace or
deciphering the recipe for gunpowder, is equally frustrated by relics of our
English. Because Riddley's language both hinders his quest to understand our
world and our attempt to understand his, Hoban's insistence that "nukespeak"
is one of the story's protagonists seems justified (Maynor & Patteson, 21).

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines the protagonist of a story as
the "first player" in a drama (675). If we assign meaning on this simplified
level, the language of any work can be seen as a protagonist because it truly is
the "first player" the reader encounters. This view is doubly true in
Clockwork and Riddley where the languages have been carefully reinvented
to mirror their human narrators. But like Orwell's and Burgess's dystopias,
Hoban's world isn't just reflected in its language. It is determined by
language.

The OED also defines "protagonist" as "the most prominent or most
important individual in a situation or cause of events" (675). "Nukespeak,"
perhaps more than 1984 or Clockwork, can fulfill this description. Riddley's
task, his very purpose for writing, is to "give a word to the whys"—making us
wise and answering the whys of his people through words. And his biggest
fear, like Orwell, is to "los things clean out of memberment." But the words
that would preserve his stories don't always exist, and the words he has, have
begun to drive him to a violent future he doesn't want—ours. Riddley has
dreams of understanding the "party cool"s" and "many cool," and seeing a
"space craf . . . going out beyont the sarvering gallack seas," but he can't
even determine the "gready mints" for the "1 litl 1," gunpowder. His people
search our language for scientific and religious meaning, and the language
always seems to mislead them. St. Eustace had nothing to do with the nuclear
disaster of 1997, and although the recipe for gun powder is correct, the result
is not political power, but only a violent explosion. But just as the shards of
English in Riddley's language reveal his world to us, our language eventually
reveals our world to him, and Riddley discovers that he wants no part in our
destructive "clevverness," because "clevverness what made us crookit (80)."
But Orwell was wrong!

It is important to remember that each of these novels isn't just fiction for fiction's sake; each is a social commentary, a warning to their generations. Whether the target of their satiric messages are the usurping state or the inevitable dangers of technology, Orwell, Burgess, and Hoban have all constructed dystopic worlds and dystopic languages to make a point. By examining how each of these fictional languages functions, the tie between a society's political system and its language becomes increasingly clearer. In the frozen-time of Winston's, Alex's, and Riddley's worlds, this connection is isolated, revealing the intimate connection between one's words and one's spiritual well-being. It also works as both a mirror of society and a force powerful enough to form or destroy any human community.

The larger implication of these fictional languages rests, of course, with the readers' futures. It is impossible to determine where our own English might be leading us today, or the strength of its pull, but Herbert Marcuse has theorized that our language is both reflecting and perpetuating a "one-dimensional society" that began after World War II. Marcuse, a contemporary philosopher, argues that many of today's ideologies are irrational and inherently ambiguous, and that as a society, we've become concerned only with productiveness. This perception, he feels, is both evident in our language and furthered by it. Particularly in his *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse describes how our language is tending toward "operationalism" and concreteness. "The names of things," he suggests, "are not only indicative of their manner of functioning, but their actual manner of functioning also defines and closes the meaning of the thing, excluding other manners of functioning" (87)—a phenomenon reflecting our technological age, according
Marcuse's observations are backed up by reading any current newspaper or journal. Generally, our focus on advancement has left us in a barrage of technical jargon, and cloudy rhetoric continues to dominate political speech (i.e. "a thousand points of light," "family values"). It seems obvious that as Americans, as capitalists, our own brand of English can reveal a great deal about our quality and perception of life. Taken collectively, though, Hoban, Burgess, and Orwell were not just emphasizing how accurately a language can reflect its community, but also the constructive power of that language.

In the fictional worlds of Winston, Alex, and Riddley, language is not merely a passive mirror, but an influential character within each drama. Their authors recognize the potent effect a manipulated language can have on their dystopic communities in effort to enlighten us, as readers, to the powerful role language plays in shaping our own lives. As satirists, Hoban, Burgess, and Orwell wrote not just to entertain their audience, but with the hope that awareness could be an impetus for change. If we are to gain anything from these novels, it should, perhaps, be that we do not have to accept decadence in our language or our culture. Warnings, after all, can be empowerment. Thus, if a decadent culture is both dependent on and evident in its language, then an awareness and an intentional rejuvenation of language could, in theory, also foster positive social change, helping us to avoid any undesirable future.


