RE-CONDITIONING ENGLAND:
GEORGE ORWELL AND THE SOCIAL-PROBLEM NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

"What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person".

This comes from George Orwell's wartime pamphlet *The Lion and the Unicorn* in which, according to Tosco Fyvel, he sought "to identify himself with England in its finest hour". Orwell offered a more prosaic justification – "I don't share the average English intellectual's hatred of his own country" – in one of his regular "London Letters" to the American *Partisan Review* and from these three sources a complex constellation of questions emerges. The issue at stake is Orwell's relationship with his country and it involves ideas of identity, history, ownership, love, hatred, community and, crucially, his position as spokesperson. Drawing and expanding upon work on Orwell and Englishness, focusing on Orwell's often overlooked originality as a novelist and challenging Raymond Williams' influential account in *Orwell* and *Culture and Society*, "Re-Conditioning England" seeks to negotiate a path through this complex of questions. This path, as the title and opening quotation imply, is guided by the past and by Orwell's engagement with the mid-nineteenth century mode of social realism. It is informed by Williams' conception of the novel as a "knowable community" and Benedict Anderson's of the nation as an "imagined community". A chronological and contextual study, the thesis pays attention, throughout, to both when and where Orwell wrote. It places his work within contemporary debates over the status of Charles Dickens, poetry, language and the nation to the end of arguing: in his engagement with contemporary social-problems, Orwell first consciously updates and then self-consciously critiques the nineteenth-century genre of condition-of-England writing.

ABBREVIATIONS

AF – Animal Farm

BD – Burmese Days

CD – A Clergyman's Daughter

CUA – Coming Up for Air

DO – Down and Out in Paris and London

HC – Homage to Catalonia

KAF – Keep the Aspidistra Flying

LU – The Lion and the Unicorn

NE-F – Nineteen Eighty-Four

WP – The Road to Wigan Pier

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"SHOOTING AN ELEPHANT" IN THE ROOM AND "GOING DOWN THE MINE": GEORGE ORWELL'S EXPANSION OF AND IMMERSION IN THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLAND QUESTION

In 1839, Thomas Carlyle posed "the condition-of-England question". "A feeling very generally exists" he claimed, at the opening of *Chartism*, "that the condition and disposition of the Working Classes is a rather ominous matter at present; that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it" (1). Immediately, according to Catherine Gallagher, writing in *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction 1832-1867*,

> the Condition of England Debate became a discourse unto itself, creating and absorbing new fields of inquiry in metaphysics, ethics, political economy, public administration, biology, medicine, religion, psychology, and aesthetics (xi).

The "condition-of-England" novel was one such field of inquiry and as Gallagher continues, "the discourse over industrialism led novelists to examine the assumptions of their literary form" (xi). It took them, according to Raymond Williams' influential account in *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, most of a decade to discover "the common forms that mattered" in response to the change in social attitudes, in the general feeling, recorded by Carlyle (10). Paying particular attention to a twenty-month period over 1847 and 1848, Williams argues that "novelists learned to look, historically, at the crises of their own immediate time: at Chartism, at the industrial struggle, at debt and speculation, at the complicated inheritance of values and of property"[1] (14). Reviewing Williams' study, based on a course of lectures delivered at Cambridge, in *Victorian Studies*, U. C. Knoepflmacher has written:

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[1] Williams lists some novels published in this period: Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son*; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*; Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*; Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*; Benjamin Disraeli's *Tancred*, Frances Trollope's *Town and Country*; Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. "It is some indication", he writes, "of the originality of those twenty months in 1846 and 1848 that two novels should come out as different from Dickens and from each other as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*" (60).

> The book's classroom origins may well account for its too vague title. "The Loss of Community in the English Novel from 1847 to 1939" might have more adequately conveyed the nostalgic theme connecting the eight chapters that Mr. Williams has carved out of his eleven lectures (455).

This thesis is focused on another nostalgic figure, George Orwell, who wrote, in 1941:

> What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person (*The Lion and the Unicorn* 393).

The claim is that in his treatment of contemporary social problems – especially from 1939, the precise year to which Knoepflmacher points – Orwell consciously engages with and self-consciously updates the "common forms" discovered by the nineteenth-century realist writers discussed by Williams.

As Knoepflmacher's criticism implies, central to Williams' argument is his claim that "most novels are in some sense knowable communities" (15). "The novelist", he explains, "offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways" (15). In Williams' view, then, the particular crisis to which novelists in the mid-nineteenth century were responding was the apparent emergence of an "unknown, unknowable, overwhelming society" about which it had come to be felt, as Carlyle had written, "that something ought to be said" (15). As Williams puts it:

> The development of the novel, then, from Austen to Eliot, traces a recognition of other kinds of people; other kinds of country; other kinds of action on which a moral emphasis must be brought to bear (24).

In his early work, Orwell recognises different kinds of people, country, action too. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), he recognises the destitute, their sleeping places and enforced worship. In *Burmese Days* (1934 in USA; 1935 in UK), he recognises the *sahiblog*, their club and courting rituals as well as the market traders, the Eurasian Christians and the native officials with whom they coexist. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), he recognises the

miners, their coalfaces and crawled commutes. The form that these recognitions take is, as introductory discussions of *Burmese Days* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* indicate, familiar.

The thesis begins by drawing comparisons – both within the texts themselves and in their receptions – between Orwell's early work, especially *Burmese Days* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and the group of texts published in the mid-nineteenth century referred to by Williams and others variously described as Industrial, Social-Problem and Condition-of-England novels (the latter formulation will be preferred throughout the thesis). In an interview, referred to at the end of this introductory chapter on Orwell's pre-1939 work, broadcast in 1940 and so coincident with the essays "My Country Right or Left" and *The Lion and the Unicorn* in which he begins to construct a revolutionary patriotic socialism, Orwell calls for a new form of novel appropriate to the change in English society. Orientated no longer towards the condition of the Working Classes, or the poor of England, the novel must account, Orwell argues, for the rise of a vast technical middle class. *Coming Up for Air*, published in 1939, was Orwell's first attempt at such a novel and is discussed in detail alongside his essays on the popular novels of Charles Dickens and comic postcards of Donald McGill in the first chapter. Through those texts Orwell constructs what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community" and it is from this construction that, he argues in "Inside the Whale", the intellectual classes have alienated themselves. That essay is discussed in the second chapter, alongside Orwell's war-time broadcasts for the BBC, to the end of establishing the link between his "semi-sociological literary criticism" and *Animal Farm*, the first book in which, he claimed, he tried to turn political writing into an art. In that fairy story, it is argued, Orwell continues *Coming Up for Air*'s project in showing how the intellectuals appear from the perspective of the common man. The third and fourth chapters, then, describe Orwell's increasing awareness that the condition of England is a constructed concept. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is central to both discussions. The former traces Orwell's discussions of language which develop towards the insight that the condition of

England and the condition of English are dependent on one another. The latter presents Orwell's last and most lasting engagement with contemporary social problems as an examination of the way in which nations are conditioned. Orwell's engagement, throughout the post-War years, with the political and philosophical journal *Polemic* is central to these discussions. "Re-Conditioning England" places Orwell within a diverse community of writers, and his work as a critical investigation into the historical and political contingency of the novel form. First, though, I will discuss the familiar form of Orwell's early, realist attempts to recognise other types of people. These attempts are controlled by dialectical relations between the public and private spheres, the subject and the object and the past and the present. Active problematics in the nineteenth-century condition-of-England novels, these relations became insistent themes of Orwell's endeavour to re-condition England through the novel.

.1.

"Almost as bad as the lower classes at home": Orwell's realism as an Expansion of the "knowable community"

Commenting further on the concept of "the knowable community" in a lecture on "The Country and the City in the Modern Novel" delivered at the University of Swansea in 1987, Williams redescribes it as "a particular form of narrative" (3). "It was in the belief", he explains, again commenting on the development of the English novel,

> that people and their relationships could be directly observed and in general understood that a very important kind of novel – what is now often called realist, at times with a certain retrospective pity or contempt – came to be composed (3).

Addressing the theme in *The Country and the City*, Williams acknowledges the historical limitations of the form: "Yet while it is a community wholly known, within the essential terms of the novel, it is an actual community very precisely selective" (166). He explains:

> Neighbours in Jane Austen are not the people actually living nearby; they are the people living a little less nearby who, in social recognition, can be visited. What she sees across the land is a network of propertied houses and families, and through the holes of this tightly drawn mesh most actual people are simply not seen (166).

Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, published in 1848, is an important text for Williams – "the most moving response in literature to the industrial sufferings of the 1840s", he writes in *Culture and Society* – because it defies English realism's traditional limitations (87). Thus for Williams, Gaskell's project is characterised by a democratic expansion equivalent to that which Erich Auerbach finds in the contemporaneous work of the Goncourt brothers in France. "Realism", Auerbach writes in *Mimesis*, "had to embrace the whole reality of contemporary civilization": "The common people in all its ramifications had to be taken into the subject matter of serious realism" (497). The Goncourts themselves, would come to conceive of their fictional project as indivisible from the historical moment as Auerbach, quoting from their *Germine Lacerteux* (1865) again shows:

> Today when the Novel is broadening and growing, when it is beginning to be the great, serious, impassioned, living form of literary study and social investigation, when, through analysis and psychological research it is becoming contemporary moral History (qtd. *Mimesis* 495).

It is thus that Williams conceives the expansive realism of Gaskell *et al*: "It was by becoming history, contemporary history – but a history of substance, of process, of the interaction of public and private life – that one important kind of novel went to the heart of its time" (13-4). In its contemporary historicity, however, *Mary Barton* remains a specifically English novel.

The *British Quarterly* understood Gaskell's *Tale of Manchester Life* as a contribution to the discourse initiated by Carlyle's question, describing it as concerned with "a subject towards which attention is strongly directed […] the condition of the poor of England" (117). It is significant, as such, that Gaskell's novel is set in Manchester, the city Asa Briggs has called the "national 'melting pot'": "All roads", writes Briggs, "led to Manchester" (*Victorian Cities* 96). At the end of his road, Friedrich Engels found a city

> peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working people's quarter or even with the workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination the working people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class (*The Condition of the Working Class in England* 85).

Writing in the preface, Gaskell describes her novel as inspired by her wondering "how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided" (36). Gaskell's description casts *Mary Barton* as a challenge to the selectively known communities of Austen and her *Tale of Manchester Life* as a challenge to the selectively drawn geography of Manchester. Kathleen Tillotson has described *Mary Barton* as "the outstanding example" of "a kind of novel which first clearly disengaged itself in the forties: the novel directly concerned with a social problem, and especially with the 'condition-of-England question'" (*Novels of the 1840s* 202). And,

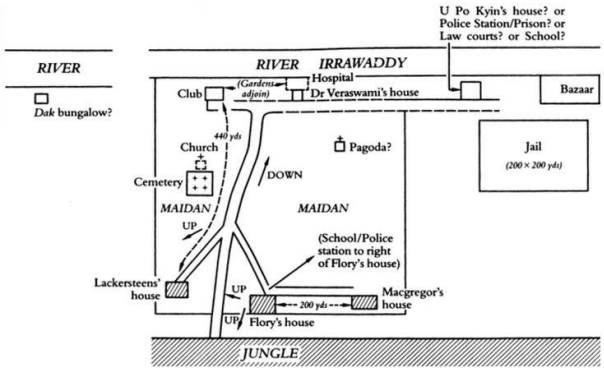
investigating the romance of the lives of the poor in the "national melting pot", Gaskell does indeed present herself as a different type of novelist. She expands the novel's "knowable community". Orwell would do this too but first, with *Burmese Days*, he would place this expansive impulse in problematic tension.

The status of *Burmese Days* as a realist novel was noted, and the fallen state of the form implied, by Compton Mackenzie in a letter to Orwell: "The longer I live", he wrote on the 20th November 1936,

> the more I realise how few "realists", to use an old fashioned word, succeed in getting the reward they deserve. I suppose it's the lack of experience from which nine out of ten readers suffer, and this applies most forcibly of all to the so-called highbrow. I thought *Burmese Days* a work of altogether exceptional insight and masterly execution, but I read no review of it that seemed to recognise that fact (Orwell Archive Box H1, Folder I).

Orwell's realist novel is, in part, an attempt to articulate the lives of the Imperial poor, analogous to those made in the nineteenth-century articulations of the lives of the poor of England; like *Mary Barton* it is conceived as a challenge to the limited experience, as Mackenzie notes, of its readers. *Burmese Days* gestures towards the existence of another community but knowledge of that community is withheld so that the novel reads as a complex synthesis of the realisms, as depicted by Williams, of Austen and Gaskell.

First, the novel acknowledges a "network of propertied houses and families". Indeed, this acknowledgement is made, in the Penguin edition of the novel, before the narrative begins through the inclusion of "a sketch-map of Kyauktada that was drawn by Orwell":



The inclusion of this map – a network of propertied houses – prepares the reader for a small-scale, Austenian novel. It is a surprise, then, to learn of the town:

> The population was about four thousand, including a couple of hundred Indians, a few score Chinese and seven Europeans. There were also two Eurasians named Mr. Francis and Mr. Samuel, the sons of an American Baptist missionary and a Roman Catholic missionary respectively. The town contained no curiosities of any kind, except an Indian fakir who had lived for twenty years in a tree near the bazaar, drawing his food up in a basket every morning (15).

For the most part, the action of the novel is contained to the sites sketched on the map, to the Club and to the private homes and actions of the white men (and occasionally women). We see Flory read, drink, shave and copulate with his purchased Burmese girl; we see Mr. Lackersteen make "a spirited attempt to rape" his niece and Mrs. Lackersteen lament the status of unmarried young women "at Home"; we see Mr. Macgregor reading, writing and setting out for his morning constitutional (238). Mrs. Lackersteen summarises the situation neatly, saying:

> "We seem to have no *authority* over the natives nowadays, with all these dreadful Reforms, and the insolence they learn from the newspapers. In some ways they are getting almost as bad as the lower classes at Home" (26).

The "lower classes", the poor of Burma, are not actually seen, even if, occasionally, we slip through the mesh and into the holes.

In a typical instance, Flory takes Elizabeth Lackersteen to the bazaar, "telling her it would amuse her to see it" (129). Taking Elizabeth into these holes, Flory tries to show her other people, "actual people": "'Look!' Flory was pointing with his stick to a stall, and saying something" (130). His attempt fails:

> Elizabeth followed him doubtfully and even unwillingly. Why was it that he always brought her to these places? Why was he forever dragging her in among the "natives", trying to get her to take an interest in them and watch their filthy, disgusting habits? It was all wrong, somehow. However, she followed, not feeling able to explain her reluctance. A wave of stifling air met them; there was a reek of garlic, dried fish, sweat, dust, anise, cloves and turmeric. The crowd surged round them, swarms of stocky peasants with cigar-brown faces, withered elders with their grey hair tied in a bun behind, young mothers carrying naked babies astride the hip (130).

Flory wonders how deep might be the romance of the crowd. He has been looking for "someone who would love Burma as he loved it and hate it as he hated it" (73). He loves the country and its people but he hates what it does to his country's people, a dual state eloquently if inelegantly captured in the nickname he earns for his sympathy to the natives: "[Ellis] had nicknamed him Nancy – short for nigger's Nancy Boy" (206). Though taken there by the sympathetic Flory, the reader sees the bazaar, and the other holes, only though Elizabeth's eyes through which everything looks "filthy", "disgusting", or, to use her favourite word, "beastly". Elizabeth is not the woman for Flory. At the end of the novel, after Flory, realising this, kills himself, she marries Mr. Macgregor and "fills with complete success the position for which Nature had designed her from the first, that of a *burra* memsahib" (300). The romance of the imperial subjects' lives is not seen. The memsahibs – Mrs. Lackersteen and her niece, doyennes of the network of propertied houses – win: they select the community. Simon Dentith, in "Realist Synthesis in the Nineteenth-Century Novel", has suggested that "the programmatic commitment to 'realism' or 'naturalism' is always accompanied by an effort to extend the social range of the novel" (39). Orwell's, or Flory's effort, is evident in *Burmese Days*, but it has no real result; Orwell's apparently old-fashioned realist novel seems at the same time to draw attention to the social constraints working against that expansive impulse.

The novel of the knowable community, as with any realist novel, is concerned, in Williams words, with "the interaction of public and private life" (*The English Novel* 13-4). There is no privacy in Kyauktada; there is, therefore, no interaction and so Flory's wondering has no outlet. The narrator presents the Imperial outpost as,

> a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism (69).

This remark destabilises the above analogy between *Burmese Days* and the novel of the "selective community". The inhabitants of the propertied houses are diminished: without private thoughts they are not a private network, without friendship they are not a real community.

Illustrating the extent of the white man's, or the Englishman's, subjugation by or diminution through imperialism would be the purpose of "Shooting an Elephant":

> it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys (504).

Orwell's insistent awareness of the interconnectedness of life in England and life in the Empire appears now as a continuation of the expansive impulse that Williams has noted as developing throughout the nineteenth century. "In an 'outpost of Empire' like Burma", Orwell writes in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "the class-question appeared at first sight to have been shelved" but it turns out, as Mrs. Lackersteen had noted, that it hadn't and that the ways of thinking about class prevalent in the nineteenth century remained (123-4). "The people who went there" did so, Orwell writes, "because in India, with cheap horses, free shooting, and hordes of black servants, it was so easy to play at being a gentleman" (108). They went there, in other words, to pretend to be part of a network of "propertied houses". Through this process, the *sahiblog* become disenfranchised. *They* become like the lower classes at home and held, to a point, outside a realist narrative that is, in this, more innovative even in its old-fashionedness than Mackenzie's commendatory letter would allow.

The expansive impulse of later-nineteenth century texts, those, like *Mary Barton*, written in response to Carlyle's question, emerged for Orwell, further, as appropriate ways of thinking about Imperial relations in the twentieth (123-4). If Dickens, Gaskell, *et al* had

found that the answer to the condition-of-England question would not be found in "England's green and pleasant Land", then, Orwell adds, it will not be found in its "dark Satanic Mills" either. Nor will it be found, even, in a combination of the two. The condition-of-England, Orwell insists, depends on people and relationships formed and acted elsewhere in places like, as "Shooting an Elephant" begins, "Moulmein, in lower Burma": "a green, unpleasant land", as Flory calls it ("Shooting an Elephant" 501; *BD* 83). This globally expansive impulse is an insistent theme across Orwell's oeuvre. He states it plainly in a review of Clarence Streit's *Union Now* printed in the *Adelphi* in 1939. "What we always forget", he writes in "Not Counting Niggers", "is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa" (360). In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, it is presented as the starting point for Orwell's conversion to socialism.

The second part of *Wigan Pier* begins: "The road from Mandalay to Wigan is a long one and the reasons for taking it are not immediately clear" (106). In the controversial second part of his Left Book Club commission, Orwell will attempt to explain his reasons for taking that journey: "I shall have to digress and explain how my own attitude towards the class question was developed. Obviously this involves writing a certain amount of autobiography" (106). Explaining his resignation from the Imperial Police in 1927, Orwell writes:

> I had reduced everything to the simple theory that the oppressed are always right and the oppressors are always wrong: a mistaken theory, but the natural result of being one of the oppressors yourself. I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants (129).

"It was in this way", he continues,

> that my thoughts turned towards the English working class. It was the first time that I had ever been really aware of the working class, and to begin with it was only because they supplied an analogy. They were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma (130).

Orwell's "working class" plays the same figurative role as had the poor who elbowed Gaskell daily in the streets. *The Road to Wigan Pier*, likewise, sees Orwell working in a similar way through his sympathetic response to a class which Carlyle had called "that great dumb toiling class which cannot speak" (*Chartism* 5). He recognises them.

Taking his readers into parts of Lancashire from which they were normally sharply separated, Orwell insists explicitly on the national importance of his narrative: "Our civilization, pace Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realises until one stops to think about it" (19). Like *Mary Barton*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is an attempt to make people stop and think, to take them into a part of the country which, as things are arranged, they will never need to visit: "Down there where coal is dug is a sort of world apart which one can quite easily go through life without ever hearing about"; "You could quite easily drive a car right across the north of England and never once remember that hundreds of feet below the road you are on the miners are hacking at the coal" (29; 30). With this recognition, however, comes a new set of representational problems to which Orwell's initial response is, again, familiar.

.2.

Statistics and Subjects, Pasts and Presents

Carlyle had intended *Chartism* to have just the type of energising effect on public discourse that Gallagher has described. Dismissing the efforts of "Statistical Inquirers" who "throw not light, but error worse than darkness" on the question, he called for "quite a new set of inquirers and methods" (12-3). Gaskell immediately presented herself as such and *Mary Barton*, therefore, as a new type of inquiry. Referring to the "Statistical Inquirers" in *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People?,* Boyd Hilton writes: "these commentators went beyond mere reportage to advocate bourgeois norms from which, as they saw it, the working classes were sadly deviating" (578). The Manchester Statistical Society, established in 1834, was the hub around which these commentators – drawn, again, to the "national melting pot" – orbited. Its founders, as Jenny Uglow reports in her biography of Gaskell, "were closely associated with Cross Street Chapel [where William Gaskell worked as an assistant minister] and were well known to the Gaskells" (89). One such commentator was James Kay, later Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth who was a friend of the Gaskells and one of the society's founders. He published *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture of Manchester* in 1832, from which emerges a "portraiture of savage life" (44). This equation of moral and physical savagery also appears in Peter Gaskell's (no relation) 1833 publication *The Manufacturing Population of England, its moral, social, and physical conditions* in which he illuminates, again in Manchester, "a social condition infinitely inferior to that of the savage" (81). These savage portraits are, as Hilton's remark indicates, typical of the genre. Their typicality is a consequence of what Guy terms the mid-Victorian "conceptual set", which she argues is constituted by the "pervasive and unexamined" tenets of "classical political economy" (9; 72). These tenets led Carlyle to lament that "Cash Payment has become the sole nexus of man to man!" and, as James Caporaso and David Levine (on whose account Guy draws) articulate, figure society as "a system of private want

satisfaction made up of independent private agents" (*Chartism* 61; *Theories of Political Economy* 36). Gaskell's father, William Stevenson, had articulated a version of this theory in a series of essays titled "The Political Economist" published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1824 and 1825 and Gaskell immediately situates her inquiry outside her father's field: "I know nothing of Political Economy, or the theories of trade" (38). Commenting on this disavowal, Carolyn Lesjak has written: "just as Gaskell distances herself from theories of trade, then, she also distances theories of trade from the truth" (*Working Fictions* 32). Gaskell distances, it could be said, statistical inquiries and political economy from the truth.

The extent to which this conception of society had been superseded by the time Orwell got to Wigan – his road took him, appropriately given the expansive impulse for which I am arguing, a mite further than Manchester – is a moot point. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, for example, is set in a "world in which money is virtue and poverty is crime" (49). Statistical Inquiry, though, had improved. Sir John Orr's pamphlet, *Food, Health and Income: Report on A Survey of Adequacy of Diet in Relation to Income*, the second edition of which was published the same year as *The Road to Wigan Pier*, contains none of the savage portraiture of its predecessors. Rather, Orr coolly explains: "as income increases, disease and death-rate decrease, children grow more quickly, adult stature is greater and general health and physique improve" (55). This finding, he concludes, "raise[s] important economic and political problems"; it alludes to important literary problems too (56).

Although he quotes from the first edition of Orr's study, Orwell finds, as had Carlyle, Statistical Inquiry an unsuitable manner of response to the condition-of-England question; for,

> When a quarter of a million miners are unemployed, it is part of the order of things that Alf Smith, a miner living in the back streets of Newcastle, should be out of work. Alf Smith is merely one of the quarter million, a statistical unit. But no human being finds it easy to regard himself as a statistical unit (77).

Yet “words are such feeble things” too: “What is the use of a brief phrase like ‘roof leaks’ or ‘four beds for eight people’? It is the kind of thing your eye slides over, registering nothing” (50). For Orwell, then, the recognition of other types of people is about catching the eye. As Colls puts it:

> So much in Orwell is about being recognised. For a writer so keen on the facts, Orwell would judge a person usually on the strength of little more than the catch of the eye. He tried to catch the eye in Wigan, but couldn’t quite, except once – the eye of a young woman from the train, or so he said (*English Rebel* 128).

So what type of response does the condition-of-England question require? The clue is in Colls’ last clause; Carlyle’s question demands a creative response. The condition-of-England question requires the condition-of-England novel, in which the truth can reside in fiction. “It is no accident”, George Levine has written, “that realism tended to be the dominant narrative mode of a Victorian England in which perhaps the greatest of all virtues, greater even than sexual propriety was truth-telling” (“Literary Realism Reconsidered” 15). “All great realists have thought of their narrative operations”, declares Fredric Jameson at the end of the volume which Levine’s essay opens, “as the striking of a blow for truth” (“A Note on Literary Realism in Conclusion” 262). Orwell, who wrote with beautiful simplicity in 1944, “I have tried to tell the truth”, is twentieth-century literature’s most famous truth-teller (“London Letter 10” 411). This reputation is perhaps not fully deserved, as will be discussed below, but what is at stake here is the claim that the particular manner of truth for which Orwell has become known is a stylistic and formal achievement which modifies the specifically nineteenth-century literary paradigm he inherits.

The episode to which Colls is referring takes place as Orwell is leaving Wigan. Looking out onto a neighbourhood of slum houses from his train window, Orwell reports: “At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe” (16). In the published version of this encounter, Orwell does not quite catch the eye: “She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to

catch her eye" (16). Describing the same event in his diary, Orwell has it take place while he was "passing up a horrible squalid side-alley", where "she looked up and caught my eye" ("15 February 1936" 427). That he represented himself as trying is, as Colls notes, typical; that he failed is also, though, significant. Orwell suggests a sort of mutual sympathy as the outcome of the encounter:

> It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that "It isn't the same for them as it would be for us", and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe (16-7).

This famous passage appears to be a version of the argument with which *The Road to Wigan Pier* will end, the claim that "we of the sinking middle class […] have nothing to lose but our aitches" (204). Yet it is also true that, as Jameson has written of realist narration in general,

> included in this collective "point of view" is a desperate fear: that of *declassement*, of slipping down the painfully climbed slope of class position and business or monetary success, of falling back into the petty bourgeoisie and thence on into working-class misery itself (266).

For behind the apparent sympathy of the moment lies an essential and apparently insoluble difference. As Lynette Hunter has written, "the narrator is warm, safe" and, most importantly, "enclosed" (*Search for a Voice* 50). The "us" and "them" remain unchallenged. The recognition of "them" – Williams' "different types of people" – is inseparable from the recognition that "we" are different. "A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role", writes Orwell later in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "he does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority" (43). The writer, even the writer aiming at mutual recognition is, it seems, one such influence: Orwell, from his enclosure, writes the girl's thoughts.

Condition-of-England novels have often been criticised from this position. In her detailed study of the genre, *The Other Nation*, Sheila Smith writes:

> the tone of voice is inevitably middle-class, appealing to middle-class readers to tackle the problem of the Other Nation, because the novel is essentially a middle-class form born of middle-class self-consciousness in the eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth when the power, leisure, and prestige of the middle class substantially increased. All these novelists were confronted with the necessity of using middle-class fictions, appealing to middle-class prejudices and social attitudes, to convey the reality of the life of the poor, the Other Nation who, for the most part, did not share these prejudices and social attitudes. So, although there are occasional glimpses of the actuality of the Other Nation, the novels are inevitably what the Victorian middle class thinks and fears of the Other Nation rather than an imaginative re-creation of its life[2] (258).

"These are very much novels about the condition of England", writes P.J. Keating of the genre in *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, "as seen from above" (227). Such, explicitly, is the perspective of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The miner, down below, is "the type of the manual worker" but, having been down the mine, Orwell's essential difference from him is confirmed: "by no conceivable amount of effort or training could I become a coal-miner, the work would kill me in a few weeks" (29). The miners inhabit not just a different nation, but a "different universe" (29). Seemingly aimed at inspiring mutual recognition, and sympathy, *The Road to Wigan Pier* in fact repeatedly evokes the imaginative, geographical and physical boundaries that keep the classes distinct.

Made against both parts of Orwell's text, this claim runs contrary to the conventional interpretation of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and it is a problem of form more than one of intention. Traceable to the preface supplied by the book's publisher, Victor Gollancz,

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[2] The fear of *declassement* described by Jameson is an essential element of this perspective. In *Culture and Society*, Williams presents *Mary Barton* as "a dramatisation of the *fear of violence* which was widespread among the upper and middle classes at the time, and which penetrated as an arresting and controlling factor, even into the deep imaginative sympathy of a Mrs Gaskell" (89). Williams has in mind, the moment in Gaskell's novel when the disenfranchised working man, John Barton, assassinates Harry Carson, a wealthy manufacturer's son; Williams points out that this moment is a recreation of the murder of Thomas Ashton. Smith makes this link too, writing that "anyone from the Manchester area who read the novel would have immediately associated the incident with the murder of Thomas Ashton, as did Thomas's sister Mary" (181). "Taking the period as a whole", writes Williams, "the response of political assassination is so uncharacteristic as to be an obvious distortion" (89).

of the Left Book Club, the convention is to regard parts one and two of Orwell's text as discrete units with independent purposes. Part One under this reading is "a terrible record of evil conditions, foul housing, wretched pay, hopeless unemployment and the villainies of the Means Test"; Part Two, by contrast, "starts with an autobiographical study" after which Orwell "comes forward as a devil's advocate, and explains, with a great deal of sympathy, why, in his opinion, so many of the best people detest Socialism" (xiii; iv). Appealing for "Documents" in the little magazine *Fact* later in 1937, Storm Jameson had written: "A task of the greatest value, urgent and not easy, is waiting to be done. George Orwell has begun on it in the first half of *The Road to Wigan Pier*" (she might have said "in the first half of the first edition of *The Road to Wigan Pier*" as the second half was cut from the second edition) (12). Demanding that "the writer keep himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the fact from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle" and distinguishing between parts one and two of Orwell's text, Jameson has accepted Gollancz's distinction (15). "If a writer does not know, if his senses and imagination have not told him, what poverty smells like, he had better find out", she had written (12). But she had also cautioned: "if he goes for his own sake, for some fancied spiritual advantage to be got from the experience, he had better stay at home: his presence in Wigan or Hoxton is either irrelevant or impudent" (12). Orwell, as described above, went to Wigan for his own sake; his was, it seems, a selfish socialism. In any case, the two halves of *The Road to Wigan Pier* are less discrete than was first thought. And they are less discrete than has often been thought since, perhaps because of, as John Rodden has noted, "a contending voice [Gollancz's] literally 'getting inside' Orwell's book" (*The Politics of Literary Reputation* 107). This biographical fragment, for example, is drawn from Part One:

> I first became aware of the unemployment problem in 1928. At that time I had just come back from Burma, where unemployment was only a word, and I had gone to Burma when I was still a boy and the post-war boom was not quite over. When I first saw unemployed men at close quarters, the thing that horrified and amazed me was to find that many of them were ashamed of being unemployed (76).

The representational problem, then, must be more holistic than either Gollancz or Jameson allow.

Acknowledging that her "suggestion that the writer should give 'an objective report' may seem naïve", Lara Feigel has defended Jameson, in *Between the Frames*, on the grounds that the "objectivity" she demands of documents "seems to imply a lack of subjectivity more than an actual scientific empiricism" (68). If Feigel is right, then Jameson's purportedly revolutionary project does not demand anything new. Williams has written of *Mary Barton* that "the method, in part, is that of documentary record" (*Culture and Society* 88). Smith quotes from a letter of advice Gaskell wrote to a friend of her daughter's prescribing that the novelist "set *objects* not *feelings* before the reader"; "objective description", Gaskell added, "implies emotion" and this dialectic is, she reports, "the staple of *Mary Barton*" (qtd. *The Other Nation* 88). *The Road to Wigan Pier* – an attempt on Orwell's part to overcome the mantra of his childhood: "the lower classes smell" – is dialectical in Gaskell's sense, rather than in the style of the documentary film as Jameson had demanded, throughout (112). Of Orwell's encounter with the slum girl, Feigel writes:

> Although [Orwell] fails to keep himself out of the picture, he succeeds in making his distanced viewpoint explicit. He also goes out of his way to make clear that his visual perspective is that of the distant camera eye and not a figure in the crowd. […] In choosing to move his location to a train and attain a cinematic distance, he emphasises his own distance from his subject (79).

By marking not only a distinction but also the significance of the space in between him and his subject, Orwell necessarily makes a subject of himself. Something like this idea operates in Williams' claim that to read Orwell is to see through "the eyes of the observer, of the man coming back to England" (*Orwell* 17). It may be, as Feigel has it, that the "visual perspective" is that of the camera eye but it does not seem quite right to say that Orwell is observing here. In narrating subjectivity, Orwell adds the novelist's perspective.

The extent to which the documentary film acts in the way Jameson suggests is, in any case, questionable. John Grierson, the movement's pioneer, praised the British Commercial Gas Association's 1935 film *Housing Problems* for showing "the common man, not in the romance of his calling, but in the more complex and intimate drama of his citizenship" (84). However, as Laura Marcus has pointed out:

> There was, in fact, something of a contradiction, though one rarely openly acknowledged, between the documentarists' insistence on the secondary importance of the human being in the films, and their assertions of the primacy of the fascination with "the common man" and the ordinary life as the underpinning of documentary culture ("'The Creative Treatment of Actuality'" 199).

There can be no documents without a documentarist: subjectivity and objectivity are always interchangeable. John Roberts, indeed, in *The Art of Interruption* has gone as far as to describe Orwell's "report on Wigan" as "a satire in fact at the expense of the portentous claims of the new social anthropology and the middle-class documentary movement as a whole" (66). There is something in this, I think. Published in the same year as Tom Harrisson, Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge started the Mass Observation movement, *The Road to Wigan Pier*'s nineteenth-century resonances invite consideration of that text as a reassertion of the ongoing relevance of Carlyle's question to novelists. After all, the "condition of the poor of England", the "condition of England question" had always been a subject – one *about which*, Carlyle had written, "something *ought to be said*, something *ought to be done*".

"To understand 'the condition of England' in the 1930s", Ken Hirschkop has written, "[Orwell] had gone to Wigan Pier, where he lived, spoke with, and observed the industrial working class" ("Culture, class and education" 461). He never found Wigan Pier, "which he had set his heart on seeing. Alas! Wigan Pier had been demolished, and even the spot where it used to stand is no longer certain" (66). Though it helped him, as the thesis as a whole will hopefully show, towards a form amenable to the condition of England in the 1940s, his

journey to a fictional place did not lead him to understand "'the condition of England' in the 1930s" either. The closest he gets is the famous scene with which Part One ends:

> I have often been struck by the peculiar easy completeness, the perfect symmetry as it were, of a working-class interior at its best. Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat – it is a good place to be in, provided that you can be not only in it but sufficiently of it to be taken for granted (104).

Although Orwell says of this scene that it "belongs only to our own moment of time and could not belong either to the future or the past", Cairns Craig is quite right to point out that Orwell "does not discover his working-class emblems with surprise, or horror at their economic deprivation, but with a shock of recognition – a shock, almost literally, of coming home" (*WP* 105; *Out of History* 126). Orwell has said on the same page that "this scene is still reduplicated in a majority of English homes, *though not so many as before the war*" and Part One ends:

> Curiously enough it is not the triumphs of modern engineering, nor the radio, nor the cinematograph, nor the five thousand novels which are published yearly, nor the crowds at Ascot and the Eton and Harrow match, but the memory of working-class interiors – *especially as I sometimes saw them in my childhood before the war, when England was still prosperous* –that reminds me that our age has not been altogether a bad one to live in (105; *emphasis added*).

For Craig, this moment exemplifies Orwell's "insistent technique", which "works by selecting some moment of the past, some image or event, and, by his precise description of it, [Orwell] reveals in it the nub of the order implicit in the flux of experience" (124). This is how nineteenth-century realism operated too, as Levine explains: "Nineteenth-century realism, as we can understand it today, leans toward the scrupulous construction of social and historical context as it impinges on the lives of characters" (18). Yet it would be wrong to note this overlap without also noting the fragility of Orwell's image, which is alternately timely and timeless and from which, moreover, he is excluded. As he writes of the miners he

observed: “I liked them and hoped they liked me; but I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were aware of it” (137). If nineteenth-century England had become an “unknown, unknowable, overwhelming society”, then how much more so is Orwell’s England? Craig quotes from Orwell’s 1942 essay “Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War”, in which he recalls “saying once to Arthur Koestler, ‘History stopped in 1936’, at which he nodded in immediate understanding” (503). “What Orwell meant by ‘history stopped’”, claims Craig, “was not that events had ceased to occur, but that the possibility of analysing and understanding the past, of *writing* history, had been destroyed; and that therefore the sense of living within the process of history had been lost” (120). This loss provides the intellectual, and emotional, context for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whose (anti)hero, Winston Smith, will say: “History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right” (162). Orwell reports that he and Koestler “were both thinking of totalitarianism in general, but more particularly of the Spanish civil war” and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is frequently linked with Orwell’s experience in the Spanish Civil War. 1936 was also the year he went to Wigan and he returned from the miners’ universe to try and rejuvenate the novel’s attachment to history (“Looking Back” 503).

Immediately after the sentence I quoted above, Hirschkop writes: “By the 1940s [Orwell] was convinced that the newsagent was the best place from which to scan English culture, because ‘[p]robably the contents of these shops is the best available indication of what the mass of the English people really feels and thinks’” (461; qting. “Boys’ Weeklies” 58). Orwell’s move is, I think, less ingenuous that Hirschkop’s transition implies. To go down the mine is to confront your inferiority and your dependence:

> In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an “intellectual” and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the *Times Lit. Supp.*, and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants – all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the

> eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel (31).

To go into the newsagent shop – or into, as will be discussed in some detail in the following chapter, the music hall or a novel by Dickens – is to enter a demotic space where "you and I", miners and even the "author of Marxism for Infants" also go, as equals, to encounter similar experiences. This is what I mean by "Re-conditioning England"; recognition is only the first stage in Orwell's project, which quickly becomes one of creative reconciliation.

Thus, Orwell's next family images are different. *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "delivered", as Stephen Ingle has written, to "the managerial class", sees Orwell "reach out", as Colls puts it, to the "technical", "new middle class" (*Social and Political Thought* 115; *English Rebel* 215). The images change accordingly. First, "you" are in the picture which "your mother keeps on the mantelpiece". Next, after this explicitly demotic, inviting image, England is figured, famously, as "a family with the wrong members in control" (401). England is:

> a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kowtowed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income. It is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts (401).

This image has social potency. In *The Break-Up of Britain*, Tom Nairn argues that

> classes embrace political revolution only when they see no other route forward. In spite of the enormous social tensions of the industrial revolution, this was never the case for the English middle class. It was possible, though not easy, for them to arrive at a workable compromise with the political ruling class (31).

This is the message of the second part of *The Road to Wigan Pier* but the image of the idealised, working-class and so exclusive family figured in the first part of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, offers only a step back; that is if it has not already disappeared. The image of the family, however, is at once inclusive and yet, in the way it points to the imbalance of power and alludes to the disenfranchised proletariat abroad, undesirable and stultifying. Cast in an

essay aiming at inspiring a socialist revolution, the England-as-family image, a metaphor which Anthony D. Smith has described as “indispensable” to nationalism offers in Orwell’s version no way forward (*National Identity* 79). Orwell’s “development of the metaphor, as Patrick Parrinder has written in *Nation and Novel*, “reveals the eye of the novelist, not the political theorist or propagandist” (316). This revelation is alluded to in the following sentence, in which England-as-family is granted, despite its stuffiness, “its private language and its common memories” (401). These are the stuff of the realist novel, of the condition-of-England novel, and Orwell, in his war-time writings would re-deploy it and, in his post-war writings, agonise over its contingency.

.3.

"The downward curve is implied in the upper one":

Orwell's re-interpretation of the "condition-of-England question"

Valentine Cunningham has suggested that "the spirit of [J.B.] Priestley's deridingly ironic question 'Who wants to know about coal?' fires Orwell's insistence on taking you 'Down the Mine'" (*British Writers of the Thirties* 240; qting. *English Journey* 318). Priestley got to East Durham and the Tees and declared: "Since I was buried during the war I have taken a dislike to narrow little passages half a mile underground. I am heartily glad that I have not to go down a mine" (*English Journey* 318). Recalling Orwell's remark that "you could quite easily drive a car right across the north of England and never once remember that hundreds of feet below the road you are on the miners are hacking at the coal", Cunningham's reading seems quite right and there was an intense rivalry between the two writers, in one direction at least[3] (30). It is likely that Orwell's hostility to Priestley is partly generational and a consequence of "the humiliation" that, according to Richard Rees, Orwell had "said that his generation must be marked" because "of not having taken part in it [the war]"; Priestley had been down "mines" of his own in France, and so had many of his readers (qtd. in *Orwell Remembered* 123). That generational aspect will be discussed in

[3] Traveling in, to borrow Stefan Collini's phrase, "his chauffeur-driven Daimler", Priestley did indeed drive across the North of England ("From the Motorcoach" 20). Cunningham is not entirely right, however. While it is true that, as Cunningham states, "Orwell never acknowledged his indebtedness" to Priestley, it is not true that, as Cunningham continues, parenthetically, "(in fact [Orwell] professed to despise Priestley's attempts at the common touch: 'And Priestley twists his proletarian awl / Cobbling at shoes that Mill and Rousseau wore / And still the wretched tool contrives to bore')" (239). That satirical verse in fact comes from the "Letter to an American Visitor by 'Obadiah Hornbrooke'" that Alex Comfort sent to Orwell *via Tribune* in 1943 and to which Orwell responded, in kind, by *defending* Preistley: "your chief target is the radio hack / The hired pep-talker – he's a safe objective" (144). In *The Lion and the Unicorn* he would describe "Priestley['s being] shoved off air" as a "tiny defeat" pushing the popular Socialist project "a few yards back" (422). He thinks of it as a defeat because it came, he speculates in his War-Time Diary, "evidently at the instance of the Conservative party" ("21 October 1940" 277).

chapters one and two; here, I want to note the specifically formal, and generic, aspect of Orwell's desire to distinguish himself from Priestley.

Priestley's *Angel Pavement*, published in 1930, was one of the first books that Orwell was paid to review. Priestley's "intention", Orwell wrote in the *Adelphi*, "more or less explicit, is to set forth the romance of London, to make a pattern of beauty from the eventless, dismal lives which interlace in a city office" (186-7). As stated and as understood by Orwell, Priestley's intention is akin to that which had motivated Gaskell:

> Abandon, says Mr. Priestley in effect, all your sneering about industrial civilisation. Remember that these clerks and typists who look so unpleasantly like ants as they stream over London Bridge at the rush hour, these clerks whom you in your superiority despise – they too are human – they too are romantic. And thus far, who will contradict him? Clerks are men and brothers, and fit material for art – applause, therefore to the writer who can use them (187).

However, he concludes: "when one has finished applauding Mr. Priestley's effort to make clerks and typists interesting, one must add that the effort does not even for a single page, come off" (187). Priestleyan means, for Orwell, "Dickens – rather diluted" because, although he attempts to continue the expansive impulse that Williams has identified in Gaskell, Dickens, *et al*, "his writing does not touch the level at which memorable fiction begins" (188; 187). Orwell would comment extensively on the persistence of Dickens' fiction in England's cultural memory in a long essay and Orwell's early work could, as detailed in the first chapter on Dickens' ongoing influence, be dismissed as "Dickens – rather diluted" too. Such a description would not, however, fit *Coming Up for Air*.

In an interview with Desmond Hawkins broadcast in December 1940, Orwell challenges the value of "proletarian literature" as a concept[4]. Literature, he felt, was a "bourgeois" category. He explains himself with reference to "the history of a proletarian writer nowadays" ("The Proletarian Writer" 297).

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[4] Jameson had also questioned, in terms similar to Orwell's, the value of the term. "Documents" begins: "I believe we should do well to give up talking about proletarian literature and talk about socialist literature instead-and mean by it writing concerned with the lives of men and women in a world which is changing and being changed" (9).

> Through some accident – very often it is simply due to having a long period on the dole – a young man of the working class gets a chance to educate himself. Then he starts writing books, and naturally he makes use of his early experiences, his sufferings under poverty, his revolt against the existing system, and so forth. But he isn't really creating an independent literature. He writes in the bourgeois manner, in the middle-class dialect. He is simply the black sheep of the bourgeois family, using the old methods for slightly different purposes. Don't mistake me. I'm not saying that he can't be as good a writer as anyone else; but if he is, it won't be because he is a working man but because he is a talented person who has learnt to write well. So long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois. But I don't believe that they will be dominant much longer, or any other class either. I believe we are passing into a classless period, and what we call proletarian literature is one of the signs of the change (297).

Such a period needs a new literature. The changed condition of England requires a new type of condition-of-England novel: "England is certainly two nations", he would write, alluding to Disraeli, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "if not three or four" (398). Recognising the poor of England is no longer enough. The novel needs now to recognise a different kind of person, different ways of thinking. *The Lion and the Unicorn* was an attempt to hasten the transition of England from "the most class-ridden country under the sun" into the "a classless, ownerless society", the classless period projected on the radio (400; 418). For Orwell, "the old distinction between Right and Left broke down when *Picture Post* was first published" (418). That popular paper, founded in 1938, the *London Evening Standard*, *Cavalcade* – a news magazine published from 1936 – and J.B. Priestley's broadcasts "point to the existence of multitudes of unlabelled people who have grasped within the last year or two that something is wrong" (418). Orwell's task, then, was to find a novel form capable of recognising these multitudes and capturing their sense that something is wrong. This is both a reflective and an effective mission, which started with *Coming Up for Air* and ended with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, to re-condition England.

Discussed in the following chapter in terms of its affinities with but development from Dickens' work, *Coming Up for Air* has been described by Jeffrey Meyers, in "Orwell's Apocalypse", as

> both a synthetic and seminal book, gathering the themes that had been explored in the poverty books of the thirties and anticipating the cultural essays and political satires of the next decade (69).

It was greeted by its first *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer with a question: "Is it quite a novel?" (355). "Perhaps in Mr. Orwell's view", the review continues by speculating, "the novel we are used to is being sawn off at the roots" (355). This, as Orwell's remarks in "The Proletarian Writer" indicate, was a prescient comment. Discussing Orwell's oeuvre as a whole, the *TLS* review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* makes a similar point:

> form had almost ceased to interest Mr. Orwell in 1939, when, in *Coming Up For Air*, the form of the novel was quite transparently a device for comparing the England of that time with the world we lived in before the First World War. In *Coming Up For Air*, also, characterisation was reduced to a minimum: now, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it has been as nearly as possible eliminated. We are no longer dealing with characters, but with society (380).

The following discussion will be principally addressed to this progression. I do not agree, though, that "form has almost ceased to interest Mr. Orwell". Rather than abandoning the form he had applied earlier in his career, in his engagement with the social problems of war and its aftermath, Orwell attempts to find a new form for the condition-of-England novel.

Nineteen Eighty-Four's *TLS* reviewer also commented: "It is a queer route that Mr. Orwell has taken from Burma to the Oceania of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, by way of Catalonia and Wigan Pier" (380). Such a route makes Orwell, I think, interesting. He may well have thought so too. For, "any writer who is not utterly lifeless", he would write in his essay on Dickens, "moves upon a kind of parabola": "the downward curve is implied in the upper one" (53). He cites James Joyce's progression from "the frigid competence of *Dubliners*" to "the dream-language of *Finnegan's Wake* [sic]" as exemplary (53). Priestley, presumably is a lifeless writer, Orwell's own development from Elephant-shooting facer of facts to self-conscious worrier about the status of "facts" is however indicative of the parabolic pattern which, as Alok Rai has written, "implies" the "sense […] of a controlled, internally logical development" (*Orwell and the Politics of Despair* 3). The chronological structure of "Re-Conditioning

England" reveals the ways in which tensions always at stake in Orwell's examination of the condition of England are placed into dialectical relation in the "downward curve" of his career. In the last decade of his life, the period Williams describes as the "third phase" of his career, rather than, as Williams claims, "creat[ing] a new myth […] of an England of basic ordinariness and decency, a real 'England'", Orwell draws out and examines the internal logic of the condition-of-England question (*Orwell* 22).

CHAPTER ONE.

"THE GHOST OF DICKENS":
AN IDENTIFICATION WITH THE (IMAGINED) COMMUNITY

The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius is Orwell's wartime paean to patriotism. Stephen Ingle, in *The Social and Political Thought of George Orwell*, has suggested, that "Orwell's Englishness was chiefly created as a disguise for socialism" (101). Tosco Fyvel, more even-handedly, describes *The Lion and the Unicorn*, which Orwell conceived, as its subtitle indicates, as an attempt to unify the two forces of patriotism and socialism into a single revolutionary activity, as Orwell's attempt to "identify himself with England in its finest hour" (*Remembering Orwell* 120). The result is a strangely ambivalent essay; it seems to call simultaneously for revolution and regression, as in the last passage where we "become more ourselves" – which implies a return to an innate or original state – by "moving forward" (432). Patrick Parrinder has alluded to this ambivalence, noting, in *Nation and Novel*, that *The Lion and the Unicorn* seems "to present a more or less transient set of traits as essential and permanent" (22). In the first section of his pamphlet, Orwell proposes a metaphorical solution to this problem. Having posed the indicative question "What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840?", he immediately reconsiders – "But then" – and reformulates his question on an individual level: "what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece?" (393). He answers the second question: "Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person" (393). But he leaves us to intuit the answer to his first. Obviously the two questions are supposed to be related, but this is more complex than it appears. Are we supposed, simply, to enlarge the significance of the photographic metaphor from the individual to the national scale? Even if we do this, the answer to the second question is not absolute; in fact, it is paradoxical: we simultaneously have "nothing" in common with, and yet are "the same" as, images of ourselves as five-year-olds. Of course, we have grown out

of that snapshot, just as England has grown out of its position in 1840, but Orwell seems to suggest a deeper relationship than this whereby an inherent sameness, a deeper sense of self, remains and is made to transcend the apparent, or external, changes.

At the end of the famous first section of *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "England Your England", Orwell claims that, "in whatever shape England emerges from the war": "England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same" (408-9). So this is a metaphorical account. Treating it as such, however, does not really solve the problem. If "metaphors mean", as Donald Davidson avers, only "what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more", then an apparently insoluble problem presents itself: how can a nation change out of recognition while remaining the same (32)? This chapter will seek an answer to this tricky question, which has to do with Orwell's conception of history more generally, by going back with him *to* the England of 1840 *from* the England of 1940 through *Inside the Whale*'s first essay: "Charles Dickens". Published early in 1940, "Charles Dickens" is Orwell's most direct engagement with the England of 1840 and acts, as such, as a focusing lens through which to investigate the relationship between the two "Englands" (or the simultaneously, but paradoxically, singular "England") of *The Lion and the Unicorn*. This discussion, supplemented by a reading of the 1939 novel *Coming Up for Air*, written while Orwell was reading for "Charles Dickens" and in which the influence of the "Dickens" drawn in the essay, and in a subsequent address to the Dickens Fellowship, is clearly felt, will discover the strands of Victorian thought that Orwell has picked from the past and from which the present-day (and at-war) "England" of *The Lion and the Unicorn* has been pulled together.

.1.

Dickens' Ghost and the Social-Problem Novel

In 1895, George Saintsbury wrote:

> There are few comparatively recent writers about whom it is more difficult to write at the present moment than it is to write about Dickens. Current public opinion about him seems to have got into a kind of tangle, and there are as many as four or five distinct views regarding him, all of which are held by considerable parties (*Corrected Impressions* 117).

Tangled at the end of the nineteenth, the perception of Charles Dickens remained confused throughout the twentieth century as distinct factions continued to disagree. Middleton Murry, writing in the *Times* in 1922, had posited a "Dickens Revival" but, in so doing, implies an earlier diminution of Dickens' reputation and this is confirmed, for example, by Saintsbury, who had gone on to complain: "There is no sense of poetry, none of mastery, hardly any of religion, in Dickens" (136). Sir Leslie Stephen, in the 1888 edition of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, had dismissed Dickens' critical reputation; "if literary fame could safely be measured by popularity with the half-educated, Dickens must claim the highest position among English novelists", he wrote – implying, of course, that it could not and that Dickens, therefore, does not (qtd. in Slater "Dickens, Charles John Huffam"). "I stand aghast", said William Lilly in the first of his lectures on *Four English Humourists of the Nineteenth Century* (given at Cambridge in 1895),

> at the inane insignificance of most of his personages, at the vapid vulgarity of most of his incidents, at the consummate crudity of much of his thought, at the intolerable ineptness of much of his diction (13-4).

By the time of Murry's essay, indeed, even those critics most amenable to Dickens had accepted his value as primarily humorous; G.K. Chesterton for example, in his (mostly appreciative) *Criticisms and Appreciations of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1913), had written that while his work "contains many romantic descriptions and many moral generalisations which Dickens probably valued highly",

> it is not for such things that he is valued. In all his writings, from his most reasoned and sustained novel to his maddest private note, it is always this obstreperous instinct for farce which stands out as his in the highest sense (50).

This is the context against which Murry posited the "revival", which did eventually occur even if, according to Dickens' current entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*,

> it was not until the American cultural critic Edmund Wilson […] argued for a much more complex interpretation of Dickens's personality and art in his seminal essay "Dickens: the two Scrooges" (in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, 1941), that a truly seismic shift began in high-cultural and academic attitudes towards Dickens. […] Important studies by George Orwell (in his *Inside the Whale*, 1940) and Humphry House (*The Dickens World*, 1941) further encouraged a total and wide-ranging revaluation of Dickens by literary critics and academic professionals.

Orwell's essay is helpfully read, as Slater's account invites, as a response to the treatments of Dickens by which it was preceded and Murry's (premature) prediction of a "Dickens Revival" is therefore a useful place to start.

As rationale for his hopeful forecast, Murry describes

> an intellectual dinner-party at which it was announced, without any manifest ill-effects upon the company, that the real test of literary taste was an admiration not for Jane Austen (as someone had suggested) but for Dickens. And the reason given for making him the touchstone was that the lover of "Emma" might be an intellectual snob, while the lover of "David Copperfield" could not be.

This is a hedged commendation; the announcement could be read as a declaration, not of Dickens' superiority, but of a desire to lower the standards of literary taste. Murry seems to acknowledge this when he introduces T.S. Eliot's essay "The Three Provincialities", in which Dickens makes a parenthetic appearance, into the discussion. "The critic", writes Eliot

> is the person who has the power to distinguish between the two points of view in himself; and to discern what, in any work of literary art, takes its place, through its expression of the genius of its own language, in European literature, and what is of purely local importance. (In the case of such a writer as Dickens, for example, this dissociation remains to be performed) (12).

Literary criticism, runs the implication, has not really got to Dickens yet – having, presumably, been engaged on critiquing the superior arts of, for example, Jane Austen. "It is rather grim", Murry concedes: "Dickens is slipped into a pair of brackets as between a pair of

forceps, tied down on the surgeon's table, and warned that a serious operation is necessary". He ends, however, on the note of hope that characterises his essay: "his life can be saved. We need not despair of him". Eliot's essay confirms that Dickens is a worthwhile case for the critic; that literary criticism *will* get to him. When it does, adds Murry, Dickens' reputation *will be* revived.

The critical position of Dickens with which Murry is concerned is, however, only one aspect of his reputation – and the different factions alluded to by Saintsbury are not uniformly convinced of its decisiveness. As George Ford points out in *Dickens and his Readers*:

> The dogged loyalty of the provincial Dickensian has been phenomenal; changes in literary fashions seem to leave him quite unruffled. His understanding of Dickens may be limited, but his persistent enthusiasm has been a powerful support (172).

For this dogged Dickensian stood, throughout the twentieth century, the Dickens Fellowship and they stood, in turn, on the persistence of his support. In ironic reference, at the Fellowship's annual dinner in 1938, to Stephen's dismissal of Dickens' critical merits fifty years earlier, a Mr. Birkett "said he was not a literary critic": "If he had been it would have been necessary for him to have pointed out", among sundry other limitations, "that the appeal of Dickens was to the half-educated" (qtd. in the *Times*, "The Common Touch of Dickens"). Birkett, and by extension the dogged Dickensians of the Fellowship as a whole, rather regard the very same popularity discredited by Stephen as *the* measure of literary fame:

> that decision, said Mr. Birkett, had been taken, and taken not so much by contributors to dictionaries or by literary critics as by the people in all lands […] the permanent place of Charles Dickens was now unalterably secure.

Already two distinct and opposing factions – the critics and the Dickensians – have emerged. Orwell reviewed, in 1945 and in 1949 respectively, critical biographies of Dickens by Una Pope-Hennessy and Hesketh Pearson. In each review, he asserts that "most of what is written about Dickens is either violently 'for' or violently 'against'" and these two factions

conform directly to these two extremes of interpretation[1] ("Review of *Charles Dickens* by Una Pope-Hennessy" 276).

Before constructing poles of critical approbation and popular approval (themselves needful of qualification), a third, problematising context needs to be considered. Biographically, too, Dickens' reputation had begun to struggle in the twentieth century. The most startling intervention in this field of the debate was Bechofer Roberts' *This Side Idolatry*, in which he rails against the popular myth, begun in John Forster's *The Life of Dickens*, "that Charles, the Inimitable Boz, had ever shown himself in his life as in his work the uncompromising foe of Cant, Hypocrisy and Humbug" (319). In the foreword to a 1946 reissuing, Roberts refers to "the Dickensian censorship" that almost kept his book from being published, concluding: "Dickens the writer was more and more subordinated by these people to Dickens the plaster saint" (5; 6). Explaining the eventual appearance of his book, Roberts writes: "the only way on which I could circumvent the Dickensian censorship and its legal sanctions was to use my materials in the shape of a historical, or, rather, biographical novel. It was not the form I would have liked, but it seemed the only one available" (6). His "biographical novel" is, nonetheless, intended as valuable criticism of Dickens and he regards it, as such, as a success, concluding: "in recent years new studies of Dickens's character have been published by writers of the most immaculate respectability who, but for *This Side Idolatory*, would scarcely have ventured to suggest that he was other than perfect" (10). This is an exaggerated boast. In 1925, Virginia Woolf, more critically than Roberts and more prosaically than her father, introduced a new edition of *David Copperfield* by declaring against the Dickens she described as "everybody's writer and no one's in particular" (76). An interpretation "based largely upon the fact that of all great writers Dickens is both the least personally charming and the least present in his books", Woolf concludes that while she

[1] The phrasing is changed slightly in his "Review of *Dickens: His Character, Comedy and Career* by Hesketh Pearson": "books about Dickens tend to be vehemently 'for' or 'against'" (114). This review was Orwell's last professional commission and it ensures that Dickens' name appears in the index of every volume of essays, letters and diaries of Davison's *Collected Works*.

"would cheerfully become Shakespeare's cat Scott's pig, or Keats's canary", she "would not cross the road (reasons of curiosity apart) to dine with Wordsworth, Byron, or Dickens" (76; 80). An episode in Patrick Hamilton's *Twenty-Thousand Streets Under the Sky* trilogy (1929) summarises the situation neatly. When Bob, the novels' hopelessly romantic anti-hero, takes Jenny, the prostitute he pathetically mistakes for his girlfriend, on an accidental pilgrimage (Bob venerates Dickens) to Dickens' house in Doughty Street she responds indifferently: "He was a silly old man with a beard" (146). Even if he still has his devotees, Dickens is laughed at by fictional prostitutes, spurned by critics and ends the 'twenties in an even more "grim" situation and in far greater need of the "surgery" that had been deemed necessary at the start of the decade.

The damage of the 1920s was nothing, however, compared to the scandal of the 1930s. The death of Sir Henry Dickens in 1933, as well as precipitating the release for publication of Dickens' *The Life of Our Lord*, also allowed for the publication of an article by the Dickens scholar Thomas Wright in the *Daily Express* naming Ellen "Nelly" Ternan as Dickens' long-term mistress. Claire Tomalin, in her "story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens", *The Invisible Woman*, reports "uproar and scandal in the press at this attack on the novelist" and, later that year, Robert Graves exploited this scandal with *The Real David Copperfield* (256). Graves' novel was published by Arthur Baker but reads much more like a Mills and Boon novel than did Roberts'. Whereas Roberts "was in no way interested in Dickens's sexual life", Graves very much is and turns David's friendship with Little Em'ly into a salacious affair:

> "Oh Emily, if it were possible to turn the clock back twenty years and start afresh! But your uncle returns tomorrow and we shall never see each other again alone after this."
>
> "Yet what is happening between us now is the most important thing that has ever happened to either of us?"
>
> "Dearest Emily, nothing matters to us now except each other" (*This Side Idolatry* 2nd ed. 6; *The Real David Copperfield* 403).

"No apologies are offered for tampering with a reputed classic", he wrote "and few, I think, will seriously demand them" (9). As well as privileging the new biographical detail in dismissing Dickens, Graves attempts, as would Roberts, to add critical merit to his opportunistic novel:

> The root of the modern difficulty with Dickens is in his continual readiness to sacrifice straightforwardness in writing to a tradesman-like exploitation of the now extinct Dear Reader. The Dear Reader public, whose acquaintance he made early by his contributions to the *Old Monthly Magazine*, was most leisurely and, in a literary sense at least, most uncritical[2] (5).

It may be objected that Graves' intervention is self-serving and, as by Ford, that "the expression *Dear Reader* never appears […] in Dickens' writings", but the truth is that Dickens' dismissal by the reading public was being similarly noted in less opportunistic novels of the period (232).

John Ashbery, in his master's thesis, notes the Dickensian aspect of Henry Green's novel *Living* (1929), speculating that "a nineteenth-century reader might turn from *Hard Times* to *Living* and find the characters of the latter understandable and attractive – perhaps even more so than those of the former" (16). This continuity, indeed, is noted in the novel where Mr. Craigan, Green's autodidactic hero, "was reading the works of Dickens, over and over again" (242). Similarly, though more sinisterly, Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* (1934) ends with its protagonist, Tony Last, condemned to purgatory in the Amazon and the perpetual rereading of the works of Dickens: "tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. Let us read *Little Dorrit* again" (389). In *Henry Green and the Writing of His Generation*, Michael North diagnoses Craigan's reading as an attempt "to exert control over a disintegrating life" (67). Jed Esty, in *A Shrinking Island*, interprets Last's reading similarly, as

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[2] Opportunistic as it undoubtedly was, *The Real David Copperfield* nonetheless depended on a critical position of which there was already precedent within Dickens' scholarship. Conceived as "the restoration of the novel written by Dickens for publication in 1850 to what appears to be its natural length and plot", Graves' text is a logical response to Chesterton's assertion that: "In all the Dickens novels can be seen, so to speak, the original thing that they were before they were novels" (Graves 6; Chesterton 65).

"a forced diet of the fetishised markers of a vanishing Englishness" (222). Craigan's provincial England of the artisan and Last's rural England of the aristocrat have atrophied; confined to memory, these lost Englands are symbolically evoked in Green and Waugh's novels by intertextual references to Dickens as a petrified embodiment of a more stable past: "times were different now" laments Craigan, having "lost his taste for Dickens", "to when that man lived" (338). Readers of Dickens might, as Ashbery avers, have found *Living*'s characters familiar but, the novel suggests, that familiarity would run against the grain of the otherwise alienating reality of twentieth-century England. Indeed, that Dickens was outdated seemed a consensual point among novelists when, in 1936, Sean O'Faoláin turned to him for Derek Verschoyle's *The English Novelists: A Survey of the Novel by Twenty Contemporary Novelists*. Dickens, O'Faoláin argues,

> hitched his star to the wagon of conventional thought and conventional morality, one of the shakiest wagons ever known. He became the novelist of bourgeois thought, and in the drawing room with its plush overmantel and its lace curtains he lay side by side with family Bible on the plush table-cover. He became the creature of his times – Hard Times (147).

Acknowledging that he "made an excellent bargain with his own difficult age" and describing him as "the great comforter of the nineteenth century", O'Faoláin confines Dickens to history: "unhappily for him the nineteenth century is gone" (151; 148).

"Criticism", declared David Cecil in *Early Victorian Novelists*, first published in 1935, "is always written in the context established by the literary taste prevalent in its period" (viii). "The literary taste prevalent in 1934, among young people with intellectual and artistic aspirations", he continues, "was set by the so-called Bloomsbury school, who were in violent reaction against the moralistic, insular, and philistine aspects of Victorianism" (viii). The above confirms this; yet throughout the nineteen thirties, as throughout his life (as Sir Leslie, even, had noted), Dickens was still being read. In *The Thirties*, Malcolm Muggeridge reports how, in 1933 and in response to "an unexpected offer by the *Daily Herald* to provide registered readers with a set of Dickens's novels, in sixteen volumes and worth four guineas,

for eleven shillings", "the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express* and *News Chronicle* offered their readers sets of Dickens's works for ten shillings, and disposed of 120,000, 124,000 and 65,000 sets respectively at an average loss of £1,200 per 10,000 sets" (85-86). Orwell, offering "Bookshop Memories" in 1936, had written that "it is always fairly easy to sell Dickens" and Muggeridge's incredible numbers suggest that he may even have helped to sell newspapers (512). Green's working man may have stopped reading Dickens, but there is little evidence that his rejection was typical of his class. Jonathan Rose, in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, argues that "Charles Dickens, though out of fashion among modernist critics, in fact passed the only true test of literary greatness – borrowings from the public library" (426). Similarly, Richard Aldington cites the Everyman Library as evidence for Dickens' continuing popularity in *Four English Portraits*: "of the thousand and more titles of this 'best collection of general literature extant in English', the book with the highest annual sale is *David Copperfield*" (189). The above critics were generally aware of Dickens' continuing popularity – Woolf, for example, figures Dickens as "an institution, a monument, a public thoroughfare trodden dusty by a million feet" – but dismissed it as a consequence of ignorance (often, as for Woolf, the ignorance of youth) or poor taste on the part of the ill-educated masses: Dickens "is abandoned to the great backward public of the depressed provinces and semi-residential suburbs", as Graves has it ("David Copperfield" 76; *The Real David Copperfield* 6). Ford addresses this gap in his survey of critical reactions to Dickens, explaining: "In the instance of Dickens, as the circulation records of any library can show, it has usually been difficult to say that his work is not read at all. It has been affirmed, instead, that he is not read by those who know better" (426). Having cited a typical Mass Observation account of library borrowings (from Tottenham, in 1946) in his history of post-war *Austerity Britain*, David Kynaston comments: "the inclusion of Dickens [who was the second most frequently borrowed author] remind[s] one that this was a world nearer to the Victorian era than to the early twenty-first century" (211). Kynaston's analysis recalls

O'Faoláin's in the conflation of Dickens with his century but he draws the opposite conclusion and thereby inscribes a qualifying class element onto the novelist's Thirties rejection of Dickens: "the nineteenth century is gone", it seems, *for some*. This is where Orwell fits into the debate; whereas "nearly every modern intellectual has gone over to some or other form of totalitarianism", he would write in "Charles Dickens", "the common man is still living in the mental world of Dickens" (55). Orwell confirms O'Faoláin's rendering of Dickens as a "comforter" – "from the Marxist or Fascist point of view, nearly all that Dickens stands for can be written off as 'bourgeois morality'" – only to add the universalising caveat that: "in moral outlook no one could be more 'bourgeois' than the English working classes" (55). If the discussion of Charles Dickens' diminishing critical reputation exposes the gap between the intellectual and the common man, then Orwell's "Charles Dickens" is an attempt to bridge that gap.

In "Rudyard Kipling" (1942), Orwell describes Kipling's continued "existence" as "a sign of the emotional overlap between the intellectual and the ordinary man" (159). Kipling's continued existence is evidenced by his "peculiar position of having been a byword for fifty years" and Dickens is in the same position (150). As Robert Douglas-Fairhurst notes in *Becoming Dickens*: "no writer, of any period, is more closely identified with the time and place in which he lived, which is why 'Victorian' and 'Dickensian' have become more or less interchangeable terms" (3-4). Orwell may be an intellectual; inescapably so, as he had (half) admitted in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "I am a degenerate modern semi-intellectual who would die if I did not get my early morning cup of tea and my *New Statesman* every Friday" (184). But with "Charles Dickens" Orwell "hitches his star" to Dickens' and, in so doing, seeks to invoke a set of nineteenth-century values and thereby inscribe himself *within* England's masses. Considered as such, the professed amateurism of "Charles Dickens" becomes important. In a letter to Humphry House, Orwell concedes: "You evidently know much more about him than I do. I have never really 'studied' him, merely read and enjoyed him" ("11

April 1940" 140). Similarly, in "In Defence of the Novel" (1936) – where *David Copperfield* is cited as an exemplar of the form – Orwell had made an incidental expression of preference for amateur criticism: "it would be a good thing if more novel-reviewing were done by amateurs" (521). With the Dickensians, Orwell distances himself from the literary criticism which had tended to dismiss Dickens and thereby associates himself with "the half-educated" masses who simply enjoy Dickens. It is relevant, then, to note that Orwell does not deal in straight literary criticism, but in "semi-sociological literary criticism" – which Alex Zwerdling defines as "sociological analysis that concentrates on the question of the writer's audience, and [for which] the consistent standard of judgment is wide appeal" – and that there are, perhaps because of this, a number of critical problems with Orwell's reading of Dickens which are worth pursuing for the way they reveal the intention behind Orwell's "Dickens"[3] (*Orwell and the Left* 43).

Josephine Guy, employing the philosopher Richard Rorty's term in *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel*, has warned against critical "doxography", which she defines as the "reconstruction of nineteenth-century history in terms of the analogies which can be made with modern, twentieth-century views" (36). According to Guy, criticism of the Victorian "social-problem" novel (Guy prefers this term to "condition-of-England", though she discusses the same group of novels – *Hard Times*, *Mary Barton*, *North and South* and *Two Nations* – as is generally grouped under that heading) is invariably spoiled by a slide into doxography:

> accounts of the social-problem novels, despite their wide theoretical and methodological differences, all possess the same limitation: they identify their sub-genre historically, but they nevertheless judge the individual novels by reference to concepts or criteria to which the Victorians would have had little or no access (67).

[3] While he was writing *Inside the Whale*, Orwell described the collection, in a letter to his agent Leonard Moore (14 July 1939), as constituted by "sort of literary-sociological essays"; having been published, he wrote to Geoffrey Gorer (3 April 1940) that it was a "kind of semi-sociological literary criticism" (*XI* 365; *XII* 137). It will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

Guy concludes that criticism of the social-problem novels is tainted by "an implication that there was another (and much better) novel about problems in mid-nineteenth-century society which Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell, Kinsley or Disraeli *could* have written, but for some reason failed to do so" (67). Against this implication, Guy positions her own criticism in defence of the novels which these writers *did write*. Through exploring what Michel Foucault would call "the epistemic foundations" of Victorian society, Guy seeks to "define the intellectual boundaries or categories within which it was possible to think" and, in a sense, this is what Orwell sets out to do in "Charles Dickens" (71).

The essay begins with the claim that "Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing" and Orwell continues by situating his study against two such examples of critical theft: G.K. Chesterton's, which "credits Dickens with his own highly individual brand of medievalism", and T.A. Jackson's "spirited efforts to turn Dickens into a blood-thirsty revolutionary" (20). Beginning in admonishment, Orwell exhibits his awareness of the vulnerability of the (dead) writer's reputation to revisionist criticism similar to Guy's "doxography". Orwell even regards "the burial of [Dickens'] body in Westminster Abbey" as "a species of theft" (20). "It may be, in fact", suggests John Rodden in *The Politics of Literary Reputation*, "that the great dead writer, the posthumous literary figure, is the type most amenable to idealization as a secure model" (85). Moreover, and precisely through his perceptiveness in highlighting the perspectival nature of much Dickens criticism, Orwell is acute in illuminating the real limitations of Dickens' work: "he does not write about the proletariat […] his real subject-matter is the London commercial bourgeoisie and their hangers-on – lawyers, clerks, tradesmen, innkeepers, small craftsmen and servants" (21). The essay's clear-sightedness on this point has won Orwell praise from Dickensians. Writing in 1955, Ford praised "Charles Dickens" as "the most perceptive essay" on Dickens' "position": "Orwell is one of the few critics who has recognised some of the complexities and contradictions of the social criticism in Dickens' novels and yet retained a respect and

love for them" (237). Introducing *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, John Gross credits Orwell for making "the traditional picture less fuzzy and more convincing by stressing Dickens's *petit bourgeois* prejudices and limitations" (x). These representative commendations refer, really, only to the very first part of Orwell's essay in which he takes explicit issue with other treatments of his subject: dishing out "rapping[s …] on the knuckles", as Gross puts it (xi). Neither has much to say on the detail of Orwell's reading of Dickens but, towards the end of his essay, Orwell suggests: "by this time anyone who is a lover of Dickens, and who has read as far as this, will probably be angry with me" (47). That they were not – as will be discussed below – or are not – as above – seems a consequence more of who wrote it, and when, than because of any critical merit the essay itself may possess. "Charles Dickens" may be "celebrated", as D.J. Taylor submitted when introducing it into the Orwell Prize's "Orwell vs. Dickens: The greatest political writer" debate in 2010, but it is, in truth, a largely derivative essay, spoiled by factual misreadings of key Dickens texts from which a partially false argument is then built. Even the point which has won Orwell most credit can be applied, at least in Terry Eagleton's view, to Dickens' contemporaries as well as it can to Dickens. "The major fiction of Victorian society", he writes in *Criticism and Ideology*, "was the product of the petty bourgeoisie" (125). He explains: "Ambiguously placed within the social formation, the petty bourgeoisie was able on the whole to encompass a richer, more significant range of experience than those writers securely lodged within a single class" (125). Because of these limitations, Orwell offers little new or valuable insight into Charles Dickens; nonetheless, when the derivations and errors are traced and the generality of his insight explored, "Charles Dickens" offers a key insight into the nature of Orwell's engagement with the condition-of-England question, and of the form of his identification with England, in this central period of his career.

It is hard to know how much Dickens criticism Orwell read prior to writing the essay; his profession of relative ignorance to House, indeed, suggests it to be negligible. The essay

refers only to Jackson, Chesterton, Roberts, and Forster, whose *Life of Charles Dickens* he must have read as he quotes from Dickens' "autobiographical fragment". He may then have read Forster's paraphrase of Hippolyte Taine's criticism of his friend:

> His imagination is at once too vivid and not sufficiently large. Its tenacious quality, and the force and concentration with which his thoughts penetrate onto the details he desires to apprehend, form limits to his knowledge, confine him to single traits, and prevent his sounding all the depths of a soul. He seizes on one attitude, trick, expression, or grimace; sees nothing else; and keeps it always unchanged (297).

This summary, claims Forster, "condenses with strict accuracy what is said by M. Taine, and has been repeated *ad nauseum* by others, professing admirers as well as open detractors"; Orwell's view, which is alternately admiring and detracting, is equally accurately covered by Forster's gloss (297). When Orwell writes, for example, that "in the power of evoking visual images [Dickens] has probably never been equalled" he qualifies it with the addition that "in a way the concreteness of his vision is a sign of what he is missing" and concludes: "after all, that is what the merely casual onlooker always sees – the outward appearance, the non-functional, the surfaces of things" (42). As evidence, Orwell cites "Doyce's 'invention' in *Little Dorrit*" and he describes it in terms which check off the points in Forster's summary of Taine:

> It is represented as something extremely ingenious and revolutionary, "of great importance to his country and his fellow-creatures", and it is also an important minor link in the book; yet we are never told what the "invention" is! On the other hand, Doyce's physical appearance is hit off with the typical Dickens touch; he has a peculiar way of moving his thumb, a way characteristic of engineers. After that, Doyce is firmly anchored in one's memory; but, as usual, Dickens has done it by fastening on something external (44).

While Orwell holds Dickens, who famously styled himself "The Inimitable", to be "a writer who can be imitated, up to a certain point", he also submits, after Taine, that

> the thing that cannot be imitated is his fertility of invention, which is invention not so much of characters, still less of "situations", as of turns of phrase and concrete details. The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the unnecessary detail (48).

In another odd note of recognition, Orwell cites as evidence for this *exactly* the same anecdote from the *Pickwick Papers* as was posited by Wiliam S. Lilly in illumination of an

identical point, as "characteristic" of Dickens' obsession with details (Orwell 48-9; Lilly 22-3). Overall, though perhaps with the exception of its initial interventions, Orwell's essay is a compound of similarly conventional critical judgments: Justin McCarthy had, for example, called Dickens "ignorant" in the *Westminster Review*, long before Orwell: "It is all very well meant, but very ignorant", wrote McCarthy of Dickens' attack on society in an essay, "Modern Novelists: Charles Dickens", of 1864 (*Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage* 452). Orwell's key claim – for Dickens' permanency – was a quantitatively verifiable, if not a critically celebrated, fact by 1940 but could equally have been lifted from almost any contemporary review of almost any of his books. *Fraser's Magazine* claimed in review of *David Copperfield*, for example: "there is not a fireside in the kingdom where the cunning fellow has not contrived to secure a corner for himself as one of the dearest, and, by this time, one of the oldest friends of the family" (244). This lack of originality could be a function, as Q.D. Leavis thought it, of Orwell's repeated disavowals of contemporary literary circles, a deliberate snub to modern critical conventions; it could bespeak Orwell's limitations as a critic; it could be, finally, that he is simply reiterating a truth about Dickens that *is there*, but had been forgotten or obfuscated by unnecessary critical posturing[4]. The truth is probably a mixture of these, but whatever the reason for Orwell's recourse to an older critical orthodoxy it is instructive as to his conception of the interrelation of past and present in communal life in England and it is notable in this context that the essay is written almost entirely in the second person. This has the effect of turning Orwell's observations on Dickens away from critical specificity and into general truths – which, in a sense, they were. Orwell's "Dickens" is not just his own, but a composite of other "Dickenses"; many of these are taken from the nineteenth-century and thus illuminate Orwell's faith in the continued relevance of nineteenth-century wisdom to twentieth-century social-problems. It is easy to

[4] "He can see through the Marxist theory", writes Leavis in review of *Inside the Whale* "and being innately decent (he displays and approves of bourgeois morality) he is disgusted with the callous theorizing inhumanity of the pro-Marxists" (174).

see then why Dickens lovers were not angered by Orwell's prelapsarian "Dickens": seen in the context of the progressively hostile Dickens criticism outlined above, Orwell's criticisms of Dickens are familiar and, therefore, benign. That they should be untroubled by the factual errors by which the essay is spoiled is harder to explain and will make it expedient to shortly dismiss Dickens himself entirely and focus, instead, only on Orwell's "Dickens". This is especially necessary because, turning to Orwell's mistakes, the "Charles Dickens" discussed below has no concrete reality and instead exists symbolically in Orwell's essay and in his war-time thinking about "England".

Complaining that "in Dickens's novels anything in the nature of work happens off-stage", Orwell echoes Gissing's familiar criticism of Dickens' "noticeable omission of the workman at war with capital", which he submits as a characteristic failure (Orwell 41; Gissing 201). In an otherwise commendatory letter, House challenges this point. Dickens, he objects, "did in spite of you & Gissing describe work, trains and railway" ("April 3 1940" 4). "I've started from the opposite end from you", he says, of his own study, "by saying how very technical and detailed D. is in describing many jobs, as compared with novelists before him & contemporary" (5). Responding, Orwell backtracks:

> The point you took up, about Dickens not writing about work, was one I did not express very well. What I should have said was that when Dickens gives a detailed description of someone working, it is always someone seen from the outside and usually a burlesque (like Wemmick or Venus) (140).

This is very different to the point's presentation in the essay where it had been explicated with an anecdotal reference to a Tolstoy fable in which hard-handed workers are granted admission to a village from which soft-handed gentlefolk are excluded. Such a situation, Orwell claims, "would be hardly intelligible to Dickens; all his heroes have soft hands" (37). This is not right. Pip, for example, has, at least in the early part of *Great Expectations*, remarkably, and shamefully, "coarse" hands:

> "He calls the knaves Jacks, this boy!" said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. "And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!"

> I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair (Bk. 1, Ch. 8).

Compounding his error in remarks on dialect, Orwell describes Pip, specifically, as an "absurdity": "brought up by people speaking broad Essex, he talks upper-class English from his earliest childhood" (38). Leaving aside the problem of narrative framing, clearly, as the above also indicates, Pip's childhood English is less "upper-class" than Orwell allows. Reflecting on this, his first encounter with Estella, Pip "determined to ask Joe why he had ever taught me to call those picture-cards Jacks, which ought to be called knaves" and "wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too" (Bk. 1, Ch. 8). Dickens, Orwell continues,

> likes a bourgeois exterior and a bourgeois (not aristocratic) accent. One curious symptom of this is that he will not allow anyone who is to play a heroic part to speak like a working man. A comic hero like Sam Weller, or a merely pathetic figure like Stephen Blackpool, can speak with a broad accent, but the *jeune premier* always speaks the then equivalent of B.B.C. (38).

Given the above, this could be regarded as another example of the propensity towards "plausible yet specious generalisation" for which Williams chastises Orwell in *Culture and Society* (286). Before going too far down this road, however, it is worth noting that Orwell's friend William Empson would make an almost identical error in regard to *Oliver Twist*. Oliver, according to Empson and "unlike the other orphans, who are represented as talking some kind of dialect, […] talks the stilted grammar of a hero of Scott or a 'juvenile lead' in Victorian melodrama, which he has had no opportunity to learn" (13). With this "first example of his symbolism", Empson suggests, Dickens "meant that all the little boys in the orphanage were being robbed of their English heritage, and he thought the best way to make his readers feel so was to make them imagine one of their own boys in such a place" (13). For Empson, then, Oliver's symbolic well-spokenness is evidence that "Dickens was deeply in tune with his audience" (14). Dickens' audience is implied by Empson's account to be one concerned with manners and accents which are, in turn, imbued with communal, national significance. It is a

compelling point. However, in a note appended to its explication, Empson relates his discovery that Dickens, in fact, "made precautions" against making this contrast too blatant "by using reported speech for all the charity-boys, the hero included. The only sentence from any child in the orphanage is the demand for More, which Oliver has been deputed to speak"; Empson concludes that "Dickens is an author we are prone to re-write in our minds" (14). This apology, which covers Orwell as well as Empson, confirms Woolf's characterisation of Dickens as "everybody's writer" and, even if it does not go so far as to validate Orwell's "Dickens" as a communal – or semi-sociological – entity, goes some way towards excusing Orwell's apparent desire to read him as such. Before and after Orwell's intervention, most Dickens criticism can be seen as working, in some way, to create a "Charles Dickens". Orwell's creation is ultimately the most interesting aspect of his essay and its creative impulse has tended thus to draw the majority of critical focus.

Orwellians, for the most part and in contradistinction to the Dickensians, are generally concerned with the end of the essay where Orwell's apparent awareness of Dickens' vulnerability to doxographic criticism seems to have diminished. Having, in Rodden's analysis, "opened 'Charles Dickens' railing at those who 'stole' Dickens", Orwell "manages by its end to appropriate Dickens for himself" (155). The essay's end begins with the remark that "when one reads any strongly individual piece of writing, one has the impression of seeing a face somewhere behind the page" and concludes with the famous description of the face Orwell sees behind Dickens' pages:

> It is the face of a man of about forty, with a small beard and a high colour. He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry* – in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls (56).

This portrait, in George Woodcock's view, "might be a portrait of Orwell himself: he seems to be projecting onto Dickens and his age the qualities which other people recognised in

him" (189). After Woodcock, Bernard Crick notes that this description "is so often taken as an unconscious self-portrait" and adds, parenthetically, his own view: "(as surely it is)" (386). Alok Rai's *Orwell and the Politics of Despair* opens with a discussion of "Orwell-as-Dickens", a persona drawn from the above description, and argues that "Orwell's image of Dickens *is* near enough to the truth about himself to be seductive"; Rai, a more careful critic than Woodcock, decides that the identification is "ultimately misleading" (1). Rai is equally suspicious later in his introduction of "Why I Write" when, having claimed that Orwell "is clearly 'inviting' us to read him in a particular way", he submits: "serious criticism must decline the invitation; it must preserve its distance and independence, its right to scrutinise critically the invitation itself" (7). This is a timely warning since it seems perfectly clear that Orwell's portrait *does* contain elements of identification; it can be read as an invitation, is surely intended to be read as an invitation, and must, as a result be scrutinised (within this, however, it is worth noting that Orwellians too are generally silent about the errors present in Orwell's essay: since these work to Dickens' disadvantage, it is not clear that Orwell would want to be read as *identical* to his subject). Though he argues that it is an inaccurate one, Rai does not doubt that the face of Dickens *is* a self-portrait; similarly, I want to understand it as such but in a wider sense: as part of a group portrait – of a group into which Orwell is trying to assimilate himself. There are two reasons for this. The first is that any identification between Orwell and Dickens does not occur at the individual level; even if it were to do so, it would be a selectively (and often erroneously) drawn Dickens with whom Orwell sought to identify. Second, having established the character of Orwell's "Dickens", it is clear that what remains by the essay's identifying end is not the individual genius of Dickens, but a generic "Dickens". And it is with this typical figure – a symbol, ultimately, of the holistic "English Genius" of *The Lion and the Unicorn* – that Orwell seeks to identify himself.

The group aspect of Orwell's identifying impulse is supported by the "autobiographical sketch" he provided in a letter to Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft

later in 1940 for inclusion in their *Twentieth Century Authors* ("17 April 1940" 147). Here, Orwell associates himself with a whole cast of authors:

> The writers I care most about and never grow tired of are Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, Dickens, Charles Reade, Samuel Butler, Zola, Flaubert and, among modern writers, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence (148).

More selectively, he adds: "the modern writer who has influenced me most is Somerset Maugham, whom I admire immensely for his power of telling a story straightforwardly and without frills" (148). The selection of Maugham troubles the general impulse to read the end of "Charles Dickens" as a self-portrait since Orwell's "Dickens" absolutely lacks the power of succinctness identified in Maugham's writing. This is not, however, to disavow the influence of Dickens and it is notable that Orwell's sketch ends with an expression of his generally anachronistic tastes:

> Outside my work the thing I care most about is gardening, especially vegetable gardening. I like English cookery and English beer, French red wines, Spanish white wines, Indian tea, strong tobacco, coal fires, candle light and comfortable chairs. I dislike big towns, noise, motor cars, the radio, tinned food, central heating and "modern" furniture (148).

Orwell presents himself, here, as hostile to his own age and there is a notable strain of such hostility in his Dickens too. Seen, at the essay's end "fighting" and "angry", Dickens is hostile in a more genial sense too. Having paraphrased Gissing's remark that "Dickens nowhere describes a railway journey with anything like the enthusiasm he shows in describing journeys by stage-coach", Orwell generalises the erroneous, as House had pointed out, point:

> In nearly all of his books one has a curious feeling that one is living in the first quarter of the nineteenth century […] several of the inventions and discoveries which have made the modern world possible […] first appeared in Dickens's lifetime, but he scarcely notes them in his books (43-4).

This backwards-looking atmosphere is part of what Orwell admires in Dickens – he will present it as common in *Coming Up for Air* – and it is essential to understanding Orwell's portrait of Dickens.

At the very end of the essay Orwell summarises the face he sees behind the pages in general terms as that of the "nineteenth-century liberal". Outlined in his introduction to *British Pamphleteers*, which he co-edited with Reginald Reynolds in 1948, Orwell presents the character of the English liberal as conforming to an essentially timeless type:

> links in a chain of thought which stretches from the slave revolts of antiquity, through various peasant risings and heretical sects of the Middle Ages, down to the Socialists of the nineteenth century and the Trotskyists and Anarchists of out present day (109).

The liberal is a point of continuity between the ages. Thus Dickens, as an exemplary nineteenth-century liberal, is a perpetually relevant figure and a link to the past. This perpetual relevance – which has been announced throughout the essay – is a central part of the apparent "identification" with which the essay ends and it is notable, in this context, that the ending includes a peculiar slippage in tense. The "nineteenth-century liberal" is defined as "a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which *are now contending for our souls*" (*emphasis added*). The nineteenth-century morphs into "now", a morphing justified by the timeless character of the liberal, and by this process "Dickens" becomes a link between past and present. Further, the final paraphrase includes a similarly instructive widening of scope as the individual face behind the page becomes that of the liberal as "a type". The type's value is granted universality by the first-person plural possessive, which serves to align the "liberal" as an individual within a broader, social context and, by implication, this also presents "us" as a class whose souls need protecting. Thus the identification evident within Orwell's Dickens does not operate on an individual level: less "Orwell-as-Dickens" than "Orwell-as-Liberal". This may depend on a peculiarly doxographic frame of reference, but Orwell's thinking about the present in 1940 is, as *The Lion and the Unicorn* repeatedly shows, inseparable from his thinking about the past and this is how he would characterise his (and our) relationship with Dickens when he stood up, "nervous in the presence of experts", as a very apt choice to address the Dickens Fellowship at their annual dinner in May 1941 ("The Dickens Fellowship Conference" 167).

"It is quite possible", Orwell had written in "Charles Dickens", "that in private life Dickens was just the kind of insensitive egoist that Mr. Bechhofer Roberts makes him appear" but, he rejoins, "in his published work there is implied a personality quite different from this, a personality which has won him far more friends than enemies" (21). Introduced by Compton Mackenzie, "as one of the few younger literary men who had recognised the greatness of Dickens", it was in the spirit of friendship that Orwell came amongst Dickens' firmest friends ("The Dickens Fellowship Conference" 167). The 1938 meeting of the fellowship, cited above, had also been the occasion of a reading from a letter to Enid Dickens Hawksley from Eleanor Roosevelt:

> Many happy years were spent reading your grandfather's books when I was young, and, now I am older, I realise what a great crusader he was. He was one of the earliest crusaders for social welfare (17).

Having drawn a partly composite and partly doxographic Dickens in his essay, it was this crusading Dickens that Orwell presented to the Fellowship. He said: "The ghost of Dickens was fighting for us today, for Dickens was in our inner consciousness putting our innermost thoughts into words and action" (167). Orwell's speech has not survived. This quote comes from the summary of his address printed in *The Dickensian* in September 1940. As a result, it is given in reported speech and in the past tense when what Orwell must have said is "The ghost of Dickens *is* fighting for us today, for Dickens *is* in our inner consciousness putting out innermost thoughts into words and action". Louis James, in his study of mid-Victorian literature, *Fiction for the Working Man*, describes the period as providing "a blueprint of many cultural problems that face modern society" (12). Morag Shiach, aware of the doxographic pitfalls of such an interpretation, writes, in *Discourse on Popular Culture*, that James' "metaphor is nonetheless a useful one: a blueprint is a coded representation which constrains the development of a final product" (71). This is how Orwell's claims for Dickens' presence within "our inner consciousness" should be understood. "Our inner consciousness" is coded and Dickens has written the code.

When hop-picking, Orwell reports to the Fellowship, "he had met men who, although they had not read the book nonetheless knew all about *Oliver Twist*; they knew it instinctively and felt that the author had struck a memorable blow on their behalf" (167). "Like the bible", Orwell claims in "Bookshop Memories",

> [Dickens] is widely known at second hand. People know by hearsay that Bill Sykes was a burglar and that Mr. Micawber had a bald head, just as they know by hearsay that Moses was found in a basket of bulrushes and saw the "back parts" of the Lord (512).

"A music-hall comedian can", he writes in "Charles Dickens", "go on the stage and impersonate Micawber or Mrs Gamp with a fair certainty of being understood, although not one in twenty of the audience had ever read a book of Dickens's right through" (48). Dickens' continued presence in twentieth-century England is analogous to our relationship with the past selves represented by our photographs. The photograph contains features that remain identifiable, if changed, today because the code that oversaw their arrangement in the photograph remains active in the later self. Contrary to the Dickens of O'Faoláin, Green and Waugh, this is how Orwell's "Dickens" operates; he does so on a social (rather than an individual) level, and the social benefit of that collectivising operation is evident in Orwell's Dickensian novel, *Coming Up for Air*.

.2.

"Under the spell of Charles Dickens": *Coming Up for Air* and Orwell's comedic common man

There are hints of Dickens present throughout Orwell's early writings. In the very beginning of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, he introduces the cast of ghoulish lodgers with whom he shared the *Hotel des Trois Moineaux*: "a gathering place for eccentric people – people who have fallen into solitary, half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal" (7). According to Raymond Williams, Dickens' method of recognition was material: "In very many cases", writes Williams in *The Country and the City*, "persons materialise, so to say, marked by some memorable physical feature, a kind of instant tag which is its own form of recognition, and by some idiosyncratic trick of speech which, quickly heard and picked up, marks them off in a functional identity" (6-7). Orwell's descriptions, in which characters are paired with memorable, defining eccentricities, clearly take the grotesques of Dickens for their model: the Rougiers are "an old ragged dwarfish couple", neither of whom "had taken off their clothes for four years"; "Henri's peculiarity was that he did not speak, except for the purposes of work, literally for days together" (7). The "joke" between *Burmese Days*' Flory and his native friend Dr Veraswami (whose name's Dickensian notes are made explicit when he is rechristened Very Slimy), "that the British Empire was an aged female patient of the doctor's", is of the same provenance (35). Orwell is even guilty of absurdities of dialect identical to those for which he unfairly condemns Dickens. In *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Dorothy is picked up by three tramps. Of her two male rescuers, the narrator notes that Charlie's "voice and manner were rather sullen, and his accent much baser than Nobby's" and whereas Nobby continues throughout the hop-picking episode as Dorothy's protector, Charlie absconds before it properly begins (85). Further, Orwell intersperses documentary detail drawn from his own experience into the narrated events of Dorothy's life. Robert Lee writes, in *Orwell's Fiction*, of the hop-picking scenes for example, that the narrator "loses

sight of Dorothy; Orwell seems more interested in the mechanics of hop-picking" (27). The same is true of the narrative's encounter with Mrs. Creevy's suburban private school and the best example here is the interjection – "there are, by the way, vast numbers of private schools" – which begins a rant against the iniquities of this type of education (210). This interjection, as "by the way" signals, does not come from the narrator, but from an external thinker – from Orwell himself. Interventions like this have led critics to look at these episodes (in isolation from the rest of the novel) "for what they reveal about Orwell's attitudes toward life in the hop-fields, life down and out in London, and life in a public school" (Lee 39). By structuring, and then invading, his novel in this way, however, Orwell is merely following Dickens. Mrs. Creevy's Ringwood House Academy For Girls is the equivalent of Wackford Squeers' Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickelby* and, to paraphrase Chesterton's remarks on Dickens' novel, Ringwood House does not exist to tell us anything about Dorothy. Rather Dorothy exists entirely in order to tell us about Ringwood House[5].

Chesterton's introduction of Dotheboys Hall here is intended to illustrate Dickens' progression from *Nickelby* to *Dombey and Son*, which, for him, "represents a break so important as to necessitate our casting back to a summary and a generalisation" (64). *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell's fourth novel, is a similar break. A transitional moment in his career, *Coming Up for Air* has been described by Jeffrey Meyers as

> both a synthetic and seminal book, gathering the themes that had been explored in the poverty books of the thirties and anticipating the cultural essays and political satires of the next decade ("Orwell's Apocalypse" 69).

It retains a Dickensian inflexion, but this is much more nuanced than the inclusion of Dickensian imitations or the Dickensian polemic with which Orwell's early oeuvre is marked. Orwell wrote *Coming Up for Air* while he was preparing for his essay on Dickens in the winter of 1938. Orwell had been sent to Morocco to convalesce after a stint in hospital and his wife

[5] "Dotheboys Hall does not exist to tell us anything about Nicholas Nickelby. Rather Nicholas Nickelby exists entirely in order to tell us about Dotheboys Hall" (Chesterton 67).

Eileen wrote back to England requesting books: "we wonder whether you would […] send us *Martin Chuzzlewit* & *Barnaby Rudge* in the ordinary Everyman edition […]. We had *Our Mutual Friend* with us but we are now competent to pass the most searching examination on it" (262-63). *Coming Up for Air*'s relative sophistication is a product of his engagement with the more considered (if more perspectival) "Charles Dickens" that was to emerge from that reading.

Coming Up for Air tells the story of, and is narrated by, George Bowling, an overweight travelling insurance salesman who lives in the typical London suburb of West Bletchley with his wife Hilda and two children. George grew up in the Thames Valley town of Lower Binfield – which Orwell, as he reports in *Down and Out*, had visited with his tramping companion Paddy – in the early twentieth century and though the events of the novel occur in his present-day England, on the brink of war, this present is continually juxtaposed with the Edwardian England of George's childhood. This juxtaposition is best symbolised by fishing. The great pleasure of George's young life, fishing "is the opposite of war": "as soon as you think of fishing you think of things that don't belong in the modern world" (83; 74). George has not fished since he was sixteen. Formally, the juxtaposition is presented in montage as the events of the present are spliced with childhood memories. "The past is a curious thing", George observes:

> It's with you all the time, I suppose an hour never passes without your thinking of things that happened ten or twenty years ago, and yet most of the time it's got no reality, it's just a set of facts that you've learned, like a lot of stuff in a history book. Then some chance sight or smell, especially smell, sets you going, and the past doesn't merely come back to you, you're actually *in* the past (30).

Much of the novel is spent in this mental state – "*in* the past" – but the relationship works the other way too. George is wrenched out of the past, for example, by the R.A.F.'s accidental bombing of Lower Binfield, to which he has returned on holiday. "There's something grand about the bursting of a big projectile", George announces before concentrating, as above, on the effects of the sensory assault on the mental state:

> What does it sound like? It's hard to say, because what you hear is mixed up with what you're frightened of. Mainly it gives you a vision of bursting metal. You seem to see great sheets of iron bursting open. But the peculiar thing is the feeling it gives you of being suddenly shoved up against reality. It's like being woken up by somebody shying a bucket of water over you. You're suddenly dragged out of your dreams by a clang of bursting metal, and it's terrible, and it's real (219).

The continued intrusions of a seemingly insatiable and inescapable modernity lead George to conclude that "the old life's finished" and critics tend to focus on this conclusion in discussing the novel's message (223). D.J. Taylor, for example, describes *Coming Up for Air* in *A Life* as "nothing less than an elegy for a bygone England" (260). By emphasising the novel's ending, however, such readings have tended to ignore the process of the novel. With *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell strikes a balance between past and present as dialectical forces active upon one another and this process is governed by the same relationship between past and present evident in Orwell's treatment of Dickens – the *nineteenth-century* Liberal who *is* fighting for us. Jeffrey Meyers has neatly captured the centrality of this relationship to *Coming Up for Air*:

> imaginative preservation of the past is the positive core in the novel that survives the present horrors and ultimately conveys the most powerful effect in the book. As Bowling says, "I'm fat but I'm thin inside. Has it ever struck you that there's a thin man [the past] inside every fat man [the present]?", and this preservation of the past in the free minds of helpless yet resisting men was one of Orwell's central concerns" (79-80; Meyers' additions).

Adapting Bowling's self-description in this way, Meyers highlights the unity between the novel's thematic preoccupations and its form: the present and the past inhere *within* the novel's narrating hero.

Writing to Julian Symons, in response to his criticism of the reprinted *Coming Up for Air*, in 1948, Orwell acknowledged: "Of course you are perfectly right about my own character constantly intruding on that of the narrator" and later critics, both hostile and admiring, have made much of this profession ("10 May" 336). "All his novels", writes Woodcock in *The Writer and Politics* "are more or less autobiographical, in that they deal

with the kind of people he has met, or the kind of experiences he has had" and Lloyd and Thomas condone his remark: "Woodcock is surely quite right" (Woodcock 119; *Culture and the State* 170). Williams describes Orwell's early novels as offering "a kind of fictionalised report" and adds that "even the best of them, *Coming Up for Air*, has more of the qualities of the virtuoso reporter […] than of full imaginative realisation. We listen to, and go about with, Orwell's Mr. Bowling; Orwell, for the most part, is evidently present, offering his report" (*Culture and Society*, 280). Critics who have taken this overlap as read, however, have elided the critically rewarding question of Bowling's positioning relative to his author; for Orwell's presence is not "evident" but, and this is far more interesting, disguised. Robert Colls has picked up on the disguising effect of Bowling's physique: "When he says that he is a fifteen-stone man with a thin man on the inside, then we listen because it is the thin one who is doing the talking" ("People's Orwell" 166). Above, Orwell was read *within* rather than as identical to his "Charles Dickens", and this is his relationship to Bowling too. In 1948, Orwell may have regarded authorial intrusion of this type as "a vice […] inherent in writing a novel in the first person, which one should never do" and he repeats this injunction in an essay, also of that year, on George Gissing where his definition of the novel "rules out novels written in the first person" (350). In 1939, though, he clearly felt that such intrusion was acceptable and this relative permissiveness scans neatly as a consequence of his being, at that time, under the spell of Dickens. In "Charles Dickens", Orwell quotes from *David Copperfield* – "No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship […] and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my bosom" – before noting the similarity between the phrasing in the novel and in Dickens' autobiographical fragment (*David Copperfield* 150: ch. 11; qtd. "Charles Dickens" 24). His conventional judgment that "obviously it is not David Copperfield who is speaking, it is Dickens himself" contains none of the reproach with which he would later admonish himself: "I am not a real novelist anyway" ("Charles Dickens" 24; "Letter to Symons" 336).

The nineteenth century left a number of first-person narratives and Orwell shows no desire, here, to deprive them of their status as "novels". Indeed, he rather allowed himself to be influenced by this earlier form.

In *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel*, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth discusses what she calls the "genial consensus of realistic narration" (65). Ermarth is referring here, specifically, to the nineteenth-century novel and makes recourse to Williams' notion of the "knowable community": "part of a traditional method – an underlying stance and approach – that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways" (*The English Novel* 14). For Ermarth, this underlying approach "implies a unity in human experience which assures us that we all inhabit the same world and that the same meanings are available to everyone" and the resultant "narrative perspective" broods "over the realistic work like an energy source" (65; 66-7). Through the assumption of consensus, then, Ermarth's nineteenth-century narrator "represents not an individual consciousness but a collective consciousness" (67). Contrary to Orwell's later maxim, it makes no difference whether the novel is written in the first person or not: the act of narration is a necessarily communal gesture. Moreover, it is communal in a specifically national sense, as Benedict Anderson had argued in *Imagined Communities*. "The idea of a novel", he writes in the first edition, "is analogous to the idea of a nation. Since in a novel two characters who may never meet are held in community through the omnipotent reader"; "Novelists", he continues, "rely on an ability to conjure up an imagined community" (31; 33). Simon Dentith, writing in "Realist Synthesis in the Nineteenth-Century Novel", agrees: "the novel was one of the ways of constructing the national imaginary, the 'imagined community' which is the necessary conceptual counterpart to the material realities of nation-states" (46). When he describes England, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, as "an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same", Orwell calls upon these

ideas (409). His England is an "imagined community" in which diversity and transformation are held alongside identity and continuity by an omnipotent, permanent "energy source". This is, moreover, how Orwell regards Dickens. "In all of Dickens's most characteristic passages", he writes, "his imagination overwhelms everything, like a kind of weed" (49). And the product of Dickens' imaginative energy source "is not so much a series of books it is more like a world" (48). It is, moreover, a world that persists and persists, precisely, through its appeal to commonality and to community:

> in his own age and ours he has been popular chiefly because he was able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man. And it is important that from this point of view people of very different types can be described as "common". In a country like England, in spite of its class-structure, there does exist a certain cultural unity[6] (55)

Written from the perspective of, in Colls' words, "one of the masses", *Coming Up for Air* is a condition-of-England novel in the Dickens tradition precisely as understood by Orwell (167). It engages the past – "his own age"; it comments on the present – "ours": and it explores the interrelation of the two. It is a "comic" expression of "the native decency of the common man". It insists upon "a certain cultural unity": "The dialogue going on within the psyche of Bowling", Roger Sell has argued, "reflects the dialogue going on within Orwell himself, which in turn opens out into what is potentially a very rewarding dialogue with his readers" (*Communicational Criticism* 260). Orwell achieves all of this, primarily, through the first-person narrative within which he disguises himself.

The first aspect of Orwell's narrative disguise – as touched upon by Meyers – is generational: George, unlike Orwell, is a veteran of the First World War. In *The Generation of 1914*, Robert Wohl posits a "generational idea" as inherent to writers too young to have fought in the Great War; this idea, he argues, "feeds on a sense of discontinuity and

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[6] Gissing, by contrast, "wanted to speak not for the multitude, but for the exceptional man, the sensitive man, isolated among barbarians" (348). Whether or not this shift is indicative of Orwell's position in the late 1940s is a discussion for a later chapter, but it is pertinent to the question of his relationship with Dickens at the early part of the decade.

disconnection from the past" (39). Orwell had diagnosed himself as suffering under this idea in a conversation with Richard Rees. Recounting this conversation in "A Fugitive From the Camp of Victory", Rees writes:

> Speaking of the First World War, he said that his generation must be marked forever by the humiliation of not having taken part in it. He had, of course, been too young to take part. But the fact that several million men, some of them not much older than himself, had been through an ordeal which he had not shared was apparently intolerable to him (123).

Orwell's employment of a War veteran as a narrative disguise, then, is a bolder device than critics who note only the Georges' similarity allow. An attempt to disavow the sense of separation by which Wohl, or the humiliation by which he, distinguishes his generation, George allows Orwell to transcend the "generational idea" just as Dickens' ghost has transcended his historical situation.

The second important aspect of Orwell's disguise, and the one in which the mark of Dickens is most evident, is class. Bowling, as Taylor points out, "existed several steps farther down the hierarchical ladder" than the typical Orwellian protagonist, who tends to be "drawn from a social class to which Orwell had some kind of affiliation" (260). This is significant because, an archetypal "hanger-on", Bowling is instead drawn from the class with which Dickens, as Orwell would invoke him, was affiliated and he is deeply aware of his social position as part of the "the common herd" of "Tories, yes-men, and bumsuckers" with whom he shares West Bletchley's Hesperides Estate (16). Hanging-on in this sense means, though, that Bowling has also managed to cling-on in a positive, moral sense: Orwell's "chief hope for the future", as declared to House, "is that the common people have never parted company with their moral code" (141). "Still living in the mental world of Dickens", the "common man" – Tory, yes-man and bumsucker as he may be – continues to share Dickens' "bourgeois morality" ("Charles Dickens" 55). When he claims to House, then, that Dickens had "a moral nose" and, as a result, "without the slightest understanding of Socialism etc., would have seen at a glance that there is something wrong with a regime that needs a

pyramid of corpses every few years", we can attach a similar sense to his "common man" (141). George Bowling has a moral nose too: he exemplifies the decency of the common man expressed, as by Dickens, in a "comic" form. This is how *Coming Up for Air* expresses it too and in reading the comic significance of George as Orwell's narrative fat suit it is instructive to consider, also, H.G. Wells' 1910 novel *The History of Mr. Polly*. "Of course the book was bound to suggest Wells watered down", Orwell admitted to Symons, but perhaps this is deliberate since, while "you cannot hold an imaginary conversation with a Dickens character", there are "comic characters that you can imagine yourself talking to – Bloom, for instance, or Pecuchet, or even Wells's Mr. Polly" ("Letter to Symons" 336; "Charles Dickens" 53).

Written, according to Edward Wagenknecht, "under the spell of Charles Dickens", *Mr. Polly* is an acknowledged influence on *Coming Up for Air*: "I have a great admiration for Wells as a writer, and he was a very early influence on me" (*Cavalcade of the English Novel* 469; "Letter to Symons" 336). The similarities between Orwell's novel and Wells' range from the superficial – Miriam Polly and Hilda Bowling share a passion for domestic economy, and hunched shoulders – to the structural – both novels take their shape from the hero's reminiscence of an active past from the perspective of a stagnant present, which then leads them off on defiant holiday. The comparison, indeed, is so obvious that Bowling (who, like Polly and, indeed, Dickens' authorial disguise David Copperfield, is a keen reader) acknowledges it:

> now and again it so happens that you strike a book which is exactly at the mental level you've reached at the moment, so much so that it seems to have been written especially for you. One of them was H. G. Wells's *The History of Mr. Polly* […]. I wonder if you can imagine the effect it had upon me, to be brought up as I'd been brought up, the son of a shopkeeper in a country town, and then to come across a book like that? (120-1).

Critics have tended to stress the texts' differences of tone. Christie Davies quotes Wells' novel in describing Bowling's holiday as a "failed break through the 'paper walls of everyday circumstance'" after which he returns

> to his everyday tasks at Flying Salamander Insurance. (Mr. Polly's neighbour little Clamp of the toyshop was insured with Royal Salamander.) The Royal Salamander has flown, and so has the Wellsian joy and optimism of Mr. Polly's escape ("Making Fun of Work" 94: qting. *Mr. Polly* 183).

The relative turn for the worse that Orwell's novel takes has led John S. Partington, in "George Orwell, H.G. Wells and Journalistic Parricide", to describe *Coming Up for Air* as a "parody" of *Mr. Polly* (45). While Jefferson Hunter is right to state, in "Orwell, Wells, and 'Coming up for Air'", that *Mr. Polly* gave Orwell "a premise to adopt and a conclusion to rewrite", Partington overstates the difference between the two novels in reading *Coming Up for Air* as part of Orwell's wider "parricide" of Wells (43). Partington takes his term from Orwell's 1941 essay "Wells, Hitler and the World State" in which he asks: "But is it not a sort of parricide for a person of my age (thirty-eight) to find fault with H. G. Wells?" (539). He explains:

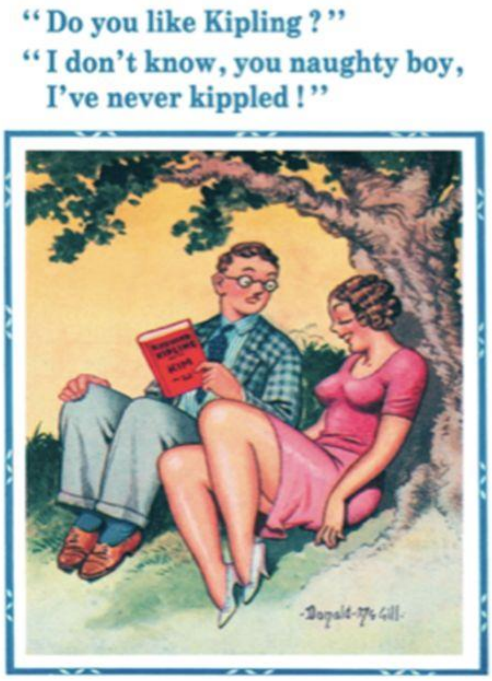
> Thinking people who were born about the beginning of this century are in some sense Wells's own creation. How much influence any mere writer has, and especially a "popular" writer whose work takes effect quickly, is questionable, but I doubt whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much. The minds of all of us, and therefore the physical world, would be perceptibly different if Wells had never existed (539).

Bowling, born about the beginning of the century and described by Orwell in a letter to his friend John Sceats as "rather thoughtful and fairly well-educated", is also in "some sense Wells' own creation"[7] (226). His superficial similarity to Mr. Polly (likewise "inclined to a localised embonpoint") places him, further, within a comic tradition of which Dickens, too, is part (4). Although he also thinks him a communicable comic, Bloom is not a suitable model

[7] This was a fact-finding letter, dated 26 October 1938. Sceats was an insurance agent as Orwell intended Bowling to be (his thoughtfulness being "more plausible with an insurance agent than, say, a commercial traveller") (226). The problem being that Orwell, like Dickens, ignorant about the way things happen, had "only very vague ideas as to what an insurance agent does" (227).

because Orwell had already tried (and failed) to write like Joyce; he never took on Flaubert. But there is a nationalist difference here: Dickens is *in* him while Wells "created" him so Orwell can write like them. *Coming Up for Air* is best read within this innately English comic tradition, which is expanded upon and defined as such in another essay of 1941 – "The Art of Donald McGill".

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell claims that "one can learn a good deal about the spirit of England from the comic coloured postcards that you see in the windows of cheap stationers' shops" (395). These postcards, many of which were the work of McGill, act, for Orwell, as "a sort of diary upon which the English people have unconsciously recorded themselves" (395). In "The Proletarian Writer" – a discussion with Desmond Hawkins for the B.B.C.'s "The Writer in the Witness Box" series, Orwell describes "the comic coloured postcards, especially Donald McGill's" to which he is "particularly attached" as part of "the special literature of the proletariat" and, in fact, there was a literary foundation to McGill's work.



Donald McGill. "Do You Like Kipling?" c.1930.
(*The Kipling Journal* 85.343 [2011]: 67).

According to Arthur Calder-Marshall's appreciative biography *Wish You Were Here*, McGill "drew his material partly from the life around him and also from his two favourite authors, Shakespeare and Dickens" (13). "There was also", he continues, "a continuous tradition of bawdry in the nineteenth-century music-hall and in abusive Valentine cards. Donald McGill inherited this tradition" (13). Calder-Marshall's acknowledgement of McGill's dual influences is presented as if contrary to the Donald McGill portrayed in Orwell's essay, of which Calder-Marshall is dismissive, describing it as "typically Orwellian […] a compound of shrewdness and nonsense" (9). McGill, he continues, "was the master of his manner and thousands had recognised this for many years before Orwell from his intellectual eminence acknowledged McGill's low excellence" (10). His first point is undoubtedly true – the above postcard, as well as evidencing the comic potential of the great author as byword, is believed to date from the 1930s and to have sold 6,000,000 copies – but it is clear that Orwell had started his attempt to marry the intellectual and the vulgar much earlier than 1941[8]. "The Art of Donald McGill" should be read, instead, as confirming Orwell's attempts to transform the "lowly vulgar" into an ideal imagined community. The essay moves outside the categories of the highbrow and vulgar presenting, instead, "something as traditional as Greek tragedy, a sort of sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law which is a part of Western European consciousness" (24). Through McGill, Calder-Marshall links Dickens and the music hall; as Orwell had done. *Coming Up for Air*'s epigram – "He's dead but he won't lie down" – comes from the music hall and the novel must, therefore, be read as part of Orwell's move too[9]. The epigram is an immediate assertion of the novel's comic credentials and through it the reader is instantly submerged into the "sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law" that is, even if it contains a scrawny wife, the novel's milieu.

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[8] This information is taken from the section on Donald McGill in Nigel Rees's *Brewer's Famous Quotations* (301). In 1975, *The Guinness Book of Records* recorded this postcard as the highest selling of all time, with six million copies sold.

[9] This song was written by Will E. Haines, Maurice Beresford and Jimmy Harper for Gracie Fields. It was originally recorded for the film *Look on the Brightside* in 1932; by 1938, when Orwell left England for Morocco, it was being regularly toured accompanied by orchestra.

Just as Dickens "himself took from earlier novelists and developed" and McGill inherited from Dickens the traditional "cult of 'character'", so are we supposed to regard George as a type: "Do you know the active, hearty kind of fat man, the athletic bouncing type that's nicknamed Fatty or Tubby and is always the life and soul of the party?" (8). Of course we do, goes the implied answer: he is "as traditional as Greek tragedy". So is George: "I'm that type. 'Fatty' they mostly call me. Fatty Bowling. George Bowling is my real name" (8). George places himself within a "type", drawn from a wider tradition and, thus, insinuates himself within a specifically English group at once social, literary and, under Anderson's formulation, national.

The nation is imagined, Anderson explains,

> because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (6).

George will never meet, or even hear of, most of the millions of other ordinary chaps who are just like him; yet he knows them, and what they are like. He will never meet any of his readers yet he knows them too. Or, rather, he knows "you", and what "you" are like. He offers a number of images through which he will insist on "your" communion with him. "You know how these streets fester all over the inner-outer suburbs", George assumes when describing Ellesmere Road, where he lives (13). Our knowledge of all sorts of other commonplaces is similarly assumed: "You know the smell churches have"; "You know the kind of holiday"; "you know how people look at you when they're in a car coming towards you" (31; 86; 166). George's whole attitude to his reader is expressed in his gloss of the ageing process: "You know how it is" (142). George knows how it is too and his habitual use of the collective pronoun, coupled with his rhetorical, introductory question works to insinuate his reader into a much wider, but again specifically English, group: "Who does not know the 'comics' of the cheap stationers' windows", asks Orwell at the beginning of "The Art of Donald McGill" (23). Though this question only "*ought* to be rhetorical", Orwell's

insistence that knowledge of the comics *should* be common, as knowledge of Dickens is common, means that George can simultaneously and immediately situate himself, his story and his reader within England's shared socio-literary tradition, within its imagined community.

Further, the specifically comedic *type* to which George adheres also works to teach us about the nature of our community, and about the attitude of straightforward "native decency" that we should take towards it. "A fat man", George tells us, "goes through his life on a different plane, a sort of light-comedy plane" (21). Having put his fatness to forewarning, formal use, then by contextualising the impending episodes of his life as comedic, George invites us to "imagine a fat Hamlet, for instance!" and the explicit distancing of tragedy serves to further enforce the novel's conception of itself as comedy (22). In *Laughter*, his seminal study of comedy, Henri Bergson marks the same dissonance between tragedy and the body. "This is just why the tragic poet is so careful to avoid anything calculated to attract attention to the material side of his heroes", he writes:

> No sooner does anxiety about the body manifest itself than the intrusion of a comic element is to be feared. On this account, the hero in a tragedy does not eat or drink or warm himself. He does not even sit down any more than can be helped. To sit down in the middle of a fine speech would imply that you remembered you had a body (52).

Exemplified by "smacked bottoms", Orwell's comic tradition is a similarly, and intensely, bodily form. Orwell evidences Dickens' place within the comedic tradition in these terms; after quoting a long excerpt from *Pickwick*, Orwell writes: "the unmistakable Dickens touch, the thing that nobody else would have thought of, is the baked shoulder of mutton and potatoes under it" (49). "It is not merely a coincidence", he adds,

> that Dickens never writes about agriculture and writes endlessly about food. He was a Cockney, and London is the centre of the earth in rather the same sense that the belly is the centre of the body (41).

Also a Cockney "(In the Thames Valley the country accents were going out. Except for the farm lads, nearly everyone who was born later than 1890 talked Cockney)", and after

Pickwick and Mr. Polly, George has a (large) body but he is not worried by its needs intruding on his story (98). Rather, he is continually eating – he memorably samples some *ersatz* sausages, "Bombs of filth bursting inside your mouth" – and drinking: "what with a bottle of wine at lunch and another at dinner, and several pints in between, besides a brandy or two, I'd had a bit too much to drink the day before" (26; 195). He even warms himself – "I was standing in front of the empty fireplace, making believe to warm my bum" – and assumes the reader does the same: "the way you do on a summer day" (191). If the novel proceeds on a "light-comedy plane", the needs of the body are its coordinates. These, as Bergson notes, are by their nature vulnerable to laughter and are thus, in his analysis, deeply social for "our laughter is always the laughter of a group" (6). George's awareness of his vulnerability to laughter is similarly social according to Bergson's model and deepens the bond between him and his reader: "You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others" (5). Glen Cavaliero's *The Alchemy of Laughter* – to which Dickens' novels are central – takes a quote from *Laughter* as its epigraph and extends Bergson's conception of comedy as "a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation" into a working theory of "the comedic process" as "collective and remedial" (Bergson 1; Cavaliero 15). Comedy, in Cavaliero's account, is "a process which enlarges human understanding and perspectives"; it is occasioned, he argues, as a response to "personal beliefs and institutional behaviour of an absolutist and authoritarian kind", which he unites in the symbol of the "monolith" (x). "A monolith", Cavaliero explicates, "is a single block of stone, its purpose in one form or another monumental. Human ideas and institutions naturally incline to such a petrifaction. So do human personalities" (3). Comedy, in Cavaliero's analysis, is a means of challenging monoliths; it might be said, given the role of Dickens in this discussion, of *fighting* them. For Orwell, similarly, "Dickens is able to go on being funny because he is in revolt against authority, and authority is always there to be laughed at. There is always room for one more custard pie" (54). George's "light-comedy plane", established by his body,

serves to distinguish him from social monoliths and it sets the trajectory of the novel, which will dissect these monoliths. It will dissect them, moreover, in particularly English terms.

George is a regular bloke and a rank and file member of "The English People". In an essay of that name, written in 1944 but held from publication until 1947, Orwell declared "English political thinking" to be "much governed by the word 'They'" (212). This maxim comes from Orwell's observation, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, that a working man "feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that, and the other" (43). In Wigan, "nobody seemed to know" who "they" were but, in the essay, "they" are simply "the higher-ups" and, in the novel, George is deeply conscious of their presence (*WP* 44; "The English People" 212).

> I'm not what they call "disgustingly" fat (8).
>
> Do you notice how often they have under-sized men for these bullying jobs? (18).
>
> Of course, there's no question that it's coming soon. You can tell how close it is by the cheer-up stuff they're talking about it in the newspaper (22).
>
> When I've mixed with chaps from the upper classes, as I did during the war, I've been struck by the fact that they never really get over that frightful drilling they go through at public schools (67).

George's "you" and the "us" that it, in concert with "Dickens-as-fighter", implies operates in comedic opposition to "them" and, in dissecting this monolithic "they", the novel's comic plane splits it into two factions: "Culture" and "Progress".

The evening we spend with George in West Bletchley is passed first at a meeting of his Left Book Club branch and then in the company of his donnish friend Old Porteous. This is a schematically dichotomous evening and George presents it in such terms: "I suppose that if the local Left Book Club branch represents Progress, old Porteous stands for Culture" (153). The two, as their transformation into proper nouns indicates, are reified, petrified forces in the novel and George is detached from, and scathing in his descriptions of, both. He implies that we are, and that we should be, too: "You know the kind of place", we are told of the venue for the Left Book Club meeting (144). We "know the line of talk" of the speaker also: "These chaps can churn it out by the hour. Just like a gramophone. Turn the handle,

press the button, and it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy" (144-5). Orwell would return to this idea in his proposed preface to *Animal Farm*, "The Freedom of the Press", where he states that "to exchange one orthodoxy for another is not necessarily an advance. The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment" (259). And this image links the two forces, foreshadowing the rejection of Culture. Just as we never hear, specifically, what Progress meant to the Left Book Club speaker, we never learn what Culture means to Old Porteous because, "just as I'd done with the Left Book Club lecturer, I didn't exactly listen to what Porteous was saying, only to the sound of his voice" (156). Old Porteous (one "of these public-school and university chaps [who] manage to look like boys till their dying day") turns out to be just as gramophonic as the "human barrel-organ" of the Left Book Club meeting (153; 148). The episode ends with his reading Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" – "or maybe it was a skylark – I forget", George parenthetically adds – and terminates with George suddenly remembering:

> that almost the first time I was here with Porteous he'd read me the very same poem. Read it in just the same way, and his voice quivered when he got to the same bit – the bit about magic casements, or something. And a curious thought struck me. *He's dead* (159).

Culture and Progress – "Dead men and live gorillas" – are monoliths (160). Between the "burr-burr-burr" of Progress, however, and the "Charm'd magic casements" of Culture, we have comedic George and he is "not even exceptional": "There are millions of others like me. Ordinary chaps that I meet everywhere, chaps I run across in pubs, bus drivers, and traveling salesmen for hardware firms" (*CA* 145; "Ode to a Nightingale" line 69; *CA* 158).

Orwell's interest is with the ordinary chaps; as Colls writes:

> Who's it to be? Old-south classics master? Or new-south insurance salesman? Orwell knew them both, and its Bowling he's with. He may be fat, he may be vulgar, and he may be one of the masses, but at least he's alive. As Gracie Fields has it: "He's dead, but he won't lie down" (*English Rebel* 167).

The same is true of Dickens and *Coming Up for Air* works to emphasise the universality of this "popular song" (as the epigram is acknowledged) by situating itself between Progress

and Culture, with Dickens in the music hall and, as such, *with* the common man. *Coming Up for Air* continues Dickens' comic expression of "the native decency of the common man" by presenting a self-consciously "common man" who operates between the reified forces of Culture and Progress.

Recalling that O'Faoláin had dismissed Dickens – "He is, in short, the great comforter of the nineteenth century, and unhappily for him the nineteenth century is gone. The farther it goes the more will his reputation decline" – it is instructive, in closing, to recall Orwell's claim that "the common man is still living in the mental world of Dickens" (O'Faoláin 148; "Charles Dickens" 55). George insists on this at the end of the first part of *Coming Up for Air*:

> I'm back in Lower Binfield, and the year's 1900. Beside the horse-trough in the market-place the carrier's horse is having its nose-bag. At the sweet-shop on the corner Mother Wheeler is weighing out a ha'porth of brandy balls. Lady Rampling's carriage is driving by, with the tiger sitting behind in his pipeclayed breeches with his arms folded. Uncle Ezekiel is cursing Joe Chamberlain. The recruiting sergeant in his scarlet jacket, tight blue overalls, and pillbox hat, is strutting up and down twisting his moustache. The drunks are puking in the yard behind the George. Vicky's at Windsor, God's in heaven, Christ's on the cross, Jonah's in the whale, Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego are in the fiery furnace, and Sihon king of the Amorites and Og the king of Bashan are sitting on their thrones looking at one another – not doing anything exactly, just existing, keeping their appointed places, like a couple of fire-dogs, or the Lion and the Unicorn (34).

This list, although it is dated 1900, evokes the world of Dickens: Mother Wheeler, Lady Rampling and the moustache-twisting recruiting sergeant have been drawn, for example, from the Dickens-Music Hall-McGill catalogue of characters. Situating George within Victorian England, however, this (the penultimate paragraph of Part I) is not the idiosyncratic Dickensian imitation that marked Orwell's early work; "the year's 1900" for one thing. This is a Dickensian declaration in the developmental sense indicated by the inclusion of H.G. Wells in the above discussion. Virginia Woolf had not, after all, impugned only Dickens but also the traditional realist style that followed him: "Books descend from books as families descend from families", she writes in "The Leaning Tower" and she continues in metaphorical tones similar to those in which Orwell had represented England:

> Some descend from Jane Austen; others from Charles Dickens. They resemble their parents, as human children resemble their parents; yet they differ as children differ, and revolt as children revolt (163).

Contrary to Orwell, who had read those born in the early twentieth century as having been created by Wells, Woolf asserts, in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown", that "on or about December 1910 human character changed" (4). So, she continues,

> the Edwardian tools are the wrong ones for us to use. They have laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things. They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there (30).

The fabric of things was, as Orwell, after Taine, had noted, Dickens' *metier*; thus, *Bleak House*:

> Poor Mr. Jellyby, who very seldom spoke and almost always sat when he was at home with his head against the wall, became interested when he saw that Caddy and I were attempting to establish some order among all this waste and ruin and took off his coat to help. But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened – bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas—that he looked frightened, and left off again. But he came regularly every evening and sat without his coat, with his head against the wall, as though he would have helped us if he had known how (Ch. 30; 479-80).

This Dickensian list of things is both exactly what Woolf objects to stylistically and precisely the style in which Orwell – disguised as Bowling – insists upon the continued presence of a pre-1910 England in contemporary English life[10]. In *Modes of Writing*, David Lodge claims that "the characteristic writing of the 1930s in England which challenged the modernist version of reality, did so formally by reverting to norms of nonliterary description of reality not very different from those observed by Bennett and Wells", not *very* different, that is, from the condition-of-England novel (47). As Lodge writes of Wells' *Tono Bungay* in *Languages of Fiction*, "the Victorians had a name for this kind of undertaking in fiction: the 'Condition of England novel'" (216). Fatty Bowling is, in other words, an expansive figure; he

[10] Thanks to Professor Valentine Cunningham for this idea.

speaks, if not for the poor of England then certainly for his new, expanding class: *Coming Up for Air* recognises different types of people, but it does so by evoking the familiar.

Bowling's is an inclusive community as he speaks for what Orwell would call, in "The Art of Donald McGill", "the Sancho Panza view of life": "his tastes lie towards safety, soft beds, no work, pots of beer and women with 'voluptuous' figures" (28-9). Having invited "you" to "look into your own mind" and ask "which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza", Orwell speculates:

> Almost certainly you are both. There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin. He is your unofficial self, the voice of the belly protesting against the soul. His tastes lie towards safety, soft beds, no work, pots of beer and women with "voluptuous" figures. He it is who punctures your fine attitudes and urges you to look after Number One, to be unfaithful to your wife, to bilk your debts, and so on and so forth. Whether you allow yourself to be influenced by him is a different question. But it is simply a lie to say that he is not part of you, just as it is a lie to say that Don Quixote is not part of you either, though most of what is said and written consists of one lie or the other, usually the first (29).

George says that "there's a thin man inside every fat man", Orwell that there's a fat man inside every thin man (*CUA* 23). With *Coming Up for Air*, Orwell tries to voice this dialectic; his comedic common man tries to tell the truth, to express both parts of his personality: "When I was eighteen", he confesses, "I suddenly turned highbrow" (*CA,* 98).

Having been invalided out of the trenches, George's war experience becomes characterised by "an appetite for books that was almost like physical thirst" (ibid., 121).

> And what I read during the next year or so! Wells, Conrad, Kipling, Galsworthy, Barry Pain, W. W. Jacobs, Pett Ridge, Oliver Onions, Compton Mackenzie, H. Seton Merriman, Maurice Baring, Stephen McKenna, May Sinclair, Arnold Bennett, Anthony Hope, Elinor Glyn, O. Henry, Stephen Leacock, and even Silas Hocking and Jean Stratton Porter. How many of the names in that list are known to you, I wonder? Half the books that people took seriously in those days are forgotten now. (121)

Half the books are forgotten, but half remain. George also "tried several of Hardy's novels" but he "always got stuck about *half*-way through" (122; emphasis added). Half a highbrow, Orwell's fat man with a thin man on the inside embodies "the Don Quixote-Sancho Panza

combination, which of course is simply the ancient dualism of body and soul in fiction form"; his "you", therefore, and the demotic "you" of Orwell's essay, is an inclusive category, like the "us" for whom Dickens is fighting.

That Old Porteous, representative of Culture, enjoys sharing George's dirty jokes enacts Orwell's lesson: "If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both" (29). "It is important", writes Orwell at the end of "Charles Dickens", that "people of very different types can be described as 'common'. In a country like England, in spite of its class-structure, there does exist a certain cultural unity" (55). Even in reifying Culture, *Coming Up for Air* asserts this cultural unity. Taylor wonders "how it was that the fat insurance man" comes into contact with Culture in the first place (261). George, as it happens, is aware of the improbability of his friendship with Porteous; "it's funny that he ever cottoned on to a chap like me", he tells us when introducing his friend (156). Partly, it's the same old comic fatness that renders George impermeable to Culture that allows him to access it: "it's one of the advantages of being fat that you can fit into almost any society" (156). More than that, though, George and Porteous "meet on common ground when it comes to dirty stories" (156). "Dirty stories", in fact, function as a sort of shibboleth in *Coming up for Air* ensuring George's access to disparate societies. They are part of the common ground George assumes with his reader: "calculate the time you've spent on things like shaving, riding to and fro on buses, waiting in railway junctions, swapping dirty stories, and reading the newspapers" (80). They may be "the one modern thing [Porteous] cares about" but they are not, as Porteous is "always reminding" George, "modern" (156). The commonality of the dirty story depends on its timelessness and everyday mundanity. As such, their telling is included amongst a list of activities qualifying George's schooldays as typical: "I got inky fingers and bit my nails and made darts out of penholders and played conkers and passed round dirty stories and learned to masturbate and cheeked old Blowers, the English master, and bullied the life out of little

Willy Simeon"; just as *you* did, just as we all did, goes the implication (68). The nineteen thirties condemnations of Dickens appear, in this context, in a different light – we have all read Dickens, or know him – as a choice no less selective and perspectival than that behind Orwell's commendation of Dickens. "Even people who affect to despise [Dickens] quote him unconsciously", Orwell had written, the implication being that condemnation of Dickens is pretence and that he can't be removed from the inner consciousness (48). Orwell's comedic common man, then, speaks to "the emotional overlap between the intellectual and the ordinary man" ("Kipling" 159).

He speaks, further, to the emotional overlap between England's political Left and its Right. Though, nominally, a Left Book Club member and so one of the "West Bletchley revolutionaries" Bowling, as noted above, had described himself as a Tory (146). This points towards a perhaps unexpected source for his appeal to the *Book of Common Prayer* – which refers to Sihon and Ogg, about whom he remembers singing in his parish church – as a further site of communal belonging. In terms that immediately invoke the above argument, the then Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin declared, in 1928, that:

> Fifty years ago all children went to church, and they often went reluctantly, but I am convinced, looking back, that the hearing - sometimes almost unconsciously - of the superb rhythm of the English Prayer Book Sunday after Sunday, and the language of the English Bible leaves its mark upon you for life. Though you may be unable to speak with these tongues, yet they do make you immune from rubbish in a way that nothing else does, and they enable you naturally and automatically to sort out the best from the second best and the third best (*Our Inheritance* 295).

So, in the final paragraph, the reader is pulled back in time too; "Is it gone for ever?", asks George of his Little Binfield world: "I'm not certain. But I tell you it was a good world to live in. I belong to it. So do you" (34). Again, as in "Charles Dickens" there is a slippage of tense through which the nineteenth century becomes present and, again, we are implicated in the slip. Insisting on our co-habitation of this Dickensian world, George invokes two motifs central to Orwell's project in this period: Jonah in the whale and "the Lion and the Unicorn". The first motif will be explicated in the following chapter but, if *Coming Up for Air*, after

"Charles Dickens", shows us who we are and, through its comedic man, what we are fighting, *The Lion and the Unicorn* – returned to in conclusion – tells us what we are fighting *for*.

.Conclusion.

Common Crusades

According to Stephen Lutman, Orwell's England is held in continuity by "a whole network of loyalties, emotions, feelings, and values, which relate to the community of the individual and which give him identity and meaning" ("Orwell's Patriotism" 154). This continuity is deeply social. It is also, given Orwell's interest in "semi-sociological literary criticism", literary: it is an "imagined community" with Dickens and then Wells as its authors, McGill as its artist and Bowling as its spokesperson. Just I am a product of the same code responsible for my appearance in my old photographs, so too is Bowling – and, by extension, his reader – a product of the same code that had earlier manifested itself in the works of Dickens. Importantly, though, these products are not identical to one another. Indeed, Dickens' "most hated types", writes Orwell, "are archaic types, people who are governed by tradition and whose eyes are turned towards the past" (32). His own view is similar. Elsewhere in *Inside the Whale*, for example, he complains that "the outlook inculcated by" all "Boys' Weeklies" "is that of a rather exceptionally stupid member of the Navy League in the year 1910" (74). Similarly, in *A Clergyman's Daughter* he produces his own version of Dickens' most hated type in Dorothy's father: "an anachronism" who "ought never to have been born into the modern world" (19). The important thing to note, then, is that while we cannot forget the past we must also grow out of it.

Noting, in "Charles Dickens", the development of Dickens' oeuvre from the hilarious sketches of *Pickwick* to the social commentary and condemnation of *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit* and the fact that this move is often regretted, Orwell announces: "What people always demand of a popular novelist is that he shall write the same book over and over again, forgetting that a man who would write the same book twice could not even write it

once"[11] (53). This remark introduces Orwell's idea of the writer as developing along the lines of a parabola and that image – to which, as Orwell's addition that "the downward curve is implied in the upper one" makes clear, symmetry is central – can, I think, be helpfully applied to Orwell's conception of England (53). It explains how I relate to my past images and how England can change and yet remain the same: we both have trajectories on which our past selves are plottable and those co-ordinates, moreover, are indicative of future developments. It is notable, finally, that these past selves are uncovered and discovered through reading and, just as individual authors have trajectories, so too do national literatures – hence the lineage traced above between Orwell and Dickens *via* Wells, Donald McGill and the Music Hall. In explication of this final thought, this discussion will conclude with a brief look at Orwell's view of another of his favourite authors, D.H. Lawrence.

Lawrence was the last writer covered by Williams' *English Novel* and so, at least if Knoepflmacher's review is acute, the last English novelist concerned with community. Thus, turning to *Orwell*, we see Williams play Orwell off against Lawrence. Doing so, Williams makes much of the title of the first part of *The Lion and the Unicorn* – "England your England" – which he contrasts with the title of Lawrence's 1922 collection of short stories *England, My England*. Williams takes Orwell's introductory remark – "When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air" – and places it as centrally instructive to his "version of England" (*LU* 392; *Orwell* 27). This "England", Williams holds, is thus presented through "the eyes of the observer" (17). Orwell's "England" is, therefore, static and is contrasted with Lawrence's: "For 'England my England' is an assertion, a declaration of independence, a challenge. 'England your England', by contrast, is a version, a story, a dream" (28). This is compelling

[11] Chesterton, for example, had written that "Nobody would ever complain of Charles Dickens going on writing his own kind of novels, his old kind of novels. If there be anywhere a man who loves good books, that man wishes there were four *Oliver Twists* and at least forty-four *Pickwick*s" (76).

but Williams' account is guilty of similar omissions to those which spoil Orwell's essay on Dickens. For one thing, it is not entirely clear how or why *England my England* is an "assertion". Egbert, the main character of Lawrence's story, has only one desire: "to hold aloof" (18). His wife Winifred suffers in the "face of [his] terrible diffidence" (18). *England, my England* appears on the list of "Best Books" that Orwell recommended to Brenda Salkeld in 1933 and in the same period under discussion here, Orwell, in reviewing a set of contemporary short stories, cites Lawrence's book as the last of merit "written in this line" (308; "Review of *The Beauty of the Dead* by H.E. Bates; *Welsh Short Stories* selected by Glyn Jones; *The Parents Left Alone* by T.O. Beachcroft; *The Battlers* by Kylie Tennant" 371). These positive remarks indicate Orwell's familiarity with (and affinity for) Lawrence's work where Williams' account of his use of the phrase implies only ignorance. In a radio broadcast of 1942, titled "The Re-discovery of Europe", Orwell offers what would amount to a robust defence against Williams' hostile characterisation. Here, Orwell makes the claim, submitting *England, my England* (as well as *The Prussian Officer*) as evidence, that Lawrence "takes the structure of existing society, with its class distinctions and so on, almost for granted in his stories, and doesn't show any very urgent wish to change it" (214-5). Orwell, then, is fully aware of the distinction between his phrase, which titled a section of an essay explicitly aimed at effecting an urgent change of society, and Lawrence's. He accounts for it, though, in an illuminatingly distinct fashion and his understanding of this distinction is brought out by his review of Muggeridge's *The Thirties*, which borrows Lawrence's phrase outright:

> I know very well what underlies these closing chapters. It is the emotion of the middle-class man, brought up in the military tradition, who finds in the moment of crisis that he is a patriot after all. It is all very well to be "advanced" and "enlightened," to snigger at Colonel Blimp and proclaim your emancipation from all traditional loyalties, but a time comes when the sand of the desert is sodden red and what have I done for thee, England, my England? As I was brought up in this tradition myself I can recognize it under strange disguises, and also sympathise with it, for even at its stupidest and most sentimental it is a comelier thing than the shallow self-righteousness of the leftwing intelligentsia (151-2).

Contra-Williams, then, we can see clearly that Orwell does conceive of “England, my England” as “an assertion, a declaration of independence, a challenge”, and identifies with it as such; when he writes “England, your England”, then, he goes beyond this, seeking a different assertion, a different declaration and a different challenge. The ghost of Dickens may be ignored by the righteous leftwing intelligentsia, but he is fighting for us, Orwell had said. With *Coming Up for Air* he had shown us who we are, and with the “England, your England” of *The Lion and the Unicorn* he implores us to join the fight.

CHAPTER TWO.

HIDING "INSIDE THE WHALE":
A REJECTION OF ONE INTELLIGENTSIA, AND THE SUGGESTION OF ANOTHER?

Writing in the *TLS* in 2003, Stefan Collini marked a familiar distinction: "Orwell is more important as a symbol than for what he actually wrote" (4). Collini is echoing Lionel Trilling, for whom Orwell "is a figure in our lives", but the distinction depends on a much earlier one ("George Orwell and the Politics of Truth" 136). When Robert Colls, writing in 2013, described Orwell as "a better essayist than a novelist", he was reiterating a position first articulated by Q.D. Leavis in 1940 (*English Rebel* 81). Reviewing *Inside the Whale* for *Scrutiny* in 1940, Leavis had sniffed:

> Mr. Orwell must have wasted a lot of energy trying to be a novelist – I think I must have read three or four novels by him, and the only impression those dreary books left on me is that nature didn't intend him to be a novelist. Yet his equivalent works in non-fiction are stimulating ("Literary Life Respectable" 175).

On the evidence of *Inside the Whale*, then, it looks to Leavis "as though if he would give up trying to be a novelist Mr. Orwell might find his *métier* in literary criticism, in a special line of it peculiar to himself and which is particularly needed now" (175). Leavis was astute in her identification of the peculiarity of Orwell's critical voice; V.S. Pritchett noted it too, praising Orwell's style, in *The New Statesman*, as "the English of the common man, cured of the common man's stutter and addressed to him" (qtd. in Rodden 182). Yet precisely that peculiarity has regularly led, contrary to Leavis' prediction, to a dismissal of Orwell's literary criticism, which, in Alex Zwerdling's typical remark "scarcely deserves the name" (*Orwell and the Left* 43). Taken together, however, these various positions, and their diverse holders, point to a cluster of related questions pertaining to Orwell's status as a public intellectual. Leavis is right; there is something unique about *Inside the Whale*, even if the title essay, like "Charles Dickens", dilutes its illuminating observations with mundane remarks and factual errors. Zwerdling is right too. Just as "Charles Dickens" rehearses the dialectical interrelation

of an England-changed and an England-still the same that Orwell had explored in *Coming up for Air* and would attempt to mobilise in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, so "Inside the Whale" is a progression towards the dialectical position – at once intellectual and popular – of "Orwell" the symbol. In this chapter, then, I will discuss *Inside the Whale*'s title essay and try to trace the way that its dialectical logic progresses into *Animal Farm*, the first book for which, as Crick reports, "Orwell's name became famous" and from which "Orwell-like became a synonym for moral seriousness expressed with humour, simplicity and subtlety" (*A Life* 488).

The discussion requires an introductory, contextualising critique of Orwell's peculiar brand of "semi-sociological literary criticism". This critique will touch, in turn, upon relevant points of publication. It is notable that although Orwell wrote regularly for the familiar organs of the left-wing intelligentsia, *Inside the Whale* was first published in book form: it was an *outside* production. Because most of the pieces Orwell contributed to the likes of *Tribune*, a Labour Party publication, and *Horizon*, edited by Cyril Connolly and Stephen Spender, were reviews, it is helpful to look elsewhere in characterising his critical project more generally. Thus the discussion that follows will refer frequently to a number of Orwell's BBC Broadcasts, especially to four talks that he gave to the World Service in 1941 and to "Voice", the "magazine" that he "edited" for six numbers in the second half of 1942. Orwell's work for the BBC, most frequently discussed, as by, for example, Douglas Kerr, as propaganda, spans almost exactly the period between the publication of *The Lion and the Unicorn* and his starting work on *Animal Farm*[1]. It also brought him into contact with a number of leading literary figures and a few important names will appear, as a result, in my

[1] Writing to Orwell in November 1942, George Woodcock presented to Orwell the "fact that the intention behind Indian broadcasts conducted under the auspices of a British imperialist government is, admittedly, to keep India out of the clutches of the Fascists, but, equally certainly, to keep it in the clutches of the British nabobs" ("18 November 1942" 213). Responding, Orwell largely agreed – "for heaven's sake don't think I don't see how they are using me" – but added the "subsidiary point […] one can't effectively remain outside the war & by working inside an institution like the BBC one can perhaps deodorize it to some small extent" ("2 December 1942" 214). "I consider I have kept our little corner fairly clean", he claimed in conclusion (214). In Kerr's view, Orwell's broadcasts "participate in [a] colonial discourse in being part of that body of statements that shapes the relation between the colonial power and its colonized subjects" ("Orwell's BBC Broadcasts" 475).

discussion of Orwell's literary criticism – including T.S. Eliot, William Empson and E.M. Forster. The last of these figures is the most influential on the logical progression of Orwell's work in this period; first for the rhetorical role he plays in "Inside the Whale" and second for a formal, fictional lesson that Orwell learned from collaborating with him on the radio. Illuminating the dual aspect of Forster's influence on Orwell, a summary of their little-discussed collaboration on a broadcast "Story by Five Authors" will link the prior discussion of Orwell's literary criticism to the concluding consideration of *Animal Farm*. Orwell's "fairy story" will be read, in closing, as the product of the dialectical logic of "Inside the Whale" and as motivated by the same concerns as drove Orwell's socio-literary critical project.

.1.

"Semi-sociological literary criticism": Orwell and interdisciplinarity

"As to the book of essays", Orwell wrote to Leonard Moore in July 1939,

> I don't know whether Gollancz will want them. They may be a bit off his track, and as they are sort of literary-sociological essays they touch at places on politics, on which I am certain to say things he wouldn't approve of (365).

Gollancz, it turned out, did want them and *Inside the Whale* was published early in 1940. Coining a phrase similar to that in which he had described the essays to Moore, the collection was, Orwell wrote to Geoffrey Gorer after publication, "kind of semi-sociological literary criticism" (3 April 1940 137). In characterising *Inside the Whale*, Orwell designates a critical practice that we might describe as interdisciplinary; having done so, though, he only half commits to it. His criticism is a blend of sociological and literary concerns, or at least it "kind of", "sort of" is. He is testing categories here but, at the same time, he is resisting categorisation. The phrase "semi-sociological literary criticism" gestures towards the terms of this thesis' treatment of Orwell as a social-problem writer. The aim here will be to establish the nature of that gesture, to establish the way in which Orwell's socio-literary criticism fits within and contributes to his career-long engagement in the condition-of-England question and then informs *Animal Farm*, read in closing as, in part, a social-problem novel. The first stage, though, is to characterise Orwell's critical practice and the four talks he gave to the BBC World Service in 1941 offer a helpful case study.

The first of these talks, on "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda", begins with a warning: "I am speaking on literary criticism, and in the world in which we are actually living that is almost as unpromising as speaking about peace. This is not a peaceful age, and it is not a critical age" because "literature has been swamped by propaganda" (484). Orwell regards this swamping, though dangerous, as natural and inevitable: "Literature had to become political because anything else would have entailed mental dishonesty" (486). It has

also been beneficial. “This period of ten years or so in which literature, even poetry, was mixed up with pamphleteering”, he said,

> did a great service to literary criticism, because it destroyed the illusion of pure aestheticism. It reminded us that propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose – a political, social and religious purpose – and that our aesthetic judgments are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs (486).

One consequence of that reminder, however, has been the discovery that

> just as […] you cannot really be detached from contemporary events, so many writers about 1939 were discovering that you cannot really sacrifice your intellectual integrity for the sake of a political creed (486).

“Aesthetic scrupulousness is not enough, but political rectitude is not enough either”, he concludes: “The events of the last ten years have left us rather in the air” (486). The particular point about the insufficiency of political rectitude being recognised in 1939 is one that I will pick up later. Here, I want to note the significance of the qualifiers around Orwell’s designation of his critical practice as “sort of literary-sociological”. His descriptions are deliberately hedged and this hedging is a mark of detachment: it acknowledges the necessary association of social and literary concerns while also noting the destabilising effect of that acknowledgement on critical practice. “The most lively criticism” of recent years, he had said,

> has nearly all of it been the work of Marxist writers, people like Christopher Caudwell and Phillip Henderson and Edward Upward, who look on every book virtually as a political pamphlet and are far more interested in digging out its political and social implications than in its literary qualities in the narrow sense (484).

David Trotter has recently described Caudwell as “the most brilliant English-speaking literary Marxist of the period” but Orwell mentions him on only one other occasion[2] (*Literature in the First Media Age* 274). The almost total absence of this exemplary figure is typical, and

[2] “In a socialist state”, Orwell told Desmond Hawkins in “The Proletarian Writer”, a discussion broadcast in December 1940, “a lot of our left-wing writers – people like Edward Upward, Christopher Caudwell, Alec Brown, Arthur Calder-Marshall and all the rest of them – who have specialised in attacking the society they live in, would have nothing to attack” (297).

important; it indicates the selective aspect, discussed in some detail below, of Orwell's characterisation of the decade. Upward, whose "Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature" had been printed in *Mind in Chains*, edited by Cecil Day Lewis, in 1937, is treated in more detail in "Inside the Whale". Henderson, whose selection by Orwell as representative has been challenged by Andy Croft – he was, Croft claims in *Red Letter Days* "intellectually isolated on the Left" for being thought to have "disregarded the primacy of aesthetic judgements" – had published *The Novel To-Day* in 1936, and Orwell reviewed it later that year for *New English Weekly* (142). Though he praised Henderson for having "the guts to say outright that art and propaganda are the same thing", Orwell thought *The Novel To-Day* "not a very good book": "Mr. Henderson is keeping up a pretence of strict critical impartiality", he explains, "but it is strange how invariably his aesthetic judgements coincide with his political ones" (533-4). Describing the contemporary blending of political or social concerns with aesthetic or literary considerations, Orwell insists nonetheless that they can be separated: that literary criticism can only be, should only be, *semi*-sociological.

This leaves an open question, however, for how, if all literary judgments are inflected with non-aesthetic concerns, can there be such thing as a purely literary judgment? This is not an easy question to answer but "Voice", which Orwell, noting that he "would be surprised if it is listened-in to by 500 people", described as "a bit of a private lunacy", suggests that Orwell is not qualified to speak to the "literary qualities" of a text, whatever they may be, in any case ("To George Woodcock 2 December 1942" 214). In the first issue of Orwell's "magazine" which "isn't quite an ordinary magazine", he discusses Dylan Thomas' "In Memory of Ann Jones" with Herbert Read and William Empson – two critics who might have objected to his description of the liveliest literary criticism of the age as naïve and explicitly Marxist (459). The brief dialogue between Orwell and Empson which follows Thomas' poem is sufficient to show the former's opinion of the latter's credentials as a critic:

> Orwell: Has anybody any opinions on that? I suppose the obvious criticism is that it doesn't mean anything. But I also doubt whether it's meant to. After all, a bird's song doesn't mean anything except that the bird is happy.
> Empson: Lazy people, when they are confronted with good poetry like Dylan Thomas's, which they can see is good, or have been told is good, but which they won't work at, are always saying it is Just Noise, or Purely Musical. This is nonsense, and it's very unfair to Dylan Thomas. That poem is full of exact meanings, and the sound would have no effect if it wasn't. I don't know any poet more packed with meaning than Dylan Thomas, and the use of the technique with sound is wholly to bring out and clarify the meaning (464).

It is not difficult to imagine what Empson might have thought of Orwell's later, but exemplary, remark, in "The Prevention of Literature", that "what the poet is saying – that is, what his poem 'means' if translated into prose – is relatively unimportant, even to himself" (377). At the beginning of *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, published in 1930, Empson had written:

> the reasons that make a line of verse likely to give pleasure, I believe, are like the reasons for anything else; one can reason about them; and while it may be true that the roots of beauty ought not to be violated, it seems to me very arrogant of the appreciative critic to think that he could do this, if he chose, by a little scratching (9).

It would be perverse to describe Orwell as an "arrogant" critic – his was not, after all, a promising age for criticism – but he certainly seems unwilling to do the "little scratching" for which Empson had called. He repeatedly presents literary quality as something ineffable. Thus, incorporating the lessons of his first broadcast, Orwell begins his second, on "Tolstoy and Shakespeare", by repeating his claim for the impossibility of purely literary criticism: "aesthetic judgments", he begins, "are always corrupted to some extent by moral or political or religious loyalties" (491).

In his second talk, Orwell attempts to mark the boundaries between these two types of consideration; for, "one cannot infer […] that there is no such thing as an aesthetic judgment, that every work of art is simply and solely a political pamphlet and can be judged only as such" (491). In illustration of his point, he discusses "one of the greatest pieces of moral, non-aesthetic criticism – *anti*-aesthetic criticism, one might say that have [sic] ever been written: Tolstoy's essay on Shakespeare" (491). His discussion is concerned to explain

the ultimate futility of such criticism: "[Shakespeare] can no more be debunked by such methods than you can destroy a flower by preaching a sermon at it" (493). In relation to Empson's claim, Orwell seems to be claiming here that the true roots of beauty *cannot* be violated, that beauty outlasts criticism. I.A. Richards had positioned his seminal *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) as an attempt

> to habilitate the critic, to defend accepted standards against Tolstoyan attacks, to narrow the interval between these standards and popular taste, to protect the arts against the crude moralities of Puritans and perverts, a general theory of value, which will not leave the statement "This is good, that bad", either vague or arbitrary, must be provided (37).

With Richards, Orwell seeks to defend Shakespeare against Tolstoy's anti-aesthetic criticism: "though Tolstoy can explain away nearly everything about Shakespeare, there is one thing that he cannot explain away, and that is his popularity" (493). He points to the same gap as that illuminated by Richards between criticism and popular taste in asserting that "one must conclude that there is something good – something durable – in Shakespeare", as there was in Dickens, or in Rudyard Kipling (493). When he returns to Tolstoy's pamphlet in an essay published in the post-war journal *Polemic*, however, Orwell closes the gap more tightly than the Cambridge academic would surely have allowed when he insists "there is no test of literary merit except survival, which is itself merely an index to majority opinion" ("Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool" 57). He had made the same claim in "Charles Dickens", writing: "for any work of art there is only one test worth bothering about – survival" (52). It is a critically benign judgement; "semi-sociological literary criticism", it seems, can be regarded as *semi*-critical: as Zwerdling has it, "Orwell's literary criticism scarcely deserves the name" (43). Orwell's first two broadcasts make him appear a literary philistine, wholly incapable of detached criticism. His third broadcast, however, undermines this appearance.

"The Meaning of a Poem" is a close reading of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Felix Randal". Here, Orwell is both more sensitive to Hopkins' technical expertise and more

nuanced in his illumination of the poet's "motivations" than the earlier talks had suggested him capable. Again in *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, Richards had insisted:

> In a full critical statement which states not only that an experience is valuable in certain ways, but also that it is caused by certain features in a contemplated object, the part which describes the value of the experience we shall call the *critical* part. That which describes the object we shall call the *technical* part (23).

In "The Meaning of a Poem", Orwell displays awareness of Richards' distinction. Having noted that in "criticisms of Hopkins […] you will usually find all the emphasis laid on his use of language and his subject-matter very lightly touched on", Orwell begins by offering his own interpretation of the technical part of Hopkins' poem and points, for example, to "the splendid rhythm of the last line […] which is actually a hexameter, the same metre in which Homer and Vergil wrote" (497; 497-8). He develops his discussion with the remark that "one cannot regard a poem as simply a pattern of words on paper, like a sort of mosaic" (498). Given the exchange with Empson noted above, this is a peculiar comment for Orwell to make but before commenting on that peculiarity, it is worth situating the remark within the context of the talk by looking at what follows: "This poem is moving because of its sound, its musical qualities, but it is also moving because of an emotional content which could not be there if Hopkins's philosophy and beliefs were different from what they were" (498). Here, Orwell reads the poem as revealing of, because informed by, the poet's personality. "The poem is also conditioned", he later writes, "by the fact that Hopkins lived at the latter end of the nineteenth century" (498). The attitude underpinning these remarks is that which had guided Orwell's treatment of Dickens; focused on what Richards called the *critical* part, it is typical of Orwell's critical practice.

Orwell's insistence on the relevance of sociological factors is more balanced here than elsewhere, however, as a result of his focus on Hopkins' technique, which returns at the end of the talk: "one comes back to the technical consideration that a subject of this kind is very much helped by Hopkins's own peculiar style" (498). Orwell refers to Hopkins'

"special power […] of re-creating the atmosphere of an English village" and claims that he would not have this power "if it were not for the purely technical studies he had made, earlier in his life, of the old Saxon poets" (498). "The poem", Orwell ends, "is a synthesis – but more than a synthesis, a sort of growing together – of a special vocabulary and a special religious and social outlook" (498-9). His talk is similarly synthetic, uniting Richards' technical and critical parts; in "The Meaning of a Poem", as in "Felix Randal", "the two fuse together, inseparably, and the whole is greater than the parts" (499). This fusion is an irregularity. That it occurred, however, that Orwell noted that a poem is not *just* sound, is important. It suggests that he is playing a role. When he tells Empson that Dylan Thomas is just like a bird, Orwell is trying to incite a response; he is fostering debate. "The Meaning of a Poem", then, highlights two final aspects of Orwell's critical persona that should be discussed before *Inside the Whale*: his role as spokesperson, and the importance of debate.

"Voice", the opening editorial had reported, "*needs* […] half a dozen voices", as well as "a little electrical power" (459; *emphasis added*). The "magazine" was the product of the fact that "there are some of us who feel that it is exactly at times like the present that literature ought not to be forgotten" (459). These opening remarks imply first, that literature is important and second, that its continuation depends on its being discussed and discussed, moreover, in different voices, from different perspectives. These ideas underpinned Orwell's final broadcast, "Literature and Totalitarianism", which was also given to the Oxford University Democratic Socialist Club[3]. Totalitarianism, Orwell declares, "isolates you from the outside world, it shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison"; "can literature survive in such an atmosphere? I think one must answer shortly that it cannot" (503). Literature, as Orwell describes it, requires dialogue and debate; it is

[3] Appropriately for an audience exposed to a "sort of semi-sociological literary criticism", the Democratic Socialist Club was sort of semi-impressed with Orwell: "He talked in vague generalisations, which to students of logic are perhaps upsetting; but in answering questions which varied from socialist boys' weeklies to Marxian melodies for the masses, he showed that his position as a leading Left Wing critic is clearly justified", *The Cherwell* reported (506-7).

possible only where individual views are exposed to the standards of others. At the same time, however, "modern literature is essentially an individual thing. It is either the truthful expression of what one man thinks and feels, or it is nothing" and totalitarianism, as would be radically dramatised in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (as discussed below), "not only forbids you to express – even to *think* – certain thoughts but it dictates what you *shall* think" (503). Under totalitarianism, therefore, literature is nothing and this is a new and specific threat to literary creation, and criticism, because, whereas "the orthodoxies of the past did not change, or at least did not change rapidly", "the peculiarity of the Totalitarian state is that though it controls thought, it doesn't fix it. It sets up questionable dogmas, and it alters them from day to day" (504). "Semi-sociological literary criticism", then, as revealed by talks delivered in an "unpromising", an uncritical, age, is defensive; Orwell's critical project is intended to protect literature from a newly and increasingly totalitarian society. As a consequence, and this is again revealed by his talk on Tolstoy, it is offensive.

In the broadcast, Orwell describes Tolstoy's pamphlet as a "terrific attack on Shakespeare" (491). "The interesting question", he writes in the later essay, "is why did he make it?" (57). In this way, Orwell casts Tolstoy's non-aesthetic criticism as interesting more for what it reveals about Tolstoy himself than for what it tells us about Shakespeare and this is true also of Orwell's "semi-sociological literary criticism". "He always was an aggressive critic", Michael Shelden has written; in Stefan Collini's view, "Orwell tended to make destructive criticism rather than, say, appreciation the distinguishing mark of 'objectivity'" (*Orwell* 107; *Absent Minds* 358). "I don't mix much in literary circles", wrote Orwell to Stephen Spender in 1938, "because I know from experience that once I have met & spoken to anyone I shall never again be able to show any intellectual brutality towards him, even when I feel I ought to" ("15? April" 132). In Zwerdling's view, Orwell's letter

> leads us directly to one of Orwell's fundamental objections to the left-wing intelligentsia – indeed to any intelligentsia – that it is basically a closed world (or at

> best an incorporative one), addicted to coterie loyalty and exclusion, and constantly tempting its members to blunt honest criticism in the name of civility (41).

Understood as such, the letter to Spender draws attention to Orwell's conception of himself as spokesperson and highlights the meta-critical aspect of Orwell's project. His role, as he sees it, is to uphold critical standards, and this effort is assisted by the strict maintenance of an outsider's position.

The American monthly *Partisan Review* appointed Orwell as a spokesperson for England in December 1941. The editors' invitation, written by Clement Greenberg, clearly indicates the type of man they thought they were approaching:

> There are things the news reports do not tell us. For instance, what's happening under the surface in the way of politics? Among the labor groups? What is the general mood, if there is such a thing, among writers, artists and intellectuals? What transmutations have their lives and their preoccupations suffered? You can be as gossipy as you please and refer to as many personalities as you like. The more the better ("Letter to George Orwell 9 December 1941" 351).

This letter is written to an outsider with the inside dope. The *Partisan Review*'s editors' estimation of Orwell's character and position inside-outside the English intellectual scene is an accurate one. Orwell's character and position were established by his "semi-sociological literary criticism" and was fiercely defended.

In a typically forthright London Letter, his fourth, Orwell described "leftwing defeatism", "the really interesting development" of which was "the increasing overlap between Fascism and pacifism" (110). Unsurprisingly, a number of pacifist intellectuals took exception to this claim and *Partisan Review* published letters from D.S. Savage, George Woodcock and Alex Comfort together with Orwell's reply under the heading "Pacifism and the War: A Controversy" later that year. Comfort – described by Orwell as "a 'pure' pacifist of the turn the other-cheek school" – responded by questioning Orwell's credentials as a spokesperson:

> some of your American readers may not realize Mr. Orwell's status in this country and take his commentary seriously. We all like him here, though the standard of his pamphleteering is going down of late, and we know him as the preacher of a doctrine

> of Physical Courage as an Asset to the left wing intellectual and so forth[4] ("London Letter 4" 111; "Pacifism and the War" 395).

"I see that Mr. Orwell is intellectual-hunting again", was Comfort's acerbic opening remark and Orwell took no exception to Comfort's characterisation when he offered his own response (395). "I have never attacked 'the intellectuals' or 'the intelligentsia' en bloc", Orwell clarified, before launching a volley of his own:

> I have used a lot of ink and done myself a lot of harm by attacking the successive literary cliques which have infested this country, not because they were intellectuals but precisely because they were *not* what I mean by true intellectuals. The life of a clique is about five years and I have been writing long enough to see three of them come and two go – the Catholic gang, the Stalinist gang, and the present Pacifist or, as they are sometimes nicknamed, Fascifist gang. My case against all of them is that they write mentally dishonest propaganda and degrade literary criticism to mutual arse-licking (399).

"Inside the Whale" is Orwell's most famous, most concentrated and most detailed attack. It is the exemplary piece of "semi-sociological literary criticism" and it will be discussed in detail below. As, explicitly and consciously, an "attack" the interesting question, as Orwell wrote of Tolstoy's attack on Shakespeare, is why did he make it? He made it to distinguish his own non-aesthetic critical project from the "most lively criticism" of his age. Achieved by insisting on an alternative view, by playing the role of the dissenting "true intellectual", this distinction is a crucial step in Orwell's establishment of the rhetorical position that he would occupy throughout the second part of his parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question: the inside-outside position that makes him a figure in our lives.

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[4] Part of Orwell's evidence for the overlap between pacifism and fascism had been that "the little anti-war paper *Now*", edited by George Woodcock, a pacifist anarchist who later became a close friend of Orwell's, had published "pure" pacifists like Comfort alongside those, like Hugh Ross Williamson, who have "been mixed up in the Fascist movement for some time" (111).

.2.

"The slogans suddenly faded from red to pink": Inside the Whale as literary history

Andy Croft's revisionist history of the 1930s, *Red Letter Days*, begins by challenging "Inside the Whale":

> Orwell deliberately confused the political history of the decade with its literature, narrowed that literature down to a small group of writers, identified that group with the work of one poet, one poem, a single stanza, a single line – and then wilfully misread it (17).

Croft's complaints are largely justified. Mixing sociological and literary concerns, Orwell conflates the politics of the nineteen-thirties with its literature. He reduces the literary history of the Thirties to a small group of writers and grants pre-eminence to one particular poet, indeed to one of that poet's words, in wilfully misreading one of his poems. Orwell's misreading of Auden's "Spain" and the reductive reading of the decade of which it is a part will be discussed below. Such a discussion is well introduced, however, by the note that literary histories are always reductive, always narrowing. In setting the terms of his own revisionist history of Thirties writing, indeed, Croft has reduced Orwell's essay to a single remark. "On the whole", Orwell had written,

> the literary history of the 'thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics. For any writer who accepts or partially accepts the discipline of a political party is sooner or later faced with the alternative: toe the line, or shut up (105; qtd. *Red Letter Days* 17).

This judgment asserts, in Croft's view, an "entirely conventional emphasis on the inalienable opposition of art and ideology" (17). Later, Croft describes Orwell's "repeated" invoking of Brown and Henderson as intended as "proof of the incompatibility of politics and literature" (142). Such glosses reveal a misreading; phrases like "inalienable opposition" and "proof of the incompatibility" greatly overstate Orwell's carefully hedged, and consciously "semi-sociological" and "literary", criticism: the literary history of the Thirties *seems to justify the opinion* that a writer does well to keep out of politics. "When not wrenched out of context",

Nick Hubble has written of Orwell's remark, "this can be seen for what it is: an ironic comment on the 'change of feeling' undergone by the Auden group" ("Imagined and imaginary whales" 36). Hubble is responding specifically to Salman Rushdie who had criticised Orwell, in "Outside the Whale", for, having "beg[un] by describing writers who ignored contemporary reality as 'usually footlers or plain idiots'", ending "Inside the Whale" by "*embrac[ing]* and *espous[ing]* this quietist philosophy" (95). Hubble's intervention, supported by Orwell's remark on the radio that "many writers about 1939 were discovering that you cannot really sacrifice your intellectual integrity for the sake of a political creed", is pertinent to Croft's criticism too. For Croft also quotes from Spender's *Horizon* essay "A Look at the Worst", 1940, where he writes that "all politics seem like provincial struggles for booty between dusky tribes" and takes Auden's "September 1, 1939" as an epigraph to his introduction[5] (qtd. *Red Letter Days* 18). Such remarks – signalling the poets' apparent abdication of political purpose – do indeed seem to suggest that politics and literature are best kept apart. They do not prove it, however, and this is partly Orwell's point. He was not just being ironic. In 1946, after all, Orwell would famously write that "what I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art" ("Why I Write" 319). Literary histories, as I have said, are always reductive.

Fredric Jameson has pointed this out in general terms. "Any rewarding use of the notion of a historical or cultural period", he argues in *Political Unconscious*,

> tends in spite of itself to give the impression of a facile totalisation, a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, "expresses" some unified inner truth – a world-view or a period style or a set of structural categories which marks the whole length and breadth of the "period" in question. Yet such an impression is fatally reductive (27).

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[5] I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-Second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade ("September 1939").

David Gervais opens his chapter on Orwell in *Literary Englands* with the more specific note that "nothing puts one off 'the Thirties' more than the notion of them as a 'decade' in which writers merged in monolithic orthodoxy" (156). Valentine Cunningham has expressed similar concerns; "We love the clarifications of labelling: the '90s, Novels of the 1840s, The Thirties and After, Poetry of the Forties", he writes in *British Writers of the Thirties*, before issuing a warning: "The process is always distortive: the myths of history and literature so produced are inevitably too pat" (13). The process, though, and especially in reference to the Thirties, is not new: labelling is a practice that demonstrably went on – and Auden's poem is testament to this – in the "low dishonest decade" itself. As two further examples will show, the labels tended to be similar to those suggested in, and the thinking no less reductive than that behind, "Inside the Whale".

Providing a "Retrospect of a Decade" in *Scrutiny* in 1939, F.R. Leavis had asked:

> has there ever before been a time when the young aspirant, graduating from his university group, could immediately and without any notable sense of change find himself in a fraternity that effectively "ran" contemporary letters – "ran" them so effectively that he could make a name and a career without even coming in sight of adult standards? (176).

Scrutiny's readers would know as well as we do the names that make up the "fraternity" – "characterised", he tells us, by "political distraction" – that bothered Leavis (176). Virginia Woolf, a year later, would name them and she gives us Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, Christopher Isherwood and Louis MacNeice in grouping them inside her metaphorical "Leaning Tower" as a set of well-meaning, if rather self-absorbed, young men:

> During all the most impressionable years of their lives they were stung into consciousness – into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come (176).

"The poet in the thirties was forced", she writes, in terms similar to but more sympathetic than Leavis', "to be a politician" (176). It may be, as Croft has written, that "Inside the Whale" has acquired "an orthodox authority in the literary histories of the period" (17). It is

also true though that, in asserting that "Auden Spender & Co. *are* 'the movement'" and confirming their gendered immaturity – "It is the same pattern all the time; public school, university, a few trips abroad, then London" – Orwell is merely reiterating an already orthodox version of the literary history of the nineteen-thirties (100; 104). "By being Marxised", Orwell wrote, "literature has moved no nearer to the masses"; "No decade in the past hundred and fifty years has been so barren of imaginative prose as the nineteen-thirties", he argued (100; 105). Similar points had been made by Leavis: "Marxist the decade decidedly was. It was also, in literature, […] a very barren decade" ("ITW" 105; "Retrospect" 176). Orwell's literary history of the Thirties is, then, of a piece with other, similarly offensive, contemporary commentaries. Meta-critical in its "semi-sociological" aspect, "Inside the Whale" is also, it should be added, a response to another, more positive, characterisation of the Thirties as a distinct and political literary decade.

When Orwell refers in "Inside the Whale" to Auden, Spender & Co.'s "serious purpose", he is aping MacNeice, who had conferred this grown-up accolade on his fellows in his 1938 book *Modern Poetry*[6] ("Inside the Whale" 99; qting. *Modern Poetry* 21). Described by the Auden generation scholar Adrian Caesar as a work of "mythology", *Modern Poetry* contrasts the "serious purpose" of MacNeice's politically-motivated contemporaries with the "tragic sense of life" of their predecessors (*Dividing Lines* 104; *Modern Poetry* 21). "The spokesmen for the present generation", Robert Wohl has written, "once they begin to think of themselves as belonging to a generation, will represent themselves and their coevals as unique, lost, sacrificed and charged by history with a special task" (*The Generation of 1914*

[6] Continuing her characterisation, Woolf speculates that "no other ten years can have produced so much autobiography as the ten years between 1930 and 1940" (177). The link between death about to come and the urge to autobiography would be confirmed in the opening paragraph of Henry Green's autobiography. Published in 1940, *Pack My Bag* begins by describing "the war which seems to be coming upon us now" as an "excuse" for the book: "that is a reason to put down what comes to mind before one is killed" (9). Responding to Woolf in 1941, Upward had echoed MacNeice: "The 'leaning tower' writers are abler and more serious than most of their detractors. No better work than theirs appeared in England in the Thirties. They may produce their best work in the 'forties" ("Falling Tower" 6). Woolf would likely have endorsed, in part at least, this view: "they have had a power which, if literature continues, may prove to be of great value in the future" (177).

39). *Modern Poetry*, which begins with the claim that "the poet is primarily a spokesman", exemplifies this self-mythologising impulse (3). "Auden, Spender and Day Lewis figure largely in the book", writes Caesar in summary,

> as representatives of a contemporary poetry which is claimed to be superior to every conceivable progenitor. The aesthetes of the 1890s, Eliot, Yeats, Hopkins, Housman, Kipling and the Georgians are all tried and found wanting (100).

Supporting his gloss, Caesar selects a quote also chosen by Orwell:

> The poets of *New Signatures*, unlike Yeats and Eliot, are emotionally partisan. Yeats proposed to turn his back on desire and hatred; Eliot sat back and watched other people's emotions with ennui and an ironical self-pity. […] The whole poetry, on the other hand, of Auden, Spender, and Day Lewis implies that they have desires and hatreds of their own and, further, that they think some things ought to be desired and others hated (*Modern Poetry* 25; qtd. *Dividing Lines* 100; "ITW" 99).

Like Leavis, Woolf and Orwell, then, MacNeice conceives of the 1930s as a distinct literary period; in contrast to these, however, he considers it a poetic golden age: homogenous, serious and, thus, superior.

Referring "to MacNeice's book on Modern Poetry" in the first "edition" of "Voice", John Atkins would explain in summary that

> the emphasis of all his school is on "information and statement" in other words, they are didactic poets. At the back of their own minds is the idea of the poet as a citizen or even a member of a political party. This means discipline from the outside (467).

"I think", said Orwell in response, "this is quite largely a sterile quarrel between generations" (467). Treating MacNeice's veneration of his generation in "Inside the Whale", however, Orwell had adopted a position closer to Atkins' and had not seemed to regard MacNeice's quarreling with his predecessors as sterile. Orwell had described literature in "Inside the Whale" in the same terms as he would later use on the radio: "literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship" (105). Written under submission to discipline, the work of the poets of the Auden generation – characterised by MacNeice as a collective expression – is not literature in Orwell's terms; the Thirties of Auden's generation is therefore a "barren" literary decade. This is the logic of

Orwell's attack. Returning to Tolstoy's attack on Shakespeare in *Polemic*, Orwell notes, as "evidence of malice", "a long series of instances" in which "Tolstoy slightly alters or colours the passages he is criticising, always in such a way as to make the plot appear a little more complicated and improbable, or the language a little more exaggerated" (57). Similar malice is evident throughout "Inside the Whale". Since perhaps the most famous part of "Inside the Whale" is Orwell's attack on Auden's "Spain", I will discuss that wilful misreading first but it is important because it exemplifies the strategy of the essay as a whole: throughout "Inside the Whale", Orwell allows the "myth" of the Thirties to overwrite its articles.

.3.

Altering, Colouring and Exaggerating: Orwell's wilful misreadings

Orwell attacks Auden, thinks Robert Colls, because he "had dared speak of murder *in a poem*" (*English Rebel* 99). It is notable, however, and especially since, as his third broadcast on literary criticism had indicated, Orwell was capable of detached literary criticism, that "Spain" is not treated as a poem in "Inside the Whale". Orwell instead reads Auden's poem, in terms invited by MacNeice, as if it were a document emphasising "information and statement" and intended to reveal the "serious purpose" of a collective. Though, as I will show, flawed, Orwell's reading of "Spain" as a document is not entirely unjustified. "Writing of any consequence", he would tell his World Service listeners, "can only be produced when a man *feels* the truth of what he is saying; without that, the creative impulse is lacking" ("Literature and Totalitarianism" 504). Auden, Spender would recall in *The Thirties and After*, "came to dislike 'Spain' as expressing an attitude which for a few months he had felt intellectually forced to adopt, but which he never truly felt" (30). There is a consistency, then, to Orwell's criticism of "Spain" and the logic behind the misreading is interesting, and illuminating.

Having quoted the third- and fourth-last stanzas, Orwell summarises "Spain" as offering

> a sort of thumb-nail sketch of a day in the life of a "good party man". In the-morning a couple of political murders, a ten-minutes' interlude to stifle 'bourgeois' remorse, and then a hurried luncheon and a busy afternoon and evening chalking walls and distributing leaflets. All very edifying[7] (103).

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[7] To-morrow for the young, the poets exploding like bombs,
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;
To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings. But to-day the struggle.

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,
The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;
To-day the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting ("Spain"; qtd. 103).

In Orwell's gloss, the "good party man" commits "political murders" himself and breaks to "stifle" his "remorse". In the poem, the "guilt" induced by necessary murder is consciously accepted, and is accepted, moreover, without interlude. Rather than "busy" and "edifying", as Orwell has it, Auden's "afternoon" is characterised as "flat" and "boring". There is no "luncheon" in Auden's poem; that "bourgeois" colouring is unique to Orwell's sketch. Orwell treats "Spain" as a sociological document and nothing else, and through this wilful misreading putatively "serious purpose" is represented as synonymous with the naïve acceptance of "necessary murder": "It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*" (103). "Personally", Orwell writes, "I would not speak so lightly of murder. It so happens that I have seen the bodies of numbers of murdered men" (103). "I don't mean killed in battle", writes Orwell of the bodies that he has seen: "I mean murdered" (103). But so does Auden. "Spain" makes us ask in what kind of world can "murder" be "necessary" and the answer is, precisely, in the world of "the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting" or in "the life of a 'good party man'". "Maybe", Colls has written, "the stanza describes a day in the life of a good party man […] but Auden was far from that"; "the poem", Caesar has pointed out, "shows Auden to be anti-Fascist, but certainly not pro-Communist" (*English Rebel* 101; *Dividing Lines* 59). Orwell's reading of "Spain" implicitly assumes Auden's submission to a Party line – to the Communist Party line – yet this goes against the evidence of the poem which seems rather to describe the moral ambivalence such submission requires: "The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder". Unfair as it may be, Orwell's treatment of "Spain" is consistent with the rhetorical logic of "Inside the Whale"; since MacNeice's book has already been used to characterise "the movement", "Spain" can be read as an expression of that character. The sociological has supervened entirely on the literary here and Orwell's criticism of Auden is uttered, like Tolstoy's "non-aesthetic criticism" of Shakespeare, not in properly good faith. Continuing his characterising critique of the literary history of the Thirties, Orwell slightly alters or colours

the passages he is criticising, always in such a way as to make the plot appear a little more complicated and improbable, or the language a little more exaggerated.

As well as the two stanzas of "Spain", Orwell offers one of Auden's titles – "You're leaving now, and it's up to you boys": "pure scoutmaster", apparently, "the exact note of the ten-minutes' straight talk on the dangers of self-abuse" – and a single stanza from Spender's "Trial of a Judge" (100). "Auden, Spender & Co. *are* 'the movement'", he claims, but when he turns to the motivations, and the politics, of a group headed by Auden and Spender, Orwell allows the company to speak for them. As well as MacNeice's veneration of the group's putatively "serious purpose" (and I will return, briefly, to *Modern Poetry* below), Orwell selects two other pieces of external evidence, and the way in which these are used to colour the decade are similarly instructive in establishing why Orwell made his attack. Characterising the group's naivety, he calls upon Cyril Connolly's autobiography, *Enemies of Promise*. As proof of the group's ideological intransigence, he presents Edward Upward's contribution to Cecil Day Lewis' *Mind in Chains* – to which neither Auden nor Spender contributed. I will discuss his employment of Upward first.

Upward's essay is titled "Sketch for a Marxist Interpretation of Literature"; it is offered tentatively, therefore, as a type of preliminary study. That it is a "sketch", however, goes unacknowledged by Orwell; in fact, he deletes the word, and references Upward's essay under the heading "A Marxist Interpretation of Literature" (108). Orwell misrepresents Upward's "Sketch" as both a more representative and a more fully-formed example of the decade's most "lively" literary criticism than was really the case. Having thus "coloured" Upward's sketch, Orwell slightly alters it. This is how he reports Upward's argument: "literary criticism which aims at being Marxist must … proclaim that no book written *at the present time* can be 'good' unless it is written from a Marxist or near-Marxist viewpoint" (108). As it had appeared in *Mind in Chains*, however, Upward's argument reads:

> literary criticism which aims at being Marxist must begin by recognising that literature does reflect social and economic conditions, and must proclaim that no book written at the present time can be "good" unless it is written from a Marxist or near-Marxist viewpoint ("Sketch" 41).

With the elided clause restored, Upward's position is clearly more nuanced than Orwell suggests. The "Marxist" position appears, in fact, closer to Orwell's than its presentation in "Inside the Whale" implies. "Inside the Whale" begins with the assertion that "a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a footler or a plain idiot"; "no thinking person", he would tell his World Service listeners, "can ignore what is happening round him or avoid taking sides" ("ITW" 87; "Tolstoy and Shakespeare" 491). Day Lewis, introducing *Mind in Chains*, had written, similarly, that "only two attitudes are possible"; Valourising "the Soviet Union", however, as a place where the mind's chains "have been broken", Day-Lewis' attitude is not, however, Orwell's (12; 17). In 1939, in a Hogarth Press pamphlet titled *The New Realism*, Spender had written that "all Marxist criticism which judges writers by their declared political opinions or insists on their having declared opinions is hasty and approximate at best, and, at worst, destructive" (23). This, again, is approximately Orwell's position yet in "Inside the Whale" he presents Spender, and Upward, as part of a doctrinaire Marxist gang for whom "a writer must either be actively 'left' or write badly" (101). Auden, in Colls' view, "was far closer to Orwell than Orwell could accept, in life and in politics" and the same is true of the "generation" of which he was the figurehead (101). Later in "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool", Orwell asks a more specific question: "why did Tolstoy, with thirty or more plays to choose from, pick out *King Lear* as his especial target?" (58). "He bore an especial enmity towards this particular play", he speculates in response, "because he was aware, consciously or unconsciously, of the resemblance between Lear's story and his own" (58). Similarly, I would suggest, Orwell chose Auden's "Spain", MacNeice's *Modern Poetry* and Upward's "Sketch" as his especial target because of the resemblance between the prevailing manner of non-aesthetic criticism and his own;

having chosen his target, he selectively alters and colours the evidence so as to blur that resemblance and to create a rhetorical space in which to distinguish his own brand of “semi-sociological literary criticism”.

.4.

"The theory of permanent adolescence": Hiding Inside the Whale

"Mr. Orwell", Q.D. Leavis had written in her *Scrutiny* review of *Inside the Whale*,

> belongs by birth and education to "the right Left people", the nucleus of the literary world who christian-name each other and are in honour bound to advance each other's literary career; he figures indeed in Connolly's autobiography as a schoolfellow ("The Literary Life Respectable" 173).

Reviewing *Enemies of Promise* the previous year, Leavis had sounded like Orwell in diagnosing Connolly with "an inability to apply purely literary criticism because of an unconscious acceptance of social values in this as in all other fields" ("The Background of Twentieth Century Letters" 163). "The odious spoilt little boys of Mr Connolly's and so many others writers' schooldays", she continues, still in terms consistent with Orwell's,

> move in a body up to the universities to become inane pretentious young men, and, still essentially unchanged, from there move into the literary quarters vacated by the last batch of their kind (164-5).

In the context of this remark, the overlap outlined above between *Scrutiny*'s reading of the Thirties, as articulated by F.R. Leavis, and Orwell's reasserts itself. Q.D. Leavis claims to like *Inside the Whale* because Orwell "differs from" his fellows "in having grown up" (173). "He sees them", she thinks,

> from outside, having emancipated himself, at any rate in part, by the force of a remarkable character. His varied writings bear an unvarying stamp; they are responsible, adult and decent (173-4).

It is hard not to think that Leavis was attracted to Orwell because he shared *Scrutiny*'s hostility to the particular type of politically-motivated work of the Auden generation – that she liked him, in other words, because of an unconscious acceptance of social values. Her claim that Orwell "displays and approves of bourgeois morality" is a serious and misleading simplification of Orwell's complex argument in "Charles Dickens" (174). Confirmation, perhaps, of the impossibility of "purely literary criticism" that had vindicated Orwell's openly semi-sociological literary criticism, Leavis' remarks allude to a further aspect of Orwell's

attack on the Auden generation, which is that it marks a rhetorical "growing up" characterised by the distinction between the "serious purpose" of the putatively doctrinaire Marxist poets and Orwell's seriousness[8]. Whereas "serious purpose" is established only in words – by those for whom murder, for example, is at most a *word* – Orwell's seriousness has been hard won, by experience. So, at least, his employment of Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* in dismissing *Modern Poetry* is intended to suggest.

Further evidence for Cunningham's claims for the distortive nature of literary mythologies, MacNeice, like Orwell (and Tolstoy), distorts and colours the evidence he employs in *Modern Poetry* in order to characterise and then to dismiss the ennui and ironical self-pity of his poetic predecessors. In an essay on T.S. Eliot published in 1936, E.M. Forster had explained how, convalescing after injury in Cairo, he had found Eliot's silence on the war important, and comforting: "Here was a protest, and a feeble one, and the more congenial for being feeble"; "he carried on the human heritage" ("T.S. Eliot" 103; qtd. *Modern Poetry* 25, "ITW" 109). Quoting these remarks, MacNeice ignores Forster's prior acknowledgement that this "simple reaction" was "too facile" (102). MacNeice's colouring of Forster's essay, like Orwell's of Upward's, ignores, or hides, an implicit similarity in their attitudes towards *Prufrock*. Likewise, that MacNeice has altered his evidence reveals the end to which it is being put. MacNeice is concerned to cast Eliot's early masterpiece simultaneously as the symbol of modernism – because liked by the putatively modernist Forster – and as "a feeble protest". Modernism, therefore, becomes "a feeble protest" against which the "serious purpose" of the 1930s poets is positively contrasted: "Ten years later less feeble protests

[8] Orwell had diagnosed the Leavises' vulnerability to the unconscious consideration of non-aesthetic criteria in 1936. In "In Defence of the Novel", he had referred to the "*Criterion-Scrutiny* assumption that literature is a game of back-scratching (claws in or claws out according to circumstances) between tiny cliques of highbrows" (520). Writing to Cyril Connolly in advance of the publication of *Enemies of Promise*, which he had promised to review for *Time & Tide*, Orwell mentions that Connolly might return the favour with a review of *Homage to Catalonia*: "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" (14 March 1938 127). When it served, then, Orwell was not adverse to a bit of claws-in criticism himself. He even, extraordinary as it may seem, suggested "Inside the Whale" for publication in *Horizon*, edited by Connolly and Spender. They declined.

were to be made by poets", MacNeice remarks ("somewhat smugly", thinks Orwell) (*Modern Poetry* 25; "ITW" 109). "Just where these 'protests' are to be found I do not know", Orwell contends and counters:

> In the contrast between Mr. Forster's comment and Mr. MacNeice's lies all the difference between a man who knows what the 1914-18 war was like and a man who barely remembers it. The truth is that in 1917 there was nothing that a thinking and a sensitive person could do, except to remain human, if possible. And a gesture of helplessness, even of frivolity, might be the best way of doing that (110).

Orwell (who has also ignored Forster's warning) is evidently concerned here to recast the so-called "serious purpose" of his contemporaries as illusory, as a consequence of their self-absorbed immaturity, of "the public-school-university-Bloomsbury pattern" (100). Explicating this immaturity, he borrows from Connolly. "Were I to deduce anything from my feelings on leaving Eton", Connolly had written in *Enemies of Promise*,

> it might be called *The Theory of Permanent Adolescence*. It is the theory that the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development (Connolly 253; qtd. Orwell 104).

"He means it!", Orwell celebrates, before confirming that "he is merely speaking the truth"; we know that Orwell "knows" the truth because he was at a great public school himself but the essay does not acknowledge this; it is hidden[9] (104).

Orwell was too young to know what the 1914-18 war was like, as he would admit in "My Country Right or Left", published, like "Inside the Whale" in 1940: "by 1917 the war had almost ceased to affect us, except through our stomachs" (270). In "My Country", the essay in which he would first declare for England, "us" is Orwell, Connolly, MacNeice, Auden, Spender & Co. and all those other "children" for whom "the western front was pinned on an

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[9] Readers who turned from *Inside the Whale* to *Enemies of Promise* would have found, as Leavis had noted, Orwell's name amongst Connolly's school-fellows where he was noted as an exception to the rule: "The remarkable thing about Orwell was that alone among the boys he was an intellectual and not a parrot for he thought for himself" (164). In his own memoir of his schooldays "Such, Such Were the Joys", Orwell actually distinguishes himself from the norm in a similar manner to that by which Connolly excused him in *Enemies of Promise*: "The various codes which were presented to you at St. Cyprian's", he writes in "Such, Such Were the Joys", "contradicted one another if you worked out their implications" (375).

easel, with a red silk thread running across on a zig-zag of drawing-pins" (270). That "us" has become a "they" in "Inside the Whale" and this movement confirms that essay's real purpose. Orwell is politically-minded too; his literary criticism is "semi-sociological". Hiding inside the whale, then, Orwell is concerned to mark his manner of political-mindedness as distinct from the doctrinaire Marxism which he ascribes to his contemporaries, the "selfish pink" poets, to borrow Auden's phrase[10]. That characterisation, I have argued, has been achieved by Orwell's manipulation of selectively and sketchily drawn evidence. Orwell's dismissal of *the* literary history of the Thirties in "Inside the Whale" is a qualified dismissal of a selectively drawn history intended to create an alternative space for an alternative literary history.

In the essay, this alternative space is most auspiciously – and controversially – occupied by Henry Miller whose "non-political, non-educational, non-progressive, non-cooperative, non-ethical, non-literary, non-consistent, non-contemporary" prose speaks like "a voice from the crowd, from the underling, from the third-class carriage, from the ordinary, non-political, non-moral, passive man" (92). "By playing off Miller against the 'Auden Generation'", Hubble has written, Orwell "was trying to create a dialectical space in which the politics of locality, human albeit passive, could interact with a wider political imaginary" ("Imagined and imaginary whales" 38). Orwell's creation of George Bowling had been an attempt to occupy that space. The third part of *Coming Up for Air*'s opening section begins on a train:

> There was a bombing plane flying low overhead. For a minute or two it seemed to be keeping pace with the train. Two vulgar kind of blokes in shabby overcoats, obviously commercials of the lowest type, newspaper canvassers probably, were sitting opposite me. One of them was reading the *Mail* and the other was reading the *Express*. I could see by their manner that they'd spotted me for one of their kind (19-20).

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[10] Auden had referred in his *Letter to Lord Byron*, published in 1937, to his left-wing friends' predictions that his "fate will be to linger on outcast / A selfish pink old Liberal to the last" (*The English Auden* 190). At the end of the decade, Orwell would write, "slogans suddenly faded from red to pink" ("ITW" 102).

George is travelling, we can assume, in third class: “Inside the Whale” continues the dialectical logic of the England-changed and England-still-the-same for which Fatty Bowling, a fat man with a thin man on the inside, had spoken. Looking forward from “Inside the Whale”, I want to trace the continuation of Orwell’s parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question from this point. For that, it is necessary to look first at the patriotic aspect of “Inside the Whale”, an aspect implied in the context of the link drawn throughout the thesis between social problems and the condition of England by the designation “semi-sociological literary criticism” but not yet commented upon, and then, in more detail, at the continuing relevance of Forster to Orwell’s project.

“How many of the values by which our grandfathers lived could now be taken seriously?”, Orwell asks in “Inside the Whale”, before dismissing “patriotism, religion, the Empire, the family, the sanctity of marriage, the Old School Tie, birth, breeding, honour, discipline” as having been gotten “rid of” (102). This only leads to a further question though for “what do you achieve, after all, by getting rid of such primal things as patriotism and religion? You have not necessarily got rid of the need for *something to believe in*” (102). Ultimately, Orwell concludes, the “Marxism” – the “serious purpose” – of the English writers of the Thirties “was simply something to believe in”:

> All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. Patriotism, religion, empire, military glory – all in one word, Russia. Father, king, leader, hero, saviour – all in one word, Stalin. God – Stalin. The devil – Hitler. Heaven – Moscow. Hell – Berlin. All the gaps were filled up. So, after all, the Communism of the English intellectual is something explicable enough. It is the patriotism of the deracinated (103).

“It may possibly be true”, Orwell would acknowledge in 1941, “that ‘the proletarian has no country’. What concerns us, however, is the fact that the proletarian, at any rate in England, feels that he has a country and will act accordingly” (“Our Opportunity” 345). “After all, and in spite of all”, he continues, “the common people were patriotic. It is of the profoundest importance to face this fact and not try to dispose of it with easy formulae” (345). The

dialectical revolutionary patriotism argued for throughout “My Country Right or Left” and *The Lion and the Unicorn* was an attempt to identify the common man. For, as “My Country” has it: “when the red militias are billeted in the Ritz I shall still feel that the England I was taught to love so long ago and for such different reasons is somehow persisting” (272). By contrast, the “intellectuals”, as characterised in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, “take their cookery from Paris and their opinions from Moscow”; Auden, Spender & Co. are deracinated patriots disposing of the patriotism of the masses with easy formulae about “serious purpose” – really just something for permanent adolescents to believe in (406). It is no wonder, then, that “by being Marxised literature has moved no nearer to the masses” (“ITW” 100). Implicit within this judgment, as a consequence of the rhetorical hiding places that Orwell establishes for himself throughout the essay, is a gesture towards an alternative literary history in which literature by facing facts and ignoring easy formulae could move closer to the masses. Orwell would assert his position within this alternative tradition with *The Lion and the Unicorn*’s final sentence, which begins: “I believe in England” (432). Prior to investigating what that means, however, I want to establish the origins of that alternative tradition in “Inside the Whale”, as represented by Forster – a thinking and a sensitive person who could remember what the First War was like.

.5.

"Only connect": Forster, A Story by Five Authors and Orwell's alternative tradition

First employed by Orwell as a point of contrast to the "permanent adolescence" of Auden, Spender & Co., Forster had appeared in *Enemies of Promise* too. His themes, Connolly had written, "are the precursors of the left-wing young people of to-day; he can be used by them as a take-off in whatever direction they would develop" (6). Given that in Connolly's view Forster's "themes are the breaking down of barriers: between white and black, between class and class, between man and woman, between art and life", it is ironic that MacNeice uses his work to establish a barrier between the "serious purpose" of the Auden generation poets and the "feeble protest" of their modernist predecessors (6). "'Only connect …' the motto of *Howard's End*", Connolly had continued, "might be the lesson of all his work" and Forster, lecturing at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1927, had offered a pre-emptive appeal against the periodising tendencies of his successors; he had tried, instead, to connect and Orwell used this theme to takeoff in a new direction.

Invited to discuss "period or periods of English Literature", Forster rejected the terms of the invitation: "This idea of a period of a development in time, with its consequent emphasis on influences and schools, happens to be exactly what I am hoping to avoid during our brief survey" (*Aspects of the Novel* 18). He invited his audience, instead, to

> visualise the English novelists not as floating down that stream which bears all its sons away unless they are careful, but as seated together in a room, a circular room, a sort of British Museum reading-room – all writing their novels simultaneously (18).

Henderson would regard Forster's image as ill-fitted to the special circumstances faced by writers in the Thirties and continues Forster's hypothetical case by having the English novelists leave the British Museum's reading-room and walk out into the street to see

> the poster of a newspaper announcing a strike, the declaration of a war, the bombing of a city, the shooting down of demonstrators, the formation of a new government, or the "sensational" fact that the legs of a murdered man or woman have been found in a trunk – many things, some of which will affect his life vitality and so his writing (*The Novel Today* 21).

Henderson seems to regard, as would MacNeice, his contemporaries as charged by history with a special task; the world, he thinks, has changed and its novelists must change with it:

> If the novel today is to have any other function than recording the doings of the decadent descendants of Moll Flanders and Robinson Crusoe, it could scarcely have a nobler function than that of awakening man to a consciousness of his destiny as a social being[11] (52).

For Forster, in contrast, the generations of English novelists, by virtue of being novelists, are engaged in a consistent and communal activity: "They come from different ages and ranks, they have different temperaments and aims, but they all hold pens in their hands, and are in the process of creation" (25). He regards them, as Orwell had regarded Dickens, as having something still to say and their methods as relevant still to the novel today.

In 1935, Forster made up part of the British delegation to the Paris Writers Congress[12]. This is what he said: "I am not a Communist, perhaps if I were younger I should be a Communist. As it is, I am what my tradition, my education and my income have made me" (77). Knowing, and explicitly mature, this is the literary intellectual as patriotic public figure. In contra-distinction to MacNeice, the spokesperson for a generation, Forster had already insisted on the relevance of his predecessors' methods to the type of literary project he regarded as important:

> if we writers today could carry this tradition on, if we could assert, under modern conditions, what has been asserted by Milton in his century and by Shelley and by Dickens in theirs, we should have no fear about our liberties (75-6).

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[11] Henderson draws upon D.S. Mirsky's *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain* – which Orwell described as "a terribly malignant but very able book" and "the archetype of Marxist literary criticism" which he advised should be read instead of *The Novel Today* – in dismissing the British Museum's reading-room as "'that spiritual home of thin-skinned liberal enlightenment known as Bloomsbury', whose members, as Mirsky says, 'do not desire the outer world to be such as might be prone to cause them any unpleasant impression'" ("Review of *The Novel To-Day*" 534; *The Novel Today* 24; qting *The Intelligentsia of Great Britain*).

[12] The delegation was completed by Aldous Huxley, John Strachey, Christina Stead, Ralph Fox, Walter Greenwood, Winifred Holtby, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison and James Hanley, a register which again indicates the selective exclusivity of Orwell's characterisation, and MacNeice's, Woolf's and the Leavises' too, of the literary history of the Thirties.

This insistence marks a slightly different type of approach to the literary past than that for which Forster had argued in *Aspects of the Novel*: Milton, Dickens and Shelley belong here to their centuries. Doing so, however, they have not floated away, but remain relevant, and connected. This, again, is similar to Orwell's conception of Dickens as both dead and yet fighting for us and, also, to Orwell's dialectical understanding of England.

The two had, moreover, broadly similar understandings of what Forster would call "the English Character". This is the first of Forster's "Notes on the English Character":

> Solidity, caution, integrity, efficiency. Lack of imagination, hypocrisy. These qualities characterise the middle classes in every country, but in England they are national characteristics also, because only in England have the middle classes been in power for one hundred and fifty years. Napoleon, in his rude way, called us "a nation of shopkeepers". We prefer to call ourselves "a great commercial nation" – it sounds more dignified – but the two phrases amount to the same (13).

Forster's essay was written in 1920. Two decades later, Orwell would write of his compatriots' "old-fashioned outlook, their graded snobberies, their mixture of bawdiness and hypocrisy, their extreme gentleness, their deeply moral attitude to life, are all mirrored there" in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, the second part of which is titled "Shopkeepers at War" (395).

At the end of the war, *The Lion and the Unicorn* concludes:

> England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same (409).

The "war" which Henderson – too young to remember the First War – thinks too terrible a challenge for Forster's "Bloomsbury" writers has not, for Orwell at least, been so bad; it has not disrupted his everlasting England, and nor will it:

> The intellectuals who hope to see it Russianised or Germanised will be disappointed. The gentleness, the hypocrisy, the thoughtlessness, the reverence for law and the hatred of uniforms will remain, along with the suet puddings and the misty skies. It needs some very great disaster, such as prolonged subjugation by a foreign enemy, to destroy a national culture (409).

Forster was also interested in the "national culture" which, in the first of his "Three Anti-Nazi Broadcasts" of 1939, he had defined in terms of the tradition which had made him as "the words and the images that have come down to us through the centuries"; these, he continues, "are often contradictory, they represent a bewildering wealth of human experience, which it is our privilege to enjoy, to examine and to build on" ("Culture and Freedom" 50). Rather than charging writers with a special task, Forster regards history as a perpetually growing continuum which it is the duty to writers to inherit and to extend. This view of history, consistent with that of Orwell for whom the England of 1840 was both identical to yet outwardly almost unrecognisable from the England of 1940, is the opposite of that implied by Henderson and MacNeice. Though in a different way from Miller, and from the Orwell of *Coming Up for Air*, Forster exists inside the whale. The silences, elisions and misrepresentations of "Inside the Whale" allow Orwell to rhetorically assume Forster's position *outside* the apparently competing mythologies of modernism and the Thirties – mythologies which Orwell, as noted above, was partly responsible for establishing. This outside position creates the space for an alternative, and implicitly more real, literary tradition and in "A Story by Five Authors", an "experimental" collaboration with Forster and others broadcast in 1942, we are given an idea of what that alternative tradition might look like and of how it might work ("Letter to L.A.G. Strong 9 September 1942" 129).

As well as Orwell, who began the story, and Forster, who concluded it, the story was written and told by (in order) L.A.G. Strong, Inez Holden and Martin Armstrong. Compared with Auden, Spender & Co. this group is notably diverse. Born in the late-nineteenth century and friends with Yeats at Oxford, Strong was an Anglo-Irish writer with an eclectic publication history. As well as editing both *A New Anthology of Modern Verse, 1920-40*, with Day Lewis, and the Gollancz series of Books for Schools, Strong had written a number of popular novels, including detective fiction, and collections of stories. He acted and directed but, besides taking part in Orwell's experiment found time, in 1942 alone, to publish three

novels and an historical anthology; he was, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* reports, "something of a 'literary chameleon'". Similarly elusive, Armstrong, born in 1882, had served in France, been literary editor of the Conservative magazine *The Spectator* and was, by 1942, a regular contributor to the BBC's *Children's Hour*. Throughout the Thirties he published a number of backwards-looking, Edwardian-style novels with twee titles like *Victorian Peep-Show* (1938) and *Simplicity Jones* (1940). Kristin Bluemel has recently described Holden, who was the same age as Orwell, as "a dropout from the gentry class who worked as both factory hand and intellectual" (*George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics* 115). By 1942, she had published four novels and an experimental collection of short stories written entirely in Basic English. A collaboration between an "essentially pre-war", as Orwell described Forster, writer whose "best book" was published at the height of modernism "in 1923 or thereabouts", an Anglo-Irish polymath, a conservative war-veteran turned Air Raid Warden and a woman, Orwell's experiment promises heterogeneity based on varied experience where *the* literary history of the thirties offers only homogeny based on non-experience ("ITW" 96).

Given that Orwell had been concerned, in "Inside the Whale", to characterise the poets of the Auden generation as attempting to lift themselves out of a continuously unwinding literary history, and to emphasise the extent to which this had distanced them from the common man, his experiment has two striking formal elements. First, as a collaboration it is a mass effort. Second, spoken over the radio it was made available to the masses: Orwell had speculated before on the culturally democratic potential of the radio and each of his contributors was known as a broadcaster[13]. By 1942, indeed, Forster was more broadcaster than writer and, according to Mary Lago, his talks on books (*Some Books*,

[13] Having discussed "Voice", in "Poetry and the Microphone", Orwell mused: "These programmes that I have been speaking of were of no great value in themselves, but I have mentioned them because of the ideas they aroused in myself and some others about the possibilities of the radio as a means of popularising poetry" (76).

as the series, broadcast, partly, under the auspices of Orwell's editorship, was unprepossessingly titled) "comprise the great majority of his 131 broadcasts" and "took the line of appreciation and, when necessary, the defence of English literature as a national asset"; he literally, then, took literature to the masses (*A Literary Life* 102). Forster's defence of English literature depends on the paradoxical aspect of his understanding of the "national culture", a paradox mirrored in his understanding of the English novelists as both writing simultaneously and asserting in their centuries. Examining and building upon contradictory words and images was precisely the task that Orwell set Forster when inviting him "to wind it [the story] up in some way or even if you like simply comment on it" ("Letter to E.M. Forster 24 October 1942").

Forster was the only contributor recruited after the story had begun and Orwell had deemed it an "unsuccessful experiment" before it reached him ("Letter to Forster"). Strong and Holden had "failed to carry on the story as it should have been" and "the fourth instalment [Armstrong's], which is quite good, really does what the second instalment ought to have done": the story that Forster was invited to "wind up" was paradoxical ("Letter to Forster"). Yet he wound it up, in the words of Desmond Avery, "in a masterful way, tying up all the loose ends that had accumulated by the time his turn came" ("A Well Spent Year" pt.3). Formally, then, "Story by Five Authors" is a metaphor for the national culture as it appeared to Forster; as it appeared, that is, to the perspective from which Orwell had denigrated the deracinated, adolescent cultural products of the Thirties poets who masqueraded as *the* movement. The experiment dramatises how an alternative literary tradition – one which, a product of plural perspectives, continues to enjoy, examine, and build upon its past – could survive the official literary history of the Thirties. For Orwell, this amounts to a new sociological and literary identity. While he had complained in "Inside the Whale" that "the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics"; he would famously write, in 1946, that "what I have most

wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art" (319). "A Story by Five Authors", broadcast in the middle of that period, at first dramatises Orwell's complaint but ends by showing him how to achieve his end.

The five authors tell, eventually, the story of Gilbert Moss. Moss is introduced by Orwell in deliberately vague, everyman terms: "With his shabby raincoat and black felt hat he might have been an unsuccessful actor or journalist, a publisher's tout, a political agent or possibly some kind of hanger-on of a lawyer's office" (91). One of, in other words, the masses or a voice from the third-class carriage, Moss becomes, by Forster's concluding contribution, through his development under Strong and Holden's authorship, "a disgruntled intellectual" (163). Orwell's instalment begins in the immediate aftermath of an air-raid when, walking through the debris of a bombed London neighbourhood, Moss encounters a hated enemy. This enemy, Coburn, is half-dead, and Moss is about to put him out of his misery, as it were, with a vengeance until Strong, picking up the story, prevents him. Armstrong presents the feud as a consequence of Coburn's perceived betrayal. Having been enticed by Coburn into quitting his job in a research lab to become a contributor to his new left-wing review ("a sort of crusade", we are told), class-conscious Moss loses everything including a burned ten pound note presented after he is snubbed by Coburn at an aborted lunch meeting (135). Concluding, Forster synthesises these ingredients into reconciliation:

> Coburn says no, he's not going to deny it, still he did go to Spain. That seems to please and satisfy Moss no end. "Spain! what! … 'Oo sent you there?" Coburn he says "You did. You when you told me what you thought of me and made me see how worthless I was" (164).

The story, here, has verged into parody. Orwell's stylised everyman – a character he had inhabited convincingly for *Coming Up for Air* – has been uncloaked; he is now Orwell himself preaching to the literary-review publishing class its worthlessness[14]. Spain acts for Moss, as it

[14] Introducing himself to his reader, George tells us: "Even if you saw me at two hundred yards' distance you'd know immediately – not, perhaps, that I was in the insurance business, but that I was some kind of tout or salesman. […] At my best moments, when I've got a new suit or when I'm

does for Orwell in “Inside the Whale”, as a rite of passage and “Inside the Whale” has been made to look like just another exercise in intellectual exclusion, an in-fight amongst the right Left people. Although Woolf does not name Orwell in “The Leaning Tower”, her summary of the decade’s major writers’ work can be seen to describe “Inside the Whale”, as it is made to appear by the parodic aspect of “Story by Five Authors”, too: “The bleat of the scapegoat sounds loud in their work”, she writes, “and the whimper of the schoolboy crying ‘Please, Sir, it was the other fellow, not me’” (171). Literature, even by being demarxised, has moved no nearer to the masses. Or so it seems.

Forster’s synthesis is presented as an argument, which is overheard and narrated by the story’s third character. Forster names the pickpocket (introduced by Strong, as a narrative tool to prevent Coburn’s murder, shifted off-stage by Holden, ignored by Armstrong) Stan: “even pick-pockets and touts have names”, he reminds his listeners and, by extension, his authorial predecessors whose narratives would have allowed them to forget (164). Forster emphasises the gap between Stan and the arguers he watches: “Stan made nothing out of this. To him both of them sounded completely crackers. If he was given money, he didn't give it away, and if there was a war he tried to dodge it” (164). Nonetheless, he focalises the narrative and the “‘Oo” in Moss’s question is aitch-less because it is Stan’s – the story, it should be remembered, was broadcast. Forster uses this repositioned focus to “show how their fine sentiments would appear to that sort of man”: “He doesn't care about snobbery or outraged feelings or moral redemption or heroism in Spain, or hopes for the world's future” (167). He doesn’t care, in other words, about being inside Orwell’s whale – or outside Woolf’s leaning tower. Unconcerned with myths, symbols and labels he simply *is* “Inside the Whale” and he gets on with it, pausing only to tell us how absurd the “serious purpose” of the Marxists and the semi-sociological literary criticism of

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smoking a cigar, I might pass for a bookie or a publican, and when things are very bad I might be touting vacuum cleaners, but at ordinary times you’d place me correctly. ‘Five to ten quid a week’, you’d say as soon as you saw me” (13-4).

the anti-Marxist looks from his perspective and it is in this shift of perspective that the story, by being *a*-Marxised, moves closer to the masses.

Such a redirection is appropriately effected by the man who had known what it meant to carry on the human tradition during the war, by the writer whose great motto was "only connect". Orwell, having already used Forster to add authority to his position here allows him to authorise it in a different sense. The story ends with Stan having been knocked down by Moss; did it "kill him?" asks Forster: "I don't know, but I hope not, because I believe in the importance of individual life. Coburn and Moss don't know and don't care" (167). The intellectuals, in other words, don't know and don't care and this is a lesson, I think, that Orwell learned. The low dishonest decade helped Orwell, at least, though he was as dishonest as any, get over the myth of periodisation, and labels, and showed him how to look, instead, for connections. In closing, then, I want to look at *Animal Farm* – "the first book in which", Orwell explains in "Why I Write", "I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole" – as a progression from "semi-sociological literary criticism" to a new type of sociological literature (320).

.Conclusion.

"The downward curve is implied in the upper one": *Animal Farm* as a condition-of-England text

"I have used a lot of ink and done myself a lot of harm", Orwell told Alex Comfort and the readers of *Partisan Review*, "by attacking the successive literary cliques which have infested this country" (399). That he attacked, I hope I have shown; it is certainly true that he used a lot of ink: "No major writer in English", Collini has commented, "can have used the terms 'intellectuals' and 'intelligentsia' as frequently as George Orwell" (*Absent Minds* 350). It is likely that it did him harm too, particularly where *Animal Farm* is concerned, as Collini again writes: "Orwell was by no means inventing the difficulties he had faced, as the surviving evidence of the pusillanimous behaviour of several publishers over *Animal Farm* makes clear"[15] (367). Orwell had predicted something like this reaction. To Gollancz, to whom Orwell's next two novels had been promised, he wrote: "I must tell you that it [*Animal Farm*] is – I think – completely unacceptable politically from your point of view" ("19 March 1944" 452). Gollancz did not want *Animal Farm* but it was, as Crick has pointed out, "quite unfair" of Orwell to "include Gollancz in his future excoriations against those who had seen its worth but had not had the guts to publish it, or who had set themselves up as censors"; he simply did not like it (452). Orwell never mentioned Eliot in these excoriations, but he could have. On behalf of Faber & Faber, to whom Orwell had also sent a copy, Eliot

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[15] Collini is referring here to Orwell's debate with Randall Swingler, published in *Polemic*. This exchange, and the publication in which it appeared, will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapters. "Mr. Swingler", Orwell had written, "seems to think that it is rather profitable to be known as a hostile critic of the U.S.S.R. It may become so in the future, but during the past four or five years it has been extremely difficult even to get anything of anti-Russian tendency into print. My book *Animal Farm*, for instance, had to be peddled round from publisher to publisher over a period of a year or so" ("The Right to Free Expression" 52). The Orwell Archive contains further anecdotal support for Orwell's claim in the form of a letter from his friend Gleb Struve. Struve, a Russian poet and professor, wrote to Orwell, on the 19th November 1944, to draw his attention to "a curious official Soviet publication called 'Reference Calender for 1944'" (Orwell Archive Box H3 Folder IV). This document is curious – and of interest to Orwell – because, though there is "no tampering with dates", "the Soviet-German pact is simply struck out of history: the omission serves a propaganda purpose". "Should you wish to use this information in print", Struve had finished, and this is where the evidence of censoring comes in, "I would ask you to withhold my name".

wrote: “We agree that it is a distinguished piece of writing; that the fable is very skilfully handled, and that the narrative keeps one’s interest on its own plane – and that is something very few authors have achieved since *Gulliver*” (“13 July 1944”; qtd. Crick 457). That sounds like the opening of a letter of acceptance, but it is immediately undercut: “On the other hand, we have no conviction […] that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time” (458). Orwell did excoriate Jonathan Cape, who was more deserving even than Eliot. Having been, in Crick’s words, “eager to publish it”, Cape opted to “send back […] the typescript of *Animal Farm* and let the matter lie on the table” after discussing it with a senior official of the Ministry of Information (Crick 455; Cape “19 June 1944”; qtd. Crick 456). Orwell referred to Cape’s volte-face in “The Freedom of the Press”, intended as a preface to *Animal Farm* but lost until 1971, where he also predicted what kind of response his book would illicit:

> The reaction towards it of most English intellectuals will be quite simple: “It oughtn’t to have been published”. Naturally, those reviewers who understand the art of denigration will not attack it on political grounds but on literary ones. They will say that it is a dull, silly book and a disgraceful waste of paper (257).

Orwell was not altogether right about this; George Soure, in the American magazine *New Republic*, wrote that “the book puzzled and saddened me. It seemed on the whole dull” but, as Crick reports, “most English reviewers noticed it warmly and nearly all praised the style” (*A Life* 488). Nonetheless, Empson recalls, Orwell was aggrieved that “not one of [the reviewers] said it was a beautiful book” (*Orwell Remembered* 183). Private letters from his old broadcasting partners Read and Forster, as well as Empson, likely pleased Orwell more. Read reported that his seven-year-old son “insisted” on having it read to him: “and he enjoys it innocently as much as I enjoy it maliciously” (“13 August 1945”; qtd. Crick 491). Empson thought it “a most impressive object” and praised “the beautiful limpid prose style” (“24 August 1945”; qtd. Crick 491). Later that month, Forster wrote to tell him that he was “delighted with *Animal Farm*” and to ask for recommendations of “Boys literature, esp.

punishment stories" (Orwell Archive Box H3 Folder IV). These various sources touch upon every aspect of the preceding discussion. The exchanges with Comfort and Swingler mark the offensive aspect of Orwell's critical position. The publishers' responses to *Animal Farm* illustrate the truth of Orwell's insistence that ostensibly literary judgments are often made in accordance with non-literary criteria, even if these are not quite borne out by the critics' response to Orwell's fairy story. The admiring letters from friends, whose names had also appeared above, allude to Orwell's success in, to adapt Forster's verb, connecting political and aesthetic considerations and introduce a new and final point, which is, though not commented on explicitly above, likewise pertinent to *Inside the Whale*. This is the point that *Animal Farm* was, like the "Boys' Weeklies" discussed in the collection and referenced by Forster, deliberately made intelligible to children. Looking at the novella, in closing, I will try and draw these disparate points together in reading that short story as a synthetic text, connecting some of what Orwell would call "the lunatic activities on which I have wasted the war years" ("London Letter 12" 165).

Orwell ends "Boys' Weeklies" by "pointing to the fact that, in England, popular imaginative literature is a field that left-wing thought has never begun to enter" (76). A deliberate attempt to turn political writing into "art", and there is no measure of artistic value except survival, merely an index to popular opinion, *Animal Farm*, a "fairy story", as it was subtitled, and a fable, is I think an attempt to enter the field of popular literature from a left-wing position. Such an entrance was needed because, as Orwell had already suggested:

> To what extent people draw their ideas from fiction is disputable. Personally I believe that most people are influenced far more than they would care to admit by novels, serial stories, films and so forth, and that from this point of view the worst books are often the most important, because they are usually the ones that are read earliest in life (74).

Discussing "Boys' Weeklies", and this question in particular, in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Jonathan Rose has written:

> Frank Richards stories in the *Gem* and *Magnet* were tremendously popular. But how successful were they in communicating conservative values down the social scale? That question can only be answered by consulting the memoirs of Richards's fans. It may be objected that none of them would say outright "These stories indoctrinated me in a bourgeois cultural hegemony, and I'm a better man for it" – but that, in effect, is what some of them did say (323).

He quotes "London hatter Frederick Willis":

> We were great readers of school stories, from which we learnt that boys of the higher class boarding schools were courageous, honourable, and chivalrous, and steeped in the traditions of the school and loyalty to the country. We tried to mould our lives according to this formula (323).

If V.S. Pritchett – "I gobbled these stories as if I were eating pie or stuffing. To hell with poor self-pitying fellows like Oliver Twist; here were the cheerful rich" – proves for Rose that "one could enjoy Frank Richards and still become a socialist or even a Communist", he does not quite dismiss Orwell's belief (330-1).

Animal Farm, in any case, is absolutely intended to be read early in life. In a fable, as Chesterton has written, "the wolf will always be wolfish; the fox will always be foxy" ("Introduction" 10). Thus, taciturn Benjamin could only be a donkey – Benjamin is a more intelligent version of A.A. Milne's Eeyore – and, as well as figuring Bolshevik heroes and villains, all of Orwell's animals are faithful to type. The cat, for example, is lazy – "when there was work to be done the cat could never be found" – while the sheep are stupid, and, there is no other word for it, sheep-like:

> Napoleon had commanded that once a week there should be held something called a Spontaneous Demonstration […]. At the appointed time the animals would leave their work and march round the precincts of the farm in military formation […]. The sheep were the greatest devotees of the Spontaneous Demonstration (27; 97-8).

This was deliberate and Orwell, writing to Eliot, referred to the "imbecile suggestion" made by Jonathan Cape, "that some other animal than pigs might be made to represent the Bolsheviks": "I could not of course", he warns, "make any change of that description" ("28 June 1944"; qtd. Crick 457). The correspondence between the animals on the farm and their

special stereotypes situates *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* within a tradition of children's literature of which the Boys' Weeklies were also a major part.

Empson's son had also enjoyed *Animal Farm*. "Our Mr. Julian", he wrote in the letter cited above, "the child Tory was delighted with it; he said it was very strong Tory propaganda" (491). Julian's political pleasure caused Empson to warn Orwell that he "must expect to be misunderstood": "I certainly don't mean that it is a fault in the allegory; it is a form that has to be set down and allowed to grow like a separate creature […]; it is a form that inherently means more than the author means" (492). Lynette Hunter has picked up on this aspect of allegory. "Allegory establishes a process", she writes in *Search for a Voice*,

> in which a human being admits that he cannot fully know the "other", the external world. He not only admits but makes that admission the source of his experience or expressiveness. It is a process opposite to the establishing of private identities for actual events external to one. What allegory effects and is concerned to realise is the activity of one's lack of knowledge (164).

Having argued above that Orwell's engagement with the condition-of-England question sees him, first, expand the knowable community of the English novel to include the still-ignored imperial- and working-classes and then create and identify an imagined community of common men, *Animal Farm* sees him accept that he does not know. This acceptance is, I think, both political and aesthetic, and it is formally similar to the sympathetic note on which Forster ended "A Story by Five Authors".

"The animals", according to Bernard Bergonzi, "are convincing as animals whilst representing for historical figures and forces" and it is generally true that many of *Animal Farm*'s leading characters are "heroes" of the Russian revolution in animals' bodies, Boxer the carthorse, for example, is Aleksei Stakhanov, as well as stereotypically fabulous creatures (*Wartime and Aftermath* 98). It is not true, however, at the end. *Animal Farm* ends with all of the animals – large and small, strong and weak, young and old – looking through a window and into the farmhouse of the recently renamed "Manor Farm". This is what they see, and hear:

> Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which (120).

Here, the "creatures outside" have no individuality. The *TLS* review of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, cited in the introduction, claims that "characterisation was reduced to a minimum" in *Coming Up For Air* and was "as nearly as possible eliminated" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where "we are no longer dealing with characters, but with society" (380). This moment in *Animal Farm* is an essential stage in this journey yet it is one which, in "Story by Five Authors" had been anticipated. Just as Orwell had introduced Gilbert Moss in "Story by Five Authors" as "an unsuccessful actor or journalist, a publisher's tout, a political agent or possibly some kind of hanger-on of a lawyer's office", so it is that here we may be given the particular perspective of a horse, a cow, a hen, a cat or a duckling. The particularity does not matter though and instead what we are given is the perspective on which the earlier "Story" had ended. The animals outside have names, of course, just as "pick-pockets and touts have names", but the purpose of *Animal Farm*'s ending is to show how "the higher-ups" would appear, to paraphrase Forster, to that sort of animal: pig and man, "they" all look the same. We, moreover, are outside the farmhouse too and, looking in through the window, "they" all look the same to "us". We don't know this, as such, but it is not a matter of knowing; instead, as with Forster's conclusion, is it a matter of perspective, and of caring.

"Your pigs are far more intelligent than the other animals", Eliot had pointed out:

> and therefore the best qualified to run the farm – in fact, there couldn't have been an *Animal Farm* at all without them: so that what was needed, (someone might argue), was not more communism but more public-spirited pigs (qtd. Crick 458).

More public-spirited pigs might have improved the lot of the other animals on the farm, but then so would have more public-spirited men. Orwell's point seems to be that the ability to create an "Animal Farm" is incompatible with public-spiritedness; as he would write in November 1945:

> Throughout history, one revolution after another – although usually producing a temporary relief, such as a sick man gets by turning over in bed – has simply led to a change of masters, because no serious effort has been made to eliminate the power instinct ("Catastrophic Gradualism" 344).

"Stressing the pigs' cleverness", Paul Kirschner has suggested, "may have been a swipe at British intellectuals" (770). He is right, I think; "The Freedom of the Press" ends: "In our country […] it is the liberals who fear liberty and the intellectuals who want to do dirt on the intellect" (259). In *Animal Farm* it is the founders of Animalism who want to do dirt on the animals and they look, to us, no different from that older generation of "intellectuals". Looking in through the window, indeed, we see the old masters acknowledge the new: "'If you have your lower animals to contend with'", jests Mr. Pilkington, "'we have our lower classes!'" (117-8).

It would be disingenuous to claim that *Animal Farm* is a condition-of-England text, and nothing else. At the same time, though, the animals' revolution has a patriotic aspect, and elements of it are particularly English in tone. In "Inside the Whale", Orwell had referred to "Rupert Brooke's 'Grantchester', the star poem of 1913" (94). He thinks that poem "nothing but an enormous gush of 'country' sentiment, a sort of accumulated vomit from a stomach stuffed with place-names" and yet, at the same time, "a valuable document" because of the way in which its popularity testifies to the prominence of "the 'country' motif" in the English national imagination (94). Homi Bhabha, describing the "imaginative geography" of England in *The Location of Culture*, has called upon another of Brooke's poems in referring to "that corner of a foreign field which is forever England"[16] (169). The animals on Orwell's farmyard are called to sacrifice themselves to that field when Old Major ends his address by teaching them a song saturated in the "country motif" and evoking Brooke's "forever England":

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[16] The first three lines of Brooke's "Soldier" read:

> If I should die, think only this of me;
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is forever England (1-3).

> Bright will shine the fields of England,
> Purer shall its waters be,
> Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes
> On the day that sets us free.
>
> For that day we all must labour,
> Though we die before it break (*AF* 13).

That Orwell should have his porcine Marx appeal to the patriotism of the common herd is logical; "Men die in battle", he had written in 1940, "because of abstractions called 'honour', 'duty', 'patriotism' and so forth" ("Notes on the Way" 125). At the end of the essay, Orwell writes:

> Marx's famous saying that "religion is the opium of the people" is habitually wrenched out of its context and given a meaning subtly but appreciably different from the one he gave it. Marx did not say, at any rate in that place, that religion is merely a dope handed out from above; he said that it is something the people create for themselves to supply a need that he recognised to be a real one. "Religion is the sigh of the soul in a soulless world. Religion is the opium of the people". What is he saying except that man does not live by bread alone, that hatred is *not* enough, that a world worth living in cannot be founded on "realism" and machine-guns[17] (126)?

"Orwell had never been a Marxist", Issac Deutscher has written: "The dialectical-materialist philosophy had always been too abstruse for him" ("'1984' – The Mysticism of Cruelty" 67). Deutscher's statement is evidently correct but his reason does not stand up; Orwell, as "Notes on the Way" indicates, followed – followed better, he implies, than many Marxists – the dialectical aspect of Marx's thought[18]. This dialectical sense of patriotism underpins *Animal Farm* too. Old Major's address begins in notes of hatred – "Man is the only real

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[17] In his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Marx writes: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (131).

[18] Recalling the *Adelphi* Summer School of 1936 in *Fugitive from the Camp of Victory*, Richard Rees describes Orwell as having "astonished everybody, including the Marxist theoreticians, by his interventions in the discussions […] At one of the sessions I noticed a leading Marxist eyeing him with a mixture of admiration and uneasiness" (147). "Orwell's work", Zwerdling has written, "indicates that he had read Marx with care and understanding. That he remained unconvinced and highly critical does not mean that he could not follow Marx's arguments; or rather, it could mean that only to a Marxist" (*Orwell and the Left* 20). It was not "dialectical-materialism", but Marxists themselves, that ensured Orwell never became one.

enemy we have" – and ends with a patriotic appeal (9). The former justifies the rebellion; the latter creates its popular support:

> after a few preliminary tries, the whole farm burst out into "Beasts of England" in tremendous unison. The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked it. They were so delighted with the song that they sang it right through five times in succession, and might have continued singing it all night if they had not been interrupted (14).

"After all, and in spite of all", Orwell had written in "Our Opportunity", which was re-titled "Patriots and Revolutionaries", "the common people were patriotic. It is of the profoundest importance to face this fact and not try to dispose of it with easy formulae" (345). Old Major, like Marx, faced this fact; after his death, however, patriotism fades out of the equation: "It's no longer needed, comrade," said Squealer stiffly, "'Beasts of England' was the song of the Rebellion. But the Rebellion is now completed" (77). The animals are told to redirect their devotion from the green fields of England to Comrade Napoleon:

> Napoleon was now never spoken of simply as "Napoleon". He was always referred to in formal style as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon", and this pigs liked to invent for him such titles as Father of All Animals, Terror of Mankind, Protector of the Sheep-fold, Ducklings' Friend, and the like (79-80).

This forced hero worship is the analogue of the "patriotism of the deracinated" which Orwell had decried in the poets of the Auden generation and which led him, in "The Freedom of the Press", to predict negative reviews; for,

> The English intelligentsia, or a great part of it, had developed a nationalistic loyalty towards the U.S.S.R., and in their hearts they felt that to cast any doubt on the wisdom of Stalin was a kind of blasphemy (257).

Old Major's dream of a dialectical, patriotic rebellion has been ossified, then, into the easy formulae of Animalism.

Immediately prior to claiming, in "The English People", that "English political thinking is much governed by the word 'They'", Orwell marks as

> significant that English revolutionary writers are obliged to use a bastard vocabulary whose key phrases are mostly translations. There are no native English words for most of the concepts they are dealing with (624-5).

The historian Jonathan Rose thinks Orwell right about this. Addressing the question of "Alienation from Marxism" in *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, Rose describes the masses as "effectively and, one could argue, deliberately, excluded by the difficulty of Marxist language" (305). As evidence, he cites the testimony of

> Glasgow MP George Barnes (b. 1859) [who] had unpleasant memories of the language used at an SDF [Social Democratic Federation] meeting. 'I was so belaboured with words about exploitation, proletariat, bourgeois and others of learned length and thundering sound just then imported from Germany' (306).

Such is how the animals on the farm feel after Old Major's dialectically patriotic revolution has been translated into "easy formulae".

First, "the pigs had succeeded in reducing the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments" (23). This is already suspect. Of Squealer – one, with Napoleon and Snowball, of the three major leaders of "Animal Farm" – we have already been told, or warned, "that he could turn black into white" (16). "The Seven Commandments" are not, though, particularly different from the principles expounded by Old Major. Where he had said, for example, that "whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend", the first two commandments read:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend (11; 23).

The important thing seems to be that the pigs "success" has been achieved, it is "explained", "by their studies of the past three months" (23). From this gestation period, the other animals have been deliberately excluded and this exclusion allows the pigs – who do no work themselves and only, like all intellectuals, study – to set the terms of the revolution. The pigs, moreover, will continue to study and to exploit the inability, or disinclination, of the other animals to do so by continuously altering the terms of the revolution so that, by the end of the story, the Seven Commandments have become one and

> ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
> BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS (114).

That is the final stage of a process of exclusion which had started almost immediately, and which had been enacted partly by the language in which the revolution was translated into easy formula. In the clearest example of this linguistic exclusion, Snowball reports that "the Seven Commandments could in effect be reduced to a single maxim, namely: 'Four legs good, two legs bad'" (30-1). Though Snowball had claimed that this slogan "contained the essential principle of Animalism", "the birds at first objected, since it seemed to them that they also had two legs, but Snowball proved to them that this was not so":

> "A bird's wing, comrades", he said, "is an organ of propulsion and not of manipulation. It should therefore be regarded as a leg. The distinguishing mark of man is the *hand*, the instrument with which he does all his mischief".
>
> The birds did not understand Snowball's long words, but they accepted his explanation, and all the humbler animals set to work to learn the new maxim by heart (31).

If the 1930s was, as Orwell had written in "Inside the Whale", "a time of labels, slogans and evasions", then so too is the time of "Animal Farm" (105). In the same way as "by being Marxised literature […] moved no nearer to the masses", Animalism by being intellectualised, moved no nearer to the masses (100). In fact, as the suppression of "Beasts of England" and the reformulation of the easy formulae – as well as some animals becoming more equal than others, it becomes "Four legs good, two legs BETTER!" – illustrate, it has been taken further away (114).

This disappoints some of the animals. Clover laments, for example, that "this was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to work for the overthrow of the human race" (75). One animal, though, is not surprised. Benjamin, the donkey, "was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered" (6). When the animals argue over the windmill proposed by Snowball and opposed by Napoleon, Benjamin "was the only animal who did not side with either faction": "Windmill or no windmill, he said, life would go on as it had always gone on – that is, badly" (45-6). At the end:

> Only old Benjamin professed to remember every detail of his long life and to know that things never had been, nor ever could be much better or much worse – hunger, hardship, and disappointment being, so he said, the unalterable law of life (111).

"Benjamin could read as well as any pig, but never exercised his faculty" (30). He is not *just* a donkey, then; his is an undeceived intelligence. Lionel Trilling, having asked what Orwell stands for, finds as his answer:

> the virtue of not being a genius, of fronting the world with nothing more than one's simple, direct, undeceiving intelligence, and a respect for the powers one does have, and the work one undertakes to do ("Orwell and the Politics of Truth" 137-8).

Benjamin embodies this value and Kirschner has described him as "the author's alter ego" (768). When he yells "Fools!", asks "do you not see what is written on the side of that van?" and explains "they are taking Boxer to the knacker's!'", Kirschner explains,

> Benjamin suddenly becomes the author – not by prudently keeping silent, but by placing sympathy before safety. He becomes 'Orwell' when, through him, the "author" suddenly seems to drop his mask and show where his heart lies (*AF* 103-4; "Dual Purpose" 765).

There is something in this idea: according to Crick, Celia Kirwan and Maimone Koestler (wife of Arthur), with whom Orwell spent Christmas 1945, "thinking of wise old Benjamin in *Animal Farm* […] used to refer to him as Donkey George" (483). More specifically, though, the "Orwell" that Benjamin becomes is the one established in "Inside the Whale".

Benjamin has a saying of his own:

> When asked whether he was not happier now that Jones was gone, he would say only "Donkeys live a long time. None of you has ever seen a dead donkey", and the others had to be content with this cryptic answer (27).

Benjamin is sceptical; he is, like Forster, what his upbringing has made him. Rhetorically, he plays the same anchoring role in *Animal Farm* that Orwell had had Forster play in "Inside the Whale": he is old enough to remember what the First World War was like. Accordingly, it is Benjamin who reads out the final judgment on "Animal Farm", just as it had been Forster who had read the final judgment on "Story by Five Authors" and there is a resonance in the respective judgments, too:

> For once Benjamin consented to break his rule, and he read out to her what was written on the wall. There was nothing there now except a single Commandment. It ran:
> ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
> BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS (114).

"Equality appears in *Animal Farm*", David Dwan has pointed out, "as both a statement of fact and as a value" ("Equality in *Animal Farm*" 665). Forster had noted the fact that some animals were more equal than others too, but he wanted it to be otherwise. Forster, like Orwell and Benjamin, values individual life; Napoleon, Squealer and Pilkington, like Coburn and Moss or "Auden, Spender & Co.", don't know and don't care. The progression from "Inside the Whale" to *Animal Farm* is marked by efforts on Orwell's part to characterise himself. He does this first by characterising the decade in which he became a writer and then by adopting a distinct perspective, from which he appears as distinct from, as outside to, the literary history of that decade and in touch with, instead, the attitudes and the feelings of those with whom he shares his country. In the period in which literature became swamped with propaganda, Orwell learned to become a public intellectual, to become what his country and its traditions made him.

CHAPTER THREE.

"AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT WHICH HAS NOT BEEN SUFFICIENTLY STUDIED": AN ENGAGEMENT IN THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLISH QUESTION

It is accepted that in the last phase of his trajectory – coinciding, roughly, with the end of the Second World War in 1945 and marked by the rise to fame following the publication of *Animal Farm* in that year and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949 – Orwell exhibits a heightened sensitivity to the political damage wrought by the abuse of language. Investigations into Orwell's views of language, accordingly, tend to focus on this period; according to W.F. Bolton, writing in *The Language of 1984*: "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and the essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946) characterise his outlook for most readers" (15). If the corpus is established, however, the characterisation has proved difficult. "Continually worrying at the issue", writes Paul Delany in "Words, Deeds and Things: Orwell's Quarrel with Language", "he tried to pin down the essence of language in memorable phrases. But his formulas, when examined closely, have a way of turning against their own premises" (96). This remark captures well the difficulties facing critics who try to reduce Orwell's view of language to his memorable phrases – found, as well as in "Politics" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in "Why I Write" and its famous declaration that "good prose is like a windowpane" (319). Such critics tend to find themselves faced with an apparently insoluble paradox[1]. In order to escape this apparent paradox, I want to look beyond Orwell's

[1] Raymond Williams writes, as evidence for his thesis that "the total effect of Orwell's work is an effect of paradox", that Orwell "was a notable critic of abuse of language, who himself practiced many certain of its major and typical abuses" (*Culture and Society* 286). Alok Rai, in similar terms, thinks it "a typically Orwellian paradox that the prose which aspires to the ideal clarity of a windowpane reveals nothing so much as it does Orwell himself" (*Orwell and the Politics of Despair* 3). Rai's paradox is a consequence of his understanding of Orwell as an anti-theorist who holds the straightforward position that, as Roger Fowler expresses it, "there are real things in the world which we *name* through language. By distorting our language with archaic euphemism or foreign words, we obscure our access to the things or ideas named by those words: good prose is like a window pane" (*The Language of George Orwell* 29). This understanding places much weight on "Why I Write" and the windowpane simile, where it is used as the interpretative key to Orwell's view of language, has had to be interpreted and numerous critics have parsed it as "good prose is transparent". This

memorable phrases and in what follows I will try to contextualise Orwell's writing about language by considering his thought on the subject as developing throughout and in similar terms to his engagement in the condition-of-England question. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, offers a number of apparently conflicting definitions of the adjective "contingent". The second definition describes a proposition "liable to happen or not; of uncertain occurrence or incidence"; the eighth has something "dependent for its occurrence or character *on* or *upon* some prior occurrence or condition". Below, I will draw on this dual meaning in arguing that Orwell abandons a realist understanding of linguistic meaning as essentially fixed and comes to think of language as a contingent – that is uncertain, rather than necessary – phenomenon the condition of which is, moreover, contingent – that is dependant upon – the condition of England.

In an editorial written for the third number of the short-lived periodical *Polemic* in May of 1946 Orwell suggests that "the connection between totalitarian habits of thought and the corruption of language is an important subject which has not been sufficiently studied" (5). Having tentatively, or obliquely, approached the subject prior to writing his editorial, Orwell afterwards offered a number of more direct and explicit studies of the connection between thought and language and with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* gave the subject its most thoroughgoing dramatic investigation. His engagement with *Polemic*, which spans the period in which he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* informs this investigation and he

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remains question-begging though – transparent to what? – so such critics have tended to bolster their interpretation by relating it to ostensibly similar extracts, such as this one from "Politics and the English Language": "When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it" (429). This process, which explains why Rai thinks it paradoxical that Orwell's own prose seems to reveal more of his psychology than it does the real things of the world, has led – as in Rai's case – to confusion and dissatisfaction; thus Fowler complains: "Orwell's style tends not to be a spotless window – it is often flecked with literary rhetoric or with personal polemic" (9). Fowler's understanding, with its assumed dichotomy between personality and things, has become orthodox but, at the same time, the instances of critical interpretation that led to it have been forgotten – as is neatly illustrated by the quotes section of the popular *Good Reads* website, where Orwell is quoted as arguing that "good prose should be transparent, like a windowpane".

continues in his editorial to posit "a direct connection between acceptance of totalitarian doctrines and the writing of bad English" before invoking the collective to assert: "we think it important that this should be pointed out" (6).

Orwell's editorial is a riposte to "the December number of the [Marxist] *Modern Quarterly*", which, he reports, "devotes one paragraph of its editorial to an attack upon *Polemic*, which, it seems, is guilty of 'persistent attempts to confuse moral issues, to break down the distinction between right and wrong'" (2). "The above-quoted statement", Orwell continues,

> implies that there are two definite entities called "right" and "wrong", which are clearly distinguishable from one another and are of a more or less permanent nature. Without some such assumption it has no meaning (2).

Orwell then refers at length to an essay in the same magazine called "Belief and Action" in which Professor J.D. Bernal is, he claims, "in effect claiming that almost any moral standard can and should be scrapped when political expediency demands it" (2). "A thing that is especially noticeable in Professor Bernal's article", Orwell suggests, "is the English, at once pompous and slovenly, in which it is written […] long, vague words express the intended meaning and at the same time blur the moral squalor of what is being said" (5). Orwell's gloss of Bernal's essay seems fair. "The new phase of world history which we are now entering", he writes, "calls for new men and new virtues; much of what now stands for virtue and morality belongs to the era of capitalist individualism" (78). He appeals for a "change from individual to collective morality", whatever that might mean (80). There seems to be something, too, in his allegation of prosaic slovenliness: "Because an individual man is a product of society, he needs must incorporate in himself, in behaviour and belief, to the degree in which he is educated, all the traditions and history of that society" (72). Orwell's specific remarks on Bernal's essay introduce two of the key ideas – language's being hostage to political expediency and style obscuring meaning – of his work on language; his general

remarks on the relationship between language and thought introduce the three ideas which will set the terms of the following discussion (2).

First, Orwell contextualises the corrupting influence of language on thought within a field of developing study and this invites a reconsideration of his own engagement with the topic as developing. Second, Orwell's use of the collective is instructive. The editorial's "we" indicates an intimacy with *Polemic* that is absent from Orwell's other institutional affiliations and his role as an agenda-setter within what he called, in a letter to his former tutor Andrew Gow, the "constellation" of *Polemic* is an under-researched aspect of Orwell's career which adds illuminating context to his thinking about language and will be explored in detail here ("12 April 1946" 242). Orwell wrote that "Bertrand Russell is of course the chief star in the constellation" ("Letter to Gow" 242). Gow had also tutored the positivist philosopher A.J. Ayer whom, in the same letter, Orwell describes as "a great friend of mine" (242). "Orwell and Ayer, in particular, did much to set the tone" of *Polemic*, reports Stefan Collini in *Absent Minds* (396). Unlike the other publications with which he was associated, *Polemic* gets favourable coverage throughout Orwell's correspondence; "Orwell's commitment to *Polemic*" writes Peter Marks, "was more substantial than to any other journal in the post-war period" and early in 1947, he wrote to Dwight Macdonald to tell him "I have now joined the editorial board" (*George Orwell the Essayist* 141; "Letter to Dwight Macdonald 26th February 1947" 50). Despite thinking that the "first number was rather dull and very badly got-up", Orwell wrote to Macdonald in January 1946 of his "great hopes of it because we have great need of some paper in which one can do long and serious literary-political articles" – again the boundaries between disciplines are blurred (12). He mentioned these hopes again to Gow after the second number and, in the same letter that mentions his having joined the editorial board, he tells Macdonald that "the paper is now taking shape a bit" (50). He is then dismayed when, because Phillips lost interest in funding it, *Polemic* "died of the usual disease" after eight issues in late 1947: "It was a calamity 'Polemic' stopping,

wasn't it", he demanded of Julian Symons on Boxing Day, 1947 ("To Gleb Struve" 323; "To Julian Symons" 237). Foregrounding the developmental and collective aspects of Orwell's engagement with the condition-of-English question adds complexity to that engagement. This complexity will be addressed in the third section to the end of arguing that Orwell's conception of the condition of England and of the condition of English are contingent upon one another and, having traced the process of Orwell's recognition of this contingency, the chapter will end with a consideration of some signs, found in the upward curve of Orwell's parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question, that can be seen as indicating this ultimate destination.

.1.

From Eyeless Creature to Duckspeaker: Orwell's developing view

Despite its fame and its influence, "Politics and the English Language" is quite a confused essay. Some of its insights are clear, original and well made. When, for example, Orwell characterises political language as "consist[ing] largely of euphemism" his diagnosis is acute:

> Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called *pacification*. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called *elimination of unreliable elements* (428).

His conclusion – that "such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them" – seems inarguable (428). His proposals for "curing" this present "decadence", however, are extremely foggy by comparison (429). "What is above all needed", he writes in an opening clause which suggests a meaningful solution is to follow:

> is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about. In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is to surrender them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising, you probably hunt about till you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning (429).

While Orwell's warning about the dangers of surrendering thought to language seems reasonable, it is hard to see how his proposed solution would work in practice. Christopher Norris may have ideological reasons for criticising what he calls Orwell's "straightforward empiricist view" but he is justified in asking "what exactly can Orwell have in mind when he conjures up a pre-linguistic stratum of innocent, original thought as yet untouched by the

malign influence of words"[2] ("Language, Truth and Ideology" 254). The disconnect in the essay between acute diagnosis of language's vulnerability to political exploitation and vague (at best) proposals for its solution appears as the consequence of Orwell's essential and central confusion over the ends the essay is intended, and fit, to achieve. His professed scope is presented as limited: "I have not here been considering the literary use of language but *merely* language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought" (429; *emphasis added*). The proposed solutions address, must address, we are told, the "*detail*" of language – that is the "silly words and phrases" from which language is constructed and by which it is spoiled – and not "the general tone or spirit of a language", which cannot be altered by "a small minority" (429). Introducing confusing, and quite probably false, distinctions, Orwell's attempt to delineate his subject reveals the uncertainty with which he approached it. "Literary language" must still be an instrument for expressing thought – as Orwell had written elsewhere at the same time, the "imaginative writer […] cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind"; in "merely" considering the relationship between thought and language, Orwell is really considering the whole subject[3] ("The Prevention of Literature" 375). Remarks like "in our time it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing" address the general tone of a language (427). The list of rules with

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[2] For Norris, Orwell's confusing solutions are evidence of his "homespun empiricist outlook – his assumption that the truth was just there to be told in a straightforward, common-sense way", an assumption that leads, Norris thinks, to a "confused philosophy of language" (242; 253). The summary nature of this judgment has led Colls to suggest that Norris' position, rather than a genuine attempt to understand Orwell's view of language, is really just a Marxist's diagnosis of "'false' consciousness" (*George Orwell* 97). "Norris and friends", Colls continues, "tried to get at Orwell on empiricist grounds in a Communist party-orchestrated attack on him called *Inside the Myth. Orwell: Views from the Left*" (97). John Newsinger, too, is suspicious of Norris' motives and describes *Inside the Myth* as "an unholy alliance of feminists, cultural theorists and old-fashioned Stalinists, dedicated to reversing his influence" (*Orwell's Politics* 156).

[3] "The Prevention of Literature" and "Politics and the English Language" are almost exactly contemporaneous. He wrote the former in November 1945 and it was published in *Polemic* in January 1946. The latter was written in December '45 and appeared in *Horizon* in April of '46. Despite their proposing largely similar positions – that "private opinions" are more likely to be truthful than statements of orthodoxy, for example – the Communist writer Randall Swingler took exception to "Prevention" in terms of "Politics" and, perhaps the first writer to discern a paradox in Orwell's view of language, played them against one another in an essay titled "The Right to Free Expression", published, with annotations by Orwell, in *Polemic* 5 and discussed below.

which the essay ends amounts to an unsatisfactory solution addressed to specific details of the language and are mostly derived in any case, as Bolton has shown, from The *Tracts*, published between 1919 and 1948 of the society for Pure English: "The *Tracts*", Bolton suggests, "show how common Orwell's language concerns were for his time, place, and class" (22). Orwell's cures, in short, are both unoriginal and insufficiently robust to cure the ills he has diagnosed.

This is, I think, the root of the paradox repeatedly reported by critics of Orwell's work on language. The framework of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* is helpful here, however, in indicating that what appears as a paradox is really a consequence of a formal discrepancy. In his introduction, de Saussure distinguishes between the internal and external aspects of a language. "Internal linguistics" is the subject of Saussure's putatively scientific course; it is "*the study of linguistic structure*" in itself: "Our definition of a language assumes that we disregard everything which does not belong to its structure as a system" (9; 21). "External linguistics" is everything else outside of de Saussure's course; it is the study of language as a social phenomenon "of interest to all those, including historians, philologists and others, who need to deal with text" (7). De Saussure regards the two aspects of linguistics as equally important – "language is a social phenomenon" – and as very difficult to separate in practice – "Language in its entirety has many different and disparate aspects. It lies astride the boundaries separating various domains" (6; 10). The disjunct between Orwell's diagnosis and his prescribed cure is explained by de Saussure's distinction. Externally, Orwell is piercing in his analysis of the invidious ends to which language is put in the name of political expediency. He tries to offer internal solutions which have to do with the nature of language itself. These, however, are limited by his adoption of what de Saussure describes – in an echo of Bolton's observation of the commonness of Orwell's concerns – as "the superficial view taken by the general public, which sees a language merely as a nomenclature", that is as "a list of terms corresponding to a list of things" (16;

65). By the time he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, Orwell had developed beyond this superficial view, as a brief comparison of seemingly verbatim aspects of "Politics and the English Language" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will illustrate.

In Robert Lee's view, "even so deservedly famous an essay as 'Politics and the English Language' does not disclose as much of Orwell's concept of the uses of language as does its thematic incorporation in *1984*" (*Orwell's Fiction* xv). Considered in light of the essay's limitations, however, the relationship between the two texts is, I think, more complicated than that. Rather than the latter offering fuller disclosure of the same concept, as Lee's remark implies, these texts in fact illustrate the way in which Orwell's conceptualisation of the English language changed throughout the last part of his career. In the essay, Orwell declares that to use "ready-made phrases" is to bypass thought: "They will construct your sentences for you – even think your thoughts for you" (427). This familiar argument is dramatised by the introduction of a speaker whose spectacles are caught by the light, which "turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them"; hearing such a speaker spouting ready-made phrases "heightens", Orwell thinks, the effect of thoughtlessness (427). It is arresting that Winston Smith should experience this exact phenomenon in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and comparing the speaker's appearances shows the way in which the novel inherits and then extends aspects of the essay's critique of contemporary political language.

While at lunch in the canteen, Winston has the ideology behind the forthcoming Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary explained to him, with dangerous clarity, by his philologist friend Syme and, in the middle of this explication, is distracted by a "strident", "remorseless" speaker at another table (56). Reminiscent of the anti-Fascist speaker whose gramophonic address had bothered George Bowling in *Coming Up For Air*, this speaker's "head was thrown back a little, and because of the angle at which he was sitting, his spectacles caught the light and presented to Winston two blank discs instead of eyes" (57).

Although his speech is "just a noise, a quack-quack-quacking", Winston "could not be in any doubt about its general nature": "Whatever it was, you could be certain that every word of it was pure orthodoxy, pure Ingsoc" (57). Winston feels about this exactly as Orwell, in the essay, has suggested he should. Just as the essay notes that hearing such a speaker evokes "a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy" so Winston has "a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy"; the essay suggests that "the appropriate noises are coming out of the larynx, but his brain is not involved" and Winston thinks exactly the same: "it was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx" (427; 57). Making, verbatim, identical points, the novel and the essay appear equivalent here.

It is tempting, indeed, given Orwell's apparent proposal of linguistic realism in "Politics and the English Language", to introduce "Why I Write" here; if the speaker's glasses, metaphorically, obscure his meaning and "good prose is like a windowpane" then the significance of the speaker can be read as part of Orwell's wider advocacy of a "transparent" language linked to objects, and to real things (319). Paul Delany has attempted a reading along these lines in "Words, Deeds and Things". Combining "Politics", "Why I Write" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he writes that Orwell's

> famous claim that "Good prose is like a windowpane" proposes that mental activity should be orientated towards objects, about which we "think wordlessly". Language turns into demonic possession in his image of the orator whose spectacles, reflecting the light, turn him into a robot, programmed to emit a stream of words, words, words (94).

While such a reading offers a perhaps appealing consistency to Orwell's view of language, it is also, for the same reason, misleading. Such a composite account, in restating Orwell's apparent understanding of language as a nomenclature and extending that understanding from "Politics" into *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, cannot account for the way in which the figure of the eyeless creature is developed in the novel. For Winston and Syme's conversation is interrupted again, and the way that this second interruption is treated reveals a different,

and deeper, understanding of the relationship between language and thought than that indicated in "Politics and the English Language".

When a nearby telescreen chimes in to report on "demonstrations [held] to thank Big Brother for raising the chocolate ration to twenty grams a week", the orthodox response of "the eyeless creature at the other table" – he "swallowed it fanatically, passionately, with a furious desire to track down, denounce, and vaporise anyone who should suggest that last week the ration had been thirty grams" – contrasts immediately and absolutely with Winston's: "only yesterday, he reflected, it had been announced that the ration was to be *reduced* to twenty grams a week" (61). The object is not the important thing here. The eyeless creature, Winston and the demonstrators of thanks must all orientate their mental activity, in some way, towards chocolate; the broadcast requires that anyone listening knows what chocolate, as a concrete object, is, and thinks it a good thing. What matters is memory; Winston contradicts the glasses-wearing robot because he engages his memory. He doesn't "think wordlessly", as Delany has it, but "reflects" – "only yesterday" – and orientates his mental activity towards a past state (94). Whereas Winston is reflective, the man just quacks and this causes Syme to teach Winston a new word, "duckspeak": "to quack like a duck"[4] (57). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s duckspeaker is, then, a more developed figure than the eyeless creature of "Politics and the English Language". This is not to say that his importance has been more fully disclosed, but that he discloses something different in the novel. That the significance of this figure changes indicates the developmental aspect of Orwell's thinking about language and his establishment as a kind of ideal subject of the

[4] The ducks on Animal Farm, it might be remembered, were part of the "stupid" group of animals – along with the sheep and the hens – who were "unable to learn the Seven Commandments by heart" and for whom the Seven Commandments were "reduced to a single maxim, namely: 'Four legs good, two legs bad'" (30-31). They too, then, exemplify the "gramophone mind" against which Orwell had warned in "The Freedom of the Press" (written as the preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm*): "To exchange one orthodoxy for another is not necessarily an advance. The enemy is the gramophone mind, whether or not one agrees with the record that is being played at the moment" (259).

totalitarian Oceanic state – “the eyeless creature with the quacking voice would never be vaporised” – indicates, further, the conclusion of that development (64). Because he allows his language and his thought to be conditioned entirely by the state, the duckspeaker indicates the contingency of the condition of English on the condition of England but before arguing that this is the position Orwell would eventually adopt it is worth considering his significance in a bit more detail in light of the definition applied to him by the philologist with whom his fate is contrasted. Syme describes “duckspeak” as “one of those interesting words that have two contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it is abuse; applied to someone you agree with, it is praise”; “Syme would be vaporised” (57; 64). “Orthodoxy was unconsciousness” but Syme’s definition displays consciousness; he rejects, that is to say, orthodoxy, and he does so by engaging a conscious interest in language, by choosing, contrary to the duckspeaker, his words (56). Whereas the duckspeaker would vaporise anyone who should suggest a view contrary to his, that is to the state’s, in defining him, Syme acknowledges the contradictory status of his world and, by referring to opponents and to agreement, references the concept of debate. It is this concept, the contrasting fates of Syme and the duckspeaker imply, which his rulers deny.

.2.

"Controversial manuscripts are invited": Debate and the *Polemic* "constellation"

Funded by Rodney Phillips, edited by Humphrey Slater and founded on the social importance of debate, *Polemic* was first published in October of 1945 and ran, as noted above, throughout the period between the publications of "Politics and English Language" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Davison reports that on the 19th of June 1945 Orwell met "Humphrey Slater to discuss *Polemic*" (178). On the same day, Orwell met Fred Warburg for lunch and in a "Note on George Orwell" Warburg makes the first reference to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* having been started: "George Orwell has written the first twelve pages of his new novel, but, of course, disclaims all knowledge of when it will be finished" (178). The writing process coincides with the *Polemic* period almost exactly, so that at the end of October, 1947 Orwell wrote to Celia Kirwan – who was Slater's secretary – explaining: "I can't possibly write anything at present. I am smothered under work. I am struggling with this novel which I am supposed to finish some time in the Spring" (222). Collini describes the book (*Polemic* was printed as a series of books to circumvent post-war restrictions on magazine publication) as "one of those short-lived, intellectually strenuous journals which tell us so much about the cultural landscape of the immediate post-war years" (396). Stating the publication's concerns in its first editorial, Slater confirmed the magazine's saturation in the "post-war environment", which he described as characterised by "political exhortations to unity and obedience" (3). In this environment, Slater continues, it was felt that "a name like *Polemic*, implying the value of an exchange of different opinions, would have a usefully provocative quality" because "from a conflict of opinion the truth arises" (3). Concluding, he explains: "the *aim* of polemic is to provide a medium for discussing […] its *method* is to print articles from different points of view on directly and indirectly relevant subjects" (5). These subjects would correspond to the

> four aspects of contemporary life with which we are especially concerned. These are (1) *The discovery of the Unconscious*, (2) *The evolution of the problem of verbal meaning*, (3) *The success of Marxism*, (4) *The fundamental significance of the arts* (5).

The second of these is of most interest here, and Slater's term is instructive: the problem that Orwell would declare, in his own editorial, insufficiently studied, is "evolving" and this evolution is evident in Orwell's work. The object-based realism of "Politics and the English Language" gives way to a more nuanced position, the terms of which suggest that Orwell's association with *Polemic* influenced his evolving position on the problem of verbal meaning.

The connection between totalitarian habits of thought and the corruption of language were particular concerns of Slater and, had Orwell read his editor's long contribution to the evolving problem, printed in *Polemic* 4, he would have learned about "The Fallacy of Real Meaning". This is a species of realism, a version of the superficial nomenclature against which de Saussure warns. The fallacy of real meaning is, Slater writes, a "childish pre-conception", "which the medieval Church ossified into a theological dogma, and which has been inherited uncritically by the contemporary world" (60). "By now", Slater had opened his essay by suggesting, "there are many people who, when they think about the subject directly, can agree that no word has any real meaning" and, he concludes,

> By abandoning the "Realist" position human thought and communication may be infinitely improved in the process of the conscious use of words as arbitrary abstractions, the validity of which is constantly being modified in the course of practice and experiment (54; 62).

Characterising "words as arbitrary abstractions", Slater's conception of language is consistent with that taken by de Saussure, whose "*first principle*" is that "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*", but "The Fallacy of Real Meaning" is not conceived as a contribution to the field of Saussurean "internal linguistics" (67). Slater's concern with the problem of verbal meaning is politically motivated. It is of a piece with *Polemic*'s dissent against political exhortations to unity and obedience because, objected to by "the political authoritarians" and "the orthodox Marxist descendants of the Prussian police philosopher, Hegel",

"linguistic theory is dangerous to orthodoxy" (63-4). Abandoning "the fallacy of real meaning", Slater places "practice and experiment" as the criteria by which the meanings of words are established. Practice and experiment are aspects of *Polemic*'s editorial commitment to debate, which Slater had further enforced, in collective terms, in the magazine's second editorial:

> In the most general terms, our editorial policy may be said to be that of encouraging free speech in an increasingly authoritarian world. Our reason for this is that we believe that difference of opinion is essential to the emergence of the new (2).

Slater concludes:

> We shall also incite people to disagree with us by publishing their objections to our views, and we intend to increase rather than to decrease, the general argumentative character of *Polemic* (3).

The number's final page reads only: "Controversial manuscripts are invited". Orwell accepts Slater's appeal to practice and experiment as the criteria for linguistic meaning. In his own contributions to *Polemic* and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he highlights the fragility of these terms, and of debate, by presenting them as social phenomena contingent on the condition of England.

Orwell, first, was good at inciting disagreement. "The direct, conscious attack on intellectual decency", he remarked in "The Prevention of Literature", published in *Polemic*'s second number, "comes from the intellectuals themselves" (379). This judgment "provoked", in Peter Marks' words, "the writer, editor and Communist Randall Swingler to a sustained, detailed and forceful attack on Orwell that *Polemic* printed (along with Orwell's annotated reply) later in the year" (*George Orwell the Essayist* 154). Having described "the method" of "The Prevention of Literature" as "the wily weaving together of insubstantial implications to lead to dogmatic conclusions", Swingler calls "Politics and the English Language" into the condemnation:

> almost before we know where we are, by an ambiguous use of words like "totalitarian" (listed by Orwell in *Horizon*, April, 1946, among "words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly"), the defence of intellectual liberty

> has become synonymous with full-scale attack on the U.S.S.R. (50; qting "Politics" 425).

To this allegation, Orwell responds: "In the article referred to, I listed 'totalitarian' among the words that are dishonestly used, precisely because of the way in which it is applied, or not applied, to the U.S.S.R."; "A person who is not simply ignorant and who claims that the U.S.S.R. is not 'totalitarian'", he continues, "is giving the word a private definition in his own mind and allowing his hearer to think that he means something different" (51; 52). Orwell's defence is not entirely ingenuous. He does not explain the link between the U.S.S.R. and the use of the word totalitarian in "Politics and the English Language". In "The Prevention of Literature", he refers to "the spread of totalitarian ideas, mostly emanating from the U.S.S.R., among English intellectuals" so Swingler is justified in highlighting a discrepancy here since Orwell does seem to equivocate in "The Prevention of Literature" between the U.S.S.R. and totalitarianism (309). Such equivocation cannot be justified according to the terms of "Politics and the English Language" in which verbal dishonesty is presented as a consequence of "gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else" (426). The *Polemic* essay's reference to "the spread of totalitarian ideas, mostly emanating from the U.S.S.R." does, with its tone of vague paranoia, read like such an expression, constructed, Swingler implies, by the creators of the "Russian myth"[5] (51). Orwell would struggle to defend this phrase under the terms of "Politics and the English Language". Forced by the parameters of "annotation" into succinctness and specificity and with his thinking clarified by debate, however, Orwell has isolated the specific issue at stake in his earlier discussions of the word "totalitarian" and so restates his argument. Rather than appealing to some kind of "real meaning", Orwell defines totalitarianism in terms of social practice: "in general a country is considered to be

[5] "Or '*mythos*'" he continues, ironically quoting another example of "The Prevention of Literature" contravening the professed aims of "Politics and the English Language" in which Orwell expresses his desire "to drive out foreign phrases" (Swingler 51; qting. "Prevention" 373; "Politics" 429).

totalitarian when it is governed by a one-party dictatorship which does not permit legal opposition and crushes freedom of speech and the Press" (51-2). The word totalitarian, Orwell's defence acknowledges, is, necessarily, abstract. Slater had replaced the fallacy of real meaning with a "conception of the plurality of levels of abstraction". "Words vary widely in their levels of abstraction", Slater explained, and offered a series of examples: "*animal* is more abstract than *giraffe*, *event* than *murder*, and *pattern* than *beyond*. No word is concrete because no word *is* the thing to which it refers" (55). Orwell employs something like Slater's conception in his debate with Swingler by defining totalitarianism in a number of different contexts – all of which have to do with the experience of living in, for example, the U.S.S.R. Whereas Swingler's "private definition" precludes debate, Orwell's appeal to the usage of a group yields a socially-conditioned meaning which can, as a result, be debated.

Evidence that he benefited from *Polemic*'s commitment to debate, Orwell's disagreement with Swingler again illustrates his abandonment of a realist position and shows him insisting on linguistic standards suitable for free political debate. This aspect of Orwell's thinking about language is not new and it would be wrong to claim that Orwell's earlier work on language was not concerned with establishing these standards; "the corruption of language", Lee has described as, "the same concept that Orwell has articulated […] since his first book and which had dominated his thoughts since his experiences in the Spanish Civil War" (152). He articulates it differently, though, across his career and what is new here is the abandonment of Realism – of the appeal to concrete meaning – as the guarantor of free political debate. The unsuitability of that guarantee is shown by comparing the development of Orwell's work on language with the contemporary work of A.J. Ayer, the "great friend" with whom he helped set the tone of *Polemic* and with that of the constellation's "chief star", Bertrand Russell.

.3.

"A very serious delusion": Orwell, Russell and Ayer

Slater had ended "The Fallacy of Real Meaning" with a recommended reading list which included Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* – first published in 1936 and reprinted in 1946 to become, in Collini's words, "one of the cultural reference-points of the next decade" – and Russell's *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1941)[6] (*Absent Minds* 400). There is no direct evidence that Orwell followed Slater's suggestions and read either of these texts but, though critics have only, so far as I am aware, noted the possible influence of Ayer's, it is suggestive, especially when the three's mutual concern with the evolution of the problem of verbal meaning is considered, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* touches upon questions raised by both Ayer and Russell[7]. The first suggestive overlap I want to discuss pertains to Russell's *Inquiry*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and to "The Prevention of Literature", Orwell's second contribution to *Polemic*.

Russell had noted, in *The Analysis of Matter* (1927), that

> Physics and perception are like two people on opposite sides of a brook which slowly widens as they walk: at first it is easy to jump across, but imperceptibly it grows more difficult, and at last a vast labour is required to get from one side to the other (137).

His *Inquiry* makes that vast effort, addressing the problem that

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[6] Slater also suggests Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Frank Lorimer's *The Growth of Reason*, A. Korzybski's *Science and Sanity*; William Empson's (Empson was also a friend of Orwell's) *Seven types of Ambiguity*, Karl Britton's *Communication*, W.M. Urban's *Language and Reality* and Rudolf Carnap's *Introduction to Semantics* (63*n*).

[7] While there is no evidence that Orwell read *Language, Truth and Logic* or *Inquiry into Truth and Logic*, various readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have found compelling resonances between Orwell's novel and Ayer's text. "It is likely Orwell knew the work", writes Colls: "Some parts of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appear to turn on its arguments" (294). Judith N. Shklar goes further, describing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in "Should Political Theory Care?" as, in part, "a response to the implications of Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, which had become quite a best-seller since it had appeared in the thirties" (11). Crick has also acknowledged this apparent influence but is more speculative in asking: "Could [Orwell] possibly have picked up something from Freddy Ayer in Paris or London about 'the verification principle', which had been his sole criterion of meaning in his *Language, Truth and Logic* of 1936?" (*Life* 521). In *Orwell Remembered*, Ayer dismisses this account, but Crick remains unwilling to give it up completely: "It would be nice, and wholly plausible, to think that Orwell took […] from Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936, new ed. 1946), but Ayer says that they never discussed philosophy and it is not amongst Orwell's known collection of books" (210).

> Physics assures us that the occurrences which we call "perceiving objects" are at the end of a long causal chain which starts from the objects, and are not likely to resemble the objects except, at best, in certain very abstract ways. We all start from "naïve realism", i.e., the doctrine that things are what they seem. We think that grass is green, that stones are hard, and that snow is cold. But physics assures us that the greenness of grass, the hardness of stones, and the coldness of snow, are not the greenness, hardness, and coldness that we know in our own experience, but something very different. The observer, when he seems to himself to be observing a stone, is really, if physics is to be believed, observing the effects of the stone upon himself. Thus science seems to be at war with itself: when it most wants to be objective, it finds itself plunged into subjectivity against its will. Naïve realism leads to physics and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false; therefore it is false (15).

It is notable that Russell outlines the problem as one generally accepted – "Physics assures us"; "we think" – and this is how Orwell would articulate it himself in, and in correspondence pertaining to, "The Prevention of Literature". "Modern physics has proven", he writes in the essay, "that what seems to us the real world is an illusion, so that to believe in the evidence of one's senses is simply vulgar philistinism" (374). "The Prevention of Literature" was also published in the American magazine *Atlantic Monthly* and in a letter to its editor, Dudley Cloud, addressing proofs and responding specifically to a query about this idea, Orwell explained:

> "Physics" is not a misprint and should stand. The point is that the existence of the electronic world, where the ordinary rules of space and time to which we are accustomed appear not to work, is now often used as an argument to show that all our ideas about the macroscopic world are illusions […] in that case all our ideas about objective reality are mistaken, and to say that we know that such and such an event happened in such and such a manner is what is called "naïve realism" (369).

Rhetorically, both Orwell and Russell are observing here: Orwell uses the same general and collective terms as Russell – "to which we are accustomed"; "our ideas about the macroscopic world" – and they note the same problem. In itself, this is suggestive; it becomes all the more so when it is considered that the same problem appears in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where it is articulated, in very similar terms, by the narrator in what James Conant has called the novel's "focal passage":

> The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly, and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth's centre ("Freedom, Cruelty and Truth" 288; *NE-F* 84).

This passage, as Conant's designation suggests, has significant interpretative currency[8]. For Craig L. Carr, writing in *Orwell, Politics, and Power*, it is evidence that:

> Orwell bequeaths a kind of naïve realism to Winston, a view for which Orwell himself seems to have had some sympathy, though the text of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* suggests that he reluctantly abandoned this epistemological outlook during the construction of the manuscript (92).

Discussing his engagement with *Polemic* as evidence that Orwell abandoned this position, above, I have suggested one possible cause for Orwell's abandonment of naïve realism; another presents itself here: "naïve realism", Russell had written, "is false". My interest here, then, is to suggest what was at stake for Orwell in giving up this position. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* dramatises both the falsity of naïve realism and, just as importantly, the ominous consequences of its necessary abandonment. These consequences are made evident by a discussion of the related epistemological outlook forwarded in Ayer's text as it is critiqued in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

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[8] The focal passage with Winston writing that "*Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows*" and this "important axiom" has focalised much of the critical attention paid to the passage as a whole (84). For Richard Rorty, it is a symbol of Orwell's commitment to free speech: "it does not matter", he writes in *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, "whether 'two plus two is four' is true, much less whether this truth is 'subjective' or 'corresponds to external reality'. All that matters is that if you do believe it, you can say it without getting hurt" (176). For Conant, whose essay is a response to Rorty's: "'Two and two make four' figures as a central example of something the truth of which must be denied by the Party because of the kind of claim that it is: one that is true and moreover easily seen to be true by anyone competent in our practices of claim-making" (299). For Stephen Ingle, the truth function of Winston's axiom is what guarantees freedom and free speech: It is our certain knowledge of the world gained through experience mediated by reason, Winston maintained, that guarantees our freedom and allows us to act in an intelligible and meaningful way, if we can retain our confidence that two plus two makes four, he says, then 'all else follows'" (*Social and Political Thought* 124).

Caleb Thompson, in his discussion of Orwell's realism, "Philosophy and Corruption of Language", has pointed out a number of similarities between Orwell's critique of language and Ayer's. Thompson characterises Orwell and Simone Weil – Weil also went to Spain and returned to warn, in "The Power of Words", against the duplicitous potential of "abstract political concepts" – as "social critics" and writes: "The Orwell/Weil type of critique does not work by laying down standards of its own, but by respecting the standards which are the context for free political discourse" (27). Thompson likens the social critics' work to that of contemporary "positivist critics", whom he characterises with specific reference to Ayer's work (28). "As with the social critics", he writes,

> the positivists distinguish between the "emotional" and the "literal" meaning of sentences, and they offer a criterion by which propositions with literal meaning can be distinguished. One would say, as Ayer puts it, "that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable" (28; qting. *Truth and Logic* 5).

Thompson addresses Orwell's early writing on language – that which is, like Weil's, most immediately responsive to his experiences in, and immediately after returning from, Spain – and accordingly highlights his appeal to a realist epistemology, a linking of words to things which he suggests was also Ayer's intention: "The aim of the positivist critique, like that of the social critics, was the elimination of vacuous forms of speech by validating language through its connections to things" (27-8).

That Orwell had sought to validate language through its connection to things is evident in "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War" where he immediately tries to render his memories tangible: "First of all the physical memories, the sounds, the smells and the surfaces of things" (497). Further, when Orwell writes that "in Spain, for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie", he seems to propose an incipiently verificationist position (504). "We say", writes Ayer, "that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express"

(36). An ordinary lie is factually significant: it is verifiable, but false. If the newspaper reports Orwell saw in Spain bear no relation to the facts, one way of understanding them is, as Ayer complained of the metaphysics of F.H. Bradley, as "not even in principle verifiable" (36). Before dismissing Bradley's metaphysics in these terms, Ayer quotes from his seminal text, *Appearance and Reality* – "'the Absolute enters into, but is itself incapable of, evolution and progress'" – then proceeds, in ironic terms:

> Of course it is possible that the author of such a remark is using English words in a way in which they are not commonly used by English-speaking people, and that he does, in fact, intend to assert something which could be empirically verified (*Language, Truth and Logic* 36; qting. Bradley 499).

There is an echo here in the terms in which Orwell had complained about Swingler's "private definition". Acknowledging this echo is simultaneously to acknowledge, however, the contingent aspect of the Verification Principle as the criteria for meaning and this acknowledgment, it turns out, is present even within the incipiently verificationist position that Orwell had taken in "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War". For, having noted that "if you look up the history of the last war in, for instance, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, you will find that a respectable amount of the material is drawn from German sources", Orwell laments that "it is just this common basis of agreement, with its implication that human beings are all one species of animal, that totalitarianism destroys" (504).

"Verificationism", writes David Dwan in "Truth and Freedom in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*", "was a popular position in the 1940s, although it was more plausibly presented as a theory of meaning rather than of truth" (387). Russell, however, did not think Ayer's Verification Principle very plausible as a theory of meaning, as he explains in his *Inquiry*:

> If I wish to "verify" the statement "Caesar was assassinated", I can only do so by means of *future* events – consulting books of history, manuscripts, etc. But these are only to the purpose as affording evidence of something other than themselves. When I make the statement, I do not mean "whoever looks up the encyclopaedia will find certain black marks on white paper". My seeing these black marks is a unique event on each occasion when I see them; on each occasion I can know that I have seen them; from this knowledge I can infer (more or less doubtfully) that Caesar was assassinated. But my perception of the black marks, and my inference from this

> perception are not what make the assertion about Caesar *true*. It would be true even if I made it without any grounds whatever. It is true because of what happened long ago, not because of anything that I am doing or shall do (325).

It is arresting, given Ayer's dismissal of Bradley, that O'Brien should chide Winston while interrogating him – "'You are no metaphysician'" – and that this rebuke leads to a description of the epistemological fragility of history (260). "'Does the past exist concretely, in space? Is there somewhere or other a place, a world of solid objects, where the past is still happening?'", O'Brien continues, to which Winston can only answer:

> "No."
> "Then where does the past exist, if at all?"
> "In records. It is written down."
> "In records. And ——?"
> "In the mind. In human memories".
> "In memory. Very well, then. We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?" (260).

"Such a view", Russell had written of verificationism, "makes history impossible and memory unintelligible" (137). The "nightmare situation" Orwell had represented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one in which, by pursuing an aggressively verificationist epistemology, the totalitarian Party renders history impossible and memory unintelligible ("Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" 135).

The difference between Winston's reaction to the news that the chocolate ration has been "raised" and that of the duckspeaker causes Winston to wonder if he is "*alone* in the possession of a memory" (62). Winston's faith that he, at least, has a memory is encouraged by a formative event: "Just once in his life he had possessed – *after* the event: that was what counted – concrete, unmistakable evidence of an act of falsification" (78). He believes this piece of evidence "enough to blow the Party to atoms" (82). Later he is convinced that what he thinks a memory is only "a very serious delusion" but even at the time he toes the line and shuts up: "without uncovering it again, he dropped the photograph into the memory hole" (258; 82). His belief is lost to communal forgetfulness:

> today, supposing that it could be somehow resurrected from its ashes, the photograph might not even be evidence. Already, at the time when he made his discovery, Oceania was no longer at war with Eurasia, and it must have been to the agents of Eastasia that the three dead men had betrayed their country. Since then there had been other changes – two, three, he could not remember how many. Very likely the confessions had been rewritten and rewritten until the original facts and dates no longer had the smallest significance (83).

In a note appended to his "Demonstration of the Impossibility of Metaphysics" – which rehearses the central argument of *Language, Truth and Logic*: that "a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express" – Ayer refers to a change of mind: "I now hold that all empirical propositions are hypotheses" (*Truth and Logic* 35; "Demonstration" 344*n*). He presents two questions that an empirical proposition must satisfy before it can be deemed verifiable: "'What observations are relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?' 'What observations would lead us to allow or deny it a place in our system of accepted propositions pending the production of further evidence?'" (344*n*). In precisely Ayer's terms, Winston traces the steps of a process by which the sort of statement that he would like to make about Jones, Aaronson, and Rutherford could be verified – by checking the nature of the crimes, their context, and the dates on which they occurred – and acknowledges the effect this verification would have on the system of accepted propositions – it would blow them to atoms. This process satisfies the terms of Ayer's reformulation of the principle of verification; at the same time, its tracing is inseparable from the simultaneous acknowledgement that the necessary steps have been systematically destroyed and that, as a result, it can have no place within a system of socially accepted propositions. It will remain a hypothesis. As Dwan has pointed out, "Winston's beliefs about the past are theoretically verifiable, even if they are no longer practically demonstrable" (388). When he adds that "they thus remain meaningful even if they cannot be shown to be true", Dwan must mean for us (388). "*Don't let it happen*", Orwell had written of the novel's "nightmare situation", "*it depends on you*" ("Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" 135). As Rorty, responding to

Conant's criticism in *Rorty and his critics*, has written: "Conant speaks as if Winston's memories are the best evidence as to the facts. Orwell and we know that they are, but how is Winston supposed to know that?" (343). Because, as will be discussed more fully in the following, final chapter, we are still in a position to stop the nightmare in which Winston lives from happening to us, we can regard his belief as meaningful but, for him, it is, precisely, insignificant.

Ayer's book, as Russell's criticism of Verification notes, does not, in fact, link words directly to objects but to experience. "A proposition is said to be verifiable", he writes in *Language, Truth and Logic*, "if, and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience" (37). "Some truths" Carr has written of the focal passage, "we are asked to suppose, are directly accessible": that water is wet is one such truth, discoverable immediately through experience (98). This claim though, for Carr, "introduces Orwell's growing understanding that this bit of philosophical fantasy could no longer be sustained in a manner that preserved individual integrity from emergent forces of social control" and we can see this, and Orwell's developing understanding, by looking at the manuscript of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (98). In an earlier draft, Orwell had had O'Brien tell Winston: "What is truth for the Party is truth. It cannot even be *verified*. There is nothing outside it. It is truth" (*Extant Manuscript* 268; *emphasis added*). Ayer's word had to go, presumably, because in fact the Party's "truth" *is* verifiable; as O'Brien reminds Winston, "We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories" (260).

Indeed, Oceania's epistemological system – if that is the right word – is verificationist in a very precise and laborious sense, as Winston should know. With the rest of the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth, he is engaged in an elephantine process whereby

> day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up to date. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have

> been correct, nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record (42).

When we follow Winston to work and see him "create" – in what it would be nice to think is a nod to Russell's objection to verificationism – a "historical" figure "who had never existed in the present" but "now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar" (50). Winston thinks this a "curious" fact about history, but it isn't; it is a curious fact about his society, which has made history – as we, English-speaking people, understand it – impossible.

History is made impossible by the Party's bureaucratically efficient verificationism and with it memories, too, are made unintelligible. In this, the linking of words to things and to experience is shown to be, in itself, an insufficient safeguard for the preservation of the standards of free discourse. Colls thinks that "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* envisages the end of England (Airstrip One) by the wiping out of its identity […] and the manipulation of its language, truth and logic" (205). O'Brien and the Party for whom he speaks may be said to be manipulating *Language, Truth and Logic*. Whereof one cannot speak, he tells Winston after Wittgenstein, an acknowledged influence on both Ayer and Russell, thereof one must not speak[9]. In this way, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* casts both meaning and truth, and language, truth and logic as social problems with particular bearing on the condition-of-England question. Insisting on Verification as the criteria for linguistic meaning, the novel warns, puts free debate – precisely that which language should promote – at risk because it cedes control over meaning to those in charge, to "them". This warning gets further iteration in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the problems posed by Newspeak: "the most searching meditation

[9] Russell had quoted Wittgenstein's slogan, the last words of his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, in his first contribution to *Polemic*, "Logical Positivism": "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (9).

ever written", thinks Conant, "on the potential intellectual implications of replacing one vocabulary with another" (314).

.4.

"Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak": Politics as the English Language

Newspeak is the official language of Oceania. Its purpose, we are told at the beginning of the Appendix, "was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (312). It has been occasionally suggested that Orwell intended Newspeak as a critique of C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards' Basic English[10]. It is hard, however, to see how such readings can be justified as Orwell's remarks on Basic are generally positive. Indeed, in a remark in his ninth "As I Please" column he offers what amounts to a direct refutation of these readings. "Public opinion", he writes,

> is beginning to wake up to the need for an international language, though fantastic misconceptions still exist. For example, many people imagine that the advocates of an international language aim at suppressing the natural languages, a thing no one has ever seriously suggested (82).

Readings which conflate Basic and Newspeak depend on this misconception of the former. Of course, given the arguments above, it is possible that Orwell's opinion of Basic changed but there is not much evidence of this; as it slipped off the national agenda with the change of government and resultant shift of emphasis to domestic policy, so it seems to have slipped off Orwell's agenda and he makes no real mention of it in the period under discussion here.

If Newspeak parodies a project of linguistic utopianism at all, then it is Interglossia, proposed by Professor Lancelot Hogben in a book of that title which Orwell reviewed for the *Manchester Evening News* in 1944: "I don't believe in a future for this language", he said

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[10] John Atkins, writing in *George Orwell: A Literary Study*, interprets Orwell's imaginary language in this context and Mary Jo Morris has more recently suggested the same in "Bentham and Basic English: The 'Pious Founders' of Newspeak". Atkins speculates that "perhaps the reason why [Orwell's] sympathy with Basic English never developed into overt support was because he feared that Basic might be the forerunner of the manipulative language that he illustrated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (103) "Just as Orwell's portrayal of Oceania exaggerates and criticises tendencies in contemporary politics", writes Morris, similarly, "so Newspeak constitutes his reply to the language schemes popular from the 1920s to the 1940s, in particular to Basic English" (102).

(32). Hogben, at least, saw *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a critique of his project. "Your book helped me to understand your irritation about *Interglossia*", he wrote to Orwell, "though I did not enjoy it any less on that account" ("19 May 1949"). "Reading between the lines", Hogben continues, "one feels that you are afraid that if we start tampering with language at all in the present totalitarian world, any change will be a change for the worst". This does not seem quite right, however, at least if the link Hogben had earlier suggested between Orwell's "irritation" with Interglossia and his novel is retained for, in the review, Orwell credits Basic (in positive *contra*distinction to Interglossia) with granting its learners "the enormous advantage of being put in touch, straight off, with two or three hundred million people" (32). "Moreover", he continues, "anyone who chooses to proceed from Basic to standard English has access to a world-wide press and the literature of hundreds of years" (32). This is manifestly not the case with Newspeak, which was designed with the explicit intention that, as Syme knew, "by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now" (55). Basic was never intended to have this effect, and would not have this effect[11]. The feature which recommends Basic to Orwell, its retention of English's link with a past tradition, is specifically destroyed by Newspeak: "When Oldspeak had been once and for all superseded", the Appendix tells us, "the last link with the past would have been severed" (324). This comparison is, I think, something of a red herring; it is, as Conant has acknowledged, to the loss entailed by the replacement of one vocabulary by another that Newspeak makes us

[11] Whereas Newspeak would "swallow the whole" of Lincoln's "Declaration of Independence" into "the single word *crimethink*", a Basic English translation would retain something of the original sentiment (325). The passage quoted in "The Principles of Newspeak" would read, in Basic, as the less elegant, but nonetheless salvageable: "We keep these truths to be clear, that all men are made equal, that they are gave power by their one putting into existence with certain rights, that among these are existence, liberty, and the going after of happiness. That to safe these rights, governments are made to take effect among men, forming of word from another their powers from the agreement of the made necessary. That whenever any form of government becomes causing destruction of those ends, it is the right of the people to change or put an end to it, and to get going new government".

attend. Newspeak shows us what else we stand to lose if we lose our language, if we allow it to be corrupted; it is, in this, a further, and final, critique on Orwell's early writing on language.

In *Language in History*, Tony Crowley identifies what he calls "a resort to etymology" as emerging in "work on the English language in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (153). This emergence, Crowley explains, tended to be "propelled by theological and political concerns; or to put it another way, the new science of language was deployed in a discourse of moral and political order" (154). Orwell's writing on language is propelled by political concerns and, in "Politics and the English Language" at least, appears to take the same form as Crowley's historicised movement. When Orwell introduces the example of a drunkard and the vicious circle of his drinking as analogous to what has happened to the condition of English –

> It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible

– he casts it in a fallen state from which it will take a significant "moral effort" to emerge (421). This position appears equivalent to that adopted by Crowley's linguistic moralists in the way that it "presuppose[s] that there was some original state of language in which a given order of morality was embodied, and from which later states had deviated" (155). In *Discourse in the Novel* Mikhail Bakhtin proposes the term *monoglossia*, which Crowley borrows in arguing:

> such an account […] depend[s] upon a belief in an absolute form of *monoglossia* and *monologism*, in which words have original, true meanings (which can be traced) and subsequent perverse meanings (which provide us with a history of fallen human thought) (156).

Orwell appears to propose *monologism* in "Politics and the English Language", as Crowley himself has noted in *Proper English?*, an anthology of *Readings in Language, History and Cultural Identity*, where he adds a note after Alison Assiter's "Did Man Make Language?":

"For an essay which has much the same stance towards a static theory of meaning as that evinced in the above essay, see George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language'" (242). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, Orwell dramatises the totalitarian aspect of static theories of meaning – that they promote *monological* thinking.

In "Politics and the English Language", Orwell diagnoses the poor condition-of-English as epitomised by a preference for phrases over words and presents a drastic and destructive cure for this contemporary "slovenliness": "if you simplify your English you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy", he instructs (430). The "follies of orthodoxy" have been discussed elsewhere but "simplify" here means to cut down: "silly words and expressions", he writes in defence of the claim that linguistic behaviour is, even at the social level, alterable or "curable", "have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process but owing to the conscious action of a minority" (428). "The defence of the English language", he writes, heightening the essay's militaristic tone towards the end, "is especially concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom which has outworn its usefulness" (429). The parallel between "scrapping" and "outworn its usefulness" creates a metaphorical resonance between language and household objects. This is a strangely mundane image given Orwell's earlier insistence on the vital importance of his subject, and the, again, militaristic tone in which the sentence opens, and this disjunct draws attention back to the insufficiency of Orwell's solutions: the threat identified in his most cogent examples is that *new* phrases have been *invented because of their usefulness* (428). When this is considered, the appeal to "usefulness" as the criteria against which "scrappable" phrases will be assessed looks ominous in its dependence on expediency, all the more so, indeed, when it is remembered that the criteria is to be arbitrated by a "small minority". *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts a society in which a small minority ("something less than 2 per cent of the population" according to Goldstein's book) exerts a conscious tyranny – "a boot stamping on a human face" is O'Brien's eloquent metaphor, borrowed from Jack London – over the

majority[12] (217; 280). This tyranny is ideologically justified under the tenets of Ingsoc and, as Syme explains, "Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak" (55). This is Politics *as* the English Language, a nightmarish exaggeration of the tenets of the earlier essay; as Delany has it, "in some crucial ways, the engineers of Newspeak seem to be faithful disciples of 'Politics and the English Language'" (97). For, the Party is expressly concerned with the scrapping of every word or idiom which has outworn, as they see it, its usefulness. Taken to its logical extreme, the "scrapping" Orwell prescribed in "Politics" has become orthodox policy:

> "It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. Of course the great wastage is in the verbs and adjectives, but there are hundreds of nouns that can be got rid of as well. It isn't only the synonyms; there are also the antonyms. After all, what justification is there for a word which is simply the opposite of some other word? A word contains its opposite in itself. Take 'good', for instance. If you have a word like 'good', what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well – better, because it's an exact opposite, which the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good', what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? 'Plusgood' covers the meaning, or 'doubleplusgood' if you want something stronger still. Of course we use those forms already, but in the final version of Newspeak there'll be nothing else. In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be covered by only six words – in reality, only one word. Don't you see the beauty of that, Winston? It was B.B.'s idea originally, of course," he added as an afterthought (54).

This is an almost outrageously ironic recapitulation of the solution Orwell had offered in his earlier essay[13]. The minority granted powers of arbitration in "Politics" has been reduced, here, to a single individual whose power is automatically assumed, "as an afterthought". Accordingly, the complex concepts of goodness and badness and all their attendant

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[12] "'You, and labor, and all of us'", prophesies Ernest Everhard, the hero of London's *The Iron Heel*, "'will be crushed under the iron heel of a despotism as relentless and terrible as any despotism that has blackened the pages of the history of man. That will be a good name for that despotism, the Iron Heel'" (109).

[13] Homi K. Bhabha has even suggested that the Party's linguistic philosophy is implicit in the terms of Orwell's. "If we look at the mental pictures projected by Orwell's own writings as he proposes a cure for the language of the body politic", he writes in "Doublespeak and the Minority of One", "we quickly realise that his underlying metaphors throw up images of some pretty nasty things done to the body of language in the effort to reform it. His own metaphors for the clarification and cure of a language made decadent by ten or fifteen years of European dictatorship are suffused with the imagination of totalitarian violence, even a kind of eugenicist enthusiasm" (30).

("useless") superlatives with their various shades of meaning, which had occupied Russell for seven pages of argumentative prose in *Polemic* 6, have been reduced to a single (and by implication useful) word in order to better accord with the aims of the individual whose boot stamps on the human face[14]. This reduction is a species of "The Fallacy of Real Meaning" that Slater had analysed in *Polemic* because of its "primitive antithetical assumption of merely two, rigidly opposite poles of generality – universals and particulars" (60). "Universal opposites such as *soft* and *hard*", Slater explains, "are only mutually exclusive if they are considered, in some almost frighteningly mysterious way, to be real things" (60). This – realist – understanding, which is, again, one which Orwell had promoted, of language has been, Slater writes "ossified into a theological dogma" and this is how it emerges in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as a tool of, to borrow O'Brien's description of the Party, "the priests of power" ("Fallacy" 60; *NE-F* 261).

When we consider that the boot is intended to stamp on the face "forever" and that this perpetuity is to be secured partly by linguistic means, Orwell's ultimate verdict on the realist epistemology he had earlier seemed to advocate is confirmed. Once the new edition of the Dictionary on which Syme is working is complete, "the whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will be no thought, as we understand it now" and where there is no thought there can be only orthodoxy (55). The historian who provides the novel's "Appendix", "The Principles of Newspeak", confirms this intention: "Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum" (313).

However, and as Thomas Pynchon has pointed out in "The Road to 1984",

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[14] "I suggest that an occurrence is 'good' when it satisfies desire, or, more precisely, that we may define 'good' as 'satisfaction of desire'. One occurrence is 'better' than another if it satisfies more desires or a more intense desire. I do not pretend that this is the only possible definition of 'good', but only that its consequences will be found more consonant with the ethical feelings of the majority of mankind than those of any other theoretically defensible position" ("Good and Bad" 5).

> From its first sentence, "The Principles of Newspeak" is written consistently in the past tense, as if to suggest some later piece of history, post-1984, in which Newspeak has become literally a thing of the past – as if in some way the anonymous author of this piece is by now free to discuss, critically and objectively, the political system of which Newspeak was, in its time, the essence. Moreover, it is our own pre-Newspeak English language that is being used to write the essay. Newspeak was supposed to have become general by 2050, and yet it appears that it did not last that long, let alone triumph, that the ancient humanistic ways of thinking inherent in standard English have persisted, survived, and ultimately prevailed, and that perhaps the social and moral order it speaks for has even, somehow, been restored[15] (6).

The novel is redeemed by the very same "standard English" – with all its "vagueness" and "incompetence" – that Orwell had explicitly denounced in the essay. There, he had written that "the defence of the English language […] has nothing to do with archaism, with the salvaging of obsolete words and turns of speech" (429). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* however, the defence of English and, perhaps, of England itself is implied to have occurred precisely through a "salvaging" of words and turns of speech that were supposed to become, or to have become, obsolete and the "slightly happier tune" that Pynchon finds in the Appendix comes from the fact that "standard English" has not, ultimately, been "departed from" (6). Newspeak is an attempt at *monoglossia* which Bakhtin describes, in terms similar to Slater's, as a product of an "absolute dogma" that creates the "narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable" language (*Discourse in the Novel* 61). As such, it contrasts negatively with standard English which, for all Orwell's previous complaints, scans still as an example of *heteroglossia* and therefore continues to offer "a working hypothesis for comprehending

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[15] This metanarrative intervention – which Crick thought clumsily "tacked on" – has not been comfortably assimilated into the body of scholarship on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Pynchon's reading is by no means accepted by the scholarship (*Life* 551). Lee has suggested that "most disturbing, after all the monstrousness the book implies for the human condition, is that 'The Principles of Newspeak' are described in the *past* tense. If we believe Orwell, we are past 1984 and closing in on 2050" (*Orwell's Fiction* 155). If this is a somewhat confusing objection to Pynchon's reading, Lorraine Saunders has contested Pynchon's view more convincingly, suggesting that "if one examines the syntax of the Appendix [even] more thoroughly, it becomes clear that it could only have been written by someone situated firmly in 1948, a person who has been able merely to glimpse into the future of 1984, like a Wellsian time-traveller" (144-5). So far as I know, Bernard Bergonzi was the first to find "a faint suggestion of hope in the Appendix on Newspeak" (*Wartime and Aftermath* 100). That note of hope underpins the currently-running Headlong Productions' theatrical adaptation of the novel; as co-creator Robert Icke told Dominic Cavendish, "I think the appendix is the most important bit. I think it's structurally the thing that defines the whole" ("Beginning at the End" 8).

and expressing reality"; for reality, that is, as it appears to English-speaking people (61). Accordingly, standard English is an appropriate medium through which the implied historian can describe the reality of a regime whose language had been specifically designed to confound reality.

Ultimately, then, in dramatising "the connection between totalitarian habits of thought and the corruption of language" – a phenomenon he had described as yet to be sufficiently studied, Orwell offers no comprehensive account for what language is, or what it should be. Dwan has written that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "promotes no comprehensive theory of truth and exposes the shortcomings of some classical positions" (390). The same is true of language. In exposing the shortcomings of a position that he had earlier advocated and of the popular position advocated by his great friend Ayer, Orwell proposes no comprehensive theory of language. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, in part, a study in what de Saussure would call "external linguistics"; Orwell's last, and most lasting, condition-of-England novel presents language as lying "astride the boundaries separating various domains" and as contingent, therefore, on the condition of England. "To question language is to question culture", Slater had written in his fourth editorial, and when Orwell questions language and culture in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* he dramatises Slater's further claim, that

> The lifelong flux of myriads of stimuli to which a man's biography is the response, is utterly saturated with verbal symbols. Every conceptual thing a human being thinks throughout his life is thought with the help of words and all his feelings are crystallised and coloured by the words he has for them; and everything a man does, and all that is, is determined absolutely by the interaction of his word-soaked emotions and his verbalised ideas. Human society is unthinkable without language and so all-pervading is the phenomenon of speech that it is reasonable to consider words the most characteristic and fundamental aspect of the human environment (2; 4).

In dramatising this claim, Orwell highlights the way in which our reliance on language makes us vulnerable to totalitarianism. Representing a "nightmare situation" conceived as a warning, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demands that we mind our language.

.Conclusion.

"The downward curve is implied in the upper one": Orwell's early work on language

Keith Williams has argued that James Joyce's *Ulysses* inspired Orwell to explore "the lost continent of our unconscious ideological construction as subjects in language" and Ruth Hoberman, speaking recently at the MLA Conference in Chicago, has presented *A Clergyman's Daughter*, which Orwell wrote while reading *Ulysses*, as an extended exploration of that construction, as depicting "a world devoid of personal agency, where the press and state-sponsored capitalism shape the very thoughts of its inhabitants" ("'The Unpaid Agitator'" 732; "The Nightmare of History in George Orwell's *A Clergyman's Daughter*"). In a letter to Brenda Salkeld, Orwell remarks of the "passage where Gerty Macdowell is soliloquising" in "the style of the Heartsease library" that what had "seemed a sort of elephantine joke" now strikes him as something more significant: "I now see that you could not possibly display the interior of the girl's mind so well in any other way"[16] ("10? December 1933" 327). "In his comments on Nausicaa", Hoberman remarks,

> we see Orwell glimpsing the extent to which what we think of as personal identities and desires are, in fact, constructed by the various texts – political, religious, literary, theatrical, journalistic – around us.

This is indeed an insistent, and an immediate theme of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, evident from the very first page as Dorothy exhorts "herself sharply in the second person plural. Come on, Dorothy, up you get! No snoozing, please! Proverbs vi, 9" (5). Proverbs vi, 9 asks: "How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?" Dorothy's citation of this exhorting interrogative – "in the second person plural" – shows her internalisation of Biblical phraseology and the way in which her identity is subject to, and constructed in, the terms of that text. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, thought and identity are

[16] Whether it would be possible to display the interior of a young girl's mind in another way is a moot point; that Joyce chose to do so in the style of the Heartsease library – a series of cheap romantic fictions for girls – seems inarguable: "Gerty MacDowell might easily have held her own beside any lady in the land and have seen herself exquisitely gowned with jewels on her brow and patrician suitors at her feet vying with one another to pay their devoirs to her" (*Ulysses* 341).

similarly subject to social forces and again this subjectivity is evident in language. In the poetry of Gordon Comstock it is not the bible but money (or, rather, the Money God),

> Who spies with jealous, watchful care,
> Our thoughts, our dreams, our secret ways,
> *Who picks our words* and cuts our clothes,
> And maps the pattern of our days (161; *emphasis added*).

In both of these early novels, the words that we use are shown to be selected for us by external, social forces. In this way *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, which predate Orwell's advocacy of Realism in the mid-1940s, dramatise the same tyrannising potential of language as that parodied in the Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In February 1947, living on Jura and trying to finish *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell turned his attention to Scottish nationalism (of which he had previously been dismissive) in what was to be one of his final "As I Please" *Tribune* columns: "one small but not negligible point", he wrote, "is the language" (44).

> At one time I would have said that it is absurd to keep alive an archaic language like Gaelic, spoken by only a few hundred thousand people. Now I am not so sure […] if people feel that they have a special culture which ought to be preserved, and that the language is part of that, difficulties should not be put in their way when they want their children to learn it properly (44).

This intervention, with its clear signalling of a change of mind, emphasises the fluidity of Orwell's views on language; instead of maintaining a fixed view on the subject, he studied it – to paraphrase his *Polemic* editorial – and thus he questioned his earlier assumptions and judgments: "Now I am not so sure". Not all of Orwell's earlier assumptions are cast aside, however, and the "As I Please" essay's remarks on the Scottish people's "archaic language" remake the link that Orwell had earlier drawn between language and identity. Our unconscious ideological construction as subjects in language is cast, in this process, as a consequence of our shared national and cultural experience; not as a lost continent but as an aspect of the nation.

In “New Words”, a peculiar, never published, essay on language which Peter Davison is “very tentative” in dating to April 1940, Orwell had offered two solutions to the problem, “noticed” by “everyone who thinks at all”, “that our language is practically useless for describing anything that goes on inside the brain” (128). Introducing some of the ideas that would concern him in “Politics and the English Language” – that, for example, “lies will fall into artistic shape when truth will not” – “New Words” is, if Davison’s dating is correct, Orwell’s first study specifically addressed to the condition-of-English question (131). Most of the essay is devoted to arguing for a vehemently realist project for the creation of “New Words” involving the cinema, but on his way to proposing this strange solution Orwell argues that “what is wanted is to discover the now nameless feelings that men have *in common*”[17] (134). As evidence that new words can be created, to a more positive end than is intended by the primarily destructive, but still occasionally creative, process of Newspeak, he refers to the family. “All large families”, he writes, “have two or three words peculiar to themselves – words which they have made up and convey subtlised, non-dictionary meanings”; “what makes it possible for the family to invent these words”, he continues, “is the basis of their common experience. Without common experience, of course, no word can mean anything” (133). Realism had always coexisted, then, with practice (and experiment) in Orwell’s writing on language. In considering Orwell’s writing about language in the context of his parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question, his concern with practice, and with “common experience”, is of the greatest interest.

In “Charles Dickens”, Orwell had argued that “people of very different types can be described as ‘common’. In a country like England, in spite of its class-structure, there does

[17] “All the powerful motives which will not go into words and which are a cause of constant lying and misunderstanding”, he suggests, “could be tracked down, given visible form, agreed upon, and named. I am sure that the film, with its almost limitless powers of representation, could accomplish this in the hands of the right investigators, though putting thoughts into visible shape would not always be easy – in fact, at first it might be as difficult as any other art” (134).

exist a certain cultural unity" (55). In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, famously, he would embody this cross-class cultural unity in the figure of the family. England, he writes,

> is a family in which the young are generally thwarted and most of the power is in the hands of irresponsible uncles and bedridden aunts. Still, it is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control – that, perhaps, is as near as once can come to describing England in a phrase (401).

Patrick Parrinder has written that "Oceania, with its leader called Big Brother, is a vast parody of the nuclear family" (*Nation and Novel* 317). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s parody will be discussed as a whole in the next chapter. I am concerned here with the link between the familial and the linguistic aspect of that parody. This link illustrates the way in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* inherits and adapts the terms of Orwell's earlier engagement with the condition of English. Throughout that engagement, Orwell presents the condition of English as contingent on the condition of England, the private language of the national family on the attitudes of the members in control: Newspeak was, after all, Big Brother's idea. Orwell presents language as conditioned by the society of which it is simultaneously an expression.

CHAPTER FOUR.

"DON'T LET IT HAPPEN. IT DEPENDS ON YOU": A METATEXTUAL EXAMINATION OF THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLAND NOVEL

In an earlier chapter, I discussed a metaphorical, rhetorical question:

> What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person (*The Lion and the Unicorn* 393).

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, as I argued above, Orwell's photograph justifies the hopeful claim on which the essay's "England Your England" section ends, the claim that, even after a shock change: "England will still be England, an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past, and, like all living things, having the power to change out of recognition and yet remain the same" (409). This dialectic of, to borrow Robert Colls' phrase, "England-changed and England-still-the-same" is the central movement of Orwell's parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question, a high point in which patriotism and revolution crystallise and England, victorious and reformed, assumes its "real shape" (*English Rebel* 151; *LU* 415). This is a high point from which Orwell's hopes for the condition of England would descend. The descent, nonetheless, is controlled by the ascent. "The downward curve is implied in the upper one", Orwell had written, explaining the parabolic progression of James Joyce's writing in "Charles Dickens" and the same implication is evident in his own "parabola" (53).

Looking back on his hopes as expressed in *The Lion and the Unicorn* in a self-critical "London Letter" to *Partisan Review* from October 1944, Orwell considers that he was half right (because Britain won the war) but, *therefore*, half wrong too:

> I could be right on a point of this kind, because I don't share the average English intellectual's hatred of his own country and am not dismayed by a British victory. But *just for the same reason* I failed to form a true picture of political developments. I hate to see England either humiliated, or humiliating. I wanted to think that we would not

> be defeated, and I wanted to think that the class distinctions and imperialist exploitation of which I am ashamed would not return (414; *emphasis added*).

In *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Orwell had defined patriotism as "devotion to something that is always changing and yet is felt to be mystically the same" (428). *The Lion and the Unicorn* was written explicitly in the context of the Blitz. "As I write", it famously begins, "highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me" (392). In his critical "London Letter" Orwell will attribute his mistaken analysis of the situation to that incredible circumstance: "most of my mistakes spring from a political analysis which I had made in the desperate period of 1940 and continued to cling to long after it should have been clear that it was untenable" ("London Letter" 412). This recognition is part of a wider shift in attitude, which can be observed unfolding all the way into Orwell's last and most lasting engagement in the condition-of-England question, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Orwell's last novel is based on the premise that "something like *Nineteen Eighty-Four could* happen", that "this is the direction in which the world is going at the present time, and the trend lies deep in the political, social and economic foundations of the contemporary world situation" ("Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" 134). "Notes on the Way", an essay written in two parts for *Time and Tide* in March and April 1940, is an analysis of the contemporary world situation. Addressing the "determination" of the Nazi state "to turn the subject peoples into a reserve of slave labour", for example, Orwell writes: "It is quite practicable, so long as the myth of 'inferior races' is believed in. Jews and Poles aren't human beings; therefore why not rob them?" ("Notes on the Way" 123). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this "myth" is a cornerstone of the Party's totalitarian regime; the "subject races", the proles, "are helpless, like the animals. Humanity is the Party. The others are outside – irrelevant" (282). This judgment is delivered by O'Brien, "the inquisitor" who describes himself and the ruling "Inner Party" he represents as "the priests of power" but who appears

to Winston Smith, his victim, as a "lunatic who is more intelligent than" he is (256; 276; 275). In "Notes on the Way", Orwell had observed:

> Human types supposedly extinct for centuries, the dancing dervish, the robber chieftain, the Grand Inquisitor, have suddenly reappeared, not as inmates of lunatic asylums, but as the masters of the world (124).

This earlier essay, then, seems to provide justification for my treatment of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the culmination of much earlier lines of Orwell's thought.

The progression is not linear, however. In "Notes on the Way", Orwell describes nationalism as a "probably desirable" mechanism in defence of conquered nations (122). Writing five years later, in "Notes on Nationalism", he appears to have abandoned this view. Here, it is patriotism which is "of its nature defensive" while "nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power" (142). The link between "Notes on Nationalism" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, as was true of "Notes on the Way", evident. Orwell's definition of nationalism as "power-hunger tempered by self-deception" fits the Party, as described to Winston by O'Brien, perfectly: "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake"; "Whatever the Party holds to be the truth, is truth […]. It needs an act of self-destruction" ("Notes on Nationalism" 142; *NE-F* 275; 261).

In "Imagined and imaginary whales", Nick Hubble draws attention to this complex lineage. "It can be seen", he writes,

> that what was described as nationalism in spring 1940 is regarded as patriotism in 1945, while the term "nationalism" has seemingly been applied to the totalitarian forms of consciousness that Orwell was to explore in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) (33).

Hubble's essay, as was discussed above, draws upon "Outside the Whale", Salman Rushdie's critique of Orwell's 1940 essay "Inside the Whale", a critique which extends into a reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and also on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, whose "idea of a novel [a]s analogous to the idea of a nation" I applied in my earlier discussion of *The*

Lion and the Unicorn and *Coming Up for Air*[1] (31). In "Outside the Whale", Rushdie reads, in Hubble's gloss, "a linked strand of pessimism and quietism running through Orwell's work from 'Inside the Whale', published in 1940, to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*": "Where Orwell wished quietism", Rushdie writes, "let there be rowdyism; in place of the whale, the protesting wail" ("Imagined and Imaginary Whales" 35; "Outside the Whale" 99). There is a notable strand of continuity between the essay and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but this is not it. Rather than espousing quietism in "Inside the Whale" Orwell is instead, as Hubble has suggested, "trying to create a dialectical space in which the politics of locality, human albeit passive, could interact with a wider political imaginary" (38). This attempt provides the terms of the continuity running between "Inside the Whale" and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Hubble's articulation is especially helpful. Orwell's last novel will be read dialectically here as a metafictional investigation into what it means to write the condition of England. Interpreted allegorically, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be seen to represent a series of attempts – which replay some of the moves, including that of "Inside the Whale", which Orwell had himself made to this end – by its characters to create a dialectical space in which to interact with a wider political imaginary. These spaces are presented for the reader's analysis and evaluation.

[1] Orwell, thinks Hubble, "anticipat[es] many of the arguments made by Benedict Anderson" (29). For Colls, similarly, Anderson's study of nationalism develops terms also found in Orwell's work: "Benedict Anderson picked up on Orwell's interest in national identities and mass communications in his highly influential text, *Imagined Communities*" (*English Rebel* 230).

.1.

"A Utopia in the form of a novel": England-changed and England-still-the-same

"Nineteen Eighty-Four may seem", Lorraine Saunders has acknowledged, "a strange candidate for a Condition of England novel, given that it is about totalitarianism" (*Unsung Artistry* 132). Orwell's last novel, though, is immediately situated in relation to the dialectics of England-changed and England-still-the-same. John Brannigan, in *Orwell to the Present*, has suggested that the weather forecast, broadcast again after six years of silence in May 1945, both "symbolised the end of 'wartime' England, and seemed to fulfil Orwell's prophecy that when the traumas and disruptions of war were over, 'England will still be England'" (15; qting. *The Lion and the Unicorn* 409). Absent from the airwaves during the war, the weather was absent too from Orwell's wartime writings; it made a significant, symbolic return, however, dominating the first paragraph of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

> It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him (3).

The weather acts here as the most immediate of a nexus of symbols designed to place Winston Smith within an England at once familiar and strange, an England-changed-and-still-the-same. The time is another such symbol, one which Orwell, as Michael Levenson has noted, used in all of his novels:

> The reflex to tell the time is so marked presumably because Orwell's view is that before we belong to the sweep of decades or centuries, epochs or ages, we are creatures of immediacy. To be located within daily time is to be located within the space of work and the rhythm of routine ("The Fictional Realist: Novels of the 1930s" 60).

Its altered appearance here thus simultaneously marks *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as continuous with and yet disconnected from Orwell's earlier condition-of-England novels: England, it signals, has both stayed the same, and changed. Addressing this opening paragraph, Colls has written: "'Winston Smith' letting himself into 'Victory Mansions' and checking his watch

at 'thirteen' is not […] any England as we know it" ("It is unlikely", he continues, "that any British war memorial would ever be called 'Victory' anything – it is not the way") (207). The bright spring morning, kept cold by a "vile" wind, however, encourages an identification which survives this otherwise discordant opening, and continues. The novel, writes Colls, is also "filled with evidences of the England people did know: patched windows and sagging roofs, ration-books and dried-out tobacco, black markets and bombed buildings"; its "characters", writes Samuel Hynes, "walk the streets of a London that is very like the London of World War II" (*English Rebel* 207; "Introduction" 14). This sameness is important. "The scene of the book is laid in Britain", Orwell explained in the "Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" he gave to America's United Automobile Workers, "in order to emphasise that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere" (135). The differences, however, are important too. For, the scene of the novel is not actually Britain but "Airstrip One" and, looking back on the England into which he had been born, the England of the 1940s, Winston thinks:

> Everything had been different then. Even the names of countries, and their shapes on the map, had been different. Airstrip One, for instance, had not been so called in those days: it had been called England or Britain, though London, he felt fairly certain, had always been called London (34).

Winston, Lynette Hunter has commented, "sees London in an entirely foreign way" (*Search for a Voice* 193). His ancestors will speak of it in an entirely foreign way too, for "the English-speaking races" are similarly threatened: as Winston's philologist friend Syme comments, "by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now'" (55). The "nightmare situation" depicted in the novel is one, then, in which the condition of "England" is a redundant term on its way to becoming an unintelligible one; "*Don't let it happen*", Orwell had written, "*it depends on you*" ("Statement" 135).

The novel's first reader, Orwell's publisher Fredric Warburg, understood *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a challenge to its readers: "if a man can conceive '1984'", he wrote in his reader's report, "he can also will to avoid it" (479). Another early reader, Bertrand Russell, also conceived of the novel as a warning and, writing in 1950, expressed his gratitude "to men who, like Orwell, decorate Satan with the horns and hooves without which he remains an abstraction"; however, he declared Orwell a "false prophet" because he had lost hope ("George Orwell" 6). Six years later, however, Russell was less, but in another sense more, sanguine and, having been asked, by the *New York Times* for a piece on "recent 'Orwellian' developments", wrote that: "Bit by bit, and step by step, the world has been marching towards the realisation of Orwell's nightmares" ("Symptoms of George Orwell's '1984'" 160). A swathe of articles published in 1984, of which Rushdie's was one, debated the proximity of the England of that year to Orwell's nightmare situation. Hunter's *Search for a Voice* was published in 1984 but her chapter on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* sums up the situation of the book's reception, and moves the discussion on:

> *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is viewed through conflicting assessments as brilliant, or negatively pessimistic. Negative readings of it see only the enclosed world it puts forward without recognising that identification with this world is only the first stage; the reader's separation, discussion and assessment must follow (192).

Hunter insists that we attend both to England-changed and to England-still-the-same, that in discussing and assessing the novel we regard it dialectically. And we do this by attending to the novel's mixed genre.

"The coined word Utopia", Orwell had pointed out in 1943, "doesn't mean 'a good place', it means merely 'non-existent place'"[2] ("Can Socialists be Happy?" 39). In 1948, as he

[2] He is quite right about this, as Chris Ferns has confirmed: "The term Utopia, of course, notoriously embodies a pun; Sir Thomas More's coinage is deliberately ambiguous in its derivation. Its root may be taken as either *ou-topos* – 'no place', or *eu-topos* – 'good place'. Utopia then, may be defined as both a good place, an ideal (or at any rate, more perfect) society, yet at the same time one that does not exist – desirable, perhaps, but at the same time unattainable" (*Narrating Utopia* 2). We tend to think of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a "dystopian" novel, but this is an anachronistic assignation. The *OED* defines a dystopia as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible" and

was finishing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell defined "the novel" as "a story which attempts to describe credible human beings" ("George Gissing" 350). Orwell's description of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in letter to Julian Symons, as "a Utopia in the form of a novel" verges, therefore, on the paradoxical: he conceives of his project as a making credible of the incredible, as a naturalisation of the non-existent ("4 February 1949" 35). The form of the novel, in this way, mirrors its content for the world in which the inhabitants of Orwell's Utopia live and work appears paradoxical too:

> The ideal set up by the Party was something huge, terrible, and glittering – a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons – a nation of warriors and fanatics, marching forward in perfect unity, all thinking the same thoughts and shouting the same slogans, perpetually working, fighting, triumphing, persecuting – three hundred million people all with the same face. The reality was decaying, dingy cities where underfed people shuffled to and fro in leaky shoes, in patched-up nineteenth-century houses that smelt always of cabbage and bad lavatories (77).

This is not quite a paradox, however; as Michael Clune points out in "Orwell and the Obvious", "the key fact here is that the false account of the world doesn't replace actual perception, but exists alongside it" (38). The same is true of the novel's mixed genre. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* does not suffer, as Carl Freedman, for example, thinks, from "generic contradiction" ("Antinomies of 1984" 93). Rather, as Hunter has argued,

> the strength of the book derives from the narrator's ability to bring the natural and the utopian very close together through irony, at the same time as making it possible through allegory for the reader to separate them (192).

A Utopia in the form of the novel, representing an England-changed and an England-still-the-same in which the reality of inhabitants' lives contradicts the ideal set up by their rulers, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a dialectical construction which, as such, allegorises the processes by which a nation changes and stays the same.

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credits its first usage to Glenn Negley and John Max Patrick who described Joseph Hall's *Mundus Alter et Idem* as depicting the "opposite of *eutopia*, the ideal society: it is a *dystopia*, if it is permissible to coin a word" in *The Quest for Utopia*, 1952.

.2.

"The priests of power": Public Knowledge and Pontiffs in an Ironically Imagined Community

In the previous chapter on language, I discussed Orwell's engagement with *Polemic* and the suggestive overlap between the "focal passage", as James Conant calls it, of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Russell's *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* ("Freedom, Cruelty and Truth" 288). I want to discuss Orwell's involvement with *Polemic* again here and also to address the way in which his Utopia in the form of a novel deconstructs Russell's conception of the relationship between the individual and society to the end of characterising the relationship of the "nightmare situation" represented in the novel to a 1940s Britain of English-speaking people. "*Don't let it happen*", Orwell had written, and answering this challenge requires an understanding of what "it" is, and of how "it" works. Further, because Russell's conception of the relationship between individuals and their society has an analogue in Anderson's conception of the nation – which is in turn instructive, as I argued above, in interpreting Orwell's project as a condition-of-England writer – the following discussion also indicates the way in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four* operates as a condition-of-England novel. Characterising the novel's society, a further aim of this brief introductory discussion, achieved by a brief discussion of *Polemic* and the major essay, "The Claims of Philosophy", that Ayer contributed to its seventh number, is an essential stage, the "first stage", as Hunter has written, in my allegorical interpretation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as, to borrow the title of David Brin's recent essay, a "Self-Preventing Prophecy"[3].

"Our private world is inside our head", Russell had claimed in *Our Knowledge of the External World* (92). Our private world, he continues, occupies a "place in perspective space" and from that perspective place we formulate what he will later call "private knowledge":

[3] By the time of its seventh issue, Orwell had joined the editorial board of *Polemic*. Ayer's essay had already appeared in *Tribune*, for which Orwell was still writing regular "As I Please" essays, in 1946. It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that Orwell must have been aware of "The Claims of Philosophy" as Ayer had presented them.

"my knowledge as to matters of fact must be based upon my perceptive experiences" (*Our Knowledge of the External World* 92; *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* 144). "Public knowledge", that is the knowledge available to society as a whole, is, in turn, "merely an abstract or epitome of private knowledges" (*Inquiry* 143). The autonomy of the individual mind is an important trope of liberal humanism and Russell's argument for "public knowledge" as the collective product of these autonomous minds finds an analogue in Anderson's for the "imagined community". In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson theorises the nation as a conceptual construction dialectically maintained by the simultaneous, quotidian and imaginative efforts of the individual members of a national population; it is exemplified, he thinks, by the mass consumption "between this hour and that, only on this day, not that" of the newspaper:

> It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life (35).

Anderson calls newspaper-reading a "mass ceremony" and the "imagined community" this individually performed ceremony figures is, as an epitome of autonomous activity, dialectical in the same sense as is Russell's public knowledge. The nightmare situation depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is one in which the liberal dialectic called upon by Russell and Anderson has been inverted.

Russell offers the Encyclopaedia as a symbol for public knowledge. He figures it as a process of epitomising accumulation; for,

> the man who is constructing an encyclopaedia is not expected himself to conduct experiments; he is expected to compare the opinions of the best authorities, and arrive, so far as he can, at the standard scientific opinion of his time (143).

"All theory of knowledge", he continues, "must start from 'what do I know?' not from 'what does mankind know?'" (143). Orwell had offered a similar figuration of the Encyclopaedia as a repository of socially acknowledged truth in "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War". "If you look up the history of the last war" on its pages, he suggests, "you will find that a respectable amount of the material is drawn from German sources"; "It is just this common basis of agreement, with its implication that human beings are all one species of animal, that totalitarianism destroys" (504). He concludes with a warning:

> The implied objective of this line of [totalitarian] thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but *the past*. If the Leader says of such and such an event, "It never happened" – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five (504).

Nineteen Eighty-Four takes this line of thought, point by point, to its logical conclusions; it represents a "nightmare" world in which Big Brother, whose rule is upheld by a clique called the Inner Party, "controls the past" because, as the Party slogan has it, "who controls the present controls the past" (260). As O'Brien tells Winston, "two and two are four" in this nightmare world "sometimes" but "sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once" (263). Symbolic of the liberal commitment to truth and knowledge, there are no encyclopaedias in the totalitarian world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Oceania's "public knowledge" is found, instead, in old issues of the newspaper, in, that is, the very symbol which Anderson had presented as *the* figure for the visible rooting of communal life in the everyday reality experienced by the nation's autonomous individuals.

In "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War", Orwell contrasts the encyclopaedia with the newspaper reports that he saw in Spain: "newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie" (503). Winston conceives of his work "rectifying" reports in the *Times* in precisely these terms: "Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connexion with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connexion that is contained in a direct lie" (43). Winston's

rectifications are intended to ensure that "every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct" and that no "item of news, [n]or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, [was] ever allowed to remain on record" (42). No longer "historically clocked", as Anderson, drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, had argued the nation must be, Oceania exists, instead, in an "endless present": "history has stopped"[4] (162). Ironically, history has been stopped in Oceania by the very symbol with which Anderson had figured its progression. The Party, as I suggested above, has made history impossible. In that earlier discussion, I argued that the most egregious of Winston's rectifications, his "creation" of Comrade Ogilvy, illustrated a "curious" fact about his society, characterising it, as is again relevant here, as one in which history has been made impossible (50). In the current context, Winston's creation suggests another curiosity in that a man who has never existed in perspective space – of whom no one has ever had private knowledge – now forms part of the public knowledge of his community where he exists "just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar" (50). "It is impossible to see reality", O'Brien later tells Winston, "except by looking through the eyes of the Party"; "Whatever the Party holds to be the truth, is truth […]. It needs an act of self-destruction" (261). "What do I know?" is no longer a valid question; Oceanic subjects are simply expected to accept, instead, what they are told mankind, that is, the Party "knows". Winston's egregious creation and O'Brien's reclassification of perspective space as a collective entity mean that Russell's dialectical construction has been deconstructed and put back together the wrong way round so that, instead of being a composite, or epitome, of private knowledges, public knowledge in

[4] Anderson conceives of the nation as "a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time" (26). This idea, "which, more than anything else", Anderson writes, "made it possible to 'think' the nation", had been expressed by Walter Benjamin in his thirteenth thesis on the philosophy of history, where he writes that "the concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time" (*Imagined Communities* 22; *Illuminations* 261).

Oceania is dictated, as a totality, from above. “Private knowledge”, for what it is worth, is thus gained only by submission to that totality.

Just as there is a corrupted form of “public knowledge” in Oceania so there is a grotesquely inverted “imagined community”. Anderson presents the practice of reading the newspaper as one of the “diurnal regularities” generating the “impersonal will” through which the nation is imagined (35). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we see this generative process enacted in the daily ritual of the Two Minutes Hate:

> The horrible thing about the Two Minutes Hate was not that one was obliged to act a part, but, on the contrary, that it was impossible to avoid joining in. Within thirty seconds any pretence was always unnecessary. A hideous ecstasy of fear and vindictiveness, a desire to kill, to torture, to smash faces in with a sledge-hammer, seemed to flow through the whole group of people like an electric current, turning one even against one’s will into a grimacing, screaming lunatic (16).

The Hate forces Winston – turns him against his will – to think the same thoughts, shout the same slogans and adopt the same facial expressions as his three hundred million compatriots. In the same way as the individual newspaper reader, or “communicant” is aware that others, of whom she or he has no knowledge, is engaged in the same act, so is the individual Hater. In becoming one with the imagined community of Oceania, Winston identifies with the “ideal” of the Party. The ideal and the real exist alongside one another, then, as Clune had suggested, and that they can do so establishes the terms in which the nightmare situation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been constructed. England’s conversion into Airstrip One has been achieved by an inversion of the dialectical conceptions of society presented in Russell’s account of knowledge and Anderson’s of the nation. This inversion corrupts the condition of England in two ways; it arrests the concept of progression through time on which the nation depends and severs the dialectical connection between the individual and the community by denying individual autonomy. To think about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a condition-of-England novel in this way is then to confront an important and inescapable ambiguity inherent in Carlyle’s question: “condition” is both a noun *and* a verb

and the *condition* of England is at once observed and acted, or created. Russell and Anderson's dialectical accounts of the way in which public knowledge and nations, respectively, are constructed are observational, but observe activity. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s nightmare situation dramatises the contingency of their dialectical models; it shows us that England could be conditioned differently. A "strange candidate", as Saunders has it, for consideration as a condition-of-England novel, this is how *Nineteen Eighty-Four* functions as such.

O'Brien, interrogating Winston in the Ministry of Truth, will confirm the Party's proposed inversion of the liberal model proposed by Russell and Anderson:

> Alone – free – the human being is always defeated […]. But if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he *is* the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal (277).

In *The Last Man in Europe*, Alan Sandison describes Winston's interrogation by O'Brien – the self-described "priest of power" – as a parody of the self-abnegation required by the Catholic Church (276). Whereas he had been approving of Protestantism, describing "prose literature as we know it [a]s the product of rationalism, of the Protestant centuries, of the autonomous individual" in "The Prevention of Literature", Orwell had previously cast Catholicism as a form of nationalism[5] ("Prevention" 378). While there is, then, evidence for Sandison's reading of the novel as a critical religious parable, I want to suggest beyond that reading that O'Brien is a priest in the same sense that the metaphysical philosophers whose work provoked Ayer into restating (and restricting) "The Claims of Philosophy" are "pontiffs". Ayer's essay, described by Stefan Collini as having the "the character of a manifesto", begins: "Contemporary philosophers may be divided into two classes: the

[5] "Nationalism, in the extended sense in which I am using the word, includes such movements and tendencies as Communism, political Catholicism, Zionism, Antisemitism, Trotskyism and Pacifism", he wrote in "Notes on Nationalism" (142). "The Catholic Church", he wrote in "Toward European Unity", 1947, "will make the establishment of true Socialism impossible, because its influence is and always must be against freedom of thought and speech, against human equality, and against any form of society tending to promote earthly happiness" (166).

pontiffs and the journeymen" (*Absent Minds* 397; "Claims" 18). "The ideal of the pontiff", Ayer explains, "is to construct a metaphysical system" (18). Oceania's "priests of power" have "set up" an exaggeratedly metaphysical "ideal" wholly divorced from the physical reality experienced by their subjects. "Pontiffs", as conceived by Ayer, pontificate from "*a country* from which the ordinary processes of logic, or indeed reasoning of any kind, appear to have been banished" (19; *emphasis added*). This is how O'Brien pontificates too; he pays no respect to the ordinary processes of logic so that, for example, two and two are only four "sometimes" and "slavery is freedom" (263; 277). Like F.H. Bradley before him, O'Brien uses "English words in a way in which they are not commonly used by English-speaking people" (*Language, Truth and Logic* 36). In demanding Winston's submission, O'Brien demands his allegiance to a nation from which the ordinary processes of logic have been banished and English words have lost their meanings; this is an England which has been conditioned not dialectically by the simultaneous activity of its subjects, but totally, by the pontiffs. Such is the character of the England depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but, as Hunter has stated, identifying the problem is only first the stage. Separation, discussion and assessment must follow. Stephen Ingle has written that

> Winston Smith fought to sustain his autonomous capacity to grasp and hold on to truth, and the story follows his endeavours to do this, first via the acquisition of a diary by means of which he could record and interpret reality, then by his affair with Julia, in which he explored his individuality through sensually experienced reality, and finally by his putative anti-state terrorism, with O'Brien acting as *agent provocateur*, in which he attempted to change reality (*Social and Political Thought* 124).

In what follows, I will investigate three dialectical spaces, which correspond roughly to the stages of Winston's fight as identified by Ingle. These spaces are places of escape from the pontiff-conditioned England, places gesturing towards the possibility of a healthily dialectical England's having been retained, and are presented, as such, for the reader's investigation and evaluation.

.3.

"Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull": Winston Writing

Critics of Orwell's last novel, both pessimistic and optimistic, have frequently privileged its working title, "The Last Man in Europe", in reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as depicting the impossibility of individuality under totalitarianism. For Sandison, for example, writing under Orwell's original title, "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* describes […] the hopeless struggle of a man to retain his grip on empirical reality and so on his individuality" (171). Sandison's linking of empirical reality to individuality recalls Russell's definition of the individual's private world as a place in "perspective" space and such readings privilege the narrator's description of Oceania as a society in which "nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (29). From this private world – the "lair of the skull" as Anderson calls it – no public knowledge and likewise no community issues. "There are", Judith N. Shklar has written, "good reasons not to care about *1984*, but better ones to take The Last Man in Europe seriously" because "it helps us to tell our stories, and indeed may even help us to decide what story to tell and how to go about it" ("Should Political Theory Care?" 17). Concerned to investigate *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as positing, allegorically, a solution to its warning, if Shklar is right then it may be that "'the few centimetres inside your skull' [sic] considered inviolable", as Malcolm Evans has written in "Text, Theory, Criticism", "by Winston Smith, 'the last man in Europe'" are a necessary starting point for this story (32). If this is the case then Winston's diary, which he begins writing immediately after escaping the vile wind at the start of the novel, is an important metatext.

"How can I tell what mankind knows?", Russell had asked: "Only by (a) personal observation of what it says in the books it has written, and (b) weighing the evidence in favour of the view that what is said in the books is true" (*Inquiry* 143). "If I am Copernicus", he continues, "I shall decide against the books" (143). Winston thinks of himself as Copernicus – "at one time it had been a sign of madness to believe that the earth goes

round the sun; today, to believe that the past is unalterable" – and with some vindication given the evident wrongness of his society's books, or newspapers (83). Conceived as an externalisation of his private property, of his private knowledge – "all he had to do was to transfer to paper the interminable restless monologue that had been running inside his head, literally for years" – Winston's diary is the first place of escape from the novel's "nightmare situation" that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* invites us to explore (30).

According to Hunter the diary "indicate[s] aspects of Winston which are not available in other ways to the reader" (*The Search for a Voice* 194). In its confessional aspect, though, there is nothing particularly innovative or revealing about the content of the diary, which reveals the Private Life of Winston Smith or, in terms which address the question of the novel's mixed genre, precisely that which we would expect a naturalist novel to reveal; novels, Orwell had written in "George Gissing" contain characters "described from the inside" (350). To find the aspect of Winston that could not be otherwise revealed, then, we have to look elsewhere, at its form. The diary is, initially, composed automatically:

> His pen had slid voluptuously over the smooth paper, printing in large neat capitals –
> DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER
> over and over again, filling half a page;
> *theyll shoot me i don't care theyll shoot me in the back of the neck i dont care down with big brother they always shoot you in the back of the neck i dont care down with big brother* —— (20; 21).

This automatic purge reveals, as Hunter puts it, "an alien mind, raw shocking edges, confusion and disorientation" and the diary's main interest lies here (193). Winston, the diary's disorientation suggests, has had to train himself to write. Observing Winston's private writings, we encounter a mind seeking orientation by revealing (through the tested and apparently innate therapeutic/penitent mechanism of confession) its shocking, alien edges. Addressing *We* in 1946, Orwell had observed that "in the twenty-sixth century, in [Yevgeny] Zamyatin's version of it, the inhabitants of Utopia have so completely lost their individuality as to be known only by numbers" (14). Oceanic society – retaining "naturalist"

elements like the "rotting nineteenth-century houses" in which its inhabitants live – may not go *quite* this far but Winston is addressed by a state functionary, the exercise instructor broadcast into his morning routine, as "6079 Smith W." (3; 39). The form of Winston's diary reveals Comrade 6079 struggling to regain, or create, his private life. This struggle is the aspect of Winston that could not be revealed in any other way. That Winston has to struggle to create his private life tells us about the condition of the England in which he lives: the inhabitants of Orwell's Utopia in the form of a novel have so completely lost their individuality as to be virtually unable to articulate themselves.

Marcus Smith has asked: "Lacking any clear external motive (and facing almost certain death if caught) why does Winston even bother with a diary?" ("The Wall of Blackness" 424). "The answer Orwell supplies", he thinks, "is that the diary is a compulsive act and that the lay-out of Winston's room and the diary itself are the causes of his rebellion" (424-5). That Winston has space to write, indeed, depends on the fact that the England of the 1940s has not been completely deleted. Written while he is "sitting in the alcove" which keeps him "outside the range of the telescreen" and "partly suggested" by "the unusual geography of the room", Winston's writing is evidence, for Smith, of his "obsession with safe, womb-like pockets" (*NE-F* 8-9; "Wall of Blackness" 425). Where Smith reads "obvious Freudian overtones" into this obsession, I would rather consider it in relation to Orwell's earlier mention of womb-like pockets in "Inside the Whale" ("Wall of Blackness" 425). "The whale's belly is simply a womb big enough for an adult", Orwell had written, and so is an alcove out of sight from the telescreen ("Inside the Whale" 107). Winston's alcove is a legacy of his flat's nineteenth-century origins and is symbolic therefore of the (lost) English characteristic of privateness, a symbolism heightened by the contrast with the hyper-modern, Utopian tool of totalitarian surveillance. Orwell had referred, in *The Lion and the Unicorn* to "the *privateness* of English life", which he described as an "English characteristic which is so much a part of us that we barely notice it" (394). "The liberty of the individual is

still believed in", he continues, "almost as in the nineteenth century […]. It is the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from above" (394). Winston's London of "rotting nineteenth-century houses" has retained, literally within those houses, the spaces in which you can do what you like in your spare time; the alcove in which Winston sits to write "had probably been intended to hold bookshelves" (5; 7). England has changed then, but Airstrip One retains vestiges of an England-still-the-same.

In "creating some sort of 'whale'", Hubble has argued, Orwell was trying to gain "purchase on an 'unceasing storm' that has not yet become history". Writing within a sort of whale of his own, Winston, I want to suggest, is trying to gain purchase outside an "endless present" which has not been allowed to become history (39). For Winston, having trained himself to write, addresses his diary specifically, to the "calendrically clocked time" that, in Anderson's view, underlies the concept of the nation. "*To the future or to the past*", Winston writes,

> *to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!* (30).

In this way, we are invited to consider Winston's diary as, potentially at least, a dialectical space capable of engaging a wider political imaginary.

Immediately after being invited, however, this consideration is placed in suspense. After addressing his diary to the future, or to the past, Winston writes a fact about his present: "*thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thoughtcrime is death*" (30). Intervening between this insight and the earlier invitation there is a brief reflection:

> He was already dead, he reflected. It seemed to him that it was only now, when he had begun to be able to formulate his thoughts, that he had taken the decisive step. The consequences of every act are included in the act itself (30).

On second reading, this brief reflection reads like a sort of prologue; having trained himself to write, or learned to formulate his thoughts, Winston has ensured his inevitable demise: "You are a flaw in the pattern", O'Brien will later tell him, "a stain that must be wiped out" (267). If Winston is "dead", as he thinks, then he is also outside history and separate therefore from the calendrically clocked time to which his diary is ostensibly addressed. Addressing the inevitability of Winston's demise in "Do It to Julia", James Connors has argued convincingly that Orwell "inserts clues" throughout the first part of the novel "which show the extent to which Winston shares the outlook of the men he imagines he despises" (470). Considered in terms of the novel's dramatisation of the mutual contingency of the condition of English and the condition of England, the phrase "*thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thoughtcrime is death*" is one such clue.

Formally, Winston's phrase resembles the Party slogans by which he is surrounded:

> From where Winston stood it was just possible to read, picked out on [The Ministry of Truth's] white face in elegant lettering, the three slogans of the Party:
>
> WAR IS PEACE
> FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
> IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH (6).

These pontificating inscriptions are parodic exaggerations of the "ready-made phrases" – "so arranged as to be more or less euphonious" – the ubiquity of which in 1940s England, Orwell had warned in "Politics and the English Language", illustrate the corrupting influence of language on thought (427). When he falls back on this form, Winston "shirks" the effort that Orwell had argued "scrupulous" writing requires – and which has its analogue in the effort Winston had gone to in trying to articulate his private life – and allows "the ready-made phrases" to "come crowding in" (426). Such phrases, and, I would stress, "*thoughtcrime does not entail death. Thoughtcrime is death*" is such a phrase, "think your thoughts for you"[6]

[6] As a slogan, "*thoughtcrime is death*" is the equivalent of Boxer's "two slogans, 'I will work harder' and 'Napoleon is always right', [which] seemed to him a sufficient answer to all problems" (55). Orwell's first readers, then, had been given a clue as to where this line of thinking might lead Winston; The Ministry of Love being simply a human version of the knacker's yard.

(427). When he conceives of his writing as "*thoughtcrime*", then, Winston reduces the complexities of his individual psychology into a ready-made phrase condensed into a single word the definition of which, like all Newspeak words, is entirely under Party control. Winston effectively translates his rebellion into Newspeak, that is into terms with which the Party is comfortable. His translation is an analogue of that discussed in "The Principles of Newspeak" – which, by means of a footnote at the bottom of page 5, the reader has already been invited to read – where a passage from the Declaration of Independence asserting the rights of the individual and the protection of liberty is "swallowed[ed] up in the single word *crimethink*" (324). Winston's translation causes him, quite explicitly, to characterise his attempt to make contact with the future or the past, with a dialectical England that changes even while it stays the same, as futile: "*Thoughtcrime is death*".

Craig L. Carr has described Winston's writing as revealing his "conviction that individual mind has a status independent of social mind" (*Orwell, Politics, and Power* 98). The novel's treatment of Winston's project reveals, in Carr's view, "Orwell's growing understanding that this bit of philosophical fantasy could no longer be sustained in a manner that preserved individual integrity from emergent forces of social control" (98). I agree. The way in which *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s nightmarish society is constructed shows Orwell's awareness that individual mind conditions social mind, and that the process is reversible, that totalitarianism, indeed, is established by reversing that process. Carr describes the telescreen as one of "the technologies of power" by which the totalitarian Party conditions England (107). Language, as discussed above, is another one and, written while he is hiding from the telescreen, Winston's diary illustrates again the efficacy of that second technology of power. As Carr puts it,

> Language is a terribly textured and complex compilation of thought possibilities and options, and as Wittgenstein understood it, it is tightly linked to the way people live, to their "form of life" as Wittgenstein put it, that is both constituted by and reflected in language. To control this would require a complete reconstruction of what people do, how they live, and the way they go on with life (100-1).

To suggest, then, as Alok Rai has done, that we see Winston "struggling futilely for an appropriate language in which to criticise the tyranny of Big Brother" is not quite right (*Orwell and the Politics of Despair* 155). Rather than a futile struggle, Winston's writings are a struggle at first, a struggle to create his individuality, then, separately, a futile attempt to criticise the tyranny of Big Brother and each time Winston writes in his diary he becomes more fully aware of the futility of his written rebellion.

His revolutionary slogan – "'*If there is hope*,' wrote Winston, '*it lies in the proles*'" – is no sooner written than it is undermined:

> *Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.*
>
> That, he reflected, might almost have been a transcription from one of the Party textbooks (72; 74).

This slogan is followed, with no contextualising intervention, by an actual transcription from a Party textbook, the children's history book that Winston has borrowed from his neighbour: "*In the old days (it ran), before the glorious Revolution, London was not the beautiful city that we know today*" (75). The imagined reader of past or future would be unable, so the implication goes, to distinguish between Winston's slogan and the Party's history. Winston's prediction of "the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate" is conspicuous, in this context, within the focal passage's assertions of a realist epistemology (84). As with his declaration that "*thoughtcrime is death*", this prediction reads as a form of prologue for Winston is going to be overthrown in debate and it is ironic, furthermore, that the Party intellectual by whom he is defeated is O'Brien. For the focal passage also signals a change in the diary's addressee:

> he was writing the diary for O'Brien – *to* O'Brien: it was like an interminable letter which no one would ever read, but which was addressed to a particular person and took its colour from that fact (84).

No longer addressed to a calendrically clocked England which, "like an everlasting animal stretching into the future and the past", has "the power to change out of recognition and yet

remain the same", Winston's diary, now taking its colour from a pontificating addressee committed to maintaining the "endless present", becomes fixed in that endless present too (*LU* 409; *NE-F* 162). In "Gamesmanship and Androcentrism in Orwell's *1984*", Daphne Patai points out that "early utopian fiction repeatedly uses an almost anthropological model" in which, "through long dialogues", "a 'native informant'" informs "a representative of the familiar old society" of "the workings of the utopian society" (856). In Orwell's utopia in the form of a novel, she argues, in contrast, "the Party's actions can best be understood as a game" (856). "This approach", she writes in terms similar to Connors', "leads us to recognise that both O'Brien and Winston are players operating from a common frame of reference" (856). An aspect of the novel's allegorical stance, consideration of O'Brien and Winston's shared frame of reference invites attendance to Winston's last diary entry:

> With the feeling that he was speaking to O'Brien, and also that he was setting forth an important axiom, he wrote:
> *Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows* (84).

At the very end of the novel, we see Winston writing again; sitting in the Chestnut Tree Café, "almost unconsciously he traced with his finger in the dust on the table: *2+2=5*" (303). Winston's interrogation by O'Brien intervenes, and causes the discrepancy, between these two acts of writing:

> "You are a slow learner, Winston," said O'Brien gently.
> "How can I help it?" he blubbered. "How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four."
> "Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane" (263).

Winston's last piece of writing, then, is a pathetic commentary on the condition of the England in which he lives; conditioned by the pontificating priests of power, Winston's England is a country from which the ordinary processes of logic, or indeed reasoning of any kind, appear to have been banished. As a recapitulation of the last entry into a diary offered as a potential space of escape from that nightmare England it invites evaluation of that

potential space and the question emerges of how valuable Winston's "important axiom" had been in the first place (230).

"The truism that two and two equals four", Hannah Arendt has written,

> is the only reliable "truth" human beings can fall back upon once they have lost the mutual guarantee, the common sense, men need in order to experience and live and know their way in a common world (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 477).

However, she continues, "this 'truth' is empty or rather no truth at all because it does not reveal anything" (477). Addressing Winston's axiom in the light of Arendt's insight, Ingle has written that, "for Orwell, to deny that two plus two equals four was to deny not merely the validity of experience but the very existence of a knowable external reality"[7] (*Social and Political Truth* 126). I am not sure about this. Certainly, Winston grants the truth that two plus two equals four the importance noted by Ingle – "truisms are true. Hold on to that!" – but Orwell, I think, had come to regard it along the lines suggested by Arendt (84). The futility of 2+2=4 could be considered an aspect of Orwell's growing recognition, as illuminated by Carr, that individual autonomy had become particularly hard to sustain in the face of totalitarian technologies of power. There are, though, reasons to suppose that Orwell's doubt about the reliability of this particular formula dates to an earlier period. I have already noted Orwell's highlighting of the fragility of Winston's belief in "Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War" but that text is not the first reference to the motif. 2+2=5, indeed, was a slogan of Soviet Russia and Orwell likely became aware of this when he read and reviewed Eugene Lyons' *Assignment in Utopia* in 1938.

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[7] Richard Rorty and James Conant have both regarded Winston's "important axiom" as important for Orwell too. Rorty regards it as an aspect of Orwell's commitment to free speech: "it does not matter whether 'two plus two is four' is true, much less whether this truth is 'subjective' or 'corresponds to external reality'. All that matters is that if you do believe it, you can say it without getting hurt" (*Contingency, irony, and solidarity* 176). Conant, in contrast, regards it as a declaration for the importance of the scientific method: "'Two and two make four' figures as a central example of something the truth of which must be denied by the Party because of the kind of claim that it is: one that is true and moreover easily seen to be true by anyone competent in our practices of claim-making" ("Freedom, Cruelty and Truth" 299).

"Orwell's first full critique of the Soviet system came late", Colls has written, "in 1938 reviews of Eugene Lyons's *Assignment in Utopia* and Franz Borkenau's *The Communist International*" (91). This is what Orwell would have found in Lyons' Right Book Club publication on 2+2=5:

> The slogan "The Five Year Plan in Four Years" was advanced, and the magic symbols "5-in-4" and "2+2=5" were posted and shouted throughout the land […] – the daring and the paradox and the tragic absurdity of the Soviet scene, its mystical simplicity, its defiance of logic, all reduced to nose-thumbing arithmetic … 2+2=5 in electric lights on Moscow housefronts, in foot-high letters on billboards, spelled planned error, hyperbole, perverse optimism; something childishly headstrong and stirringly imaginative … 2+2=5: a slogan born in premature success, tobogganing towards horror and destined to end up, lamely, as 2+2¼=5 (240).

It is worth quoting at some length from Orwell's review which, as Colls indicates, highlights a number of themes found in Lyons' text that would be dramatised in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where the horrors of Stalinism are recast in an English context:

> The G.P.U. are everywhere, everyone lives in constant terror of denunciation, freedom of speech and of the press are obliterated to an extent we can hardly imagine. There are periodical waves of terror, sometimes the "liquidation" of kulaks or Nepmen, sometimes some monstrous state trial at which people who have been in prison for months or years are suddenly dragged forth to make incredible confessions, while their children publish articles in the newspapers saying "I repudiate my father as a Trotskyist serpent". Meanwhile the invisible Stalin is worshipped in terms that would have made Nero blush. This – at great length and in much detail – is the picture Mr. Lyons presents, and I do not believe he has misrepresented the facts (160).

Orwell first projected "an age in which two and two will make five when the Leader says so" in a 1939 review of Russell's *Power: A New Social Analysis*.

Though Orwell liked Russell's book, he thought that, ultimately, he "merely utters what amounts to a pious hope that the present state of things will not endure" (311). A "pious hope" when uttered by Russell, it is hard to see why Orwell would invest such faith in Winston's declaration. Winston may think "*Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows*" is an axiom but he is wrong; it is a prayer, and thus appropriately addressed to a self-described "priest of power", even if he will reject it. Rather, I think, Winston's "important axiom" acts as further evidence of his loneliness for, as

Arendt has argued: “Under the conditions of loneliness […] the self-evident is no longer just a means of the intellect and begins to be productive, to develop its own lines of thought” (477). When Winston writes “*Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four*” and adds that “*if that is granted, all else follows*”, he imbues a self-evident, but “empty”, truth with a “productive” potency it cannot fulfil (84). His important axiom, then, is just another symbol of his solitude. When he translates his attempts to externalise his private property into Newspeak, when he allows his diary to be coloured by a pontiff, Winston denies it the dialectical potency that it had initially promised: what could have been a dialectical space becomes, tragically, an empty space. Winston’s diary offers no valuable private knowledge and is not fit therefore to condition an alternative public knowledge.

Winston, Martha Nussbaum has written, is “a fragile reed on which to rest our hopes for humanity” (“The Death of Pity” 292). This is quite right; Winston, I think, is meant to act as a fragile reed for our hopes for humanity or, in the terms of this discussion, for our hopes for the condition of England. In “The Proletarian Writer”, a radio discussion between Orwell and Desmond Hawkins broadcast in 1940, Orwell had said: “so long as the bourgeoisie are the dominant class, literature must be bourgeois” (297). Hubble relates this to Orwell’s remark from “Inside the Whale”, published the same year, that the “importance” of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* is “merely symptomatic”, “a demonstration of the *impossibility* of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into its new shape” (112). Applying these related remarks, as well as Orwell’s later description of “prose literature” as “the product of rationalism, of the Protestant centuries, of the autonomous individual”, to Winston’s writing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, bourgeois Winston’s diary appears as a symptomatic demonstration of the impossibility of *any* literature until the world has shaken itself into a new shape: so long as the pontiffs are the dominant class, all writing must pontificate (“The Prevention of Literature” 378).

Winston writes on one further occasion and this is worth final consideration here. After writing in his diary for the final time, and before writing in the dust on his table at the café, Winston is given, in his cell in the Ministry of Truth, a slate and a pencil. In an ironic replaying of his earlier illicit writing,

> [Winston] began to write down the thoughts that came into his head. He wrote first in large clumsy capitals:
>
> FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
>
> Then almost without a pause he wrote beneath it:
>
> TWO AND TWO MAKE FIVE (290).

From within another "whale" – a cell too is a womb big enough for an adult – Winston again struggles to externalise his private world. This time, though, his internal monologue shows only the way in which his private world has been conditioned by the pontiffs by whom he is ruled. Whales, then, and private worlds written, that is conditioned, by pontificating intellectuals are shown to be insufficient in themselves to re-condition England. Winston's private writing fails to reveal an autonomous individual; he is not Copernicus. Writing in private, then, is not how we prevent the nightmare situation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from happening. "On the one hand", Hunter has written,

> Winston believes that "uttering" through his private writing will provide him with identity, but in effect it is like being one on the sea-bottom, "lost in a monstrous world where he himself was the monster", isolated. This is set against his comment that "it was not be making yourself heard, but by staying sane that you carry on the human heritage". Yet without discussion how can he know he is sane? This again was Flory's problem. It is the double-sidedness of writing as communication and self-expression, the double-sidedness of isolation as both madness and sanity[8] (194; qting. *NE-F* 28; 30).

There is, nonetheless, an important allegorical lesson here relevant to consideration of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a warning perhaps not, as Shklar has it, about which stories to tell and how to tell them but rather about which stories not to tell and how not to tell them: don't allow your writing, and your language, to be "coloured" by pontiff intellectuals. Doing

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[8] Connors has also linked Winston to *Burmese Days*' Flory: "Significantly Flory, like Winston, attempts a belated rebellion against a system he despises and, like the latter, fails" (466).

so renders Winston's rebellion mutable, as foretold; its consequences as such, however, are held in suspense for a short period which is started off by an altogether more hopeful piece of writing. "*I love you*", Winston reads at the start of Part Two and this scrawl initiates the creation of a new place of escape from the novel's nightmare situation, one which offers a new type of dialectical space for the reader's investigation and evaluation.

.4.

"Talking by instalments": Julia debating

"*I love you*" is the content of the message that Julia slips Winston at the start of the second part of the novel. Where Winston had started Part One of the novel writing, then, Part Two begins with him reading and this progression signals the novel's progression into analysis of a second type of dialectical space, one which though it is initiated by an act of writing is characterised by the altogether more hopeful activity of talking. Without discussion, Hunter had asked, how can Winston know he is sane? Julia offers him discussion and thus a path to a more hopeful guarantee of sanity than membership of "a minority of one" (83). Though, as with Winston's early writing, Julia's handwriting is "unformed", it yet articulates a clear and rebellious identity defined by its first-person agency (113). Whereas Winston writes in hiding and worries about how compromising his possession of a pen may be, Julia hands her writing out; whereas Winston, although able to read the unorthodoxy "written" on Syme's "face", does nothing about it, Julia, who similarly sees "something" in Winston's "face", acts (56; 128). She is, altogether, a more hopeful case and, although Patai's dismissal of Julia as an "insignificant female", evidence for her interpretation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an "allegory of hypertrophied masculinity", has been highly influential, more recent criticism has tended to view Julia in a more positive light (866; 868). Introducing the 2000 Penguin Classics edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for example, Ben Pimlott remarks that Julia, possessing "a solidity and a touch of humour that are missing elsewhere", "breathes life into the novel" (vii-iii). Elaine Scarry's more recent "Defence of Poesy" goes further, offering "The Treatise of Julia", in which a spirited argument for the value of counterfactuals is presented as a necessary counterpoint to Winston's obsession with facts. Ingle, more recently still, has suggested that "Winston Smith was not the last truly autonomous individual in Europe; Julia was" (*Social and Political Thought* 128). This progression, while welcome, begins to overstate Julia's importance. For one thing, Patai's

allegation of the novel's androcentrism is not so easily dismissed; that impulse is, rather, reasserted in a manner which serves to underline Winston's fragility as a reed for our hopes for the condition of England. Before examining that reassertion, however, it is worth investigating the dialectical space that Julia's written intervention initiates and in which the novel's androcentrism is contested.

To begin with, as Hunter has claimed, Winston and Julia's relationship "provides an analogy for a comparison with the reader" (203). Before their affair begins, Winston, as I have illustrated, has already allowed his rebellion to be written by O'Brien. Patai has suggested that this allowance extends to the way in which

> Winston sees his sexual relationship with Julia, which she initiates, as a political act, a blow against the Party. It is thus made to serve a political purpose – or, in other terms, it is corrupted by the Party's all-pervasive control. Julia, in contrast to Winston, seeks sexual encounters purely for pleasure (860).

The contrast, however, runs deeper, and is rendered as more meaningful in the novel, than this. Winston's characterisation of his rebellion as "thoughtcrime", as "death", is flatly denied by Julia. Thus Colls has credited her with "the most important words in the book":

> "We are the dead", he said.
> "We're not dead yet", said Julia prosaically (*English Rebel* 216; qting *NE-F* 142).

Winston, like Bradley before him, and like O'Brien, "is using English words in a way in which they are not commonly used by English-speaking people" here and Julia's prosaic reminder is important for Colls because it reminds us that "Orwell spends his life trying to get away from empty abstraction and closer to the world as it was" (216). This reminder recalls Ayer's distinction between pontiff and journeymen philosophers, and this second category is helpful in characterising Julia. "Unlike the pontiffs", Ayer explains, "the journeymen do not set out in quest of ultimate reality", "they do not try to build systems" but are concerned, instead, with the problems "that arise out of the common usages and assumptions of everyday life" (20). Later, he writes that in the journeyman's "eyes, the *raison d'etre* of the philosopher is the fact that people continually get themselves into states of metaphysical

doubt. They are inclined to say, for example", as Winston is inclined to say, "that they can never really know what goes on in another person's mind, or even, more seriously, that he has a mind" (22). Where this is the case, Ayer writes, it "is the business of the philosopher to effect their cure" and "the method of cure is to enter sympathetically into the patient's neurosis and try to talk it out" (22). This, at least in the early part of their relationship, is Julia's role. By reminding Winston of the realities of the world as it is, and of the way in which English words are used by English-speaking people, she pulls him back down to earth, as it were, or, better, back into England. Julia's words are those of the journeyman or, I would suggest, those of the reader who is also, in identifying with Winston's world, invited to share sympathetically with his neurosis. Julia, in this way, offers an alternative dialectic. She gestures to an alternative philosophical and political imaginary. She promises the discussion and interaction that Winston, as Hunter has noted, requires in order to know that he is sane, that we all, as Ayer had noted, require in order to know that we are sane.

This is how Julia articulates her politics:

> You wanted a good time; "they", meaning the Party, wanted to stop you having it; you broke the rules as best you could. She seemed to think it just as natural that "they" should want to rob you of your pleasures as that you should want to avoid being caught (137-8).

Winston doesn't really understand this so he dismisses Julia's rebellion as merely animalistic; Julia's manifesto causes Winston to wonder

> vaguely how many others like her there might be in the younger generation people who had grown up in the world of the Revolution, knowing nothing else, accepting the Party as something unalterable, like the sky, not rebelling against its authority but simply evading it, as a rabbit dodges a dog (138).

The reader, however, is invited to conceive of it differently. Anti-theyism is, after all, a distinctively English trait, cast as such by Orwell in "The English People": "English political thinking is much governed by the word 'They'. 'They' are the higher-ups, the mysterious powers who do things to you against your will" (625). Julia's articulation of this distinctively English political attitude, and Winston's inability to understand it, points to an important

contrast between them, one which, moreover, reaches back into Orwell's prior engagement with, and articulations of, the condition-of-England question.

Reviewing Philip Henderson's *The Novel To-Day*, in 1936, Orwell had complained that "the basic trouble with all orthodox Marxists is that, possessing a system which appears to explain everything, they never bother to discover what is going on inside other people's heads" (534). A "lonely ghost" wondering if he is "*alone* in the possession of a memory", this is Winston's trouble too, as is shown most clearly when he follows "a lunatic impulse" to go into a pub and attempt conversation with a prole (30; 62; 90). This does not go well and after a litre of bad beer and some conversation "at cross-purposes" Winston resigns himself: "The old man's memory was nothing but a rubbish-heap of details. One could question him all day without getting any real information" (94; 95). "The reader", Patrick Parrinder has responded, "is likely to judge otherwise" (*Nation and Novel* 318). This is especially true, I think, of the particular type of reader that Orwell had spent a large part of his earlier career imagining. In my earlier discussion of *Coming Up for Air*, I suggested that Orwell's 1939 novel insistently invoked England as an imagined community characterised by "the comic coloured postcards that you see in the windows of cheap stationers' shops" – "a sort of diary upon which the English people have unconsciously recorded themselves" – and evidence, along with the existence of Kipling's "good bad poetry" and figured so popularly by Donald McGill, of "the emotional overlap between the intellectual and the ordinary man" (*LU* 395; "Rudyard Kipling" 159). "If you look into your own mind", Orwell had asked in "The Art of Donald McGill", "which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza?" (28). "Almost certainly", he suspects,

> you are both. There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin. He is your unofficial self, the voice of the belly protesting against the soul (29).

This is the dialectic that Orwell had *Coming Up for Air*'s Fatty Bowling embody. It is therefore notable, in this context, that Orwell's 1939 novel, having been, as he told Symons, "rather killed by the outbreak of war and then blitzed out of existence", was republished in May 1948 and Orwell makes regular reference to the earlier novel in correspondence throughout the period in which he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*[9] ("10 May 1948" 336). The adventures of funny old Fatty Bowling were, then, very much on Orwell's mind as he developed the tragic demise of Winston Smith and Julia and this invites attendance to the earlier imagined world in consideration of the latter.

Throughout *Coming Up for Air*, Bowling insists that he is just like you. "George Bowling is the masses", Colls has written, "and a good deal of superior people's time and effort in the 1930s went into being superior to people like him" (*English Rebel* 111-2). Winston tries to condescend to the old man in the pub, but his time and effort is wasted and he emerges with his superiority over him confirmed, as is reflected in the pronoun the narrator chooses in denouncing the old man's memory. Saunders has written that

> the variety of ways Orwell "talks" to the reader through a prolific use of "you" reflect that he is part of a modernising force in English language usage, one that is consciously moving away from the upper-class accents of "one" (*Unsung Artistry* 48).

The narrator's recourse to the upper-class accents of "one" in his dismissal of the old man's memory emphasises Winston's lack of interest in what is really going on in the subaltern's head but also signals that the reader is not required to share this lack of interest: "*One* could question him all day without getting any real information" but that does not mean that *you*

[9] In Notes for his literary executor, dated 1945, Orwell is sanguine about *Coming Up for Air*: "there are some passages early in the book which I think make it worth reprinting" (114). "Struggling" with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as he wrote to Leonard Moore in May 1947, however, Orwell appears anxious to have the novel reprinted as soon as possible ("To Leonard Moore 21 May 1947" 145). He spent much of the earlier part of the year tracking down a copy – he wasn't joking about it being "blitzed out of existence" – and eventually had to steal a copy from a library in order to get it printed: "I don't want the issue of this book held up"; ("To Moore 7 March 1947" 70; "25 March 1947" 90).

couldn't have a good chat with him[10]. Julia, an anti-theyist like you and George, would have been able to chat with the old man too.

Among the rubbish of the old man's memory, which Orwell, who took "a pleasure" in "scraps of useless information" would likely have appreciated, the old man is able to provide is this: "'they liked you to touch your cap to 'em. It showed respect, like'" ("Why I Write" 319; *NE-F* 95). Julia would have understood this as something other than rubbish; her political attitude puts her in touch with an English political tradition in which the old man also has a part but of which Winston has no understanding. "The common man is still living in the mental world of Dickens", Orwell had written in 1940, "but nearly every modern intellectual has gone over to some or other form of totalitarianism" ("Charles Dickens" 55). In 1984, *every* intellectual appears to have gone over to the Party's brand of power-hungry totalitarianism, but Julia – "'not clever'", but "fond of using her hands" and "at home with machinery" – has managed, Bowling-like, to cling on to some version of the mental world of Dickens (136). Julia possess "a good-tempered antinomianism rather of Dickens's type" so that, whereas Winston finds himself submerged against his will in the "ideal" imagined community set up by the pontificating Party, "she stir[s] a sort of envy in him by telling him that during the Two Minutes Hate her great difficulty was to avoid bursting out laughing" ("Charles Dickens" 55; *NE-F* 160).

Unlike Winston, Julia is a physical being. After reminding Winston that he's not dead yet, Julia offers him exactly the sort of physical comfort for which Bowling had looked in vain; having "twisted herself round and pressed her bosom against him", she tells him:

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[10] The "clientele" of "The Moon Under Water", Orwell's "favourite public-house", "though fairly large, consists mostly of 'regulars' who occupy the same chair every evening and *go there for conversation* as much as for the beer" (98; 99; *emphasis added*). Pubs "ought to be", he writes in the same essay and in terms which evoke both the national aspect of the pub – presented as one of *The Lion and the Unicorn*'s "*characteristic* fragments of the English scene" – and, in turn, the familial aspect of the nation, "family gathering-places" (*LU* 392; "Moon Under Water" 100). George Woodcock, reminiscing about his relationship with Orwell in *Letter to the Past*, is sceptical about his friend's comfort in the pub: "George did not appear to know any of the workingmen who frequented the pub, and he certainly seemed out of place among them, a rather frayed sahib wearing shabby clothes with all the insouciance an old etonian displays on such occasions" (286).

> "stop talking about dying. And now listen, dear, we've got to fix up about the next time we meet. We may as well go back to the place in the wood. We've given it a good long rest. But you must get there by a different way this time. I've got it all planned out. You take the train – but look, I'll draw it out for you".
>
> And in her practical way she scraped together a small square of dust, and with a twig from a pigeon's nest began drawing a map on the floor (143).

Julia's appreciation of the satiric aspect of the Party's grandiosity and her insistence on bodily pleasures asserts her comfort in the "traditional […] sub-world of smacked bottoms and scrawny mothers-in-law" that was, I argued above, Bowling's, and his reader's, milieu ("The Art of Donald McGill" 24). Her private world is attuned to the "chorus of raspberries from all the millions of common men" that Orwell purportedly

> never read[s] the proclamations of generals before battle, the speeches of fuhrers and prime ministers, the solidarity songs of public schools and left-wing political parties, national anthems, Temperance tracts, papal encyclicals and sermons against gambling and contraception, without seeming to hear (29).

If there is a strand of quietism running from "Inside the Whale" to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* then it is that Julia's voice, like Bowling's and Miller's before her, comes from the "third-class carriage" ("Inside the Whale" 92). Unlike Winston, Julia takes "it for granted that everyone, or nearly everyone, secretly hated the Party and would break the rules if he thought it safe to do so" (159). She imagines herself part of a dissident community the like of which the self-described lonely ghost cannot conceive; Julia, in other words, is part of a wider political imaginary, one which defines itself against the pontiffs who condition the society in which she lives. Julia, in this, is a journeyman in a broader sense still than that suggested above for, having characterised his new philosophical category, Ayer ends "The Claims of Philosophy" with an abdication of the philosopher's right to make claims; that right belongs instead, or should belong, Ayer argues, to the common, everyman individual, to the journeyman: "No more than the scientist", he writes, "is the philosopher specially privileged to lay down the rules of conduct, or to prescribe an ideal form of life" (33). "Political institutions", Ayer's journeyman would insist against the pontiff, "are not sacrosanct" (31). "It may", he concedes, "in certain circumstances, be beyond the power of a given individual to change

them, but it does not follow that he is bound to think them good" (31). Julia's assumed, or imagined, community of dissidents, defined by an anti-theyism Winston doesn't understand, does not think the political institutions of its society good, even if it cannot change them. Julia's imagination of this community is a natural epitome of the various pieces of evidence of individual autonomy that she has experienced and hearing of these experiences sparks, for a fleeting moment, Winston's imagination into conceiving of a dissident community. When, for example, during their first sexual encounter, Winston asks Julia if she has "done this before". Julia's answer implies the existence of other rebels: "'Of course. Hundreds of times – well, scores of times anyway'" (131). Momentarily at least, Winston understands Julia's promiscuity in this way:

> His heart leapt. Scores of times she had done it: he wished it had been hundreds – thousands. […] Who knew, perhaps the Party was rotten under the surface, its cult of strenuousness and self-denial simply a sham concealing iniquity (131).

This speculation goes unconfirmed by the text; O'Brien denies it when he tells Winston he is "the last man", but the novel gives us no reason to trust O'Brien, quite the opposite, in fact (282). Briefly a reed for Winston's hopes for humanity, Julia symbolises the activity by which a more natural England could be conditioned.

Over the course of their first meetings, Winston and Julia conduct "a curious, intermittent conversation"; Julia, we are told, "appeared to be quite used to this kind of conversation" and she even has a name for it: "'talking by instalments'" (134-5). Julia, we are reminded, had done this sort of thing before. When Julia has been discussed by critics of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it has mostly been in terms of her sexuality but her ability as a conversationalist – an ability which Winston, writing his Private Life behind the atavistic, face-saving alcove of his flat, has never tried to hone – is important too[11]. United in their

[11] The key passage on the importance of Julia's sexuality is: "Their embrace had been a battle, the climax a victory. It was a blow struck against the Party. It was a political act" (133). Thus Ronald Berman writes that "the narrative describes sexual and aesthetic consciousness; its central object is a piece of coral embedded in glass; its central act is the act of love" (87). Gorman Beauchamp has cited

hatred of the Party, she and Winston, to borrow Ayer's phrase, "talk it out" and talking of this kind is important for Orwell, as it was for the *Polemic*-ists in general. They believed, as Slater states in his opening editorial, that "from a conflict of opinion the truth arises" (3). Conflicts of opinion, implying the interaction of autonomous individuals and briefly realised in the early stages of Winston and Julia's relationship, are precisely what the Party cannot tolerate; their attitude to truth is totalitarian, and dictatorial: "whatever the Party holds to be the truth, is truth" (261). Carr has written that "what matters" to Orwell "is the inclination and ability to *pursue* the truth, to reconsider, rethink, and re-examine accepted belief" (*Orwell, Politics, and Power* 96). Evidence that Orwell took this, *Polemic*-ist, line is found in his debate with Swingler: "What is needed", he had insisted, "is the right to print what one believes to be true […]. Of course, one develops and modifies one's views" (53). One develops and modifies one's views, or you develop and modify your views, by talking; for Michael Walzer it is part of Orwell's

> commitment to democracy – not the sovereign people only but also the political process: the rough and tumble of debate and the mutual tolerance that keeps the rough and tumble from getting too rough ("George Orwell's England" 129).

Intellectuals, going over to totalitarianism, do not share this commitment; Swingler certainly doesn't:

> where he happens to approve of my conclusions he says to me, "*Go ahead! You are quite right to follow your own judgment*": where he disapproves, he says, *"Do you*

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the sexual aspect of rebellion as an important point of overlap between *We* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in "Of Man's Last Disobedience", while Patai writes: "Her rebellion against the Party has no ideological or theoretical foundation; rather, it is grounded in her desire for pleasure" (866). Shklar offers a different approach in "Should Political Theory Care" where she realigns Julia's sexuality as an aspect of her healthy, and political, "skepticism" (14). That Julia's sexuality is only part of her rebellious potency is anecdotally confirmed, I think, by Orwell's allowing the Argentinean translation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be "slightly bawdlerised" by the omission of scenes describing the carnal aspect of Winston and Julia's rebellion ("Orwell's Notes on his Books and Essays" 227). "On 22 November 1949", Davison reports, "Leonard Moore sent Orwell a request for certain cuts to be made in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*": "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* had a 'basic philosophy'", the representative explained, "'aimed against some of the most powerful movements of our time', and it would be regrettable if those who found such ideas 'distasteful' could procure the book's withdrawal 'on some quite irrelevant point of morality'" ("Proposed Cuts to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 179-80).

> *realise that you are only a single fallible human being and that you have no right to put your own views forward as if they were gospel truth"* (47).

This is how O'Brien will conduct himself in his interrogation of Winston; two and two are allowed to make four "sometimes", after all. "The individual is morally impotent", Stephen Spender had written in *Polemic*'s last essay; rebelling alone in the first part of the novel, Winston is impotent too ("Thoughts in an Aeroplane over Europe" 63). Talking by instalments with Julia, however, seems a partial cure.

That Winston and Julia have different opinions is evident enough. They have debates too, about, for example, the importance of the scrap of paper, discussed in the previous chapter, Winston believes enough to blow the Party to pieces:

> "Just in that one instance, in my whole life, I did possess actual concrete evidence after the event – years after it."
>
> "And what good was that?"
>
> "It was no good, because I threw it away a few minutes later. But if the same thing happened today, I should keep it."
>
> "Well, I wouldn't!" said Julia. "I'm quite ready to take risks, but only for something worth while, not for bits of old newspaper" (162).

Whereas Winston, despite his experience to the contrary, still treats the newspaper, as the Party wants him to, as a repository of public truth, Julia treats it for what it is: worthless. On another occasion, because "in some ways she was far more acute than Winston, and far less susceptible to Party propaganda", Julia seems to lead Winston to modify his views:

> when he happened in some connexion to mention the war against Eurasia, she startled him by saying casually that in her opinion the war was not happening. The rocket bombs which fell daily on London were probably fired by the Government of Oceania itself, "just to keep people frightened". This was an idea that had literally never occurred to him (160).

As readers located in a time when thought is still free and when (journey)men are different from one another, we can recognise the value of interventions like Julia's; Winston does not see this conflict of opinion, this debate, for what it is, however, so does not fully appreciate it and ultimately abandons the process. Before showing how Winston abandons his and Julia's dialectical relationship, however, it is important to stress that it *is* dialectical. Escaping

into Julia's myriad hiding places Winston is shown a dialectical space which offers interaction with a wider political imaginary.

.5.

"The best books, he perceived, are those that tell you what you know already": Winston reading, Julia echoing

When they go together to O'Brien's flat to become initiated into the dissident society (the worryingly, if appropriately named *Brother*hood), the dynamic of Winston and Julia's relationship changes. There, O'Brien "almost ignored Julia, seeming to take it for granted that Winston could speak for her" (179). Winston is quite comfortable with this arrangement. Julia, after all, had been sceptical about the Brotherhood: "she refused to believe", sensibly and with some justification, it will turn out, "that widespread, organised opposition existed or could exist […] Such a thing as an independent political movement was outside her *imagination*" (159-60; *emphasis added*). Speaking for her, Winston promises to do all manner of terrible things in Julia's name.

> "You are prepared to give your lives?"
> "Yes."
> "You are prepared to commit murder?"
> "Yes."
> "To commit acts of sabotage which may cause the death of hundreds of innocent people?"
> "Yes."
> "To betray your country to foreign powers?"
> "Yes."
> "You are prepared to cheat, to forge, to blackmail, to corrupt the minds of children, to distribute habit-forming drugs, to encourage prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases – to do anything which is likely to cause demoralization and weaken the power of the Party?"
> "Yes."
> "If, for example, it would somehow serve our interests to throw sulphuric acid in a child's face – are you prepared to do that?"
> "Yes."
> "You are prepared to lose your identity and live out the rest of your life as a waiter or a dock-worker?"
> "Yes."
> "You are prepared to commit suicide, if and when we order you to do so?"
> "Yes" (179-80).

In this way, the Brotherhood is presented to and embraced by Winston as advocating a form of what Orwell had called "Catastrophic Gradualism", in an essay of that name published in

1945, in which "crime follows crime" yet, "in some mystical way, in the sight of God, or perhaps in the sight of Marx, this is Progress" (343). "In the name of Socialism", Orwell had noted earlier in the essay,

> the Russian regime has committed almost every crime that can be imagined, but at the same time its evolution is away from Socialism, unless one re-defines that word in terms that no Socialist of 1917 would have accepted. To those who admit these facts, only two courses are open. One is simply to repudiate the whole theory of totalitarianism, which few English intellectuals have the courage to do: the other is to fall back on Catastrophic Gradualism (342).

The regime of the Party has committed almost every crime that can be imagined in the name of Ingsoc. No English Socialist of 1917 would have accepted their totalitarian brand of "English Socialism". "The real objective of Socialism is human brotherhood", Orwell had written in 1943, but no English Socialist of 1917 would prefer the Brotherhood to the Party ("Can Socialists be Happy?" 41). The dissident organisation that Winston has longed to join explicitly proposes to commit the Party's crimes again under a new name and a newly defined objective. Committing to it, and to commit those crimes, Winston looks forward to "progress", not as we would understand it, nor Julia, but as it is understood in the sight of God, perhaps, or pontiff philosophers. Julia gestures towards the alternative course and, when she eventually speaks, she reasserts her individual agency against totalitarianism:

> "You are prepared, the two of you, to separate and never see one another again?"
> "No!" broke in Julia (180).

If he ever understood it in these terms, Winston will forget Julia's intervention. After his arrest,

> He hardly thought of Julia. He could not fix his mind on her. He loved her and would not betray her; but that was only a fact, known as he knew the rules of arithmetic. He felt no love for her, and he hardly even wondered what was happening to her. He thought oftener of O'Brien, with a flickering hope. O'Brien might know that he had been arrested. The Brotherhood, he had said, never tried to save its members (240).

Arrested, he assumes for his membership of the Brotherhood, Winston has come to understand his love for Julia on his own terms – their "love" has been recast here as the

equivalent of 2+2=4, as another mutable symbol of Winston's loneliness. Accordingly, when the series of promises that had made up *his* initiation to the Brotherhood is broadcast back to Winston, it proves to him that he has no right to the moral supremacy he tries to assert over the Party. Julia is entirely deleted from this broadcast, Winston hears

> a sound-track of the conversation *he* had had with O'Brien, on the night when *he* had enrolled *himself* in the Brotherhood. *He* heard *himself* promising to lie, to steal, to forge, to murder, to encourage drug-taking and prostitution, to disseminate venereal diseases, to throw vitriol in a child's face (283; *emphasis added*).

"O'Brien made a small impatient gesture, as though to say that the demonstration was hardly worth making. Then he turned a switch and the voices stopped" (283). The original conversation is another of the clues that Connors has argued Orwell inserts into the first part of the narrative to show Winston's acceptance of Party values. Interpreted allegorically when replayed, this clue alludes to the importance of Julia's forgotten intervention, of her insistence on an individual agency manifest in a love the likes of which the "brotherhood" that Orwell had argued in 1943 was "the real objective of Socialism" depends upon. Julia's insistence on her and Winston's communion, like her earlier "I love you", gestures towards a wider political imaginary – made concrete by, for example, the surface of the Earth on which they make love for the first time – in which individual agency can promote community. Winston, however, forgets about that intervention. Having had her intervene in this way, and provide a point of contrast to Winston, Orwell changes Julia's role in the novel which becomes, again, about Winston as the novel concentrates on showing us how not to construct ourselves as members of a humanely imagined community. After visiting O'Brien's flat, Winston and Julia spend less and less time talking (also less and less time copulating) and more time reading the textbook of the Brotherhood's revolution; or, at least, Winston reads. Julia sleeps.

Having joined the Brotherhood, Winston receives a copy of Emanuel Goldstein's dissident textbook *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* and his previously

vague dissidence against the existing order becomes that of the "book-trained Socialist" against whom Orwell had railed throughout his career: "The best books, [Winston] perceived" from reading Goldstein's, "are those that tell you what you know already" (208). From now on, Winston prefers reading "the Book", which tells him nothing new, to discussion with Julia, from whom, as above, he learned things (208). This shows a typically "orthodox" frame of reference, as Colls has written:

> Winston trusts the book like all intellectuals must. Julia does not. What she knows about the Party she has not learned there. She is a 26-year-old mechanic – a technical woman, one of the new middle class that Orwell had reached out to in the late 1930s – smart, young, self-aware, unsnobbish and competent in all the ways Winston is not (215-6).

When he refers to Orwell reaching out to "the new middle class" Colls reiterates the link I have tried to draw between Julia and George Bowling; attendant within this link, however, is the recognition that Julia changes, or at least the narrative's portrayal of Julia changes, once she and Winston return from O'Brien's flat.

There were clues that this would happen. The class to which Bowling belongs, and returns, "is best recognised", Colls writes, "like George is best recognised, by its mobility" and *journey*man-like Julia had been recognised by this mobility too, as indicated by her ability to talk by instalments and her practical cunning (manifest partly in a long list of hiding places). But she loses it and, prior to being spoken for in O'Brien's flat, finds herself – despite her protestations: "I'm not literary, dear" – written into a Utopia; she has allowed herself to be figured metaphorically as Winston constructs a new type of womb-like space: "The paperweight was the room he was in, and the coral was Julia's life and his own, fixed in a sort of eternity at the heart of the crystal" (137; 154). This is the third space of escape that the novel will present for its reader's evaluation but it is not a hopeful one because it is not dialectical. In it Julia's mobility, the characteristic attribute of her undeceived class, and of the journeyman, has been arrested just as the "clocked, calendrical time" of the nation has stopped: Julia, like England itself, finds herself trapped by a corrupted intelligentsia in an

"endless present" (162). She loses her agency and with it go the novel's allusions to a wider political imaginary.

Julia becomes the person that "book-trained", catastrophic gradualist Winston wants her to be so that this is what happens the next time Winston intones his mantra:

> "We are the dead," he said.
> "We are the dead," echoed Julia dutifully.
> "You are the dead," said an iron voice behind them (230).

Julia's "dutiful" echo shows her transformation from smart independent journeywoman into acolyte – she toes the line, as it were, and shuts up – and this transformation is her undoing. She has allowed her rebellion to be coloured by Winston just as he had allowed his to be coloured by O'Brien. Her imagined community of anti-theyists has been reduced to a single cell of a (fictional) "community" which is not actually a community: "The members of the Brotherhood", O'Brien explains, "have no way of recognising one another, and it is impossible for any one member to be aware of the identity of more than a few others" (183). "We are the dead", he continues, "our only true life is in the future" (183). The terms of O'Brien's description of the Brotherhood echo those in which Orwell had described "religious belief" in "Notes on the Way". "By the nineteenth century", he writes,

> it was already in essence a lie, a semi-conscious device for keeping the rich rich and the poor poor. The poor were to be contented with their poverty, because it would all be made up to them in the world beyond the grave, usually pictured as something mid-way between Kew Gardens and a jeweller's shop. Ten thousand a year for me, two pounds a week for you, but we are all the children of God (124).

The Brotherhood is a similar sop. When O'Brien tells Winston that he "collaborated in writing" its text book he presents it as a tool used by the Party to redirect rebellious energies: "The programme it sets forth is nonsense. The secret accumulation of knowledge – a gradual spread of enlightenment – ultimately a proletarian rebellion — the overthrow of the Party" (274). Winston's seduction by this device is another facet of his intellectual pathology. The Brotherhood is the Oceanic equivalent of the Communist Party in 1930s England; "it was simply something to believe in":

> All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. Patriotism, religion, empire, military glory – all in one word, Russia. Father, king, leader, hero, saviour – all in one word, Stalin. God Stalin. The devil – Hitler. Heaven – Moscow. Hell – Berlin. All the gaps were filled up. So, after all, the "Communism" of the English intellectual is something inexplicable enough. It is the patriotism of the deracinated ("Inside the Whale" 103).

Julia offers Winston access to an "imagined community" of English people defined by an anti-Theyistic patriotism concerned with staying alive. Naturalist novels, Orwell had written, "contain at least two characters, probably more, who are described from the inside and on the same level of probability" ("George Gissing" 350). "Novelists rely", according to Anderson, "on an ability to conjure up an imagined community" (*Imagined Communities* 33). Rather than choose this naturalist community, however, Winston prefers O'Brien's Utopia. "Utopia", as Orwell had written in "Rudyard Kipling", "never arrives"; choosing O'Brien, Winston chooses death and Julia, dutifully, follows (160). The hopelessness of Winston's choice is instantly confirmed. "You are the dead", they are told and the next thing that happens is that "the fragment of coral, a tiny crinkle of pink like a sugar rosebud from a cake, rolled across the mat. How small, thought Winston, how small it always was!" (232). Rather than a dialectical space, Winston's domestic idyll, established once journeywoman Julia shuts up, is small just as his private world was empty. As with his important axiom, indeed, the futility of that space had been implied earlier, in the upwards curve of Orwell's parabola.

At the end of a long list of "things to look out for in the junk shop" that he suggested to readers of the *Evening Standard* in January 1946, Orwell had offered "glass paper-weights with pictures at the bottom" and then: "There are others that have a piece of coral enclosed in the glass, but these are always fantastically expensive" (18). This list comes in a short piece titled "Just Junk" and that, ultimately, is what Winston's Utopian domesticity amounts to: it is just fantastically expensive junk. Julia – a late-1940s version of whom may well have read the *Standard* on her way home from work – should know this. But she doesn't and that

she doesn't is a consequence of her mind, and this is where Patai's androcentrism comes in, having been landscaped by Winston just as surely as his has been mapped by Big Brother. Unlike George Bowling, when Julia's told she's dead she stops moving and, eventually, dutifully, lies down. "*Don't let it happen*", Orwell had written, "*it depends on you*" and what this means, again, is that the intellectuals will not save us. Worse: "they" may even prevent you from saving yourself.

.Conclusion.

"The conclusion of any Marxist intellectual": Winston observing, Orwell conditioning

In their last moments of ideologically constructed happiness, Winston and Julia look out of the window of their bedroom above the junkshop. They are looking down on a prole woman. She is singing (a "drivelling song") and watching her sing, Winston has an epiphany:

> The birds sang, the proles sang, the Party did not sing. All round the world, in London and New York, in Africa and Brazil, and in the mysterious, forbidden lands beyond the frontiers, in the streets of Paris and Berlin, in the villages of the endless Russian plain, in the bazaars of China and Japan – everywhere stood the same solid unconquerable figure, made monstrous by work and childbearing, toiling from birth to death and still singing. Out of those mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come. You were the dead, theirs was the future. But you could share in that future if you kept alive the mind as they kept alive the body, and passed on the secret doctrine that two plus two make four (227; 230).

For Raymond Williams, this episode sums up all that is wrong with Orwell. Winston's epiphany, he writes in *Culture and Society*,

> is the conclusion of any Marxist intellectual, in specifically Marxist terms, but with this difference from at any rate some Marxists: that the proles now, like the animals, are "monstrous" and not yet "conscious" – one day they will be so, and meanwhile the exile keeps the truth alive. The only point I would make is that this way of seeing the working people is not from fact and observation, but from the pressures of feeling exiled: other people are seen as an undifferentiated mass beyond one, the "monstrous" figure. Here, again, is the paradox: that the only class in which you can put any hope is written off, in present terms, as hopeless (294).

As it relates to Winston, Williams' point is acute. That a discontinuity exists between the observation and the feeling is, indeed, acknowledged by the text:

> "She's beautiful," he murmured.
> "She's a metre across the hips, easily," said Julia.
> "That is her style of beauty," said Winston (228).

This is Julia's last attempt to have Winston modify his point of view; her next act will be to "dutifully" echo his "We are the dead" mantra. Had she, instead of toeing the line and shutting up, reminded Winston that he wasn't dead yet, Julia would have reminded him – and the reader – that the difference between Winston and Julia on one side of the glass and

the prole woman on the other was significantly less marked than his "specifically Marxist" distinction indicates: Julia, in her early character as a representative English person, did not feel the pressures of exile as Winston did. I have discussed already the discipline-demanding aspect of Winston's "intellectual", pseudo-Marxist or Catastrophic Gradualist rebellion and, beyond insisting that the similarity between Winston's conclusion and the conclusion of any Marxist intellectual is precisely the point, I don't want to repeat that argument. Rather, I want to suggest that Winston's intellectual conclusion figures as an ironic, allegorical replaying of earlier moments in Orwell's parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question.

This is how Orwell described the train journey which took him away from Wigan in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (a broadly similar event is described in a different context in the diary):

> As we moved slowly through the outskirts of the town we passed row after row of little grey slum houses running at right angles to the embankment. At the back of one of the houses a young woman was kneeling on the stones, poking a stick up the leaden waste-pipe which ran from the sink inside and which I suppose was blocked. I had time to see everything about her – her sacking apron, her clumsy clogs, her arms reddened by the cold. She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that "It isn't the same for them as it would be for us," and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe (16-7).

On first reading, this episode and the above from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appear to be significantly different from one another: the girl in Wigan retains her agency – "She knew well enough" – and is in this way presented, precisely, as thoughtful; by deeming the proles thoughtless, Winston makes the mistake against which *Wigan Pier* counsels. A second reading of the two episodes, however, reveals a deeper rhetorical resonance.

In terms of narrative, both are presented as unlooked-for epiphanies.

> As [Winston] looked at the woman in her characteristic attitude, her thick arms reaching up for the line, her powerful mare-like buttocks [again, the animalism of proletarian life, as it appears to the intellectual, is highlighted] protruded, *it struck him* for the first time that she was beautiful" (*NE-F* 228; *emphasis added*).

This is equivalent to Orwell's "*it struck me* then that we are mistaken when we say that 'It isn't the same for them as it would be for us'". In both cases, this means that the subject becomes an object so that Winston's "thoughtless" prole is a repository of hope because she is reduced to her "mighty loins" and, even if Orwell's slum girl achieves grammatical subjectivity, she does so only by accepting "what was happening to her", that is precisely by accepting her lack of agency. The episodes share a further, structural resemblance by adopting the perspective of the privileged (intellectual, male) speaker looking out of a window and down onto an inferior (proletarian, female) subject and in both the epiphany occurs *as a consequence* of that gaze. In this way, it appears that Orwell has Winston fill the role of reporting male intellectual which he had played himself in, for example, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Before suggesting why Orwell might have wanted to make this metatextual comparison, I want to consider the relevance of another of his earlier texts to this scene.

"Get hold of a dozen of these things, preferably McGill's, and spread them out on a table", Orwell had commanded his reader in arguing for "The Art of Donald McGill": "What do you see?", he asks (24). Characteristically, though, he is going to tell you what you see:

> Your first impression is of overpowering vulgarity. This is quite apart from the ever-present obscenity, and apart also from the hideousness of the colours. They have an utter lowness of mental atmosphere which comes out not only in the nature of the jokes but, even more, in the grotesque, staring, blatant quality of the drawings. The designs, like those of a child, are full of heavy lines and empty spaces, and all the figures in them, every gesture and attitude, are deliberately ugly, the faces grinning and vacuous, the women monstrously parodied, with bottoms like Hottentots (24).

Winston's periodically patriotic prole woman – "a metre across the hips, easily", as Julia objects – probably looks a lot like one of McGill's grotesque Hottentots; she has, as noted,

about the same amount of agency. For Arthur Calder-Marshall, writing in *Wish You Were Here*, his biography of McGill,

> Orwell's essay, filled though it is with memorable phrases, is more expressive of the divorce of the Olympian intellectual of the 1930s from the lowly vulgar, than of any true understanding. George Blair, ex-Etonian, Burmese policeman, down-and-out in London and Paris, chaser of crumbs round the tablecloth of a Wigan tripe-shop, veteran of the POUM in the Spanish Civil War, found in McGill things which were really in his own consciousness (11).

Calder-Marshall's criticism depends on a fundamental misreading of Orwell's essay, the point of which is precisely that the themes depicted so colourfully by McGill made up (part of) all of our consciousnesses:

> If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both. There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin. He is your unofficial self, the voice of the belly protesting against the soul (29).

Orwell's essay, as I argued above, is expressive of his move from a position of "degenerate modern semi-intellectual[ism]", as he had written in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, towards a position of (imagined) community with the English People (184). "The Art of Donald McGill" casts him, and "you", as dialectical beings in which the soul and the body interact.

Winston's intellectual conclusion, however, "is more expressive of the divorce of the Olympian intellectual of the 1930s from the lowly vulgar, than of any true understanding". Orwell places the intellectual and the masses, the soul and the body, the saint and the comical squire, on a dialectical continuum; Winston separates the intellectual and the prole, the mind and the body and, on those grounds, the living and the dead. Winston imagines a community, but not one to which he can belong. "Dead", Winston is, specifically, an exile; inside Winston's intellectual sanctuary, "we find ourselves", as Ayer had written of the pontiff's textbooks, "in a country from which the ordinary processes of logic, or indeed reasoning of any kind, appear to have been banished" ("The Claims of Philosophy" 19). We find ourselves, in other words, in a Utopia, looking towards a world which will never arrive.

Winston's epiphany shows that, just as he has learned to think of himself in the Party's terms, so he has internalised the Party's representation of the proles as thoughtless. His immediately undermined insight parodies the futility of analyses of the condition of England which merely take things as they are – "traditionally", as Collini has observed, the genre "hasn't allowed much standing to 'the way people want to live'" – and, in so doing, gestures allegorically towards a more hopeful form of condition-of-England writing[12] ("From the Motorcoach" 18).

Addressing Orwell's train journey in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Hunter has drawn attention to the contrast between the narrator and the object narrated, writing: "the narrator is warm, safe, enclosed from the cold outside; the train is an escape bearing him away from the disgust of his earlier experience" (*Search for a Voice* 50). Crick, similarly, has described Orwell's journey as

> a symbol of the writer's almost desperate pain at being merely an observer, a member of another class who, having done his contracted task, is carried off remorselessly and mechanically simply to write about "what can be done?" (*A Life* 287).

By restaging the episode at the end of a career spent writing about the condition of England in an allegorical novel conceived as a warning, Orwell indicates that writing about, or observing, the condition of England is not enough. Reading is not enough and imagining will not do either. England has, rather, to be acted or, to modify Winston's mantra, lived. "Political institutions are not sacrosanct", Ayer had written:

> It may, in certain circumstances, be beyond the power of a given individual to change them, but it does not follow that he is bound to think them good. That they are what they are is an unmistakable fact, but it does not follow that they are what they ought to be. And the question what they ought to be is ultimately a moral question. It is for the individual to answer it in accordance with the values that he himself adopts ("Claims" 31).

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[12] In fact, as Lorraine Saunders has shown, "the proles *are* shown to think for themselves" (*Unsung Artistry* 14). On the novel's very early pages, when Winston writes in his diary for the first time, a visit to the cinema in which a violent war film he thinks "very good" is interrupted by an old woman shouting out – "*They didn't oughter of showed it, not in front of the kids*" – and she, as Saunders points out, "however inarticulately, is voicing an opinion, one that is innately humanist" even if Winston dismisses it as a "*typical prole reaction*" (*Unsung Artistry* 14; *NE-F* 10-11).

The condition of England is not sacrosanct either; the question of what it ought to be is a moral question for the individual to answer. In order for the individual's answer to be heard, however, she or he has to live in a dialectically conditioned England in which individual activity epitomises an imagined community, private knowledge into public. It is too late for Winston to change his England, or even to escape his nightmare situation, but his proposed solution does not in any case allow for the necessary type of community – his individual prole is "thoughtless", instead of actively "adopting" values, she has these inscribed on her from within an intellectual's sanctuary. This is not how it works: "The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don't let it happen. It depends on you*". A dialectical pronoun denoting both the individual and the collective, "*you*" are the dialectical space by which England is conditioned; your patriotism is the force by which, as Orwell had written during the war, "the nation keeps itself in its familiar shape", its familiar, dialectical, shape (*LU* 397).

CODA

RE-CONDITIONING ENGLAND AND LITERARY/LITERATE CULTURE

"A great deal is said about saving culture", Spender declares at the end of *The New Realism*, "but the really important thing is to have a culture to save" (24). Orwell, I think, would have agreed with his fellow *Polemic*-ist. "All the culture that is most truly native", Orwell had written in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, "centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'" (394). This native culture was signified in Orwell's conviction that, in Ken Hirschkop's summary, "the newsagent was the best place from which to scan English culture" ("Culture, class and education" 461). It is evident too in his literary criticism, which Alex Zwerdling describes as

> sociological analysis that concentrates on the question of the writer's audience, and the consistent standard of judgment is wide appeal. In the essay on Dickens, for example, he is fascinated by the inexplicable way in which his work has filtered down to a nonintellectual audience (*Orwell and the Left* 43).

The above chapters have concentrated largely on the antinomian aspect of England's unofficial culture, on the characteristic anti-Theyism of the English People, and Orwell was undoubtedly a fierce defender of that culture. Re-conditioning England, however, requires more than that. Throughout his oeuvre, across the whole of his parabolic engagement with the condition-of-England question, Orwell alludes to and insists on the value of literary culture.

The clue to this is in a small detail from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston writes his diary in an alcove that "had probably been intended to hold bookshelves" (7). Above, I focused on the alcove as a space in which you can do what you like in your spare time and so as a vestige of the "the *privateness* of English life" which Orwell had described, in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, as an "English characteristic which is so much a part of us that we barely notice it" (394). As a gesture towards the familiar England of the earlier essay, the alcove, I

suggested, offered a place of escape from the England-changed depicted in the novel. But the alcove is only a "space" because the books it was designed to hold no longer exist. They have been subjected, together with "periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs" to the "process of continuous alteration" on which the aggressively verificationist epistemology of the Party defends (42). "Written by machinery", "books were just a commodity that had to be produced, like jam or bootlaces" (201; 136). In a few years time, as Syme says, "Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron [will] exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be" (56). This process has already started: "Various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens", the Appendix tells us, were "in process of translation: when the task had been completed, their original writings, with all else that survived of the literature of the past, would be destroyed" (325). One of Winston's colleagues in the Records Department is "a mild, ineffectual, dreamy creature named Ampleforth, with very hairy ears and a surprising talent for juggling with rhymes and metres" whose job is to produce "garbled versions – definitive texts, they were called – of poems which had become ideologically offensive, but which for one reason or another were to be retained in the anthologies" (45). My earlier statement, then, needs rewording. The books exist, but they do so only as objects. Their *cultural* significance has been deleted and so Winston's alcove which "had probably been intended to hold bookshelves" has, in 1984, nothing, to use Spender's word, so important to hold. With access only to an empty space, Winston, having "woke[n] up with the word 'Shakespeare' on his lips" has nothing to hang it on (33).

Canonical references, especially to Shakespeare, are a regular feature of dystopian literature. "Fortunately the antediluvian time of those Shakespeares and Dostoevskys (or what were their names?) is past", writes D-503 in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (41). The Savage, in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which Orwell had claimed "must be partly derived from

it [*We*]", finds in Shakespeare the language to critique the World State in which he finds himself: "Only in Othello's words could he find an adequate vehicle for his contempt and hatred" ("Freedom and Happiness" 14; *Brave New World* 172). But no one else, or almost no one else, has read the Bard:

> "Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about my ears, and sometimes voices".
>
> The Savage's face lit up with a sudden pleasure. "Have you read it too?" he asked. "I thought nobody knew about that book here, in England".
>
> "Almost nobody. I'm one of the very few. It's prohibited, you see" (172).

Considered in terms of condition-of-England writing, however, this referential trope is also significant.

Elizabeth Gaskell's poor could not speak for themselves. Her designation, in the preface to *Mary Barton*, of her subjects as "the dumb people" owes its genesis to Carlyle who refers to "that great dumb toiling class which cannot speak" (*Mary Barton* 39; *Chartism*, 5). Carlyle's language here, with *Chartism* in general, is an angry response to the first failed Chartist petition to parliament in 1839. This failure is enacted in *Mary Barton*, in which John Barton forms part of the workers' delegation: "As long as I live, our rejection of that day will abide in my heart; and as long as I live I shall curse them as so cruelly refused to hear us; but I'll not speak of it no more" (144-5). John and the rest of the delegation (his working-class "us") are not, as his lament suggests, "dumb"; rather they are rejected, or ignored. As Jenny Uglow has pointed out:

> Among themselves they are not "dumb". They have their stories, their ballads and their poetry, and can speak to their peers, as John Barton does, with "rough Lancashire eloquence coming out of the fullness of his heart". The problem […] is that the poor speak a language to which the rich are deaf (*Elizabeth Gaskell* 202).

In order "to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses this dumb people", Gaskell must circumvent this rhetorical dumbness, which is further complicated by England's geographically distinct dialects (39). As she notes in a letter to her publisher, Edward Chapman: "it is so difficult living in Lancashire to decide upon words likely to be

unintelligible in another county" ("17 April 1848" 55). Gaskell's solution was to "put notes to those [words] we believe to require them" (55). These come in the form of footnotes, translations in which the narrator clarifies the meaning of the text for the benefit of the unschooled reader. As her letter to Chapman indicates, these notes are motivated by a realist concern; people in Lancashire genuinely speak this way, as she notes in a second letter to her publisher in which she complains about misspellings of dialect, and need to be represented as such: "In looking over the book I see numerous errors regarding the part written in the Lancashire dialect: 'g*o*tten' should always be 'g*e*tten'; &c" ("5 December 1848" 64). Walter Greenwood had done this too in *Love on the Dole*; the majority of Gaskell's notes, however, include a quotation from the English literary canon and in this way the footnotes are made to serve a social, socialising, purpose: "'Don' is constantly used in Lancashire for 'do'; as it was by our older writers. 'And that may non Hors *don*.' – *Sir J. Mandeville*. 'But for th' entente to *don* this sinne.' – *Chaucer*" (97). Through reference to their canonical providence, the words and phrases the novel draws from dialect serve to justify both the dialect and the novel itself within the wider tradition of English literature. All of Orwell's novels refer to England's literary tradition.

Burmese Days is rich in literary allusion. The policeman, Westfield, routinely quotes Shakespeare: "lead on, Macduff" is his particular catchphrase (17; 33; 241). Flory's friend Dr. Veraswami owns "a book-case containing a rather unappetising little library, mainly books of essays, of the Emerson-Carlyle-Stevenson type" and, like Westfield, quotes Shakespeare: "They were such men – I quote your immortal Shakespeare – ass, take them for all in all, we shall not look upon their like again!" (35; 36). "You've read Ibsen, of course", Flory assumes, but "Ah, no, Mr Flory, alas!" (40). Flory summarises British Imperialism, "They build a prison and call it progress", "rather regretfully – for the doctor would not recognize the allusion" to

the Roman author Tacitus[1] (41). "I 'counsel ignoble ease'", he concludes: "like old Belial in Paradise Lost" (42). Later, he ironically invokes William Blake's patriotic panegyric: "Burma's mostly jungle – a green, unpleasant land, I call it" (83). Glossing the imperialist's experience, the narrator explains: "Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs" (69). Flory, rebelling against that existence, "had learned to live inwardly, secretly, in books and secret thoughts" and worries: "Was he no more than a loafer using his idleness to invent imaginary woes? A spiritual Mrs. Wititterly? A Hamlet without poetry?" (70; 73). Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, these canonical proper nouns symbolise the similarly capitalized "Home" from which the novel's characters have been exiled while also, as with the Kipling reference, render the alien world of Burma intelligible to readers, paraphrasing Gaskell, in another country.

In *A Clergyman's Daughter*, the function of Shakespeare changes. In *Burmese Days* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the bard's name acts – as had Dickens' for Tony Last in Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* – as a marker of a lost Englishness; in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, he is an altogether more demotic force. Having "spent two pounds three shillings out of her precious four pounds ten on a dozen secondhand copies of a cheap school edition of Shakespeare", Dorothy Hare takes *Macbeth* off the cheap pages and makes Shakespeare live for her students: "they took readily to Shakespeare, as all children do when he is not made horrible with parsing and analysing" (194; 195). Dorothy's secondhand copies have belonged to other students and the Shakespeare whom children can enjoy has been passed down the generations. This is one definition of canonical, one which, as the above discussion of his work on Dickens shows, matters to Orwell. It is not the only one, however:

> One lady was disturbed to hear that her child was being given Shakespeare to read. "She had heard", she wrote, "that this Mr. Shakespeare was a writer of stage-plays, and was Miss Millborough quite certain that he wasn't a very *immoral* writer? For her own part she had never so much as been to the pictures in her life, let alone to a

[1] In the *Agricola*, Tacitus had written: "*Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*" (II; 41). This invocation translates: Where they make a desert they call it peace.

> stage-play, and she felt that even in *reading* stage-plays there was a very grave danger," etc., etc. She gave way, however, on being informed that Mr. Shakespeare was dead. This seemed to reassure her (201).

Dorothy, eventually, is galled. Ironically, she gives up her living Shakespeare after the word "womb" is breeched. As Mr. Poynder, an affronted parent, puts it: "Only the other morning I was reading a piece in my *News Chronicle* about Shakespeare being the father of English Literature; well, if that's Literature, let's have a bit *less* Literature, say I!" (205). A stable Shakespeare, known, but not actually read, reasserts itself and the status of the canon, as a result, is undermined. Such a canon holds no value for Orwell. The "frail hope" that Bergonzi finds "in the Appendix on Newspeak", that because "the literary classics of the past are being rewritten in Newspeak […] Literature resists the ultimate totalitarian transformation, which suggests some persistence of traditional human values" is, for this reason, not even that (100). The value of the canon, for Orwell, resides in its readness, in, that is, its having been read and its still being readable.

Gordon Comstock reads Shakespeare too. In fact, he "read nothing nowadays, except Shakespeare and *Sherlock Holmes*" (34). Why these two texts in particular is not made clear but the introduction of the latter marks a different sort of canon, that of the "Good Bad Book". "A type of book", writes Orwell in his celebrated essay of that name,

> which we hardly seem to produce in these days, but which flowered with great richness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is what Chesterton called the "good bad book": that is, the kind of book that has no literary pretensions but which remains readable when more serious productions have perished. Obviously outstanding books in this line are Raffles and the Sherlock Holmes stories (348).

Flourishing in the past, the golden age of Orwell's youth celebrated in *Coming Up for Air*, the "good bad book" plays a different, but no less important, role in Orwell's conception of literary culture as a canonical space in which, like in the Music Hall or on the pages of Dickens' novels, cultural and economic differences can be suspended and a lost past is made real again. The "Good Bad Book" is a symbol of liberal society. "All one can say", he concludes:

> is that, while civilisation remains such that one needs distraction from time to time, "light" literature has its appointed place; also that there is such a thing as sheer skill, or native grace, which may have more survival value than erudition or intellectual power (350).

The essay, printed in *Tribune* in 1945, attracted more than one sniffy response. One reader complained that Orwell "did not follow through to its conclusion his essay on the survival of 'bad' books":

> The point is really that what might be termed second-rate authors – storytellers pure and simple – often tend to survive because the author *was* second-rate; he wrote on his own level. And that level is the level of the vast majority of readers to-day (qtd. Davison *I Belong to the Left* 350).

Keep the Aspidistra Flying satirises exactly this type of concerned highbrow in the figure of Mrs. Penn who carries "under her arm a copy of *The Forsyte Saga* – title outwards, so that passers-by could spot her for a high-brow" and worries about "the books these lower classes read!" (14-5). This is not the manner of Orwell's concern.

In "Books *v.* Cigarettes", the two are set against one another as equally tangible forms of entertainment. Orwell calculates: "I am spending far more on tobacco than I do on books" (96). In this, he is not exceptional though the disparity in his case is very much smaller since he spends £25 per year on books whereas, at least before the war, "the average person was only buying, directly or indirectly, about three books a year. These three books taken together might cost £1, or probably less" (97). This, he concludes, "is not a proud record for a country which is nearly 100 per cent literate and where the ordinary man spends more on cigarettes than an Indian peasant has for his whole livelihood" (97). There is no brow-based judgment here; Orwell is not concerned whether the English people are buying books by Shakespeare, Dickens, Milton, Priestley, Woolf, Joyce or Ethel M. Dell but that they are reading. Again and again Orwell speaks to "you", to, ultimately, a community of readers. Looking at Orwell's novel reinterpretation of the condition-of-England question as a whole, then, Spender's remark needs modified: the really important thing is to have a literate culture to save.

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