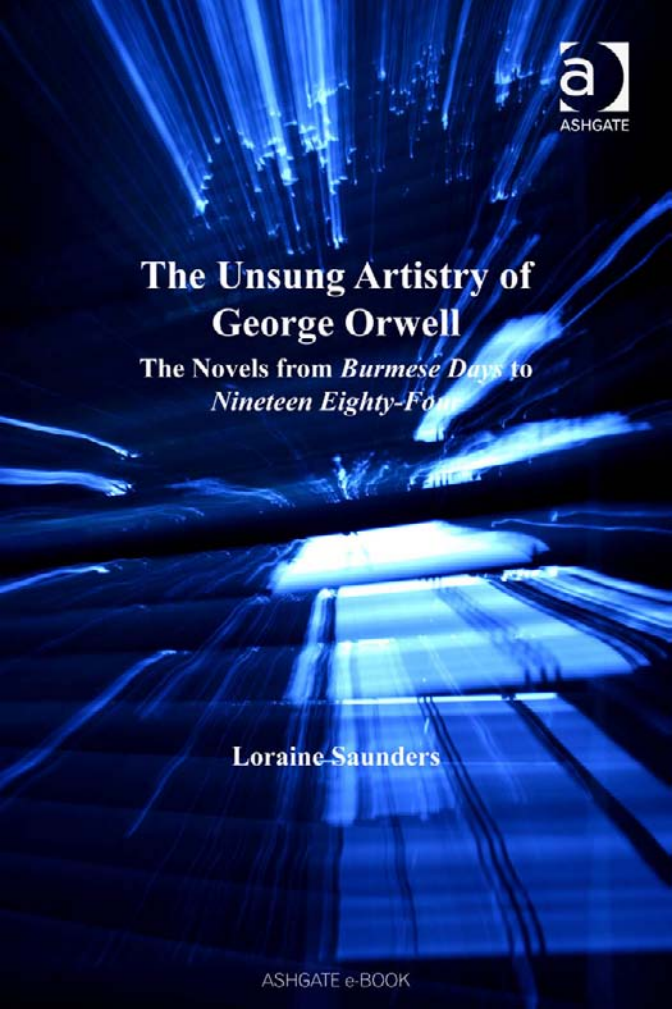
ASHGATE
The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell
The Novels from *Burmese Days* to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
Loraine Saunders
ASHGATE e-BOOK

THE UNSUNG ARTISTRY OF GEORGE ORWELL

For my mother

The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell

The Novels from *Burmese Days* to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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ASHGATE

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Preface

Some may well have initially raised an eyebrow when reading the title, *The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell* because Orwell's popularity is as high as ever, and anyone interested in literature will probably know something positive of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, respectively. People might understandably wonder whether Orwell is in fact so 'unsung'. On many levels he is not. As an acute political observer and formidable satirist his reputation and creative talent are as celebrated as ever, more so even than when he was alive. However, his 1930s' novels have never enjoyed the exposure and popularity that surround his last two works, nor have they the notoriety of his controversial documentaries, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*.

I was introduced to *Animal Farm* at school and read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1984. I enjoyed both books immensely and re-read them on numerous occasions. However, it was not until many years later, until my research on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* at The University of Liverpool (in relation to language, thought and behaviour), that I came to understand how complex Orwell's narratives are. When turning my full attention to his earlier novels, I was pleasantly surprised by their textual richness, complex character development, stylistic innovation, humour, and – this is important – their *optimism*, for they are better known as tales of failure rather than journeys of emancipation. When I re-read the early novels (post *Burmese Days*, which does end in failure) I found it incredible that they were a) so misunderstood and b) so little regarded in the academic world, to say nothing of being virtually forgotten today by the reading public. It was this imbalance that set me on the road to providing a corrective.

It is no surprise, given the relative invisibility of Orwell's 1930s' novels, that undergraduates frequently encounter *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on curricula but rarely see *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air*. I had the pleasure as Course Director of the 'Imperial Encounters' module at The University of Manchester of including *Burmese Days* on the reading list. It was a delight to discuss the merits of an Orwell novel other than *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (ground-breaking and textually rich though it is). With regard to *Burmese Days*, students were surprised at its unique narrative approach where, for example, Orwell creates authorial distance through the use of limited intermediaries. Likewise, they were intrigued to learn of the stylistically complex ways he is able to weave in his political message through a tight mesh of intertextual homage, polyphonic layering, bathetic humour, and an unapologetic celebration of ordinary people and their 'common decency'.

In providing fresh readings of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and in analysing his early novels as they never have been before, this study reveals the aesthetic components of the unique style Orwell developed in order to air his singular political voice. Through tightly controlled use of *free indirect thought*, a

strong framing system, and an innovative author/character dualism Orwell produced some fine prose indeed; and if *Burmese Days*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up for Air* can get back on curricula it can only enhance appreciation of the development of the novel and Orwell's significant contribution to the tradition of literary realism.

Loraine Saunders
Liverpool
30 August 2007

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List of Abbreviations

ACD	*A Clergyman's Daughter*
APTI	*A Passage to India*
BD	*Burmese Days*
CP	*Collected Plays with their Prefaces*
CUFA	*Coming Up for Air*
CW	*The Complete Works of George Orwell*
D&O	*Down and Out in Paris and London*
Exile	*Born in Exile*
GG	'George Gissing'
Hindrances	'Hindrances and Help-Meets: Women in the Writings of George Orwell'
HTC	*Homage to Catalonia*
ITM	*Inside the Myth*
ITW	'Inside the Whale'
Jubilee	*In the Year of Jubilee*
KTAF	*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*
L&U	'The Lion & the Unicorn'
LoF	*The Language of Fiction*
NEM	'Not Enough Money: A Sketch of George Gissing'
NGS	*New Grub Street*
Ryecroft	*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*
TNW	*The Nether World*
TOW	*The Odd Women*
Utopias	*The Faber Book of Utopias*
Wigan Pier	*The Road to Wigan Pier*
WIW	'Why I Write'
Workers	*Workers in the Dawn*

Introduction

The centenary of George Orwell's birth date (25 June 2003) saw a resurgence of interest in Orwell's work – newspapers, radio and television all played homage to the writer born Eric Arthur Blair. Two weighty biographies, one by D. J Taylor and one by Gordon Bowker, marked the occasion. Both of these books joined the chorus of opinion in praise of Orwell's journalistic output, and of his other works, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Homage to Catalonia*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. However, there was a wide pouring forth of scorn as to Orwell's overall merits as a novelist. Geoffrey Wheatcroft echoed D. J. Taylor in repeating his sentiments thus: 'As a novelist, Orwell scarcely begins to exist'. He writes, resonating familiar sentiment, that Orwell's books are no more than 'projections of his own self-pity'; and the overall conclusion reached is that Orwell's 'posthumous reputation is close to being literary fraud'.[1]

Happily, there are those who value Orwell's novelistic capacity somewhat higher. John Carey, for example, declares that Orwell 'wrote the most vibrant, surprising prose of the twentieth century', and Carey stresses that the secret of Orwell's style lies in its 'invisibility'.[2] This book echoes Carey's judgment; and through detailed textual analyses, the most thorough to date, this book, quite simply, makes Orwell's style visible, revealing – for the first time – how Orwell's novels are, by virtue of varying approaches to narrative voice, psychological point of view, and a very distinctive poetics of composition, as rich textually as *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This book aims at redressing an imbalance in Orwell studies that has insisted Orwell's reputation as a first-rate novelist must rely *solely* upon the continued appreciation of his last two works.[3]

The blind eye that is habitually turned towards Orwell's thirties' novels undoubtedly owes much to the plethora of critical works on this period that, however reverential to the integrity of Orwell's work as a journalist, have marginalized Orwell's contribution by questioning his imaginative and artistic powers. Orwell is seen, prior to *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as an essayist in disguise. Referring to Orwell's first three novels Randall Stevenson, chiming a familiar chord, writes: 'All three novels show a talent for exact, journalistic observation which

1 Geofrey Wheatcroft, 'George at 100', *Prospect*, June 2003, pp. 10–11.

2 John Carey, in response to D. J. Taylor's *Orwell*: *The Life*, writes, '[Taylor] leaves out [Orwell's] greatest achievement. The secret of his style is its invisibility. He wrote the most vibrant, surprising prose of the twentieth century, but disguised it as ordinary prose' ('The Invisible Man', *The Sunday Times*, 18.05.03), pp. 35–6.

3 The following criticism provides a good example of this insistence: 'If we are to measure George Orwell's success in the durability of his two later novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* then we need to examine his projection of Big Brother' (B. Campbell, 'Orwell – Paterfamilias or Big Brother?', in Christopher Norris, ed. *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left* (London, 1984), pp. 126–38 (p. 126).

develops a detailed context for examination of social questions'.[4] Whilst Stevenson acknowledges that 'this "meticulous descriptive quality" … shows [Orwell's] fiction sharing like Isherwood's in the "new realism" of the thirties' (p. 38), he nevertheless reiterates the oft-voiced opinion that Orwell, however convincing his novels may be *in part*, is '"primarily an essayist"' (p. 39). Plenty of examples, taken out of context – and so removed from their artistic arrangement in the novel – are offered by Stevenson, typically highlighting the seemingly journalistic aspect of Orwell's prose.[5] Furthermore, Orwell is seen not only as half a novelist, but also as not embracing the spirit of radicalism exhibited by his contemporaries, apparently due to a stubborn admiration for writers such as Bennett and H. G. Wells. It would seem that it is for this perceived narrowness that Orwell's novels are not given the attention to detail that the other thirties' writers are in Stevenson's study; hence Orwell's experimentation with style and form is overlooked in ways that they are not with other writers. Edward Upward's first novel, *Journey to the Border*, for example, is gone over with a meticulous eye, and despite the acknowledgement that this novel is overtly propagandist often employing the unreconstructed language of autobiography, the novel nevertheless is hailed as an important achievement because it is 'one of the most successful of thirties' employments of fantasy, actually offer[ing] an account of how fantasy can and should be renounced' (p. 46).

There are countless books on 'the thirties' that have examined Orwell in relation to 'The Auden Generation', and what is most striking regarding the references to Orwell, apart from the allegedly essayistic limitations to his prose, is the conviction that Orwell rejected and was depressed by his age. When drawing comparisons to, for example, the ways in which Orwell shares a preoccupation for 'contrasting the new and the old, modernity and decay',[6] Orwell's novels are often read for what they can reveal about the author. Referring to *Coming Up for Air*, Bergonzi writes,

> George Bowling is very much a vehicle for Orwell's vision of English life, and his responses suggest that the troubled ambivalence expressed in Orwell's poem of 1934, 'On a Ruined Farm near the His Master's Voice Gramophone Factory' has now been resolved into outright rejection of the new architecture of the factory and the way of life associated with it (p. 107).

Reading Orwell's protagonists as vehicles for Orwell's world vision is simply too reductionist and ignores the complexity of Orwell's creativity. This study takes a fresh look at Orwell's novels, and demonstrates the ways in which Orwell distances

4 Randall Stevenson, *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* (London, 1986), p. 38.

5 Similarly, Bernard Bergonzi in his book *Reading the Thirties: Texts and Contexts* (London, 1978) writes (referring to *A Clergyman's Daughter*), 'Here, as so often in Orwell's fiction, the essayist tends to take over from the novelist ….' (p. 31). A great part of this study is devoted to revealing the artistic reach and nature of these so-called journalistic or essayistic elements.

6 Bernard Bergonzi, *Reading the Thirties*, p. 60. Valentine Cunningham's book *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford, 1988) is particularly useful not least because he provides a full working Bibliography on critical studies of this period.

himself from the negativity of his protagonists. In this respect my book is an extension of critical works such as Kristin Bluemel's *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics* (London: Palgrave, 2004), a book which reveals the vibrancy of Orwell's London life and literary connections, thereby offering a corrective to the body of critical work that has insisted on Orwell's literary isolationism:

> Orwell generally emerges … as a uniquely autonomous writer, the common-man genius, working for the most part outside the society and communities that so concerned him .... To habitually represent Orwell as a solitary figure working outside cultural communities or groups underestimates his deep engagement with his various jobs, his political activities, and the friendships, rivalries, and professional ambitions that informed his work (p. 5).

Bluemel's book places Orwell alongside the ignored maverick writers who did not go to Oxford or Cambridge, writers whose taxonomy has hitherto troubled critics. Bluemel refers to this group as 'Intermodernists', namely, Stevie Smith, Mulk Raj Anand and Inez Holden, explaining how they are very much 'writer-workers' who wish to appeal to a working-class audience, and in so doing are to an extent writing against 'the dominant narrative aesthetic of the 1930s' (p. 104). With regard to Orwell, Bluemel's research is heavily and intentionally biographical and, by her own admission, Orwell is given less attention than the other writers despite his name being given prominence in the title. Nevertheless, Bluemel has brought the neglected aspects of Orwell's life and work to the fore once again. Of course, Orwell is as popular as ever, but this is due to the continued obsession with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Though my book is looking at Orwell's last two novels, and offering new readings, the overriding import is to be a part of the growing sea-change in Orwell criticism that is at last recognizing the totality of Orwell's contribution to twentieth-century literature; and in doing this I am building on the achievements of critics such as Peter Davison, Roger Fowler, Håkan Ringbom, and Lynette Hunter, who, by taking Orwell's stylistic technique seriously, have made invaluable inroads into aiding our understanding of his artistic consequence.

To argue that Orwell's thirties' novels are ringing successes, that is, not merely partly successful, may seem a futile undertaking when the author himself so vehemently condemned them.[7] Indeed, to argue thus in light of statements such as: 'I have sometimes written a so-called novel within about two years of the original conception, but then they were always weak, silly books which I afterwards suppressed' may appear something of a Sisyphean task.[8] But in what ways are *Burmese Days*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* 'weak' and 'silly' books? Orwell, for one, never actually elucidated, he merely got as far

7 *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* suffered from a great deal of in-house censorship. In his detailed 'notes on the text' Davison shows, where possible, exactly what changes were made to the novels and where he has been able to restore original text. He also details Orwell's frustration and disgust with the results of in-house censorship. Similarly, in *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (London, 1996) Davison writes that it was only after '*A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra* ran into censorship troubles [that] Orwell came to reject both novels' (p. 54).

8 Orwell, letter to Tosco Fyvel, *The Complete Works*, vol. XX, pp. 85–6 (p. 86).

as denigrating them – the result, in truth, of an emotional knee-jerk to censorship, coupled with a very English tendency for groundless self-deprecation, and, as shall be revealed throughout this book, such self-denigration is *always* utilized by the critics to verify their claims of inadequacy.[9]

This is not to suggest that there are not weak points in Orwell's work, such as in parts of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, where, for example, the romantic dialogue is at times unconvincing because Rosemary is just too 'jolly hockeysticks' (e.g.): 'How silly we always are! Now, Gordon, *be* nice for once' (p. 133). Moreover, Gordon's turn-around at the end of the book, where he suddenly transforms from idle snob into someone who will be happy to feel himself 'one of the ruck of men' (p. 267) is doubtful. This is nit picking, however, not to mention subjective, and should not detract from appreciation of the overall skilful and compelling composition of Orwell's polemical novels.[10]

One of the most frequent criticisms of Orwell's novels, particularly those produced in the thirties, is that one often cannot distinguish between Orwell's voice and that of his characters' voices. Exactly *who is speaking* is said to be unclear – is it Flory or Orwell? Dorothy or Orwell? Gordon or Orwell? And even, Bowling or Orwell? The reason for this is quite simply that critics have not appreciated Orwell's experimentation with Free Indirect Discourse, where the authorial voice is replaced by the thoughts and feelings of the character, although the narrative remains in the third-person. Indeed, close reading reveals how Orwell takes care to put in place key linguistic markers that will signal the various vocal transitions. Furthermore, there has been the unhelpful critical practice of working biography into textual analysis to the point where it takes over. The following criticism is a typical example of this misleading analytical tool: 'The Orwell-character in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*

9 No doubt such self-damning criticism encouraged Fyvel to assert that after the publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell 'more or less coasted. Setting himself the task of writing a book a year, he wrote three angry youthful novels' (*George Orwell: A Personal Memoir* [London, 1983], p. 52). Fyvel also writes that Orwell 'could basically only write about himself', and insists that *A Clergyman's Daughter* is the 'least successful' of Orwell's novels. He echoes Meyers in arguing that the Trafalgar Square scene 'is written unsuccessfully in the manner of James Joyce' (p. 54). Taylor writes 'Orwell came to dislike *A Clergyman's Daughter*, famously describing it as 'bollix', and would never allow it to be reprinted in his lifetime' (p. 139). These are typical examples of an all too willing readiness to recruit Orwell in support of claims that his early prose fiction is poor; again, hard textual evidence is conspicuously absent.

10 Much use is made of Peter Davison's recent supplementary volume to *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (1998), entitled *The Lost Orwell* (London, 2006) as it provides many hitherto unknown aspects of Orwell's writing, art, and life. For example, contained in the book is an obituary that Orwell wrote on H G Wells. In the piece Orwell concludes that 'very few writers have ever had less literary vanity' (p. 139). Boyd Tonkin, in his review of *The Lost Orwell*, highlights Orwell's comment on Wells's lack of literary vanity and adds to the line, 'Except the obituarist himself, perhaps' (Tonkin, 'A Week in Books' *The Independent* 02.06.06).

(1936) imagines civilisation dying … and Orwell was just as gloomy with his friends'.[11]

This study, then, will be looking at how Orwell makes distinctions between voices; what is more, we shall see how Orwell layers his narratives with a distinctive polyphony, which has the effect of distancing the omniscient narrator and, among other things, bringing in a fallible human voice, a voice often confused with that of Orwell's. Indeed, what has been largely missed is the fact that Orwell experimented with a distinctly Dostoevskyian heteroglossia in *all* of his writing, and especially so throughout the 1930s; however, where Dostoevsky seeks to proliferate meaning, Orwell seeks, rather soberly and conversely, to fasten meaning to the mooring of a distinct authorial consciousness.

In his quest to make political writing into an art Orwell was abruptly to change his narrative style, and this book reveals how Orwell progresses from the naturalistic, somewhat whimsical 'purple passages' of *Burmese Days* to the tighter, pithier, more politically energized prose of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Coming Up for Air* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; and we see not only *how* Orwell hones the propagandist elements of his fiction, but also *what* these political elements comprise of. This is not to suggest that *Burmese Days* is less worthy than the subsequent fictions; it is merely that Orwell would learn valuable lessons in composition when writing this book, as he must have done from the novels he wrote in Paris and destroyed, and, importantly, would develop his unique approach to narrative voice.

As already touched upon, one of the reasons for Orwell's diminished stature as an important all-round novelist is Orwell himself; and I would like here to offer a neat demonstration of Orwell's singular authorial self-effacement in order to begin the process of removing the impediment that is Orwell's undeserved novelistic invisibility, at least as far as his thirties' novels are concerned. The example is provided by Orwell's 1936 brief review of E M Forster's *A Passage to India*, where, omitting to make reference to *Burmese Days*, Orwell entirely dismisses the importance of his own contribution to the fiction of Empire.[12] Here is Orwell's review:

> *A Passage to India* is not the perfect novel about India, but it is the best we have ever had and the best we are likely to get, for it is only by some improbable accident that anyone capable of writing a decent novel can be got to stay in India long enough to absorb the atmosphere (*CW*, vol. X, p. 502).

Burmese Days is a book about the impact of British colonialism on Indian culture and people. Certainly, Orwell has the required credentials for writing a 'decent novel'

11 Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* [1972] (New York, 1976), p. 373.

12 As we shall see throughout this study, when reviewing novels that clearly have something in common with his own fiction, Orwell will always neglect to put his work forward. In *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell constantly dismisses his part in the Spanish Civil War. However, many have written testifying to Orwell's bravery and leadership in the war. See particularly *Remembering Orwell*, ed. Stephen Wadhams (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 78–80.

in this field. He was certainly in Burma 'long enough to absorb the atmosphere'; and there is a telling later reference to *A Passage to India* that betrays Orwell's conscious feelings of affinity with Forster in that they share special insider knowledge of India, or rather, of the Indian psyche. Here (in 1949), referring to Gandhi, Orwell writes, '... [Gandhi] seems to have been quite free from that maniacal suspiciousness which, as E M Forster rightly says in *A Passage to India*, is the besetting Indian vice, as hypocrisy is the British' (*CW*, vol. XX, p. 6). Clearly, Orwell can only make such an observation on 'the besetting Indian vice' because he has lived among Indians for a long enough period of time. So it is entirely disingenuous to ignore his novelistic credentials, and indeed, *Burmese Days*.

Another notable injustice that Orwell commits against his novel is that he would, in all likelihood, have preferred *Burmese Days* to *A Passage to India* for the simple reason that his own novel actually discusses the underlying economic reasons for the British presence in India – conspicuously absent in Forster's book.[13] Consider the following conversation between Flory and the Indian doctor Veraswami in *Burmese Days* (the equivalent of Fielding and Aziz in *A Passage to India*):

> 'My dear doctor,' said Flory, 'how can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? .... Do you suppose my firm, for instance, could get its timber contracts if the country weren't in the hands of the British? Or the other timber firms, or the oil companies, or the miners and planters and traders .... The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English ... (p. 38).[14]

In *A Passage to India*, despite Fielding's rebellious dissatisfaction with the Anglo-Indians around him – their arrogance, racism, ignorance, and so on – Fielding returns to India as the husband of a high-ranking official's daughter, and is therefore very much the Anglo-Indian official he formerly despised. Aziz, troubled at his estranged friend's return and also Fielding's renewed friendship with the 'enemies', reflects thus: 'These five people were making up their little difficulties, and closing their broken ranks against the alien .... Hence the strength of England ...' (*APTI*, p. 293). Orwell would certainly not have missed the subtle propaganda operating in Forster's denouement, which, through Fielding's conversion, redeems the British Raj at the eleventh hour.[15] Indeed, Orwell's lack of enthusiasm for *A Passage to India* suggests

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13 Orwell is reviewing *A Passage to India* along with Henry Miller's *Black Spring* and four other novels. *Black Spring* occupies almost the entire space (approximately 1000 words) and Orwell states enthusiastically: 'I advise anyone who can get hold of [*Black Spring*] to read it' (*The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 499–501 [p. 500]). What Orwell says of *A Passage to India* is extremely lack lustre in comparison.

14 This is not to suggest that Orwell is 'pamphleteering' here, and that we are to take such observations as savvy political comment – not at all. Much of what Flory declares is blatantly inflammatory and reveals petulant and immature analysis, such as when Flory posits that the people who profit most from British Imperialism are 'gangs of Jews and Scotchmen' (p. 38). Indeed, such ambivalent character positioning is all part of Orwell's unique narrative approach and will be brought out in greater detail anon.

15 Roland Barthes's famous essay 'Operation Margarine' could be describing the subtle propaganda operating in *A Passage to India*:

> [T]ake the established value which you want to restore or develop, and first lavishly display its pettiness, the injustices which it produces, the vexations to which

dissatisfaction with it, and no doubt Orwell would have been all too aware that the book 'received a very cool response from Indian Nationalists'.[16] Moreover, given the resemblances to Fielding and Aziz in Flory and Dr Veraswami, Orwell it would seem is reworking this relationship with the intention of playing out a rather different socio-political cultural dynamic that will consciously resist reflecting 'the strength of England'.

The explicit reworking of established narratives is a feature of Orwell's novels that will be examined in detail in this book, particularly notable when one compares Orwell's novels to those of George Gissing. Research on Gissing's influence has so far tended to reach the conclusion that Orwell simply borrowed from Gissing, whether for character, setting or plot. Many parallels have rightly been drawn between, most notably, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *New Grub Street*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *The Odd Women*, *Coming Up for Air* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, *Animal Farm* and *Demos*. Certainly there are parallels; however, the relationship between these novels, and novelists, is not as straightforward as has been suggested, and key features have been missed that reveal how Orwell is, for much of the time, inverting features of Gissing's novels in order to reflect an opposing political and moral schema. Ostensibly, Orwell's novels do seem to embody the melancholy traits that mark Gissing's emotional landscapes; however, as we shall see, there is a defiant spirit of optimism that simmers, or shimmers, beneath the drab surfaces of Orwell's fiction post *Burmese Days*.

The lighter aspect of Orwell's novels may be partly attributable to Orwell's admiration and enthusiasm for proletarian literature, which he believed to have a raw energy that the more politically charged fiction of his day lacked. Undoubtedly, Orwell sought to emulate what he described as the crude vitality of this new-style proletarian art. This study reveals how Orwell *is* a proletarian writer according to his own criterion, not least because the socialism in this unpartisan fiction was much closer to Orwell's political positioning than was the socialism espoused by the works of his left-wing contemporaries. Orwell's high regard for Charlie Chaplin is relevant here. Orwell appreciated Chaplin as a fellow polemicist who, as well as championing the common man, could, in addition, and perhaps more importantly, negotiate the balance between art and propaganda successfully, something, it has to be said, many

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it gives rise, and plunge it into its natural imperfection; then at the last moment, save it *in spite of*, or rather, *by* the heavy curse of its blemishes (p. 41).

... The army, an absolute value? It is unthinkable: look at its vexations, its strictness, the always possible blindness of its chiefs. The church, infallible? Alas, it is very doubtful: look at its bigots, its powerless priests, its murderous conformism. And then common sense makes its reckoning: what is this trifling dross of Order compared to its advantages? (*Mythologies*, p. 42).

Through Fielding and the mending of all the old English friendships Forster has saved the British *by* the heavy curse of its blemishes: the British may be impossible snobs, addicted to gin, and general godless brutes, but *by jingo* they know how to come together when there's a country to run.

16 David Seed, 'Disorientation and Commitment in the Fiction of Empire: Kipling and Orwell', *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 1984, vol. 14, 4, pp. 269–80 (p. 277).

proletarian writers could not do well. In revealing how Orwell manages the disparate and competing discourses of art and propaganda into a lucid and coherent whole we shall see why it is that Orwell has more in common with Chaplin than with his fellow writers.

As stated at the beginning of this introduction, whilst *thorough* textual analysis of Orwell's novelistic technique has been thin on the ground, negative critical commentary, as to his novelistic capabilities, has been copious. One commentator has picked up on the tendency in Orwell criticism to dismiss Orwell's prose without much or even any actual attention to the text. In his study of Orwell's essayistic and novelistic style Håkan Ringbom writes, regarding the general claims made for Orwell's 'windowpane' clarity,

> Among other words used to describe [Orwell's] style are 'nervous, flexible and lucid', 'spare, tough', 'direct, active, cogent and epigrammatic', and 'relaxed, flexible, yet balanced'. *Only rarely would such statements be supported by explanatory comments or even by illustrative quotations from Orwell's works* [my italics].[17]

The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell provides the hitherto absent explanatory commentary and illustrative statements that demonstrate just how Orwell achieves, among other things, cogency and lucidity in his early as well as his late fiction. Orwell's novels, with some exceptions for *Burmese Days*, are, contrary to popular perception, successful examples of Orwell's progress in making political writing into an art; and what they are most certainly not, are the half-baked products of an 'odd' and singularly 'prejudiced' writer.

17 Håkan Ringbom, '*George Orwell as Essayist: A Stylistic Study*', *Acta Academiae Aboensis. Ser. A Humaniora*, vol. 44 (Abo, 1973), p. 9.

Chapter 1

Orwell: The Proletarian Novelist

Before embarking on a more comprehensive analysis of Orwell's novelistic technique, I should like to begin by foregrounding the reasons why Orwell is essentially a proletarian writer, despite the fact that not one of his protagonists is representative of the manual labouring class. This is necessary, not only to provide the socio-political context in which Orwell is writing, but further to establish Orwell's singular political agenda that will inform his art from inception to end. There have been countless books and anthologies written on the subject of proletarian literature, often inadvertently highlighting just how loose and contested the category can be.[1] And because Orwell has a distinctive 'take' on what proletarian literature is, it is helpful for Orwell to introduce the genre himself: 'What people mean by [proletarian literature], roughly speaking, is a literature in which the viewpoint of the working class, which is supposed to be completely different from that of the richer classes, gets a hearing. And that, of course, has got mixed up with Socialist propaganda'.[2] Note Orwell's use of the word 'supposed'; this indicates Orwell's dissatisfaction with the proletarian emphasis on class separatism, which is why Orwell's alternative proletarian angle will be to insist that the viewpoint of the working class is *not* wholly different from that of the richer middle classes, and by the same token, that the 'richer classes' (a mostly downwardly mobile group by the 1930s) must realise that their viewpoint *ought* to be similar to that of the modern working classes; and moreover, that they, by dint of their reduced economic circumstances, are also working class:

> We must drop that misleading habit of pretending that the only proletarians are manual labourers. It has got to be brought home to the clerk, the engineer, the commercial traveler, the middle-class man who has 'come down in the world', the village grocer, the lower-grade civil servant, and all other doubtful cases that they *are* the proletariat (*WP*, p. 211).[3]

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1 For example, David Madden's *Proletarian Writers of the Thirties* (Carbondale & Edwardsville, 1968) argues that the 1930s proletarian writers were essentially Marxist. Conversely, there is James F Murphy's *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature* (Urbana, 1991). Murphy makes a case for the proletarian anti-leftist writers from the 1920s onwards. Consultation with the British Library Catalogue on the subject of proletarian literature will direct readers to an exhaustive list of other books on the subject. This chapter shall focus on Orwell's own proletarian criterion.

2 Orwell, 'The Writer in the Witness Box' discussion, *The Complete Works*, vol. XII, pp. 294–9 (p. 295). In the draft introduction to this discussion Orwell writes, regarding the definition of proletarian literature, 'Obviously it doesn't mean the literature that proletarians actually read – in that case the Daily Express would be the real proletarian literature' (*The Complete Works*, vol. XII, p. 283).

3 Orwell would later summarize: '[I]n tastes, habits, manners and outlook the working class and the middle class are drawing together .... The old-style 'proletarian' – collarless,

This is the lesson that each of Orwell's beleaguered neo-proletarian heroes will learn – albeit subtly.

Of the classically recognizable proletarian novels, it is Tressell's *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* [1914] that stands out for Orwell. Orwell is impressed by the honesty of Tressell's account of working-class life and its realistic portrayal of the ordinary man's political consciousness:

> In the last twenty years or so books written from a Left-wing angle have usually idealised the working class. Tressell, although he pities his fellow-workers, also despises them and says so plainly. The word 'philanthropists' in the title of the book is ironical. The workers are 'philanthropists' because they are fools enough to support – out of charity, as it were – a worthless class of property owners. They not only accept their fate like cattle but 'oppose and ridicule any suggestion of reform.' This last [sic] is the main theme of the book.[4]

Whilst no doubt being disappointed by the misanthropy in this novel, it is this very element that makes the account of working-class hardship more reliable for Orwell. However, with regard to the *artistic* merit of Tressell's novel, Orwell would have had great distaste for much of the prose, particularly the ending with its appalling political rhetoric. The last paragraph begins, 'But from these ruins was surely growing the glorious fabric of the Co-operative Commonwealth. Mankind, awakening from the long night of bondage.' So it runs on to the very last line of the novel: 'The Golden Light that will be diffused throughout all the happy world from the rays of the risen sun of Socialism'. Indeed, Orwell was highly critical of much proletarian literature for such hyperbolic indulgence; and where there was negligence of form, Orwell was more dismissive. In a review of *Hunger and Love* by Lionel Britton, Orwell says, 'As a novel *Hunger and Love* is almost worthless'.[5] Orwell laments that the book 'tells the truth about life, but make[s] no attempt to be readable' (p. 204). Orwell explains the novel's deficiency thus:

> The tricks of style, and particularly the repetitions, become very tiresome after a few chapters .... No doubt Mr. Britton would say that his object was to tell the truth, not to compose an elegant novel; but even so, truth is not served by leaving out commas (p. 204).

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unshaven and with muscles warped by heavy labour – still exists, but he is constantly decreasing ...' (Orwell, 'The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius', *The Complete Works*, vol. XII pp. 391–434 [p. 408]).

4 Orwell, 'Review of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell', *The Complete Works*, vol. XVIII, pp. 255–7 (p. 255).

5 Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. X, 'Review of *Hunger and Love* by Lionel Britton [1931], *Albert Grope* by F. O. Mann', pp. 203–5 (p. 204). It is worth nothing that Orwell recognizes no certain link between being proletarian and writing proletarian literature: 'W. H. Davies was a proletarian, but he wouldn't be called a proletarian writer. Paul Potts would probably be called a proletarian writer, but he isn't a proletarian' (Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. XII, pp. 282–4 [p. 283]). Among the proletarian novels that Orwell favours are Jack London's *The Road* [1907], Jack Hilton's *Caliban Shrieks* [1935] and James Hanley's *Grey Children* [1937].

Moreover, Orwell talks of Britton not having any sense of selection, and interestingly he had no respect for Britton's uniquely modernist style.[6]

Of other writers, airing the views of those who are not the richer classes, Orwell greatly enthuses over Henry Miller's work. And when considering how Orwell values Miller above their more politically-charged peers – notably Auden and Spender *et al* – a clearer picture of Orwell's proletarian aim soon emerges. In his essay, 'Inside the Whale', partly concerned with Miller, particularly Miller's first book *Tropic of Cancer*, Orwell is struck by the extent to which Miller's book is in the opposite direction to that of the 'politically responsible' path. For this reason Orwell likes it enormously, likes it despite the fact that he has declared it politically *ir*responsible. In analysing Miller's book, Orwell comes to understand why, as he feels, the great body of politically invested thirties' novels do not achieve their desired socialistic aim. Their collective failure, he believes, lies in their choice of protagonist. These works do not feature what Orwell calls the average sensual man. Orwell writes, 'The average sensual man is out of fashion. The passive non-political attitude is out of fashion. Pre-occupation with sex and truthfulness about the inner life are out of fashion' (ITW, p. 92). Orwell attacks Louis MacNeice's dismissal of E. M. Forster's appraisal (in 1917) of Eliot's 'Prufrock'. Forster approves of 'Prufrock' because in the midst of inhuman misery, '"He who could turn aside to complain of ladies and drawing-rooms preserved a tiny drop of our self-respect, he carried on the human heritage"'(ITW, p. 109). Commenting on this review, 'smugly' as Orwell puts it, MacNeice opines that (in relation to 'Prufrock'), 'Ten years later less feeble protests were to be made by poets and the human heritage carried on rather differently'. Orwell dismisses this claim and reiterates Forster's contention that to carry on the human heritage is to 'keep in touch with pre-war emotions'. Orwell continues: 'What a relief it would have been at such a time, to read about the hesitations of a middle-aged highbrow with a bald spot!' (ITW, p. 110) In the same spirit of appraisal, Orwell maintains that Miller's voice is a 'human voice among the bomb-explosions, a friendly American voice, innocent of public-spiritedness'. Essential to an understanding of Orwell's characters is an appreciation of the fact that they all represent the average sensual man. Orwell's protagonists all share a passive, non-political attitude toward life. Orwell is at all times truthful about the

6 One cannot underestimate the importance Orwell places on selection, as indeed he does on the value of composition. Orwell's reaction to the editing of his own novels is proof alone of this. It was because of Gollancz's interference with his selection that Orwell felt *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* were ruined. In a letter to his agent Leonard Moore, referring to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Orwell writes, 'I have made the alterations Gollancz asked for .... It seems to me to have utterly ruined the book ....' (*CW*, vol. X, p. 434). In this letter Orwell talks of his annoyance at not being told of the changes earlier. I think 'annoyance' is the key word here and could explain Orwell's stubborn refusal to consider these books in a more generous light. Significantly, when the American Book-of-the-Month Club insisted that they would not publish *Nineteen Eighty-Four* unless Orwell agreed to drop 'The Principles of Newspeak' appendix and the lengthy essay on Oligarchical Collectivism Orwell refused even though he stood to lose £40,000 in US sales, a staggering amount then, reiterating to his agent his conviction that the entire structure of the book would be 'ruined' if 'large chunks here and there' were removed.

nature of their inner lives and he shows a pre-occupation with their sex lives. This is arguably where Orwell departs from the trend in proletarian literature, where there is a tendency to sanitize or beatify the ordinary man.

The public-spiritedness that Orwell so dislikes in the thirties' writers is further complicated by two other convictions: firstly, Orwell suspects his peers of disingenuousness, and secondly, he feels these writers lack life experience. Orwell stresses that his contemporaries are both privileged and limited in their outlook, especially when compared with their predecessors:

> The outstanding writers of the twenties were of very varied origins, few of them had passed through the ordinary English educational mill ... and most of them had had at some time to struggle against poverty, neglect, and even downright persecution. On the other hand, nearly all the younger writers fit easily into the public-school–university–Bloomsbury pattern. The few who are of proletarian origin are of the kind that is declassed early in life, first by means of scholarships and then by the bleaching-tub of London 'culture' (ITW, p. 100).[7]

Added to this, of course, is Orwell's famous mistrust of their left-wing orthodoxy that made a certain set of opinions 'absolutely *de rigueur* on certain subjects' (ITW, pp. 101); or more brutally, what Orwell considered their Stalinist 'infection'.

Indubitably, the business of writing proletarian fiction is complex, and again it is interesting to note that Orwell does not publicly acknowledge his own contribution to the field; for what is most striking about 'Inside the Whale', which is principally an evaluation of the writers of the thirties, is that Orwell omits himself. In fact, Orwell writes the essay as if he were not himself a writer, as he did in his review of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*. This becomes more curious when Orwell is lamenting that Miller does not write about the 'ordinary man' in the fuller sense: 'Miller's "ordinary man" is neither the manual worker nor the suburban householder, but the derelict, the *déclassé*'. Orwell declares, rather extraordinarily, that 'No English or American novelist has as yet [by 1940] seriously attempted that' (ITW, p. 92). By 'that' he means writing about the ordinary suburban householder. Yet, Orwell has written a book *solely* about an ordinary suburban householder – George Bowling (*Coming Up for Air*). Orwell's reticence is remarkable.[8]

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7 Virginia Woolf viewed the Auden-Spender generation with equal suspicion. She felt that identification with 'the common man' could not exist while the espousers of equality were living an extremely comfortable life. She labels them 'The Leaning Tower Group'. She says of this 'gilded tower' that 'it decides his angle of vision; it affects his power of communication'. Moreover, it is with the fact that these new left-wing writers do not acknowledge their advantaged – and therefore restricted – viewing position that she takes issue. See Virginia Woolf, 'The Leaning Tower' in *Collected Essays*, vol. 2 [1940] (London, 1966), p. 169. Edward Upward, among others, attacks her line of argument. See Mark Hussy, *Virginia Woolf A–Z: The Essential Reference to Her Life and Writings* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 143–4. It is interesting to note that Louis MacNeice made comparable criticism of the Georgian poets. He questioned their legitimacy to champion or proclaim themselves to be essentially of nature. He writes, 'They idyllised the countryside without being rooted, as nature poets should be, in their subject .... They are mainly townsmen on excursion' (Louis MacNiece, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* [Oxford, 1938], p. 8).

8 Orwell writes, in further praise of Miller's work, that Miller 'has been able to get the most out of his rather limited material because he has had the courage to identify with it. The

Nineteen Eighty-Four and *Animal Farm*: Prole *vs* Intellectual

Having argued for Orwell's proletarian status, it is now necessary to examine Orwell's controversial portrayal of the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Beatrix Campbell, echoing in part Raymond Williams, has famously scoffed at Orwell for his apparently patronizing and offensive treatment of the working classes in his last novel, particularly in his treatment of their thought processes:

> [Orwell] cannot conceive of the working class itself as a *thinking* class. The result is a class, which is thoughtless and leaderless, a class in its natural state .... 'I think, therefore I am' apparently doesn't apply to the proles; to think is to become middle class. It is this which enables us to track the continuity between *Wigan Pier* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[9]

Before examining Orwell's depiction of proletarian thought, there is a significant point to make about the proles in this book, which is, that they are far likelier to be symbolic of an innately decent *type* of human than representative of a real class; and their role in the novel being, by way of contrast, to expose the learned inhumanity of the upper or ruling classes, reflecting the novel's determination to be a contemporary satire on its time. In the novel we are told, regarding the proles, that:

> Left to themselves like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina they had reverted to a style of life that appeared natural to them ... no attempt was made to indoctrinate them with the ideology of the party' (p. 74).

If we recall Orwell's damning commentary on the politicized intellectual language of his time, fuelled in part by the lies that were being disseminated through the foreign presses covering the Spanish Civil War, then we can appreciate the weight of his mistrust surrounding the so-called thinking classes: Orwell wrote that 'Political language ... [has become] designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give the appearance of solidity to pure wind'.[10] This sinister aspect of intellectual thought was reinforced when Orwell turned his attention to the increasingly Russifed Left:

> For somewhat complex reasons, nearly the whole of the English left has been driven to accept the Russian régime as 'Socialist', while silently recognising that its spirit and practice are quite alien to anything that is meant by 'Socialism' in this country. Hence there is a sort of schizophrenic manner of thinking, in which words like 'democracy' can bear two irreconcilable meanings, and such things as concentration camps and mass deportations can be right and wrong simultaneously.[11]

This discovery or trend is of course central to Orwell's creation of *doublethink* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. '*Doublethink* lies at the very heart of Ingsoc, since the

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ordinary man, "the average sensual man", has been given the power of speech, like Balaam's ass' (ITW, p. 92).

9 Beatrix Campbell, 'Orwell – Paterfamilias or Big Brother?', p. 128.

10 Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language', *The Complete* Works, vol. VII, pp. 421–32 (p. 430).

11 Orwell, 'Writers and Leviathan', *The Complete* Works, vol. XIX, pp. 288–93 (p. 290).

essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty' (p. 223). It is in the fact that the proles cannot be *doublethinkful*, because they have no ideological way of thinking, that the true virtue of their thought processes can be understood. And the proles *are* shown to think for themselves. The 'typical prole reaction' to the horrific scenes of violence being shown in front of children is a clear demonstration of thought. When an old man shouts out: 'They didn't oughter of showed it, not in front of the kids' (p. 11), he, however inarticulately, is voicing an opinion, one that is innately humanist.

The cardinal point is that here is a class that is vastly more capable of thought than the inhuman politicos gaining voyeuristic thrills at the sight of a child's arm being shot off. Consider Orwell's description of the woman he sees unblocking a drain-pipe in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

> 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 (p. 52).

Clearly this woman, as Orwell perceives her, is not blind to her circumstances. She is fully aware of the bleakness of her social position, and, the implication is, would frankly say so if she were in a position to do so. The animals in *Animal Farm* are situated in much the same way as the girl unblocking the drainpipe, and through the worker-horses Boxer and Clover Orwell delivers his simple linguistic manifesto: 'If [Clover] could have spoken her thoughts it would have been to say that this was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves … to work for the overthrow of the human race' (p. 58).[12] Boxer, likewise is shown time and time again in the face of the pigs' sophistry to be incapable of expressing his disillusionment and opposition. This is Boxer on hearing that the Sunday morning meetings are to be banned in favour of a pigs' committee: 'Even Boxer was vaguely troubled. He set his ears back, shook his forelock several times and tried hard to marshal his thoughts, but in the end he could not think of anything to say' (p. 34). However, there is

12 The depth of Orwell's engagement with linguistics in *Animal Farm* that directly challenges Stalin's view has not been recognized. Indeed, Orwell's view of language expressed through this simple axiom, 'If she could have spoken her thoughts …' rejects Stalin's premise regarding language that runs:

> It is said that thoughts arise in the mind of man prior to their being expressed in speech, that they arise without language material, without the language shell, in so to speak, a naked form. But this is absolutely wrong. Whatever the thoughts that arise in the mind of man, they can arise and exist only on the basis of language terminology and phrases …

Joseph Stalin, 'Reply to Krasheninnikova', in Bruce Franklin, ed. *The Essential Stalin: Major Theoretical Writings 1905–52* [1950] (London, 1973), pp. 430–36 (p. 433). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it should be noted that Newspeak is a parody of a State's attempt to control the thoughts of its peoples through an imposed system of language. See Roger Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell* (London, 1995), p. 211.

seemingly also the opposite view put forward by Orwell. This is Winston looking out at a 'prole' woman hanging out her washing: 'The woman down there had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart and a fertile belly' (p. 228). Whilst this is actually the thought of Winston – the spatial point of view is established as his and what follows are his thoughts (this use of *free indirect thought* is explained fully in Chapter Three), the sentiment is not contradicted and so suggests sympathy with Winston's judgement. The crucial factor in reconciling these ostensibly contradictory positions lies in the realization that moments of lucidity and epiphany are rare for people who are oppressed and overworked. Orwell makes a comment to this effect when arguing that the Russian masses would have to have had their moments of clarity together if they were to rise in opposition.[13]

Orwell was a great admirer of Milton, and was much taken with Milton's idea that humans carry within themselves the spirit of revolt through 'the known rules of ancient liberty':

> If Milton did a service to the human intellect, it was not by writing pamphlets against Salmasius but by weaving noble words round comparatively simple thoughts. For instance:– *I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs, By the known rules of ancient liberty* .... Over a period of 300 years, how many defenders of free speech must have drawn strength from that line, "By the known rules of ancient liberty"![14]

This, of course, is the spirit which plagues and eventually precipitates Winston's conversion. However, if the proles are silent, then the party intellectuals are worse than silent. Think of the party members' use of *duckspeak* where phrases can be delivered without the involvement of thought, and that such language comes from the larynx rather than the brain, with the human voice turning into a machine – this becomes the party spokesmen spraying out statistics, facts or the current party line like a machine-gun spraying out bullets. And it is interesting on this point to consider the importance given to euphony as an optimum aid in preventing thought:

> In Newspeak, euphony outweighed every consideration other than exactitude of meaning. Regularity of grammar was always sacrificed to it when it seemed necessary. And rightly so, since what was required, above all for political purposes, were short clipped words of unmistakable meaning which could be uttered rapidly and which roused the minimum of echoes in the speaker's mind (p. 321).

In terms of *knowledge* without language, the Miltonic idea that a person can become conscious of their subjugated state simply *by the known rules of ancient liberty* is volubly expressed through Winston. Here are Winston's feelings on reading 'The Book':[15]

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13 Orwell writes: 'The Russian masses could only practice civil disobedience if the same idea happened to occur to all of them simultaneously' ('Reflections on Gandhi', *The Complete Works*, vol. XX, p. 9).

14 Orwell, 'Review of *Milton: Man and Thinker* by Denis Saurat', *The Complete Works*, vol. VI, pp. 338–40 (p. 340).

15 The book given to him by inner-party member O'Brien, supposedly written by Emmanuel Goldstein, entitled *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*.

> The book fascinated him, or more exactly it reassured him. In a sense it told him nothing that was new, but that was part of the attraction. It said what he would have said, if it had been possible for him to set his scattered thoughts in order. It was the product of a mind similar to his own, but enormously more powerful, more systematic, less fear-ridden. The best books, he perceived, are those that tell you what you know already (p. 208).

On one level, it is probably not overstating the argument to say that Orwell's novels are an attempt to set the scattered thoughts of an entire class in order; a class that he has become to feel himself part of, which, whilst perhaps being distastefully mawkish or even hubristic for many a critical palate, is no less true.

Orwell has been criticized for such humanist positioning that insists on 'a mute protest in your bones'. Christopher Norris writes, 'Orwell's homespun empiricist outlook – his assumption that the truth was just there to be told in a straightforward, common-sense way – now seems not merely naive but culpably self-deluding'.[16] An answer to this possibly lies in Orwell's description of the Italian militiaman (in *Homage to Catalonia*). Orwell read a great deal in this man's face regarding the 'crystal spirit' of the proletarian, and yet he also wrote, 'But I ... knew that to retain my first impression of him I must not see him again'. Orwell then is all too aware of his potential to disseminate falsities about the innate goodness of men and therefore the proletariat (see Chapter Six for further discussion).[17] Nevertheless, whatever his private misgivings may be, his anti-Swiftian projections dominate his literary portrayals, and in this unshakable nature of Orwell's 'common sense' outlook, he is remarkably close to Charlie Chaplin; and a comparison of the two men leads to the discovery of many striking similarities in both personal and artistic temperament, and particularly in their comic outlook.

Orwell, Chaplin and The Common Man

In 1940 Orwell reviewed Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, a satirical portrayal of Hitler's egomania. In this review, where Orwell delineates Chaplin's essentially humanist and anti-Swiftian political outlook, Orwell's deeply held humanist/socialist beliefs are sharply echoed:

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16 Christopher Norris, 'Language, Truth and Ideology: Orwell and the Post-War Left', in *Inside the Myth*, pp. 242–62 (p. 242).

17 For further discussion on Orwell's contribution to the debate surrounding language, thought and human understanding see Noam Chomsky, *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use* (New York, 1986). Chomsky writes:

> For many years, I have been intrigued by two problems concerning human knowledge. The first is the problem of explaining how we can know so much given that we have such limited evidence. The second is the problem of explaining how we can know so little given that we have so much evidence. The first problem we might call "Plato's Problem", the second "Orwell's Problem" … (p. xxv).

See also Peter Carruthers, *Language Thought and Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 183–7.

> It is [Chaplin's] power to stand for a sort of concentrated essence of the common man, for the ineradicable belief in decency that exists in the hearts of ordinary people, at any rate in the west .... The common man is wiser than the intellectuals, just as animals are wiser than men. Any intellectual can make you out a splendid "case" for smashing the German Trade Unions and torturing Jews. But the common man, who has no intellect, only instinct and tradition, knows that "it isn't right". Any one who has not lost his moral sense – and an education in Marxism and similar creeds consists largely in destroying your moral sense – knows that "it isn't right" to march into the houses of harmless little Jewish shopkeepers and set fire to their furniture.[18]

Orwell's defence and indeed his foregrounding of the common man, with all his innate decency and lack of sadism, like Chaplin's proletarian heroes, must have been in part a reaction to the fascistic eugenic voices of the utopian writers who sought to persuade against the claims of the masses to their share of the earth's riches. Consider the extremity of language employed by H. G. Wells's in his *Anticipations* of 1901:

> It has become apparent that whole masses of human population are, as a whole, inferior in their claim upon the future, to other masses, that they cannot be given opportunities or trusted with the power as the superior peoples are trusted, that their characteristic weaknesses are contagious and detrimental in the civilizing fabric, and that their range and incapacity tempts and demoralizes the strong. To give them equality is to sink to their level, to protect and cherish them is to be swamped in their fecundity .... The ethical system of these men of the New Republic, the ethical system which will dominate the world state, will be shaped primarily to favour the procreation of what is fine and efficient and beautiful in humanity.[19]

Interestingly, B. Campbell believes that Orwell has nothing but contempt for 'the people'. She writes, although with absolutely no textual evidence:

> Despite his wish to invest his revolutionary optimism in the people, what [Orwell] feels for the common people edges on contempt. Actually, he thinks they're dead common (Paterfamilias, p. 127).[20]

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18 Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. XII, pp. 313–15 (p. 315).

19 H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (London, 1901), sourced from John Carey's *The Faber Book of Utopias* (1999), p. 368. Carey points out that Wells in his *Anticipations* 'chillingly' argues, with equal sincerity, that '"swarms of black and brown, and dirty-white, and yellow people", who do not meet the needs of the new efficiency, "will have to go". It is "their portion to disappear"' (*Utopias*, p. 368).

20 Such assumptions have had the effect of fomenting critical prejudice against Orwell. Reception of his work is often tinged with preconceptions about his dislikes. John Rodden has identified an ideological bias against Orwell running through much feminist criticism; his analysis could equally apply to class-sensitive treatment of Orwell's work: '... "gender-tinged" images of the author get disseminated ... gender-sensitive critiques bear on the formation of reputations ... intellectual reference groups and ideological allegiances shape critical response ...', ('"A Sexist After All?" The Feminists' Orwell, *New Orleans Review*, 1990, vol. 17, pp. 33–46 [p. 33]). It is my belief that a great deal of critical response to Orwell has been shaped negatively through such processes as Rodden has detailed. It would seem that Orwell

Campbell insists that Orwell portrays the working class as a class that merely suffers, instead of a class that 'struggles' (Paterfamilias, p. 129). Campbell says 'For some reason, which Orwell never explains, the working class is the material of revolution' (p. 134).[21] Orwell's seemingly ambivalent attitude toward the working class in terms of their capacity as catalysts for change is in reality not so contradictory as it appears. Consider Roland Barthes's analysis of Chaplin's proletarian figures:

> It is precisely because Chaplin portrays a kind of primitive proletarian, still outside Revolution, that the representative force of the latter is immense. No socialist work has yet succeeded in expressing the humiliated condition of the worker with so much violence and generosity. Brecht alone, perhaps, has glimpsed the necessity, for socialist art, of always taking Man on the eve of Revolution, that is to say, still blind, on the point of having his eyes opened to the revolutionary light by the 'natural' excess of his wretchedness.

Barthes argues that this technique is effective politically because: 'To see someone who does not see is the best way to be intensely aware of *what* he does not see' [his italics] (*Mythologies*, p. 40). In the beginning Dorothy, Gordon, Bowling and Winston are 'still blind' and very much 'on the point of having his eyes opened …'.[22] The most explicit demonstration of this propagandizing element is in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This is Winston's diary, referring here to his having viewed a violent propaganda film (I have supplied the punctuation):

> Then there was a wonderful shot of a child's arm going up up up right up into the air .... There was a lot of applause from the party seats but a woman down in the prole part of the house suddenly started kicking up a fuss and shouting that they didn't oughter of showed it not in front of the kids they didn't, it aint right not in front of the kids it aint (p. 11)

At this point, Orwell has constructed the narrative to show Winston unwittingly revealing how the proles *instinctively* react to graphic scenes of violence in contrast to his sadistic enjoyment ('wonderful shot'). When Winston reports the prole woman shouting, 'They didn't oughter of showed it, not in front of the kids' he does not

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is, in fact, the *victim* of ideological assumption: a classic case being that Orwell is supposed to have labelled the working class as 'smelly'. One could turn such criticism around and say, 'it is quite clear: people *think* that Orwell thinks people stink'. I will let Orwell speak in his own defence (the book referred to is *Wigan Pier*):

> .... I not only did not say that the working class 'smells,' I said almost the opposite of this. What I said, as any one who chooses to consult the book can see, is that twenty or thirty years ago, when I was a child, middle-class children were taught to <u>believe</u> that the working class 'smells'... (*Lost Orwell*, p. 107).

21 It is really quite simple: Orwell believes that for the working class to become a revolutionary class it must be swelled with those who think themselves 'other', i.e., 'the clerk, the engineer, the commercial traveler, the middle-class man who has 'come down in the world', the village grocer, the lower-grade civil servant, and all other doubtful cases that … *are* the proletariat'.

22 On the day of Orwell's funeral David Astor asked Orwell's sister, Avril, what sort of person Orwell admired most. Her reply was 'the working-class mother of ten children' (Wadhams, ed. *Remembering Orwell*, p. 218). One can readily imagine H. G. Wells's abhorrence at such a remark.

experience any sort of epiphany whereby his monstrous callousness is laid bare before him, he merely comments that it is a 'typical prole reaction' (p. 11). However, we the reader, following the elenctic demonstration, can readily see all the social iniquity hidden from Winston.

Of course, Winston does come to understand that *it isn't right* to find the sight of a dismembered arm 'wonderful', just as he learns that *it isn't right* to kick a severed hand 'into the gutter as though it had been a cabbage-stalk'.[23] Gordon Comstock and George Bowling, as we shall see, are the forerunners of Winston in that they were content once-upon-a-time, as it were, to languish in a state of insensitivity, that is, until they are forced to look upon the world with more human eyes. However, what is still more interesting about Orwell's similarity to Chaplin is that Orwell had not only found a kindred political spirit in this man, but also an artistic soul mate, for there are remarkable similarities in their respective styles of narrative arrangement too. In his review of *The Great Dictator*, Orwell makes much of how, despite a great deal of mixed technique, Chaplin's film succeeds. He talks of how Chaplin's serious political message is everywhere woven into the scenes, and is, moreover, essentially what holds the film together. Where the thread is broken is at the end when the Hitler impostor (a Jewish barber, Chaplin himself) makes the alternative triumphal speech, although again, Orwell will insist on the overall success of the rupture:

> And here occurs the big moment of the film. Instead of making the speech that is expected of him, Charlie makes a powerful fighting speech in favour of democracy, tolerance, and common decency. It is really a tremendous speech, a sort of version of Lincoln's Gettysburg address done into Hollywood English, one of the strongest pieces of propaganda I have heard in a long time. It is, of course, understating the matter to say that it is out of tune with the rest of the film (p. 314).

That Orwell understands this speech to be 'out of tune with the rest of the film', whilst continuing to appreciate its impact, reflects an attitude to his own work that will be brought out in the course of this book.

A notable feature of Chaplin's characters is that they share a Don Quixote/Sancho Panza duality of body and soul that mark Orwell's protagonists. In counteracting Swift's contention that man, certainly the common man, is akin to the savage Yahoos, Orwell instead insists that 'noble folly and base wisdom exist side by side in nearly every human being. If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or

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23 This is also the scene where Winston reflects on the humanity of the proles in relation to the barbarism of the so-called civilized party members, such as himself:

> [The proles] were governed by private loyalties which they did not question. What mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself .... For the first time in his life he did not despise the proles .... The Proles had stayed human. They had not become hardened inside (p. 172).

This is Chaplinesque in the unapologetic rawness of the emotion ('a tear, a word spoken to a dying man') with its borderline sentimentality, as is the entire book if we consider the juxtaposed comedic elements: the at-crossed-purposes exchanges between Winston and the prole in the pub (where Winston is attempting to discover whether life was better for the people before the revolution) are really very funny.

Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both'.[24] This assertion is inseparable from Orwell's conviction that 'the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit' (*D&O*, p. 152). This is exactly the point Chaplin is making in showing that Hitler can be indistinguishable from a little Jewish barber. In doing this, Orwell applauds the film's brilliant exposure of the Nietzschen superman:

> From the point of view of anyone who believes in supermen, it is a most disastrous accident that the greatest of all the supermen should be almost the double of an absurd little Jewish foundling with a tendency to fall into pails of whitewash. It is the sort of fact that ought to be kept dark. However, luckily, it can't be kept dark, and the allure of power politics will be a fraction weaker for every human being who sees this film (p. 315).

Orwell's character portrayals are at all times acting to undermine the ideal or virtuous, and at the same time will insist that the common man is every man. And this simple but ever-disputed truism is arguably Orwell's most significant contribution to socialist proletarian literature as is Orwell's use of humour to undermine the power hungry. Totalitarian regimes notoriously imposed silence on those who joked about them, as many Soviet citizens found to their cost when they were imprisoned for telling one.

Part of the enduring appeal of *Animal Farm* and indeed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has to lie in their humorous qualities, which are never translated adequately on to screen. It is Orwell's adept exploitation of bathos, as in, 'a sudden ludicrous descent from exalted to ordinary matters' (*OED*) that creates some of his best comic tensions. In *Animal Farm* it is through illuminating the staggering hubris of the controlling pigs, only to see them brought low through their cowardice, ignorance or plain stupidity that Orwell bathetically pokes most fun at their faux superiority. Again, we see what the animals do not see. The scene some days after The Battle of the Windmill, caused by the discovery that the rival farmer Frederick had paid for their timber with forged notes, has a particularly neat comic twist; and it is Orwell's play with the Stalin-figure, Napoleon, that is expertly bathetic. Orwell sets up Napoleon for his most egregious fall in the scene prior to the discovery of the forged notes, where, in a ridiculous ceremony, Napoleon has the animals file past him to witness his procurement of this glorious money. We are told that, 'Smiling beatifically, and wearing both his decorations, Napoleon reposed on a bed of straw on the platform, with the money at his side, neatly piled on a china dish' (p. 62). The wearing of his decorations and the china-dish touch neatly underscores Napoleon's politically misplaced mammonish deference for 'the root of all evil', and illustrates Orwell's eye for comic detail. Indeed, Orwell makes great play with Napoleon's love of medals. After the animals have won their Pyrrhic victory over Frederick and his men, Napoleon creates a new decoration, 'The Order of the Green Banner', only to confer it upon himself. However, it is in the drunken debauchery of the pigs and especially its aftermath that Orwell increases the comic strain. Napoleon and the other pigs, now living in Jones's cottage and well on their way to having broken every socialist doctrine in the book, find a case of whisky (of course, the Fifth Commandment of *Animalism* is 'No animal shall drink alcohol'). What follows the discovery of the whisky is a delightful

24 Orwell, 'The Art of Donald McGill', *The Complete Works*, vol. XIII, pp. 23–31 (p. 29).

tableau depicting the all-too-common stages of drunkenness, which the reader, but not the animals, anticipates. We see Napoleon playing the fool in Mr Jones's bowler hat against a backdrop of noisy drunken revelry from the farmhouse. The scene next morning shows Orwell capitalizing on the comedy. The animals are bemused by the 'deathly silence' that has fallen over the cottage. The reader can picture only too well what groans and sufferings would be taking place inside; and when Squealer comes out to make an announcement, 'walking slowly and dejectedly, his eyes dull, his tail hanging limply behind him, and with every appearance of being seriously ill,' the reader, whilst enjoying the spectacle, is also caught up in the animals' suspense as to what he has come out to say to them. And the news is, that 'Comrade Napoleon was dying!' (p. 72). Of course, the reader knows only too well that Napoleon is merely hungover, but the folly of the pigs is hysterically comic. The 'roasting' of the pigs (no pun intended) does not stop there because we see Squealer continuing to emerge from the cottage with messages from the 'dying leader': 'As his last act upon earth, Comrade Napoleon had pronounced a solemn decree: the drinking of alcohol was to be punished by death' (p. 73)'. Orwell's final bathetic blow comes in the very next paragraph, which depicts the animals going into the village to purchase 'some booklets on brewing and distilling'. The chapter finishes with the Fifth Commandment becoming "'No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*.'" The story then returns to a serious equilibrium, with the next chapter beginning 'Boxer's split hoof was a long time in healing', demonstrating Orwell's expert handling of weighty political comment with high comedy.

Another Chaplinesque quality in Orwell is his passion to *perfect* the art of political storytelling: 'What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art' (WIW, p. 319). Chaplin's perfectionism in producing his political films is legendary; he is reputed as being one of the first directors to take endless retakes. Orwell, like Chaplin, understood that making good art was 'not easy'. Orwell stressed that its creation 'raises problems of construction and of language, and it raises in a new way the problem of truthfulness' (WIW, p. 320). Referring to his experience of writing *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell gives us a detail that is a key component of his political art form.

> Among other things [*Homage to Catalonia*] contains a long chapter, full of newspaper quotations and the like, defending Trotskyists who were accused of plotting with Franco. Clearly such a chapter, which after a year or two would lose its interest for any ordinary reader, must ruin the book (p. 320).

He proceeds to divulge that a respected critic 'lectured' him about the long chapter, lamenting, '"You've turned what might have been a good book into journalism"'. Orwell agrees with him, true to self-deprecating disingenuousness, but insists that he 'could not have done otherwise' (p. 320). At first glance this appears to be Orwell admitting that he deliberately 'ruined' his book. However, he is merely stating that he could not do otherwise than include the journalism.[25] This is a prime example

25 We are not to take Orwell at his word when he agrees that he 'ruined' the book. After his brief discussion of *Animal Farm* Orwell tells us that he is going to write another novel. True to his self-deprecating manner he laments, 'It is bound to be a failure'. However, he

of Orwell not being able to violate his literary instincts; the very instincts that will mirror the 'reviving', proletarian art form with all its crude vitality, no matter how 'odd' or wrong other people might view them. This very much mirrors Chaplin's experience, who, for example, was told repeatedly that mixing slapstick with serious drama – as in *The Kid* – would not work. It proved to be one of Chaplin's most successful films.[26]

If we look at the ending of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* we can observe a stirring and emotional Chaplinesque speech:

> He wondered about the people in houses like those. They would be, for example, small clerks, shop-assistants, commercial travellers, insurance touts, tram conductors. Did *they* know that they were only puppets dancing when money pulled the strings? You bet they didn't. And if they did, what would they care? They were too busy being born, being married, begetting children, working, dying. It mightn't be a bad thing, if you could manage it, to feel yourself one of them, one of the ruck of men. *Our civilisation is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmuted into something nobler* ... [my italics]. They 'kept themselves respectable'– kept the aspidistras flying ... The aspidistra is the tree of life, he thought suddenly (pp. 267–8).

The line, 'Our civilisation is founded on greed and fear' sounds very like the Jewish barber's speech at the end of *The Great Dictator*, and it is certainly out of tune with the rest of the novel (of course, Orwell had not yet seen the film: it was released in 1939). It is also, again, unapologetically mawkish. However, if we remember Orwell's insistence that 'the basis of Socialism is humanism' then this denouement to the novel, that is, Gordon's metamorphosis into a 'decent' human being, should not really come as a surprise in what is, after all, a socialist work of art. How convincing this conversion appears is something that the reader must decide. However, it is difficult to deny its 'crude vitality', and the uncompromising way, as in Chaplin's films, that it champions ordinary people and ordinary life – in short 'the common man'.

Coming Up for Air and George Bowling: The 'Material Boy'

Coming Up for Air is undoubtedly Orwell's most recognizably proletarian novel, featuring as it does, 'a typical middle-aged bloke with about £5 a week and a house in the suburbs', for a protagonist.[27] It is also Orwell's most propagandist, for George

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finishes this sentence with the words 'every book is a failure' (WIW, p. 320). One should always bear in mind this melancholic and somewhat abstract philosophical pronouncement when considering Orwell's comments undermining his own work.

26 Chaplin funded the entire production of *The Great Dictator*, as he did with many of his films, so that he could have complete artistic control.

27 Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. XI, pp. 226–8 (pp. 226–7). This quotation is taken from a letter Orwell wrote to John Sceats, an insurance agent who wrote articles for the socialist monthly *Controversy*, whom Orwell is approaching for details for his character Bowling.

Bowling is the stuff revolutions are made of. It is essential here to provide some historical background to the book. Orwell is writing this novel with World War Two looming and fascist dictatorships gaining more and more ground in Europe. Orwell understood that it was largely through middle-class support, by promising economic stability, that Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were successful. With *Coming Up for Air* Orwell wanted to get there first, that is, to persuade the 'typical middle-aged bloke' that his stable life was not worth the keeping. The following argument reflects the book's political agenda:

> At this moment it is not so much a question of surrendering life as of surrendering leisure, comfort, economic liberty, social prestige. There are few people in England who really want to see their country conquered by Germany. If it can be made clear that defeating Hitler means wiping out class privilege, the great mass of middling people, the £6 a week to £2000 a year class, will probably be on our side. These people are quite indispensable (L&U, p. 421).

Coming Up for Air was written in the wake of Orwell's experience of the Spanish Civil War where he had breathed, albeit fleetingly, what he felt to be the true air of socialism. And yet, he also knew that the people to whom he was indebted for this rare insight were unique in their hunger for socialism:

> Men and women armed only with sticks of dynamite rushed across the open squares and stormed stone buildings held by trained soldiers with machine-guns .... [I]t would be hard to believe that the Anarchists and Socialists who were the backbone of the resistance were doing this kind of thing for the preservation of capitalist democracy, which especially in the Anarchist view was no more than a centralised swindling machine (*HTC*, p. 191).[28]

Whilst Orwell knew that the same sort of revolutionary force could not be found in England, it would seem that in Coming Up for Air he sought to inject some of its spirit into 'the people' by playing up ideas of empty materialism and invidious snobbery. It is arguably in this cause that Bowling's feelings of social superiority are often foregrounded:

> If you'd suggested to me then, in 1919, that I ought to start a shop – a tobacco and sweet-shop, say or a general store in some god-forsaken village – I'd just have laughed. I'd worn pips on my shoulder, and my social standards had risen. At the same time I didn't share the delusion, which was pretty common among ex-officers, that I could spend the rest of my

28 It should be pointed out that Orwell, according to his own testimony, had found himself in the most revolutionary part of Spain. As Douglas Kerr stresses – 'The book is Orwell's homage to Catalonia (not to Spain ....' (*George Orwell* [Tavistock, 2003], p. 56). Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit* (London, 1937), the only book Orwell recommends on the Spanish civil war in *Homage to Catalonia*, explains the uniqueness of the anarchist attitude:

> Anarchism does not believe in the creation of a new world through the improvement of the material conditions of the lower classes, but in the creation of a new world out of the moral resurrection of those classes which have not yet been contaminated by the spirit of mammon and greed (p. 22).

> life drinking pink gin. I'd got to have a job. And the job, of course would be 'in business' – just what kind of job I didn't know (CUFA, p. 129).

The first line, 'If you'd suggested to me then,' hints that he might feel differently if asked about his feelings today. Nevertheless, Bowling continues to feel himself socially above other men. His reaction to the new inhabitants of his old town, which has expanded beyond recognition, is testimony to this. Bowling rages: 'Sentimental, you say? Anti-social? Oughtn't to prefer trees to men? I say it depends what trees and what men' (CUFA, p. 229). He finishes his rant with, 'Not that there's anything one can do about it, except to wish them a pox in their guts' (CUFA, p. 230). Bowling resembles the fascistic Birkin, the semi-autobiographical hero of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, a novel Orwell was familiar with. Birkin growls, 'I abhor humanity, I wish it swept away'.[29] Bowling is in danger of being consumed by a similar misanthropic fire.

Bowling's anti-social attitude could be seen as curious given the pains he takes to attend political meetings. However, the brand of socialism that he encounters appals him, subjected as he is to a good deal of maniacal ranting by fanatics, coupled with the overly jargonised rhetoric of earnest intellectuals regurgitating Marx, reflecting Orwell's direct attack on the British Left in this book, that is, on their failure to appeal to the ordinary middle class. Bowling at one meeting closes his eyes, which has the following effect:

> I got inside *his* skull. It was a peculiar sensation. For about a second I was inside him, you might almost say I *was* him .... I saw the vision he was seeing. And it wasn't at all the kind of vision that can be talked about .... It's a picture of himself smashing people's faces in with a spanner. Fascist faces, of course (*CUFA*, p. 156).

Bowling reflects: 'The same thing over and over again. Hate, hate, hate. Let's all get together and have a good hate' (*CUFA*, p156). Interestingly, Bowling does not recognize himself later on in the violence of *his* emotions towards the people of Lower Binfield. However, that the reader can make this observation draws one's critical attention again to Orwell's technique of focalisation: Orwell allows us 'to see someone who does not see'. Bowling does not see that he is being consumed by fascistic emotions. The representation of the socialist meetings that Bowling attends directly mirrors Orwell's disgust with the orthodox Marxist speakers he witnessed in the thirties:

> Sometimes, when I listen to these people talking, and still more when I read their books, I get the impression that, to them, the whole Socialist movement is no more than a kind of exciting heresy-hunt – a leaping to and fro of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of 'Fee fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist'. It is because of this kind of thing that it is so much easier to feel yourself a Socialist when you are among working-class people (*Wigan Pier*, p. 209).

Orwell talks of the 'horrible jargon' used by socialists. He hates such phrases as 'bourgeois ideology', 'proletarian solidarity', 'expropriation of the expropriators'

29 D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* [1921] (Harmondsworth, 1996), p. 151.

and the 'burbling about dialectical materialism'; and, 'Even the single word "Comrade" has done its dirty little bit towards discrediting the Socialist movement' (*Wigan Pier*, p. 210). All these elements can be seen at play in the meetings attended by Bowling.

The fact that Bowling observes a jaundiced attitude in the left-wing speakers at the lectures but does not reflect upon his own echoing of like sentiment is highly poignant. Thinking of *Wigan Pier*, we can 'place' Bowling: he is one of the 'many millions' for whom 'when the pinch came ... would side with their oppressors ... against those who ought to be their allies.' Essentially, Bowling is a decent man whose potential is being squandered, and his like, as stated above, are the only hope, as Orwell sees it, for even the *possibility* of English socialism taking root. When Orwell has Winston Smith in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* declare that 'if there is hope, it lies in the proles', he meant that men like Winston and Julia (and Bowling and Gordon Comstock) had to rekindle their innate humanity and return to their proletarian roots. Peter Goodall sums up *Coming Up for Air*, and Bowling's role in it, excellently:

> The deepest analysis of common decency in the novel ... is in the life of George Bowling. Bowling is really the prototype of the proles, despite the fact that he is from a different social class from the proles in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is better off and better educated. George Bowling does not have to be from the city working-class in order to be a prole. What likens him to them is partly social class and economic level, but mainly private beliefs and ideals, and above all an attitude to life.[30]

It is here worth saying a little more about the traditional proletarian that Orwell does not represent in his novels. This is a class of people that Orwell does not believe needs to be addressed in the cause of socialism. The salient lines of the poem that Orwell writes in honour of the Italian militiaman that he met in the POUM barracks on his arrival in Barcelona, run: 'And he was born knowing what I had learned/Out of books and slowly.[31] Gordon, Bowling and Winston, crudely speaking, have to relearn their saving humanity. The idea that humans carry within them the kernel of true humanity is a matter of gospel to Orwell. In fact, Orwell's entire political thinking is rooted in a determined belief that the 'ordinary' man is nobler than the 'cultivated' man. Orwell's insistence on the innate decency of the uneducated man, whilst reflecting a direct engagement with the political debate of his own time, was born out of a disagreement with writers of an earlier period.[32] For example, in discussing Swift's unreasonable condemnation of man, Orwell writes:

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30 Peter Goodall, 'Common Decency and the Common People in the Writing of George Orwell', *Durham University Journal*, vol. LXXX (1), 1991, pp. 75–83 (p. 80).

31 Orwell, 'Looking Back on the Spanish War', *The Complete Works*, vol. XIII, p. 511.

32 It is worth stressing that Orwell believed that to retain the favourable first impression of the Italian militiaman he should never meet him again suggesting an awareness of idealistic indulgence on his part, although an indulgence which would be necessary for his propagandist cause, perhaps.

> [Swift's] vision of society was so penetrating, and yet ... it's false. He couldn't see what the simplest person sees, that life is worth living and human beings, even if they're dirty and ridiculous, are mostly decent.[33]

Undoubtedly, Orwell has less anxiety about the dirty and the ridiculous. His political sympathies, albeit ambivalent ones, lie with the genteel poor, the sinking middle class, epitomized by Dorothy and Gordon's sister, Julia, who are aligning themselves with a class that merely sneers at them.[34] The reasons for his targeting this group, as outlined above, lie in the fact that he believes this class to be fundamental to the cause of socialism – for they are the educated masses and without them a fundamental shift in social organization will not come to pass.

Yet, some might perhaps ask *why*, if Orwell did not believe the British people capable of the kind of socialist fervour akin to that of the anarchists he mixed with in Spain, did he continue with such a Sisyphean task in trying to convert them? The answer probably lies in the fact that Orwell was more of a realist than a revolutionary, and his sober brand of socialism would perhaps have given him more assurance of his purpose:

> A Socialist is not obliged to believe that human society can actually be made perfect, but almost any Socialist does believe that it could be a great deal better than it is at present, and that most of the evil that men do results from the warping effects of injustice and inequality. The basis of Socialism is humanism. It can co-exist with religious belief, but not with the belief that man is a limited creature who will always misbehave himself if he gets half a chance.[35]

The injustices that Bowling would commit against his fellow man, the 'pox' that he wishes on them, are shown to be largely brought about by the warping effects produced by his feelings of littleness in the world; and it is his awakening to this fact that is the essential proletarian and humanist/socialist message of this novel, as it is for *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

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33 Orwell, 'Imaginary Interview: George Orwell and Jonathan Swift', *The Complete Works*, vol. XIV, pp. 154–63 (p. 161). Orig. title: 'Too Hard on Humanity'.

34 The Honourable Verrall in *Burmese Days* epitomizes Orwell's view of how the British middle classes, those like Flory who make up the numbers of the European Club, are viewed from 'above': '[Verrall] knew the society of those small Burma stations – a nasty, poodle-faking, horseless riff-raff. He despised them' (p. 209). Bowling's wife, Hilda, is from the 'horseless riff-raff' class, and this will be expanded upon, particularly when looking at how Bowling comes to disabuse himself of his misguided admiration of class status.

35 Orwell, 'What is Socialism?' *The Complete Works*, vol. XVIII, pp. 60–63 (p. 63). Vernon Richards, an anarchist friend and 'comrade' in Spain, said this of Orwell's 'realist' position:

> The principal reason why Orwell was never an anarchist seems to me to be that he thought of himself as a 'realist', and that it was useless to talk of social revolution when its realisation seemed so remote; we had to face the immediate problems. As a result, [Orwell] found himself in the position of having continually to choose between the lesser and greater evils. *George Orwell at Home (and among the Anarchists): Essays and Photographs* (London, 1998), p. 9.

Chapter 2

Aspects of Orwell's Political Aesthetic

Exploring the nature of Orwell's political aesthetic is, in the main, a study of Orwell's *fusion* of art and propaganda, that is, the balance he strikes between these opposing forms of creative expression. It is clear from the opening lines of Orwell's second novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, that Orwell has disposed of the purple passages that are characteristic of *Burmese Days*. The effect is dramatic. Consider the opening paragraph of *Burmese Days*, which has the scheming magistrate U Po Kyin sitting on his veranda. Orwell sets the tranquil scene:

> Occasional faint breaths of wind, seeming cool by contrast, stirred the newly-drenched orchids that hung from the eaves. Beyond the orchids one could see the dusty, curved trunk of a palm tree, and then the blazing ultramarine sky. Up in the zenith, so high that it dazzled one to look at them, a few vultures circled without the quiver of a wing.

In his essay 'Why I Write' Orwell reveals that initially he had wanted to write 'enormous naturalistic novels ... full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound' (p. 317). In the opening of *Burmese Days* one has a sense of Orwell using words for the sake of their sound: 'newly-drenched orchids', 'blazing ultramarine sky', and 'without the quiver of a wing' are lyrical and politically neutral. The vultures circling above are the only *obvious* metaphor expressing foreboding.[1] The opening of *A Clergyman's Daughter* could not be in sharper contrast:

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1 Jonathan Butler points out that the opening of *Burmese Days* has many ironic parallels with The Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, and in his analysis of Orwell's parodic beginning Butler demonstrates the more deliberately subversive elements of Orwell's beginning. He writes:

> Instead of the freshness of the vernal season in Chaucer, where the 'swete breeth' of Zephirus blows, there is 'a closeness in the air … [and] … stifling midday hours' …. Likewise, instead of the bright 'yonge sonne' there is the 'blazing ultramarine sky', and in that oriental 'zenith' it is not the 'smale fowles' that 'maken melodye', but the 'few vultures' circling 'without the quiver of a wing'. The still, hot and claustrophobic climate of Upper Burma is placed in direct counterpoint to the sense of green and growth in Chaucer's England.
>
> (*George Orwell: A Study of a Sense of Place and Time in his Works from 1933 to 1939* [Leicester, 1981]).

The radically contrasting opening of *A Clergyman's Daughter* would seem to suggest that Orwell was somewhat dissatisfied with the political subtleness of this introduction to *Burmese Days*.

> As the alarm clock on the chest of drawers exploded like a horrid little bomb of bell metal, Dorothy, wrenched from the depths of some complex, troubling dream, awoke with a start and lay on her back looking into the darkness in extreme exhaustion.

One can feel the difference in energy levels immediately. The former is static and peaceful, somewhat whimsical. The latter by comparison is charged and purposeful. Everything about this passage is 'alarming' – it is one sentence crowded with disturbing adjectives, and situated in the centre of this disorder is the protagonist in a state of paralysis. The introduction works like an overture, establishing the main themes of the novel: psychological trauma, societal dysfunction – the 'horrid little bomb of bell metal' signalling modern *world* warfare; and most of all the passage foregrounds an atmosphere of pressure – Dorothy is exhausted, but the alarm bell is commanding her to rise. We can observe in this introduction a conscious shift in narrative execution, and, more importantly, in choice – Orwell is now more aware, not only of what he wishes to include, but also of what he desires to leave out. This is an important point to make because Orwell once said of the novel that:

> One advantage of the novel, as a literary form, is that you can stuff very nearly anything into it. Fragments of old diaries, scraps of conversation overheard in the street, unpublished poems, disquisitions on politics or life in general, miscellaneous information on every subject from botany to tin-mining – *with a very little ingenuity they can all be pressed into service* [my italics].[2]

Orwell suggests here an abandonment of form and selection; and a *glimpse* at Orwell's fiction may well encourage one to imagine that Orwell merely threw 'fragments of old diaries' and 'scraps of information' together *ad hoc*, but closer study reveals that Orwell does not 'stuff' his novels with information heedless of artistic composition. Orwell finishes 'Why I Write' with the passage:

> Looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally [his italics] (p. 320).

This chapter will look at the ways Orwell weaves political purpose in to his novels, and will seek to establish the degree to which he manages to avoid humbug.

That Nighttown Scene – What *Was* Orwell Thinking?

Bearing in mind Orwell's avowed determination to inject political life into his prose, let us now consider Orwell's infamous Nighttown chapter in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, with its form so obviously borrowed from Joyce's Nighttown chapter in *Ulysses*. I say 'infamous' because Orwell's version, set in Trafalgar Square, has been endlessly discussed, with critics divided as to its intrinsic worth. J. Meyers, echoing a multitude of voices past and present, openly scoffs at Orwell's imitation; he quotes

2 Orwell, 'Review of *The Porch* and *The Stronghold* by Richard Church', *The Complete Works*, vol. XVI, pp. 326–8 (p. 326).

Orwell laughing at his own attempt to emulate Joyce.[3] Others are more constructive: Douglas Kerr's assessment, for example. In praise of the chapter's artistic merits Kerr writes:

> It is a striking and important moment in Orwell's writing, as the destitute grumble and shiver through the merciless night, finally piling together for warmth on a bench 'in a monstrous shapeless clot, men and women clinging indiscriminately together, like a bunch of toads at spawning time' (*CD* 174). These are the last people in London, and for a while Dorothy is an indistinguishable component of this human heap. They have no possessions at all except their voice, and to tell their story Orwell recognizes that he has to allow them to speak for themselves. So the controlling narrative voice falls silent, and a chattering polyphony takes over ... (Kerr, p. 27).[4]

However, on the reappearance of the narrator to this scene Kerr is highly critical and believes Orwell to have failed in artistic nerve:

> Orwell cannot sustain the formal revolution that allows his huddled mass of characters to speak for themselves. As happens quite often in his early work (and the comparison with the routine boldness of *Ulysses* shows this up very clearly), he seems to lose his nerve. The 'stage directions' get longer, and turn into narrative, and by the end of the chapter the Orwell narrator is back in control with his omniscience, his normative literary English, and his heroine soon to be returned to a version of middle-class existence (p. 28).

That Orwell actively *chooses* to re-enter as omniscient narrator is not considered, which makes more sense when Orwell's proletarian commitment to his writing is considered. If one grants the essentially comedic tenor of Joyce's Nighttown scene, the 'Come, ducky dear, I want a word with you' level of address, and that Orwell's ragged assembly are no less comic (and I would not wish to underestimate how brilliantly funny Joyce's chapter is), then it follows that this art form is incompatible with the demands of compassionate political prose.[5] And yet, Orwell's narrative

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3 In recently discovered letters between Orwell and his French translator, though calling *A Clergyman's Daughter* 'tripe', Orwell recommends that Raimbault read 'the first part of chapter three', which, Orwell says, he 'is quite happy with' (*The Lost Orwell*, p. 44). This is the Nighttown chapter. The various reactions to Orwell's inclusion of this chapter are interesting if for no other reason than they highlight an unwillingness on the critics' part to trust Orwell's judgement. J. Meyers, repeating Norman Collins, even goes so far as to hint that '"The chaotic structure of [*A Clergyman's Daughter*] would suggest some kind of mental instability"' (*Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* [London, 2000], p. 119).

4 In showing how Orwell utilizes and adapts Joyce's medium of representation Kerr contradicts those critics who rush to insist that the Nighttown scene 'is written unsuccessfully in the manner of James Joyce' (Fyvel, p. 54). Furthermore, Kerr demonstrates the extent to which Orwell makes this scene uniquely his: 'Orwell's London night also looks like a parodic underground reply to the London day of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*' (p. 27). This kind of reply or nod, along with Orwell's direct borrowing from other writers, will be expanded upon in the final chapter.

5 Without doubt Joyce's ragged band are described with a cruel comic relish that Orwell, with his direct experience of 'down and outs', would surely not have the stomach for, as in the following description of 'the idiot', which comes in answer to a woman's call

attendant throughout these scenes is apolitical and has none of the propagandizing elements that mark the surrounding chapters; it is indeed mirroring Joyce in being merely stage direction. If we examine the text we can see how like Joyce's it is (this is near the end of Orwell's Nighttown chapter):

> *Dorothy* (to Mrs McElligot): 'Look at us all! Just look at us! What clothes! What faces!'
> *Mrs Bendigo*: 'You're no Greta Garbo yourself, if you don't mind my mentioning it.'
> *Mrs Wayne*: 'Well, now, the time *do* seem to pass slowly when you're waiting for a nice cup of tea, don't it now?'
> *Mr Tallboys* (chanting): 'For our soul is brought low, even unto the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the ground!'
> *Charlie*: 'Kippers! Perishing piles of 'em! I can smell 'em through the perishing glass.'
> *Ginger* (singing):
>
> '*But I'm dan-cing with tears–in my eyes* –
> 'Cos the girl – in my arms – isn't you-o-ou!'
>
> (Much time passes. Five strikes. Intolerable ages seem to pass. Then the door is suddenly wrenched open and the people stampede in to fight for the corner seats. Almost swooning in the hot air, they fling themselves down and sprawl across the tables, drinking in the heat and the smell of food through all their pores) (pp. 181–2).

Notice in the final passage – in the authorial return – that the word 'people' is not modified by any adjective. One would expect a compassionate narrator to add 'wretched' or 'exhausted' or anything that would inject some sentiment; however, as in Joyce's attendant voice, we get nothing. The authorial comment is altogether without emotion. Therefore, it is the comedic atmosphere that dominates. Now compare the above narration to the narrator who introduces the next subchapter detailing Dorothy's continuing homelessness:

> So [Dorothy] stayed in London, and became one of that curious tribe, rare but never quite extinct – the tribe of women who are penniless and homeless, but who make such desperate efforts to hide it that they very nearly succeed; women who wash their faces at drinking fountains in the cold of the dawn, and carefully uncrumple their clothes after sleepless nights, and carry themselves with an air of reserve and decency, so that only their faces, pale beneath sunburn, tell you for certain that they are destitute (pp. 184–5).

The adjectives are back now in full force, for example, 'curious', 'penniless', 'homeless', 'desperate' 'pale', 'destitute', and so on. Their inclusion injects a sober, steady, prosaic tenor into the narrative voice that could not be in starker contrast

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of 'wait my love, and I'll be with you'. The reply is 'Round behind the stable', and the commentary attending is: '(A deafmute idiot with goggle eyes, his shapeless mouth dribbling, jerks past, shaken in Saint Vitus' dance. A chain of children's hands imprisons him.)', *Ulysses* [1920] (Harmondsworth: 1986), p. 350. Throughout the chapter Joyce revels in bringing forth readers' delighted disgust, hence we have spectacles such as the 'massive whoremistress … dressed in a threequarter ivory gown, fringed round the hem with tasselled selvedge …. Her eyes are deeply carboned. She has a sprouting moustache. Her olive face is heavy, slightly sweated and fullnosed with orangetainted nostrils' (p. 429). Again, Orwell does not linger on or magnify personal defects whether in manner or appearance in these scenes.

to the surreal chaos and ludicrous cacophony that preceded it. Indeed, the passage strikes a chastening chord. In short, the time for laughing at such people is over. The reversion to a sympathetic authoritative narrator replete with his 'normative English' could be read as a deliberate violation of Joyce's apolitical artistic space.[6]

We can read Roger Fowler's analysis of the Joyce's Nighttown scene as providing support for Orwell's version. Referring to Joyce's Nighttown chapter Fowler writes: '... this polyphonic discourse is estranging rather than mimetic ... the effect is surreal or hallucinatory' (Fowler, p. 118). Fowler stresses that through such a medium 'the mundane world becomes fantastic'. Orwell's night-people are certainly more mundane than Joyce's, and the polyphonic discourse is mimetic rather than strange. Furthermore, the return of the authorial voice immediately after the scene serves to reinforce our sense of the everyday. Given that Orwell's novel is intended to be part socialist propaganda it is entirely in keeping with Orwell's socio-political aesthetic that he desires to keep within the sphere of the real and ordinary as opposed to the surreal and extraordinary.

The French translator of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, R. N. Raimbault, recognizes that there is a successful textual dynamic at work in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. In a letter to Orwell, Raimbault writes:[7]

> My second impression has not contradicted the first. You are too harsh about your book. It is a book which is often powerful and makes remarkable observations, strange – in particular your Trafalgar Square – full of humour, sometimes fierce, and written boldly and with captivating originality .... and the characters ... so well observed and so well painted by Dorothy, are typically humane (*The Lost Orwell*, p. 46).

Raimbault's description of Orwell's treatment of the people as 'typically humane' underscores the socio-political and humanist considerations that are markedly absent in Joyce's Nighttown scenes. Robert Lee provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which the seemingly incongruous elements of the documentary style in *A Clergyman's Daughter* combine to produce an overall form that is part of a greater political dynamic operating in the text:

> Such passages spoil the conventional unity and justify the designation episodic. But this need not be pejorative. If we think of the novel as picaresque, the seemingly random adventures the protagonist experiences must conventionally be disparate, revealing varied inequities in the society which is explored.[8]

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6 This conclusion echoes Bluemel's contention that, 'When intermodernists experiment with style or form … their narratives are still within a recognizably realist tradition' (p. 5).

7 Raimbault was a Professor of English at Le Mans University, and 'a distinguished translator of two American novelists, Upton Sinclair and, most notably, William Faulkner, doing much to keep alive Faulkner's reputation in the 1940s' (Davison, 'Swindles & Perversions: A Brief Retrospect', *Britain & Overseas*, vol. 35, Autumn, 2005, pp. 20–36 [p. 34]).

8 Robert A. Lee, *Orwell's Fiction* (Notre Dame, 1969), p. 27. Similarly, Richard Smyer provides an illuminating study of *A Clergyman's Daughter* detailing, with extensive attention to the text, its intense levels of psychological symbolism. Furthermore, he delineates the novels tightly constructed plot:

In Goodall's analysis of the eclectic mix of topic in Orwell's 'As I Please' articles for *Tribune* he affords an insight into the *intentionally* discordant nature of Orwell's political aesthetic:

> Orwell himself said that many people wrote concerning his scraps of useless information ... but presumably as many were turned off by the 'bourgeois' references to gardening and country life. Certainly the juxtaposition of details is always surprising and, no doubt, occasionally deliberately provocative. For instance, a piece about the criminality of the acts of Nazi leaders is followed immediately and without transition by: "As the 53 bus carries me to and fro I never, at any rate when it is light enough to see, pass the little church of St John, just across the road from Lord's, without a pang." ... The scraps of information seem to function in a way comparable to the fool's speeches in *King Lear* – a reminder, amidst all the murder and folly, that ordinary life still trickles on (p. 11).

Goodall's analysis neatly encapsulates Orwell's design in bringing unrelated pieces together with the quite deliberate intention of marking their arbitrary arrangement: 'followed immediately and without transition'. Goodall here has identified a vital component in Orwell's poetics of composition, highlighting that what may seem like incongruity is actually more dynamic and harmonious.

Orwell and Bernard Shaw: More than Pamphleteers

A contrast between Orwell and Bernard Shaw is revealing as an aid to appreciation of Orwell's attitude to political art, not least because, while admiring Shaw's propaganda, Orwell does not care for Shaw's politics, that is, his 'Fabian Socialism'. Nevertheless, with this in mind, the reasons for Orwell's liking of Shaw's polemics are insightful. In fact, what Orwell says in praise of Shaw's art would not be misplaced if it were applied to his own work. Orwell writes:

> It would be an absurdity to regard Shaw as a pamphleteer and nothing more. The sense of purpose with which he always writes would get him nowhere if he were not also an artist. In illustration of this I point once again to *Arms and the Man* .... Nowhere is there a false emphasis or a clumsily contrived incident; the play gives the impression of having grown as naturally as a plant. There are not even any verbal fireworks; brilliant as the dialogue is, every word of it helps the action along (*CW*, vol. XIV, p. 326).

> ... another way of looking at these stages of the narrative is to regard the opening section as primarily dealing with the heroine's conscious feelings of discontent; the second (and longest) section as being, for the most part, an interior drama, a descent into a subconscious mis-en-scene where an obscure struggle between guilt and a longing for innocence and peace takes place; and the third, a return to the daylight world of emotional isolation and a life spent trying to muffle an anxiety-burdened consciousness (*Primal Dream and Primal Crime* [Columbia, MO, 1979], p. 46).

Whilst agreeing with Smyer that there is a three-stage breakdown in this novel, I disagree with his analysis of the final stage. By the end of the novel Dorothy is largely free of her old anxieties.

Orwell's comment that 'every word of it helps the action along' is significant because when Orwell's texts are scrutinized one can begin to appreciate how every word is placed in accordance with some design. Consider the following preface to *Widowers' Houses* where Shaw is responding to negative criticism of his play. He writes,

> It was further objected that my play, being didactic, was therefore not a work of art – a proposition which, if examined, will be found to mean either that the world's acknowledged masterpieces are not works of art, or else exactly nothing at all.[9]

This resonates with Orwell's attitude to his own art:

> When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write because there is some lie that I want to expose .... But I could not do the work of writing a book ... if it were not also an aesthetic experience (WIW, p. 318).

Orwell's essays on his writing read like Shaw's prefaces and his replies to his critics, where, most notably, Shaw is proud to call himself a 'propagandist'. This foreshadows Orwell. Thus, when Shaw declaims: 'I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective instrument of moral propaganda in the world ....', one could readily read this as an Orwellian peroration, as one could with the last line of the preface to *Widowers' Houses*, which reads, 'I am no novice in the current critical theories of dramatic art; and what I have done I have done on purpose'. It is arguably Orwell's sense of purpose that gives a singular energy to his prose style.

Consider Orwell's purposeful choice of adjective in the following passage – a self-conscious work of prose that deliberately interrupts the referential metonymic language of the documentary style to move into the realm of the poetic and metaphoric:

> In a crowded, dirty little country like ours one takes defilement almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys seem a more normal, probable landscape than grass and trees, and even in the depths of the country you half expect to lever up a broken bottle or a rusty can. But out here the snow was untrodden and lay so deep that only the tops of the stone boundary-walls were showing, winding over the hills like black paths. I remembered that D. H. Lawrence, writing of this same landscape or another near by, said that the snow-covered hills rippled away into the distance 'like muscle'. It was not the simile that would have occurred to me. To my eye the snow and the black walls were more like a white dress with black piping running across it (*Wigan Pier*, pp. 15–16).

What is significant about Orwell's description of an English landscape is the way he explicitly draws attention to his *choice* of language – Orwell inviting the reader to consider his choice of metaphor against one that Lawrence has employed. Orwell's intention is of course that he wishes to establish that one writer looks at life in a gentle, rather innocent way, while the other insists on viewing life in cruder, animalistic terms. Orwell's description of the snow-covered landscape like a

9 G. B. Shaw, *Widowers' Houses* in *Collected Plays with their Prefaces* [1898] (London, 1970), p. 43.

'white dress with black piping running across it' is gentle – reminiscent of nothing more nocuous than a ladies' draper's shop. Lawrence's rippling muscle is more representative of aggressive Darwinist symbolism because it suggests a fascistic celebration of strength, specifically the male form. Moreover, Lawrence is rendering nature masculine whereas Orwell's landscape is feminine. Referring to Lawrence's generation, Orwell writes, 'Those who followed them have had to undo a great deal of what they did' (*CW*, XIII, p. 216). In the fascistic climate that Orwell is writing in, his gentler dress motif could be understood as following in that spirit of undoing.

A good example of Orwell's eye for small detail can be found in Orwell's review of *The Two Carlyles* by Osbert Burdett. Referring to Carlyle's book, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Orwell says of it that there are 'Fine panegyrics ... fine adjectives – adjectives which, living a strange life of their own, give an air of profundity – but no real depth of thought. It is only a splendid vestment of words, draped about a few worn, rather mean ideas' (p. 196).[10] Orwell is extremely sensitive to the ways in which language works, and also punctuation. Referring to Carlyle's treatment of Marat, he says: 'Some obscure spite moves Carlyle to damn Marat, and so he damns him, when the facts give out, by tricks of repetition, even by punctuation; every semi-colon is an insult'[11] (p. 197).

Gordon Bowker's biography of Orwell contains an illuminating anecdote illustrating the lengths that Orwell was prepared to go in his quest to find the right medium for his artistic expression. We see Orwell sitting at his desk copying out, from memory, passages from Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and also Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden*. When asked by his flatmate Sayers what he is doing Orwell replies, 'I'm trying to find a style which eliminates the adjective'.[12] That one of the books should be *Ashenden* is not surprising because this book explicitly draws attention to the methodology of its artistic composition. This is the narrator's defence of his prose style in *Ashenden*:

> ... fiction should use life merely as raw material which it arranges in ingenious patterns. You have a very good analogy in painting. The landscape painters of the seventeenth century were not interested in the direct representation of nature, which to them was no more than the occasion for a formal decoration. They constructed a scene architecturally, balancing for example the mass of a tree with the mass of a cloud, and used light and shade to make a definite pattern. Their intention was not to portray a landscape but to create a work of art. It was a deliberate composition.[13]

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10 Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. X, 'Review of *The Two Carlyles* by Osbert Burdett', pp. 195–7 (p. 196).

11 When returning his *Coming Up for Air* proofs to Roger Senhouse, a Director of Secker & Warburg, Orwell wrote, 'Did you know by the way that this book hasn't got a semicolon in it. I decided about that time that the semicolon is an unnecessary stop and that I would write my next book without one'. He did in fact have three in that novel and was never fully to cease using it. See *CW*, vol. VII, p. 249–50.

12 *George Orwell* (London, 2003), p. 176.

13 Somerest Maugham, *Ashendon or The British Agent* [1928] (London, 1955), p. vi. The narrator talks of life's 'material' being 'scrappy' and 'pointless', and stresses that it is the author's or artist's job 'to make it coherent, dramatic and probable' (p. viii). This is precisely what Orwell does with his 'material'.

It is Orwell's arrangement of his raw material that testifies to his having a deep awareness of what constitutes the difference between a work of art and a mere regurgitation of life experience. Referring to *A Clergyman's Daughter*, D. J. Taylor repeats familiar sentiments when he reflects that it is 'curious' and 'odd'. Taylor argues that the novel fails because '[I]t is one of those books in which a writer's private demons contend with a mass of reportage masquerading as background'.[14] He continues, 'Part Two, on the other hand, is simply an excuse for Orwell to reheat some of his tramping and hopping exploits' (p. 139). Orwell's diary entries do reveal that, for a good part of the novel, Orwell is drawing on his own experiences. However, a comparison between the diary and novel reveals that there has been significant artistic re-arrangement of this raw material.[15] Observe the following diary entry where Orwell is describing the action of hop-picking:

> Between working and getting meals (and that meant fetching everlasting cans of water, struggling with wet faggots, frying in the tin-lids etc.) one seemed to have not an instant to spare …. It wasn't a bad life, but what with standing all day, sleeping rough and getting my hands cut to bits, I felt a wreck at the end of it (*CW*, vol. X, p. 225).

Emotionally the passage is dry; his entire experience being summed up in the line 'it wasn't a bad life'. In fact, the hop-picking diaries are in the main journalistic notations of facts and figures, such as who make up the hop-pickers, how they are paid, and the extent to which they are exploited and so on. This, in contrast, is Dorothy 'looking back, afterwards, upon her interlude of hop-picking':

> [I]t was always the afternoons that Dorothy remembered. Those long, laborious hours in the strong sunlight, in the sound of forty voices singing, in the smell of hops and wood smoke, had a quality peculiar and unforgettable. As the afternoon wore on you grew almost too tired to stand …. Yet you were happy, with an unreasonable happiness. The work took hold of you and absorbed you. It was stupid work, mechanical, exhausting and every day more painful to the hands, and yet you never wearied of it; when the weather was fine and the hops were good you had the feeling that you could go on picking for ever and ever. It gave you a physical joy, a warm satisfied feeling inside you … (p. 113).

Dorothy's reflections continue in a similar vein for many pages. The transformation from the hard-boiled objective journalist of the diary entry with his 'it wasn't a bad life' into the lyrically sensual being narrating above is forcefully apparent. The above passage, unlike its predecessor, is alive with alliterative rhythm: 'long, laborious hours in strong sunlight'. The passage is suffused with emotion: 'yet you were happy', 'it gave you a physical joy'. Gone is the formal pronoun 'one' and in its stead we have 'you', making the account more personal, helping the reader share the experience.

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14 D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (London, 2003), p. 137.

15 *A Clergyman's Daughter* is in fact one of Orwell's most richly constructed novels; and its protagonist, Dorothy Hare, one of his most misunderstood creations, with perhaps the exception of those who take Gordon Comstock seriously: (e.g.) 'Orwell's depiction of Gordon's anger, frustration and difficulties as a writer are completely serious' (V. Meyers, *George Orwell* [Basingstoke, 1991], p. 79).

To insist that such writing is 'simply an excuse for Orwell to reheat some of his tramping and hopping exploits' is too narrow a view. What the above hop-picking passage reflects, along with all the other passages quoted in this chapter, by dint of their meticulous revision, is an acute sense of Orwell's grasp of rhythm, political inflection, skillful composition and, above all, his sense of purpose. In short, these passages reveal a writer who has made considerable inroads into making political writing into an art, as can be seen in the following examination of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell *vs* Upward

Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border* published in 1938 certainly contains all the ingredients of socialist 'responsibility' that Orwell loathed. A brief comparison of Upward's novel with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* will demonstrate how the balance between political message and pure artistry is managed respectively by these two writers. This is from *Journey to the Border*:

> The tutor was passing the refreshment tent. He was approaching the road which led downwards from the racecourse. He had made up his mind what he would do. He would walk into the town. It was not more than five miles away, and he would arrive there within an hour and a half. He would visit the newsagent's shop outside which he had once seen a poster advertising a meeting of the Internationalist Workers' Movement. He would ask the newsagent to put him in touch with the local secretary of the Movement.[16]

Joining the Internationalist Workers' Movement is going to save the protagonist from insanity, which has been brought on by over-exposure to the petty-bullying and stuffy banality of a bourgeois country set. The resolution could not be given in blunter terms; yet the narrative, in fact, is a plodding chronology: *The tutor was passing ... He was approaching the road ... He had made up his mind ... He would visit the newsagent's shop* ... It continues in the same strain. Another example:

> There would be evenings when with [sic] Mr Parkin's knowledge he would go to see the village schoolmaster or the Congregationalist Minister. He would talk to them about the Movement. Mr Parkin would give him the sack if he got to hear about this. In which case the tutor would go to London, where the Movement was at its strongest (p. 135).

This narrative is following the tutor's thoughts, yet it is given in strictly third person with no attempt to narrate in the character's modality or manner: *In which case the tutor would go to London*. The result again is laboured. However, the socialism is abundantly clear. Stephen Spender, in his 1994 introduction to the revised edition, states, 'It is not too much to say that *Journey to the Border* contains some of the most beautiful prose poems of the century' (p. 9). The example Spender gives of Upward's 'most beautiful prose poetry' (here referring to a description of a steamroller) is: 'It was simple and bold and powerful, crested in front with a rampant

16 Edward Upward, *Journey to the Border* [1938] (London, 1994), p. 135. The novel was first published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf for their Hogarth Press.

brass unicorn, thumping with its pistons like a thumping heart' (p. 9). One is tempted to question whether or not the simile 'thumping ... like a thumping heart' is terribly original. However, such a line of questioning is not of primary concern; rather, it is the separation of the artistic from the political throughout *Journey to the Border* that separates it from Orwell's prose composition – Upward fails to *fuse* art and propaganda.[17] The narrative build-up to the tutor's rebellion is without atmosphere – there is no symbolism or metaphoric nuance as there is in the description of the steamroller, but such descriptions are divorced from the rest of the 'action' so the overall effect suffers. In contrast, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a symphony of political message and artistic dynamism; and a comparison between Orwell's initial opening to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (much closer to Upward's non-poetic prose) with his final version provides a rare insight into Orwell's methodological approach to his art. This is Orwell's first attempt:

> It was a cold blowy day in early April, and a million radios were striking thirteen. Winston Smith pushed open the glass door of Victory Mansions, turned to the right down the passage way and pressed the button of the lift. Nothing happened. He had just pressed a second time when a door at the end of the passage opened, letting out a smell of boiled greens and old rag mats, and the aged prole who acted as porter and caretaker thrust out a grey, seamed face and stood for a moment sucking his teeth and watching Winston malignantly.
>
> "Lift ain't working," he announced at last.

The revised narrative runs:

> 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.
>
> The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.

This is word for word how the final version was to appear, so we can see the exact transformation the text underwent. The initial introduction differs from the second in that it is dull in comparison. It is a mere sequence of detail, similar to that of Upward's. The latter, by contrast, is a neat conceptualisation of Winston in relation to his environment and home. Indeed, the first sentence has become memorable in its own right. The clocks 'striking thirteen', as opposed to 'a million radios', better

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17 It is most fortunate that a large part of the original *Nineteen Eighty-Four* manuscript survives because it provides a rare insight into the processes Orwell's writing would undergo. Peter Davison makes the following comments on the surviving manuscript:

> George Orwell was no hoarder of his manuscripts. Of his nine books, a few notes survive for *Burmese Days*; because they were subjected to censorship, a page or two of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* were not destroyed and have come to light in the files of the first publisher of that book; and Orwell's typescripts used by the printers to set *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are in the Orwell Archive. It is, therefore, a particularly happy chance that so much of the preliminary drafting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should have survived (*George Orwell: Nineteen Eighty-Four. The Facsimile of the Extant Manuscript*, ed. Peter Davison [London, 1984], p. ix).

emphasizes the now military status of the traditional timepiece (it is thirteen hundred hours as oppose to one o'clock in the afternoon). The second sentence establishes Winston's status as the embattled figure. He is attempting, futilely, to fortify himself against the elements. His struggle 'to escape the vile wind', emphasized by the adverb 'quickly' being repeated, ends in defeat as 'the swirl of gritty dust' enters the building with him. The building is called 'Victory Mansions'; the victory of the 'vile wind' now becomes symbolic, as Winston's struggle to evade the vile, all-pervasive elements of The Party will also end in defeat.

The first paragraph gives none of this immediate symbolism: 'Winston Smith pushed open the glass door of Victory Mansions, turned to the right down the passage way and pressed the button of the lift'. One can feel the deadness of sentences such as 'pushed open the glass door, and turned to the right down the passage'. This is mere documentary, void of richness and creative tension. Similarly, 'a cold blowy day in early April', becomes 'a bright cold day in April', and where the former gives a sense of a specific day, the latter transcends specificity to build atmosphere – it is 'the yellow note' that we meet later. It is also – we can begin making parallels, an indication of the text's imaginative quality – the cold white light of the Ministry of Love. In fact, the light of the bright cold day suffuses the entire opening scene making it incredibly vivid. This demonstrates how Orwell is able to reduce and hone meaning, bringing his technique of focalisation to the fore. Unfortunately, we are not able to chart the progress of Orwell's other fictional beginnings. However, owing to their being rich in symbolism, pithy, and direct we can confidently imagine that the initial attempts were weaker in comparison.

Despite the continued popularity of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* it is not highly rated by critics. Even promotional exordiums concentrate more on delineating its supposed shortcomings, as the following introduction to the Penguin 1989 edition of the book, by Ben Pimlott, demonstrates:

> The novel's weaknesses can now be seen in clearer focus …. The narrative lacks development, the dialogue is sometimes weak, and most of the people are two-dimensional, existing only to explain a political point or permit a side-swipe at a species in the real world (p. vi).

Winston Smith, we are told, 'is a loner and a loser, a prospectless member of the lower middle class, filled with impotent rage at those who control his life' (p. vii). Parsons is described with equal assuredness as '*merely* [a] caricature political activist' [my italics]. Whilst there maybe some legitimacy in charging the dialogue with weakness, it does not follow that rest of the novel is equally defective. Indeed, such dismissive commentary overlooks entirely Parsons's comic role throughout the novel in which he plays a significant part, which is unusual for one of Orwell's caricatures. It is through Parsons, that 'mass of imbecile enthusiasms', that Orwell lands some of his most powerful political punches. Again, it is Orwell's technique of focalisation, which allows us to see what someone does not see. We gasp at Parsons's blind devotion to The Party in the face of its glaring emptiness and cruelty. Consider the following scene where Parsons, Syme and Winston are having lunch in

the canteen and are interrupted by one of the frequent celebratory announcements by the government over the Tanoy system:

> The phrase 'our new, happy life' recurred several times. It had been a favourite of late with the Ministry of Plenty. Parsons, his attention caught by the trumpet call, sat listening with a sort of gaping solemnity, a sort of edified boredom. He could not follow the figures, but he was aware that they were in some way a cause for satisfaction (p. 61).

The words 'solemnity' and 'edified' operate to expose Parsons's gratuitous misapplication of reverence. Parsons is listening to the broadcast with hardly enough tobacco in his pipe to make a smoke worthwhile, and he is always attempting to cadge razor blades. Yet he can swallow the Party's lies about plenty. Parsons is set up from the outset to be discredited: 'His whole appearance was that of a little boy grown large …. In visualising him one saw always a picture of dimpled knees and sleeves rolled back from pudgy forearms' (p. 59).[18] This comic, *parsonical* appearance, and his staggering incomprehension, colliding with an earnest desire to be pleased, ultimately works to reflect ridicule on The Party, mixed as it is with an obsequious devotion to a system that seeks to crush him at every turn, reaching its nadir when Parsons is arrested for a *thoughtcrime* he has no knowledge of committing. The scene in the cell where Winston is astonished to find Parsons joining him is one of the most comic in the novel. Using bathos Orwell is able to construct a polemic through which to throw vitiating scorn on the inhuman machinations of totalitarianism practised by The Party. Parsons, with his 'froglike face … [and] slightly sanctimonious expression' says desperately to Winston, with regard to his arrest: 'Do you know what I'm going to say to them when I go up before the tribunal?' "Thank you," I'm going to say, "Thank you for saving me before it was too late"' (p. 245). So obvious is this obscene show of servility and blind devotion that one could easily imagine even a naive character like Stan Laurel giving a double take at such folly. Parsons is exposed again in the same fashion when he confesses to being immensely proud of his daughter for denouncing him: 'pretty smart for a nipper of seven, eh?' The scene ends with Parsons, having 'ripped down his shorts', on 'the lavatory pan' in full view of the others, using it 'loudly and abundantly'. *This*, the narrative screams, is your most devoted follower?[19]

It has to be said that there is a dearth of humour in the political works of the thirties and forties; there is certainly no trace of it in Upward's *Journey to the Border*, and

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18 Note the use of the pronoun 'one' over 'you' in this sentence. Its distant tone, and much will be said of pronoun use in the next chapter, suggests that this view of Parsons is coming through Winston's eyes.

19 One commentator, by no means alone, takes Parsons's portrayal rather more seriously, and with regard to this scene writes, 'The awful lesson of this is not at first obvious. Slowly, the horror of Parsons's comments are borne in on one', (Donald McCormick, *Approaching 1984*, in *George Orwell – Animal Farm/Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Reader's Essential Guide to Criticism*, ed. Daniel Lea [Basingstoke, 2001]), p. 175. I would argue that we are not meant to see the horror of the child's behaviour, but rather Parsons's obscene admiration for his 'nasty-minded little daughter' (McCormick), and the reader, like Winston, is meant to be 'wide-eyed' with incredulity at the perverse extent of Parsons's gullibility and lack of common sense.

it is perhaps this aspect of Orwell's aesthetic that has ensured the popularity of an extremely political novel, and would arguably do so for his thirties' works if widely read again. And if indeed humour *is* the magic ingredient in Orwell's style then it shows that he had shrewder instincts than Shaw, who, when writing *Widowers' Houses*, chose to remove the comic elements (detailed in Chapter 6). While most know of *Pygmalion* (and of course its transformation into *My Fair Lady*) few would recall *Widowers' Houses*, which leads one to think, given the humorous content of *Pygmalion*, that Shaw would have been better to leave them in. This is a moot point, naturally; but it does remain an important one, and the comic elements of Orwell's prose shall be picked up on throughout this study.

Chapter 3

Who Is Speaking? Orwell's Narrative Perspectives

'Narrative point of view is arguably the very essence of a story's style'.[1] Orwell is a writer who continually experimented with narrative voice and presence, that is, with narrative point of view. Failure to understand Orwell's play with narrative perspective is perhaps an underlying cause of critical dissatisfaction with Orwell's fiction. For what has been largely missed is the fact that the narrative voices, which are subject to continual shifts in psychological perspective and narratorial positioning, have been carefully placed in accordance with a high degree of narrative understanding.

To reveal Orwell's handling of narrative voice I will begin by examining *Down and Out in Paris and London* because, as with his other documentary works, a relatively straightforward authorial point of view operates, one that is manifestly different from the variable, third-person voice of *Burmese Days*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and also the first-person voice in *Coming Up for Air*.[2] In *Down and Out*, as one would expect, the speaking voice works appropriately as a conduit for the author's thoughts and perspective. Orwell's thirties' novels are widely perceived to be failed attempts at leaving the journalistic tone behind. At best Orwell is seen only to half succeed in establishing another voice, and when he does it is claimed that one cannot distinguish, for the greater part, between Orwell's voice and that of his characters'. In fact, Orwell does make distinctions in his novels; what is more, he layers his narrative with different voices, thereby distancing the omniscient narrator and bringing in a fallible human voice that has the effect of softening the didacticism by way of truer-to-life accents. Fowler has pointed out that Orwell, by casting off the authorial, omniscient narrator, and bringing in other narrative voices, is experimenting with a distinctly Dostoevskyian heteroglossia in his thirties' fiction.[3] To aid a better understanding of what Orwell is attempting to achieve with his multi-voiced narratives it is necessary to say something more of Dostoevsky's narrative technique, as identified by Bakhtin:

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1 Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology and Point of View* [1993] (London, 2000), p. 5.

2 The word 'straightforward' is used here to differentiate the reportage style from the decidedly more complex narration found in the novels, and is by no means meant to suggest that Orwell's reportage is without its problems.

3 Fowler contends that Orwell's multi-voiced narratives would 'not have met with Bakhtin's approval'. He continues, '[Bakhtin's] discussion of Dostoevsky makes it clear that he preferred the author to be attentive to, and the reader to learn from, the novel points of view in the alien voice' (*The Language of George Orwell* [London, 1995], p. 234).

> Any acquaintance with the voluminous literature on Dostoevsky leaves the impression that one is dealing not with a *single* author-artist who wrote novels and stories, but with a number of philosophical statements by *several* author-thinkers .... For the purposes of critical thought, Dostoevsky's work has been broken down into a series of disparate, contradictory philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character. Among these also figure, but in far from first place, the philosophical views of the author himself.[4]

Bakhtin highlights the various critical reactions to Dostoevsky's unique polyphonic arrangement:

> For some scholars Dostoevsky's voices merge with the voices of one or another of his characters; for others, it is a peculiar synthesis of all these ideological voices; for yet others, Dostoevsky's voice is simply drowned out by all those other voices (p. 5).

What is significant is not the extent to which Orwell puts in place several author-thinkers (and there are important points of departure for Orwell's author-thinkers), but the levels of *critical* engagement with Dostoevsky's narrative to which Bakhtin draws our attention. The operative word is 'engagement', because critics, for the most part, have not engaged with Orwell's text, they have merely given it a cursory glance then hurried away to bemoan its flaws and confusions.

Bearing in mind Bakhtin's identification of Dostoevsky's author-thinker, let me first analyse Orwell's narrative style by contrasting *Down and Out in Paris and London* (given first) and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*:

> It is altogether curious, your first contact with poverty. You have thought so much about poverty – it is the thing you have feared all your life, the thing you knew would happen to you sooner or later; and it is all so utterly and prosaically different. You thought it would be quite simple; it is extraordinarily complicated. You thought it would be terrible; it is merely squalid and boring. It is the peculiar *lowness* of poverty that you discover first; the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping (*D&O*, p. 76).

> Women, women! ... Why should one, merely because one has no money, be deprived of *that*? ... What else could you expect? He had no hold over her. No money, therefore no hold. In the last resort, what holds a woman to a man, except money? (*KTAF*, pp. 113–14)

In the first passage on poverty there is no uncertainty about who is speaking – it is Orwell; it is a 'straightforward' authorial point of view, and of course there is no need to consider an author-thinker in a work of reportage such as this. In the second passage, on the fickleness of women, is it as clear from whom the fictive utterance comes? Should this insight into the female disposition in relation to love and money be taken as representing the author's thoughts? And if not, is this voice valid in itself, that is, is this an example of an author-thinker whose argument should be treated with the respect one affords an author? David Seed puts it neatly when he writes, referring to *Burmese Days*, that Orwell's protagonist 'Flory enacts the novelist's

4 *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. by C. Emerson (Manchester, 1984), p. 5.

dissatisfaction with the Anglo-Indians by renouncing the club'.[5] This statement is, of course, entirely valid. Flory in this case is representative of an author-thinker. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Orwell employs various narrative devices to signal that Gordon Comstock in no way enacts the author's dissatisfaction with the moneyed world by his renunciation of it. This is mostly achieved through *free indirect thought* (or *free indirect speech*) presentation where a character's thoughts replace the voice of the omniscient narrator. Many critics mistake a character's, often flawed, vision of the world for authorial commentary. With *free indirect thought* a character's thoughts are not formally indicated with the he/she thought tag, nor are there any quotation marks, but instead the narration unobtrusively shifts into their perspective, although adopting key linguistic markers to alert the reader to the altered internal focalisation.[6] And this is where, especially so with Gordon Comstock, Orwell parts company with the Dostoevskyian author-thinker. Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's characters that they are not 'illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with his own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event' [original italics] (p. 6). I would argue that whereas Dostoevsky seeks to proliferate meaning endlessly in a blaze of formidable artistic creation, Orwell seeks, rather soberly, to anchor meaning to the reach of a distinct authorial consciousness, and to keep it very much within the unity of an event; for his characters, quite deliberately, are at all times a vehicle for the author's ideological position.[7]

Let us now turn to *Down and Out in Paris and London*, where, as well as making initial inroads into how we might distinguish between voices in Orwell's work, we can in addition go some way to establishing the tenor of Orwell's personal voice and, with regard to the latter, eradicate some of the more persistent myths surrounding Orwell's supposed invidious class prejudice. Undeniably, Orwell suffers, as writers

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5 David Seed, 'Disorientation and Commitment in the Fiction of Empire: Kipling and Orwell', in *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*, 1984, vol. 14, 4, pp. 269–80 (p. 276).

6 Narelle Shaw provides an excellent study of Jane Austen's development of *free indirect speech* in her paper, 'Free Indirect Speech and Jane Austen's 1816 Revision of Northanger Abbey', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, vol. 30, 4, *Nineteenth Century* (Autumn, 1990), pp. 591–601. Shaw demonstrates how Austen, often through ironic detachment, is able to expose characters by subtly revealing their often villainous thought processes. Shaw draws attention to the use of exclamation marks and idioms for marking a character's internal speech. See Also David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel* (London, 2002).

7 To reiterate: of Dostoevsky's characterization Bakhtin writes:

> Characters are polemicized with, learned from; attempts are made to develop their views into finished systems. The character is treated as ideologically authoritative and independent; he is perceived as the author of a fully weighted ideological conception of his own, and not as the object of Dostoevsky's finalizing artistic vision (Bakhtin, p. 5).

In many ways Orwell's characterization is somewhat the reverse, and with a slight twist, in that they are the objects of Orwell's finalizing political vision – realised in metamorphosis at the end of their respective journeys. Orwell's characters are always the object of an authorial consciousness, there as representatives, unlike Dostoevsky's characters who are the 'autonomous carrier[s] of [their] own individual word' (p. 5).

like Dostoevsky, Joyce, Zola, and so on, do not, indeed, more than any writer not of 'the right', from a deeply ingrained suspicion of his harbouring an innate dislike for the 'lower' classes he champions. Consider Lynette Hunter's examination of *Down and Out in Paris and London* in which she makes some curious observations on Orwell's narrative voice in relation to his descriptions of poverty and the people he encounters in Paris. She argues that Orwell is conscious of suffering from upper-class prejudice, and what is more, wishes to draw our attention to his untenable predisposition. After her observation that 'Any observer is governed by the condition of his background'[8] she argues that Orwell begins his notes on the Parisian poor with just such an awareness of his own potential for prejudicial bias. Hunter writes:

> Reading this first chapter alone a reader might well conclude that such a narrator was blinkered, ignorant, prejudiced, sentimental, clichéd, or worse, snide and supercilious. Any judgements made on poverty would be invalid, coloured by his irrevocably narrow perspective (p. 15).

Examples of this sentimentality, superciliousness, prejudice and so forth, are completely absent. Nothing from the text is given in support of its claims. It is necessary, therefore, in order to assess the legitimacy of the argument, to examine the text.[9]

Down and Out opens with a description of a landlady, Madame Monce, who is 'yelling' in the street – 'her bare feet stuck into sabots and her grey hair was streaming down'. The street is described as 'a ravine of tall leprous houses, lurching towards one another in queer attitudes, as though they had all been frozen in the act of collapse'.[10] The overall impression of the area is as follows:

> The Paris slums are a gathering-place for eccentric people – people who have fallen into solitary half-mad grooves of life and given up trying to be normal or decent. Poverty frees them from ordinary standards of behaviour, just as money frees people from work (p. 69).

People are referred to as 'eccentric' and 'solitary'. The accusation of 'blinkered' and 'prejudiced' is extremely difficult to either prove or refute. In describing houses as 'leprous' is Orwell doing them an injustice? Madame Monce has her 'bare feet ... stuck into sabots' and her 'grey hair [is] streaming down' her back. Certainly we get the impression that she is inelegant ('bare' feet and 'stuck' clearly suggest this) and

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8 Lynette Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice* (Milton Keynes, 1984), p. 15.

9 Philip Hensher argues a similar case when he writes:

> [Orwell's novels] ... are always stepping out of the anonymous voice and giving us some seemingly unarguable but actually rather odd piece of analysis .... Orwell, always presenting himself as rational, was in fact quite unable to escape from his prejudices ('How Calm Was the Voice of Reason?' *The Spectator*, 10.05.03, pp. 33–4).

Examples of this 'seemingly unarguable' and 'rather odd piece of analysis' are conspicuously absent. Of course, I understand that Hunter is not arguing that Orwell *is* prejudiced.

10 Taken from: *Orwell and the Dispossessed – Down and Out in Paris and London* in the Context of Essays, Reviews and Letters Selected from *The Complete Works of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth, 2001), p. 68.

slovenly, her hair has not been attended to, and its being grey, therefore not youthful, should have been tied up. However, there is not the least indication that the observer finds this spectacle either quaint or disgusting. If we examine the passage in relation to an instance where Orwell is unequivocally blinkered and prejudiced, then the descriptions of the people and the Paris slums look decidedly free of judgement. Compare it with this infamous passage in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

> One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England (p. 161).

Without doubt, that is snide and supercilious. It is contemptuous, shows a belief in his sense of superiority, and is plain nasty.[11] There is nothing like this kind of invective in the first chapter in Orwell's descriptions of the Parisians, notwithstanding Charlie; and the Paris hotels are entirely another matter! In describing his lodging house, Orwell says it is 'dirty', but 'homelike', and the owners are 'good sorts' – all fairly harmless. In describing the varied population in the quarter, Orwell says of some that they are 'fantastically poor'. This certainly impresses upon one Orwell's sense of wonder, but no more. Orwell finishes the first chapter with this:

> I am trying to describe the people in our quarter, not for the mere curiosity, but because they are all part of the story. Poverty is what I am writing about, and I had my first contact with poverty in this slum (p. 71).

There is no evidence in the language to suggest other than that this is Orwell's testimony. Nor is their anything to hint at sophistry when Orwell tells us that he is labouring with the subject matter: 'I am *trying* to describe'. Similarly, what is there in the text to make one suspicious of his motives, to doubt that he is not prompted by mere 'curiosity'? Moreover, since the story is a political one we can infer that Orwell is quite deliberate with his pen, so it is unlikely that he would fall victim to the vices of cliché, sentimentality, snideness and so forth. Admittedly, Hunter does stress that he is attempting to point out his own narrow-mindedness, but lack of evidence makes this doubtful.

Although Hunter gives no specific examples to support her argument she does insist that Orwell has written the chapter in this way in order to highlight the narrator's, that is, Orwell's, lack of objective credentials in dealing with such subject matter. Hunter's analysis of *Down and Out* is interesting because she believes Orwell is self-conscious about his narrative technique, although only in so far as to reflect personal awareness of his prejudicial injustice to his subject matter. Hunter insists, mainly through an examination of Charlie's three stories, that the narrator moves from ignorance to understanding and in doing so becomes 'less prejudiced'. This, she argues, is Orwell's 'technique of evaluation'. Yet, if we look at Charlie's stories, they give no indication that Orwell was ever, at any time, 'taken in' by the

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11 It must be emphasized that this passage has been taken out of context. In the book it works as part of Orwell's rhetoric and hyperbole. It was meant to be offensive, whereas Orwell has no reason for wishing to offend the genuinely poor he describes (see Chapter 6).

nonsense he talks, as Hunter argues. Orwell would not have been attempting to delineate a process of narrative enlightenment here. Charlie is simply one of the 'queer' people Orwell meets in the *bistro*. What is more, Charlie is someone 'of family and education' so is untypical of the slum class. Here, Orwell's privileged background can hardly be put forward as grounds for lack of ability in the art of objective observation. Thus, the putative journey from ignorance to understanding, to show that the narrator is rendered less prejudiced, is the product of an imposed reading. Hunter argues that Orwell admits to being taken in by Charlie:

> Charlie's third story ... provides the denouement to Part One of the book. He [the narrator, i.e., Orwell] prefaces the story with the remark, 'Very likely Charlie was lying as usual, but it was a good story' (p. 165). There is no doubt how we are to read it. Unlike the first tale which took the narrator in ... this tale is retold specifically as a story (p. 18).

Hunter overlooks the fact that 'the narrator' has included the phrase 'as usual', meaning he has never believed a word that was said by Charlie. Hunter insists that the reader was encouraged to take Charlie at face value, but Charlie is never presented as credible. The preface to Charlie's initial story runs thus: 'He declaims like an orator on a barricade, rolling the words on his tongue and gesticulating with his short arms. ... He is, somehow profoundly disgusting to see' (p. 71). There is much more of such description, and it can serve no other purpose than to cast doubt on Charlie's credibility. Orwell is more interested in the truth of Charlie's last story, on 'the death of old Roucolle', for the sole reason that it tells of the demise of a man Orwell had a great interest in. Roucolle had earned himself a reputation in the quarter as an eccentric tramp miser. Orwell says, 'I should very much like to have known him' (p. 153). It is for this reason that he is interested to know if Charlie's last tale about Roucolle's cause of death is true, especially as it has to do with this man's being undone by his own greed.

Hunter's analysis reflects an all too prevalent preoccupation with the idea that Orwell is governed by his lower upper-middle class, Etonian and Colonial background even though Orwell has rejected that background. This preconception is deepened when critics examine Orwell's novels because there is a great deal of prejudice and bias running through them. What commentators fail to appreciate is that the prejudice, for the most part, is not the personal prejudice of the author.[12]

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12 The following criticism by John Mander regarding *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* demonstrates the results of misreading character thoughts for authorial reflection:

> Instead of allowing the money theme to develop out of the talk and behaviour of his characters, Orwell tells at the start that his novel is going to be about money. He hammers this into us page after page: 'For after all, what is there behind it, except money? Money for the right kind of education .... Give me not righteousness, give me money, only money'.
>
> *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is not, by general consent, a very good novel. But are the others so very different? In *Coming Up for Air* ... there is a similar intrusion of Orwellian prejudice (*The Writer and Commitment* [London, 1961], p. 74).

Orwell undoubtedly is dealing with prejudice. However, and this is of paramount importance, it is the prejudice of Gordon Comstock and George Bowling.

Representations of Thought

One of the most striking aspects of Orwell's narrative is its lack of direct thought presentation; and while many novelists have given voice to their characters' inner thoughts without recourse to the familiar he/she thought tag since the novel form's inception, it is probably due to the fact, as Fowler points out, that Orwell had read *Ulysses* that inverted commas and the he/she thought mode is conspicuously absent.[13] Direct thought presentation makes an appearance here and there in his work as it does in this extract from *Burmese Days*: 'Flory yawned as he came out of the gate .... "Bloody, bloody hole!" he thought' (p. 15) but it is not common. Note the use of the exclamation mark. This is one of the most obvious indicators in Orwell's narratives that the inner thoughts of a character are being represented. In *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Dorothy Hare's first thoughts are narrated thus: 'Come on, Dorothy, up you get! No snoozing, please!' (p. 1). The narrator prefaces this line with '[she] exhorted herself sharply in the second person plural'; but after this, the narrator does not indicate directly that Dorothy is about to think this or that thought: 'She simply hung her gold cross about her neck – plain gold cross; no crucifixes, please!' (p. 5). The latter half of the sentence is of course Dorothy, but the text has not needed to indicate this formally. However, paradoxically, the exclamation point, for Dorothy, will serve to indicate *lack* of real thought processes. Indeed, her thoughts, leading up to her mental breakdown, reveal a mind resisting truthful reflection. It is precisely this suffocation of her inner troubles that will precipitate her loss of memory. However, by the time she is returned to the place of her initial anguish and childish exhortations she is really able to think for herself. In fact, to greater and lesser degrees, Orwell's challenged heroes, with the exception of Flory, come to master their negative self-destructive thoughts and behaviours, and as a result are in a sense something of their own *Deus ex machina*. This is subtle and slight, but none the less there. This aspect of Orwell's characters' lives will be further examined later.

It is Orwell's deployment of the generic pronouns 'one', 'you' and 'we' that mostly serve to add layers to his narrative voices. However, as the word 'deployment' suggests, their use is not arbitrary, nor simply a fudge to avoid the problem of authorial control. They are placed with precision and demonstrate a commitment to spatial and psychological points of view. At this juncture Ricoeur's definition of how point of view works would be useful:

13 It must be pointed out that Fowler does not value *A Clergyman's Daughter* highly. He writes, 'Orwell regarded *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as his least successful books. The former is a poorly constructed and implausible novel ....' (p. 2). He calls it Orwell's 'most ragged and unconvincing, and stylistically pretentious, novel' (p. 21). Fowler's textual analysis of this book is confined, almost solely, to examining Orwell's treatment of dialect in the hop-picking scenes, pp. 101–6, and the alien, 'other' voices of the Nighttown chapter, pp. 109–18. Nothing significant is given to support his claims of implausibility, poor construction, and pretentiousness. Unsurprisingly, Fowler has prefaced his dislike of these books with Orwell's own damning criticism. It would seem that he has been only too eager to follow Orwell's word.

> Point of view, I will say, designates in the third- or first-person narrative the orientation of the narrator's attitude toward the characters and the characters' attitudes toward one another. This effects the composition of the work and is the object of a 'poetics of composition'.[14]

Orwell does this within the second-person, especially as his narratives favour the second-person pronoun 'you' over all others. In his use of 'you' Orwell is very much operating within his own 'poetics of composition'. Indeed, as we shall see when contrasting *A Clergyman's Daughter* with *Burmese Days*, Orwell was largely to abandon the more formal third-person pronoun 'one' and replace it with the informal second-person 'you'. Orwell, we know, was highly sensitive to class accents, famously ending *The Road to Wigan Pier* with 'we have nothing to lose but our aitches', and his use of 'you' reflects this. When referring to pronoun use Otto Jespersen's study of modern English grammar is invaluable because it explains much about how pronouns have evolved to connote highly specific meaning.[15] Other insights provided by Jespersen include, for example, the enduring use of 'you' in terms of abuse "'… you young devil, you'" (p. 1.30), which, of course, extends to much stronger expletory usage. The variety of ways Orwell 'talks' to the reader through a prolific use of 'you' reflect that he is part of a modernizing force in English language usage, one that is consciously moving away from the upper-class accents of 'one'. It should also be stressed that Orwell's abandonment of 'one' for 'you', whilst acting as a corrective to the distant and haughty tones of 'one', would probably carry with it a certain sensitivity surrounding its potential to generate political meaning. The ubiquitous 'you' in the left-wing propagandizing poetry of the Auden group would often signal 'comrade', which of course was anathema to Orwell, embodying as it did so strong a link with Stalinist sympathies.[16]

Another significant factor in Orwell's frequent use of 'you' in his narratives is that it denotes a preference for having an active sentence over a passive one. This is important because its insertion serves to foreground a subject, allowing for greater narrative play with voice and presence.[17] *Burmese Days*, for the first part,

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14 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chigago, 1985), p. 93.

15 Otto Jespersen, *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, vol. VII [1943] (London, 1949), p. 129.

16 It is worth noting that Orwell's closest novelistic companion of the thirties, Christopher Isherwood, has the strong class accents of Oxbridge in abundance in his novels, and however much implied criticism there might be of these voices, the novels remain firmly situated in the high-society world Isherwood inhabited. The following is typical:

> Mary was describing over the telephone, for the twentieth time, the awful scare they'd had at last week's concert, with the Spanish Quartet. The 'cello and second violin – poor little things, they were almost in tears – had left their parts of Dohnányi locked up in a hotel at Victoria …. (*The Memorial: Portrait of a Family* [1932] [London, 1952], p. 173)

Here again, it would be useful to reiterate Orwell's preference for proletarian literature, with its championing of the ordinary voice, because this is the voice that Orwell is continually attempting to get closer to, and his profuse use of 'you' is instrumental in this quest.

17 One of Orwell's grammatical rules in his 1946 essay, 'Politics and the English Language' is, 'Never use the passive where you can use the active' (*CW*, vol. XVII, pp. 421–32, [p. 430]).

uses the generic pronoun 'one', although importantly, it still operates in an identical way to that of its replacement 'you' in that the 'one' or 'you' narrating shares his protagonist's experiences as though he were side by side with him – Orwell is here experimenting with notions of hybridity that he would later develop, most notably in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. To give an example: Flory is pictured walking to the Club in the sweltering morning sun. The narrative runs: 'It was nearly nine o'clock and the sun was fiercer every minute. The heat throbbed down on one's head with a steady, rhythmic thumping like the blows from an enormous bolster' (p. 15). The distinct impression given is that this is not Flory's head being baked, but the narrator's; as it is when the narrator says, 'Beyond that was the European club, and when one looked at the Club ... one looked at the real centre of the town'. The narrator occupies the same space as his protagonist, and this is a feature of Orwell's narration that appears throughout his work. In fact, there is an aspect to the narration of *Burmese Days* that mirrors the kinds of authorial asides that pepper H. G. Wells's Condition of England fiction.[18] In *Burmese Days* the description of the racist and bigoted Ellis is as follows:

> Ellis really did hate Orientals – hated them with a bitter, restless loathing as something evil or unclean ... Any hint of friendly feeling towards an Oriental seemed to him a horrible perversity. He was an intelligent man and an able servant of his firm, but he was one of those Englishmen – common, unfortunately – who should never be allowed to set foot in the East (p. 21).

There are few who would argue that last sentence was not the voice of the author. In any case, it is the voice of someone who does not share the unpleasant predilections of Ellis. It is the voice of a more balanced and objective narrator. This is a cardinal point, because Orwell was largely to abandon any authorial obligation to objectivity in favour of a subjective indulgence, reflecting a growing awareness in Orwell of greater control over his political aesthetic.[19]

The generic pronoun 'you' does not make an appearance until about a third of the way through *Burmese Days*. The effect on the narrative voice is a highly significant one and it mirrors a similar use in his subsequent fictions. What 'you' effectively does is distance the author from a controlling authorial narrative voice. It will be

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18 Orwell has much in common with H. G. Wells in the discursive, proselytizing nature of his prose. One commentator writes that Orwell, like Wells, is a sociological writer who criticises society through the medium of the novel. He writes that this is achieved through dialogue, description and 'sometimes through directed authorial comment' (J. R. Hammond, *H. G. Wells and The Modern Novel* [London, 1988], p. 56). However, Orwell does not present his fiction in quite the same directly heuristic manner.

19 David Seed argues that the inability to distinguish between Flory's thoughts and Orwell's impairs the artistic and political credibility of the novel: 'The combination of guilt and over-involvement with his protagonist ... vitiates Orwell's presentation of empire' (Seed, p. 278). However, if we consider an alternative – that Orwell *means* to keep events within the subjective realm, firmly attached to the authorial umbilical cord, with all its 'messy' and emotional attachment, then the book would seem less of a failure and more artistically inclined to representations of the true-to-life. Orwell's increasing use of the more subjective pronoun 'you' would suggests this.

helpful to recall Lynette Hunter's view (cited above) of Orwell's narration of *Down and Out in Paris and London*:

> Reading this first chapter alone a reader might well conclude that such a narrator was blinkered, ignorant, prejudiced, sentimental, clichéd, or worse, snide and supercilious. Any judgements made on poverty would be invalid, coloured by his irrevocably narrow perspective (p. 15).

While, as explained above, I do not believe such conclusions can be reached in relation to Orwell's narration of that documentary work, I do believe that Orwell invests his fictional narrators with elements of these negative qualities, so that the narrator is like that of a first person as opposed to omniscient third. If we look at the first passage in *Burmese Days* to contain 'you' we can see the effect.

> What was at the centre of all his thoughts now, and what poisoned everything, was the ever bitterer hatred of the atmosphere of imperialism in which he lived. For as his brain developed – you cannot stop your brain developing, and it is one of the tragedies of the half-educated that they develop late, when they are already committed to some wrong way of life – he had grasped the truth about the English and their Empire (p. 68).

There is a suggestion that the confident aphorism inserted there could be made invalid because of the supercilious tone. 'It is one of the tragedies of the half-educated' could have dropped from the mouth of any one of Oscar Wilde's impossibly snooty and mordant social observers. But who is speaking? Whose unquestionable wisdom is it? I believe there is an element of persiflage operating which is there to undermine the narrative authority. Orwell, here, is distancing himself from one who claims 'unanswerable wisdom', and he is also getting closer to letting characters speak for themselves, as he will allow in subsequent novels through the medium of *free indirect thought*.

This kind of narrative device, which might be described as the renunciation of authorial hegemony, is in keeping with a general style of narration that refuses omniscience, one that gains ground steadily in *Burmese Days* and is, more importantly, a feature of subsequent novels from the outset where the 'other' voice is aligned with the voice of the protagonist.[20] And if one thinks of having many author-thinkers then it follows that they would not be wiser than an author who has rejected the responsibility of universal truth telling. When Flory makes one of his typical anti-imperial strikes such as 'The official holds the Burman down while the business man goes through his pockets' (p. 38) all might be well, that is, until Flory

20 Thus, in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, when we read, with regard to Dorothy, that 'Mr Warburton's hold over her was in the fact that he was a man and had the careless good humour and the intellectual largeness that women so seldom have', we should not rush to cite this as an instance of Orwell's narrow sexist judgement, for it is most certainly Dorothy's view. The clue to it being her perception comes in the next line: 'But why couldn't they leave you *alone*?' (p. 81). The last line is unmistakably *her* thought, which might coincide with Orwell's own feelings, but that is immaterial. Orwell comes to play more and more with this full psychological shift into *free indirect thought* – particularly lively in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.

adds, 'The British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to ... gangs of Jews and Scotchmen'. This political observation, then, whilst being partly true is shown as too complex for Flory's intellectual grasp; but, after all, he is just your 'average sensual man' and therefore limited.[21] The leitmotif of limitation works on all narrative levels. There is a crucial point in the book where Flory is tormented because he believes the woman he loves, Elizabeth Lackersteen, may be having an affair with the handsome and wealthy young Lieutenant, the Honourable Verrall:

> But meanwhile, was it true, what he suspected? Had Verrall really become Elizabeth's lover? There is no knowing, but on the whole the chances were against it, for, had it been so, there would have been no concealing it in such a place as Kyauktada (p. 236).

This kind of narration demonstrates that there is restricted vision, and this serves to limit the powers of the narrator. Again, it is the deliberate use of a 'limited intermediary' and this brings the reader into play. A sense, almost of deficiency, often strong in Flory's political commentary, is woven into the narrative, which undermines the asides, reflections, casual comments and universal truths expressed, so that nothing can be taken at face-value because the 'integrity' of the speaker is not, in a sense, known. Toward the end of the story, Verrall leaves without saying goodbye to Elizabeth. The narrative runs, 'Whether Verrall had started the train early to escape Elizabeth, or to escape the grass-wallahs, was an interesting question that was never cleared up' (p. 279). Of course, this also operates as a joke, but it is very much in keeping with an overall narrative caprice or seeming caprice that vacillates between omniscience and limitation – a feature of Orwell's political aesthetic throughout his writing career.[22]

Little has been said on point of view in *Animal Farm*, and yet much of the book is narrated by a limited intermediary, by a voice suggestive of someone acting as a spokesperson for the animals, and someone who wishes to believe in the promises of socialist progress being made to the animals. Consider the following reflection:

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21 Raymond Williams views Dorothy, Gordon and Bowling as failed Bloom characters because their range of consciousness is limited. Williams, failing to recognise Orwell's proletarian angle, and therefore the deliberate restriction of his characters' vision, argues that such characters are 'limited intermediaries'. Williams says that 'Shooting an Elephant' is more successful than *Burmese Days* 'because instead of a Flory an Orwell is present' (Raymond Williams, *Orwell* [1971] [Glasgow, 1978], p. 49). This last point is important because in Orwell's fiction it is the *nature* of limitation that Orwell, through various narrative devices, is exploring.

22 It is interesting to note Orwell's own commentary on the lighter aspects of his narration: 'I have not altered except in minor details the account of Dorothy's difficulties with the children's parents, and the row over 'Macbeth', as, making for the slight touch of burlesque, this is the kind of thing that does happen in these schools' ('List of Pre-Publication Revisions, 1934–5', *The Complete Works*, vol. III, p. 301). Another brilliantly light moment in *A Clergyman's Daughter* is where the unknown narrator comments on Dorothy's departure from the school, having been cheated out of money: 'It would be interesting to know whether this was another of the occasions when Mrs Creevy laughed' (p. 269). Again, the limited narrative perspective is being deliberately highlighted.

> Somehow it seemed as though the farm had grown richer without making the animals themselves any richer – except, of course, for the pigs and the dogs. Perhaps this was partly because there were so many pigs and so many dogs. It was not that these creatures did not work, after their fashion. There was, as Squealer was never tired of explaining, endless work in the supervision and organization of the farm. Much of this work was of a kind that the other animals were too ignorant to understand. For example, Squealer told them that the pigs had to expend enormous labour every day upon mysterious things called 'files', 'reports', 'minutes', and 'memoranda'. These were large sheets of paper which had to be closely covered with writing, and as soon as they were so covered, they were burnt in the furnace. This was of the highest importance for the welfare of the farm, Squealer said. But still, neither pigs nor dogs produced any food by their own labour; and there were very many of them, and their appetites were always good (p. 80).

The adverbs *somehow* and *perhaps* denote someone who does not have privileged information, who is not omniscient, and someone also who is attempting to justify suspicious behaviour; although, such is the questioning of their tone, and their quoting of Squealer, that the reader is left in no doubt as to what is really happening: *we* can see that it is not fair for the pigs to receive so much and return so little, and that the other animals are at all times being deceived by their leaders. On one level, Orwell's limited intermediary works to create for the reader the suspicious mental atmosphere that would predominate in such a climate, which is well demonstrated with regard to Snowball, the Trotsky figure. The reader never discovers who initially blew up the windmill, just as we do not find out who is the culprit of all the other atrocities; therefore, we are never quite sure if the destruction has come from within or without, which perfectly reflects the complex double-dealing machinations of totalitarian governments. Again, the significant detail is Orwell's awareness of his narrative approach.

I would like now to examine further how the omniscient narrator in *Burmese Days* operates, with a view to establishing Orwell's acute awareness of both *how* his narrator communicates, and similarly how that presence is felt, which will demonstrate engagement with 'the act of communication', such as described in the following:

> The initial question, then, is whether a narrator is present, and if he is, how his presence is recognized and how strongly it is felt by the audience. The narrator comes into existence when the story itself is made to seem a demonstrable act of communication.[23]

We can observe a self-conscious presence when, for example, we are given a potted history of Verrall's exploits. However, the interesting detail is that when there is no limited viewing position, no specific spatial angle, the narrative is more objective, operating with minimum bias and psychological richness. Take the use of the word 'offensive' that appears in Verrall's history (of which an omniscient narrator would have to be relied upon because no character in the story has prior knowledge of Verrall): 'Somehow, nothing very serious ever did happen to Verrall, however offensive he made himself' (p. 210). This is simply a statement of fact about Verrall's

23 Seymour Chatman, 'The Structure of Narrative Transmission', in Fowler's *Style and Structure in Literature* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 212–57 (p. 215).

behaviour to his fellow countrymen. This is not so when the word is employed as an adverb to describe Verrall sitting on his horse:

> He sat on his horse as though he were part of it, and he looked offensively young and fit. His fresh face was tanned to the exact shade that went with his light-coloured eyes, and he was as elegant as a picture with his white buckskin topi. ... Flory felt uncomfortable in his presence (p. 190).

The use of the modal adverb 'offensively' is from the perspective, the viewing position, of the older, and rather jealous Flory, who is neither young nor fit, but dearly wishes to be both. Similarly, the adjective 'fresh' is selected from the psychological point of view of Flory who, with his 'hideous birthmark', is far from 'fresh faced'. If readers are sympathetic, or even share Flory's sense of inferiority, then they could well agree with this description of Verrall, or alternatively, they could see that this is merely the opinion of a disgruntled man and think of Verrall more objectively. The essential point is that the reader is not being nudged into a specific way of viewing Verrall's character by an author who has his own opinions on the merits, or otherwise, of his characters. Moreover, with such distinctions in voice, Orwell shows awareness for the literary questions surrounding 'who sees?' and 'who speaks?' (as identified by Gérard Genette), which again, testifies to his artistic control over narrative voice.[24]

This increasing distaste for neutrality by Orwell in his narration can be traced through the excessive use of the second-person 'you' in *A Clergyman's Daughter* and the novels that follow. Unlike *Burmese Days*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* opens with the informal 'you'. It serves to create a subjective, intimate mood from the outset, and the voice that follows, while not Dorothy's, is aligned with her way of seeing and thinking, as Hunter points out, and gives the illusion that the narrator is an active participant in the story: 'The alarm clock continued its nagging, feminine clamour, which would go on for five minutes or thereabouts if you did not stop it' (p. 1). It would be natural enough to write this as a passive sentence and thus avoid the subject 'you': 'which would go on for five minutes or thereabouts if *it were not stopped*' [my italics], but to do that would create a more objective commentary. The passive sentence is practically non-existent in his thirties' novels. Moreover, it is the narrator behind the 'you' that is significant. Who is speaking here? Who would be inclined to describe the alarm of a clock as a 'nagging, feminine clamour'?

Daphne Patai believes that the description of the 'nagging' clock unwittingly betrays a masculine bias, one that will subsequently fall short in portraying a female character with any real sympathy: 'If the book's title prepares us for a narrative about a woman, the novel's second line reveals that this woman and her story will be judged from a conventionally biased masculine perspective' (Patai, p. 99). Patai does not consider that Orwell has intentionally opted for this patriarchal inferiorization of female association in the description. This is more likely to be Dorothy's *feeling* toward the clock that might wake her father, which, if it did, would certainly be

24 Genette explains how the question of 'who sees?' or 'who perceives?' is connected with a question of mood, and 'who speaks?' with a question of voice. For further discussion of Genette's study of focalization see *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York, 1983), p. 64.

viewed by him as 'nagging, feminine clamour'.[25] Dorothy is even afraid to let the bath water run freely lest it awaken her father: 'Dorothy filled the bath as slowly as possible – the splashing always woke her father if she turned on the tap too fast' (p. 2). So the narrative, whilst appearing to have a sexist bias, is actually always aligned with Dorothy's point of view. A good indication of this is where we see Dorothy having just got out of bed on her way downstairs to the kitchen to clear the ashes from the range. She has to feel her way about 'With care – for the kitchen table had a nasty trick of reaching out in the darkness and banging you on the hip-bone' (p. 2). As it is the hip-bone that is bashed – females being generally shorter, so more at table height, and their hip-bones more prominent, i.e., more likely to be bashed – one gets the sense that it is a female voice speaking. This is reinforced quite starkly later in the book when the inside of the women's hut is described in the hop-picking scenes from the unmistakable perspective of a woman: 'At half past five, at a tap on the wall of your hut, you crawled out of your sleeping nest and began searching for your shoes, amid sleepy curses from the women' (p. 108). Indeed, throughout the hop-picking scenes a more feminine voice conveys the descriptions, and gives the impression that we are receiving Dorothy's impressions. Take the following detailing of the actual hop-picking:

> As the afternoon wore on you grew almost too tired to stand, and the small green hop lice got into your hair and into your ears and worried you .... Yet you were happy, with an unreasonable happiness. The work took hold of you and absorbed you ... and yet you never wearied of it; when the weather was fine and the hops were good you had the feeling that you could go on picking for ever and for ever (pp. 113–14).

It is particularly that last sentence, 'for ever and for ever'. It has a romantic, fairy-tale 'happy ever after' quality, and also a whimsical strain that one more readily associates with a young woman than with an older, hardened, objective political journalist. At such moments the narrator and subject are conflated. Again, this has the effect of distancing the authorial voice, and giving us one that is, instead, in tune with Dorothy's, *is* Dorothy. Substituting 'one' for 'you' illustrates how ludicrous the former would sound, with the subject being repeated so often. Read the above paragraph and substitute 'one' for 'you' and it will read like a Noel Coward parody. Orwell would have been sensitive to this and his abandonment of 'one' in the narration of *Burmese Days* testifies to this. Consider the narrator here talking about the monsoon season in Burma:

> [T]hen suddenly the monsoon blew eastward, first in sharp squalls, then in a heavy ceaseless downpour that drenched everything *until neither one's clothes, one's bed nor even one's food ever seemed to be dry* [my italics] (p. 66).

25 Smyer argues persuasively that Dorothy is suffering from a deeply traumatizing incest anxiety around her father. Smyer provides numerous indications of this, the most striking being her father's surname of Hare, which takes on more significance when one considers Dorothy's revulsion at the thought of furry animals. Warburton too is seen as compounding Dorothy's anxiety, particularly because he is another father figure (Smyer, p. 43). And when one reads that Dorothy 'had had her share, and rather more than her share, of casual attention from men' (*ACD*, p. 81) the innuendo would appear to strengthen Smyer's claims.

Here, the possessive 'one's' has inescapable aristocratic tones, but more than this it carries an individual emphasis. Jespersen explains how, 'As a general rule, it may be said that *one* is preferred for the generic person if referring to the speaker himself – *you* if referring to the hearer' (p. 154); and this rule, of course, applying no less to the possessive forms.[26] Therefore, if Orwell were to use the possessive pronoun 'your' instead of "one's" then the narrative voice would touch the reader who is 'the hearer'. 'One' does make an appearance in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. When Dorothy is journeying to the hopfields of Kent with Nobby and his friends they have to stop and beg for food:

> One person can beg for his food easily enough on the road, and even two can manage it, but it is a very different matter when there are four people together. In such circumstances one can only keep alive if one hunts for food as persistently and single-mindedly as a wild beast (p. 95).

The voice of the narrator here is impersonal; the reader, 'the hearer', is not being included. Its use is consistent with a narrator who does not wish to include the reader in such ignominious activity.

Hunter comments on the use of 'you' in Orwell's early novels. Referring to *A Clergyman's Daughter* she concludes that there are often ambiguous uses of this pronoun so making it impossible to know whether we are being given Dorothy's thoughts or the narrator's. She highlights a comment made in church: 'You could have imagined that there was only a dry skeleton inside the black overcoat' (p. 14). She writes, 'But for the measured discursive structure of the note it could be Dorothy speaking; and even then one is not sure that it is the narrator alone for, after all, the macabre observation is appropriate to her state of mind' (p. 29). Hunter's comments here allow us to draw attention to Orwell's unique organisation of thought. If Dorothy could express herself, this is exactly how she would describe Miss Mayfill, and there are clear indications in the narrative that declare a commitment to staying within the character's mental atmosphere or modality.[27] Dorothy is in church, fighting a losing battle against 'sacrilegious thoughts', hence the endless needling of herself in penance for her transgressions, particularly for her feelings toward Miss Mayfill. Observe the following description of Miss Mayfill, and then Dorothy's reaction:

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26 Jespersen provides an adroit illustration of this principle in a sample of dialogue taken from Jack London's *Martin Eden*, which is a semi-autobiographical novel about a struggling writer:

> Miss Ruth asks Martin: "By the way, Mr Eden, what is *booze*? You used it several times, you know." "Oh, booze," he laughed. "It's slang. It means whisky and beer – anything that will make you drunk." – This makes her say: "Don't use 'you' when you are impersonal. 'You' is very personal, and your use of it just now was not precisely what you meant." "I don't just see that." "Why, you said just now to me, 'whisky and beer – anything that will make you drunk' – make *me* drunk, don't you see?" "Well, it would, wouldn't it?" "Yes, of course," she smiled, "but it would be nicer not to bring me into it. Substitute 'one' for 'you,' and see how much better it sounds." (p. 154).

27 When the narrative voice is unclear, it has been said of this kind of representation that, 'It is often regarded as a fusion of narratorial and character voices, a "dual" voice in the terms of Pascal' (Simpson, p. 23). Orwell, it would seem, is experimenting with narratorial duality.

> It was not an appetising mouth; not the kind of mouth that you would like to see drinking out of your cup. Suddenly, spontaneously, as though the Devil himself had put it there, the prayer slipped from Dorothy's lips: 'O God, let me not have to take the chalice after Miss Mayfill!' (p. 9)

Clearly, Dorothy has been thinking about what an unappetising mouth it is when she should be thinking about being cleansed of mortal sin through the blood of salvation. She would be aware that it would be difficult for her to enter into a 'state of grace' having drunk the blood of Christ with a mind so 'polluted' with disgust for a fellow being. Dorothy's thought processes are a main feature of the novel, and Orwell's development of Dorothy's mind is particularly interesting; for, by the end of the book she is well on her way to independence of mind.

Dorothy's mental turn-around begins with the narrator having to help her out when she struggles, in her conversation with Mr Warburton, to support her argument regarding her need for faith in the absence of actual belief:

> What she would have said was that though her faith had left her, she had not changed, could not change, did not want to change, the spiritual background of her mind; that her cosmos, though now it seemed to her empty and meaningless, was still in a sense the Christian cosmos. ... but she could not put this into words (p. 286).

In lieu of the sophisticated language needed to express her thoughts we are told that Dorothy 'concluded lamely': 'Somehow I feel that it's better for me to go on as I was before' (p. 286). However, after her return to Knype Hill, we see that she has been grappling with the problem of lack of faith, and also with Mr Warburton's damning forecast regarding her future life as an impoverished spinster:

> It was not that she was in any doubt about the external facts of her future. She could see it all quite clearly before her .... Whatever happened, at the very best, she had to face the destiny that is common to all lonely and penniless women ....
>
> But it didn't matter, it didn't matter! That was the thing that you could never drive into the heads of the Mr Warburtons of this world ... that mere outward things like poverty and drudgery, and even loneliness, don't matter in themselves. It is the things that happen in your heart that matter (p. 291).

Dorothy's thoughts continue page after page, and at one point she asks herself, 'Where had she gone, that well-meaning, ridiculous girl who had prayed ecstatically in the summer-scented fields and pricked her arm as a punishment for sacrilegious thoughts?' (p. 292). There are clear indicators operating to show that we are getting Dorothy's thoughts directly, and not those of the narrator: 'Where had she got to? She had been saying that if death ends all, then there is no hope and no meaning in anything. Well, what then?' (p. 294). Here the narration has signalled that Dorothy's transformation to independent thinker is now complete. We do still get a glimpse of the old Dorothy, that 'ridiculous girl': 'What on earth have I been doing all this time? .... She admonished herself. Come on, Dorothy! No slacking, please!' (p. 295). However, these are merely the vestigial traces of her old customary habit; and while they do, and probably will, mark her out as inappropriately girlish, they will mask a deeply thoughtful and mature inner self. It is surely incorrect for Hunter to conclude

that, 'before [Orwell] discovered techniques adequate to his writing, his conclusions simply failed' (p. 35). *A Clergyman's Daughter*, she insists, fails because Dorothy could not find a compromise. The blame for this she puts firmly at the author's door: 'The narrator ... fail[s] to suggest any adequate alternative for the character's way of life' (p. 28). Such criticism fails to engage with the richness of the narrative that forecasts a decidedly more hopeful future for Dorothy:

> The smell of glue was the answer to her prayer. She did not know this. She did not reflect, consciously, that the solution to her difficulty lay in accepting the fact that there was no solution; that if one gets on with the job that lies to hand, the ultimate purpose of the job fades into insignificance; that faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable. She could not formulate these thoughts as yet, she could only live them. Much later, perhaps, she would formulate them and draw comfort from them (p. 295).

Dorothy's self-assuredness comes then because intuitively she is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable. The narrative line that runs, 'She could not formulate these thoughts as yet, she could only live them' demonstrates a future saving maturity. From this sentence we perceive that not formulating her thoughts is what Dorothy has been doing throughout the book until its end, which is one of the reasons for her memory loss. It is interesting that the narrator uses the word 'perhaps' in relation to how Dorothy might formulate her thoughts in the future. Again, this demonstrates a spatio-temporal consistency. We see Dorothy only at this time and place, and as the narrator is situated in that same time and place, and this strengthens the narrative commitment to *her* point of view, he has no powers to see what will happen beyond. It has the effect of visually enlarging the moment because of the concentration of focus.

In terms of the narrative richness of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, we can now say something about representations of thought that suggest Orwell himself. The effect is the fading in and fading out of a character by a narrator who occupies the same spatio-temporal point. Observe the following narration of Dorothy's plight:

> ... there were other times when her nerves were more on edge than usual, and when she looked round at the score of silly little faces, grinning or mutinous, she found it possible to hate them. *Children are so blind, so selfish, so merciless. They do not know when they are tormenting you past bearing, and if they did know they would not care* [my italics] (p. 250).

We can see a pattern here. There is a detailed description of hardship – Dorothy's hardship – and then, through the use of 'you', a figure, more mature, who has clearly had experience of such children, the figure of Orwell himself, fades back in again, beginning with 'Children are so blind ....' This is about shared experience and this objective figure suggests Orwell, the former teacher. As it does in the following:

> ... and yet if you are forced to bore them and oppress them, they will hate you for it without ever asking themselves whether it is you who are to blame. How true – when you happen not to be a schoolteacher yourself – how true those often-quoted lines sound –

Under a cruel eye outworn
The little ones spend the day
In sighing and dismay!

But when you yourself are the cruel eye outworn, you realise that there is another side to the picture (pp. 250–51).

More and more in the scenes detailing Dorothy's school experiences there is a feeling that Orwell, with his multiple uses of 'you' and 'you yourself', is referring to himself. This increasingly becomes the case, so much so that Dorothy is quite forgotten, such is the presence of this other voice. Moreover, the language employed by the 'other' narrator becomes more and more familiar to the point of being deliberately intrusive:

> There are, by the way, vast numbers of private schools in England. Second-rate, third-rate and fourth-rate (Ringwood House was a specimen of the fourth-rate school), they exist by the dozen and the score in every London suburb and every suburban town (p. 239).

It is in the use of the term 'by the way' that the narrator moves the reader even further away from Dorothy's point of view. The reader is being 'hailed' in the Althusserian sense by a narrator who resembles the author. The important feature is that Orwell deliberately exposes, with such interpellation, an awareness of an authorial intrusion. This 'by the way' is an instance of what Goffman would call 'breaking frame'.[28] It allows the narrator to talk comfortably, at some length, about such schools – the percentage that will come under government inspection, how such schools are started and so on. Again, the emphasis here is on the *deliberate* inclusion of such a device.[29] It allows Orwell to show that Dorothy's experience is not unique but typical: the individual is also a representative type. Here, discursive information about third-rate schools and the like is not stuck on in order to air a grievance for propagandist purposes but is part of the essential fabric of this new experimental art form in political realism. Similarly, when Orwell wants to talk about teaching, he does not feel the need to disguise the fact that he is imparting his wisdom derived from his own experience:

> There is no dealing with children, even with children who are fond of you, unless you can keep your prestige as an adult; let that prestige be once damaged, and even the best-hearted children will despise you (p. 245).

There is now an overwhelming sense that this is the author speaking about his personal experiences, and that he is happy to continue making his presence felt

28 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Harmondsworth, 1975). Goffman uses his concept of 'frame analysis' to aid in the understanding of different sorts of reality.

29 Orwell, having had experience of such fourth-rate schools did, of course, wish to expose them, and it was a matter of great annoyance that he had to resist because his publisher Gollancz feared another libel suit. He writes, 'The description of Dorothy's first lesson at the school has been toned down, with a view to giving a less exaggerated impression of the low standard prevailing in these schools' ('List of Pre-Publication Revisions, 1934–5', p. 301).

through such interruptions. Take the following, which is describing the eagerness of the girls to be elected as helpers to their teacher Dorothy:[30]

> The two girls who were 'monitors' for the week, and whose job it was to clean the blackboard, collect exercise books and so forth (children will fight for the privilege of doing jobs of that kind), leapt from their place to fetch the half-finished contour map ... (p. 242).

Orwell is increasingly interrupting now. In the above it is in parenthesis. Taylor insists that such digressions and interruptions give one 'the sense of a novel endlessly pulling itself back from the brink of turning into a *New Statesman* article' and this is 'rather too strong for comfort' (Taylor, p. 139). Not being comfortable with Orwell's style is a common complaint. I would suggest that one is not meant to be wholly comfortable with it. Instead, one is meant to reflect on the issues being raised, which is precisely what makes it a polemical work. In this, Orwell employs many of the alienating and defamiliarization effects that Brecht adopts for his Epic theatre.

Orwell's Hold over His Fictional Reality: Dorothy's Story

Many critics argue that Orwell largely fails to develop Dorothy's character, and this is because Dorothy, they suggest, is woefully insipid from the outset. For example:

> Orwell adds to his difficulties by deliberately selecting a watery personality as his centre. Dorothy is not only pale in appearance, she is pale in her responses. There are no extremes in her personality, no energy in her actions. At times she seems to fade into the detailed background.[31]

As shown above, Dorothy is far from pale in her responses – she is both brave and intellectual. Nevertheless there are times when Dorothy does fade into the detailed background, but this is not a failure of narrative control, it is Orwell desiring that the frame dominates.[32] Consider the above criticism in relation to the following extract, where again, Orwell, through the use of the second-person pronoun 'you', has arguably brought himself into the picture:[33]

> It was a life that wore you out, used up every ounce of your energy, and kept you profoundly, unquestionably happy. In the literal sense of the word, it stupefied you. The long days in the fields, the coarse food and insufficient sleep, the smell of hops and wood

30 Brecht broke with the established conventions of theatrical realism by having actors remain on stage at all times, and in so doing exposed the mechanisms behind the illusory reality of drama. The aim was to have audiences reflect on what they were seeing, which in turn was meant to encourage greater societal and political reflection in the theatre goers.

31 Jenni Calder, *Chronicles of Conscience: A Study of George Orwell and Arthur Koestler* (London, 1968), p. 87.

32 Note also the first sentence: 'Orwell adds to his difficulties'. Critics are forever suggesting that Orwell struggles with his writing as if most writers do not.

33 Dierdre Beddoe in her essay, 'Hindrances and Help-Meets: Women in the Writings of George Orwell', constantly refers to Dorothy as 'pathetic'. See *Inside the Myth*, pp. 139–54.

> smoke, lulled you into an almost beast-like heaviness. Your wits seemed to thicken, just as your skin did, in the rain and sunshine and perpetual fresh air (*ACD*, p. 121).

Here, Orwell demonstrates how one's personality is submerged into non-existence through laborious work. In many ways Dorothy's character has been submerged from the outset by her upbringing. Indeed, our first glimpse of Dorothy is to see her lying 'on her back looking into the darkness in extreme exhaustion' (p. 1). Dorothy is presented spatially as barely distinguishable from that background. This is not a weakness, but the very dramatisation of Dorothy's situation. The point is not to view this kind of 'fading' as flawed, because background, the causes of the fading, is the focus of the novel. If we think again of Simpson's assertion that 'narrative point of view is arguably the very essence of a story's style', then the author/character dualism of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is Orwell's unique narrative style. Furthermore, to look for strong personalities in Orwell's novels is as futile as it is pointless; they are not meant to be exceptional, outstanding or gregarious. They are meant to be ordinary, beaten down by circumstances – by the conditions of life, and it is in tracing the trajectory of their respective journeys to a more hopeful position in the world, with the exception of Flory in *Burmese Days*, that Orwell makes his especial authorial task.

One of the most frequent criticisms of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is that Dorothy's memory loss is 'implausible'.[34] I find the accusation astonishing. From the very beginning of the book Dorothy's memory loss has been anticipated. The book opens with Dorothy awaking from a 'troubling dream' in a state of 'extreme exhaustion'. We are told that she is 'aching from head to foot' (p. 1). It is five-thirty in the morning and she is preparing to do the household chores, *before* her own round of unpaid curate duties begins, while the maid is snoring soundly in bed. All the time she is trying to shut out thoughts of her father's humiliating debts. When she suddenly remembers the worst, Cargill's bill, we are told: 'A deadly pang, an actual physical pang, had gone through her viscera' (p. 4). And, as all these earthly worries rage in her head, we observe Dorothy's absurd, and by contrast, bathetic mental response: 'Come on, Dorothy! In you go! No funking, please! Then she stepped resolutely into the bath ... and let the icy girdle of water slide up her body' (p. 2). When Dorothy's thoughts are presented in this way we can readily observe that there is not much mental activity going on; but, as made clear above, Dorothy, when at leisure to think,

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34 Implausibility seems to be the chief complaint against Dorothy and the book as a whole. Daphne Patai writes, 'Dorothy does not suffer a breakdown; she suffers from a creator, Orwell, who, having invented a female protagonist, does not know how to get her out of the house and into the street where he wants to place her' (*The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology* [Amherst, 1984], p. 97). Similarly, Jenni Calder insists that, 'Dorothy … is the least successful of Orwell's fictional rebels. He is just not able to get far enough inside an unfamiliar consciousness' (*Chronicles of Conscience*, p. 87). Regarding her memory loss, she writes, 'It seems that Orwell deliberately removed from her actions all sense of motive' (p. 88). There is not a single example from the text to demonstrate this apparent lack, as there is none when she writes, '*A Clergyman's Daughter* is the least successful of Orwell's novels. He himself acknowledged this. Most of the reasons for its failure stem directly from Orwell's own uncertain position as a member of the middle class' (p. 89).

as in church, is tormented by 'sacrilegious thoughts' that prompt her to positively self-harm: 'She drew the pin again from her lapel and drove it into her arm so hard that it was all she could do to suppress a cry of pain' (p. 10). The line immediately before 'Come on, Dorothy', is 'She drove herself forward with her usual exhortations'. One gets a sense of cattle being herded, with Dorothy effectively being her own herder. Indeed, there is a quality of schizophrenia in Dorothy as she labours in vain against 'utter[ing] deadly blasphemy upon the altar steps' (p. 10). Throughout the book Dorothy's state of mind is compared to that of an animal: the 'beast-like heaviness' and so on. When she loses her memory the narrator tells us 'she merely *saw*, as an animal sees, without speculation and almost without consciousness' (p. 85). The essential point is that she is being *prevented* from thinking by the pressures of her over-worked life. At all times the narrator takes care to let the reader understand that the demands of Dorothy's life, both mental and physical, are waging a damaging war of attrition on her already overwrought senses:

> Dorothy pressed her fingers against her eyes. She had not yet succeeded in concentrating her thoughts – indeed, the memory of Cargill's bill was still worrying her intermittently. The prayers, which she knew by heart, were flowing through her head unheeded (p. 7).

A picture of a girl struggling under the weight of immense tensions builds and builds with pressure-cooker intensity. There is Cargill's bill; the jumble sale to raise money for the collapsing belfry floor; the three pounds nineteen and fourpence that has to last her 'thirty nine further days', and note the precise details of figures, there is no vague notion of money being owed but a very exact tally and so much the more menacing. Then there are the costumes she has to make for the school play: 'For the moment she had even forgotten the bill for twenty-one pounds seven and ninepence at Cargill's. She could think of nothing save that fearful mountain of unmade clothes that lay ahead of her' (p. 61). So it goes on. On top of this there are the extremely upsetting feelings caused by the repulsive sexual attentions of the obscene Mr Warburton, to say nothing of the incest anxiety surrounding her father.[35] Robert Lee is particularly perceptive here. He points out that Dorothy not only suffers at the hands of her brutally insensitive father, but she daily has to witness her father's callous and unchristian treatment of his parishioners, epitomised by the Reverend's refusal to attend a dying baby because it will interrupt his breakfast, all of which daily undermine Dorothy's faith. Lee writes, 'all these reveal him [her father] to be enough in himself to drive a person to mental breakdown' (p. 30). Lee is equally incisive regarding the book's attack on the Church of England through Dorothy's father. Lee refers to the 'Miltonic indignation at the corrupt clergy' (Lee, p. 29) expressed in the book.

And if more proof were needed regarding the plausibility of Dorothy's mental collapse, take the three scenes prior to Dorothy's memory loss, which are assiduous in their commitment to detailing the exhausting and intolerable pressures she is undergoing; and notice how particular attention is given to showing how they are impeding her powers of mental calculation. There is also potent symbolism operating

35 In the original version Orwell writes that Warburton 'tried to rape Dorothy'. See Peter Davison's Penguin references on pp. vi (41/2).

in the final scenes, prior to her breakdown, in the form of the jackboots which await her at the rectory, which, if we think of the brutal 'boot stamping on a human face *forever'* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, lends the text a further layering of meaning associated with ideas of pressure. The crucial point of Dorothy's breakdown begins when she appears at the 'noisy rehearsal' of *Charles I*: 'It was horribly hot in the conservatory, and there was a powerful smell of glue and the sour sweat of children. Dorothy was kneeling on the floor, with her mouth full of pins' (p. 58). We are told that 'with half her mind' Dorothy is meditating upon the two pairs of jackboots she must make for Charles I. 'With the other half' she is listening to the 'angry shouts' of the schoolteacher, Victor who is barking out his commands to the unruly children. Dorothy here is framed mute and kneeling in the thick of a hot, stuffy hall amid 'angry shouts', her mind equally choked by consideration of the boots and Victor's shouting. We are told that she is working 'against time' as the play is only 'a fortnight distant'. Her work is described as 'feverish' (p. 61). When the play rehearsal is at an end, Victor engages Dorothy in conversation. Here we see a very tightly controlled narrative, often working symbolically when it shows Dorothy as literally impeded in her effort to talk because her mouth is often 'gagged' with the tools of her present occupation. It is also significant that Victor, the moment the rehearsal is over, is described thus: 'He watched the children out, and then, having forgotten their existence as soon as they were out of his sight, produced a page of music from his pocket' (p. 62). Victor's mind, then, has been divested of the burden of the play and he can move on to other, more indulgent, pursuits. Dorothy in contrast enjoys no such privilege. What is more the narrative takes care to show it. The conversation between Victor and Dorothy opens, somewhat ironically, thus (the salient lines are italicised), '"I was thinking"', said Dorothy *as she stopped her machine and snipped off the thread*, "we might make those helmets out of old bowler hats"' (p. 63). Notice that her sentence is broken by the narrator detailing her preoccupation with her work. Practically all of her conversation is given in this manner: '"You know he'll only say no," said Dorothy, *threading a needle to sew the buttons on the doublet*' (p. 63) '"I know it's dreadful," admitted Dorothy, *sewing on her button*' (p. 65). '"No, I'm afraid I didn't," said Dorothy, *holding another button in position with her thumb*' (p. 66). '"That's not true!" said Dorothy rather sharply *as she pressed the third button into place*' (p. 67). The subject matter between the two has been varied and discursive, ranging from the possibility of Dorothy asking her father if they might have a Catholic-style procession, to a discussion of Bertrand Russell on Modernism and Free Thought. However, Dorothy is shown to be more engaged with her work than the conversation.

The next scene is the penultimate one where Dorothy visits Mr Warburton's house. The most telling detail comes when she is getting ready to leave. Mr Warburton asks her another of his 'clever' questions. The narrator tells us:

> Dorothy did not answer. Her conscience had given her another and harder jab – she had remembered those wretched, unmade jackboots, and the fact that at least one of them had got to be made tonight. She was, however, unbearably tired. *She had had an exhausting afternoon, starting off with ten miles or so of bicycling to and fro in the sun*, delivering the parish magazine, and continuing with the Mothers' Union tea in the hot little wooden-walled room [my italics] (pp. 74–5).

The catalogue of her duties performed that day ends with: 'and after supper she had weeded the pea rows until the light failed and her back seemed to be breaking. With one thing and another, she was even more tired than usual' (p. 75). On top of her physical exertions Dorothy is also having to contend with the impossible demands of piety: 'She would, she suddenly decided, make two jackboots tonight instead of only one, as a penance for the hour she had wasted' (p. 76). To compound her anxiety Mr Warburton makes yet another of his sexual advances whereupon Dorothy is filled with the repugnant vision of the 'furry thighs of satyr' once again. The chapter ends with her 'aching' and 'sticky eyed' boiling up the glue pot in readiness to make the jackboots. The narrator comments:

> Moreover, there was a somehow exceptional quality about her tiredness tonight. She felt, in an almost literal sense of the words, washed out. As she stood beside the table she had a sudden, very strange feeling as though her mind had been entirely emptied (p. 84).

If we were merely told that Dorothy's tiredness was of 'exceptional quality' immediately prior to her breakdown then there might be grounds for accusing the text of inadequacy. However, as the above detail shows, there is a tremendous amount of attention given to the build up to her nervous breakdown, and if one reads the text attentively then her memory loss should not come as a surprise.

Peter Davison provides a commentary on the ending of *A Clergyman's Daughter* that demonstrates the book's adherence to continuity and closure in Dorothy's development. Davison begins by recalling Patrick Reilly's observation that 'Dorothy's odyssey [concludes] with her return to her father, the Rector, but not to her Father in Heaven'.[36] Davison points to the metaphoric significance of the glue in both its solution and smell:

> And finally, in the last two sentences of the book there comes Dorothy's (and, I think, Orwell's) solution. The problem of faith and no faith has vanished and 'with pious concentration' she works at her task. The word 'pious' and the implicit likening of the smell of the glue to the burning of incense are telling. Where shall she (and Orwell) go? As Basil Willey puts it in his introduction to Rutherford, 'in the direction, perhaps, of what is now (since Bonhoeffer) called "religionless Christianity" (Davison, p. 64).

Indeed, the inescapable symbolism of the glue reveals how tightly constructed the text is, especially when considered in relation to the idea of Dorothy's 'odyssey'.[37]

Keep the Aspidistra Flying and Psychological Perspective

As I have suggested, Gordon Comstock in no way enacts the author's dissatisfaction with the moneyed world by his renunciation of it. Bakhtin's analysis of Dostoevsky's

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36 Patrick Reilly, *George Orwell: The Age's Adversary* (1986), p. 120.

37 Such holistic appreciation of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is refreshing because the majority of positive praise is given only to parts, with statements like the following being typical: 'The fifty pages on the private school are the best writing in the book' (Laurence Brander, *George Orwell* [London, 1954], p. 98).

poetics was invoked to reflect how *his* characters, unlike Orwell's, are not 'illuminated by a single authorial consciousness', but instead, realised through 'a plurality of consciousnesses'. For the remainder of this chapter I will examine in more detail the ways in which Gordon's consciousness is explored, and, more importantly, how the text resists promoting any real engagement or sympathy with his point of view.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying, though a third-person narrative, is written heavily from the psychological perspective, the singularly soured perspective of its anti-hero Gordon Comstock. Roger Fowler explains:

> *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* takes a long stride toward a richer psychological presentation, for in his novel, as in *Coming Up for Air* three years later, Orwell makes use of modern linguistic techniques to suggest unique mind-styles for his heroes. In a nutshell, he had read and was influenced by *Ulysses* (Fowler, p. 140).

Whilst I do not accept that this book is psychologically richer than *A Clergyman's Daughter*, it is certainly radically different narratorally. Fowler demonstrates how much of the viewpoint in the narrative is focalized through Gordon's consciousness using, as already touched upon, *free indirect thought*. Fowler believes Orwell to be solely indebted to Joyce for knowledge of this narrative technique, but Orwell's extensive reading, particularly of George Gissing, and his familiarity with the pioneers of this method, most notably Jane Austen, would suggest he was not so reliant on *Ulysses* for this awareness. Nevertheless, Fowler's work on Orwell is invaluable, particularly for the ways in which he lists the various stratagems Orwell employs to denote character perspective, colloquial terms, exclamation marks, orientating words and so on (see Fowler, pp. 140–48).

It is important to establish that in some important respects Gordon is not an anti-hero at all. He is certainly not an anti-hero like his descendents, the obnoxious Jimmy Porter, for example, in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and the most famous, perhaps owing to the book's comic brilliance, being Jim Dixon of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, whose laddishness and I-don't-give-a-damn attitude is applauded by the author. One can empathize with anti-heroes; we wish we had the guts to behave like they do. And the author will employ key strategies to prompt our sympathies for the poor devil who is losing the battle with the forces of conventionalism or whatever it might be, usually by making everyone else, especially those who wish to halt the hero's excesses, look dreary, pompous or absurd. There is virtually no prompting for the reader to get on Gordon's side. Interestingly, most critics have drawn parallels between Orwell and Gordon. However, Orwell is far closer to Gordon's aristocratic friend Ravelston, the editor of the left-wing magazine *Antichrist*. In class, disposition and stature there are striking resemblances between Ravelston and Orwell. Orwell was for a time the literary editor of the socialist weekly journal *Tribune*, then run by Aneurin Bevan. This is how the young Canadian poet, Paul Potts, remembers Orwell at this time:

> I once caught [Orwell] putting a ten (shilling) note into an envelope to send back to someone some poems that even he couldn't publish. When I saw him doing this he'd looked as guilty as if he'd been a boy caught stealing jam .... For me he was the quintessence of

> an English gentleman with his corners rubbed off. In this man's presence there are kings who could have looked parvenus.[38]

Potts says that Orwell was 'far too kind a man to be an effective editor' (*RO*, p. 139). So, when we read in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* that Ravelston 'had not merely a charm of manner, but also a kind of fundamental decency, a graceful attitude to life' (p. 90), and that he 'was so used to encouraging despondent poets' (p. 91) we might easily think of Orwell at *Tribune*. Orwell certainly did not have the easy aristocratic qualities of Ravelston, nor indeed his money, but Orwell was a gentleman who wore tailored suits, which, like Ravelston's, are the only kind that can become aristocratically shabby (*KTAF*, p. 175).[39] One has only to read *The Road to Wigan Pier* to understand that Orwell could never be mistaken for anything other than a gentleman by the working classes, something Gordon is never mistaken for, much to his chagrin.

This brings us to the question of what Gordon represents in the novel (developed further in the next chapter). Gordon is representative of the hopeless class instinct that existed in England at this time, which – and this is crucial to understanding Orwell's definition of the proletarian class – is all the more hopeless because it is based on imagined differences. This 'politics of minor difference' is heightened by the contrast set up between Gordon and Ravelston. Between these two there is a real difference of breeding: 'Besides Ravelston's taller, comelier figure [Gordon] looked frail, fretful and miserably shabby' (p. 90). Moreover, that Gordon should possess such a high opinion of himself, when he is of decidedly average talent, and also shallow, cruel, and amoral – constantly taking his sister's meagre savings – demonstrates that his beliefs in his superiority are founded on nothing. His second-rate public school may have taught him that society regards him as above other men, but reality is all too apparently against him. Such a view of Gordon is suggested from the outset, and when one considers the closure of the book, where Gordon comes to see himself for what he is: an ordinary man with an ordinary outlook, it is all but confirmed. Such an ending testifies to the thematic consistency of the book. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is not only technically tightly controlled from beginning to end but has also a well-defined socio-political agenda running through it. Again, to what extent we can believe in Gordon's class U-turn perhaps demands some suspension of reality.

Our introduction to Gordon shows a 'moth-eaten' man 'loung[ing]' across a table. He is in the bookshop where he has come in order that he will be free 'to write', that is, to pursue his literary pretensions. The following passage is typical of Gordon's thought processes, and demonstrates well his misguided arrogance:

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38 Potts, in *Remembering Orwell*, ed. Stephen Wadhams (Harmondsworth, 1984), p. 139, hereafter *RO*.

39 Stephen Wadhams provides details of Orwell's clothing history: 'Denny and Sons outfitted Eric Blair with made-to-measure clothes throughout his life, and a quick glance through the old, stiff-covered order books confirms that he invariably bought the best cloth' (*RO*, p. 28).

> There were fifteen or twenty shelves of poetry. Gordon regarded them sourly. Dud stuff, for the most part. A little above eye-level, already on their way to heaven and oblivion, were the poets of yesteryear, the stars of his earlier youth. Yeats, Davies, Housman, Thomas, De La Mare, Hardy. Dead stars. Below them, exactly at eye-level, were the squibs of the passing minute. Eliot, Pound, Auden, Campbell, Day Lewis, Spender. Very damp squibs, that lot. Dead stars above, damp squibs below. Shall we ever again get a writer worth reading? But Lawrence was all right, and Joyce even better before he went off his coco-nut (p. 12).

There is no reported thought; it is pure statement, and yet there can be little doubt that this is Gordon's perspective. The histrionics (dead stars above, damp squibs below) and arrogance of referring to T. S. Eliot and Day Lewis et al as the 'squibs of the passing minute', together with the slangy language such as 'went off his coco-nut' combine to exude nothing but Gordon's mean outlook. Therefore, when the question, 'Shall we ever again get a writer worth reading?' is read, one does not assume that the author is asking. In terms of the general question of 'Who is speaking?' or, who is 'we' here, Jespersen again is helpful. He demonstrates the kindly and friendly qualities of *we*, such as the paternal overtones expressed when used by people in positions of authority, who wish to appear less imposing, as might a doctor to a young patient, as in "'how are we today?' (p. 129). Jespersen tells us that when using *we*, 'the speaker includes himself, often with a certain humility: we are but human [and] we live to learn' (p. 153). With these comradely connotations in mind, Gordon's usage of *we* has the potential to create resentment in a reader who does not wish to be associated with such immature criticism and reproach as contained in Gordon's rant about 'dead stars', and Orwell would be aware of this. As one after another of the bookshop customers is described, it soon becomes clear that they are described from Gordon's point of view. Not only is the reader positioned directionally to see from Gordon's viewing position but one also gains a strong sense of *his* attitude. One of the most telling linguistic markers is that the working class are described as lower class, and this is something of a theme in the book. Ravelston, the editor of *AntiChrist*, has to chastise his upper-class girlfriend for referring to the 'lower classes'. Her reply is this: 'the working class, if you like then. But they smell just the same' (p. 109). Hermione goes on to say that Ravelston's liking for the lower classes is 'disgusting'.[40] In *Burmese Days* it is the insufferable Mrs Lackersteen who talks of the 'lower classes' back in England being as ungovernable as the Burmese 'coolies'. To use the term in this way means one thing, that you are an insensitive snob. In light of this, it would be useful to take the following guide on 'authorial point of view' into consideration:

40 Orwell's portrayal of Hermione will be returned to in Chapter Five on 'Orwell's Women', for she demonstrates well Orwell's inversion of Gissing's Madonna-whore/angel-harridan paradigm – Gissing arguably insisting that it is only 'well bred' women who can inhabit the positive sphere.

> There is an interesting, if complex, relation between (1) what a fictional character ... is, (2) the point of view from which the character ... is presented, and (3) the attitudes and judgements towards the character ... invited of the reader.[41]

There are specific devices employed within the narrative that operate to indicate whether it is Gordon or his narrator who is communicating. Take the following sentence: 'His eyes refocused themselves upon the posters opposite. Foul, bloody things' (p. 5). The expletive language is Gordon's, coming as it does in the wake of his focus. Yet, there is the voice of a narrator who is 'other' to Gordon. This is the narrator who introduces Gordon as 'rather moth-eaten' with 'a small frail figure', 'delicate bones and fretful movements' (p. 1). The adjective 'fretful' sums up well Gordon's state of mind, and this carefully chosen description is consistent with a narrator who undermines Gordon's voice, exposing the inadequacies within. We are told that Gordon has only 'Fivepence halfpenny – twopence halfpenny and a Joey' to his name. There follows a description of Gordon examining the money. The Joey, he complains, is a 'Beastly, useless thing! And bloody fool to have taken it!' (p. 1). Reported speech is absent, but no one can really be in doubt as to whose thoughts these are. The next sentence runs: 'It had happened yesterday, when he was buying cigarettes. "Don't mind a threepenny-bit, do you, sir?" the little bitch of a shop-girl had chirped'. Again, the use of the exclamation mark signals Gordon's thoughts. Calling the shop assistant a 'little bitch' also reveals Gordon's characteristic suspiciousness and paranoia that will insist everyone is against him because he is poor. Take the following:

> His heart sickened to think that he had only fivepence halfpenny in the world, threepence of which couldn't even be spent. Because how can you buy anything with a threepenny-bit? It isn't a coin, it's the answer to a riddle. You look such a fool when you take it out of your pocket, unless it's in among a whole handful of other coins (p. 2).

The paragraph ends with 'and you stalk out with your nose in the air, and can't ever go to that shop again'. Again, there is a strong feeling of histrionics and superciliousness. This would be an example of what Peter Davison calls the 'ironic detachment' that exists in the novel.[42] This is evident in the narrator's belittling descriptions of his subject: 'Gordon was not impressive to look at. He was just five feet seven inches high, and because his hair was usually too long he gave the impression that his head was a little too big for his body' (p. 3). Alongside these unflattering descriptions there is insight into Gordon's hypocrisy and bitterness. On Gordon's hatred of *all* of the books in the shop, we are told that 'it was the snooty "cultured" kind of books that he hated the worst ... [books] that Gordon himself might have written if he had had a little more money' (p. 8). Indeed, through this 'other' narrator, Gordon's rants and tirades against 'the money God' and the 'money stink' are shown to be rather disingenuous. Yet we are told that it is economic forces that stifle and extinguish

41 Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 140.

42 Peter Davison writes that Orwell is always 'ironically detached' from the character of Gordon Comstock, *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (London, 1996), p. 65.

Gordon's creativity: 'He couldn't cope with rhymes and adjectives. You can't, with only twopence halfpenny in your pocket' (p. 5). But this 'can't' is used too often. We are told that 'You can't be friendly, you can't even be civil, when you have no money in your pocket' (p. 27). Clearly his position is ludicrous. More than this, it is hopelessly materialistic and defeatist, certainly not to be admired. Gordon's enjoyment of sex likewise is soured because he has only eightpence clinking in his trouser pocket. Gordon blames everything on the lack of money and his skewed vision is parodied over and over again.[43]

For this reason there is a distinct separation between Gordon's narrative expression and that of a more impartial observer, except where there are descriptions of Gordon. The descriptions of the people who frequent the shop are highly interesting in terms of highlighting the dynamic tensions set up between the narrators of this novel. One of the first people to come into the shop is described thus: 'A decentish middle-aged man, black suit, bowler hat, umbrella and despatch-case – provincial solicitor or Town Clerk – keeking at the window with large pale-coloured eyes. He wore a guilty look' (p. 5). That is a description that is fairly judgement free. But then the next sentence runs 'Gordon followed the direction of his eyes. Ah! So that was it! He had nosed out those D. H. Lawrence first editions in the far corner. Pining for a bit of smut, of course'. Again, there is no reported-thought tag here.[44] The exclamation marks and the fact that the reader has become spatially aligned with Gordon strongly indicate that the reader is receiving Gordon's reactions to the gentleman. It continues:

> He had the regular Dissenting pouches round his mouth. At home, president of the local Purity League or Seaside Vigilance Committee (rubber-soled slippers and electric torch, spotting kissing couples along the beach parade), and now up in town on the razzle. Gordon wished he would come in. Sell him a copy of *Women in Love*. How it would disappoint him!
>
> But no! The Welsh solicitor had funked it. He tucked his umbrella under his arm and moved off with righteously turned backside. But doubtless tonight, when darkness hid his blushes, he'd slink into one of the rubber-shops and buy *High Jinks in a Parisian Convent*, by Sadie Blackeyes.
>
> Gordon turned away from the door and back to the bookshelves (pp. 5–6).

The descriptions are lively, cynical and highly derogatory, in other words *not* those of an objective narrator. Indeed, it will be seen that Gordon is most animated in thought when thinking ill of others. Take again the description of the books in the shop that ends 'And if we did get a writer worth reading, should we know him when we saw him, so choked as we are with trash? Ping! Shop bell. Gordon turned' (pp. 11–12).

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43 It is interesting to compare Orwell's experience of poverty with Gordon's. Orwell writes, 'And there is another feeling that is a great consolation in poverty .... It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure .... You have talked so often of going to the dogs – well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them, and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety'. (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, in *Orwell and the Dispossessed*, ed. Peter Davison [Harmondsworth, 2001], p. 78–9).

44 It does, at one point in the paragraph, say 'A bad face he had, Gordon thought', but this instance of reported thought does not directly give any indication that it is Gordon who is thinking that the man with the 'bad face' is also 'pining for a bit of smut'.

The harsh, dismissive voice is strongly indicated to be Gordon's, especially as the caustic observation stops at 'Ping! Shop bell'.

I have already pointed out that some read Orwell as having a good deal of sympathy for Gordon: 'Orwell's depiction of Gordon's anger, frustration and difficulties as a writer are completely serious' (V. Meyers, p. 79). Whilst not many would go so far, understanding that Gordon is often the object of humorous detachment, many critics still fail to detect the *extent* of authorial distance that Orwell puts between himself and this, his most confused and immature protagonist. In failing to spot this intended discrepancy commentators continue to miss the socio-political subtext operating throughout the novel. Indeed, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, owing to their overtly politicized content, have possibly done Orwell's thirties' novels a great disservice in that readers have become, in a sense, impatient with these more subtle political fictions. In the next chapter this subtlety is brought out in more detail through a contrast between Orwell and George Gissing, arguably the writer who most influenced Orwell. I shall further analyse the ways in which sympathy *is* given to Gordon, although not as the frustrated, ill-mannered failing poet, but as a young man who is the victim of misguided class-consciousness.

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Chapter 4

The Influence of George Gissing

I would like to introduce this section on Gissing's all-pervasive influence by saying something of Orwell's essay on this, his favourite English novelist, entitled 'George Gissing'.[1] It is in this essay that Orwell explains Gissing's particular novelistic appeal:

> The writers commonly paraded as 'great English novelists' have a way of turning out either to be not true novelists, or not to be Englishmen. Gissing was not a writer of picaresque tales, or burlesques, or comedies, or political tracts: he was interested in individual human beings, and the fact that he can deal sympathetically with several different sets of motives, and make a credible story out of the collision between them, makes him exceptional among English writers.[2]

Given such a eulogy it is not surprising that Orwell was to draw heavily from Gissing's work, and that critics are increasingly coming to the conclusion that 'to understand Orwell fully, one must first read Gissing'.[3] Undoubtedly, Orwell's novels do, 'owe much to Gissing'.[4] However, much of the research so far, reinforced by Connolly, has tended to reach the conclusion that Orwell simply borrowed from Gissing, whether for character, setting or plot.[5] Many parallels have been drawn between, most notably, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *New Grub Street*, *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *The Odd Women*, *Coming Up for Air* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, *Animal*

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1 The essay was written around 1948, but due to the folding of the publication *Politics and Letters* was not published until 1960, after Orwell's death (see *CW*, vol. XIX, p. 346). 'George Gissing' is a continuance of a much shorter published piece Orwell wrote in 1943, entitled 'Not Enough Money: A Sketch of George Gissing', *CW*, vol. XV, pp. 45–7.

2 Orwell, 'George Gissing', *The Complete Works*, vol. XIX, pp. 346–52 (pp. 350–51). Perhaps because Orwell's experimental fiction incorporates the picaresque, is prone to burlesque, is often comic, and is of course political, Orwell cannot regard himself as a 'true novelist', according to his own exacting criterion, although, as we have seen, Orwell is not to be trusted when it comes to self-evaluation.

3 Arthur Lewis, 'Mark Connolly. *Orwell and Gissing*', *Utopian Studies*, Book Reviews, pp. 181–3 (p. 181). Lewis here is reiterating and reinforcing Connolly's conclusion. Lewis, 'despite reservations', recommends Connolly's research on the nature of Gissing's influence because it 'has pushed the Gissing-Orwell relationship farther than have other critics' (p. 183). This is true, and it is for this reason that I shall make much use of Connolly's paper.

4 Mark Connolly (quoting J. R. Hammond), *Orwell and Gissing* (New York, 1997), p. 11.

5 Indeed, Orwell does sometimes borrow directly from Gissing, and in the final chapter we shall see how Orwell's idea for *Animal Farm* came not from (as Orwell informs us) his experiences of seeing a small boy in charge of 'a huge cart-horse', but, more likely, from an observation made in Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*.

Farm and *Demos*.[6] Certainly there are parallels; however, the relationship between these novels, and novelists, is not as straightforward as has been suggested. This chapter looks at Orwell's unique intertextual play with Gissing's works, revealing how Orwell is, for much of the time, reworking Gissing's texts to suit a rather different political and moral agenda.[7]

It is significant that Orwell feels Mark Rutherford (William Hale White) to be the nearest 'great' English writer to Gissing, and the reasons he gives for this go some way to highlighting the essential differences between Orwell and Gissing. Orwell says of Rutherford that there is a 'haunting resemblance' to Gissing, which, he argues, is 'probably explained by the fact that both men lack that curse of English writers, a "sense of humour". A certain low-spiritedness, an air of loneliness, is common to both of them' (GG, p. 351). Ostensibly, Orwell's novels would seem to embody these melancholy traits. However, simmering beneath the surface of Orwell's fiction is a defiant spirit of optimism and this explains why the resemblance between Gissing and Orwell is more interesting than haunting.

Narrating Discontent: The Management of Narrative Sympathies

Whilst there are unmistakable similarities between *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Orwell's differing approach to narrative voice is immediately discernable. The following are two quotations, taken from *New Grub Street* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* respectively, reproduced as they appear in Connolly's study. It is important to note that Connolly gives the quotations as an example of thematic similitude between Gissing and Orwell:

> To have money is becoming of more and more importance in a literary career principally because to have money is to have friends. (Gissing, *New Grub Street*)
>
> Money, money, all is money. Could you write even a penny novelette without money to put heart in you? Invention, energy, wit, style, charm – they've all got to be paid for in

6 *Demos* is almost certainly the parent novel of *Animal Farm* – as soon as the young radicals gain any power they begin to betray 'the cause' and simultaneously begin to adopt bourgeois values and adornments whilst using elaborate language to deceive themselves and others of their bourgeoisification. Referring to *Demos* Orwell says that 'Gissing shows great prescience, and also a rather surprising knowledge of the inner workings of the Socialist movement' (NEM, p. 334). Connolly provides an excellent study of the comparisons between these two novels.

7 J. R. Hammond, whom Connolly echoes frequently, writes that each of Orwell's novels 'is in a sense a study in failure'; and he concludes that these 'studies in failure owe much to Gissing' (*A George Orwell Companion* [London: Macmillan, 1982], p. 41). In arguing thus, Hammond, like Connolly, misses the ways in which Orwell's narratives are working to undermine the pessimistic bias of their protagonists. For example, Hammond writes that Gordon Comstock fails by 'abandoning all his principles in the interests of respectability' (p. 41). If one examines the novel more closely, it becomes apparent that Gordon in fact had no principles to abandon – quite the reverse; consequently, he has all to gain through his U-turn.

> hard cash .... You can't even be friendly, you can't be civil, when you have no money in your pocket. (Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*)

The key words here are *free indirect thought* (discussed in the previous chapter). To have 'Gissing' written beneath the first quotation, as if those words were attributable to the author's sentiment, is valid here because the unfolding story bears testament to the fact that money is indeed essential to the pursuit of a *prosperous* professional literary career in late Victorian England. Therefore, in all likelihood Gissing has not employed *free indirect thought* here, but inserted his own value-judgement. However, in the second instance, it should better read 'Gordon Comstock, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*' because 'money, money, all is money' and so on, is an expression of character point of view, and is most definitely not the author's feeling. It is only Gordon who cannot be civil or friendly without money. Connolly repeats this kind of author-centred reading when he writes, 'Similarly, Comstock regrets the fact that he has no hold over Rosemary. "In the last resort," Orwell asks, "what holds a woman to a man, except money?"' (p. 40). To write 'Orwell asks' is reading the book as if Orwell were speaking, at least at that particular place. Unmistakably, it is Gordon's voice. Connolly's quotation is again contrasted with a quotation from the narrator of *New Grub Street* who laments thus on the subject of 'educated women': '"... not one in fifty thousand would share poverty with the brightest genius ever born"' (p. 40).[8] Whilst there is reason to take the latter bitter reflection seriously, because it echoes Gissing's experience, there is no such imperative in the former instance. To confuse the narrator with the author is not a problem when an author's views resemble his narrator's, but when they are *wholly* at odds, as they are, I believe, for much of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, then such a reading significantly distorts the meaning of the text.

Connolly writes, referring to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*:

> The dominant themes of Orwell's novel – the crushing effect of poverty on artistic sensibility, sex starvation, envious hatred for the literary elite, resistance to slick commercialism, and masochistic martyrdom – are drawn from *New Grub Street* in great detail (p. 39).

The understanding here is that the treatment of these themes is similar if not equal. However, owing to essential differences in the emotional and artistic make-up of Gordon Comstock and Edwin Reardon, the protagonist of *New Grub Street*, Orwell is

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8 Orwell comments on (what he perceives to be) Gissing's *legitimate* despair of women as they were in the nineteenth century, at least to a man of Gissing's penurious status:

> People who might, without becoming less efficient, have been reasonably happy chose instead to be miserable, inventing senseless tabus with which to terrify themselves. Money was a nuisance not merely because without it you starved; what was more important was that unless you had quite a lot of it – £300 a year, say – society would not allow you to live gracefully or even peacefully. Women were a nuisance because even more than men they were the believers in tabus, still enslaved to respectability even when they had offended against it. Money and women were therefore the two instruments through which society avenged itself on the courageous and the intelligent (GG, *CW*, p. 348).

in fact approaching these grand subjects from a somewhat different angle, which has everything to do with his writing in the 1930s and not the 1880/90s, and, moreover, that he wishes to reflect important socio-historical changes; for, contrary to popular opinion, Orwell saw a lot to be grateful for in his own time.[9] Orwell was keenly aware that as bleak as the thirties were, at least for the middle classes, in all their gradations, life, especially London life, was much improved upon that of Gissing's time, which he describes as a 'fog-bound, gas-lit London of the 'eighties, a city of drunken puritans, where clothes, architecture and furniture had reached their rock-bottom of ugliness' (GG, p. 347). Similarly, Orwell writes, 'There are many reasons, and George Gissing's novels are among them, for thinking that the present age is a good deal better than the last one' (p. 347).

Connolly, echoing Meyers, claims that, 'The Gissing influence helps to explain the confusions and flaws in Orwell's third novel' (p. 38), the first flaw being the apparent incongruity of 'writing a "novel of poverty" in the depths of the Depression ... [with] an highly unrepresentative character'. Orwell, it would seem, should have chosen a 'laid off factory worker' instead of 'a poet' (p. 38). Calling Gordon Comstock 'a poet' as if there were no equivocation about it rather suggests some confusion on the critics' part to read the signs indicating otherwise. Connolly quotes from Stansky and Abrahams on their evaluation of Gordon as an unlikely protagonist for the time. It finishes with: '"The Socialism espoused by his friend Ravelston ... elicits from Gordon a profound boredom, a cynical No to everything Socialism claims to stand for ... (pp. 123–4)"' (p. 39). Connolly joins in Stansky and Abrahams's cry of, 'what then does Gordon and the novel represent?' Their conclusion is that Gordon represents some sort of 'malignant' alter ego that Orwell had to 'exorcize'. To understand what Gordon represents in the novel is to go some way to understanding the somewhat complex nature of the relationship between Orwell and Gissing, in particular, their radically differing socio-political positions.

The similarities between Gordon Comstock and Edwin Reardon are obvious enough in that they are impoverished, thirty-something men failing in their attempt to be productive writers. However, Gordon resembles Reardon as tin resembles gold. Reardon's plight is real; Gordon's, for the greater part, is not. Edwin Reardon starts out in London with no friends or connections and finds that his literary aspirations are coming to nothing. Then he manages to get a menial post in a hospital:

> When he had recovered from his state of semi-starvation, and was living in comfort (a pound a week is a very large sum if you have previously had to live on ten shillings), Reardon found that the impulse to literary production awoke in him more strongly than ever (p. 61).

Reardon begins to produce novels of merit and is beginning to get talked about in prominent literary circles. He then inherits some money and relishes in the prospect of the break and travel it will afford him. Upon returning from his travels abroad Reardon is introduced to Amy Yule, who is greatly impressed by the soon-to-be-acclaimed author. Of Reardon's literary powers we are informed that though 'the author had no faculty for constructing a story ... strong characterization was within

9 *New Grub Street* was published in 1891 but Gissing began getting published from 1880.

his scope, and an intellectual fervour ... marked all his pages' (p. 62). Then comes a psychological profiling that will go far in aiding understanding of Reardon's later literary struggles:

> He was the kind of man who cannot struggle against adverse conditions, but whom prosperity warms to the exercise of his powers. Anything like the care of responsibility would sooner or later harass him into unproductiveness. That he should produce much was in any case out of the question; possibly a book every two or three years might not prove too great a strain upon his delicate mental organism, but for him to attempt more than that would certainly be fatal to the peculiar merit of his work (p. 63).

So it turns out to be: largely due to his wife's interference, the sensitive Reardon is harassed into unproductiveness. Gordon Comstock, by contrast, has established literary connections in London from the outset; indeed, his best friend is the editor of a left-wing publication that is quite willing to promote his work. Gordon has had one volume of poetry published, entitled *Mice*, which falls into immediate obscurity. Of Gordon's talents we know only that '*The Times Lit. Supp.* had declared that it showed "exceptional promise"' (p. 11) – 'promise' being the operative word; it is not exceptional in itself, and in any case it is likely that Ravelston, or one of Ravelston's friends, wrote the review. Exactly why Gordon's talent fails to develop is not spelled out. However, much can be inferred, and this is where the singular talent of Orwell's style can be seen at work. For, it is only by careful study of Gordon's outlook on life that a full appreciation of Gordon's unsuitability as an artist can be understood.

Orwell writes that the atmosphere of *New Grub Street* is 'horribly intelligible, so much so that I have sometimes thought that no professional writer should read [it]' (NEM, p. 46). *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, whilst sharing obvious enough elements, is an entirely different kind of book in that it is not addressing the plight of frustrated literary talent, but rather, the folly of egotistical youth, particularly when it is coupled with a groundless sense of class superiority. One of the most significant departures for Orwell is that, where Gissing is writing about the 'exceptional' man, Orwell is writing about the 'ordinary' man. Gordon, for all his literary and déclassé aspirations, is ordinary in the author's eyes. In terms of authorial alignment, Orwell says of Gissing that, 'He wanted to speak not for the multitude, but for the exceptional man, the sensitive man, isolated among the barbarians' (GG, p. 348). Edwin Reardon is such a man. Gordon Comstock indubitably feels that he is such a man but, from the outset, he is shown to be far nearer the barbarian than he knows. On one level Orwell's novel is about exposure: Gordon is simply a representative of the lower-middle class whose education and family have given pretentious ambitions. Again, regarding the 'the unemployed of Middlesborough', who are constantly invoked, of these people Gordon never thinks – they don't exist. It is the 'other' narrator who keeps mentioning 'the unemployed of Middlesborough'. The effect has to be to limit sympathy for Gordon's struggle. In many ways one is struck by the extent to which the book is about life-chances. Gordon's are actually pretty good. Life-chances are, of course, inseparable from class, and there is much in the book about Gordon's family. Appreciating his background is essential to an understanding of what Gordon represents.

Gordon belongs to the Comstocks, who are an impoverished middle-class family who could only afford a 'third-rate' school for their son. The Comstock family are, to put it crudely, representative of the losers in the capitalist system: 'Every one of them seemed doomed, as though by a curse, to a dismal, shabby, hole-and-corner existence' (*KTAF*, p. 41). The problem with the Comstock family is that they are preoccupied with money, and yet have none. They are also ashamed of their poverty and try to hide the fact of their penury – 'It was not poverty, but the down-dragging of *respectability* that had done for them' (*KTAF*, p. 47). Gordon's sister is described as living, 'the typical submerged life of the penniless unmarried woman', and this life she accepted, 'hardly realizing that her destiny could ever have been different' (*KTAF*, p. 62). The reason for the Comstocks' collective failure is their middle-class inhibitions. They are contrasted, in Gordon's way of thinking – a rare moment of his humanity intruding – with the 'lower classes', who are seen as thriving:

> They [the Comstocks] never had the sense to lash out and just *live*, money or no money, as the lower classes do. How right the lower classes are! Hats off to the factory lad who with fourpence in the world puts his girl in the family way! At least he's got blood and not money in his veins (*KTAF*, p. 47).

Despite such moments of egalitarian clarity, Gordon, for the most part, can only think in terms of literary ambition, for which he is woefully ill-equipped. He is extremely bitter not to have financial independence. It is his greatest desire to have money so that he might become something of note in the world of art and literature:

> It was the snooty 'cultured' books that he hated the worst. Books of criticism and belles-lettres. The kind of thing that those moneyed young beasts from Cambridge write almost in their sleep – and that Gordon himself might have written if he had had a little more money (*KTAF*, p. 8).

This passage is crucial in terms of establishing that there could be no authorial sympathy for Gordon's literary aspirations. That Gordon would be writing in the 'belles-lettres' style if he had money is something that would elicit scorn from Orwell.[10] This is important because Gissing would clearly have had nothing but sympathy for his protagonist's courageous yet increasingly futile endeavours to write.

If we consider Orwell's admiration for the impoverished working-class writer George Garrett (Matt Lowe), an ex-seaman and largely unemployed docker whom he met in Liverpool, we can come to a fairly reliable estimation of what Orwell would have thought of a man like Gordon Comstock. Garrett had experienced a great deal of life, including having had many adventures in America during prohibition. Orwell confided to Richard Rees that, 'I had some long talks with G. and was greatly impressed by him'.[11] So much so in fact that Orwell urged Garrett to write his

10 Orwell's appreciation of John Galsworthy tells us much with regard to his views on the writer in relation to his art. He writes of Galsworthy, 'There is nothing about him of the elegant gentleman-littérateur', in 'John Galsworthy', *The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 138–42 (p. 138).

11 Orwell, *The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 441–2 (p. 442).

biography. However, Garrett was never able to manage the biography, and Orwell provides the reason:

> As usual, living in about two rooms on the dole with a wife (who I gather objects to his writing) and a number of kids, he finds it impossible to settle to any long work and can only do short stories.[12]

That is real life. The fictional Gordon has no such encumbrances and yet cannot even manage to finish his poem *London Pleasures*. Thinking again of Orwell's belief that the age he is living in is a great deal improved on the one Gissing inhabited, Gordon could be seen, on one level, to represent the attitude of the writers of the twenties, who, for Orwell, 'achieve the difficult feat of making modern life out to be worse than it is'.[13] Orwell laments that for them, '"Disillusionment" is all the fashion'. The trend, as he views it, is to indulge in *taedium vitae* and facile despairs. He writes that their 'despair-of-life reaches a Turkish-bath atmosphere of self-pity' (ITW, p. 116). Orwell has aligned Gordon with this way of thinking. Gordon begins to resemble one of the hollow men of Eliot's 'Sweeney Agonistes'. Gordon is living in a time of 'dole queues, hunger marches and the Jarrow Crusade'.[14] Yet all that he cares about is finishing his *London Pleasures* and seeing it in print:

> In his mind's eye he saw the 'slim' white buckram shape of *London Pleasures*; the excellent paper, the wide margins, the good Caslon type, the refined dust-jacket. And the reviews in all the best papers. 'An outstanding achievement' – *The Times Lit. Supp.* 'A welcome relief from the Sitwell school' – *Scrutiny* (*KTAF*, p. 71–2).

There is, as usual, a strong sense of how Gordon 'sees', of how he perceives, and this is a wonderful evocation of the falseness of externalities. It works to draw attention instead to Gordon's limited ways of seeing. Given the paucity of Gordon's *one* poem, and herein lies the subtlety of Orwell's narrative persuasion, we can read for ourselves that this young man's thoughts are nothing but vainglory, and as such are leading him wildly astray.

Gordon's insensitive poetic disposition is actually attacked on a number of levels in the narrative, and within the attack there is an unmistakable dig at Gissing. Consider the chapter that opens with an imitation by Gordon of bucolic poetry, and ends with his tirade against any modern attempt to bring 'the seasons' into London:

> Spring, spring! Bytuene Mershe an Averil, when spray beginneth to spring! When shaws be sheene and swards full fayre, and leaves both large and longue! ... See almost any poet between the Bronze Age and 1850.

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12 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier Diary*, *The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 439–41 (p. 439).

13 Orwell is referring particularly to T. S. Eliot's poem 'Sweeney Agonistes', 'ITW', p. 114.

14 Alok Rai, *Orwell and the Politics of Despair: A Critical Study of the Writings of George Orwell* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 55.

> But how absurd that even now, in the era of central heating and tinned peaches, a thousand so-called poets are still writing in the same strain! For what difference does spring or winter or any other time of year make to the average civilised person nowadays? In a town like London the most striking seasonal change, apart from the mere change of temperature, is in the things you see lying about on the pavement (p. 248).

Compare the view expressed above with Orwell's own observations on the perceptible seasonal changes in the city:

> The point is that the pleasures of Spring are available to everybody, and cost nothing. Even in the most sordid street the coming of Spring will register itself by some sign or other, if it is only a brighter blue between the chimney pots or the vivid green of an elder sprouting on a blitzed site.[15]

Gordon never notices anything of the sort in London. The voice in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, commenting on the most striking seasonal change in London, the things that litter the pavement, is clearly Gordon's view because the next paragraph runs: 'If it was spring Gordon failed to notice it (p. 248)'. So much for the sensitive poet! In his 'Some Thoughts ...' essay Orwell talks of Nature 'existing unofficially' in the city. Orwell is alarmed that love of nature has become somehow wrong in a modern, now politicized world. He asks, 'Is it wicked to take a pleasure in Spring and other seasonal changes?' (p. 239). In Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (which Orwell comments on in 'Not Enough Money: A Sketch of George Gissing'), the eponymous narrator, Henry Ryecroft, is identical to Gordon in his vehement revulsion of town living. One of Ryecroft's first observations is that in town 'season made no perceptible difference'.[16] In Gissing's attitude, as expressed through Ryecroft, one can easily imagine Orwell believing him, like Eliot and Joyce, and certainly Gordon Comstock, to be 'making modern life out to be worse than it is'. Similarly, in Gordon's ironically entitled poem, *London Pleasures*, with its foregrounding of gritty realism: 'They think of rates, rent, season tickets', it would seem that Orwell is killing two birds with one stone by simultaneously attacking W. H. Auden and like poets, who were arguably avoiding such frivolous subjects such as 'the beauty of nature'.[17]

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15 Orwell, 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad', in *The Complete Works*, vol. XVIII, pp. 238–41 (p. 239).

16 Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* [1903] (Brighton, 1982), p. 19.

17 'Some Thoughts on the Common Toad' was written for the left-wing publication *Tribune*. In this lengthy piece Orwell informs his readers that articles on the appreciation of nature always bring in 'abusive letters'. He writes 'People, so the thought runs, ought to be discontented, and it is our job to multiply our wants and not simply to increase our enjoyment of the things we have already' (pp. 239–40). Orwell argues that the left has become suspicious of what they perceive to be a spurious 'townie' love of the soil. Orwell defends his preference with typical rhetorical aplomb: 'If a man cannot enjoy the return of Spring, why should he be happy in a labour-saving Utopia?' He adds that ideally (if economic and political problems could be solved) life should become simpler, and in such case, suspects that 'finding the first primrose will loom larger than the sort of pleasure one gets from eating an ice to the tune of a Wurlitzer' (p. 240). Interestingly, that last line could have been written by Gissing, whose loathing of the fun-park transformations of England's coastal towns and beauty spots is represented in his novels.

Clearly, then, there is little respect for Gordon the poet. However, if there is no support for the struggling artist, there is empathy with Gordon the man, which brings us to the novel's socio-political/humanist agenda. Sympathy for Gordon initially takes the form of showing that it would be difficult for Gordon to have turned out otherwise:

> Gordon thought it all out, in the naive selfish manner of a boy. There are two ways to live, he decided. You can be rich, or you can deliberately refuse to be rich. You can possess money, or you can despise money; the one fatal thing is to worship money and fail to get it (p. 47).

This crude philosophy had been born of a natural enough contempt for a family that has merely atrophied instead of having *lived* as Gordon had wanted them to. Similarly:

> He took it for granted that he himself would never be able to make money. It hardly even occurred to him that he might have talents which could be turned to account. That was what his schoolmasters had done for him; they had rubbed it into him that he was a seditious little nuisance and not likely to 'succeed' in life. He accepted this. Very well, then, he would refuse the whole business of 'succeeding'; he would make it his purpose *not* to 'succeed'. Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven; better to serve in hell than serve in heaven, for that matter. Already, at sixteen, he knew which side he was on. He was *against* the money-god and all his swinish priesthood. He had declared war on money, but secretly, of course (p. 48).

Contained in that passage is Gordon's motivating psychological force, and right at the end a revelation of the very falseness of his stance: 'but secretly, of course', that testifies to the disingenuousness of his declared war made in his nonage. At the beginning of the passage we can be sure the comments about de-motivating schoolmasters are not Gordon's because of the line, 'It hardly even occurred to him that he might have talents which could be turned to account'. The narrator here strikes a rare chord of compassion, for, with the exception of the narrative bias working in favour of Rosemary when Gordon is behaving badly to her – discussed in the next chapter – there is practically no sympathetic voice in attendance, until Gordon's turn around at the end.

The consummate authorial control over narrative voice, with its endless emotional gear changes, is a feature of Gissing's novelistic technique that must have impressed Orwell; and given the control Orwell exercises over his own narrative voice, he must have been much influenced by Gissing in this area. There is an interesting passage in *New Grub Street* where Gissing, quite as the undisguised author in the classic, extrinsic manner of George Eliot, makes direct appeal to the reader on Reardon's behalf. It begins, 'The chances are that you have neither understanding nor sympathy for men such as Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen. They merely provoke you ....' (p. 425). It is an extraordinary inclusion because it rather suggests that the narrator does not believe he has done his job in steering reader sympathy along the right path. Or possibly it is a mischievous little aside, deliberately drawing attention to the narrator's skill in adeptly manipulating the reader's sympathies. For the frustrated

Edwin Reardon there can be nothing but sympathetic understanding from the beginning. It is therefore nigh on impossible to suppose that the narrator believed himself to have failed in his endeavours to create an impression on the reader and to temper the reader's imaginative response to Reardon. The following extracts demonstrate that only the most unfeeling of readers could be angrily contemptuous in response to Reardon's inaction:

> He seldom slept, in the proper sense of the word; as a rule he was conscious all through the night of 'a kind of fighting' between physical weariness and wakeful toil of the mind. It often happened that some wholly imaginary obstacle in the story he was writing kept him under a sense of effort throughout the dark hours .... In his unsoothing slumber he talked aloud .... Once Amy heard him begging for money – positively begging, like some poor wretch in the street (p. 189).

Such descriptions are supported by an extrinsic voice that seeks to secure further the correct emotional responses to Reardon: 'But the short relief thus afforded soon passed in the recollection of real distress'. It is notable that nowhere in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is there any sense of genuinely lasting anguish being suffered by the struggling artist. Indeed, Gordon's lame desire to be 'down in the safe soft womb of the earth' where there is 'no getting of jobs' suggests he has brought circumstances to this juncture merely to luxuriate in his 'distress'. Significantly, there comes, after the passage just quoted above, a description of the beginning of Reardon's serious mental breakdown, and because Orwell portrays Gordon's final dissent into inertia in an almost identical manner, although with essential differences, a contrast between the two is illuminating in terms of compassionate alignment.

> It seemed to [Reardon] that the greatest happiness attainable would be to creep into some dark, warm corner, out of the sight and memory of men, and lie there torpid, with a blessed half-consciousness that death was slowly overcoming him. Of all the sufferings collected into each four and twenty hours this rising to a new day was the worst' (p. 190).

Compare this with Gordon's 'weariness':

> Under ground, under ground! Down in the safe soft womb of earth, where there is no getting of jobs or losing of jobs, no relatives or friends to plague you, no hope, fear, ambition, honour – no *duns* of any kind. That was where he wished to be.
>
> Yet it was not death, actual physical death, that he wished for .... Before he had fought against the money-code, and yet he had clung to his wretched remnant of decency. But now it was precisely from decency that he wanted to escape (p. 227).

Here, Gordon has cast himself in the role of a traumatized Dostoyevskian character; the allusion to *Notes from Underground* is inescapable. However, we are invited to laugh at this pathetic figure. Clearly, this is a childish position, infantile even if we consider the 'safe' and 'soft' womb analogy, another example of his naive selfishness and immaturity. Gordon, unlike Reardon, who truly does wish for death in order to escape the agonies of his creative sterility, is an unmanly, unheroic figure, especially so when one considers his desire for the easy life, replete with fame and wealth and no work.

Another area where there are ostensible similarities between Gissing's and Orwell's characters is in their, as Connolly puts it, 'shame-faced sensitivity'. Connolly cites the following passage where Gordon is squirming because of his possession of a threepenny-bit:

> Because how can you buy anything with a threepennybit? It isn't a coin, it's the answer to a riddle. You look such a fool when you take it out of your pocket, unless it's in among a whole handful of other coins ... The shopgirl sniffs. She spots immediately that it's your last threepence in the world .... And you stalk out with your nose in the air and can't ever go to that shop again [*KTAF*] (Connolly, p. 21).

Connolly argues that 'the hero of Gissing's *Born in Exile*, Godwin Peak, is equally distressed when he scrutinizes the "shamefaced change"'. It is interesting to look at the passage from *Born in Exile* detailing the incident. The acutely class-sensitive Godwin, every bit the impoverished scholarship boy struggling to keep up appearances of solvency, at the end of a school term finds himself in the rare position of getting drunk with two friends. He recklessly spends the few precious coins that he will need for his transport home and to pay the last of his rent. Moreover, he will face the shame of having to tell his landlady that he cannot pay his meagre bill:

> And he hated the thought of leaving his bill unpaid; the more so because it was a trifling sum, a week's settlement. To put himself under however brief an obligation to a woman such as the landlady gnawed at his pride.[18]

The shame is real enough because he will have to expose his poverty as well as asking for an unpleasant favour. The key point to make here is that Connolly divines no difference in the narration of this passage with the *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 'threepenny-bit' scene: 'Peak is equally distressed when he scrutinizes the "shamefaced change"'. However, the shame is not equal, and the reasons for this inequality reflect fundamental differences in Gissing's and Orwell's concerns. In Gordon's shame there is every suggestion that he is deceiving himself as to the extent of the scorn the threepenny-bit will generate: 'She spots immediately that it's your last threepence in the world'. But how could she? This is nothing more than Gordon's paranoia, a perverse feeling that he is always exposed to ridicule through lack of money. This sort of conviction happens time and time again. Gordon surmises thus on his penurious situation: 'The way it gives everyone the right to stamp on you. The way everyone *wants* to stamp on you' (p. 110) [Orwell's italics]. It is this way of thinking that leads Gordon to reject a very important literary friend, Paul Doring, simply because there is a mix-up about the date of a party. Gordon receives a letter of apology from Doring and a renewed invitation for another time. Gordon is beside himself: 'So Doring was pretending that it was all a mistake – was pretending not to have insulted him' (p. 111). This is a masterly deployment of *free indirect thought* allowing Gordon to expose himself yet again. So worked up does Gordon get in his conviction that Doring, his wife, and all their connections are laughing at him that he makes what will be an absurd exposure of himself by replying to the invitation

18 Gissing, *Born in Exile* [1892] (Brighton, 1978), p. 58.

with this: 'Dear Doring, – With reference to your letter: Go —— yourself' (p. 112). It works to great comic effect in the book, the reason being, of course, that we do not share Gordon's point of view, and see his reaction as it should be seen, as foolish paranoia. Extrinsic narration is practically absent in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. We are never quite told how to view Gordon, but we can certainly infer a great deal. To refer to Godwin Peak again – Gissing brings the readers into sympathetic alignment with Godwin; we understand why he acts often to his own disadvantage, subjected as he is to feeling his social inferiority at every turn. Orwell is no less manipulative in aligning narrative sympathies, it is merely that in Gordon's case he is attempting to draw sympathy away from his protagonist who, through his shame at having only a threepenny coin is like Gissing's nineteenth-century forebears 'inventing senseless tabus with which to terrify himself'. In showing how Gordon need not feel shame through having little money, because in actuality he is not being looked down upon, Orwell is actively engaged in changing anti-social perceptions about the importance of money in relation to personal dignity.

The essential difference between Orwell and Gissing's creative aesthetic is that Gissing is far nearer to Zola and Dostoevsky in his indulgence and delineation of tragic, sordid realism, where characters are sucked into an all-consuming vortex (to generalize) of fleeting triumphs and lasting agonies of despair. Orwell, conversely, is happily restrained by the prioritizing demands of his socio-political commitments. On the outcome of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, that is, on Gordon's return to the advertising agency, Connolly fails to understand Orwell's proletarian commitment when he writes that Gordon, 'terminates his money-strike ... abandons his literary career, and becomes what he – and Orwell – always despised, a little man in a little job' (p. 46). Gordon is not to be confused with one of the scurrying beetle-like men of the ministries that Orwell famously despises, nor with Gordon's earlier view of the 'bowler-hatted sneak ... the docile little cit who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage pie and stewed tinned pears [etc]' (p. 47). He is now more akin to the factory lad who at least has got 'blood not money in his veins'.[19]

Connolly, in noting similarities between Orwell, Dickens and Gissing, presents all three men as equally disgusted by everything squalid. Connolly quotes three lengthy passages from Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to demonstrate his point. Of the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* passage Connolly argues that there is much enthusiastic description of 'swarming proles' at play in grimy surroundings. In describing the working class in this way Orwell is, we are told, mirroring Dickens who has his underclass 'wallowing in filth', and similarly, Orwell is said to be like Gissing who has the them 'mauling each other with vile caresses'. Connolly concludes:

> These passages exhibit a common pattern of development, attention to detail, and tone. Following a graphic description of extreme squalor, the inhabitants are revealed to be brutish "wrangling" subhumans prone to drink and violence. *The authors' reactions express both fear and disgust. In all three scenes, the viewpoint is that of a shocked*

19 Robert Bierman's 1997 film adaptation of the book captures the note of harmony and optimism between Gordon and Rosemary excellently; although their overt celebration of being members of the middle class rather goes against the egalitarian spirit of the novel.

> *outsider. In all three passages, the poor are represented as a separate species who are granted no individual identity or compassion* [my italics] (p. 29).

This conclusion is perfectly valid as far as Dickens and Gissing are concerned, but it is not valid for Orwell. Clearly, Connolly is inferring the authors' predilections from the value judgements circulating in the texts. However, Orwell often narrates in a voice that is in conflict with his own point of view. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is no exception. Look again at the passage cited by Connolly that apparently demonstrates Orwell's disgust:

> Within three or four minutes [Winston] was out of the area which the bomb had affected, and the sordid swarming life of the streets was going on as though nothing had happened. It was nearly twenty hours, and the drinking-shops which the proles frequented ('pubs' they called them) were chocked with customers (p. 88).

The fact that the time is given by the twenty-four hour clock, and further, that the narrator feels the need to inform us that 'drinking shops' are 'pubs' to the proles distances the narrator from the author for whom there is no such term as 'drinking shops' and who certainly knows what a pub is. The beginning of the paragraph on the 'sordid swarming life', begins '[Winston] kicked the thing into the gutter, and then, to avoid the crowd, turned down a side-street to the right'. The 'thing' that Winston kicks into the gutter is the severed hand from a victim of the bomb attack he has just witnessed. Referring to the hand as 'the thing' reflects callous indifference to the human trauma. Later, when Winston begins to learn the nature of his inhumanity he returns to this instance and is horrified that he had kicked the hand 'into the gutter as though it had been a cabbage-stalk'. In terms of the disgusted observations on the 'sordid swarming prole life', this feeling of revulsion is all Winston's, not Orwell's, when he is still in the grip of The Party's jaundiced psyche. Thus, what at first glance appear to be examples of Orwell's class prejudice, disgust, petty snobbery and so on, turn out, on closer inspection, to be examples of someone else's: Winston's in this case. Here again, regarding promotion of the ordinary and squalid, is a juncture where Orwell parts company with Gissing, who, like the unconverted Winston, is all too quick to take offence at 'the masses'.

Gissing and The Common Man

Orwell writes that Gissing is 'Anti-Socialist and anti-democratic .... As for the working class, he regards them as savages, and says so with great frankness' (NEM, p. 46). There, as far as Orwell is concerned, stands Gissing in the humanist debate. Since Orwell's thirties' novels are practically dedicated to this question of democratic justice for the people, an appreciation of Gissing's contribution to it is necessary in establishing further essential differences between these two writers. That Gissing regards the working classes as savages is evident when one reads Gissing's novels, staggeringly so in *Demos*, and yet it is not true of *The Nether World*, a novel that devotes itself exclusively to the plight of the poorest in London. Orwell, as with many of Gissing's novels during this time, was only able to obtain a 'soup-stained'

library copy of *The Nether World*, and, interestingly, though the novel depicts a lower working class suffering abominably from poverty and social injustice, he does not comment on it. Clearly, it did not sway his conclusion that:

> Gissing grasped that the middle classes suffer more from economic insecurity than the working class, and are more ready to take action against it. To ignore that fact has been one of the major blunders of the Left, and from this sensitive novelist who loved Greek tragedies and began writing long before Hitler was born, one can learn something about the origins of Fascism (NEM, p. 46–7).

Narratorally, *The Nether World* stands apart from Gissing's other works, and it is something that Orwell must have been aware of. The novel, in fact, is a complete departure from Gissing's others in that there is nothing but unreserved, unequivocal empathy for the degradations and vices of the poor, so much so that *The Nether World* could be read as an *experiment in identification* (although, in this there are similarities with *The Odd Women* – discussed in Chapter 5). Regarding *The Nether World*, this novel demonstrates how Gissing *does not* here approach the working classes as he does in his other works. Strikingly, it is the balance of judgement on individual virtue that marks out *The Nether World*. Take the following passages, and note the narrator's compassion:

> It is a virtuous world, and our frequent condemnations are invariably based on justice; will it be greatly harmful if for once we temper our righteous judgement with ever so little mercy?[20] (*TNW*, p. 302)

Then consider:

> The day's work had tired him exceptionally, doubtless owing to his nervousness, and again on the way to Sidney's he had recourse to a dose of the familiar stimulant. With our eyes on a man of Hewitt's station we note these little things; we set them down as a point scored against him; yet if our business were with a man of leisure, who, owing to worry, found his glass of wine at luncheon and again at dinner an acceptable support, we certainly should not think of paying attention to the matter. Poverty makes a crime of every indulgence (*TNW*, p. 296).

Gone is the familiar condemnation of weakness of character that mark the pages of his previous books on the working class.[21] Consider Gissing's further treatment of John Hewitt, a working-class man who makes speeches against the injustices of capitalist society. After money has been embezzled from the burial fund of his club, with the result that he cannot give his long-suffering wife a decent funeral, Hewitt rages thus:

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20 Gissing, *The Nether World* [1889] (Oxford, 1999), p. 302.

21 This book was Gissing's last to deal exclusively with working-class life (his growing private fortune was to remove him from any real contact with the slums), and significantly it was written immediately after the tragic death of his first wife, Nell (1888). She had succumbed entirely to alcoholism and died utterly alone. In many ways this book could be seen as an assuagement of Gissing's guilt at having abandoned his wife to such a dreadful fate.

> I've been drove mad, I tell you – mad! It's well if I don't do murder yet; every man as I see go by with a good coat on his back and a face fat with good feeding, it's all I can do to keep from catchin' his throat an tearin' the life out of him!' (p. 191).

Nowhere in the novel is there any censure of such an outpouring; it is perfectly understandable, and therefore reasonable. John Hewitt is at no time portrayed unsympathetically; he is simply seen as struggling to keep as decent as possible under the weight of impossible burdens and the oppression of others – exasperated by the embezzler of the burial fund. Nearly all of the characters in this novel succumb to ignoble temptations, and the strongest censure applied is along the lines of, 'as in almost all cases, his nature was corrupted' (p. 194). Gissing's use of the term, 'his nature' is highly significant because Gissing engages deeply in the nature *vs* nurture debate that had begun to rage with Darwin's discoveries, and arguably reached its peak at the time Orwell is writing, ending – at least for the most part – in the wake of the Holocaust. Gissing's novels reveal that the author is predominantly in the nature camp, with the view that the 'lower classes' are naturally low. One of the most vivid characters in *The Nether World* is Clem Peckover. Gissing describes her with full Swiftian force, and the relish of his disgust is certainly the more familiar Gissing:

> Her forehead was low and of great width; her nose was well shapen, and had large sensual apertures; her cruel lips may be seen on certain fine antique busts; the neck that supported her heavy head was splendidly rounded. In laughing, she became a model for an artist, an embodiment of fierce life independent of morality .... One would have compared her, not to some piece of exuberant normal vegetation, but rather to a rank, evilly-fostered growth (*TNW*, p. 8).

Clem is described as being on a par with 'the noble savage running wild in the woods' (*TNW*, p. 6). She is simply of a class that is still, as the narrator of *Demos* puts it, 'in an elementary stage of civilisation'.[22] In *Demos* this elementary stage of humanity is manifested in the character Mutimer, the working class parvenu who inherits money and also power only to misuse it. This is Mutimer in confrontation with his wife, Adela:

> The thin crust of refinement was shattered; the very man came to light, coarse, violent, whipped into fury by his passions, of which injured self-love was not the least .... Whensoever he had shown anger in conversation with her, she had made him sensible of her superiority; at length he fell back upon his brute force and resolved to bring her to his feet, if need be by outrage. Even his accent deteriorated as he flung out his passionate words; he spoke like any London mechanic, with defect and excess of aspirates, with neglect of g's at the end words, and so on. Adela could not bear it; she moved to the door. But he caught her and thrust her back; it was all but a blow (*Demos*, p. 367).

Nowhere is there any sympathy with, or justification for, Mutimer's behaviour; he is simply the savage barbarian run amuck in 'the upper world'. Sentences such as 'the very man came to light' voluntarily signal a belief in a natural difference between men. Certainly the above scene tends to promote the idea of an insurmountable divide

22 Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism* [1886] (London, 1972), p. 145.

between one class and another. Here is a similar sketch of the social interloper, Lord Dunfield:

> His crude gaiety gave place to bilious pessimism; his coarse good-nature corrupted into brutal harshness; the varnish of gentle breeding was rubbed away, and showed the cheap, rough fibre beneath. In a word, this young man became precisely what he would have been had he grown up in a low station and amid unkindly circumstances.[23]

This is clearly narrated from a contemptuous stand point, similar to the narrative stance in *Demos* and many others. Lord Dunfield may have escaped his lower-class roots but his education and refinement had only disguised the 'brute' beneath. Such narrative bias states unequivocally that Gissing, as Orwell points out, does regard the working class as savages, despite narratorial sympathies to the contrary in *The Nether World*. It is not surprising, indeed, it is highly significant, that *The Nether World* is more experimental in its composition compared to Gissing's other works. Its narration is particularly interesting for its employment of a variation of pronouns. Through the use of 'we' and 'our', the narrative plays with notions of interpellation – but just whose shared perspective is implied? In the following extract the position of the 'we' becomes clearer as it turns into 'you' and 'I'. In the following scene 'Philanthropic ladies of great conscientiousness' take over a soup-kitchen from the 'respectable' working class who have been successfully administering soup to the slum-dwellers of Shooter's Gardens. The elegant but wrong-headed usurpers think that the soup should be dispensed with a better accent and more grace of behaviour if there is to be any improvement in the manners of the recipients. However, the citizens will have none of it and, after one provocation too many, they revolt and ditch the soup on the floor. The narrative comment runs:

> Vast was the indignation of Miss Lant and the other ladies. "This is their gratitude!" Now if you or I had been there, what an opportunity for easing our minds! "Gratitude, mesdames? You have entered upon this work with expectation of gratitude? – And can you not perceive that these people of Shooter's Gardens are poor, besotted, disease-struck creatures, of whom – in the mass – scarcely a human quality is to be expected? Have you still to learn what this nether world has been made by those who belong to the sphere above it? – Gratitude, quotha? – Nay, do *you* be grateful that these hapless, half-starved women do not turn and rend you. At present they satisfy themselves with insolence. Take it silently, you who at all events hold some count of their dire state; and endeavour to feed them without arousing animosity!"' (*TNW*, p. 252).

The narrator here is playing with the nature *vs* nurture debate, suggesting sympathy with the latter view – and with regard to the former – implying that such a belief is an unjust and insupportable complaisance. It would seem that the narrator has positioned himself as one of the judgemental readers, that is, one of those who tolerate social injustice through a misguided conviction that the masses have only themselves to blame. However, given that the above is given in quotation marks, the narrative is highly suggestive of a political orator such as one might find at

23 Gissing, 'Lord Dunfield', *Human Odds and Ends* [1898] (New York, 1977), pp. 257–62 (p. 258).

Speakers' Corner, much featured in the novel. The speaker is making a passionate tirade against their, including the narrator's, prejudice that would seek to confirm its low opinion of the poor – 'what an opportunity for easing our minds!' The speaker, who has been clearly marked as other than the narrator, through quotation marks, resembles the egalitarian narrator who ordinarily speaks in this novel. It is this that gives the impression of its being an *experiment in identification*. Thus, the liberal views expressed are not representative of the author's true sentiments.

If Orwell believed Gissing to be unequivocally sincere in this book he would not have said this of him: '[Gissing] did not see that they [the working class] were capable of becoming civilized if given slightly better opportunities' (GG, p. 351). *The Nether World* smacks of sympathies rather too generous; practically every page is devoted to excusing wrong behaviour; and given its uncharacteristic narrative perspective Orwell was entirely right not to alter his opinion on Gissing's political sympathies which had him conclude that Gissing had 'a deep loathing of the ugliness, emptiness and cruelty of the society he lived in, but he was concerned to describe it rather than to change it' (GG, p. 352).

One area where Gissing never fails to have a swipe at 'the common man' is in his appreciation of the music hall. The following reference, referring to a woman singing a popular music-hall song, entitled 'For Ever and for Ever', is typical in its unapologetic disgust:

> Her eyes turned upward, her fat figure rolling from side to side, her mouth very wide open, Mrs Middlemist did full justice to the erotic passion of this great lyric:
>
> "*Perchawnce if we 'ad never met,*
> *We 'ad been spared this made regret,*
> *This hendless striving to forget –*
> *For hever – hand – for he–e–e–ver!"*
>
> Mrs. Murch let her head drop sentimentally.[24]

The delight Gissing takes in open mockery is keenly felt in the comic cockney detail. Gissing's description of Mrs Murch, just prior to this, who is so visibly moved by the sentiment of the lyrics runs, 'Her face had a hungry, spiteful, leering expression; she spoke in a shrill, peevish tone'. We are told that all of her six children had died in infancy and that 'she lived apart from her husband, who had something to do with the manufacture of an Infants' Food' (*Jubilee*, p. 91). There is more than a note of comic derision in the allusion to Mrs Murch's children having been poisoned by their father. The detail is related in such a casual and matter-of-fact manner – certainly there is no hint that anyone ought to be sorry for the childless mother. Such treatment could not be in starker contrast to Orwell's music-hall loving 'proles' in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Ostensibly, it might look as if there is similar parody because the cockney dialect is retained and there is also the derisive voice in attendance:

> *They sye that time 'eals all things,*
> *They sye you can always forget;*
> *But the smiles an' the tears acrorss the years*

24 Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* [1894] (Brighton, 1976), p. 91.

> *They twist my 'eart-strings yet!*
> She knew the whole drivelling song by heart, it seemed (p. 163).[25]

The psychological point of view is that of Winston Smith's, however; although his sneering observation soon takes a softer, more reflective course: 'Her voice floated upward with the sweet summer air, very tuneful, charged with a sort of happy melancholy. ... [Winston] had never heard a member of the Party singing alone and spontaneously' (pp. 163–4).[26] In the first chapter I compared Orwell's narrative technique with Dostoevsky's and concluded that where the latter seeks to explore meaning through endless psychological labyrinths of polyphonic discourse, Orwell, conversely, desires that meaning will ultimately cohere to his highly attuned ideological point of view, although will often undermine such authority through limited authorial omniscience. However, Winston's admiration for the proles, in all their natural if squalid excess, coupled with his hatred for the authoritarian Puritanism of The Party, is a direct propagandizing of Orwell's firmly held belief that 'life is worth living and human beings, even if they're dirty and ridiculous, are mostly decent' ('Imaginary interview with Swift'). In everything that Orwell writes there is this core message working its way through the fogbound mindset of his characters, that is, until it finally emerges into the liberal daylight of their newly formed conscience.

Orwell would certainly have appreciated the inherent narrative complexities of Gissing's novels, and understood too that Gissing was, like himself, writing in the Condition of England tradition, which is characterized by its 'terrible fluidity of self-revelation'.[27] Gissing's departures and vacillations would seem symptomatic of a greater societal dislocation. As one commentator notes:

> For all his notorious pessimism, Gissing is not … trapped between one world that is dying and one that is powerless to be born; he is, rather, caught in the emotional upheaval of the birth pangs of the modern world.[28]

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25 Orwell was a great fan of music-hall culture. In his review of *Applesauce* Orwell relishes in describing the 'vulgar' comedy of many of the acts he saw, and he especially appreciated the 'utter baseness that Little Tich could get into … simple words' (*CW*, vol. XIII, pp. 252–4 [p. 253]). Orwell argues convincingly that such comedy is *healthily* nationalistic and family orientated.

26 Orwell is here drawing from his life at the BBC during WWII, where he was impressed with the singing of the cleaning women: 'The only time when one hears people singing in the BBC is in the early morning, between 6 and 8. That is the time when the charwomen are at work …. [T]hey have wonderful choruses, all singing together as they sweep the passages' (*CW*, vol. XIII, p. 354). Orwell comments that it gives the building 'quite a different atmosphere … from what it has later in the day'.

27 The quotation is Henry James's famous condemnation of Wells's confessional style, expanded upon in Chapter Six, where we shall look in more detail at the Condition of England tradition, particularly Orwell's contribution to it.

28 Arlene Young, quoted from her introduction to Gissing's *The Odd Women* [1893], ed. Arlene Young (Peterborough, Ontario, 1998), p. 9.

Nevertheless, we can – in terms of socio-political balance – observe that however much Gissing delivers egalitarian sympathy the overriding impression left on one is that of an author who ultimately despises the idea of social flux, with all the class re-shuffling that such a shift would entail, as the following passage testifies:

> They had lived with more or less well-to-do families in the lower middle class, people who could not have inherited refinement, and had not acquired any, neither proletarians nor gentlefolk, consumed with a disease of vulgar pretentiousness, *inflated with the miasma of democracy* [my italics] (Gissing, *TOW*, p. 44).

Holding such anti-democratic beliefs, it follows that, as far as Orwell is concerned, Gissing's sphere of influence must be principally artistic; although, given Gissing's complex textual dynamic, this was no meagre pool of resources.

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Chapter 5

Orwell's Women: Working Against Gissing's Models

It is probably fair to say that Orwell's novels are not generally regarded as championing female equality. However, closer inspection of his work reveals an author who is decidedly more appreciative of, and respectful towards, the opposite sex than his reputation has allowed. George Gissing is relevant to this investigation of Orwell's feminist side because in Orwell's female characterization there is a good deal to suggest that his portrayals are in some part a reaction against his favourite's impossible idealization of women on the one hand and, on the other, his reactionary misogyny.

Interestingly, Gissing is heralded by many as one of England's first feminists, and when reading Gissing's sensitive portrayals of female struggle one feels this to be apt.[1] However, when examining Gissing's novels more closely the accolade of proto-feminist becomes problematic. Significantly, Orwell did not see Gissing as a feminist, and came to this conclusion on Gissing's female characterization:

> The connecting link between them however, is that all of them are miserably limited in outlook. Even the clever and spirited ones, like Rhoda in *The Odd Women* ... cannot get away from readymade standards. In his heart Gissing seems to feel that women are natural inferiors. He wants them to be better educated, but on the other hand, he does not want them to have freedom, which they are certain to misuse. On the whole the best women in his books are the self-effacing, home-keeping ones (GG, p. 350).

There is abundant evidence to suggest that Orwell has the above considerations in mind when developing his own fictional women, because in many respects Orwell's female characters are somewhat the inverse of Gissing's in that the 'better-bred' women, Elizabeth Lackersteen in *Burmese Days*, Hermione in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and Hilda Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*, are something of maleficent types. Or at least they *incline* toward the negative, but again, there is much subtlety in

1 Jacob Korg argues that Gissing 'took the "woman problem" as one of his themes, favored better education and self-determination for women in economic and sexual life, and treated with complete respect their intellectual capacities and the economic problems they confronted' (Korg, 'George Orwell and His Favorite Novelist', *The Gissing Newsletter*, vol. XXI, 4 [Bradford, 1985], pp. 1–11 [p. 8]). As we shall see, Gissing's attitudes towards women are more ambivalent than Korg suggests.

Orwell's characterization, and when this is picked up a broader, more balanced strain can be observed.[2]

In Gissing's portrayals of women there is, notwithstanding the complexity of characteristics invested in all his protagonists, an unmistakable Madonna-whore dichotomy at work, as Connolly points out. There is on the one hand, the ideal chaste, demure and intelligent woman. On the other, there is the debased coarse, 'loose' woman. The paradigm is largely class-based, with women of the 'lower' world representing the worse of the two examples.[3] Conversely in Orwell's novels, and this is where the inverse class prejudice surfaces, there is distinct bias running *against* the 'civilized' and 'well-bred' woman.

For Gissing, again with notable exceptions, a woman's class status, much more so than a man's, will determine her sexual morality, personal integrity, degree of intelligence and so on. In comparing Orwell's women with Gissing's, it will be seen that the corresponding details, in terms of their personal development, attitudes to sex, cultural and moral outlook and so on, suggest that Orwell is actively engaged in challenging many of Gissing's gender/class premises.

The following extract demonstrates well Gissing's treatment of women (here in the process of class ascendancy) that declares quite openly a contempt and even disgust for social aspiration in women of the 'lower' class. This reflects Gissing's belief in an inherent biological gulf between groups, and there is nothing in the narrative to suggest that this voice is any other than that of the author's:

> They spoke a peculiar tongue, the product of sham education and mock refinement grafted upon a stock of robust vulgarity. One and all would have been moved to indignant surprise if accused of ignorance or defective breeding .... The truth was, of course, that their minds, characters, propensities had remained absolutely proof against such educational influence as had been brought to bear upon them. That they used a finer accent than their servants signified only that they had grown up amid falsities, and were enabled, by the help of money, to dwell above-stairs, instead of with their spiritual kindred below.[4]

Gissing's ideas of social Darwinism are here distinctly put in play; words such as 'stock', 'defective breeding' and 'their spiritual kindred' swing him firmly back into

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2 Gissing's turbulent history with women cannot be ignored: At the age of 18 (in 1875) Gissing put an end to a promising academic career by repeatedly stealing money from the cloakroom at Owens College. He was eventually caught and sent to prison. He had stolen from his Colleagues in order to keep Nell Harrison from prostitution. On coming out of prison he married Nell only to be subjected to years of misery through her alcoholism and mental health problems. His second marriage to the working class Edith Underwood proved to be an equally disastrous match and she was eventually sent to an asylum. Gissing allying himself with two women so clearly unsuitable (and of the 'despised class') must raise questions about his own sexual mental health. In any case, his pronouncements on class and sexual morality should be understood in the context of his highly fraught personal experiences with 'lower bred' women.

3 Orwell remarks that such polarizations at least 'invalidate [Gissing's] implied condemnation of the female sex in general' (GG, p. 350).

4 Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* [1894] (Brighton, 1976), p. 7.

the nature camp. The Miss Frenches are a sharp reminder of Gissing's insistence on the *natural* and indeed unalterable inferiority of low-born women.

Many critics have argued that Orwell's novels tend to portray women as natural inferiors, unequal in conversation and outlook to their male counterparts. Julia's failure to engage in 'The Book'[5] in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often cited, with critics arguing that Julia's apathy reflects an authorial view that women can neither appreciate intellectual thought nor, thanks to their self-centred natures, engage in political life.[6] This is not how Julia is portrayed in the novel. Although we are told that she is 'not clever' nor interested in books, she is a lively conversationalist who provides Winston with new insights into Party behaviour – the connection between chastity and political orthodoxy that had escaped Winston, for example (pp. 138–40). Moreover, the authorial voice takes care to explain Julia's political indifference: we learn that it is because she is born of a generation that has, owing to its having known nothing else, internalized and naturalized repression, to the extent that the concept of individuals having any real power is absurd to her and hence, political engagement is illogical:

> [Winston] wondered vaguely how many others like [Julia] 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 (p. 151).

From the swell of feminist criticism hostile to Orwell's female characterization, as we shall see, it is often argued that Orwell's female characters ultimately have a negative impact, and that they are never developed beyond sexist, patriarchal stereotypes. Whilst this may be partly true for Elizabeth Lackersteen and Hilda Bowling, it is not true for either Rosemary, Gordon Comstock's girlfriend in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, or Dorothy Hare in *A Clergyman's Daughter*.[7] In examining Orwell's treatment of women it will be illuminating first to contrast Rosemary with one of Gissing's more ambivalent heroines, Nancy Lord, from *In the Year of Jubilee*. Gissing vacillates between admiration and contempt for her on account of Nancy's mixed-class parentage. The terms 'ladylike and 'unladylike' are used because they are part of the Gissing Madonna-whore lexicon, and are therefore useful in drawing comparisons between the two writers' differing treatment of women.

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5 Emmanuel Goldstein's illicit *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*.

6 See B. Campbell's 'Paterfamilias', p. 133. Copious correspondence by, from and to 'Orwell's women', most notably, Jacintha Buddicom, Brenda Salkeld, Eileen O'Shaughnessy and Sonia Brownell, reveals how Orwell delighted in, and loved intellectual women. See *The Complete Works* and *The Lost Orwell* – the latter publication has letters by his first wife, Eileen, which provide many unique and touching insights into her life with Orwell.

7 John Rodden neatly delineates how the phenomenon of blinkered criticism is formed and sustained: '... "gender-tinged" images of the author get disseminated ... gender-sensitive critiques bear on the formation of reputations ... intellectual reference groups and ideological allegiances shape critical response ...' ('"A Sexist After All?", p. 33).

Ladylike and Unladylike Figures

When comparing Rosemary to Nancy Lord one feels that Orwell has Gissing's model before him, and, as usual, is doing something quite different with it, something that will reflect how attitudes have moved on from those 'fog-bound' days in which Gissing is writing. Both women eventually trap their boyfriends by becoming pregnant. Nancy Lord is very much one of Gissing's modern women, although one who is of quite a different stamp from that of the Miss Frenches, being of decidedly better 'stock'. Of a sudden Nancy Lord is to be given more social and domestic liberty, as the care of her father is now to be undertaken solely by the housekeeper, just promoted to a position of equality in the household. Nancy's nascent outlook is given as follows:

> Thus, by aid of circumstance, had she put herself into complete accord with the spirit of her time. Abundant privilege; no obligation. A reference of all things to her sovereign will and pleasure. Withal, a defiant rather than a hopeful mood; resentment of the undisguisable fact that her will was sovereign only in a poor little sphere which she would gladly have transcended (p. 96).

The note of disapproval is abundantly clear – 'reference of all things to her sovereign will and pleasure'. The understanding is that women are gaining freedoms without any mature understanding of social obligations, or indeed – having been indulged with a dangerous level of education and independence – are displaying a wilful disinclination for taking on board any social responsibility. In portraying Nancy Lord thus, Gissing, with typical misogynistic flare, is presenting a cocktail of feminine hubris and independence that is set up only to be ignominiously toppled.

Rosemary, on the other hand, in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, has similarly abundant privilege, in the sense of being obligated to no one but herself, but she is definitely hopeful and considerate instead of defiant. Neither is Rosemary resentful because her social sphere is 'little', so much so that it does not allow her the simple comfort of meeting her boyfriend in private. Moreover, Rosemary's demeanour, in contrast to Nancy's, never loses any of its feminine charm when she is going about independently:

> Rosemary met him on time. It was one of her virtues that she was never late, and even at this hour of the morning she was bright and debonair. She was rather nicely dressed, as usual (p. 138).

The narrative point of view is not suggestive of Gordon's here; the tenor of the voice, neither peevish nor sulky, is nearer to that of a truly omniscient narrator, close to Orwell himself. The use of the object pronoun *him* in 'Rosemary met him on time', shifts focus to a narrator who is observing the action as oppose to being part of it. The voice is rather like that of the sympathetic narrator in the opening scenes of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (discussed in Chapter Two). The narrative voice attending Nancy Lord's independence, contrastingly, reveals a negative bias against her new-found freedoms, which extends even to her manner: 'her personal demeanour showed a change. So careful hitherto of feminine grace and decorum,

she began to affect a mannishness of bearing' (p. 97). The words 'mannish' and 'mannishness' appear frequently in Gissing's novels to signify unattractiveness in strong women. Nancy's independence allows her to go about the streets of London quite alone, a taste for which, it is pointed out, she has developed after experiencing the often drunken crowds on Jubilee night, a further sign of her decadence – Gissing's hatred for the 'marauding masses' coming through. However, it is in her relationship with a man attempting to quit this 'low' sphere that the narrator builds a picture of Nancy's growing insularity and self-importance:

> Part of the pleasure she found in Crewe's society came from her sense of being so undeniably his superior; she liked to give him a sharp command, and observe his ready obedience. To his talk she listened with a good-natured, condescending smile, occasionally making a remark which implied a more liberal view, a larger intelligence, than his (p. 102).

This insight into her thoughts comes shortly after *her* reflection that the house of Champion Hill was 'an abode of arrogance and snobbery' (p. 97). When she and Crewe are on top of the Monument surveying 'the vision of London's immensity', the narrator tells us:

> In her conceit of self-importance, she stood there, above the battling millions of men .... Here her senses seemed to make literal the assumption by which her mind had always been directed: that she – Nancy Lord – was the mid point of the universe (p. 104).

There can be no mistaking the narrative view of her independent state: Nancy has transgressed into a realm that she is not fitted to inhabit. The language chosen works to undermine her right to inhabit even a symbolic position. She is 'above the battling millions of men', but she is no wise and compassionate Goddess at this 'mid point of the universe'. On the contrary, she is full of vain conceit with no heed for the social struggle taking place below (the struggle Crewe is enmeshed in). Again, Gissing hits a misogynistic note as he does on many occasions when detailing Nancy's interactions with men. Crewe is awe-stricken by Nancy as he observes her looking down upon London, clearly not reading the true direction of her thoughts: 'I never saw you looking so well. I believe you're the most beautiful girl to be found anywhere in this London!' (p. 104). We are told that there is genuine emotion in his voice as he speaks. This is in stark contrast to the disingenuous Nancy, whom we subsequently learn is prepared to marry a man she obviously despises if he can earn 'twenty thousand a year'. Crewe becomes uneasy here and says, 'But you have thoughts above money'. Her reply is, 'My thoughts are my own. I may think as I choose'. (p. 105). Given the selfish and materialistic nature of her thoughts, such a bold and modern statement operates to illuminate their coarse and decidedly unladylike quality. Now observe Rosemary's 'unladylike' behaviour toward the snooty waiter who is openly bullying Gordon into buying more than he can afford; note how she is allowed to be herself, without any show of disapproval from the narrator:

> As they sat down and he [the waiter] turned away for a moment [Rosemary] made a face at his back.
>
> 'I'm going to pay for my own lunch,' she whispered to Gordon, across the table.

> 'No, you're not.'
> 'What a horrible place! The food's sure to be filthy. I do wish we hadn't come.'
> 'Sh!' (p. 148).

The restaurant scene exudes sympathy for Gordon and Rosemary, but more importantly for Rosemary because she is attempting to bring some common sense into this ridiculous war between Gordon and the waiter. It is the detail of her making a face at the waiter and offering to pay her own way that shows how very far Orwell is from demanding feminine grace and decorum in his heroines. Moreover, when outside the restaurant, after Gordon has been unnecessarily 'robbed' of his limited resources, the narrative runs: 'Rosemary walked ahead of [Gordon], rather nervous, not speaking. She was half-frightened now by the thing she had resolved to do. [Gordon] watched her strong delicate limbs moving' (p. 152). To have 'strong' and 'delicate' in the same adjectival mix impresses upon one that Orwell discerns no weakening of the feminine form when a woman is perceived to be physically powerful and self-assured. Certainly, there is no perception of 'mannishness' in her demeanour and behaviour overall despite her subtle assertiveness and level-headed behaviour generally. Of course, it is from Gordon's perspective that we observe Rosemary's 'delicate limbs moving', but as we shall see when analysing the disastrous sex scene of moments later, the authorial voice is always in awe of Rosemary.

To return to Nancy Lord – Nancy is desperately in love with Lionel Tarrant, who lives in Champion Hill – the 'abode of arrogance and snobbery' alluded to above. Tarrant is her social superior, both in education and class. Nancy had become acquainted with the family through their governess. Tarrant pursues Nancy, although never with any serious intentions: 'Miss Nancy Lord was not by any means the kind of person that entered his thoughts when they turned to marriage. He regarded her in every respect his inferior' (p. 145). Nancy by no means encourages her seduction, but when she finally succumbs to Tarrant's sexual advances her actions, as she is mortifyingly aware, cannot be regarded as those of a lady because she has allowed herself to be compromised by meeting him late and without a chaperone. Afterwards, Nancy, working on Tarrant's sense of honour, immediately secures his hand in marriage. There is no doubt that she has trapped him, for he is appalled by the whole affair: 'Could it be sober fact? Had he in very deed committed so gross an absurdity?' (p. 145). And although Nancy gains in Tarrant's regard, they never live together as man and wife; she is merely, though legally wed, in effect a mistress. Nancy has been effectively condemned to a humiliating life of solitude and social ignominy for her initial unladylike transgression and 'ill breeding'.[8]

With regard to Rosemary's pregnancy, Deirdre Beddoe strikes a familiar feminist chord by viewing the ending to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as depressing because, she believes, 'Rosemary has of course eventually trapped [Gordon]' (Beddoe, p. 146). This conclusion could not be further from the implications set out in the narrative;

8 Significantly, the narrator's *full* sympathy returns to Nancy once she has reconciled herself to motherhood and quiet domesticity. Similarly, there is much implied censure of Tarrant's conduct toward his wife. However, the overriding impression is that Nancy's fate was sealed by her initial sexual indiscretion and amorality.

for, on the contrary, Rosemary has saved Gordon from a futile and suicidal life; what is more, Gordon comes to understand this perfectly:

> What had he done? Chucked up the sponge! Broken all his oaths! His long and lonely war had ended in ignominious defeat. ... He was coming back to the fold repentant. He seemed to be walking faster than usual. There was a peculiar sensation, an actual physical sensation, in his heart, in his limbs, all over him. What was it? Shame, misery, despair? Rage at being back in the clutch of money? Boredom when he thought of the deadly future? He dragged the sensation forth, faced it, examined it. It was relief (*KTAF*, p. 265).

The dramatic build-up to the relief felt by Gordon renders it unequivocal – Gordon by his own admission, after searching his feelings deeply and honestly, for once, has been saved by a pregnancy that forced him to grow up. If we go back a little, it is clear that the narrator was always entirely with Rosemary in terms of sympathy, nowhere more apparent than when Gordon is indulging in one of his tirades against women: 'You won't sleep with me, simply and solely because I've got no money. ... You've got that deep-down mystical feeling that somehow a man without money isn't worthy of you. ... Women!' (p. 127) Gordon rages for quite some time on the subject of women's meanness of outlook. Rosemary interrupts him to stand up for her sex, but Gordon dismisses her claims. In the end she bursts out laughing. The narrator steps in:

> She was really extraordinarily good-natured. Besides, what he was saying was such palpable nonsense that it did not even exasperate her. Gordon's diatribes against women were in reality a kind of perverse joke; indeed, the whole sex-war is at bottom only a joke. For some reason it is great fun to pose as a feminist or an anti-feminist according to your sex (p. 127).

This is a rare occasion in the novel where an omniscient, authorial narrator explicitly condemns Gordon's opinion. It can have no other effect than that of saying: on this issue, understanding of Gordon's sexist views will not be left to chance. Elsewhere, Gordon's 'palpable nonsense' is simply reported, with no specific commentary afterwards – no *reaction* from the narrator. One is therefore at liberty to agree with Gordon, although to do so would be to read against the grain of the text. Consider the following passage where Gordon is inwardly declaiming with his usual vituperation:

> The types he saw all around him, especially the older men, made him squirm. That was what it meant to worship the money-god! To settle down, to Make Good, to sell your soul for a villa and an aspidistra! To turn into the typical little bowler-hatted sneak ... who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage pie and stewed tinned pears ... and then perhaps a spot of licit sexual intercourse if his wife 'feels in the mood!' What a fate! (p. 51)

Gordon's viewpoint is indicated in the familiar way, with exclamation marks, but also the viewing position is established as his: 'the types *he* saw all around him'; and the observations that follow are typical of character observation. However, the wider narrative works to undermine this negative, male-centred view, as it does in

the following, where the rarely-heard authoritative narrator takes care to show just how compatible Gordon and Rosemary really are, despite Gordon's nonsense talk about women. As they continue arguing, along the clichéd lines of 'men are brutes and women are soulless', the narrator tells us:

> Gordon and Rosemary never grew tired of this kind of thing. Each laughed with delight at the other's absurdities. There was a merry war between them. Even as they disputed, arm in arm, they pressed their bodies delightedly together. They were very happy. Indeed, they adored one another. Each was to the other a standing joke and an object infinitely precious (p. 128).

Again, where Rosemary is concerned, the narrator will not leave the reader's understanding to chance. Gordon would clearly not be selling his soul in marrying a mate as companionable as her. Another clear indication of their supreme compatibility is the 'merry war' allusion: this is a direct reference to the 'merry war betwixt Signoir Benedick and her' in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. With this nod to Leonato's observation on courtly harmony Orwell is repeating the example of 'love that can tease without wounding'. If we accept this then the novel cannot end with Gordon having been trapped, and it is because of this that Rosemary is free from all negative stereotyping. C Hitchens believes Orwell to have botched the ending of this novel through a failure to maintain any meaningful symbolism:

> At the beginning of the book, Gordon's puny volume of poems is likened to a row of foetuses ... the very image of the sterile and abortive. Redeeming this by means of a hastily conceived pregnancy is not Orwell's most innovative fictional resolution (*Orwell's Victory*, p. 132).

Such dismissive commentary rather demonstrates that hastiness lies firmly with the commentator and not with Orwell's plot. When one reads the last line of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, which is 'Well, once again things were happening in the Comstock family' and contrasts the line to the depressing sterility of the book's opening, it is obvious that Rosemary's pregnancy had been planned from the beginning; this is most certainly a wanted pregnancy. The symbolism in likening Gordon's puny volume of poems to foetuses rather signifies that it is Gordon's poetry that needed to be aborted, and not, mercifully, Rosemary's baby, which is precisely what happens. Moreover, given the extent to which Rosemary is supported narratorilly for her out-of-wedlock pregnancy (a much more serious matter in the 1930s than it is today) Orwell has moved just about as far as he can from indulging in the Madonna-whore framework of judgement that Gissing indulges in. Indeed, treatment of sex throughout *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* operates to demythologize taboos surrounding ideas of female promiscuity.

Connolly argues that Gordon is as much a victim of chaste and limited feminine social outlooks as the hapless Edwin Reardon, and his equally beleaguered friend Biffen in *New Grub Street*:

> By embracing poverty, Gordon only guarantees that he will suffer the loneliness of "The womanless bed" just as Gissing's Reardon loses his wife, "He had won the world's greatest prize – a woman's love – but could not retain it because his pockets were empty (p. 40).

On the contrary, Gordon guarantees his loneliness because he is thoughtless and uncaring at moments when the opposite behaviour is required of him. If we look at the scene in some detail we can observe that all narrative sympathies are with Rosemary. The first speaker is Gordon:

> 'May I? – now?'
> 'Yes. All right.'
> 'You're not frightened?'
> 'No.'
> 'I'll be as gentle as I can with you.'
> 'It doesn't matter.'
> A moment later:
> 'Oh, Gordon, no! No, no, no!'
> 'What? What is it?'
> 'No, Gordon, no! You mustn't *No!*'

Rosemary's assertion that 'it doesn't matter' demonstrates that she *had* fully committed herself finally to having sex with him, and had made herself completely ready, so that her abrupt rejection of Gordon 'a moment later' is shown as spontaneous, and her repetition of 'no' together with the violence of her expression, completely out of character, demonstrates a sincere strength of feeling. The scene ends thus:

> 'I didn't expect *this*,' he said bitterly.
> 'But I couldn't help it, Gordon! You ought to have – you know.'
> 'You don't think I go in for that kind of thing, do you?'
> 'But what else can we do? I can't have a baby, can I?'
> 'You must take your chance.'
> 'Oh, Gordon, how impossible you are!'
>
> She lay looking up at him, her face full of distress, too overcome for the moment even to remember that she was naked. His disappointment turned to anger. There you are you see! Money again! Even in the most secret action of your life you don't escape it; you've still got to spoil everything with filthy cold-blooded precautions for money's sake. Money, money, always money! (p. 157)

The contrast in Rosemary and Gordon's dialogue works to heighten our sense of Rosemary's humility, particularly when the narrator reminds us of her nakedness. Gordon's use of the word 'cold-blooded' works ironically – one cannot escape noticing that his response to Rosemary's obvious embarrassment – 'you must take your chance', is extremely cold-blooded, but as usual, he is wholly without the faculty of *self*-censure. Furthermore, his belief that it is money that is the sole cause of this present calamity is another example of his perverse take on life. At first glance there appear to be striking similarities to Gissing's *New Grub Street* here, in that Edwin Reardon and Biffen are rejected by women because of their poverty, and both are struggling writers, although with notable differences to Gordon. However, Reardon and Biffen are rejected as *partners*, not merely rejected at moments of extreme sexual confusion. Orwell comments directly on the sexual politics of women in Gissing's time, concluding: 'Women of refinement and sensibility will not face poverty. And here one notices again the deep difference between that day and our own' (GG, p. 349).

Again, in terms of gender relations, there is a sense that Orwell is consciously working against Gissing's outmoded models, which is why, in the above scene, it is Gordon who is tormenting Rosemary, and, importantly, not the other way about.

We can contrast the episode between Rosemary and Gordon, showing male disappointment, with the following scene from *New Grub Street*, at a moment when Reardon is failing in his ability to write. Reardon implores his wife, Amy, at the end of a particularly fruitless day, to come and sit with him. It is a clear plea:

> 'Come and sit by me, dearest.'
> 'What's the matter? Can't you do anything?'
> 'No; come and talk to me; we can understand each other better.'
> 'Nonsense; you have such morbid ideas. I can't bear to sit in the gloom' (p. 47).

The harshness of her replies is unmistakable. In fact, Amy Reardon, at least in comparison with her intensely sensitive husband, turns out to be almost a sinister character. Amy witnesses the decline of her husband, indeed, due to her harsh treatment of him, is instrumental in it, and only becomes more contemptuous of his determination to abandon writing in order to reclaim his mental health. She would rather he stuck at it and snap out of his depression. Eventually, after she has left him because he can no longer support her at an acceptable standard, Reardon dies, clearly brought on by personal neglect. One of the last visions of Amy is of her seated at an elegant dinner table where she is hostess. She has married her husband's opposite, Jasper Milvain, the man who cynically sees writing as a lucrative trade and nothing more.

> When she bent her head towards the person with whom she spoke, it was an act of queenly favour. Her words were uttered with just enough deliberation to give them the value of an opinion; she smiled with a delicious shade of irony; her glance intimated that nothing could be too subtle for her understanding (p. 511).

The portrait is now complete, and any thoughts that Amy was not playing a part to her former husband are banished; she hated him because he could not provide her with the sort of company that would allow her to smile 'with a delicious shade of irony'. Because of this insidious side of her nature, she is arguably one of Gissing's most misogynistic creations.

There can be little doubt that Gissing, the consummate craftsman, was consciously writing Amy this way. There are contrasts set up from the outset between Reardon and Amy that are clearly meant to demonstrate Reardon's sensitivity and generosity of feeling against Amy's insensitivity and lack of kindness, and this is a commonly established dichotomy in Gissing's gender sparring.[9] Moreover, there is a sense that

9 The elegant and beautiful musician Alma Frothingham in *The Whirlpool* [1897] (London, 1997) is a good example, not only of gender disparity, but also of the grey area in Gissing's class models (although perhaps explained because of her 'mixed blood'). Her husband is decency itself, and although attempting to persuade Alma to give up her public performances on grounds of health, he applies in vain. Alma is not content with quiet, respectable married life and the care of her son. We are told that 'her senses [were] crying for the delight of an existence that loses itself in whirl and glare' (p. 388). Unlike Nancy Lord,

Gissing is attempting to reveal generic truths about the nature of male and female relationships, feeding into a conviction that man is not only the first sex, but, moreover, the *nobler* sex. Similar contrasts are set up between Gordon and Rosemary, but, as demonstrated above, it is the male sex that is shown to be wanting.[10] However, there is undoubtedly Orwell's 'other' women, who are not portrayed as the nobler sex – far from it, and it is to these 'lesser beings' that we now turn, with a view to establishing the extent to which Orwell seeks to overturn Gissing's upper-class bias (Amy Reardon being something of an anomaly in terms of Gissing's Madonna-whore polarization).

Inverting the Madonna-Whore Paradigm

If Rosemary is the 'angel' in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, albeit one of a very modern variety, then undoubtedly Hermione, Ravelston's fiancée, is the harridan in this novel. Again, these terms are too crude as is 'Madonna-whore', but nevertheless both are useful to highlight contrasts in the sexual politics of female character. The following is a description of Hermione from *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*:

> She lay quiet, content to argue no longer, her arms round him, like a sleepy siren. The woman-scent breathed out of her, a powerful wordless propaganda against all altruism and all justice (p. 109).

Just after this description we see Hermione roundly preventing Ravelston from giving money to a tramp outside the expensive Modigliani's restaurant, a man who merely wants a penny or two for a cup of tea. Given that they are about to feast on fine wine and fillet steak she has really proven herself to be proof 'against all altruism and all justice'. Of such vicious unkindness Rosemary would be incapable, as she would in referring to the working classes as 'lower' class, and of calling them 'disgusting' as Hermione habitually does, even though she is constantly reprimanded for her insufferably snooty and cold attitude by Ravelston. Hermione then is something of a grotesque but there is very little of her in the novel. It is probably for this lack of authorial interest that she remains one-dimensional, rather like the evil Mrs Creevy in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Conversely, Orwell develops a similarly posh character, Elizabeth Lackersteen in *Burmese Days*, to a considerable degree. In doing so he provides much sympathetic insight into her 'harridan/whore' behaviour.

Alma descends into a life of hedonism and eventually adultery. She is blackmailed, and this is the description of her as she faces the culprit: 'Alma felt instinct of savagery; in a flash of the primitive mind she saw herself spring upon her enemy, tear, bite, destroy' (p. 396). Alma dies of a drug overdose shortly after this episode. The closing line of the book shows her husband and son blissfully free of her destructive influence: 'hand in hand, each thinking his own thoughts, they walked homeward through the evening sunshine'.

10 Significantly it is Gordon who is shown to have a meanness of outlook, and he, alone of the two, who has a strong sense of class feeling. This exposure of meanness in class-aware people can be observed in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. As Peter Davison points out: 'Whereas [Dorothy] is unworldly and has a sweet and gentle disposition, her father is described by Orwell as 'a "difficult" kind of man of "almost unfailing ill-humour"' (Davison, p. 54).

Connolly argues that Orwell, in *Burmese Days*, is mirroring Gissing's Madonna-whore theme in *Workers in the Dawn*, with Elizabeth cast in the model of Helen Norman, the intelligent, saintly figure with whom Arthur Golding falls desperately in love, and in whom he hopes to be saved from a life of degradation with the alcoholic prostitute, Carrie. The similarities in the men's respective situations seem obvious enough. Like Golding, Flory is in a miserable relationship with a dependent woman, Ma Hla May, who is his social inferior, and who, like Carrie, is also a whore, although her role as prostitute we shall see is not quite what Carrie's is. Connolly writes of Elizabeth: 'Fresh from Paris, [she] represents everything Flory has long felt exiled from – art, intelligent conversation, Western civilisation, youth and decency' (p. 55). Flory certainly feels this to be the case:

> Elizabeth, by coming into his life, had so changed it and renewed it that all the dirty, miserable years might never have passed. Her presence had changed the whole orbit of his mind. ... Where is the life that late I led? he thought. Just by existing she had made it possible for him, she had even made it natural to him, to act decently (p. 156).

For all her appearance of culture and refinement, Elizabeth is actually unintelligent to the point of vacuity, self-serving, and racist, and in this she is shown to be representative of her class – the ruling class from which Flory is so desperate to escape.[11] Of her time spent in Paris we learn that she took no part in life there, and that 'she disliked all foreigners *en bloc*' (p. 95) – clearly not a hopeful sign for Flory. Indeed, Elizabeth's time in Paris was mostly spent poring over the English illustrated papers such as *Tatler* and *The Sporting and Dramatic*:

> Ah, what joys were pictured there! 'Hounds meeting on the lawn of Charlton Hall, the lovely Warwickshire seat of Lord Burrowdean'. ... 'Sunbathing at Cannes. Left to right: Miss Barbara Pilbrick, Sir Edward Tuke [etc]' (p. 96).

This is her 'lovely, lovely, golden world!' a world that she might have been part of if the family money had held out. As it was she merely had a taste of it via an expensive boarding school. However, it was to seal her character, enslaving Elizabeth to a life of bitter disappointments and perpetual disgust with her environment. Foregrounding such detail brings out Orwell's sympathetic treatment of class.[12] He resists the easy option of merely sneering at Elizabeth's upper-class prejudice:

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11 It is interesting to compare Elizabeth with Adela Quested in *A Passage to India*. Adela, in Forster's novel, represents a new type of English woman, one who is trying to resist the narrow-mindedness of her Anglo-Indian 'sisters'. Adela is curious about India – its Hindu-Muslim mix and so on, and in this respect she would have been perfect for Flory. In refusing to provide Flory with an intelligent and liberal woman, Orwell's Elizabeth character, it would seem, is meant to be representative of a persistent and desperate moneyless class that is stubbornly but misguidedly insisting on its ethnic supremacy.

12 Dione Venables in her postscript to the republished 1974 *Eric & Us* (Chichester, 2006) draws attention to Elizabeth's surname of Lackersteen, highlighting how close it is to *lack esteem*. Venables believes that Orwell had Jacintha in mind when writing Julia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Julia's dark wavy hair and the detail of the freckles on her nose would suggest he did, although his first wife Eileen does also fit the description especially being

> It was not unnatural, with the example of her mother before her eyes, that Elizabeth should have a healthy loathing of Art. In fact, any excess of intellect – 'braininess' was her word for it – tended to belong, in her eyes, to the 'beastly'. Real people, she felt, decent people – people who shot grouse, went to Ascot, yachted at Cowes – were not brainy. ... 'Highbrow' was a bitter word in her vocabulary (p. 96).

Saying that Elizabeth has a 'healthy loathing of Art' entirely removes censure from her position, although we understand that she would be an unsuitable partner for Flory. Flory's poetic, 'Where is the life that late I led' now becomes bitterly ironic. That Flory thinks of Elizabeth as some saving intellectual grace begins to look like a parody of the Gissing model. Indeed, practically all of the exchanges between Elizabeth and Flory are a demonstration of his blind infatuation against her increasing uneasiness that she is in the grip of a 'beastly', 'brainy' 'highbrow':

> 'Whatever is that noise?' said Elizabeth, stopping. 'It sounds just like a jazz band!'
> 'Native music. They're having a *pwe* – that's a kind of Burmese play; a cross between a historical drama and a revue, if you can imagine that. It'll interest you, I think (p. 104).

Not surprisingly, her response is, '"Oh,"', the narrator adding: 'she said rather doubtfully'. The entirety of Elizabeth's comments are negative and demonstrate unequivocally the paucity of her outlook: 'Do they always have their plays in the middle of the road?' (p. 104). Flory begins a spirited explanation, of the kind that has clearly failed to notice the criticism in the question, even after she has said, '... they are *allowed* to – blocking up the whole road-way?' (Orwell's italics. Elizabeth's speech will always be represented as it appears). His answer is, 'Oh yes. There are no traffic regulations here. No traffic to regulate, you see' (p. 105). Needless to say, she does not see. They watch the sensuous dance – Elizabeth 'with a mixture of amazement, boredom and something approaching horror' (p. 107). Flory, showing that he is in his truly native element, begins a lengthy explanation of all that the dance signifies. Failing to note the signs of mingled amazement and horror in Elizabeth, he begins, 'I knew this would interest you; that's why I brought you here' (p. 107). We know what is coming and indeed witness Flory digging himself deeper into a hole: 'There's a touch of the diabolical in all Mongols. And yet when you look closely, what art, what centuries of culture you can see behind it!' (p. 107). Flory's allusion to art and culture alert the esoterically privileged reader to Elizabeth's horror at the mention of such things. We know that '"Highbrow" was a bitter word in her vocabulary', and so her disgust is easily anticipated by us, if not by Flory. Again, this management of our expectations reflects Orwell's narrative awareness. Flory goes on and on talking 'discursively and incautiously' with the result that Elizabeth is more discomforted than ever: 'What *was* the man talking about?'

There is humour here, for the reader is all the time waiting for Elizabeth's bathetic responses – her dumbfounded 'oh?' or 'oh!' The scene reaches a comic climax, off-

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much taller than Jacintha. Hilary Spurling contends in her book *The Girl from the Fiction Department* (London, 2002) that Orwell's last wife Sonia Brownell was his inspiration for Julia. The fact that Sonia was a strikingly beautiful blonde would suggest that whatever else might be her influence as muse for this novel, she was not 'the face' of Julia.

setting any misogynist outrage, when Elizabeth announces 'abruptly' that she has had enough and is leaving. Flory is naturally dismayed and begins to apologize for the Burmese lack of 'decency', but even this he cannot manage without plunging himself into the mire of cultural reflection: 'I ought to have thought .... These people's sense of decency isn't the same as ours – it's stricter in some ways – but ——' (p. 110). All is lost; she cannot bear to listen to another 'beastly' word and cuts him short. In addition to the humour present, there is a telling play on the word 'decency' operating, which delivers Orwell's political voice; it serves, in the colonial cultural context of extreme social hegemony, to foreground, and so question, the concept of exactly what constitutes good or decent behaviour. It is notable that Elizabeth is desperate to escape the dance only to be 'rescued' by the white-man's Club, which is itself a veritable hotbed of sexual immorality, alcoholism and racism – it is certainly not a 'good' or 'decent' retreat.

Interestingly, during this disastrous stepping out together Elizabeth echoes views on phrenology that feature in Gissing's portrayals of 'the wicked', which again highlights her ignorance, and so is also a volley at Gissing's Swiftian portrayals of *naturally* 'low' types. Here they are talking about the Burmese, Elizabeth is commenting on how *revolting*' they are. Flory insists that they are 'charming' with 'splendid bodies'. Elizabeth is disgusted: 'But they have such hideous-shaped heads! ... And the way their foreheads slant back – it makes them look *so wicked*. I remember reading ... that a person with a sloping forehead is a *criminal type*' (p. 122).[13] Flory's response, not quite exasperated, is, 'Oh, come, that's a bit sweeping! Round about half the people in the world have that kind of forehead.' To this she says, sounding exactly like the bigoted racist Ellis, from the Club, whom Flory is thoroughly sickened by, 'Oh, well, if you count *coloured* people, of course ——!' The conversation ends in typical fashion, with Flory digging himself deeper into his 'beastly', 'brainy' hole, and Elizabeth demonstrating that she is as empty-headed as she is shallow:

> 'But, you know, one gets used to the brown skin in time. In fact they say – I believe it's true – that after a few years in these countries a brown skin seems more natural than a white one. And after all, it *is* more natural. Take the world as a whole, it's an eccentricity to be white' (p. 122).

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13 Two women who are decidedly of the criminal type are described thus in *Workers in the Dawn*:

> The two faces were a study for Hogarth: that of Polly Hemp, round, fair, marked with an incomparably vicious smile, the nose very thin and well-shaped, the lips brutally sensual, the forehead narrow and receding; that of Mrs Pole altogether coarser and more vulgar .... At the present moment both faces, different as were their outlines, vied in giving expression to the meanest phase of the meanest vice, that of avarice (vol. III, pp. 288–9).

It is typical that the word 'sensual' is used when describing such 'lower-class' women, and it is typical that the word 'brutal' collocates with the word 'sensual' – for Gissing, these two characteristics are seemingly inseparable in the criminal class. Similarly words such as 'vicious', 'meanest' and 'avarice' are commonly employed to describe the 'whore' type. Gissing's Madonna women are never sensual, brutal, mean or avaricious. Orwell's negative Madonna figures, on the other hand, have many such qualities. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the face of Winston Smith's wife is described as 'aristocratic', but she is vacuous.

Her response, with the usual italicization denoting the thoughtless but polite English ladylike type, is: 'You *do* have some funny ideas!' Immediately after this exclamation the narration runs, 'And so on and so on' (p. 123). The unmistakable hint is that this folly will continue in exactly the same manner *ad infinitum*, and therefore it is not worth documenting any more of it. One is reminded of Lenina in *Brave New World*. Flory is trying to get Elizabeth to understand his radical way of thinking, but at all costs Elizabeth resists the very act of thinking, betraying an *intuitive* sense of his subversiveness, reflecting Orwell's belief in Elizabeth's societal conditioning: 'She felt all the while an unsatisfactoriness, an unsoundness in the things he said' (p. 123). The resemblance to Lenina's reaction to Bernard Marx's unorthodoxy is inescapable, and of course Lenina has been laboratory-conditioned to resist oppositional thought: 'Odd, odd, *odd*, was Lenina's verdict on Bernard Marx'.[14] Similarly, in response to Bernard's asking her to understand his need for them to be alone: '"I don't understand anything," she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact' (*Brave New World*, p. 82). Her use of words such as 'beastly' and 'brainy', particularly when italicized, especially coming at the end of a sentence, like Lenina's 'odd, odd, *odd*, are her *crimestop* words, the invaluable aid to ensuring that her incomprehension will not be stirred into troublesome thought.

Elizabeth, then, is a far cry from Helen Norman, not least because Helen is extremely intelligent and educated; for example, she is learning Latin in order to read the New Testament. Of one of her theological tutors, Dr. Eidenbenz, Helen reflects: 'To maintain his position he has recourse to sophisms which a healthy-minded child could at once see through'.[15] Helen's mind is admirable too because she is an atheist, as are the more remarkable of Gissing's intellectual heroes – she is similar in outlook to Godwin Peak, the autobiographical protagonist of *Born in Exile*. With regard to Helen's saintliness, Gissing's narrator, highly suggestive of Gissing himself, conveys no sarcasm when he has Arthur rapturously saying, '"She is indeed a goddess! ... And she is far superior to me as a 'Madonna' of Raphael is to this miserable smudge which I call a picture"' (*Workers*, vol. I, p. 384). Many times Helen is beatified by the worshipping Arthur: 'A halo seemed to play around her head and glorify her' (vol. III, p. 332). And the sainthood is entirely deserved because she continually sacrifices her happiness to aid others. That Orwell does not have women behave as saints is not surprising given his unshakable belief that anyone tempted to be a saint is manifestly not tempted to be a human being.[16]

In Gissing's novels, then, intelligence and sensitivity in women are shown mainly in women of the 'upper world'. In the 'lower world' women are usually portrayed as innately immoral, of decidedly 'easy virtue', and generally insensitive and coarse – shop girls and factory girls are always of this stamp. Yet, as we have seen, with Amy

14 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* [1932] (London, 1994), p. 78.

15 Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* [1880] (New York, 1976), p. 314.

16 Orwell's 'Reflections on Gandhi' forcefully brings home his abhorrence of those who have pretensions to sainthood: 'The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection …. Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings' (*CW*, vol. XX, pp. 5–12, [p. 9]).

Reardon and Alma Frothingham, Gissing goes a little way to blurring the intrinsic distinctions between class groups that he has set up in his dichotomous paring of good *vs* bad or high *vs* low, although, as stated above, the inescapable innuendo is that there is 'bad blood' in the 'grey' women, which shows their cruel or sensual nature to be the result of an inferior gene pool manifesting itself.[17] Significantly, Orwell too will blur distinctions, and again, the ways in which he does so further evince a transposable intertextual engagement with Gissing's archetypes.

Blurring Distinctions

Orwell's portrayals of women indicate that he is out of patience with such impossible paragons of virtue as Gissing's, particularly when those of a better class are shown as its exclusive inheritors. Hilda Bowling's class and history are revealing in terms of Orwell's inversion of the Gissing model. Without doubt Hilda Bowling is an extremely unattractive figure: she has no conversation, is perpetually 'glooming', and is someone whose 'main kick in life [is] out of foreseeing disasters' (p. 7) (although that description is from her husband's point of view when he is bored by his home life). She has turned out to be a miserable disappointment to her husband, and Bowling portrays his wife as a her-in-doors stereotype of the worst kind, the type imagined by Gordon Comstock before his enlightenment. The similarity to Elizabeth Lackersteen is striking when we learn that Hilda's background is exactly that of Elizabeth's:

> Hilda belonged to a class I only knew by hearsay, the poverty-stricken officer class. For generations past her family had been soldiers, sailors, clergymen, Anglo-Indian officials and that kind of thing. They'd never had any money, but on the other hand none of them had ever done anything that I should recognise as work. Say what you will, there's a kind of snob-appeal in that, if you belong as I do to the God-fearing shopkeeper class (p. 137–8).

Bowling then, has come to understand just how feeble was his belief in the innate prestige of the 'officer class', and through him Orwell makes a political point that challenges class imbalances favouring the so-called better educated. However, it is not Hilda that I wish to compare with Elizabeth at this juncture, but rather Ma Hla May, Elizabeth's opposite. Like Hermione and Mrs Creevy, Hilda is featured too little to provide a rich source of references. Ma Hla May is the lower-class 'whore' figure, who, like Carrie (*Workers in the Dawn*), is responsible for making her lover miserable. Yet it becomes clear in Orwell's treatment of Ma Hla May that the descriptions work to humanize rather than demonize her. Furthermore, she is cast as the person being exploited by the rich and powerful – the occupying power – with pitiable consequences.

17 It should be pointed out that Alma Frothingham's 'pedigree' is not fully known, and because her father brought disgrace on his family by embezzling money, it is suggested that there is 'bad blood' in her genes.

Our introduction to Ma Hla May reflects a narratorial attitude that, from the outset, seeks to deflect attention away from her negative status.[18] From the beginning our attention is directed at Flory, whose behaviour is hypocritical because it is very much that of the exploitative colonial, the very type that he is secretly waging war against. He allows Ma Hla May to come to tea, although she cannot wear her sandals 'in her master's presence' (p. 51). It is clear that she sleeps with Flory only for money and gifts. Despite this she is treated sympathetically from the beginning. Flory, we are told, 'had bought [Ma Hla May] from her parents two years ago, for three hundred rupees' (p. 52). She has had no choice, clearly, but to be what she is, and her nature, far from being embittered, is by contrast, shown to be rather innocent; she is certainly not of the scheming and murderous types that mark out most of Gissing's 'whores':

> Flory's embraces meant nothing to her ... yet she was bitterly hurt when he neglected them. Sometimes she had even put love philtres in his food. It was the idle concubine's life that she loved, and the visits to her village dressed in all her finery, when she could boast of her position as a *bo-kadaw* – a white man's wife; for she had persuaded everyone, herself included, that she was Flory's legal wife (p. 53).

That she believes herself to be married tells us that the girl, slave though she is, has some pride. Her main weakness seems to be that she has failed to understand how grossly she is being exploited, which again highlights Orwell's political foregrounding. Where Gissing's 'nether world' and parvenu whore types are menacing and harbour sinful and deviant natures, Orwell's merely reflect a harmless, self-deluding and at worst silly nature. Despite Flory's rejection of her after sex Ma Hla May continues with her caresses:

> She had never learned the wisdom of leaving him alone at these times. She believed that lechery was a form of witchcraft, giving a woman magical powers over a man, until in the end she could weaken him to a half-idiotic slave. Each successive embrace sapped Flory's will and made the spell stronger – this was her belief (p. 54).

This insight into her psyche has a mildly comic effect as we imagine the poor girl's hopelessly deluded faith in her charms. The important detail, however, is her harmlessness. She is no threat to Flory; there is nothing in the least 'brutally sensual' about her, which, again, works rather to explode the Madonna-whore mythology that Gissing indulges in. The final undoing of Flory – Ma Hla May's public denunciation of him in church – is not of her doing, as it is unequivocally stated in the book. She is merely a pawn, yet again, in the political scheming of the all-powerful magistrate U Po Kyin, and therefore of men, who has orchestrated the entire affair so that he may become the first Indian man to be admitted to the Club. Through Flory's efforts and support the honour is going to go to Dr Veraswami. Flory's disgrace means the

18 Even the fact that she is a whore is given quite matter-of-factly without any trace of censure: 'Flory's embraces meant nothing to her (Ba Pe, Ko S'la's younger brother, was secretly her lover)', p. 53. This also works to lessen her pathetic and dependent state.

disgrace also of the doctor, and therefore the end of his chances of being admitted into the Club.

Elizabeth's reaction to Flory's public disgrace through Ma Hla May is significant in that it marks, or at least appears to confirm, her hard nature:

> The thought that he had been the lover of that grey-faced maniacal creature made her shudder in her bones. But worse than that, worse than anything, was his ugliness at this moment. His face appalled her, it was so ghastly, rigid and old .... She hated him now for his birthmark. She had never known till this moment how dishonouring, how unforgivable a thing it was (p. 286).[19]

Outside the church Flory begs Elizabeth to listen to an explanation, but she pretends that there has never been anything between them to make such an explanation necessary. Her treatment is seemingly ruthless and heartless given his visibly miserable distress. In nature she could not be further away from a woman like Helen Norman. Arthur, like Flory to Elizabeth, wants Helen to be his guide and mentor, his saviour from a life of debauchery [Arthur]: 'Whatever you say I will do! Whatever you say *must* be right! (vol. III, p. 90). Likewise, Flory wants Elizabeth to save him from a life of futility and loneliness [Flory]: '"Try to realise what it means, and that you're the sole person on earth who could save me from it"' (p. 289). Helen understands Arthur and grants him the guidance and commitment he seeks. Elizabeth, in contrast, is neither able to understand Flory nor to commit to him. Yet this is where Orwell's fairness, the blurring of distinctions, comes into play, because Elizabeth is redeemed to some extent by circumstance.

Soon after Flory's suicide, Elizabeth marries Mr Macgregor, the Deputy Commissioner, and one of her reasons is that he 'is not to be despised' (p. 299). The description of Elizabeth at the close of the book could be read as a damning criticism of her as an individual:

> Elizabeth has grown mature surprisingly quickly, and a certain hardness of manner that always belonged to her has become accentuated. Her servants live in terror of her, though she speaks no Burmese. She has an exhaustive knowledge of the Civil List, gives charming little dinner-parties and knows how to put the wives of subordinate officials in their places – in short, she fills with complete success the position for which Nature had designed her from the first, that of a *burra* mensahib.

This could be construed as misogynistic if it were not for certain key details that foreshadow and indeed precipitate such an ending. First of all, it must not be forgotten that Elizabeth was being sexually harassed, quite seriously so, by her uncle, who is also her guardian, and with whom she was living. In light of this, her choice to marry an old bore, and thereby get out of the quasi-incestuous home, is not surprising.

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19 Peter Davison suggests that the reason why Flory's birthmark is so 'unforgivable' in the eyes of Elizabeth is because it makes him 'coloured'. After Flory's death his birthmark fades almost completely. At his funeral the padre 'deliver[s] a short address on the virtues of dead men' (p. 295). Davison draws attention to the ironical narratorial aside immediately after that runs, 'All Englishmen are virtuous when they are dead'. Davison writes, 'he might have added in Flory's case, and now white' (Davison, p. 52).

Moreover, we are given details about her treatment and rejection of Flory that reveal not a vicious and heartless self seeker, such as Amy Reardon and Alma Frothingham, but someone who possesses a deep sense of behaving with moral right. There is a crucial scene in the book where Flory arrives back from Kyauktada with the express purpose of making Elizabeth understand the extent of his love for her. Elizabeth's language and behaviour are detailed as follows: '"You *have* been away a long time, Mr Flory! You're quite a *Stranger*! We've *so* missed you at the club!" etc. etc. She was italicising every other word' (p. 226). This kind of conversation goes on for some time with Flory increasingly tormented by her refusal to acknowledge his clear desire to be serious. He tries to summon the courage to speak plainly; however,

> Not a word could his tongue utter except futile trivialities. How could he plead or argue when that bright easy air of hers, that dragged every word to the level of Club-chatter, silenced him before he spoke (p. 227).

The sentence immediately after this passage is 'Where do they learn it, that dreadful tee-heeing brightness? In these brisk modern girls' schools, no doubt'. The narrative voice here is interesting: it could be read as Flory's internal thoughts, but the indication is that of a narrator other than Flory – the coolness of the observation is out of step with Flory's tumultuous emotions. The effect is to reduce the condemnation of Elizabeth's conduct by showing it to be the result of taught behaviour. This is a minor insight, however. The greatest sympathy is summoned for Elizabeth when we see that her final rejection of Flory, whom she had begun to take seriously, is brought about because of a passionately felt dishonour at his public disgrace. The narration runs:

> Her aunt would be furious when she heard that she had refused Flory. And there was her uncle and his leg-pinching – between the two of them, life here would become impossible. Perhaps she would have to go Home unmarried after all. Black Beetles! No matter. Anything – spinsterhood, drudgery, anything – sooner than the alternative. Never would she yield to a man who had been so disgraced! Death sooner, far sooner (p. 290).

That she would *honestly* face such a wretched future rather than submit to a comfortable life, because of the disgrace that would be attached to it, shows a principled quality in her hitherto not acknowledged – that she marries a man she does not love shortly after, well, that is arguably her all-too-human failing in the face of such demanding upheaval driven as she is to select from few alternatives.

Regarding Hilda Bowling's fate in marriage, there is renewed hope for her just at the ending of *Coming Up for Air*. The suggestion comes via a final exclamation mark, further demonstrating the degree to which Orwell's narratives are honed to remove superfluous detail. The crucial moment comes after Bowling, having returned home from an unsuccessful quest to rediscover the charms of his boyhood, has to convince his glooming wife that he has not been away having an affair. He had pretended to be on business but a returned letter of Hilda's from a hotel in the Midlands exposed the lie. Bowling reflects that it is not so much 'the weeks on end of ghastly nagging and sulking' that will get him down but 'the kind of mental squalor, the kind of atmosphere in which the real reason why I'd gone to Lower Binfield wouldn't even

be conceivable' (p. 246). However, Bowling does keep trying to get his wife to listen to him: 'But look here, Hilda! You've got this all wrong ...' (p. 245). Hilda's stubborn refusal to listen to an alternative reason for her husband's secret trip is persistently met with some form of 'But Hilda!', indicating Bowling's deep frustration with his wife's refusal to understand him. Then, just before the end of the book, when it looks certain that he will not be able to convince his wife of what he has really been up to, which is attempting to rekindle some of his youthful happiness and optimism before a miserable marriage and work-life took hold, there *appears* resignation: 'Quite useless, of course. She'd found me guilty and now she was going to tell me what she thought of me. ... No use playing injured innocence any longer. All I wanted was the line of least resistance.' The last sentence suggests a casual apathy that is in keeping with the 'mental squalor' of his married life from which he has been so desperate to escape. As Bowling puts it a moment earlier, 'Nothing's real in Ellesmere Road except gas bills, school fees, boiled cabbage and the office on Monday'. However, immediately after Bowling's whinging predictable acceptance, he then runs over three possibilities as a final course of action with Hilda. These are:

A. To tell her what I'd really been doing and somehow make her believe me.
B. To pull the old gag about losing my memory.
C. To let her go on thinking it was a woman, and take my medicine.

Beneath these options is Bowling's decision, which is also the last sentence of the novel. It runs, 'But, damn it! I knew which it would have to be'. Given that Bowling had already resigned himself to the C option a moment earlier – 'no use playing injured innocence any longer', the last sentence of the book, through the exclamation mark in 'But, damn it!' screams option A ('a' for action?): *damn it*, I *will* make my wife understand me! There could be no sensible use of an exclamation mark indicative of resignation. This decision, then, signals that Bowling intends to put an end to the drudging malaise that has been his home life, a state of affairs that he has undoubtedly contributed to by his lack of interest in Hilda, with all its cynicism and faux detached amusement. To reiterate: this is not how the novel is read, most critics agreeing that 'Hilda will believe for ever that [George] has been with a woman, [and that] the love affair George has attempted is with his boyhood past and it has proved impossible to realize'.[20] Of course, Hilda may well believe forever that her husband

20 David Wykes, *A Preface to George Orwell* (London, 1987), p. 106. Raymond Williams's criticism of Orwell's outlook is telling on this point. He, along with many others, believes that Orwell failed in his novels because of a 'characteristic coldness, an inability to realise the full life of another'. He concludes that in *all* of Orwell's novels, 'Relationships are characteristically meagre, ephemeral, reluctant, disillusioning, even betraying' (Williams, p. 89). Similarly, in the casting of George Bowling, Hunter laments that the narrator is limited 'to a negative rather than a positive perspective. He can indicate his approval or disapproval of what the narrator/character does, but cannot suggest anything further' (p. 91). Terry Eagleton echoes both of the above sentiments when he writes, 'Failure was Orwell's forte, a leitmotif of his fiction. For him, it was what was real, as it was for Beckett. All of his fictional protagonists are humbled and defeated; and while this may be arraigned as unduly pessimistic, it was not the view of the world they taught at Eton' (Terry Eagleton, 'Reach-Me-Down Romantic', *London Review of Books*, 19.06.03, pp. 6–9).

has been with a woman, but not if Bowling can help it! – this is the point. In any case, it shows that Bowling respects his wife's opinion, perhaps as he has never done before, which again bodes well for his success.

Beddoe writes that in Elizabeth Lackersteen and Hilda Bowling Orwell gives us 'some of the most obnoxious portrayals of women in English fiction (Hindrances, p. 141). Whilst it is true that in many ways they are obnoxious I would argue that in characters like Mrs Pole, Polly Hemp, Clem Peckover, the Miss Frenches, Amy Reardon, and Alma Frothingham it is Gissing who deserves that accolade. When one examines the narrative treatment of women such as Hilda and Elizabeth as a whole it can be seen that they are not so odious as may appear; at any rate they are shown to be a product of a certain class upbringing, which again lessens their negative impact – something that cannot be said of Mrs Pole et al, who are simply presented as though they were born bad.

The result of such denouements is that where Gissing's narratives often prompt an angry response to a character's shortcomings, Orwell's, more often, tend to deflect censure away from the individual, especially where women are concerned, and this denotes that he is altogether less 'worked up' on the Women-question than is Gissing.

Dorothy Hare: Orwell's not so Odd Woman

Of Gissing's book *The Odd Women*, Orwell writes that it is Gissing's 'most perfect and also his most depressing novel' (NEM, p. 46). Without doubt Dorothy Hare is Orwell's 'odd woman'.[21] However, Dorothy Hare, contrary to popular critical interpretation, is not meant to be a depressing figure. By contrasting Dorothy with *The Odd Women*'s young heroine, Monica Madden, who marries disastrously to escape her penurious drudgery, we can see why Orwell decided to have Dorothy remain in her single, independent state as opposed to taking the easier escape route out of poverty by accepting Mr Warburton's offer of marriage.

Before showing how Dorothy Hare escapes the 'odd woman' label, it is necessary to provide some account of *The Odd Women*. To begin with, it is a notable departure from Gissing's other novels in that it is dedicated to exposing the hardships that face impoverished gentlewomen in late Victorian England. In addition, it employs the Madonna-whore leitmotif but with a markedly different dynamic in place, at least as far as the pretty heroine, Monica Madden is concerned. It is one that works, quite deliberately, to expose the iniquitous unfairness contained in the Madonna-whore

21 Arlene Young explains how the term 'Odd women' came about in late Victorian society:

> As the century progressed there was a growing imbalance in the ratio of women to men, which produced the problem of what was popularly referred to as 'odd', 'superfluous' or 'redundant' women, i.e. women destined to live their lives singly – 'odd' rather than paired – because there weren't enough husbands to go round (Introduction to *The Odd Women* [1893] [Peterborough, Ontario, 1998], p. 9).

Young further explains that an imbalance in the birth rate was aggravated by male emigrations to the United States and the colonies.

'choice' set before some women. The novel charts the history of the Madden sisters, who, on the sudden death of their father, are ejected from a comfortable home and forced to make their own way in life. Naturally enough, because of their lack of education and training, it transpires that they are incapable of making their own way in the world. The youngest sister, pretty Monica Madden, consents to marry Edmund Widdowson, a man old enough to be her father, in order to escape the rigours and tedium of work. Widdowson idolizes Monica in much the same way Arthur Golding does Helen, although there is no shared intellectual understanding. The significant detail of Widdowson's brand of worship is not that it is misplaced, but that it is grievous to his wife's mental health as his jealous and reclusive nature oppress her with their increasing intensity. Such is the explicit condemnation of Widdowson in his attitude toward Monica that commentators frequently refer to Gissing's feminist stance here. Adrian Poole summarizes:

> After their marriage, it becomes clear that Widdowson is the precise embodiment of the conventional, 'Ruskinian' attitude towards woman, that ostensibly enthrones and idolises her as queen of the domestic virtues, and in actuality censors brutally any attempt to transgress the narrow limits of the domestic prison.[22]

The narrator of *The Odd Women* is outspoken on the reactionary and harmful way Widdowson treats his wife: 'Never had it occurred to Widdowson that a wife remains an individual, with rights and obligations independent of her wifely condition' (p. 168). Increasingly wearied and disgusted by her husband, Monica is drawn to a younger man whose nature is the very antithesis of Widdowson's, being youthful, easy-going and intellectual. Poole highlights the inescapable Madonna-whore choice laid before Monica: 'Monica finds herself forced to choose between the definitions of wife or whore for herself, and of husband or adulterer for the Other' (Poole, p. 188).

A Clergyman's Daughter pays homage to *The Odd Women*, particularly in its portrayal of Monica Madden. There is the quite obvious 'nod' to Gissing where Dorothy is reading *The Odd Women* over a lonely lunch (just an egg and two cheese sandwiches) on Christmas Day.[23] Here, also, there is a resemblance to Monica Madden's sister, Alice, who reads the bible as '*her* refuge from the barrenness and bitterness of life' [Gissing's italics].[24] The reason for the italicized '*her*' is because their sister Virginia has taken refuge in 'the bottle', and has become a hopeless alcoholic.[25] However, it is in Monica Madden's rejection of her oppressive husband that the subtler, more significant influence on *A Clergyman's Daughter* can be detected.

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22 Adrian Poole, *Gissing in Context* (London, 1975), pp. 186–7.

23 The fact that Dorothy is reading such a quasi-feminist novel shows that she is developing into a more reflective and independent-minded individual.

24 Gissing, *The Odd Women* [1893] (Peterborough, Ontario, 1998), p. 305.

25 In this too one detects Gissing's influence. Dorothy, on observing her lonely friend's indulgence of tea (another unmarried 'odd' woman), comes to understand its significance:

> Dorothy perceived that by one of two well-beaten roads every third-rate schoolmistress must travel: Miss Strong's road, via whisky to the workhouse; or Miss Beaver's road, via strong tea to a decent death in the Home for Decayed Gentlewomen (p. 259).

In a key chapter Alice, Monica's 'sober' sister, is seen telling Monica that it is her 'duty' to return to her husband:

> 'Don't use that word to me!' exclaimed [Monica] angrily. 'It is *not* my duty. It can be no woman's duty to live with a man she hates – or even make a pretence of living with him' (p. 304).

In Dorothy's rejection of Warburton one can readily imagine that Orwell has Monica and Mr Widdowson in mind – the scene where Dorothy rejects Warburton's proposal of marriage suggests it convincingly (the three syllables in 'Widdowson' and 'Warburton' distinctly chime). The rejection scene begins with Warburton making a blunt reference to Dorothy's 'odd-woman' status: 'Consider what your future will be like .... It's the same future that lies before any woman of your class with no husband and no money' (p. 280). These were the exact inducements that made Monica consent to marry Mr Widdowson, and in Warburton there is more than a hint that Dorothy is wise not to accept him, even after he has told her that she will be 'all the time withering, drying up, growing more sour and more angular and more friendless' (p. 283). He talks of her having to work for 'some diseased hag who will occupy herself in thinking of ways to humiliate you' (p. 282). The language itself is quite brutal, suggesting that Warburton is deriving some sadistic pleasure out of seeing her this way. It certainly exposes his misogyny. And one must not forget that he had once tried to rape Dorothy (see Chapter Three). We are told that Dorothy is 'half hypnotised' by his words, and that she is on the brink of saying 'Yes, I will marry you', but then Warburton pulls her to him:

> It broke the spell. The visions that had held her helpless – visions of poverty and of escape from poverty – suddenly vanished and left only a shocked realisation of what was happening to her. She was in the arms of a man – a fattish, oldish man! A wave of disgust and deadly fear went through her. ... His thick male body was pressing her backwards and downwards, his large, pink face, smooth, but to her eyes old, was bearing down upon her (p. 283).

The last sentence is symbolic of rape – the 'thick male body' together with the words 'large', 'pink' and 'smooth' suggest the phallus, especially when coupled with 'pressing her backwards and downwards', and again with 'bearing down upon her'. This could be read as Dorothy's personal revulsion – her unnatural abhorrence of sex that has her imagine the 'furry thighs of satyrs', but the narrative also states quite plainly at this point that Warburton is a 'fat, debauched bachelor', and Dorothy would be roused into re-living his former attempt to rape her, which was arguably the catalyst to her nervous breakdown. Moreover, we are told, after Dorothy's firm rejection of him, that 'Mr Warburton remained on his feet, regarding her with an expression of resigned, almost amused disappointment' (p. 284). There is every suggestion here that Warburton is callous – 'almost amused' – so Dorothy is right in her instincts not to trust either her well-being or her future happiness to him. Like Widdowson to Monica Madden, and the furry animals of Dorothy's imagination, Warburton, it would seem, was more than likely, as Dorothy suspects, to 'turn dangerous at any minute', particularly given that he has attempted 'seductions',

culminating in attempted rape (which Orwell had to cut out), on many occasions in the past. There is also clear admiration for Dorothy's spirit. Warburton continues to question her ability to return to her old life. He puts before her again the details of the tedium she will have to face. This concludes with, 'Holy Communion twice a week and here we go round the doxology-bush, chanting Gregorian plain-song .... You can manage it?' We are told that 'Dorothy smiled in spite of herself' and she wittily replies, 'Not plain-song. Father doesn't like it' (p. 286). There is a shift here in how Dorothy is to be perceived. Her sense of humour demonstrates strength of composure and moves her away from the girlish, duped victim of moments ago – she is back in control, or rather, in control for the first time in her life. It is the first time she has ever made a *calculated* decision regarding her fate. Moreover, the mild sarcasm aimed at her father suggests that she is no longer made anxious by thoughts of him. At the end of Dorothy's conversation with Warburton, when Dorothy tells him that she will 'kneel down on Miss Mayfill's right instead of on her left', the reader is invited to smile (Miss Mayfill is the old dowager who slobbers copiously on the communion chalice). In seating herself to the right of her, Dorothy will leave the slobbered-on chalice for some other poor wretch to tackle. Again, this self-assured humour is a sure sign that Dorothy's youthful piety has now left her. (Earlier Dorothy knelt purposely on the left so that she would receive the wetted cup as punishment for uncharitable thoughts regarding her abhorrence at Miss Mayfill's wet mouth-print.)

One final point to make regarding Dorothy's strength is that Orwell works in an aspidistra reference that indirectly operates to undermine Warburton's belittling lecture. Warburton says to her, 'Women who don't marry wither up – they wither up like aspidistras in back-parlour windows; and the devilish thing is that they don't even know that they're withering' (p. 282). The plant's positive significance at the end of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and indeed in the title, suggests the simile is placed to negate Warburton's insulting and *mistaken* comparison. Rather, it will symbolise her robustness in the face of trial. Significantly, Gordon Comstock never succeeds in his attempts to kill off the aspidistras he finds in his various lodging rooms. He is ever amazed that no matter what he does to them, mostly stabbing them with cigarettes, they *do not* wither up and die. His final pronouncement on the aspidistra is that it is 'the tree of life' (p. 268). *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* was written just after *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Nevertheless the unequivocal championing of its strength and longevity, and its prominence in a novel written immediately after, not to mention Orwell's vast knowledge of and interest in English flora stemming from his childhood, suggest Orwell had been aware of its vigorous quality when writing Warburton's line.

The tone of the narrative, then, at the point where Dorothy is returning to the world of spinsterhood is positive, not excessively so to be sure, but the note is there. Deirdre Beddoe describes Dorothy as a 'pathetic drudge' and insists that 'the novel ends with her returning to the pathetic role of middle-class spinster' (Hindrances, p. 141). There is certainly poignant resignation to her destiny:

> It was not that she was in any doubt about the external facts of her future. She could see it all quite clearly before her. Ten years, perhaps, as unsalaried curate, and then back to

> school-teaching. ... Whatever happened, at the very best, she had to face the destiny that is common to all lonely and penniless women ....
>
> But it didn't matter, it didn't matter! That was the thing that you could never drive into the Mr Warburton's of this world, not if you talked to them for a thousand years; that mere outward things like poverty and drudgery, and even loneliness, don't matter in themselves. It is the things that happen in your heart that matter (p. 291).

Monica Madden's fate, ground down as she was with fatigue, is to die in childbirth; in comparison, Dorothy's singleton fate is certainly preferable.

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Chapter 6

Orwell's Unique Style

'Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing' – so runs the first line of Orwell's essay on Charles Dickens. In this final chapter, as well as examining aspects of Orwell's narrative technique that indicate how Orwell differs, I would like to look at Orwell's magpie plundering of the literary nest in order to come to an understanding of how Orwell develops his unique fictional style through the use of other writers' material, particularly in his adoption/adaptation of their ideas for his own representations of truth.

The most obvious examples of Orwell's 'stealing' are to be found in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the boot stamping on a human face, *forever* is taken directly from Jack London's *The Iron Heel*. The illicit bedroom scenes, above Mr Charrington's antique shop, where Julia eschews her party overall for a dress, and where she will wear makeup and 'be a woman', are suggestive of the scenes between the *femme fatale* I-330 and the sexually inexperienced protagonist D-503 in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*. And the scenes that depict Julia falling asleep as 'The Book' is read out to her by Winston recall Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*. Clearly, there is a direct engagement with these utopian texts to the point where the accusation of having simply lifted the plot device appears legitimate. Interestingly, Aldous Huxley insisted that he had never read Zamyatin's *We*, and yet there are inescapable similarities to the 'OneState' structure and ideological nature of *We* in *Brave New World*. However, I do not wish to dwell on these instances of appropriation – they have been discussed many times over in other critical works – and instead will pick up on borrowing that has hitherto gone undetected.

Taking from Gissing

Of all the writers who have directly influenced Orwell it is Gissing who dominates. One cannot read far into an Orwell novel, or even his non-fiction, before some feature of Gissing's narrative is suggested. Consider the censorious point of view expressed in the following extract from *Down and Out in Paris and London*; it is where Orwell, posing as a tramp, is receiving charitable assistance:

> What could a few women and old men do against a hundred hostile tramps? They were afraid of us, and we were frankly bullying them. It was our revenge upon them for having humiliated us by feeding us (*D&O*, p. 198).

This sympathetic portrayal of ungrateful hostility in the face of charity is reminiscent of Gissing's 'soup-kitchen revolt' in *The Nether World* (detailed in Chapter 4) where

Gissing airs the flip-side of the charitable coin. Contrast the above with the following passage from *The Nether World*, detailing the misbehaviour of the women as they object to the quality of the soup being dished up:

> 'Gratitude, quotha? – Nay, do *you* be grateful that these hapless, half-starved women do not turn and rend you. At present they satisfy themselves with insolence. Take it silently, you who at all events hold some count of their dire state; and endeavour to feed them without arousing animosity!' (p. 252).

Orwell's scene, of course, does not incontrovertibly point to his having borrowed this psychological profiling from Gissing; it is perhaps a mere echoing of sentiment. However, there are other examples that positively scream 'theft!' Take Orwell's declaration on where he got his idea for *Animal Farm*:

> The actual details of the story did not come to me for some time until one day (I was then living in a small village) I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat.[1]

This sounds perfectly reasonable until one reads an almost identical experience in Gissing's last novel, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The unmistakable passage comes at a moment when Henry Ryecroft is discussing his reading preferences. One of Ryecroft's literary heroes, M. de Tillemont, whilst on a vigorous walk in the country, is arrested by the sight of small children in command of large cattle. Tillemont is compelled to ask the following question: '"How is it that you, a little child, are able to control that animal, so much bigger and stronger?"'[2] Leaving aside for a moment the implications of this 'discovery' – on the very opposite page to the one cited above, featuring M. De Tillemont, one is reminded again of a memorable passage in Orwell's writing. Ryecroft is eulogizing over his classical books. He writes, 'a perfume rises from the page as one reads about them' (p. 172). In Orwell's review of Salvador Dali's autobiography he writes, 'It is a book that stinks. If it were possible for a book to give a physical stink off its pages, this one would'.[3] When reading *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, as with many of Gissing's books, one is reminded almost without intermission of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and *Coming Up for Air*.[4] For example, Orwell's habitual references to the urban man's relationship with nature are as much a feature of Orwell's novels as they are of Gissing's, although with some notable distinctions. Consider the following

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1 Orwell, in 'Preface to the Ukrainian Edition of *Animal Farm*' [March 1947], *The Complete Works*, vol. XIX, pp. 86–9 (p. 86).

2 Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* [1903] (Brighton, 1982), p. 173. As outlined in Chapter 4, Orwell was certainly familiar with this novel.

3 Orwell, 'Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on Salvador Dali', *The Complete Works*, vol. XVI, pp. 233–41 (p. 236).

4 Orwell points out that 'the central plot of Shaw's play, *Pygmalion*, is lifted straight out of [Smollet's] *Peregrine Pickle*' (*CW*, XVI, p. 275). Orwell highlights this fact because the oversight testifies to the neglect of Smollet.

rhapsodic description of nature by Ryecroft, who at long last is living away from the city and 'at leisure' to enjoy nature's offerings:

> Could anything be more wonderful than the fact that here am I, day by day, not only at leisure to walk forth and gaze at the larches, but blessed with the tranquillity of mind needful for such enjoyment? (p. 73)

Compare this with Bowling's description of an encounter with nature:

> I bent down to pick a primrose. Couldn't reach it – too much belly. I squatted down on my haunches and picked a little bunch of them. Lucky there was no one to see me. The leaves were kind of crinkly and shaped like rabbits' ears .... I was alive that moment when I stood looking at the primroses and the red embers under the hedge. It's a feeling inside you, a kind of peaceful feeling, and yet it's like a flame (p. 172).

The essential difference is that in the Gissing passage it is the point of view of the 'exceptional man' again, in all his Quixotic abandon, whereas in Orwell's passage, love of nature is experienced through the 'average sensual man' – phrases like 'too much belly' sitting alongside 'it's like a flame' and so forth, confirming Orwell's commitment to represent the Sancho Panza-Don Quixote dualism of body and soul, the idea of 'noble folly and base wisdom' coexisting in every man. Significantly, Orwell provides a description of Gissing, which testifies to a belief that Gissing resembles his last, most gracious hero, Henry Ryecroft:

> A bookish, perhaps over-civilised man, in love with classical antiquity, who found himself trapped in a cold, smoky, Protestant country where it was impossible to be comfortable without a thick padding of money between yourself and the outer world (GG, p. 347).

Henry Ryecroft has cut himself off from the outer world thanks to a thick padding of money. Ryecroft's papers, his journal, are a celebration of his solitary existence, and on every page he is marvelling at the peace he now enjoys, undoubtedly mirroring Gissing's last years of prosperity after a life of poverty, which unlike Orwell, he thoroughly detested and was embittered towards. However, Orwell would certainly recognize his pronouncements on how a peaceful life promotes a relationship with literature. Indeed, one finds this identical concern in Orwell's novels. This is Ryecroft before his escape to the country: 'I remember afternoons of languor, when books were a weariness, and no thought could be squeezed out of the drowsy brain' (*Ryecroft*, p. 20). Significantly, the emphasis in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not on the horror, but the boredom of life: 'The truly characteristic thing about modern life was not its cruelty and insecurity, but simply its bareness ... its listlessness' (p. 77). Both authors take care to delineate the boredom-inducing aspects of modern life, tedious jobs, domestic chaos and so on, that render an individual only fit to *consume* worthless easy-reading.[5] Dorothy Hare, like Gordon Comstock, loses her 'appetite' for good

5 Gissing is scathing about the Forster Education Act of 1870, which gave every child the right to an elementary education. He saw it as mostly having spawned vast swathes of semi-literates who fuel demand for meaningless easy reading. If we think of Julia's job in Minitrue, where 'rubbishy newspapers containing nothing but sport, crime and astrology' are

books – 'After a while nearly all books seemed wearisome and unintelligible' (*ACD*, p. 257). Immediately after this sentence, suggesting Orwell himself, comes the line, 'for the mind will not work to any purpose when it is quite alone.' Eventually Dorothy, like many a Gissing character, cannot 'cope with anything more difficult than a detective story' (*ACD*, p. 257).

However, Orwell is characteristically less perturbed on the subject than Gissing, and in Orwell's unmistakably Gissingesque scenes on this topic we can identify several notes of departure. Gissing was a classical Greek scholar, and his struggling writer-hero Reardon in *New Grub Street* is also a lover of classical Greek. Reardon constantly reads out excerpts from his prized collection to his wife Amy. At one point he reads from the *Odyssey*. He quotes Odysseus addressing Nausicaa, and on finishing he exclaims to his wife, '*That* was not written at so many pages a day, with a workhouse clock clanging its admonition at the poet's ear. How it freshened the soul!'[6] Immediately after this sentence Reardon says, 'How the eyes grew dim with a rare joy in the sounding of those nobly sweet hexameters' (*NGS*, p. 125). In *Coming Up for Air* Orwell pays homage to such sentiment by having Bowling react in a similar way to what is clearly a Gissing figure – Porteous, the Greek scholar who lives quietly by himself, surrounded by Greek classical literature, paying no heed to the modern world outside. Porteous reads aloud for Bowling, and Bowling is comforted by this. Bowling reflects, 'It's all kind of peaceful, kind of mellow' (*CUFA*, p. 164). Bowling goes on to say, 'soothing', adding, sounding again like Reardon, 'While you listen you aren't in the same world as trams and gas bills and insurance companies' (*CUFA*, p. 164). This, however, is where the homage ends, because in the next moment there is an all too evident dig at Gissing. Bowling tries to engage Porteous in a conversation about the current political climate. Porteous refuses to see any *new* threat to world order. When asked his opinion of Hitler, Porteous merely replies, '"Hitler? The German person? My dear fellow, I *don't* think of him"' (p. 165). Porteous dogmatically sticks to a belief that 'there is nothing new under the sun'. Bowling tells us that Porteous finally 'hauls a book out of the shelves and reads me a passage about some Greek tyrant back in the BCs who certainly might have been Hitler's twin brother' (p. 166). Bowling becomes increasingly exasperated with his friend's cultural preference for everything Greek and Latin. Bowling concludes that Porteous is '*dead*. He's a ghost. All people like that are dead' (p. 168).

It is worth noting too that Orwell disliked the dominance of Greek and Latin studies in public schools, and tells how, as a boy, he relished learning that Caliph

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created, we can see how Orwell develops the sinister implications of this trend. We might think of Secker & Warburg who published the entirety of Orwell's work only to refuse publishing *The Lost Orwell*, 2006 (the final supplement to *The Complete Works of George Orwell*) on the grounds that it would not generate enough sales to make it worth their while. As part of the enormously wealthy Random House, Boyd Tonkin points out that instead Secker & Warburg are putting money into projects such as *Big Brother* non-celebrity winner Chantelle's *Living the Dream* (the popular catchphrase that constantly surrounded her while on the show). Tonkin points out that the publisher would 'rather spend a fortune on the victor of *Big Brother* than a relative pittance on the creator of Big Brother' ('A Week in Books', *The Independent*, 02.06.06).

6 Gissing, *New Grub Street*, ed. John Goode [1891] (Oxford, 1998) p. 125.

Omar had 'destroyed the libraries of Alexandria ... and great numbers of tragedies by Euripides and others are said to have perished quite irrevocably'.[7] Orwell tells of his sense of relief because the reduction of Greek texts meant 'so many less words to look up in the dictionary' (p. 275). Orwell further dislikes the preference that Greek and Latin are given over English literature in the school curriculum:

> Classical education is going down the drain at last, but even now there must be far more adults who have been flogged through the entire extant works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Virgil [and] Horace ... than have read the English masterpieces of the eighteenth century (*CW*, vol. XVI, p. 275).

Interestingly, language such as 'going down the drain' invokes the crude embittered voice of characters like Gordon Comstock and George Bowling, and in this light one gains a sense that Orwell is drawing attention to the extremity and imbalance of his argument, which is surprising in someone who was in fact brilliant at Greek and Latin studies (see *CW*, vol. X, p. 87). Nevertheless, Orwell clearly feels that the Classics should be subordinated to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, with authors like Smollet, Fielding and Swift being given as much, if not more, attention than the classics.

Clearly then, Gissing's influence is considerable, even if there are departures in terms of moral, political and social outlook, and not surprisingly Orwell's artistic application, arrangement and content will reflect these key realignments. This applies no less when Orwell is 'stealing' from other writers. If we look at Orwell's similarity to Shaw, then we can observe how Orwell can moreover make an established literary style all his own.

Orwell, Shaw and the Series

Ringbom has noted that like Shaw a striking characteristic of Orwell's work is his use of a negative series for rhetorical and dramatic effect:[8]

> A feature common to both Orwell's and Shaw's series is the frequency of words with a negative connotation. Shaw's catalogues of invectives make up one of his most obvious stylistic characteristics, and Orwell resembles Shaw in his highly critical attitude to most things. Also, when positive words occur they are often used ironically, especially in his early work (Ringbom, p. 16).

Ringbom demonstrates how Shaw employs, for the most part, what has been termed the *static* series: this series 'shows no direct relationship with what precedes or follows' (p. 18). Shaw's series is also frequently complex, with a tendency to be discursive.

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7 Orwell, 'As I Please', *The Complete Works*, vol. XVI, pp. 275–7 (p. 275).

8 Fowler gives an excellent account of the ways in which Orwell's series is a stylistic technique heavily influenced by Emile Zola. Fowler breaks down the lexical patterns to reveal Zola's unmistakable methodological approach. For example: 'Three other simple linguistic strategies dominate the impressionistic technique of "sordid realism". The first is a set of nouns and verbs, in a colloquial register, designating unpleasant, intrusive or low-life objects, sensations and actions'. For the remaining, see Fowler's *The Language of George Orwell*, pp. 73–4.

Ringbom says that, 'Shaw manages to squeeze a tremendous amount of material into one sentence' (Ringbom, pp. 18–19). Ringbom gives the following example of Shaw's elaborate series (taken from the 'Preface to *Heartbreak House*'):

> War cannot bear the terrible castigation of comedy, the ruthless light of laughter that glares on the stage. When men are heroically dying for their country, it is not the time to shew their lovers and wives and fathers and mothers how they are being sacrificed to the blunders of boobies, the cupidity of capitalists, the ambition of conquerors, the electioneering of demagogues, the Pharisaism of patriots, the lusts and lies and rancors and bloodthirsts that love war because it opens their prison doors, and sets them in the thrones of power and popularity (Ringbom, p. 399).

This, according to Ringbom, is an example of the *ramifying* series. It builds into a crescendo of consequences, culminating here in a firework display of rhetorical condemnation. What distinguishes it from Orwell's series is that it looks out, and can be entirely distinct from what has gone before, whereas Orwell's series, more often, looks back, and is a representation of all that has preceded it. Ringbom summarizes:

> Orwell, on the other hand, employs the series for a different purpose. Most of his series have a direct connection with what precedes them, and they are more closely knit, more functional than Shaw's in that they generally provide concrete illustrations of a general point made earlier (Ringbom, p. 19).

Ringbom identifies this as representing the *exemplifying* series. With this in mind I should like to examine one of Orwell's more memorable series and see how it compares with Shaw's in terms of rhetorical balance, impact, and also humour. The series is from *Coming Up for Air*. It begins as Bowling turns his car onto the Oxford road, the road that will deliver him back to his boyhood town of Lower Binfield. The series begins when Bowling is suddenly gripped by the paralysing thought that there is a citizens' army after him led by his wife:

> Hilda was in front, of course, with the kids tagging after her .... And Sir Herbert Crum and the higher-ups of the Flying Salamander in their Rolls-Royces .... And ... all the poor down-trodden pen-pushers from Ellesmere Road ... some of them wheeling prams and mowing-machines and concrete garden-rollers .... And ... the people whom you've never seen but who rule your destiny all the same, the Home Secretary, Scotland Yard, the Temperance League, the Bank of England, Lord Beaverbrook, Hitler and Stalin on tandem bicycle, the bench of Bishops .... I could all most here them shouting: 'There's a chap who thinks he's going to escape! There's a chap who says he won't be streamlined! He's going back to Lower Binfield! After him! Stop him! (pp. 182–3)

This series is a summary of everything that has brought Bowling to his present malaise. Yet it is brilliant in terms of the visual effect that is both comic and serious. It is the forerunner of the Monty Python montage, and the chase *à la* Benny Hill – we can visualize Hitler and Stalin on a tandem followed by the seated bench of Bishops *on wheels*. And there is a nice touch when Bowling says, 'It's queer. The impression was so strong that I actually took a peep through the little window at the back of the

car to make sure I wasn't being followed' (p. 183). The action of Bowling's turning back heightens the visual effect by bringing it to the fore, allowing it to linger that bit longer.

Interestingly, in Gissing's work, Orwell saw a resemblance to Mark Rutherford's novels in its lack of a 'sense of humour' (GG, p. 351). Orwell recognizes that Gissing's novels do not lack 'funny passages', but what chiefly impresses him is Gissing's unconcern with 'getting a laugh'. Bernard Shaw at times consciously omits humour from his work. In an interview regarding *Widowers' Houses* Shaw replies to the question 'May we anticipate some of your unrivalled touches of humour ...?' with 'Certainly not. I have removed with the greatest of care every line that could possibly provoke a smile' (*CP*, p. 126). Even if not entirely in earnest here, and of course witty, the reply demonstrates that humour can militate against serious intent. Orwell, I would argue, manages to use humour without undermining his serious intent. Bowling's anxiety is not lessened or undermined by imagining Hilda, Hitler and Stalin after him. If these spectres were in isolation it would be different. However, the build up of numbers works to reveal the extent of Bowling's paranoia and anxiety – this is more than a brief, illusory comic moment. It is the outpouring of a despair that has been mounting for years, bringing in, as it does, almost every class of person that Bowling has had to deal with his entire adult life.

The series in the preface to *Heartbreak House* that Ringbom singles out is also an example of Shaw's not-so-brilliant rhetoric. There is some awful alliteration in it: 'light of laughter', 'blunders of boobies', 'cupidity of capitalists', 'Pharisaism of patriots', and so on. Nowhere does Orwell adopt such grating repetition bordering on the unreadable.

There is evidence to suggest that at times Orwell does borrow directly from writers for this particular artistic arrangement. In Arnold Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* there is a very Orwellian series in the first chapter (here referring to England's rivers): 'What a natural, simple country ... with [it's] comfortable names – Trent, Mease, Dove, Tern, Dane, Stour, Tame, and even hasty Severn!' [1908] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 37. Compare this with George Bowling on English coarse fish: 'There's a kind of peacefulness in the names of English coarse fish. Roach, rudd, dace, bleak, barbel, bream, gudgeon, pike, chub, carp, tench. They're solid kind of names' (*CUFA*, p. 76). Orwell makes reference to *The Old Wives' Tale* on many occasions; indeed, he is a tremendous admirer of Bennett. So the likelihood is that he was influenced directly by that particular arrangement of ideas.

Unexpected Beginnings: The Alien Focus

Regarding 'Such, Such were the Joys', Peter Davison writes,

> Orwell starts this essay, not as might be expected with what forms its second section, a description of this 'expensive and snobbish school' (pp. 360–66), but with a vivid and painful account of how, soon after his arrival, he reverted to wetting the bed and the physical punishment that induced. Because he writes so personally this has been assumed

> by many readers to be factual. However, it is likely that Orwell has imaginatively taken the experience of another boy as his own for dramatic effect.[9]

Leaving aside for the moment the reasons why Orwell would wish to invent a history for himself, it is the purpose of his opening *The Road to Wigan Pier* with a graphic description of the filth and squalor of the Brooker's tripe shop that I wish to examine here. Douglas Kerr considers the implications of such a beginning of a documentary on working-class life, where one would naturally expect a voice more representative of a sympathetic socialist correspondent. Kerr writes:

> In its way it is a memorable portrait, but it is not one that you would choose to illustrate a theme of the dignity of working people, nor (since the narrator, a middle-class visitor from the south of England, is the principal victim of the Brookers) their exploitation. It raises the question of what the narrator is doing, and what he is doing there. These are questions that open into the perennial Orwell issues of subjectivity and genre (p. 40).

Indeed, why *would* Orwell wish to begin a documentary on the working-class poor in such a deliberately incendiary manner? One answer could be that Orwell prefers to upset expectation, desiring instead to lift the subject matter from its somewhat scripted framework in order to give a more realistic and balanced account of working-class life – they are people after all and so subject to the folly and vice of the rest of the population. This theory gains ground when one compares *Wigan Pier* with Wal Hanninton's book of social reportage, entitled *The Problem of the Distressed Areas*, published by Victor Gollancz in the same year, and indeed was part of the same awareness-raising project. Hannington's book begins:

> During the winter months of 1933–4, the Distressed Areas of South Wales, Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland, and the West of Scotland were the scenes of turbulent working-class demonstrations and agitations against the Government on the question of unemployment.[10]

This is clearly far more in keeping with a book of social reportage, and is what a reader would expect from a man who is also the national leader of the N.U.W.M.

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9 Peter Davison, *The Lost Orwell* (London, 2006), pp. 202–3. Davison adds, 'A fuller analysis, which points to other ways in which Orwell distorted and caricatured reality ... will be found in Robert Pearce's "Truth and Falsehood", *Review of English Studies*, ns, 43, 171' (1992), p. 373. See also Bernard Crick's *George Orwell: A Life*, p. 69.

10 Wal Hannington, *The Problem of the Distressed Areas* (London, 1937), p. 13. It is worth noting that Orwell was not impressed with Hannington, either as a representative socialist or an orator. Peter Davison summarizes Orwell's negative views of the left-wing intelligentsia in his *Orwell's England* footnotes:

> Orwell, in his diary for 11 February 1936, described hearing [Wal Hannington] speak at Wigan Co-op Hall. Hannington was, he wrote, 'A poor speaker, using all the padding and clichés of the Socialist orator, and with the wrong kind of cockney accent (once gain, though a Communist entirely a bourgeois) ....' (X/424). In his London letter to *Partisan Review*, 23 May 1943 (XV/2096), Orwell included him with Harry Pollit (a founding member of the British CP, who gave *The Road to Wigan Pier* an adverse review) among those who, 'After all the years they have had on the job', cannot imagine any occupation except boosting Soviet Russia (p. 220).

(National Unemployed Workers' Movement). Orwell actually writes a review of Hannington's 'rival' book praising it (see *CW*, vol. XI, pp. 98–9). Moreover, Orwell was in the thick of trade union activity during his stay in Wigan, but he was to ignore it effectively in his account of the working class he met in Wigan; and Orwell acknowledged his debt to the political activists in his Wigan diary. However, the point, as has been made by John Newsinger, is that Orwell is not writing about activists but the working class:

> More important is the way that [Orwell] makes invisible in the book the network of political activists who assisted him in his investigations. The point is, of course, that he was not writing about working-class political activists, but about the working class. This is not to say that he ignores the role of the left. According to Orwell, 'the best work for the unemployed is being done by the NUWM'.[11]

In any case, given the Marxist colouring of political activism at the time Orwell would have viewed any working-class participation in it as corrupting. From Bernard Crick's biography on Orwell, as with subsequent biographies, we know that Orwell was staying in a decent lodging house before he removed himself to one that was infinitely worse. Quite deliberately then, Orwell wishes squalor to be his beginning.

Let us now turn to the actual beginning of *Wigan Pier*, to the filthy lodging house where Orwell slept in a room that stank like a 'ferret's cage', and where he looked on in horror as he was handed bread-and-butter with the indentation of a dirty black thumbprint – and where he would eventually flee from because of the sight of an over-flowing chamber pot under the table. Almost in its entirety, Orwell's introduction to the Industrial North, through the Brooker's lodging house, is not a flattering portrait. There is a 'Scotch miner' who is 'a bore' (p. 6). Another fellow lodger, Joe, an unemployed man on the PAC (Public Assistance Committee) is described as looking 'more like a neglected little boy than a grown-up man' (p. 7). The Brookers themselves are, of course, dealt with in a similarly derogatory fashion:

> By local standards [the Brookers] were not so badly off, for, in some way I did not understand, Mr Brooker was dodging the Means Test and drawing an allowance from the PAC, but their chief pleasure was talking about their grievances to anyone who would listen. Mrs Brooker used to lament by the hour, lying on her sofa, a soft mound of fat and self-pity, saying the same things over and over again (p. 10).

Again, Orwell *had* been staying in a clean and decent lodging house before his experience at the Brookers', but conspicuously chooses to decamp from his comfortable dwelling to a house that was not 'respectable', and certainly far from comfortable.[12] The question of why Orwell would seek out the seedier side

11 John Newsinger, *Orwell's Politics* [1999] (London, 2001), p. 37.

12 See Bernard Crick's *George Orwell: A Life* (London, 1980), p. 183. Despite Orwell's diary account that insists he was compelled to leave his reasonably comfortable lodgings, there is evidence to suggest that he decamped voluntarily. In any case, it is clear enough that Orwell had enough contacts with I.L.P. and N.U.W.M. members to get 'decent' accommodation if he wanted it.

of working-class life, with the express intent of beginning his commissioned documentary with a focus on all that is squalid, could be found in Orwell's review of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*. Orwell's praise of Miller's novel says much about Orwell's dislike for the idealization of humanity. Despite what Orwell sees as a callous coarseness in the treatment of the sexual encounters of Miller's characters, whom Orwell describes as the 'out-at-elbow, good-for-nothing type', Orwell praises the book because he finds it a welcome departure from 'the monstrous soppification of the sexual theme' which he believes has been prevalent 'in most of the fiction of the past hundred years'.[13] Orwell admires Miller for 'brutally insisting on the facts', and while Miller may, as far as Orwell is concerned, have swung 'the pendulum too far', he adds that nevertheless Miller 'does swing it in the right direction' (p. 405). The pendulum analogy is useful in thinking of Orwell's treatment of his subject in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. In this piece on Miller Orwell writes that, 'Man is not a Yahoo, but he is rather like a Yahoo and needs to be reminded of it from time to time'. Orwell concludes that such honest treatment of human behaviour, even if debased and seemingly cruel, is preferable to, for example, 'the tee-heeing brightness of *Punch*' and equally to H. G. Wells's 'Utopiae infested by nude school-marms' (p. 405). Perhaps Orwell felt that the pendulum had swung too far in the direction of an idealized view of the working-class. In view of this kind of counter-alignment it would seem that Orwell is wishing to smear a little dirt on what he perceives to be an all too squeaky clean portrayal of the working class and unemployed. This is Orwell, like Miller, 'brutally insisting of the facts'. The essential point, however, is that Orwell will feel himself to be humanizing rather than insulting and dehumanizing his subject. Orwell insists that *Tropic of Cancer*, while appearing to be 'a vilification of human nature' (p. 404), is in fact something approaching its opposite. Orwell's review was written two years before he went to Wigan, and of course written after his tramping exploits chronicled in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, so we must grant that Orwell certainly would have known what his motivations were in focusing on the Brookers, their filth, and the overall mental squalor of the place.

Another contributing factor to this uncompassionate start has been suggested by David Seed in his identification of what he terms the conscious 'masquerading' quality of the authors of empire fiction. In his discussion of Kipling, T. E. Lawrence and Orwell, Seed writes:

> ... Lawrence diagnoses one of the central anxieties in imperial fiction, namely a recognition that identity is relative to cultural context. He hints at the element of masquerade in his imitation of the Arabs. ... Since he can identify with neither culture he is left suspended in a limbo of isolation (p. 270).

Seed defines Orwell's like dilemma for the construction of narrative sympathies in *Burmese Days*. And later, referring to Orwell's essay 'Shooting an Elephant', Seed writes:

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13 Orwell, 'Review of *Tropic of Cancer* by Henry Miller; *The Wolf at the Door* by Robert Francis', *The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 404–6 (p. 405).

> Orwell expresses his revulsion at being forced into stereotyped actions through figures which suggest a discrepancy between role and feeling, between inner self and outer facade (p. 278).

This could be extended to Orwell's anxiety about the cultural context he finds himself in as a member of the ruling class, also as a southerner, visiting and describing the plight of the oppressed in the North of whom he has formerly known nothing. In light of this, Orwell, through quasi-scatological symbolism, wishes to expose his revulsion, and therefore the discrepancy – as when in *Wigan Pier* he has himself view the girl unblocking the foul drainpipe from the privileged position of a person in a train, someone who is speeding out of the depressed area she is rooted to. In his diary entry Orwell records the encounter as it happened: 'At that moment she looked up and caught my eye' (*CW*, vol. X p. 427). The intimacy of such a direct encounter is possibly too intrusive on Orwell's part, and so to reproduce it thus would be to suggest a relationship that was not there; an instance of Orwell seeking to reduce accusations of hypocrisy perhaps.

The insulting and provocative elements of Orwell's 'attacks', which feature in all forms of his writing, ensure that Orwell constantly alienates himself not just from individuals, but from entire bodies of people – Crick talks of 'the long-suffering inhabitants of Wigan', and says that 'Wigan is, to this day, collectively touchy about the tripe shop issue' (Crick, p. 184).[14] If the inhabitants of Wigan are still touchy the left is, to this day, no less sensitive regarding Orwell's infamous harangue on 'quack' socialists in *Wigan Pier*:

> One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England (p. 161).[15]

However, if one is willing to give Orwell the benefit of the doubt, that is, to trust that he is attempting something beyond insult, then a more reasonable note can be discerned. For example, the above quotation is usually given in isolation, as if this were nothing more than an instance of Orwell's having-a-go. The reason for its inclusion in a book of literary criticism is usually to reflect the darker, crankier 'other' Orwell, who does not wish for debate, but merely to hurt people for his own perverse pleasure. I think that the diatribe on 'crank' socialists is deliberately hyperbolic, employed to spark debate. That criticism reflects a deeply held conviction that socialists *are* alienating the ordinary non-political working class. In earlier pages, and leading up to this quotation Orwell meticulously catalogues the failure of the left

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14 I gave a lecture on *Homage to Catalonia* at the Wigan and Leigh Arts Festival (March 2005) and the coordinator Alan Barton confirmed that *The Road to Wigan Pier* is still an extremely sore point with many of the people of Wigan.

15 At a lecture held at Wedgwood Memorial College to commemorate the centenary of Orwell's birth (25 June 2003) Colin Ward was asked to leave out this quotation from his talk as it had been used by every speaker who had gone before. Colin Ward is the writer of 'Orwell and Anarchism', in *George Orwell at Home (and Among the Anarchists)*: *Essays and Photographs*, pp. 15–46.

to get 'the people' on their side when England and Britain, as Orwell puts it, are 'in a very serious mess' (*Wigan Pier*, p. 158). His frustration is everywhere apparent: 'Yet the fact that we have got to face is that Socialism is *not* establishing itself' (p. 159) [his italics]. He talks of socialism 'visibly going back', which he sees as disastrous because 'everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world-system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out' (p. 158). Orwell rejects the Marxist view of socialism arriving 'by some mysterious process called "historical necessity"' (p. 160), and believes that its only hope of materializing is by making socialism more ordinary or at least, more appealing to ordinary people. The encounter between an ordinary man and two of the 'sandal-wearing type' of socialists illuminates his point perfectly. Orwell witnessed this encounter on a bus during the ILP summer school being held at Letchworth. The ILP men are wearing khaki shorts and shirts, are hatless with 'long grey hair bobbed in the Lloyd George style'. Orwell recounts, 'The man next to me, a commercial traveller I should say, glanced at me, at them, and back again at me, and murmured, "Socialists", as who should say, "Red Indians"' (p. 162). Orwell finishes his assessment on the alienating aspects of socialists thus:

> As I have pointed out already, many people who are not repelled by Socialism are repelled by Socialists. Socialism, as now presented, is unattractive largely because it appears, at any rate from the outside, to be the plaything of cranks, doctrinaires, parlour Bolsheviks and so forth. But it is also worth remembering that this is only so because the cranks, doctrinaires, etc., have been allowed to get there first ... (pp. 204–5).

Keith Alldritt provides a helpful insight into Orwell's invective. Commenting on Orwell's attack on W. H. Auden as 'a sort of gutless Kipling' Alldritt writes, 'The bad temper which informs these value judgements derives most significantly from Orwell's sense of the triviality of contemporary literary culture'.[16] I believe this is true and that Orwell uses insult to reflect legitimate frustration, although, and this is equally important because it testifies to Orwell deliberately softening his blows, there is more often than not an element of humour present. Can you really take a man seriously when he attacks feminists with the same vigour, and in the same context, as nudists and fruit-juice drinkers, especially when it is written by a man who often writes humorously?

Having looked at Orwell's 'alien' focus, I would now like to turn to examine the ways in which, largely through his use of foregrounding frame, Orwell focuses on English life in general, and in so doing is contributing to the Condition of England tradition, an aspect of his experimental fiction that has not been acknowledged.

Framing Failure: Orwell and the Condition of England Novel

I should first like to recall Lodge's examination of the debate between Henry James and H. G. Wells (documented by Leon Edel and Gordon N. Ray) on the subject of what constitutes good, sound, and acceptable prose. Lodge defends Wells's *Tono-*

16 Keith Alldritt, *The Making of George Orwell: An Essay in Literary History* (London, 1969), p. 81.

Bungay against claims by James that it is a failed work of art. I think Orwell's novels can be defended on the same grounds as Lodge puts forward in defence of Wells. Lodge writes:

> It was a classic encounter between a great theorist and exponent of the aesthetically 'pure', modern, international novel, and a redoubtable spokesman for and practitioner of the rambling, discursive, aesthetically 'impure' novel of the traditional English type (*LoF*, p. 214).

Tono-Bungay is told in the first person, and rejoices, according to Henry James, in 'the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation' [His italics] (*LoF*, p. 215). Lodge explains how James saw this as a weakness. Lodge asks of what 'type' of novel is *Tono-Bungay*. He notes that 'it is confessional in form'. Indeed, the narrator, George Ponderevo, wants to tell, by way of writing a novel, of his findings with society and of his dealings with men in general because he has lived a varied and widely experienced life. Lodge writes,

> The Victorians had a name for this kind of undertaking in fiction: the 'Condition of England novel'. This description was often applied to novels which sought to articulate and interpret, in the mode of fiction, the changing nature of English society in an era of economic, political, religious, and philosophical revolution' (*LoF*, p. 216).[17]

Lodge reminds us of Wells's *An Experiment in Biography*. In this book Wells argues that the English novel 'matured' at a time of social stability, and as a result novels were written in a manner that reflected relatively fixed social frameworks. Therefore the standards by which novels were judged favoured a framework that promoted cohesion, strong character development and closure. But when a novelist (Wells in this case) wants to reflect a fragmented and disjointed society the traditional stable framework will not do. Lodge reflects on what Wells is doing in *Tono-Bungay*:

> One might say the frame *is* the picture. That is, the main vehicle of Wells's social analysis of the condition of England in *Tono-Bungay* is not the story or the characters, but the descriptive commentary which, in most novels, we regard as the frame. I refer to the descriptions of landscape and townscape, of architecture and domestic interiors, and the narrator's reflection on them, which occupy so prominent a place in the novel (p. 218).

I would argue that this is how *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Coming Up for Air* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* operate – frame is vigorously foregrounded in these books. Take the following description of Dorothy's new environment:

> Southbridge was a repellent suburb. ... Brough Road lay somewhere at the heart of it, amid labyrinths of meanly decent streets, all so indistinguishably alike, with their ranks of semi-detached houses ... you could lose yourself there almost as easily as in a Brazilian forest (p. 197).

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17 Lodge points out that C. F. G. Masterman's *The Condition of England* ('a book of social criticism in the tradition of Carlyle and Arnold') was brought out the same year as *Tono-Bungay* (1909) and Masterman had read proofs of *Tono-Bungay* when preparing his manuscript (*LoF*, p. 217). Of course, Orwell wrote his famous social criticism, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), in the same sprit.

Dorothy is to live in Brough Road, and so will be situated at the heart of this allegorical forest of sameness and meanness. And being at the heart she couldn't be more framed. Bowling is similarly framed and depressed by sameness:

> Down below, out of the little square of bathroom window, I could see the ten yards by five of grass, with a privet hedge round it .... There's the same back garden, same privets and same grass, behind every house in Ellesmere Road (p. 3).

Bowling is framed by his 'little square of bathroom window' as a cell window might frame a prisoner. Indeed, with the vantage point of the yard from above, and this coupled with the precise details of the 'ten yards by five of grass', and the fact of being hedged in, can all be read as an extended metaphor for prison life; and the repetition of the word 'same' serves to focus the reader on the dull conformity of Bowling's environment (and of course the dominating frame reaches behemoth proportions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*). Lodge talks of how Dickens's Coketown is both a setting and a frame. The examples just given operate in the same way. Lodge argues that Dickens 'invests these inanimate objects and collections of objects with a strange and sinister life of their own' (*LoF*, p. 219). Dorothy, Bowling and Winston, from the outset, are shown to emerge from their 'frame' depressed by it: 'An insidious and contemptible self-pity' causes Dorothy to bury her head under the bedclothes (this is our introduction to her). Similarly, Bowling tells us, shortly after his description of the sameness of his neighbourhood that 'nowadays I nearly always do have a morose kind of feeling in the early mornings'. Winston's submergence into the background of an omnipresent crushing environment goes without saying. Such positioning of the individual mirrors Dickens's Coketown treatment: the individual is secondary to their environment and affected greatly by it. Lodge insists that it is through such images that Dickens 'draws the episodic narrative into a coherent design' (*LoF*, p. 219), and he concludes that Wells is operating in much the same way as Dickens when writing *Tono-Bungay*, with the result that individual failure is seen as a reflection of a greater societal failure and not as stemming out of something more personal. He writes:

> Seen in this perspective, the fact that 'Tono-Bungay', the foundation of Ponderevo's immense fortune, should be a quack *medicine*, which falsely claims to cure all the ills of modern society, from boredom, fatigue, and strain, to falling hair and ageing gums, has a more than fortuitous appropriateness; George's failure to achieve a satisfactory and mature sexual relationship becomes a symptom of the universal disorder ('Love,' he says, 'like everything else in this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live, is a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connections (IV, ii, 2)' (*LoF*, p. 219).

George Ponderevo's failure then is not meant to be a reflection of individual failure but rather as being symptomatic of a universal failing.

In the first-person narration of *Tono-Bungay*, through the voice of aspiring novelist George Ponderevo, Wells may be cleverly anticipating what the likely critical responses to his Condition of England novel might be:

> I've reached the criticizing, novel-writing age, and here I am writing mine – my one novel – without having any of the discipline to refrain and omit that I suppose the regular novel-writer acquires.

> ... I've found the restraints and rules of the art (as I made them out) impossible for me. I like to write, I am keenly interested in writing, but it is not my technique. I'm an engineer .... (p. 5)

It is not to be supposed that Wells suffers from similar technical shortcomings. Wells's technique of employing a novice story teller is adopted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; there is a direct allusion to the *terrible fluidity of self-revelation* in Winston's attempt to set down his scattered thoughts in the diary:

> He did not know what had made him pour out this stream of rubbish. But the curious thing was that while he was doing so a totally different memory had clarified itself in his mind, to the point where he felt almost equal to writing it down (p. 11).

The act of telling without *the discipline to refrain and omit* is shown to aid clarity, to help make sense of a disturbing world. Moreover, there are moments in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that almost stop, and here the narrator exposes what could be described as a struggle between the first and third-person voice, as in the following: 'Winston was gelatinous with fatigue. Gelatinous was the right word. It had come into his head spontaneously' (p. 186). Need the narrator have added *it had come into his head spontaneously*? Without this sentence, the narrative would run: 'Winston was gelatinous with fatigue. His body seemed to have not only the weakness of a jelly, but its translucency'. It reads well enough but it is does not convey Winton's awareness of his fatigue. Orwell, of course, could easily have used *free indirect speech* at this point, as he does often in this novel, as in others. But what this approach to voice does is to bring the reader's attention to the *act* of story-telling and voice. Orwell, then, is keen to focus on his character's internal thought processes, that is, on the individual's need to make sense of their world.

The fact that such shifts in point of view can happen without our needing to notice demonstrates the organization of Orwell's novels, revealing an equally competent author who, like Wells, can make the episodic cohere through the foregrounding of frame, a commitment to focus, sustained symbolism, character development and so on. Similarly, there is an *investment* in the individual: it is through their will to improve that the intolerable conditions of life will change. *Tono-Bungay* ends thus:

> I have come to see myself from the outside, my country from the outside – without illusions. We make and pass.
>
> We are all things that make and pass, striving upon a hidden mission, out to the open sea (p. 415).

The note may appear melancholy and prosaic, but the heliotrope quality is there – Ponderevo's head turned 'out to the open sea'. At such a point frame vanishes, and the constraining, oppressive effects of its reach are gone, which brings the novel to closure, even if an uncertain one. Orwell's novels, with the exception of his first, incorporate this optimism – the incompetent rages and despairing self-pity disappear to be replaced by something altogether more mature and hopeful. And it is for these reasons that Orwell's novels are not the failures in form, content and optimism that they are purported to be.

Whilst *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may seem a strange candidate for a Condition of England novel, given that it is about totalitarianism, if one looks at the international power politics that Orwell witnessed being played out on the world stage throughout the Second World War between formally hostile powers (and the carving up of the defeated Axis powers by the Potsdam Agreement of 1945) then the political language and societal structure in the novel resonate clearly with Orwell's world of 1948. The Tehran Conference of 1943, for example, saw Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin signing a pact in order to unite against 'the common enemy' Germany, with no mention of the fact that Stalin had been an ally with Germany prior to World War Two, until Hitler invaded the U.S.S.R. (and Stalin had signed a secret pact with Hitler to divide Poland between them and take over the Baltic States). This is exactly the kind of fractious triumvirate existing among Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, the ruling states in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, previously satirized in *Animal Farm* through the pigs' unnatural alliance with the humans. The union of Britain, the USA and the U.S.S.R to win World War Two was of course successful. However, the language of unity and common purpose chimed in the Tehran agreement, such as 'We express our determination that our nations shall work together in war and in the peace that will follow' was not to last long, and Orwell was still alive to feel the chill of the 'cold war'; indeed, he coined the phrase.[18] It is arguably because of this historical accuracy that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* continues to interest and generate discussion. In short, it is not simply a book about a future that failed to come to pass.

18 Peter Davison points out that while others have been credited with coining the phrase the 'cold war', the *OED* cites Orwell as the first to use 'cold war' in his essay of 1945 entitled 'You and the Atom Bomb'. The others cited use the term 'cold war' after this date. This essay could have been lifted from The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

> It is a commonplace that the history of civilisation is largely the history of weapons. In particular, the connection between the discovery of gunpowder and the overthrow of feudalism by the bourgeoisie has been pointed out over and over again. And though I have no doubt exceptions can be brought forward, I think the following rule would be generally found true: that ages in which the dominant weapon is expensive or difficult to make will tend to be ages of despotism ….
>
> We were once told that the aeroplane had "abolished frontiers"; actually it is only since the aeroplane became a serious weapon that frontiers have become definitely impassable ….
>
> Had the atomic bomb turned out to be something as cheap and easily manufactured as a bicycle or an alarm clock, it might well have plunged us back into barbarism, but it might, on the other hand, have meant the end of national sovereignty and of the highly-centralised police State. If, as seems to be the case, it is a rare and costly object as difficult to produce as a battleship, it is likelier to put an end to large-scale wars at the cost of prolonging indefinitely a "peace that is no peace" (*CW*, vol. XVII, pp. 319–23), pp. 319–21.

Orwell's Observations: Fact or Fallacy?

Without doubt, Orwell's approach to his subject is complex. With regard to the propagandist slant in Orwell's political and social observations, recent criticism has sought to reinvigorate the debate surrounding Orwell's reliability as an *honest* writer:

> The resilient myth of George Orwell as a blunt, contentious, but fundamentally honest writer draws much of its force from Orwell's position as an eye-witness to crucial events or significant situations .... Modern critical debate, however, has called into question the capacity of the author to depict reality, objectively or otherwise; the terms themselves – 'author', 'depiction', 'reality' and 'objectivity', are viewed with varying degrees of scepticism. The role and status of the eye-witness, the 'I' in literature, are under scrutiny.[19]

Peter Davison has identified a key element in Orwell's propagandist method, which, when understood, serves to legitimize Orwell's claims to honesty and clarity even when the truth is not strictly being observed. Davison points to one of Orwell's earliest writings entitled 'A Short Story', written around 1928/29, and finds in it a crucial detail that will shed much light on the way in which one is to read Orwell. The story, written in high burlesque, is about a thorough cad, though a perfect gentleman in society's eyes, who jeopardizes his chances of marriage to a wealthy woman by keeping a mistress. The cad-figure is caught stepping from the house of this mistress by his future brother-in-law. 'Happily' the brother-in-law mistakes the house for a brothel, and the cad says 'so his good opinion of me was restored'.[20] What makes this story interesting for Davison is not the parody of social mores, but a note on the text made by Orwell. Beneath the title 'A Short Story' is written in brackets, 'This never happened to me, but it would have if I had the chance'. Referring to this statement, Davison writes:

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19 Peter Marks, 'The Ideological Eye-Witness: An Examination of the Eye-Witness in Two Works by George Orwell', in *Subjectivity and Literature from the Romantics to the Present Day*, ed. Philip Shaw and Peter Stockwell (London, 1991), pp. 85–92 (p. 85). The works in question are 'A Hanging' and 'Shooting an Elephant'. The conclusions of this particular 'investigation' are largely favourable to Orwell, recognizing his awareness and handling of the 'I' in his story-telling: '... subtly, however, the narrator is shown to be acutely self-aware and disarmingly honest about his prejudices' (p. 90). Similarly: 'Orwell's use of the personal in eye-witness, then, has importance both in terms of the narrative and ideology .... It seems clear that it is unnecessary to situate Orwell within either piece to validate interpretation .... The invocation of Orwell as narrator is superfluous to an understanding of that tale' (p. 91). Orwell addresses this very question in his review of *Foreign Correspondent: Twelve British Journalists* and other war reportage. Referring to the dubious reliability of one of the books, Orwell writes, 'Compare this narrative with some of the others in the book (especially the opening one, where Mr O. D. Gallagher presents the Chino-Japanese War as a huge joke) and you see the difference between being an eye-witness and merely an I-witness' (*CW*, vol. XI, pp. 390–92 [p. 391]).

20 Orwell, 'A Short Story', in *The Complete Works*, vol. X, pp. 115–16 (p. 115).

> This seems to point to Orwell's capacity for writing on that narrow edge that separates fact and fiction, the edge which would distinguish elements of his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (p. 27).

Davison goes on to discuss the autobiographical aspects of Orwell's fictional novels, prompted by Orwell's review of Alex Comfort's *No Such Liberty*, where Orwell writes, that though it is not strictly autobiographical, it is '"in the sense that the author identifies with the hero, thinks him worthy of sympathy and agrees with the sentiments that he expresses"' (p. 38). Davison then points to Orwell's essay, 'The Prevention of Literature', 'in which he declares that the imaginative writer "may distort and caricature reality in order to make his meaning clearer, but he cannot misrepresent the scenery of his own mind"' (p. 38). Davison stresses that it is the *imaginative* in Orwell's work that counts and not whether he, for example, 'witnessed a hanging or shot an elephant' (p. 46). Davison is able to cite many instances of where Orwell is giving fiction as fact and, also, where he is passing off fact for fiction – to give one instance, Orwell insists in 'Shooting an Elephant' that he is 'a poor shot', but the reality is quite the contrary (p. 46). Davison details how Orwell deliberately makes complex the distinctions between fact and fiction, and in doing is 'complicating the categorisation of his writings', so much so, Davison tells us, that librarians and publishers will differ in placing *Down and Out in Paris and London* as fiction or autobiography. Similarly, Davison writes, '*The Road to Wigan Pier* is social reportage – well, Part One – but Part Two?' (p. 42). Davison's conclusion is that 'Orwell's fictionalising ... is acceptable because the "truth" being offered is independent of the artistic reorganisation' (p. 43).

How trustworthy or otherwise Orwell's observations are is something that runs deep through Orwell criticism. A study of *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* illuminates instances where Orwell attempts to draw distinctions between propaganda, which loosely could be truth presented in your own way, with all the personal bias, exaggeration and downright falsehood that implies, and 'concrete' truth, which is telling of what you see in the simplest and most objective manner possible. The following, taken from *Wigan Pier*, involves Orwell's reactions to various establishment attacks on the working class. When the miners are accused of over-eating Orwell makes a spirited defence, writing: 'I notice that the Rev W. R. Inge, in his book *England*, accuses the miners of gluttony. From my own observation I should say that they eat astonishingly little' (p. 35). Orwell informs us that most miners insisted that they could not do their work on a heavy meal, and what they took for their lunch struck him to be merely a snack of bread-and-dripping and tea. If this were a false statement by Orwell in his defence of a people whom he clearly admires, then one could dismiss him as an unreliable witness: but how are we to gauge its reliability? Later in *Wigan Pier*, Orwell comments on how the left are incensed when the working class are criticized and tutored by middle- and upper-class women on nutrition. Orwell, whilst understanding the resentment they cause, shares the middle-class women's view (though importantly, not their conduct). He writes:

> The working-class palate now rejects good food almost automatically. The number of people who *prefer* tinned peas and tinned fish to real peas and real fish must be increasing every year, and plenty of people who could afford real milk in their tea would much sooner have tinned milk – even that dreadful tinned milk which is made of sugar and cornflour and has UNFIT FOR BABIES on the tin in huge letters (p. 92).

There are countless people who would be enraged and indignant at reading this, as Orwell suggests himself, and would dismiss it as the blind prejudice of a snob. There is little ground, however, for believing that this is a false account from Orwell given the balance of his general observations overall: when the miners are accused of gluttony he flatly refutes the charge; when they are charged with preferring tinned peas to fresh, Orwell 'holds his hands up'. One can only conclude that Orwell is reporting what he has witnessed, although, the extent to which 'the reporter' has had adequate exposure to *representative* eating habits of the working classes is another matter.

Orwell's observations in 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' are illuminating on the question of Orwell's objective integrity because time and distance are to change the ways he views events. Orwell begins his 'Looking Back ...' essay with, 'Early one morning another man and I had gone out to snipe at the Fascists in the trenches outside Huesca ....' This man and Orwell, we learn, had had no luck in spying a fascist until finally the enemy came within sight. Orwell aimed his rifle and made ready to fire. However, the man, Orwell informs us, 'was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him'. The reason Orwell gives for staying his shot is this: 'I had come here to shoot at "Fascists"; but a man who is holding up his trousers isn't a "Fascist", he is visibly a fellow creature, similar to yourself, and you don't feel like shooting at him' (*CW*, vol. XIII, p. 501). Why was this account not included in Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*? One answer could be that he had not thought of it then, and this is not meant flippantly. Orwell writes immediately after the aborted sniper execution, 'What does this incident demonstrate? Nothing very much, because it is the kind of thing that happens all the time in all wars'. However, Orwell is being disingenuous with his 'nothing very much' – to a point. The answer is implicitly suggested, which is, that basic human feeling must come before party allegiance, lose sight of this and the war is not worth winning. Again, whether or not that incident actually happened as Orwell describes it is irrelevant because the moral lesson of the episode overrides all other considerations.

Kerr has identified this trait in Orwell's approach to his subject. Referring to the beginning of *Homage to Catalonia*, where Orwell has an encounter with the Italian militiaman puzzling over a map, Kerr gives a brilliant insight into the subtle, yet powerful symbolism that Orwell is capable of achieving:

> It is one of those vivid, almost allegorical encounters with some other that punctuate Orwell's writing about his life. Whether or not it actually happened, or happened like that, the meeting is highly charged, crackling with ideological and personal significance. The handclasp represents entry into a community (Orwell was there to enlist), masculine like Orwell's other communities .... The image might be that of a propaganda poster – Peasants and Intellectuals Unite! (p. 54)

Clearly, fidelity to actual events as they happened is unimportant in instances such as this where the ideological impact is paramount.

This is, of course, not so when considering representations of truth that must be historically responsible. Interestingly, when considering his thoughts whilst on the run in Spain, after the POUM had been suppressed, Orwell reflects that he was unable to see events clearly:

> I [was] conscious of nothing save physical discomfort and a deep desire for this damned nonsense to be over. Afterwards I can see the significance of events, but while they are happening I merely want to be out of them (p. 167).

When Orwell insists that he was 'conscious of nothing save physical discomfort' at this critical time we need to be guarded. This description of himself, caring nothing except for his own hide, is too closely aligned with the 'unexceptional man': the man who is 'a poor shot', wet the bed as a child, shot the elephant because he was 'afraid of looking a fool', the man who neglects to include himself in anthologies of literature, and the man whose observations mean 'nothing very much'. Indeed, for Orwell to maintain that he needs distance in order that he can see events clearly becomes doubtful when we examine his *later* reflections of the Russian agenda in revolutionary Spain:

> As to the Russians, their motives in the Spanish War are completely inscrutable. Did they, as the pinks believed, intervene in Spain in order to defend democracy and thwart the Nazis? Then why did they intervene on such a niggardly scale and finally leave Spain in the lurch? Or did they, as the Catholics maintained, intervene in order to foster revolution in Spain? Then why did they do all in their power to crush the Spanish revolutionary movements, defend private property and hand power to the middle class as against the working class? Or did they, as the Trotskyists suggested, intervene simply in order to *prevent* a Spanish revolution? Then why not have backed Franco? (*CW*, vol. XIII, p. 508).

The motives of Stalin were not so inscrutable for Orwell when he was actually in Spain:

> The only unexpected feature in the Spanish situation – and outside Spain it has caused an immense amount of misunderstanding – is that among the parties on the Government side the Communists stood not upon the extreme left, but upon the extreme Right. (p. 198).

Orwell wrote 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' around 1942, so perhaps because the Soviet Union is now helping England and the allies defeat Hitler, Orwell simply cannot emotionally detach himself.[21] Orwell's clarity on the Russian position whilst in Spain is unequivocal. As he writes many times over, 'The Russians were in a

21 It is not entirely certain when 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' was published. Peter Davison suggests 1942 (*CW*, vol. XIII, p. 497). Of course, Orwell was always acutely aware of men's capacity for unconscious venality.

position to dictate terms. There is very little doubt that these terms were, in substance, "Prevent revolution or you get no weapons"' (p. 195).[22]

Bill Alexander claims that Orwell was to 'obscure and denigrate the real issues in the struggle against fascism'.[23] Alexander further maintains that the 'great merit' of *Homage to Catalonia* to the establishment lies in '[Orwell's] contention that the revolution was cynically betrayed' (p. 98). There is little doubt that the revolution *was* cynically betrayed. We now know that Stalin had decided to eliminate the POUM and CNT from the outset. In light of this, the subsequent charges by the government that the anarchists were fascist collaborators can be seen for what it is – a deliberate lie. Alexander does not address this gross misrepresentation that had soldiers, who were sincerely fighting for the liberation of Spain, locked up and then executed for treason. Given that Alexander was in a position to see events clearly in Spain, as he was 'a political commissar and commander of the British Battalion of the XVth International Brigade' (*CW*, vol. XI, p. 32), his claims to honest reportage become highly questionable.[24]

As we have seen, Orwell employs many devices in the service of his veracity and rhetoric, often with the result that he is flatly disbelieved. A good example of this would be one commentator's reaction to Orwell's explanation of how his conversion from pacifist to hawk (in his attitude to the Second World War) came about. Orwell had been both writing pamphlets and making speeches against support for the war. However, Orwell tells us that on 'the night before the Russo-German pact was announced I dreamt that the war had started' (*CW*, vol. XII, p. 271). This dream was to 'reveal the real state' of his feelings, which were that he was a true patriot after all. Scott Lucas is not impressed with Orwell's explanation of a dream, and writes, regarding Orwell's dilemma in justifying his turn around: 'There remained a problem. Given his strident calls against a war with Germany, how could Orwell

22 It is recorded in *Pravda* (17 December, 1936) that Stalin will eliminate both the POUM and CNT (Trotskyists and Anarcho-Syndicalists). *Pravda* records that the hunting down of these groups 'will be carried out with same energy as in USSR' i.e., as in the 1936 Purge trials. Similarly, a document found by Karen Hatherley, in the National Historical Archive (Madrid, 1989), shows that the NKVD (later KGB) wanted both Eric and Eileen Blair arrested on suspicion of treason against the government. Among the list of grievances against them were, 'Their correspondence reveals that they are rabid Trotskyites', and 'Eric B. took part in the events in May' (*CW*, vol. XI, p. 31.) See also *The Lost Orwell*, pp. 167–8.

23 Bill Alexander, 'George Orwell in Spain', in *Inside the Myth*, pp. 85–102 (p. 90).

24 Lawrence and Wishart (publishers of *Inside the Myth* where Bill Alexander's attack on Orwell appears), published Georges Soria's *Trotskyism in the Service of Franco: Facts and Documents on the Activities of the P.O.U.M.* The book insists that the P.O.U.M. is 'one of the most important instruments which the Spanish rebels use in their struggle against the legitimate Spanish Government'. Orwell had seen this, as it had first appeared in the *Daily Worker* (14 Sep. 1937). Orwell categorically rejects these claims in Appendix II of *Homage to Catalonia*. Again, he was absolutely correct as to the deliberately spurious nature of such accusations. It is now known that this article and many like it were part of a Communist misinformation deluge 'timed to "appear before the trial of Trotskyist leaders ..."'. Davison (*CW*, vol. XI, pp. 30–37) provides further details of the underhand political machinations happening in Spain at this time. Bill Alexander's name appears frequently.

justify this sudden shift beyond the rather lame excuse of a portentous dream?' (Lucas, p. 59).

One could imagine Orwell raising a posthumous smile at his dream being dismissed as a 'rather lame excuse'. Would he care that he had been 'seen through' – if indeed he had, and would it matter to him if he were unfairly criticized? As Orwell has undoubtedly been 'guilty' of such misrepresentations of truth in the past one would imagine that Orwell would not be overly concerned (the pattern is too frequent to deny *some* licence will be taken). In any case, if Orwell has succeeded in getting his point across then one feels he must be satisfied, and Lucas does understand that the dream is Orwell's way of introducing his views on Englishness and patriotism as a potential force for socialist change: 'The answer came through the elevation not of "socialism" but of "Englishness". *Patriotism of the middle classes is a thing to be made use of*, the new Orwell assured his public' (Lucas, p. 59). Moreover, one suspects, given the obvious respect Lucas has for Orwell's writing, that he would be in agreement with Thomas, who writes, 'If [Orwell] can convince us of the truth of what he has experienced, we are ready to tolerate greater rhetorical play with our emotions'.[25]

With the exception of his mention above, Charles Dickens has so far been largely absent from this study. This might seem surprising in light of the quotation, 'Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing'. However, there will not be a detailed engagement with Dickens's influence here because where the borrowing is obvious, or suggestive of Dickens, it is largely in Orwell's indulgence in caricature, as in this description of the bookshop owner, Mr Cheeseman in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*:

> Mr Cheeseman was a rather sinister little man, almost small enough to be called a dwarf. ... As a rule a dwarf, when malformed, has a full-sized torso and practically no legs. With Mr Cheeseman it was the other way about. His legs were of normal length, but the top half of his body was so short that his buttocks seemed to sprout almost immediately below his shoulder blades. This gave him, in walking, a resemblance to a pair of scissors (p. 223).

Douglas Kerr notes Orwell's Dickensian types; he draws parallels between Boxer, the indefatigable workhorse in *Animal Farm* and Joe Gargery, Pip's uncle in *Great Expectations*. Kerr writes: 'Boxer's alphabetical agonies recall those of Joe Gargery in Dickens's *Great Expectations* ...' (p. 90).[26]

A writer's literary activity, in terms of 'legitimate plagiarism', for want of a more suitable expression, is, of course, impossible to scrutinize with any certainty, although it is hardly a new problem, but one Julia Kristeva successfully addresses, arguably, in her term 'intertextuality', to which John Mullan draws attention:

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25 Edward M. Thomas, *Orwell* [1965] (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 45.

26 Kerr continues that sentence with 'and in a different way, of Mr Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*'. The word 'different' suggests a more complex textual relationship in this case, resulting in a proliferation of meaning, similar to the 'parodic underground reply' Kerr ascribes to the Nighttown scene.

> 'Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?' This is the narrator's complaint asked in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (vol. v, ch. I, 283). Except that it is plagiarized from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), one of Sterne's favourite books. Burton mocked writers who 'lard their leane bookes with the fat of others Workes', even as he conceded that all writers 'skim off the Creame of other mens Wits'. These days we like to admire judicious larceny. The scholars who first discovered Sterne's 'borrowings' were shocked at his thieving. Today's academics, in contrast, revel in his novel's intertextuality. Coined by the French critic Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, 'intertextuality' … is now shorthand for almost any kind of allusiveness or imitation.[27]

So, we cannot finally say that Orwell got his idea for *Animal Farm* from reading a line about 'small children in command of large cattle' in Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, nor can we confidently assert that Orwell, in imagining a book giving off a physical smell, is 'stealing' from Gissing – but happily, nor should we care. Nevertheless, there are moments in Orwell's writing where its familiarity tends to confirm real biographical experience. Take again the portrayal of Boxer, the stoical workhorse in *Animal Farm*:

> Boxer could not get beyond the letter D. He would trace out A, B, C, D in the dust with his great hoof, and then would stand staring at the letters with his ears back, sometimes shaking his forelock, trying with all his might to remember what came next and never succeeding (p. 21).

We have met Boxer before in the opening pages of *Homage to Catalonia*. This is the description of the Italian Militiaman he meets in the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona:

> He was standing in profile to me, his chin on his breast, gazing with a puzzled frown at a map which one of the officers had open on the table. ... Obviously he could not make head or tail of the map; obviously he regarded map-reading as a stupendous intellectual feat (p. 1).

Boxer, like the Italian Militiaman, represents the workingman on whose 'powerful shoulders' successful revolutions must inevitably rest. Such depictions of touching, yet pathetic human ignorance are undoubtedly controversial for some, and will always land Orwell in the political mire where he will struggle to emerge unstained from accusations of class prejudice and patriarchal condescension. However, given the admiration and compassion with which he writes and repeats such observations, we must acknowledge that he believed what he saw, and recorded faithfully. He may not have viewed the girl unblocking the drainpipe from the window of a train, but there is no reason to doubt that he was sincere in his belief that he read intelligence and awareness in her face.

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27 Mullan, *How Novels Work* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 286–7. Mullan's book is an excellent guide to the development of the novel. He begins with the first novelists Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson (1700s) and follows the trajectory of prose creativity right through to the present day, examining the techniques of writers such as Ian McEwan and Donna Tartt, always drawing parallels with their literary predecessors.

To refer again to 'Shooting an Elephant', it is impossible to know from the essay whether Orwell did in fact shoot an elephant, although there is evidence to suggest that he did (*CW*, vol. X, p. 506). However, new evidence has come to light which shows that when Orwell was stationed at Moulmein in 1926 (where 'Shooting an Elephant' is set) a report appeared in the *Rangoon Gazette* entitled 'Rogue Elephant Shot'. Peter Davison points out that key details of the report appear in Orwell's essay:

> The similarities to 'Shooting an Elephant' will be apparent: the killing of a villager, ravaging plantations, the uncertainty as to whether the elephant belongs to a powerful trading company or not, and the little detail about the delight of the villagers (*Lost Orwell*, p. 166)

The coincidences are too strong to be ignored *on the one hand*.[28] However, if we recall Davison's conclusion that 'Orwell's fictionalising ... is acceptable because the "truth" being offered is independent of the artistic reorganisation' (p. 43) then we can be satisfied that in the end it is not of great importance; and arguably, the essential detail of 'Shooting an Elephant' is its quality as a fable:

> One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism (*CW*, vol. X, p. 502).

Orwell, while conceivably misrepresenting what actually happened, is not 'misrepresenting the scenery of his mind', as referred to above. What matters for Orwell is his objective.[29]

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28 Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* is again relevant here. Apart from revealing that Orwell would have been aware of such a debate surrounding this very issue of authenticity, Bennett actually provides a neat critical answer to the question of whether a writer should confuse fact with fiction. In his Preface to *The Old Wives' Tale* Bennett writes:

> It has been asserted that unless I had actually been present at a public execution, I could not have written the chapter in which Sophia was at the Auxerre solemnity. I have not been present at a public execution, and the whole of my information about public executions was derived from a series of articles on them which I read in the Paris *Matin* (p. 34).

Bennett explains how another writer, in the magazine *Vanity Fair*, ridicules his attempt at describing an execution and provides a more 'convincing' portrait – as of one who was actually witness to such an event. This also turns out to be false. Bennett derives the following insight: 'This detail is worth preserving, for it is a reproof to that large body of readers, who, when a novelist has really carried conviction to them, assert off hand: "Oh, that must be autobiography!"' (p. 35).

29 In addition to Peter Marks's 'The Ideological Eye-Witness: An Examination of the Eye-Witness in Two Works by George Orwell' another engaging study in this area is Peter Goodall's '"Was the So-called Melon Actually a Pumpkin?": Orwell and the Problem of Realism', *AUMLA* (*Journal of the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association*), vol. 75, 1991, pp. 3–20.

To conclude, there is certainly originality in the way Orwell unites fact, fiction and purpose, both his own and other people's, and in this Orwell stands out, as does Gissing:

> What I want to make a claim for is the uniqueness of Gissing, his specific effectivity. Like Bennett and Orwell, I feel that it is not merely the centrality of Gissing's themes which needs to be affirmed, but the "originality" of their realisation.[30]

There is much originality in the realization of Orwell's themes, particularly in the subtlety of narrative authority, which appears consciously to resist the explicit proselytizing and didactic voice prevalent in his documentary and essay writing. As a result, questions surrounding fact and fallacy, originality and imitation, diminish in importance, and one is left unencumbered to enjoy the delights afforded by highly crafted prose, whether it be *The Road to Wigan Pier* or *A Clergyman's Daughter*.

30 John Goode, *George Gissing: Ideology and Fiction* (London, 1978), p. 14.

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Chapter 7

Conclusion

This study of Orwell's novelistic artistry has attempted to correct hasty and unfair criticism that will cavalierly assert, with exiguous recourse to textual example, that '*A Clergyman's Daughter* is pretty well unreadable today'.[1] Or that '[Orwell's] four pre-war efforts constitute a sort of amateur throat clearing' (Hitchens, p. 133) and, equally reductive, that '[Orwell's] whole work is a kind of didactic monologue'.[2] Orwell's novels are demonstrably more than this, and it has to be understood that Orwell was a ruthless and blinkered critic when it came to his own work. Moreover, he was never constructive when criticizing himself; he was merely emotional, and a good demonstration of this is the fact that he 'destroyed an entire manuscript after a single publisher's letter' (Taylor, *Orwell: The Life*, *p*. 94). His pronouncement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was: 'I have just finished a novel I have been tinkering about with since the summer of 1947. ... I am not pleased with it, but I think it is a good idea'.[3] The word tinkering is wholly unwarranted although typically Orwell. It is worth noting that the book he was 'not pleased with' was voted *the* representative English novel by the BBC in 2003.

One commentator sums up Orwell's novels thus:

> Orwell could be said to have written four variations on the same novel during the 1930s and to have reworked it one last time with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Certainly, the chief ingredient remains constant: a lonely protagonist struggling for a modest share of dignity and happiness against insuperable social odds. The settings change, from Burma to Oceania via London and the Home Counties, but the root conflict remains, as does its inevitable outcome – that characteristic sense of defeat, of exposure to forces too powerful to be resisted, even when they can somehow be survived.[4]

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1 Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (London, 2000), p. 120. Consider the following criticism of *Coming Up for Air*:

> [It] display[s] two obvious weaknesses. Like his other novels, this too deals with a solitary character, but Orwell has compounded this fact with the greater failing – as he himself was soon to pronounce it – of making it a first-person narrative (Wykes, p. 106).

Typically, no examples of this obvious weakness are provided; in their place is Orwell's self-denigration.

2 Gerald J. Concannon, *The Development of George Orwell's Art* (New York, 1977), p. 17. Here reiterating John Manders's assertion in *The Writer and Commitment* (1926).

3 Orwell, Letter to Malcolm Muggeridge [Dec. 1948], *The Lost Orwell*, pp. 116–17 (p. 117). It should be said that Orwell had been *thinking* of the book for much longer.

4 L. Spencer, 'The Novels of the 1930s', in J. A. Jowitt & R. K. S. Taylor (eds) *George Orwell* (Bradford Centre Occasional Papers, no. 3, 1981), pp. 46–67.

I would agree with the first part of this summation, but completely reject the latter, beginning with the line 'but the root conflict remains ...'. This is a common misconception with regard to Orwell's novels, for, as we have seen, after having Flory suffer defeat, Orwell abandons this form of quietus and turns the despondent protagonist around: Dorothy's maturity and humour will save her from being a stereotyped spinster who will always incite pity; Gordon at last comes to see himself as a man among many, having finally awoken from his long narcissistic and anti-social slumber. Bowling, it is strongly suggested, is going to break the habits of a lifetime, which will begin with him actually *talking* to his wife, and Winston Smith learns to identify with the innate humanity of 'the common people' whom he had formerly despised, demonstrating that his defeat is external and therefore societal.

These happier endings locate Orwell firmly within a humanist tradition that lends itself to an affirmation of life, an averment that Orwell was highly proactive in the cause of, as the following pronouncement on D. H. Lawrence's characterization attests:

> The ultimate subject matter of nearly all Lawrence's books is the failure of contemporary men, especially in the English-speaking countries, to live their lives intensely enough .... What he is saying is simply that modern men aren't fully alive, whether they fail through having too narrow standards or through not having any (*CW*, XII, p. 213).

Compare the above to this:

> ... even though [Orwell] is somewhat optimistic, he is more inclined to nourish his imagination on the ills of society than on its potentialities for a richer existence, and he often seems too greatly alarmed by the sense of present deterioration to be able to envision a more humanly rewarding future (Smyer, p. 42).[5]

On the contrary, through Orwell's characters' maturation, Orwell's novels hint unreservedly to the potentialities for a richer existence. Somewhat paradoxically and curiously, many critics believe that the ending of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is decidedly optimistic, in terms of how Orwell viewed the future organisation of society. The reasons for this are owing to 'the fact' that the 'The Principles of Newspeak' Appendix is written, as Thomas Pynchon argues 'consistently in the past tense as if to suggest some later, happier moment in history, post 1984'. From this Pynchon concludes:

> 'The Principles of Newspeak' serves as a way to brighten an otherwise bleakly pessimistic ending – sending us back out into the streets of our own dystopia whistling a slightly happier tune than the end of the story by itself would have warranted.[6]

It is a comforting thought. However, if one examines the syntax of the Appendix more thoroughly, it becomes clear that it could only have been written by someone

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5 Whilst agreeing with a great deal of Smyer's findings on the textual richness of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, it is with his insistence on its pessimistic end that I part company, completely rejecting Smyer's assertion that Dorothy returns to a 'world of emotional isolation and a life spent trying to muffle an anxiety-burdened conscience' (p. 46). Dorothy's humour and light-hearted resignation have been missed.

6 Pynchon, Introduction to 2003 Penguin edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. xxiv. Margaret Atwood puts forward an identical reading. See *Narrating Utopia*: *Ideology, Gender, Form in Utopian Literature*, Chris Ferns (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 248.

situated firmly in 1948, a person who has been able merely to glimpse into the future of 1984, like a Wellsian time-traveller. Observe the following Newspeak words: '*The A Vocabulary* ... was composed almost entirely of words that we *already possess*' [my italics]. Similarly: 'None of the *now-existing* adverbs was retained.' And: 'It was also possible, as in *present-day* English, to modify the meanings of almost any word by prepositional affixes ...' (pp. 212–13). The 'we' in this instance is surely Orwell and his readers of 1949; for, if this were 'the scholarly voice' of someone in the future, post 1984, then they could not employ the adverbial phrase, 'already possess', and note the crucial *present tense* form of the verb 'possess'. As we have seen, from their inception Orwell's fictional narratives have reflected a keen awareness of spatial point of view, with a narrator often deliberately sharing the restricted viewing position of his character, thus reducing the God-like reach of an omniscient narrator. Therefore, when we read, at the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that, 'It was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak ... in the year 2050,' we can only conclude that the writer of the Appendix, just as the reader, is not in a position to *know* with any certainty what the outcome will be, hence Orwell's warning of '*it depends on you*'.[7] Nevertheless, in their more hopeful reading of Orwell's last novel, Pynchon and Atwood at least recognize that Orwell's fictional denouements do not necessarily reflect a resigned pessimism, which in turn demonstrates that they appreciate the *potential* for optimism in a novel that foregrounds darker themes, thereby obviating the familiar accusation of inconsistency in Orwell's humanist position. Of course, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is importantly a satire directed at the totalitarian tendencies he observed in his beloved England of 1948 – Orwell's reversal of the number 48 – the year he finished the novel – being a loud indicator of this.[8]

The debates over the meaning of Orwell's last novel reflect a well-established preoccupation with a certainty that Orwell was somewhat at sea in his political convictions, a conviction that sits comfortably with a belief that Orwell employed a muddled technique throughout his novel-writing career, all of which were, it has been argued, the result of a seemingly illogical eclectic taste and apparently unsound understanding of literary genres. Goodall, for example, talks of Orwell's 'perverseness' in 'valuing experimental stylists for their realism and realist writers for the aesthetic qualities of their prose' (p. 4). I think that this novel and irreverent approach to works of art is the very essence of Orwell's style. Orwell brings together

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7 This line is taken from the following in 'Orwell's Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*': 'The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don't let it happen. It depends on you*' [his italics] (*The Complete Works*, vol. XX, p. 134). That *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can reflect both a present and a future is not so contradictory or paradoxical as it sounds, and for this reason Orwell's last novel is rather like the Rubin vase/profile illusion, where a picture can be either two profiles facing one another or simply the depiction of a vase, or still, it can be both at the same time.

8 Davison points out in his book, *A Literary Life*, that Orwell in fact first had 1980 for the title, and then 1982 before he settled on 1984 (the extant manuscript of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows this). Davison believes that Orwell had his son's twentieth birthday in mind. See pp. 134–5. Still, it is likely that Orwell would have been sensible of the fact that the title was a reversal of date in which he finished the novel and therefore satisfied with what 48 to 84 might signify to readers.

the allegorical with the documentary, the polyphonic with the monophonic, the elegiac with the fairytale, and the elenctic with the deictic – exposure of Comstock's misplaced insistence that money is the root of all dysfunction being an example of the former, and the reportage-type commentaries about the reason for poor schools in *A Clergyman's Daughter* being an example of the latter. Moreover, Orwell unites these seemingly disparate elements with a highly charged and purposeful organizing will. To reiterate Orwell's views on proletarian literature, Orwell writes that these books have had a 'reviving effect' and have 'introduced a note of what you might call crudeness and vitality' to the literary world.

Rare praise has come to light recently through the discovery of a number of letters between Orwell and his French translator, R. N. Raimbault, that testify to an early appreciation of the vitality in Orwell's novels. The comments made by Raimbault demonstrate that Orwell was judged in France more objectively than by most English critics of that time, with the result that the qualities of his technique were recognized. This letter refers to *Burmese Days*:

> In 'Down and Out', the events have dominated and controlled you, you had been only a truthful narrator and wise observer. Here, in 'Burmese Days' it is you who dominate your subject, you become the constructor, you raise yourself admirably, through the analysis you deliver your sharp sense of observation until the conclusion giving a true and lasting strength to your work.
>
> *You have avoided all the flaws for which one generally criticises English novels, in particular their never-ending beginnings which, under the disguise of creating an atmosphere, indefinitely delay the action* [my italics].[9]

If we think again of the immediate action of the alarm clock, at the beginning of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, exploding 'like a horrid little bomb of bell metal' and compare it to the 'occasional faint breaths of wind ... stirr[ing] the newly-drenched orchids' and so on, that introduce *Burmese Days* one can imagine that Orwell has taken on board Raimbault's observation and chosen to make his beginnings even more to the political point. Ringbom also notes that 'some of the vigour and liveliness that characterizes Orwell's style is owing to his punctuation and typography, which are unorthodox at least when judged by the rules found in manuals of style' (p. 19).

The aim of this book has been to provide evidence of this vigour and liveliness, and to contradict those who persist in asserting that 'The few occasions when Orwell tried to write in a different, more experimental vein were not successful' (Goodall, p. 3). If the overall success of these books is acknowledged then it is time to reverse the tide of negative criticism that has severely damaged Orwell's novelistic legacy, and time instead to appreciate the entirety of Orwell's experimental political fiction anew.

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9 R. N. Raimbault, [1934] *The Lost Orwell*, p. 19. The original is as follows:

> Ici, dans "Burmese Days", c'est vous qui dominez votre sujet, vous devenez un constructeur, vous vous élevez admirablement, à travers l'analyse que vous livre votre sens aigu de l'observation, jusqu'à; la synthèse qui fait la vraie et durable force de votre oeuvre.
>
> Vous avez évité tous les défauts qu'on reproche généralement aux romans anglais, en particulier ces débuts interminables qui, sous couleur de créer une atmosphère, retardent indéfiniment l'action.

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