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Fact and Fiction: George Orwell as Writer, Reporter, and Voice of the Masses

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the interdependent relationship between Orwell's fiction and nonfiction works. I will explore multiple examples of both to highlight his experience and his talent for reportage, in addition to his skill with dystopian rhetoric and outsider perspective, and how each skill builds upon and improves the other. I argue that in spite of the commercial success of his two most prominent works of fiction (*Nineteen Eighty-four* and *Animal Farm*), his nonfiction expertise is equally as important and culturally relevant. My intention is to prove that both mediums encompass similar qualities that work together to make Orwell's work successful as a vehicle for generating social consciousness.

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Chapter 1

PREFACE

George Orwell (1903-1950), born Eric Blair, was an impressive man who produced an equally impressive body of work. Initiating the research for this project involved reading a majority of his essays, novels, and nonfiction pieces. For obvious reasons, an undergraduate thesis has neither the scope nor breadth to incorporate his body of work in its entirety, and therefore decisions on which pieces should bear the focus of the paper needed to be made. Though reading his writing as a whole helped me to come to the conclusion I reach by the end of the paper, I chose to examine most directly the three novels and two nonfiction works that feature most prominently in my paper, as well as the three essays that I touch on at different points for arguments sake. The majority of Orwell's work is narrated from the dystopian-like outsider perspective that I dissect in the paper, but I felt that these pieces specifically made the best examples.

I decided first to incorporate his two most well known works of fiction, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), first and foremost because they would be most familiar to anyone reading my thesis. Both texts have a resonance in our current literary curriculums, being taught in high schools across the country as well as some college courses. There is a cultural resonance with the dystopian themes featured in both of these pieces that is most commonly associated with Orwell, even by those who know his work only by reputation. Additionally, as two of the books written towards the end of

his life, I felt that they most genuinely encompassed the direction that his narrative voice eventually took.

The third novel I chose, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), stands separate from the dystopian themes associated with Orwell's work, and that is the reason that I chose to use it. I was also fascinated with the Dorothy's disconnect with reality as a result of her amnesia, which set the novel apart from other less-dystopian options, like *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), or *Burmese Days* (1934). The first tells the story of a man of little means struggling to keep his literary integrity in a world run by money, the second explores the race and class struggles that exist in the British Imperial Colony of Burma. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*'s Gordon Comstock's fall from relative luxury and eventual decision to live in mediocrity falls close to Dorothy's experience, and the unfamiliar setting of *Burmese Days* mirrors the unfamiliar scenes of hop-picking to the upper-class British audience. However, I believe that Dorothy's story embodies the general narrative voice that threads between all of Orwell's non-dystopian work in a way that is succinct and straightforward, making it a better example for my purpose than his other examples of non-dystopian fiction.

The decision as to which non-fiction works to include was a more difficult one. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) was the first Orwell I'd ever read, and was one of the reasons I chose to study Orwell for this project after I spent time in Spain and, specifically parts of Catalonia. For that reason it holds a special significance to me. However, once that project began to unravel, I came to the conclusion that *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) were more useful examples of the type of writing and the specific social commentary that I wanted to focus

on. Though it does have overt themes of suffering and humanity, *Homage* also focuses on the politics of the Spanish Civil War and on Orwell's experiences more directly than either *Down and Out* or *Wigan Pier*. Both pieces I chose emphasized the suffering Orwell witnesses, as well as that which he experiences, which connected more directly with the point I am arguing. They are more broadly focused, and for this reason I found them more pertinent to my topic.

As for the essays, I originally hadn't intended to utilize any of them. First, many of them recapitulate ideas set forth in Orwell's larger works. Second, there are so many of them that I worried choosing one over the other would be more difficult and less easily justified. However, when I decided not to include *Burmese Days*, I found that "A Hanging" (1931) showed a similar side to Orwell's Burma experience in a way that was helpful to my argument. Additionally, "The Spike" (1931) showed a more in-depth description of the no-cost, poor-quality vagabond housing that was so frequently mentioned in *Down and Out*. I felt that it was a good supplement to the analysis already offered by the full-length work. I also struggled deciding whether to include "Politics and the English Language" (1946) or "Why I Write" (1946) as I felt that they both gave insight to Orwell as a writer in a way that was useful and poignant. However, in the end I chose only to mention "Why I Write" briefly, and "Politics and the English Language" not at all, as the analysis of the larger works proved to be more useful to the paper as a whole in the long run. Essentially, when I looked back at the paper, it didn't seem to be lacking the insight provided by these essays, as that insight is provided less directly and reflected differently in each of the full-length works that I spend most of the paper analyzing.

Though I feel that Orwell's body of work as a whole embodies the same themes and ideas I put forth in my paper, I also stand by my choices. Though many of these pieces could have been replaced by other comparable works with a similar resulting argument, I believe that the decisions I made in regards to what books to include and not include helped me to write a stronger paper, with a more solid argument.

Chapter 2

INTRODUCTION: A MAN OF CONTRADICTIONS

George Orwell was a man of contradictions. A self-proclaimed socialist, his writing often betrays profound disappointment with modern socialism. Born into upper-middle class society, he spent his life rebelling against the standards and expectations that came with his privilege. He had a place in respectable society and abandoned it, exploring instead the life of those who hailed from a different world. In his fiction, Orwell creates "outsider" characters as moral standards, whose views oppose the norm enforced by the society they inhabit. He retells his own experiences through the perspective of the "other," choosing throughout his life to inhabit the outsider persona first in Burma, and later in Paris and London. He consistently chose to inhabit the space outside of what the general population would have considered normal. This trend comes partly as a result of his own personal political views, which opposed both his privileged upbringing and the popular political views at the time, but also as a result of his thoughts on humanity. According to Michael Clune, "[Orwell] believes literature restores freshness, novelty, and interest to our perception of things," (Clune 42). This fresh, novel, and interesting perception permeates not only his fictional literature but also his nonfictional accounts.

Orwell believed that honest observation required an outside perspective, and he chose to live his life by that example. As one observer noted, "Orwell believed that if men write and speak clearly, they are likelier to think clearly and remain comparatively

free" (Bal 188). In his fiction, as in his life, Orwell believed in a reversal of the literary "other." Instead of portraying a world where outsiders are abnormal, or monsters, or deviants, Orwell creates a world where society takes on the persona of the savage, and the outsider becomes a beacon of sanity in a world of chaos. This is how he perceived the world he lived in, and how he presented it through his essays and semi-autobiographical pieces. In his fiction, too, everyday life for his characters becomes a self-guided struggle to find humanity in spite of countless obstacles. Though he draws upon fictional dystopian precedents, Orwell translates his use of simple language and his outsider perspective to nonfiction in a way that becomes distinctly Orwellian, and that is why his non-fiction accounts succeed as social commentary.

Though it is true that Orwell's more popular fiction received more critical acclaim and attention than the rest of his work, Orwell's nonfiction has had an equally significant impact on contemporary and modern public reception of his writing, the distribution of his ideas, and his modern resonance as an author in the realm of English literature at the present day. His mastery of the first medium breeds life into the second, and vice versa. His nonfiction exemplifies the reportage that is so characteristic of all of his writings, novel and essay alike. His flair for nightmarish dystopian fiction brings out the other-worldy rhetoric that appears just as frequently in his nonfictional accounts. Without the experiences reported in *Down and Out in Paris and London* or *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he would lack the authority that makes *Nineteen Eighty-four*, *Animal Farm,* and *A Clergman's Daughter* so compelling. And without the empathy that created his fiction, he wouldn't have had the impulse to embody the outsider roles he found among the poor. There is more to George Orwell than his popular fiction. At the same time, his fiction

does as much work for social awareness as does his nonfiction. His ability to embody—and empower—the voice of the masses contributes to his current relevance.

Chapter 3

ORWELL AS OBSERVER AND OUTSIDER

In the essay "George Orwell" from *Essays in Criticism,* Raymond Williams asserts of George Orwell, "He is one of a number of men who, deprived of a settled way of living, or of a faith, or having rejected those which were inherited, find virtue in a kind of improvised living, and in an assertion of independence" (Williams 44). There are other literary examples, including Jack London and Jack Kerouac, who share these same characteristics. However, Orwell's specific type of impoverished living and the way in which he later writes about it is distinct from any of the other "number of men." Though one critic describes Orwell as having "never really lost a certain boyish, Robinson Crusoe spirit" (Bal 107), there is something more to Orwell's improvised living than just a spirit of adventure. It could be said that the motivation was guilt. Another critic makes the argument that, "The book is viewed as the record of a bourgeois intellectual's attempt to explore the lower strata of society in order to expand his social awareness and…expiate his middle-class sense of guilt" (Smyer 75). Williams argues against the idea of a guilt-ridden motivation when he writes, "Orwell, in different parts of his career, is both exile and vagrant. The vagrant, in literary terms, is the reporter…[like] Orwell in Paris or among the unemployed" (Williams 46). Orwell acts as a reporter, not from a sense of inner guilt but from a sense of obligation to spread social consciousness. In doing so, Orwell gains the ability to be a physical outsider while still empathizing with the subjects of his writing gives Orwell's novels and accounts both resonance and the accessibility.

He wrote as he lived, with clear, simple observation that provoked emotional reactions in an audience far removed from scenes of human suffering. A person ignorant of the downfalls of totalitarian government feels horror in response to Winston's torture in *Nineteen Eighty-four*. Someone apathetic to the plight of the poor connects with the men described in the Spikes in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Orwell writes about people from the lower depths, but he writes for people of all classes, and of all time periods. His style has a quality of intelligent simplicity that appeals to more than just one specific audience.

Orwell's first published book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* begins, "The Rue du Coq d'Or Paris, seven in the morning. A succession of furious, choking yells from the street" (Orwell 1). The facts stand as nouns emblematic of events as they unfold before him. He writes, "I sketch this scene, just to convey something of the spirit of the Rue du Coq d'Or" (Orwell 1). It is sheer reporting, more survey than story. Simple language and supporting details are symptomatic of Orwell's writing from the beginning. Of Orwell's first recorded excursion into the lives of the lower classes, one critic contends, "Orwell made contact with the physical reality of poverty to look down at the roots on which his existence was founded…The book is packed with unique and strange information about real life" (Bal 81). Whether he is describing his job at the hotel, his own debilitating hunger, or the chastisement of a woman at a neighboring hotel for some small crime, the details are vivid and full. They serve to place the physically distant reader in the middle of the scene being described. One critic observes, "Orwell's first book certainly exhibits some of the characteristics of a documentary" (Smyer 12). But there is a parallel quality to his writing that exists distinctly separate from documentary.

In the same scene, Orwell explains, "There were eccentric characters in the hotel. 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" (Orwell 3). These statements are based on fact, and then described with a perspective of human understanding. These people aren't mad, they are people who have fallen into a half-mad life. This detail provides a context without giving specific background information, and in this one sentence Orwell generates sympathy for a sketch of a character whose flaw is not particular to himself, but to a failure that is universally human. "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" (Orwell 5). He manages to humanize the dehumanized by writing a clean portrait of the impoverished masses that the upper classes can understand without the normalized social reaction of disgust or snobbery. Orwell goes on to explain, "The slum, with its dirt and its queer lives, was first an object-lesson in poverty, and then the background for my own experiences. It is for this reason that I try to give some idea of what life was like there" (Orwell 5). He wishes to give a voice to the people he meets, the kind of people that the average class-conscious British citizen would never meet objectively, and gives them the kind of objective characterization that makes them easy to relate to. This act of giving a recognizable voice to people who otherwise would never be recognized is one that Orwell continues to do throughout his writing career.

After Paris, Orwell returns to his home. However, the London he returns to is different from the London he knew in his youth. In returning home a beggar, rather than a collegian, Orwell finds a much different world than he remembers. Orwell put on the

"rags" of the poor, "[Orwell] put on their rags and wandered among them, and suffered with them and for them, and reported back to the world above the abyss how it was down there. He had found his subject" (Stansky 228). In *Down and Out,* Orwell describes the clothes as "not merely dirty and shapeless, they had…a gracelessness, a patina of antique filth, quite different from mere shabbiness" (Orwell 129). He describes the experience of first seeing his own shabby-clothed reflection, "I saw a hang-dog man, obviously a tramp, coming towards me, and when I looked again it was myself, reflected in a shop window" (Orwell 130). He is surprised at the ease of his transformation and is able to describe this surprise in a way the reader can relate to. Orwell bridges the gap between classes as an upper-class intellectual disguised as an impoverished tramp. Orwell dressed a tramp, acting a tramp, being treated like a tramp helps familiarize the experience of poverty to a class that otherwise would not understand. He proves, through his own experience, that the line between prosperity and poverty is thin and the descent can be made with horrifying ease.

By presenting this descent through both action and observation, Orwell becomes a figure that seems paradoxical. He is of one class, inhabiting another, and retelling his experiences to the first. He is outsider as defined by birth, but emotionally connected to this new world. When Orwell spends his first night in a "flophouse" (or *spike* in Cocknified English), he is shocked by the lack of beds, as would be any other Englishman accustomed to lodging in hotels or rented rooms. In spite of his apparently bourgeois reaction, his roommate's response is the same as he would give to any other fellow tramp. "'Beds?' said the other man, surprised. 'There aren't no beds! What yer expect? This is one of them spikes where you sleeps on the floor. Christ! Ain't you got

used to that yet?" (Orwell 147). Orwell is treated as anyone else sleeping in a spike would be treated. This man doesn't know Orwell's societal "difference" and treats him with the respect of a societal equal. It follows, then, that any other middle-class gentleman who dressed as a tramp would be treated the same way. Through his actions, Orwell forms a plane of reality where two worlds, seemingly separate, intersect. This is the point where *Down and Out* begins to achieve a social consciousness that can be accepted and understood by people from different classes.

This experience of intersection is repeated in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell's account of his observations of coal miners in industrial northern England. *Wigan Pier* was a report commissioned by the Left Book Club, a socialist organization, to document the living and working conditions of the workers in the mines, to be distributed to other members of the club. In true Orwellian nature, he stays in a boarding house with other workers, immersing himself in the living conditions he is being asked to document. He describes the place as something that "depresses" him: "It was not only the dirt, the smells, and the vile food but the feeling of stagnant meaningless decay" (Orwell 17). He establishes distance from the miners early in the book, stating "I am not a manual laborer, and please God I never shall be one" (Orwell 32). He aligns himself with his audience of English citizens who are not coal miners. Establishing himself as a man separate from the miners mirrors his choice to establish himself as a tramp in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Of *Wigan Pier* one critic writes, "The book is a reportage, told by an outsider, that makes no claim to intimacy" (Stansky 286). This reportage gives him the authority to speak on behalf of the people he observes. Orwell's ability to embody the place of one sector of humanity without alienating another is a skill that lends itself to the

type of class-bridging his work achieves. His success in this field explains the success of his novels as tools for social awareness.

After his connection to the audience is affirmed, Orwell acknowledges his respect for these men and their lives, so different from the reality of upper-middle-class London. "It is impossible to watch the [miners] at work without feeling a pang of envy for their toughness" (Orwell 22). In this line there is empathy for these men that exist in a world separate from his own. He goes on to explain this world to his audience. When describing a coal miner with whom he stayed for a period of time, Orwell explains, "A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a passive role. He does not act, he is acted upon. He feels himself the slave of mysterious authority and has a firm conviction that 'they' will never allow him to do this, that, and the other" (Orwell 49). The man, previously a coal miner who now suffered from poor eyesight, is made to go through a series of inconveniences every month in order to collect his pension. Orwell juxtaposes this with his own experience as a writer, "I do not earn much more than a miner earns, but I do at least get it paid into my bank in a gentlemanly manner and can draw it out when I choose. And even when my account is exhausted the bank people are still passably polite" (Orwell 49). He relates society's victimization of the miner to his own ability to transcend the experience of being pressed into a passive role. He invites similar introspection from the reader, to draw conclusions of a similar type in respect to their own lives. One critic put forth the idea that, "[Orwell] could concern himself with the plight of *others*, identify with the existence of others, objectify the angers that stirred him and transmute them into a concern for others" (Stansky 68). His concern for the

plight of others is what drives him and fuels his writing. Orwell's personal concern for others draws similar concern from his readers.

The same concern is shown in Orwell's essay, "The Spike." Of the poor he encounters, Orwell writes, "They have nothing worthy to be called conversation, because the emptiness of belly leaves no speculation in their souls" (Orwell 16). Winston, the protagonist of Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-four,* provides a fictional example of a similar social paralysis that arises when the body is overtaken by distractingly debilitating needs. In the case of *Nineteen Eighty-four,* the cause of the problem is an overwhelming sense of fear and paranoia, not hunger. But the effects are similar. Much like the tramps in the spike, Winston cannot perform any real introspection, or form any real conversation, because his thoughts are so strongly monitored by the Ministry of Truth.

Winston inhabits an outsider persona that mirrors Orwell's repeated position of marginalization. He is a free-thinker in a society of brainwashed citizens, where "Thoughtcrime IS death" (Orwell 30). In Winston, Orwell creates a character to whom one can relate. In spite of his personal rebellions, he is fearful, and his bravery at times wavers. He is flawed. Winston is the same outside observer that Orwell strives to be. By utilizing a character outside of the brainwashed masses, Orwell gives the reader a description of life that is strange, but from a perspective that seems familiar. The novel begins, "It was a bright cold day in April" (Orwell 1) a familiar enough concept to anyone who has lived through a London April. The sentence continues, "The clocks were striking thirteen" (Orwell 1). Immediately, he presents the world of *Nineteen Eighty-four* as something different than contemporary London. "The hallway smelt of

boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall…Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working" (Orwell 1). Orwell utilizes the same specificity of detail symptomatic of his nonfiction, only in his fiction he is able to craft the details in a way that further serves his purpose. The scene he creates in the opening pages of *Nineteen Eighty-four* contains the same feeling of familiar-and-yet-unfamiliar details that Orwell often relies on. By the time Orwell reaches the last line of his second paragraph, "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell 1) the world he presents has already reached a level of some familiarity. The clear, simple reportage of details so familiar to a repeated reader of Orwell serve to create a scene of plausibility even when the subject is equally as foreign as it is fictional. Orwell's details give the illusion of close proximity even as the dystopian subject creates distance.

This same feeling of connection to a world of fictional distance is experienced with *Animal Farm*, a second work of fiction for which Orwell is well-known. This piece was originally tag-lined "A Fairy Story," as it includes some characteristics of a fairytale, including the use of talking animals as characters. In spite of these commonalities the novella, a satirical piece related to the political history of the Soviet Union, is far from a typical fairytale. The first paragraph could easily be the beginnings of any anecdotal tale of a typical farm, but the normal expectations that accompany a farm-related anecdote are quickly broken. In spite of the reversal of these expectations, the narrator still presents the characters in a way that humanizes them, creating personalities that invite emotional attachment even though they take the form of farm animals. "Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle life, who had never quite got her figure back after her

fourth foal. Boxer was an enormous beast…he was not of first-rate intelligence, but he was universally respected for his steadfastness of character" (Orwell 1). If the novel hadn't presented these characters as horses, they easily could have been a couple met at a grocery store, or strolling along the Thames. Orwell saturates every scene with vivid detail, creating again a world that seems almost plausible in spite of all of the impossible aspects. The seasons do not simply change, "The early apples were now ripening, and the grass of the orchard was littered with windfalls" (Orwell 35). When describing the farm, Orwell writes, "The long pasture stretching down to the main road, the hayfield, the spinney…the ploughed fields where the young wheat was thick and green, and the red roofs of the farm buildings with the smoke curling from the chimneys" (Orwell 86). The world is described in striking detail, so it begins to resemble a world familiar to the audience. "Orwell's ability to imagine in so much intensity such a situation is partly due to the fact that the situation was already in some respects a reality" (Bal 219). Orwell's success comes from combining truths that are undoubtedly real with details that are undoubtedly false, creating a kind of half-truth that leaves room for some degree of plausibility.

The rhetorical success and strength of these half-truths, and of Orwell's writing in general, depend on his use of the outsider persona. Presenting information from the perspective of the other, be it factual or fictional, gives Orwell the ability to shape the information so as to reach as wide an audience as possible. In his essay "Why I Write," Orwell tells us that, "From the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and under-valued. I knew I had a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts" (Orwell 1). He used this knowledge with skill and

force, and the effects of his successful portrayal and usage of the feeling of isolation run rampant through his body of work in its entirety. He is skilled at being an outsider, he is even more skilled at portraying the feelings of being an outsider, and his most impressive skill comes from his ability to use the feeling of isolation to join two separate groups in a way that can be mutually accessible. *Down & Out* would have been impossible without his tendency toward isolation. *The Road to Wigan Pier* would not have been as effective if he had not immersed himself so completely as an outsider in the mining culture. Winston's role in *Nineteen Eighty-four* exists because Orwell manages to make his character's marginalization seem both heroic and pitiable at the same time. And *Animal Farm* wouldn't have had the same impact if it hadn't established the distance that is required of any serious plot that depends almost entirely on talking animals. Orwell's reporting ability began in the slums of London and continued into the dystopian world of Oceania. His distanced perspective and emotional attachment is felt in northern England just the same as it is in regards to Animal Farm. These parallels between fact and fiction show imagination and attention to detail that can only be achieved by someone living with the perspective of an outsider.

Chapter 4

FRAMING REALITY AS IT MIRRORS DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

Orwell's mastery of his own imagination, and the powerful way he combines it with logic and truth help him overcome the arbitrariness sometimes found in works of science fiction. Essentially, the strength in Orwell's fiction comes from the way that it mirrors his accounts of reality. It is important to notice that the opposite is also true. "The thoughts discussed in his essays and those embodied in his novels flow together so intimately that it is losing half the argument to consider one expression of them while ignoring the other" (Woodcock 394). Just as his fiction mirrors reality, his accounts of reality mirror his fictional writing. Another critic asserts, "One of the conventions that utopian/dystopian fiction shares with science fiction is the minute and painstaking description of particular features of the environment" (Clune 34). Orwell, especially, has a handle on descriptive language that emphasizes these conventions. The critic continues, "These descriptions are made necessary by the fact that some of these features—teleporters, spaceships, telescreens—are unfamiliar to readers, and one of the chief pleasures of such novels is to see exactly what such strange objects look like" (Clune 34). Orwell's nonfiction accounts of reality follow these same dystopian conventions. He describes the world from the perspective of someone unfamiliar with the terrain, an outsider. He takes the position of a narrator in a dystopian novel, even when he writes about reality. He gains this perspective by habitually inhabiting the space of the "other" in respect to the subjects of his writing.

One critic explains that the dystopian convention of outsider description can "come into conflict with another convention: the attempt to present the future world as it appears to its inhabitants" (Clune 34). This conflict is one Orwell runs into when he deals with reality as well—presenting a "new world" to outsiders while also accurately describing the experience of the new world's inhabitants. The difficulty in explaining the backbreaking work of a miner or the debilitating hunger of a beggar to one who has never formed a rough callus or felt the pang of an empty stomach comes from a disconnect in shared experience. To someone who lacks the experiences common for a miner or a beggar, such descriptions seem surreal. The degree to which the lower classes suffer can be difficult to understand for someone who has never felt suffering. By attempting translation of one reality to the inhabitants of another, Orwell juxtaposes two worlds to amplify the disparities that exist. He deals in realities that are so separate, horrific, and unbelievable to the privileged classes that they can at times seem to be anecdotes from a work of dystopian fiction.

Regarding *Nineteen Eighty-four*, one critic writes, "There are pages in *Nineteen Eighty-four* that are shocking in their cruelty" (Stansky 114). So, too, are some pages from *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*. From "The insecurity of a 'rickety table,'" to "the physical distastefulness of cigarette butts and lukewarm tea" (Smyer 10). Orwell terrifies and tantalizes the reader at the same time. He simultaneously invokes sensations of pleasure and of fear, in order to "bring some order out of this chaos" (Smyer 10). The reality of poverty and war can at times be as shocking in it's cruelty as Big Brother and The Ministry of Truth, and the struggle to bring order

out of chaos is exemplified by fusing the conventions of science fiction with honest observations of the world, as Orwell does.

This same tension is felt in Orwell's descriptions of battlefields and spikes for an audience accustomed to luxury, all from the same contemporary world. It is a similar struggle to Orwell's attempt to find order in chaos. In the example of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Orwell creates chaos to find order. The slogans he chooses for Oceania are in themselves contradictions meant to enhance confusion. "War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength" (Orwell 29). In Orwell's contemporary London, war is constant, freedom at time seems subjective and fragile, and ignorance is rampant. The slogans take these concepts in conjunction with their opposing ideas to exacerbate the chaos created in reality. War may seem necessary as a result of the public rhetoric, but the proof of its destruction is everywhere. "War is Peace" forces the reader to realize that war, far from peaceful, may not even be a necessary evil. Subjective freedom is a complicated concept, but "Freedom is Slavery" is a contradiction, leading to the realization that the subjective and fragile freedom in a totalitarian state is no freedom at all. And ignorance might be rampant in a world where education has taken a backseat to political issues, but the idea that there is strength in ignorance could be a horrifying enough to cause a change in mindset. *Nineteen Eighty-four* comes at a time in history when contradictions and fear were at an all time high. "Appearing, as the novel did, after the atomic bomb, it became an embodiment of all the postwar terrors" (Bal 21). The world itself, the plane of reality, was beginning to look post-apocalyptic to the people who were experiencing war. The disconnect between expected and remembered reality when compared to the reality of the war left room for a book like *Nineteen Eighty-four*

which showcased, through its contradictions, what many feared a worst-case-scenario post-war England could eventually come to resemble.

Nineteen Eighty-four catalogues a series of these contradictions. "[*Nineteen Eighty-four*] describes a prohibition against the obvious, against perceiving the surface of the world, a prohibition resisted by the passionate affirmation of the hardness of stones and the wetness of water" (Clune 31). While the Ministry of Truth prohibits the acknowledgement of the obvious, Orwell's writing demands it. He exaggerates the flaws of socialism to create Ingsoc, the reigning form of government in the novel, to encourage the reader to draw parallels between the actual flaws socialism and the chaotic descriptions within the pages of *Nineteen Eighty-four.* Orwell presents contradictions between what is written and what is understood. When Winston first begins writing in his journal, he reacts with fear. "He was already dead, he reflected. It seemed to him that it was only now, when he had begun to be able to formulate his thoughts, that he had taken the decisive step" The first contradiction comes immediately: the reader knows Winston is not dead, as he is processing thought. "The consequences of every act are included in the act itself. He wrote: *Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death.* Now he had recognized himself as a dead man it became important to stay alive as long as possible" (Orwell 30). The second comes in the phrase he writes. Readers understand that thought cannot actually, literally be death, but this is the reality of the character in the novel. The final sentence, the idea that once recognized as dead a person commits himself to surviving is less of a contradiction and more of a statement of human reality. This is an instinct universally human. In spite of the disconnect between Winston's reality and the reality of Orwell's audience, Winston's

character is still inherently human. He can be understood, in spite of the space that exists between fiction and reality.

In *A Clergyman's Daughter,* Orwell also plays with the space between fiction and non-fiction. His protagonist, Dorothy, inhabits an unreal place in a world much more familiar to contemporary England. Orwell manufactures this space by giving his character amnesia, forcing himself to describe the world through the eyes of a stranger. Immediately upon being afflicted with amnesia, the narrative voice explains the world as Dorothy experiences it.

> She merely *saw*, as an animal sees, without speculation and almost without consciousness. The noises of the street—the confused din of voices, the hooting of horns and the scream of the trams grinding on their gritty rails—flowed through her head provoking purely physical responses. She had no words, nor any conception of the purpose of such things as words, nor any consciousness of time or place, or of her own body or even of her own existence.
>
> (Orwell 96)

Because of her sudden amnesia, Dorothy takes on the outsider role that Orwell so often depends on. The world she experiences is the same world that Orwell inhabits, but from her perspective it is completely foreign. Rather than *Nineteen Eighty-four*'s familiar presentation of a foreign world, Dorothy presents a familiar world in a foreign way. The familiar problem of poverty in 20th century England becomes unbelievable through the eyes of an amnesiac.

Even once the amnesia wears off, and memories begin to come back to Dorothy, her innocence makes her perspective seem equally as foreign. After growing up sheltered by her overbearing father, Dorothy's new experiences make the world seem a frightening place. After arriving in London, following her decision to give up on hop picking, she is

advised to rent a room at “Mary’s,” a nearby brothel. Upon encountering her first prostitutes, Dorothy observes, “They looked young, their faces being quite hidden under rouge and pink powder, and their lips painted scarlet as geranium petals. But amid the pink powder their china-blue eyes were tired and old’ and that was somehow horrible, because it reminded you of a girl’s mask with an old woman’s face behind it” (Orwell 158). This is a perspective of prostitutes uncommon to people who have never encountered one in a humanizing way. Orwell successfully uses Dorothy’s inexperience and naivety to present a new perspective to a jaded upper class. One critic observes, “We need to be aware of the extent to which realism of detail is used in this novel to produce a surrealistic effect” (Smyer 45). The world of *A Clergyman’s Daughter* is hardly dystopian, like that of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, but its narrative utilizes the same type of perspective and detail. The success of the novel comes from its shock value—the reader is presented with poverty, a problem he understands exists for others but may never have encountered on a personal level. Orwell puts a face to the otherwise anonymous suffering. Dorothy, an upper-class girl with an upper-class accent is often refused employment because of the assumptions that it triggers in her perspective employers. This causes sympathy from the readers, who understand that none of Dorothy’s problems are a result of her own flaws or sins. Orwell puts a sympathetic human face on the problem of poverty, and gives a different perspective in order to translate the hardships associated with poverty (that he knows from experience) to a group of people who have no previous experience with poverty at all.

In analyzing his previous experience with poverty as it is recorded in *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell observes, “Watching coal-miners at work, you realize momentarily

what different universes different people inhabit" (Orwell 33). Though readers realize that the miners inhabit the same physical universe, by utilizing rhetoric that could be linked to dystopian literature Orwell highlights the differences between the metaphorical universe of the reader and the metaphorical universe of the miner. He writes, "It gives you the feeling that they are not real people at all, but a kind of ghost for ever rehearsing the same futile rigmarole" (Orwell 17). He manages to compare the working classes, often dehumanized by the upper classes, to surreal ghosts in a way that emphasizes how dehumanized they have become. By explaining the way that life makes these people seem like ghosts, Orwell is pointing out that they are, in reality, so far from ghosts that the qualities that make them seem ghost-like stem from unfair treatment and their unfair places in society. He makes the world of miners seem even further from reality when he describes the jobs of women in the coal mines, "Crawling on all fours and dragging tubs of coal. They used to go on doing this even when they were pregnant. And even now, if coal could not be produced without pregnant women dragging it to and fro, I fancy we should let them do it rather than deprive ourselves of coal" (Orwell 34). A world in which coal becomes so important that pregnant women are risked to produce it sounds too cruel to be a reality, but Orwell shows that this is the life of a coal miner. It is dangerous, violent, and necessary in a way that is hard for those in the lap of luxury to understand. By drawing the parallels between reality and a dystopian reality that seems obscene, Orwell makes the point that reform is desperately needed in the working conditions he experienced in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

In his essay, "A Hanging," Orwell describes the experience of witnessing the hanging of a prisoner while a member of the Royal Guard in Burma. He contemplates

for a moment before the execution what it means to hang a man. He writes, "Till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man" He continues, "This man was not dying, he was alive just as we were alive. All of the organs in his body were working" In a moment of self-awareness, he realizes that, "He and we were a party of men walking together, seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding the same world; and in two minutes…one of us would be gone—one mind less, one world less" (Orwell 26). This condemned man, whose crime we are not told and whose sins are left unnamed, is thoroughly humanized before us immediately before his death, at which point his executioners become monsters. Afterwards, one man tells an anecdote of a failed hanging, in which a doctor had to come and finish the job. The surrounding men laugh and jest. Orwell describes the scene that follows the execution as one of relief. The men joke and jeer, sharing a drink as the dead man lies nearby. This scene, a moment of Orwell's reality, is described in a way that seems unreal. How can supposedly civilized people celebrate in a manner of such poor taste? How can the prison guards act so callously and inhumanely, while the prisoners show the human emotions of fear, and regret? Orwell uses dystopian rhetoric here to create an "other" of the European prison guards the reader would normally connect with, and a human out of the native Indian prisoner with whom the reader would usually feel the least connection.

Though Orwell is most famous for creating fictional dystopian worlds, he also had success at utilizing the same dystopian rhetoric in his nonfiction. He found that when the world is presented in a way that seems jarringly like fiction, it creates a narrative of parallels between the lives of the readers and the lives of the people he encountered in his travels. The presentation of a lower-class reality, when compared to the standard of

living enjoyed by the upper and middle classes in England at the time, becomes a powerful way to highlight the changes in social order that need to be made. Dystopian rhetoric allows Orwell to create fictional worlds that highlight the problems in reality, but it also allows him to describe the real world in a way that emphasizes the same problems. Utilizing the outsider perspective and the classic dystopian rhetoric, Orwell finds a way to bridge the two different perspectives and present the changes that need to be made without alienating his readers.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION: ORWELL'S DYSTOPIAN REALITY GENERATES SOCIAL AWARENESS

The distinction between the two classes always existed, but Orwell's words gives voice to the similarities that exist. He brings the situation to light in a way that is useful, successful, and moving without bordering on gruesome or painful enough to alienate the audience. Of Orwell, Williams writes, "When we emphasize one of the alternative definitions of hero—'a clear-seeing, self reliant, valiant man.' Orwell is our most common illustration" (Williams 44). George Orwell exemplifies this kind of hero. And through his heroism, he communicates the realities of an almost subterranean world, the world of the underclasses, to a generation of respectable Britons seemingly apathetic to the gap. The disconnect between the expectation of the British upper classes and the reality that Orwell is living created by his dystopian approach to reality brings awareness of poverty and oppression to the British elite. Through his personal experiences, Orwell manages to generate this awareness in a powerful and productive way that neither the true account of an actual beggar nor the emotionless account from a detached reporter could accomplish.

One critic explains, "In many senses, [Orwell] is the first contemporary writer who believes that the individual must create a framework of meaning if he is to remain human, while at the same time he must learn to exist beyond the comforting shadow of the absolutes" (Bal 25). Orwell affirms this, implicitly and explicitly, throughout his writing. There is more to the poor than being poor, there is more to mining than being a miner, there is more to *Nineteen Eighty-four* than just good versus bad, black and white.

Orwell works exclusively in the space between black and white answers, shying from the use of absolutes. He uses his expertise as an outsider and his masterful power of dystopian rhetoric to create stories that embody this space of relativity and uses it to bring awareness to the issues he cares so deeply about. The same critic later continues, "the nightmarish character" of *Nineteen Eighty-four* gives it "an uncompromising moral urgency which helps to force it into the consciousness of the twentieth century civilization" (Bal 147). Orwell creates situations that mimic a scene from some horrible dream in order to point out how horrific life, at times, can be. And these nightmarish scenes manifest themselves not only in his fictional narratives but also in his nonfiction accounts of life. The nightmares he creates highlight the nightmarish qualities Orwell finds in every day life, helping to bring awareness to the social, economic, and political problems in the world.

One such example of a successfully created nightmare comes in *A Clergyman's Daughter*. Amnesia forces Dorothy to fall from a stable lifestyle of some means to the kind of impoverished status Orwell experiences in *Down and Out*. She is awoken one day having lost the safety of her home and the comfort of her every day routine. Dorothy is a character that people of means can relate to, and her nightmarish situation is therefore easily empathized. In this character Orwell manages to fictionalize his class-straddling experiences in London and Paris in a way that can be published for consumption.

Animal Farm also presents an example of a story-turned-nightmare in order to ease the public consumption of an otherwise ignored idea. One critic observes that the story is "a fairy tale, a mixture of fantasy and harshness, of mysterious dangers happily overcome by some characters and terrible punishments falling on the heads of others"

(Smer 111). In the plight of the animals, drowning under their own decisions, mistakes, and consequences, Orwell creates characters that encompass the flaws of humanity. His animals are human in all but name. The reader watches their well-meaning plans unravel in spite of the good intentions of the "lower classes" of animals. The situation is familiar and also achingly sad. Orwell is able to take a seemingly ridiculous concept, animals acting out the story of failed communism in Soviet Russia, and make it heartbreaking and beautiful. When the well-meaning writing on the wall finally degenerates into "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 134), the inevitability of the human condition seeps from the pages.

In the pages of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, similar inevitability is found. Orwell creates a new language, a mix between English and something completely foreign to his readers. This mix of real and imagined language distances his dystopian world from modern England. Such invented words as Ingsoc, Newspeak, and Doublethink all raise awareness of the problems in then-modern England, and problems associated with Socialism. One critic observes that Orwell believes "the language of free men must be candid, vivid, and truthful" (Bal 189). The creation of this new language emphasizes the need for a truth that is both candid and vivid. Creating these words shows how convoluted our language has become. The introduction of this new language serves to make the reader feel immediately out of place in the world of the novel. And this feeling of distance assists in the success of the book as a tool for social awareness. He brings to life the nightmare of a place where everyone understands the social cues and societal rules except for the reader. Being that disconnected from the "normal" behaviors and actions showcased in Orwell's dystopian world engenders feelings of alienation for those

who have never felt alienated. He uses language to help underline the feeling of helplessness experienced by those marginalized by society by creating a situation where the reader feels marginalized.

The proles, especially, embody this marginalization. A majority of the population of Oceania is made up of proles, and they are presented in the novel as the closest to contemporary human life. They aren't as affected by the Ministry of Truth. They symbolize the poor classes of London but they also are the most recognizably human of the characters in the book. One critic points out, "Winston believes the proles will create the future he is unable to grasp" (Clune 49). In the proles Orwell shows how the marginalized populations can hold a strength that is distinctly human. Orwell writes, "If there is hope…it is in the proles" (Orwell 72). Hope is a thing uncommon in Oceania. But the closest to hopeful and content that Winston ever gets is when he and Julia stay in the flat above the prole shop. The hope comes when he abandons his society's assumptions and expectations and instead tries to think for himself and feel on his own. Upon abandoning the structures that represent the class system, Winston finds a kind of freedom. And in that freedom, for a brief moment, he finds a sentiment of self-acceptance.

Orwell explores similar concepts of freedom from structure in his nonfiction. In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, he is essentially living among the proles. One expert notes, "The London section of *Down and Out* stresses human physical decay, and the tone is of pure disgust" (Smyer 78). He presents the filth of the streets and the horrible living conditions he experiences with a force that seems unreal, and therefore sinks into the consciousness of the reader. He describes one bedroom as having "the

sweetish reek of paregoric and foul linen" (Orwell 131). Of the men in line for a spike he describes, "the youngest a fresh-faced boy of sixteen, the oldest a doubled-up toothless mummy of seventy-five" (Orwell 144). These images, painted with stark honesty and a sense of distance, serve to successfully describe the plight of the poor, otherwise forgotten classes. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, more than any of his fiction, serves to bring social awareness to the issues of class inequality that Orwell feels are so important.

Class inequality is showcased with the same degree of masterful narrative power in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. He feels a sense of awe at the power of the workers. He sees them as everyday heroes. And he presents them as such. He describes the heroic strength required of the average miner, in detail. He describes the long hours and the backbreaking work. After showcasing the superhuman strength of these men, Orwell writes, "On the whole we are not aware of it; we all know that we 'must have coal,' but we seldom or never remember what coal-getting involves" (Orwell 33). As a metaphor for the ignorance of the upper classes to the plight of the lower classes, this statement is incredibly powerful. He presents a perspective the reader otherwise wouldn't know, and then calls for the acknowledgment and awareness of the situation. And he does so powerfully, in a way that successfully calls attention to the social issues he feels are so important. Of the plight of the miners, Orwell writes "Most of the time, of course, we should prefer to forget that they were doing it" (Orwell 34). And this is the main message of the report. It's a message that permeates all of his work, fiction and nonfiction.

In his fiction, Orwell creates situations that explain the social issues he concerns himself. But in his nonfiction, he lives these situations. He immerses himself in the culture and reports back. His experience grants him rhetorical authority. He brings this authority into his fiction by creating characters based on the people he met when he experienced true poverty. In his nonfiction, Orwell writes in a way that is equal parts shocking and compelling. This is a skill that mirrors his fictional worlds of nightmarish dystopia. In his writing, Orwell works to synthesize the most distinguishing characteristics of both types of writing to bring social awareness to a community that was often almost completely ignorant. This man of contradictions uses contradiction to his advantage through juxtaposition and framing in a way that makes him a successful communicator. It is this type of rhetoric that makes Orwell's body of work, fiction and nonfiction, a lasting staple in the realm of English literature. The voice that Orwell cultivates through transmuting the characteristics of science fiction into his nonfictional accounts of atrocities is what George Orwell leaves as his most important legacy. He blurs the lines between what is considered distinctly fiction and what is considered distinctly reportage, just as he blurs the lines between classes. By borrowing from one medium and lending to the other, Orwell's distinctive ability to grant a voice to the voiceless masses is an incredibly powerful tool for creating social awareness. And without his mastery of both different forms of writing, his body of work would be neither as compelling nor as successful as a form of social commentary.

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