From Wigan Pier to Airstrip One:

A Critical Evaluation of George Orwell’s Writing and Politics post-September 11

Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

30/03/2005

David L. Urry
Acknowledgements

This thesis was written under the auspices of Associate Professor Tara Brabazon. I am grateful too for additional support from Professor Steve Redhead, my family and friends, and postgraduate colleagues.

Thanks to everyone concerned.
Eric Arthur Blair GEORGE ORWELL

Figure 1
Abstract

This thesis summons a contemporary reading of George Orwell, evaluating his current role and function as novelist, essayist, and twentieth century cultural icon. The year 2003 marked the centenary of Eric Blair’s birth and proved a productive year for Blair (and Orwell) enthusiasts. After nearly three years of research, my journey through Orwell’s words and world(s) has undergone significant re-evaluation, taking me far beyond such an appropriate commemoration. In the tragic aftermath of 9/11 — through Afghanistan and Iraq, Bali, Madrid, and London — Orwell’s grimly dystopian vision acquires renewed significance for a new generation. Few writers (living or dead) are as enduringly newsworthy and malleable as George Orwell. The scope and diversity of his work — the sheer volume of his letters, essays, and assorted journalism — elicits a response from academics, journalists, critics and readers. My research, tempered by a ‘War’ on terror and a televisual Big Brother, shapes these responses at a time when 24-hour surveillance is viewed as the path to instant celebrity.

Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four provides unique insights into a highly pervasive and secretive regime, which in light of post 9/11 political trajectories is highly admonitory. These pathways and connections are produced in my research. I do not make easy links between past and present — Eric and Tony Blair — at the level of metaphor or simile. Indeed, the pages that follow traverse the digital archives and probe the rationale for mobilising Orwell in this time and place. I am focussed on writing a history and establishing a context calibrated to the fictional Oceania.
This doctorate commenced as an investigation of George Orwell’s journalism and fiction one hundred years after his birth. At the outset of the candidature, the Twin Towers fell and new implications and interpretations of Orwell arose. My research demonstrates that the Oceania of Orwell’s imagining presents an evocative insight into the contemporary alliance forged by the Bush, Blair, and Howard triumvirate in its quest for world peace. Using Orwell as a guide, I move through theories of writing and politics, in the process uncovering capitalism’s inherently hostile and negligent attitude towards those who are materially less fortunate. I began my work convinced of Orwell’s relevance to cultural studies, particularly in understanding popular cultural writing and the need for social intervention. I concluded this process even more persuaded of my original intent, but shaped, sharpened and compensated by new events, insights, tragedies and Big Brothers.

It is imperative for the future directives of cultural studies that critical, political, pedagogic and intellectual links with Orwell are (re-)formed, (re-)established and maintained. My text works in the spaces between cultural studies and cultural journalism, pondering the role and significance of the critical — and dissenting — intellectual. Memory, History, and Identity all circulate in Orwell’s prose. These concerns and questions have provided impetus and direction for this thesis. They have also shaped the research.
Few expect Orwell’s totalitarian dystopia to materialise unchallenged from the pages of a book. The wielders of power are more capable and more subtle. Yet it is impossible to deny that the litany of lies and contempt central to Big Brother’s Oceania is reproducible by any administration assisted by a complicit media and a malleable citizenry. The emergence of such a phenomenon has been well documented in the post 9/11 United States. This thesis has arisen out of the miasma of hubris, lies and contempt framing and surrounding Mr. Bush’s war on terror. My purpose — not unlike Orwell’s in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — is to warn, not judge or berate. Orwell understood political rhetoric. He was not a prophet but a journalist who interpreted the nuances and temptations of excessive power. He had witnessed the extraordinary ‘death’ of history in Spain, and thereafter he raised his pen to combat intellectual hypocrisy and dishonesty wherever he found it. Under Orwell’s tutelage, plain words pierce, probe and unsettle. They are sharp cutting instruments, fully capable of transcending time. How else are we to explain his enduring popularity as a writer? This thesis offers a critical and interpretative homage to George Orwell, a man who recognised the beauty of well chosen words, who loved and appreciated their enduring complexity and power.

A framing structure has been chosen that places Orwell in close relation to poverty, class and politics, war and journalism. Individual chapter headings (and their contents) exploit Orwell’s unique response to the significant talking points of his era. After resolving to write professionally, Orwell starved and struggled in Paris, and frequented ‘doss houses’ in and around London. I track these wanderings in chapter one. He studied the effects of the Depression and unemployment in Yorkshire and Lancashire
chapter two), and fought and was wounded in Spain (chapter three). Thereafter he turned to political writing and journalism (chapter four). What he failed to anticipate was a post war Britain overwhelmed by despondency and dissolved by internal devolution (chapter five). His concluding apocalyptic discharge, the dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, was directed at the higher echelons of institutional power and corporate corruption in Britain, America, and Europe, which I explore in chapter six.

The world has changed significantly since Orwell (and J. B. Priestley) went in search of England’s faltering ‘pulse’ in the 1930s. Englishness and traditional working class values have distorted and shifted in unexpected ways. These transformations are partly the result of war and the loss of empire. They are also a response to American cultural and economic hegemony, the privatisation of industry, offshore investments, the emergence of the European Economic Community, and the burgeoning global economy. George Orwell matters, even after this scale of change because he faced his own prejudices on the page and developed a writing style that enabled him to challenge the accepted orthodoxies and hypocrisies of his era. This is evident when returning to his essays and journalism, fifty-five years after his death. He possessed the ability to make readers feel uncomfortable, raising topics and concerns that we would rather not discuss. Denounced as a traitor by the pre-1956 unreconstructed left and feted as a hero by the self-congratulatory right, Orwell resists labelling and easy categorization. We owe him a considerable debt for exposing the likely directions of unchecked political ambition, and this insight should not be treated lightly. As I read him, Orwell was the last man in Europe, ‘the canary in the mine.’ He is a literary world heritage site of considerable
iconic appeal and international significance. He is an outsider’s ‘outsider’ perpetually facing inwards, and we need him now.
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Thanks are due to Jackie Jura at *Orwell Today*, for permission to use the illustrations displayed in this thesis.
Introduction

The author must not interpret. But he may tell why and how he wrote his book. ¹

Umberto Eco

Half a century after his death, the name George Orwell is synonymous with a mix of intrusive authoritarian government, personal integrity, and relentless honesty. As a writer, he is associated with a plain yet compelling prose style. Reasons for this longevity and influence are more difficult to locate, and even more complex to justify. Jeffrey Meyers points out that Orwell’s “worldwide sales and influence are greater than any other serious writer of our time …. His political and literary impact [is] incalculable.”² Indeed, it is not unusual for politicians, journalists and writers to invoke Orwell’s name whenever a government is suspected of adopting especially draconian policies.³ Christopher Hitchens states, “To describe a state of affairs as ‘Orwellian’ is to imply crushing tyranny and fear and conformism. To describe a piece of writing as

¹ Umberto Eco, Postscript to The Name of the Rose (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 8
³ Ari Berman places this term into a contemporary setting. He states, “The first of convicted Iran/contra criminal Poindexter's recent strikes … proposed fighting terrorism by skirting the Privacy Act of 1974 and electronically monitoring the everyday transactions of millions of ordinary Americans …. Called ‘an Orwellian concept if I've ever heard one,’ by former Senator Gary Hart (co-author of the Hart-Rudman Homeland Security report), one hundred senators refused to fund TIA this past February. Renamed Terrorism Information Awareness, the program will likely be killed once and for all when Congress reconvenes.” Ari Berman, “Ideas the Pentagon Wishes It Never Had,” The Nation, 23 August 2003. http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?id=20030901&s=berman (31/8/2004)
‘Orwellian’ is to recognize that human resistance to these terrors is unquenchable.”4 In the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell provides a secular and highly politicised vision of a tyrannical hell on earth. He imagines a world where there is no memory of past or recent events, a world without recollection, where the known facts are constantly shaped to suit the needs of the state, and a critical and interpretative history no longer exists. It is a world of secrecy and twenty-four hour surveillance. Violence, fear and uncertainty, impoverishment and perpetual warfare punctuate the lives and experiences of the citizenry. This is the creation of Big Brother — the ruthless and despotic figurehead of Oceania — and his privileged Inner Party. Although no one has ever seen Big Brother, there are billboard-sized posters of his visage pasted over societal facades and buildings.

Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four provides unique insights into a highly pervasive and secretive regime, which in light of post 9/11 trajectories is highly admonitory. It is this connection that is shaped in my research. I am interested in writing the history, and summoning and affirming the context decentred in the fictional Oceania. This doctorate commenced as an investigation of George Orwell’s journalism and fiction one hundred years after his birth. At the outset of the candidature, the Twin Towers fell and new interpretations of Orwell emerged. The directives of the original project are consequently quite different and distinctive from those presented in this current document. This thesis argues that the Oceania of Orwell’s imagining is akin to facets of the alliance (coalition) forged by the Bush, Blair and Howard triumvirate in its quest for

4 Christopher Hitchens, Orwell’s Victory (London: Penguin, 2003), 5
world peace. Using Orwell as a guide, I move through theories of writing and politics, in the process uncovering capitalism’s inherent hostility and negligence towards those who are materially less fortunate. I began my work convinced of Orwell’s relevance to cultural studies, and to writers and theorists, particularly in understanding popular cultural writing and the desire for social intervention. I concluded this process even more convinced of my original intent, but sharpened, shaped, and challenged by fresh insights, unforseen tragedies, and newly emergent Big Brothers.

This thesis is not an Orwell biography. Neither is it a commentary on Animal Farm — a book completely deserving of specific research in its own right. Two important new biographical works were published in 2003 — the year of Orwell’s centenary — that will satisfy the curiosity of most readers. There are already well established biographical works by Stansky and Abrahams, Crick, Sheldon, and Meyers, that provide insights into the darkest recesses of Orwell’s innately private life. Orwell was essentially an industrious freelance writer and reviewer frequently plagued by personal troubles, mounting domestic bills, and increasing ill health. Lasting fame

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5 The phrase ‘world peace’ — the strategic by-product of political expediency — should be understood to signify ‘perpetual war’ in its Orwellian sense. In the novel, E. Goldstein states in his illegally circulated publication, “The essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour. War is a way of shattering to pieces … materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent.” Extract from, George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 167. An intelligent reasoning proletariat — this latter thought is arguably Big Brother’s — and (probably most) present-day politicians — greatest fears.


7 Stansky, Peter and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1974), and Orwell: The Transformation (London: Granada, 1982)


and literary success only came in his final years, by which time he was much too ill to enjoy its fruits. The emerging details of Orwell’s inner life actually provide scant new material for further biographical interest.  

This doctorate does not construct, configure or explore a ‘real Orwell,’ or even a ‘real Blair.’  Instead, I concentrate on writing the spaces between the end of the Cold War and the start of the newly established Global War on terror — between the Orwell centenary and world events following 9/11. Synonymous with the ‘gutters’ in comic strips — the vertical blank spaces between the illustrated panels where the connections and exchanges take place — Orwell formulates his narratives in the margins. To mobilize Jody Berland and move metaphors, ‘What is a margin?’ I asked a friend recently. ‘You know what a margin is,’ she replied, ‘it’s outside the body of the text. It’s what holds the page together. Also,’ she added, ‘it’s where you write your notes.’  

Working from Berland’s words, my research and language arches beyond the authenticating print to the ambiguous margins. When ‘fiendish’ Mr. Black stabs the likeable Mr. Green, the violence (action) occurs out of frame. The reader’s imagination provides the closure in these interchanges, because there are no sounds or movements in a comic strip.  Veteran comic artist Will Eisner states that the illusion of timing in any

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11 Not even his ‘list’ of communist sympathizers is of great personal or political import, except (perhaps) to his most vehement critics.  
A comic strip is all a matter of sequencing (or manipulating) the pictorial forms. A similar model is offered in this thesis, where the fluidity and movement occurs ‘out of shot’ — within the ‘gutters’ of time, memory, and history. My research reconnects the latter half of the twentieth century with the ongoing present. In unearthing Orwellian fragments, a metaphoric archaeological dig is enacted through the layers of his prose. Like the mysterious creative process in Ted Hughes’ seminal poem about writing ‘poetry’ — ‘The Thought Fox’ — the words of recorded history also appear like fresh footprints on the page: “Now/ and again now, and now, and now/… with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox.” I am seeking to fashion a network of links between elements of Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four (1948), and President Bush’s ‘War on terror’ (2001). It has not been a difficult intellectual trajectory to justify or create. Consider the chapters where Winston Smith is arrested, imprisoned, tortured, interrogated and brainwashed by O’Brien. The narrative is not overly futuristic or fanciful. These practices are enacted in places like Camp Delta (Guantanamo Bay) and Abu Ghraib now.

This thesis was in the planning stages at the time of the tragic events of 9/11, and began in earnest just four months later (in January 2002). Originally, I wondered what drove a lower-upper middle-class writer, which was Orwell’s own categorisation, to abandon traditional methods of making his way in the world. Orwell hated filth and

15 Eisner states, “A comic becomes ‘real’ when time and timing is factored into the creation …. In graphics the experience is conveyed by the use of illusions and symbols and their arrangement.” Will Eisner, Comics and Sequential Art (Tamarac, Florida: Poorhouse Press, 2004), 26
squalor, yet he went ‘down and out’ in order to experience life ‘below stairs.’ However, I was soon side-tracked by the Trade Towers tragedy in Manhattan, New York City.

It is no coincidence that the tightening of international and domestic security arrangements, bolstered by the USA Patriot Act I & II\(^1\) (2001, 2003), and the UK Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001), and Civil Contingencies Act (2004), has impacted upon, and leached into my reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell was not scare-mongering when he wrote his final text. It was always his belief that Totalitarian government was *likely*, rather than inevitable. The book is a forecast rather than a prophecy. He also confirmed that it was not intended as an outright attack on English socialism, despite the use of the acronym Ingsoc. Orwell is clear about both of these issues.\(^1\)\(^9\) A strong leader like Big Brother with his oppressive state apparatus and elite Inner Party clique could (and probably would) emerge anywhere — given the right setting and circumstances. Such a government could even erupt from the nest of Western style democracy. I believe that there is ample evidence to support this reading in contemporary world politics. The basic architecture for Orwell’s three great superstates — Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia — has been in place for some time now, as Raymond Williams pointed out in 1971.\(^2\)\(^0\) I pursue this topic separately in the final chapter of the thesis.

\(^2\) Known variously as Patriot II, and ‘Son of Patriot,’ it is also (tentatively) named *The Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003*.
\(^3\) Crick, ibid., 563, 569; George Orwell, “Statement on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*,” in Peter Davison (ed.) *Orwell and Politics* (London: Penguin, 2001), 500
The tragic events of 11 September 2001 punctuate and now totally dominate international politics. We are peering through hastily applied field bandages at contemporary world events. Everything in sight (our gaze) is necessarily tinged, coloured and distorted by the immediacy of our palpable distress. In such a context, it is impossible to see anything clearly, and certainly none of the detail is sharply in focus. The wound is still raw. Perspective is necessary, but clarity is unachievable viewed through the bloodied gauze of our times. The lack of focus was observable at the time the Trade Towers collapsed in Manhattan. Switching channels, I remember the ‘on air’ confusion. This was evidently ‘live’ television coverage — *Good Morning America, The Early Show* — but there was no script.\(^{21}\) Nothing like this event had happened live-to-air before, and there were silences and gaping holes in the story. High profile network news anchors were left stuttering and floundering, vainly attempting to communicate meaningfully.\(^{22}\) Nobody knew, or could say for certain exactly what had occurred.\(^{23}\) Instead, live coverage resorted to endlessly reiterating the obvious, that a plane had crashed into one of the Manhattan towers, high up the skyscraper. At first it was thought to be a tragic accident,\(^{24}\) but then another plane entered the frame and crashed into the other tower and suddenly events and interpretations assumed a darker tone.\(^{25}\)

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\(^{22}\) Lori Robertson, “We have a breaking story,” *American Journalism Review* (October 2001): 22


Surveillance and the endless replaying of available footage has fashioned (and constructed) a culture of fear, uncertainty and deep suspicion. It is — unhappily — true, for those of us living in urban environments, that Big Brother is indeed watching our every move.

In this thesis, I argue that Orwell is essential reading in perilous (even apocalyptic) times. I also establish a link between the main players in President Bush’s ‘coalition,’ and Big Brother’s Oceania, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In both instances, a triad of nations is represented — the United States of America, Britain, and Australia. With new emphasis on the word ‘terror,’ and the emergence of unspecified unnamed ‘evils,’ governments around the world have implemented preventative legislation to lessen the threat of the terrorist bombs. As a result, Orwell’s Surveillance State is closer now than when I began this research journey. With these thoughts in mind, chapter one establishes a link between Big Brother and the contemporary era. The chapter also traces Orwell’s journey as a journalist and aspiring novelist through the early years of struggle and innovation. It took him time to determine his goal of becoming a political writer. At the outset, his interest lay in writing novels — a fairly safe and predictable response given the thinking of his era. However, he gradually realised that his talents lay beyond the easy definition of fiction. Bernard Bergonzi points out, that Orwell was more comfortable with — and had a greater facility for —

works of personal narrative."27 His documentary prose writing: *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and *Homage to Catalonia*, shows his effectiveness in locating the key concerns of the time. I consider these different phases of Orwell’s journey (chapters two and three) probing the growth and development of his very public political persona. This critique is important since Orwell states in ‘Why I Write,’ that a writer’s “subject-matter … [is] determined by the age he lives in.”28 Such a thought is echoed by the influential historian E. H. Carr, who states “Great history is written precisely when the historian’s vision of the past is illuminated by insights into the problems of the present.”29 We live and learn. Life has a unique way of focusing the aspiring writer’s (and historian’s) attention back onto the present. Greil Marcus contends that “Cultural awakening comes not when one learns the contours of the master-narrative, but when one realizes … that what one has always been told is incomplete, backward, false, [even] a lie.”30 Any reading of the past is unavoidably coloured by what we already think and imagine that we know, or have experienced, or surmise.31 In a very real sense the time is always now.32 Dick Hebdige infers as much — “There’s nowhere else but here” 33 — but is this maxim accurate? Denial and active forgetting creates a

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28 George Orwell, “Why I Write,” in *Orwell and Politics*, 459
31 In fact, the past frequently provides valuable insights into the future. As Tara Brabazon points out, “All histories, although written about the past, forecast the future.” In “‘Brixton's Aflame’ Television History Workshop and the Battle for Britain,” *Liminal* 4 (1998): 50
cultural environment of comfort. History is most often written as a linear narrative.\textsuperscript{34} The horrors of September 11 are resistant to such prosaic treatment. Is it possible to translate the complex events and interpretations of 9/11 into words? Real time events have the capacity to freeze momentarily, like the hands of a clock in a photograph. The adrenaline shock of such intense memories may play subtle games with the mind. Most memories of Ground Zero are (now) lost or tightly suppressed within. To borrow from Douglas Coupland, “history does not record my response.”\textsuperscript{35} History seldom incorporates the wor(l)ds of the poor, the illiterate and the disempowered. Writers and historians fashion clever stories from accumulated facts and testimonies: interpretations of reality, versions of versions.\textsuperscript{36} Like the searching camera in cinéma vérité, the astute writer angles for interesting insights and revelations, hoping to provoke some form of acknowledgement from the audience.\textsuperscript{37}

If we wish to understand Orwell, then we need to see him in a similar context, paying close attention to how his words — moving as they do through time and space — elicit a reaction in the present. As a journalist, Orwell made it clear that his job was to “report contemporary events … as truthfully as is consistent with the ignorance, bias and self-deception from which every observer necessarily suffers.”\textsuperscript{38} He was constantly stating and restating his central themes and arguments, changing interpretations as required. His goal was not only accuracy, but relevance. There are traces of this

\textsuperscript{34} Le Goff, “Past/Present,” 7
\textsuperscript{35} Douglas Coupland, \textit{Generation X} (London: Abacus, 1992), 36
\textsuperscript{36} Hayden White, “Historical emplotment and the problem of truth,” in Keith Jenkins (ed.), \textit{The Postmodern History Reader} (London: Routledge, 1997), 393
selection process throughout his political oeuvre. The use of “truthfully” is revealing because it warns not only of an inherent writer’s bias (the sin of exaggeration), but it also exposes the inbuilt preferences of scholarly critique (accuracy). No one individual can lay claim to possessing the whole truth. It is difficult enough to disassociate ‘I,’ the self, and the performed identity from the printed page. As Brent Cunningham points out, “Few would argue that complete objectivity is possible, yet we bristle when someone suggests we aren’t being objective.”39 Yet, it is impossible to remain neutral, to frame and utter definitive readings of volatile events with total impartiality. The only available option is to read widely, balance interpretations, probe subjectivities and construct a well researched and cited analysis. Obviously opinions have value, and such diversity in writing, broadcasting and journalism is necessary in a democracy. There is a need to be aware of the various external influences and pressures that may help to form (indeed even ‘sway’) much that passes for informed opinion. As a committed literary stylist, Orwell was also vitally aware of the need to uphold and maintain certain aesthetic perspectives and values in his work.40 For that reason several minor passages in Down and Out and Wigan Pier were constructed with the plot firmly in mind — a strategy not entirely lost on historian Robert Pearce.41

38 George Orwell, “The Prevention of Literature,” Orwell and Politics, 381
40 Orwell, “Why I Write,” 462
"Coming Up For Air," perhaps the most readable of the earlier novels, comes closest to addressing the central elements of Orwell’s Edwardian childhood — before the First World War changed the social and political landscape. It is a tale of innocence lost. The book’s amiable and portly protagonist George (‘Tubby’) Bowling, verbalises Orwell’s fears of another war with Germany, and incorporates elements of loss and nostalgia, blended with memory and history. I will examine Orwell’s concept of England and Englishness, in chapter four. The following section — chapter five — deals with unemployment, working class anger and despair. This is Britain in the riotous 1980s and 1990s, when anarchic class war flared up violently and unexpectedly in a number of disadvantaged housing estates. What happened to Orwell’s expected proletarian revolution? Clearly it did not materialize in 1941 when he produced ‘The Lion and the Unicorn,’ and it did not occur in 1948 when he penned Nineteen Eighty-Four, pinning his fading hopes on the proles. Aspects of change at street level — the emergence of the impoverished and angry (under)class — have since the 1970s impacted on traditional English values and class-based expectations in surprising ways. How else to explain the violence? The 1980s and 1990s saw an increase in unemployment, poverty, alienation and homelessness, political anarchy, drug abuse, petty crime, arson and vandalism. Applying the work of latter-day writers, among them John Pilger, Beatrix Campbell, Jack Ramsay, Polly Toynbee, and Nick Davies, I trace the threads of the failed revolution through to the present. What has become of Orwell’s ‘decent’ England? With devolution in Scotland and Wales, and an uneasy (sectarian) truce holding in Northern Ireland, the old historical configuration of a unified Britain is rapidly crumbling. When noting the steady influx of migrant peoples from the Caribbean
and the dismemberment of India in the late 1940s, political refugees from former Soviet Bloc countries in the wake of the Cold War and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, Orwell’s nostalgia for a tea-drinking England spirals from view. Suddenly Tony Blair’s ‘Cool Britannia’ appears a vastly different nation, with a population only nominally resembling its former Celtic, Norse, Anglo-Saxon, Norman heritage. Controversial journalist Darcus Howe closes the final episode of his disturbing White Tribe documentary with the line, “There is no National Culture anymore …. No English culture.”

Howe alerts his viewers to the fact that there is no longer a role for working class nostalgia — the cloth caps, shawls and wooden clogs are gone, along with the condemned tenements and the open community spirit. If Orwell is to make any serious impression on a younger generation raised on MTV, rap and hip hop, then he must be understood within the context of constantly changing social mores and economic values.

All forms of government are prone to error. Death and failure are part of the processes and structures of life. Such a bleak overview is not new; the satirist Jonathan Swift was repulsed by humanity, as Orwell confirmed in ‘Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver’s Travels.’ Swift’s protagonist, Lemuel Gulliver, was appalled at the appearance, the foetid smell and behaviour of the ape-like Yahoos (a type of ‘mankind’ in general). In his wonderfully engaging London: The Biography (2001), Peter Ackroyd wryly observes that overcrowded urbanized humanity (quite literally)

43 George Orwell, “Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver’s Travels,” in Essays, 373, 385
‘stinks.’\textsuperscript{44} Evidently we humans are less remarkable and significant than our swollen and inflated egos would allow. Orwell found himself in considerable trouble over his sharp olfactory senses, although it was the ‘stench’ of unemployment and the petty injustices of bureaucracy and the Means Test that upset him more than the unwashed working bodies.\textsuperscript{45} He rightly believed that there was something gravely wrong with a society unable to appraise itself openly and honestly: to admit to its mistakes and to make amends.\textsuperscript{46} Orwell was grimly mindful of the events that preoccupied writers and intellectuals in the 1930s, during World War Two and leading up to the Cold War, a phrase of his coining.\textsuperscript{47} He thrashed out many of these issues in his writing: the Depression, unemployment, and industrial decline in \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} (1936), Fascism, revolution and Soviet betrayal in \textit{Homage to Catalonia} (1938), England, nostalgia, and modernity in \textit{Coming Up For Air} (1939), and the grimly dystopian future in \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} (1949). Orwell was an inveterate cultural commentator. To Christopher Hitchens, he was the unsung father of cultural studies.\textsuperscript{48} He was also a superlative journalist, essayist, and writer of plain and unadorned English prose. Since his relatively early death, the unique body of work he compiled has become crucial to our understanding of the twentieth century. Although he grew increasingly despondent

\textsuperscript{44} Peter Ackroyd, \textit{London: The Biography} (London: Vintage, 2001), 366-369
\textsuperscript{45} Concerning the issue of offensive body odour, Orwell actually stated, “Here you come to the real secret of class distinctions in the West … It is summed up in four frightful words which people nowadays are chary of uttering, but which were bandied about quite freely in my childhood … \textit{The lower classes smell.”} George Orwell, \textit{Wigan Pier}, 119
\textsuperscript{46} Orwell, ibid., 139
\textsuperscript{47} Christopher Hitchens, \textit{Orwell’s Victory}, 79
\textsuperscript{48} Hitchens, ibid., 53
towards the end of his life, he never gave up entirely.\footnote{49} Orwell remains a truly mythic and iconic English cultural figure.

The ancestry of the often maligned and frequently disputed discipline of cultural studies is traceable in and through English history in the last century. There are many trajectories, geographies and histories of cultural studies. This current research emerges from Perth, Western Australia, the most isolated capital city on Earth. Colonial and postcolonial knowledges dialogue and discharge in such inaccessible places. University English, while claiming many origins, allegedly materialized from the study of “philology and the history of language-in-literature” at Oxford prior to 1918.\footnote{50} It was at Cambridge, in the tense spiritual vacuum created by the Great War, that the interest in English ‘culture’ gained credence. Fred Inglis acknowledges that the study of English Literature was “a much contested subject” in its own right, because it broke with the learning tradition of Classics, (Law) and Philosophy.\footnote{51} It was F. R. Leavis, in fact, who “made English literature what it remains” today, a ‘tool’ capable of “confronting the modern world.”\footnote{52} Perhaps ‘unmasking’ is a more appropriate choice than ‘confronting’ since literature attempts to remove the (often political) façades of everyday life in a pseudo-realistic manner. Angela McRobbie describes the cultural studies of this period as, “exploring … the significance of the social and historical context of literature.”\footnote{53} It is not necessary to elaborate on the joint contribution of the Leavis’ (F. R & Q. D.) during

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49 Douglas Kerr, \textit{George Orwell} (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 85
50 Fred Inglis, \textit{Cultural Studies} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 30
51 Inglis, ibid., 30
52 Inglis, ibid., 36
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everyday had considerable potential for serious study. This would have suited Orwell, whose own eclectic interests regularly found their way into print. He revelled in English cultural artefacts — limericks, jokes and naughty postcards, boy’s comics, tea and English cuisine. He championed clear expression and accuracy in journalism, and his critical essay on ‘Charles Dickens’ elicited particular praise from Q. D. Leavis. Orwell influenced a generation of writers and scholars, including Raymond Williams, and Richard Hoggart, and (more indirectly) a generation of CCCS graduates. The value of his contribution to journalism, essay writing, literary criticism, and the emergent discipline of cultural studies is underwritten (and under acknowledged) but incredibly important.

My concern is with George Orwell and the close attention he paid to the unremarkable aspects of popular culture during the 1930s and 1940s. This is most noticeable in the bleak English novels: *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, and *Coming Up For Air*, although it is also scattered through a good deal of his journalism. Douglas Kerr points out that the early novels “take the shape of a project whose topic is contemporary England.” Like many Anglo-Indians, Orwell acquired a
nostalgic vision of ‘the mother country’ that partnered him through life. This impression is influenced by the social conventions, country houses, inherited wealth, and class snobbishness that he encountered while still at prep school. Kerr adds, “[H]e was always able to see England from the East,” and from a position of detachment. It could be argued that Orwell, because of his Anglo-Indian experiences, was perpetually engaged in a voyage of cultural discovery. He was never comfortably middle-class in lifestyle, although like his Comstock character, this was the result of deliberation. Kerr observes that Orwell possessed the ability “to be surprised by … the commonplace.” His writing is full of unexpected references to flowers, and birdsong, rivers and woods. A collage of cultural diversity runs throughout this predominantly English writing. Orwell delighted in creating verbal iconography:

The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pintables in the Soho pubs, the old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning.

Here, and elsewhere in the same essay, Orwell equates such routine monotony exclusively with Englishness. The English — we are told — have “mild knobby faces … bad teeth and gentle manners”; they are “inveterate gamblers … devoted to dirty jokes,” and are noticeably foul-mouthed. Beatrix Campbell correctly notes that such

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61 Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, India in 1903.
63 Kerr, George Orwell, 24
65 Kerr, George Orwell, 24
67 Orwell, ibid., 141
statements described (working) men at the time.\textsuperscript{68} While recognizing this caveat, Orwell’s writing demystifies the day-to-day attitudes and activities of very \textit{ordinary} English men and women in a distant (bygone) era. Writing this thesis from Australia, the presentation of Englishness is sharpened and critiqued by Britishness, a colonising power that still maintains a presence at the level of iconography in my nation. This ambivalence filters theories of nationalism and space throughout my research.

Orwell has always fascinated me. I can remember reading \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} as a disgruntled teenager, and being suitably impressed with its gloomy sense of inevitability. No doubt, Winston Smith’s ultimate failure accommodated my despairing adolescent mood at the time. The novel also underlined several matters about which I was already aware — namely that authority was not generally on my side (and quite likely it never would be), and that it was not to be trusted. Possibly this attitude was partly shaped by journalist Harry Evans, one-time editor of \textit{The Sunday Times}, whose habitual approach to interviewing politicians was to ask himself, “[W]hy is this bastard lying to me?”\textsuperscript{69} I also sensed that there was neither position nor appropriate reward reserved for ‘ordinary’ working people in this life. George Orwell reached similar conclusions much earlier. These were lessons, which incidentally, we both acquired at prep school.\textsuperscript{70} My views have moderated considerably since my teens, but I am still unimpressed by large institutions, especially Governments. I am not comfortable either

\textsuperscript{68} Beatrix Campbell, \textit{Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s} (London: Virago, 1984), 220
with the idea of political parties and regulatory authorities, though I appreciate the need for law and stability. Yet I doubt whether any single administration, no matter how well-intentioned or outwardly ‘decent,’ is capable of establishing impartiality, justice and fair play in a world that consistently rewards the wealthy, and condemns the poor and dispossessed. What do Prime Ministers, Cabinet members, and ‘high achievers’ know of penury and social disadvantage? As Ian Slater observes, “the world can’t be bettered by people for whom poverty remains as something abstract — something out there — [and] merely seen in passing.”

Like Orwell, I believe that it is “the wrong family members” who generally end up in control. There appears to be no ready remedy or antidote to this phenomenon. In a democracy, a government can be voted out of power, but by then it is usually much too late to rescind the negative consequences of its policies. It is not possible to return to a fork in the road or to take an alternative path once the decisions are made and the course is set. There are some actions that must stand. Words for example cannot be recalled; wars cannot be un-fought; neither can the dead be adequately atoned. Orwell worked through much of this thinking in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and the three English novels. He controversially arrived at no firm conclusions but remained depressed and pessimistic about English politics. The expected proletarian revolution never materialised, and his critique of socialism only attracted scorn and contempt from the intellectual left.

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74 Bernard Crick, *Orwell: A Life*, 18
There are several different Orwell’s, and they do not blend or sit comfortably together. Each era and each critic constructs the Orwell that is required. The Big Brother television programme, for example, has eviscerated surveillance of its sinister overtones, emptying Big Brother (and Orwell) of meaning. Implacable Orwell critics, Raymond Williams,75 Christopher Norris,76 and Scott Lucas,77 have allowed politics — if not personal mendacity — to cloud otherwise solid reasoning. George Orwell, as a cultural analyst is rarely cited in cultural studies particularly in the burgeoning reality television theory. Yet Orwell’s major works have never gone out of print. Animal Farm is still regularly taught in schools and colleges around the world,78 and Nineteen Eighty-Four provides political impetus for the post 9/11 world.79 So clearly, Orwell generates emotions and elicits a variety of different responses.

Any contemporary study of George Orwell would be negligent if it did not refer to Professor Peter Davison’s monumental twenty volume Complete Works of George

75 D. J. Taylor, Orwell: The Life, 241-242
78 The St Andrew’s Cathedral School (Sydney) has Animal Farm on its Literature Circles Book List (Year 9). In the United States, the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) ‘District Adopted Curriculum’ lists “1984” suitable for Grades 11 and 12. The Birchwood Community High School in Warrington, United Kingdom, lists Animal Farm on its Course for GCSE English.
Orwell (CW). As the title implies, this is a large (and expensive) collection of Orwell’s extant letters and writing. However, George Orwell: The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (CEJL) in four volumes edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, is still a favourite with readers and researchers. Penguin Books have gathered topical selections of Orwell’s writing in separate volumes: Orwell and Politics, and Orwell in Spain, have been especially relevant to my purposes. I have also relied heavily upon the single volume collection of Orwell’s Essays. Of the more readily obtainable biographies and critical studies, I have found Bernard Crick’s Orwell: A Life to be indispensable. Peter Stansky and William Abrahams’ quirky two volume biography, The Unknown Orwell, and Orwell: The Transformation has proved helpful, as has ‘Tosco’ Fyvel’s George Orwell: A Personal Memoir. George Woodcock’s The Crystal Spirit, and Ian Slater’s Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One contain perceptive analyses of Orwell’s major works. Critical content that is more recent is provided by John Newsinger, Jeffrey Meyers, Christopher Hitchens, and Douglas Kerr. The centenary biographies by D.

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84 Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life (London: Penguin, 1992)
85 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1974); Orwell: The Transformation (London: Granada, 1982)
89 John Newsinger, Orwell’s Politics (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)
J. Taylor93 and Gordon Bowker94 also provide useful updated material. These acquisitions are, in the main, generally favourable to Orwell. In contrast, I found Christopher Norris’ Inside the Myth,95 Raymond Williams’ Orwell, and Politics and Letters,96 and Scott Lucas’ Orwell97 to be openly critical, and in some instances hostile and partisan. Research necessitates the searching out of favourable and unfavourable — mainstream and radical — opinions alike, and Orwell’s detractors and malcontents have subsequently added additional piquancy to my interpretative analysis.

The content of this thesis has been considerably enhanced by the addition of material gathered from a variety of digital sources. I have accumulated news and views from around the world via the progressive “radical press.”98 Clearly, a great deal of Orwell’s reportage — especially post Spanish Civil War — qualifies him for inclusion among the small “native”99 English radical press of his era. According to Christopher Hitchens, Orwell is important because he provides “a historical example”100 of how journalism effectively and endurably intervenes in politics. Chris Atton points out “that throughout his career, despite his work at The Observer and the BBC, Orwell

92 Douglas Kerr, George Orwell (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003)
95 Christopher Norris (ed.), Inside The Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984)
99 Atton, “News Cultures,” 496
100 Christopher Hitchens, Orwell’s Victory, 182
contributed essays and letters to numerous, small-circulation, radical journals.”101 Orwell was not a permanent member of any political party. For him, politics played an essential role in his journalism, but membership was provisional. Reportage from the outside — from the margins — has assumed a wider application in light of contemporary political reportage over the last two decades. My thesis places George Orwell as the logical antecedent of such contemporary writers as John Pilger, the late Paul Foot, Bea Campbell, Nick Davies, and George Monbiot. These are all perceived as practicing “a form of journalism in opposition to the mainstream.”102 We only need consider Orwell’s *Down and Out, Wigan Pier,* and *Homage to Catalonia,* to appreciate why I have placed him at the head of this category. Orwell explodes the mythic relationship between scholarship and difficulty,103 with his logical plain prose style. He was able to say unpopular things in a popular way. Put colloquially, he managed to ‘get under people’s skin.’104 Essentially, Orwell attacked class, inherited wealth, and government, along with the privileged assumptions of life. He questioned why the poor are marginalised and devalued, when it is capital and the political system that creates the misery and the poverty. He was above all wary of Big Government, with its propensity — if unchecked — to ‘spin’ the truth. I revisit those sites. It is imperative for the future directives of cultural studies that critical, political, and intellectual links with Orwell are reforged, re-established and maintained. My text works in the spaces between cultural studies and

101 Atton, “News Cultures,” 496
102 Atton, ibid., 494
cultural journalism, pondering the role and significance of the critical and dissenting intellectual. Memory, history, and identity all circulate in Orwell’s prose. These concerns have provided the impetus and the direction of this thesis. They have also shaped the research.

Conducting such a project from Australia presents specific challenges. University libraries provide a selection of online study aids and resources: Digital Collections, Catalogues, and Full-text Databases. Of the latter Factiva, Proquest, and Expanded Academic are invaluable. These greatly facilitate searching the huge repositories of archived newspapers, e-journals and humanities articles within the context of an Australian university. Through Libdex it is possible to access the homepages of 18,000 participating libraries worldwide. Researching via the Internet is of great value to writers and academics. How many underfunded university libraries, particularly in Australia, hold a copy of the New Statesman, Volume 1, Number 1, 1913, or allow perusal of the Book of Kells? Books not available on the shelf are located and read online, or downloaded as e-books from selected sites. While rummaging through presidential speeches, ‘news gaggles’ and press releases, television and radio transcripts, online journals and newspaper archives searching for Orwellian tropes, themes and parallels, I have discovered much that is not available on Library shelves. The search for articles by and about George Orwell has also led to an investigation of class and unemployment, crime and anarchy, identity and Englishness in the latter half of the twentieth century.

104 Bernard Crick, Orwell: A Life, 18
While the research process of this thesis has mobilised the digitized and convergent media opportunities of the twenty first century, I have also returned to the early twentieth century to track the road to Orwell, as much as to Wigan Pier. Orwell was knowledgeable about working class literature. An early influence on his own writing was Jack London.\textsuperscript{105} He also enjoyed Robert Tressell’s \textit{The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists} (1911), borrowing the essence of Tressell’s disclaimer about truth for the introduction of \textit{Down and Out in Paris and London}.\textsuperscript{106} Of \textit{Philanthropists}, Orwell states, “It recorded things that were everyday experiences but which had not been noticed before.”\textsuperscript{107} Fellow writer and playwright J. B. Priestley completed his own \textit{English Journey} (1933) at the end of the Depression. While Priestley’s book takes a quite different approach to working communities than does Orwell’s \textit{Wigan Pier}, both uncovered a side of English working class life that mill owners and politicians would rather they had left unexplored. Another popular writer of that era was Walter Greenwood. His working class novel \textit{Love on the Dole} (1933) was a bestseller, and has had an influence on the direction of this thesis. All of these have added intertextual layers to the study of poverty and class in England. A perusal of back issues of the \textit{New Statesman} has provided invaluable background material to the Thatcher-Major-Blair governments. I have also found much that was useful to my research in UK newspapers such as \textit{The Guardian}, \textit{The Independent}, \textit{The Observer} and \textit{The Sunday Herald}, \textit{The Mirror}, \textit{The Times}, and \textit{The Economist} (journal). In their different ways, all are

\textsuperscript{105} George Orwell, “The Proletarian Writer,” in \textit{CEJL} II, 40
\textsuperscript{106} Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 187
\textsuperscript{107} Orwell, “The Proletarian Writer,” 56
outstanding providers of research material. It would be difficult for any small University to provide print archives of such magnitude, much of which dates back to the 1980s.

Several of the journalistic arguments presented in this thesis underpin questions of writing style. What follows, projects from John Howard’s Liberal Australia. Thanks to the advantages of digitization — the movement of virtual content through space — a thesis with a large quantity of overseas journalism has been written. One of the original contributions to knowledge in this thesis is an exploration of how Orwell’s work sits in the new e-journalistic environment. A host of US papers and online journals, with diverse political perspectives have also been instrumental in forming a coherent dissenting linear narrative of contemporary American politics post 9/11. They include ZDNet, AlterNet, Nation, Texas Observer, CounterPunch, Corp Watch, Mother Jones, Nieman Reports, American Journalism Review, Quill, Columbia Journalism Review, USA Today, The Washington Post, The New Yorker, The Boston Globe, The New York Times, Atlantic, and the neoconservative Weekly Standard. In an ironic Orwellian twist, I am indebted to the FBI Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Reading Room, for a wide collection of serviceable material, which is currently available on line.¹⁰⁸ The steady flow of data central to the research is curiously analogous with the daily tasks assigned to Winston Smith in the Records Department at the Ministry of Truth. The main difference here is that, unlike Winston, I am not expected to rewrite the content — merely to research and shape where appropriate.¹⁰⁹ History is not being overwritten so

¹⁰⁹ George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 38-40
much as it is being gathered. Memory is not being erased, but edited, footnoted, and presented for examiners and other readers to ponder. E-research offers opportunities and challenges. Clearly though, the scale, breadth and relationships forged in the chapters that follow could not have been conducted even five years ago.

The question will and should arise: why should this discussion of source material matter? I am researching and writing a Doctoral thesis, so there must be a variety of sources expressing different views and opinions, apart from those formulated in books and scholarly journals. However there is a specific reason why I have deliberately drawn from (online) journalism — indeed often I have relied upon it. Brian McNair states, “At the simplest level, journalism presents us with an ongoing narrative about the world beyond our immediate experience. This narrative is asserted to be ‘true.’”

Newspapers, in much the same way as e-libraries, databases and other useful internet tools, provide readily obtainable (and usually free) access to knowledge. Often this material is the only prior information a reader possess on contemporary events. Much is therefore dependant — not as William Carlos Williams aptly remarked “on a red wheel barrow glazed with rain” — but on first impressions garnered from the media. It is what we initially read in the papers, hear on the radio, or see on television that moulds our interpretations, our ‘reality.’ As McNair asserts, “Journalism … is often said to be our ‘window on the world.’”

This is an important metaphor to maintain. It is a mask

\[\text{References:}\]

110 Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK: A Textbook*, 3rd edition (London: Routledge, 1999), 21


112 McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK*, 21
of a democratic citizenry that we make up our own minds, but not without discursive framing from the news and print media. It is the basis on which every Government Press Agency relies. Is it not strange how much we take for granted? Orwell alleges, “Most people, if asked to prove that the earth is round … would start off by saying that ‘everyone knows’ the earth to be round, and if pressed further would become angry.”113

Such a response is partly because we are under intense social pressure to conform. A simple “I don’t know” would hardly be an appropriate response to make in this the ‘Information’ Age.

Few writers (living or dead) are as enduringly newsworthy, relevant, or popular as George Orwell. The scope and variety of his work — the sheer volume of his letters, essays, and assorted journalism — elicits a response from academics, fellow journalists, critics and readers. This doctorate offers one such response. Why should Orwell’s reputation for controversy continue so long after his death? Part of the answer lies in the fact that he has undoubtedly provided the contemporary reader with phrases, ideas and arguments that remain relevant. During his lifetime, Orwell was openly critical of political parties and political jargon. Bergonzi describes him as “the dissident, anti-Marxist socialist.”114 Such a position evidently takes Orwell’s special ability to realise. He despised the selfish ‘fat cats’ of British industry, rejected capitalism, and called for radical change: “Nationalization of industry,” the “[L.]imitation of incomes,” and

“Reform of the educational system.” 115 Orwell also quietly bemoaned the desecration of the English language by politicians. 116 He was not totally convinced by mechanisation either, because “the objective of mechanical progress is a foolproof world — which may or may not mean a world inhabited by fools.” 117 Labour-saving devices were definitely advantageous. 118 Change, particularly when it meant imported American apples, canned foodstuffs, and foil-wrapped cheese was emphatically without merit. 119 Although Orwell died in 1950, his writing and phrasing punctuates the global capitalist economy. We have inherited nearly all of the troubles that confronted his era — famine, poverty, war, disease, and unemployment — plus several new concerns like ‘global warming,’ ‘pollution,’ ‘drugs’ and ‘terrorism.’ Many of these issues remain unresolved because like class politics, we evidently lack the political will to implement change. 120 Orwell is particularly useful when wading through the barrage of obfuscation and spin doctoring that has emerged from Washington, Westminster, and Canberra, in the wake of 9/11. He literally wrote the book on Newspeak. 121

For journalism to intervene in weighty political matters is entirely right and appropriate. That my undergraduate and honours degrees have moved between cultural studies and journalism is similarly suitable. Orwell frequently attacked injustice and wrongful conduct, recognising that politicians simply cannot interrogate themselves

115 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 176
116 George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in Inside the Whale and other Essays (London: Penguin, 2001), 143
117 Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, 182
118 Orwell, ibid., 184
119 Orwell, ibid., 190
120 Orwell, ibid., 139
effectively. At the same time, his interests were not all serious. He was deeply immersed in quite mundane matters like the price of beer, tobacco and books. Journalists are required to routinely digest news and current affairs, and process the relevant information into convenient bite-sized pieces. Brian McNair reminds us that it is all part of the job description. Put simply, the journalist is there to ask the really awkward questions, and in that sense, he or she plays a vital role in “feeding and sustaining the democratic process.”

In a highly industrialised and pressurised world, sometimes termed the Information Age, it is impossible to assess process and interrogate such a diversity of issues. McNair also reminds us that it is journalism that “provides the information from which we draw our ‘cognitive maps’ of reality.” Without regular media input in fact, it is doubtful whether we would know very much about the state of local and world politics or the economy. In the escalating war on terror, to select a contemporary theme, the Bush administration would clearly prefer to respond to perceived terrorist threats covertly. Despite frequent reminders from veteran reporters like Bob Giles that, “[T]he duty of the press is to be watchful over the exercise of power.”

Most Governments are reluctant to release sensitive information into the public sector, especially when it is likely to embarrass them. The Bush administration has a reputation for studiously avoiding answering tough questions from the news

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121 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 257-268
122 Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK*, 21
123 McNair, ibid.
media.\textsuperscript{126} Vice-president Dick Cheney, in particular, is widely acknowledged to be deeply hostile to the press.\textsuperscript{127} Yet truth has a disconcerting habit of protruding at inopportune moments, especially from the point of view of overly-secretive governments. Recent potent examples of this are the photographs and testimonies of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison;\textsuperscript{128} the ‘real’ Jessica Lynch story; and the (still) missing, and now wholly abandoned WMDs. There are simply too many independent loopholes in a democratic system for an administration to monitor successfully, and for this, we should all be grateful.

After three years of research, my interest in Orwell has necessarily undergone significant re-evaluation. The thesis is primarily concerned with Orwell’s contribution to journalism, which (still) plays an active role in framing and making sense of contemporary world events. His essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ forms the basis of \textit{The Observer’s} in-house style guide. However, the merits of clear prose aside, Orwell’s dystopian \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} offers a warning to the dangers of unchallenged and secretive government. It requires little mental acuity to recognise that we are already living with the technological realities of the Big Brother state: wire taps and 24-hour CCTV surveillance, satellite imaging, advanced nuclear weapons capabilities and space colonization for example. The thesis examines several key Orwellian tropes — good and bad political writing (reportage), failed social revolution

\textsuperscript{126} John W. Dean, \textit{Worse than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush} (South Yarra, Victoria: Hardie Grant Books, 2004), 178
\textsuperscript{127} James Bamford, “Is the Press Up to the Task of Reporting These Stories?” \textit{Nieman Reports}, 19-20
(class war), ‘power’ politics (‘spin’ and doublespeak), the military industrial complex (perpetual war for perpetual peace), internal surveillance (data storage), and capitalism (corporate globalization). I discuss these issues in the context of the war on terror. I am continually surprised at Orwell’s insights. How did he manage to appraise contemporary world politics so accurately? As a natural process of evolution, the chapter headings and thesis title have all changed significantly, a scenario doubtless experienced by every writer. What started out as “George Orwell: A Journalist’s Search for Wigan Pier” has become “From Wigan Pier to Airstrip One: A Critical Evaluation of George Orwell’s Writing and Politics post-September 11.” It is not necessarily a better title but it extends and highlights the contemporary links more succinctly. Rapid change is the new order of business in the Information Age.

The accelerating pace ... is so rapid and exponential that no one really knows where it’s headed. But one thing is sure: it is transforming everything we do.129

Disconnected from real time, the ceaseless lava flow of digitised ‘knowledge’ permits not only convergence but rapid copying and distribution of data. This is the new Memory Hole, where — rather than destroying memory — we simply bury it under complex layers of rhetoric and nuanced spin. Displaying great skill and perspicacity, the network of global Big Brothers have blighted the contemporary world with the same composite of lies that Orwell fashioned for Oceania.

WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

128 To date the Defense Department steadfastly refuses to release any further information pertaining to prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison.

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Few writers expect Orwell’s totalitarian dystopia to materialise unchallenged from the pages of a book. The wielders of power are more capable, and more subtle than that. The litany of lies and contempt central to Big Brother’s Oceania is eminently reproducible by any administration served by a complicit media and a gullible electorate. The emergence of such a phenomenon has been well documented in America, post 9/11.\(^\text{130}\) This thesis has arisen out of the miasma of ideological spin and hubris framing and surrounding Mr. Bush’s war on terror. My purpose — not unlike Orwell’s in his last novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — is to warn, not berate. Orwell understood political rhetoric. He was not a prophet but a realist who understood the temptations of excessive power. He had witnessed the ‘death’ of history in Spain, and thereafter he raised his pen to combat intellectual hypocrisy and dishonesty wherever he found it. To some, words are never enough — they want deeds and actions — but under Orwell’s tutelage words take on the ability to pierce and probe and unsettle. They are sharp cutting instruments, fully capable of transcending time. How else are we to explain his enduring popularity as a writer? This thesis offers a critical and interpretative homage to George Orwell, a man who recognised the power of well chosen words, and was captivated and enthralled by their complexity and power.

\(^{129}\) Raymond Seitz, transcribed speech cited Harvey, *Global Disorder*, 14

Court Undermined the Constitution and Chose our President (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001)
PART ONE: Living between Two Wars

Figure 2
Chapter One

Writing As (and When) I Please

A sense of crisis is one of the first things needful in the writer today. He must see the crisis of our time as a threat to human freedom, and must seek to restore freedom in the only way possible: by … extending the limits of consciousness.  

Arthur Marwick

It is more than fifty years since George Orwell died, yet *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, “have sold a phenomenal forty million copies in more than sixty languages.” That is a considerable achievement for someone who allegedly wrote “plainly, without grace or sensitivity.” The terms ‘Big Brother,’ ‘Room 101,’ ‘Doublethink,’ and ‘Thoughtcrime,’ have entered the language, as has the adjective ‘Orwellian,’ which refers to the prophetic as much as to the secretive machinations of state authority. Orwell’s influence is enduring and widespread — deservedly so. Bernard Bergonzi states, “He was regarded as an embodiment of English decency, bloody-mindedness, and grumbling; a dissenting radical with conservative instincts; an

old Etonian with a working class suspicion of ‘them.’” More recently, Britain’s Gordon Brown cited Orwell in a speech concerned with defining national identity; and historian Timothy Garton Ash referred to him as “the most influential political writer in the twentieth century.” This is high praise, although such declarations are sure to raise hackles and provoke protestation from erstwhile comrades. The most obvious and compelling reason for Orwell’s success is that his writing is “pertinent to our time.” Yet instead of assuming this relevance, it is more important to justify and explicate the dialogue between past and present. Consequently, I begin this chapter by developing the links between Orwell’s dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, and the emergent authoritarian style of government favoured by George W. Bush’s neoconservative administration in the wake of 11 September 2001. This is necessary because the practices of the state in Orwell’s final novel and the methodology currently employed by the Bush Administration are too similar to wave aside as accidental or incidental. I am not suggesting that the Bush Administration is in any way a literal embodiment of Big Brother, despite its proclivity for Orwellian ‘doublespeak.’ However, since 9/11 the neoconservative element within the Bush Administration has been granted a unique opportunity to act according to type, and secrecy and high-handedness figure prominently in their administrative methodology.

5 Bernard Bergonzi, Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background 1939-1960 (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 171
7 Garton Ash, “Introduction,” xi
8 Christopher Hitchens, Orwell’s Victory (London: Penguin, 2003). Hitchens alludes to the fact that Orwell’s name “is enough to evoke a shiver of revulsion” with detractors on the left (33).
With the release of *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* in September 2002, the Bush Administration has delivered its blueprint for empire building. The world’s most powerful economy also possesses the world’s most powerful army.

With 1.4 million troops, four major fleets, global air power including airlift capability, rapid reaction projection, a nearly total domination of both the military and peaceful uses of space, and a military budget as big as those of all its allies put together, American dominance is actually more absolute, and extends over a much wider global canvas, than that of the Roman empire.

Robert N. Bellah states, “on top of [that] the United States has hegemonic cultural and linguistic influence.” It is therefore essential to recognise the enormous potential for good — and conversely for harm — that the United States has at its disposal. Given the fact that Mr. Bush clearly intends to impose his will on international politics, his government was recently dubbed “[T]he most frightening American Administration in modern times.” The label (incidentally) is entirely appropriate and applicable, given that the world is now demonstrably more dangerous and destabilised than it was in 1948 when *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published. From such a position, at least theoretically, there is little the United States need do (in addition) to achieve the majority of its global aims and objectives.

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11 Robert Harvey, *Global Disorder* (London: Robinson, 2003), 16
14 There is little doubt that the goal of America’s current anti-terror crusade is to establish conditions of global hegemony. Chomsky points out that the Imperial design has long been determined, and that the Bush-Cheney administration is merely continuing the original Wilsonian mandate (admittedly) with additional vigour. He states, “The message is clear: We
It is my contention, argued throughout this thesis, that Orwell’s last novel was not the product of a dying man’s depression. Neither was it a literal prophecy. It was, and still remains, a dire warning. The novel was the product of considerable thought, as Jeffrey Meyers affirms.

He’d been thinking about the idea for many years, throughout the Blitz, on his journey to postwar Germany, in his essays and book reviews, and in conversations with Koestler, who’d had direct experience with political repression.

Orwell was not best known for imaginative fiction, but for his insights. The plots of his earlier novels are barely convincing. *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935) is described by D. J. Taylor as “a curious novel, one of the oddest things that Orwell ever wrote.” Gordon Bowker refers to it as “undoubtedly his least satisfactory novel,” while Crick calls it “embarrassingly bad.” I mention this because segments of the novel are highly experimental and stylistically avant-garde. *A Clergyman’s Daughter* reveals Orwell’s incapacity to write great literary imaginative fiction — a truth that he acknowledged. It is his documentary reportage and journalism that is truly representative of his talents.

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15 Ian Slater, *Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 240
19 Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 165
20 Bernard Crick, *Orwell: A Life*, 18
Orwell’s reputation is built upon a penchant for gritty realism, based in part, upon his own experiences. The world of Big Brother — Oceania (and Airstrip One) — is not ‘imaginary’ in the sense of being fantasy. His friend Arthur Koestler, an ex-communist who had been imprisoned by the Fascists in Spain, would attest to that.22 Rather, it has its basis in the starkest reality imaginable — totalitarian state government. Murray N. Rothbard ended his 1949 review of Nineteen Eighty-Four with a rhetorical question. He states, “Orwell’s collectivist world of the future is doubtless a nightmare — but is it merely a dream?”23 Such a comment shows that Orwell understood the aims and methods of authoritarian government better than his reviewers. Throughout his essays and reportage, he honed and developed his most burdensome political thoughts.

Evidence of carefully crafted perspective occurred long before Nineteen Eighty-Four was written. Reading Orwell’s review of The Machiavellians by James Burnham, or his own ‘Notes on Nationalism’ in 1974 would have been vaguely ‘unsettling’ knowing that Richard Milhous Nixon was in power.24 It would have been moderately disturbing in the 1980s too, with Ronald Reagan spending unprecedented sums on the military and “talking enticingly of ‘a shield … [to] protect us from nuclear missiles.’”25 It should be remembered that President Reagan did not hesitate to resort to military force when he

22 Jeffrey Meyers, Orwell: Wintry Conscience, 211
deemed it necessary: the ‘liberation’ (invasion) of Grenada (1983) and the bombing of Tripoli (1986) come to mind. Now, with George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the White House for a second term — and given the current American economic and military supremacy — Orwell’s prescient political insight is (frankly) alarming. The United States undoubtedly experienced tremendous shock on September 11 and understandably, the fear of repetition coupled with the nation’s war footing, has allowed the Government the right to intrude into everyday life. The USA Patriot Act (I) was hurriedly passed through Congress only a month after the attacks. In the words of one critic, Ronald Dworkin, it “sets out a new, breathtakingly vague and broad definition of terrorism.” This hastily implemented legislation in turn led to a range of unprecedented Presidential announcements concerning the future treatment and trial (and guilt) of terror suspects. Many of Mr. Bush’s post 9/11 decisions (especially the right to arrest and subsequently try suspects “at his sole discretion”) have received enthusiastic heartland approval. Had any of these rigorous enactments occurred outside of America, the participating government would be regarded as “the most lawless of totalitarian dictatorships.” However, since it has occurred in the United States, the President’s hard line response is viewed as a natural and an appropriate response from the leader of a

29 Dworkin, “The Threat of Patriotism,” 44
30 Dworkin, ibid.
31 Dworkin, ibid.
democratic nation at war. This viewpoint, in my opinion, is myopic and the notion of America ‘being at war’ is gravely misleading. Orwell reminds us that:

All nationalists have the power of not seeing resemblances between similar sets of facts … Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits but according to who does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage — torture, the use of hostages … imprisonment without trial, forgery, assassination, the bombing of civilians — [that] does not change its moral colour when it is committed by ‘our’ side.32

President Bush evidently accepts the sentiment expressed by Jenni Calder, “that the realization of an ideal [the eradication of ‘evil’] is worth any sacrifice” — or cost in human lives.33 Mr. Bush allegedly will not be gainsaid, held accountable, or questioned over his administration’s hawkish reasoning.34 As the pugnacious adopted Texan maintains, “Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we.”35 To be sure, this is a slip of the tongue, but all parapraxis is indicative of some form of internal disturbance or cognitive displacement.36 The troubled office of the US Presidency — measured by Mr. Bush’s performance thus far — is evidently in the midst of significant intellectual, ethical and moral decline.

32 George Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” in Essays, 307
33 Jenni Calder, Huxley and Orwell: Brave New World & Nineteen Eighty-Four (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), 7
Francis Fukuyama once strongly “argued that we [meaning ‘civilization’ and/or ‘The West’] had reached the ‘end of history.’” He was doubtless referring to the ascendancy of global capital (the ever expanding money market), and the dissemination of liberal democracy and technology throughout the world. Fukuyama has not fully retracted his earlier position, despite the increased threat of mayhem in the wake of 9/11, and the vehement rejection of American cultural hegemony by Islamo-fascism. However, he has clarified his views regarding pre-emption and nation building. He also calls into question America’s ability to understand an ancient culture like Iraq’s.

Americans have tended to believe that their institutions and values — democracy, individual rights, the rule of law and prosperity based on economic freedom — represent universal aspirations that will ultimately be shared by people all over the world, if given the opportunity. They are inclined to think that American society appeals to people of all cultures.

The acceptance of American values is clearly not outwardly observable in Iraq, a nation with an aggressive propensity for tribalism, and religious sectarianism — a potent mix. Besides which, its ancient cultural heritage cannot easily be shrugged off, any more than can the effect of its years of despotic totalitarian rule under Saddam Hussein. Fukuyama accepts that there is great perplexity in the United States over the rejection of those same values and institutions that Washington pundits consider sacrosanct, and vital to democracy. Evidently, Mr. Bush’s determination to impose his views on Iraq and the Middle East has not taken into account the need for realistic post-operative planning.

Concerning the Iraq war, Fukuyama appropriately contends that the Bush administration

38 Fukuyama, ibid., 5-6
39 Fukuyama, ibid., 4
demonstrably failed to weigh up the difficulties of nation building during the war’s early planning stages.\textsuperscript{41} Furthermore, the Bush administration has consistently denied all contrary evidence to its own findings, strongly disagreeing with the European Union’s verdict (pointedly led by France and Germany) that post-war Iraq is a disaster.\textsuperscript{42} Seen from Washington’s standpoint, Mr. Bush’s ‘crusade’\textsuperscript{43} is little more than an old fashioned business venture gone somewhat awry, but the mission is ultimately still salvageable and on track.\textsuperscript{44} Fukuyama disagrees that it is totally successful, and argues that the long term effects of invading Iraq will hinder and undermine the United States international reputation for many years to come. Apart from Dworkin’s ongoing concerns for the legality of the USA’s response to terror,\textsuperscript{45} and Fukuyama’s misgivings about neo-conservative logic, a solid array of debate concerning America’s use of force has arisen. Amidst a plethora of books, articles, essays and interviews, the voice of reason prevails. Norman Mailer,\textsuperscript{46} Stanley Hoffmann,\textsuperscript{47} Ron Suskind,\textsuperscript{48} Thomas Powers,\textsuperscript{49} Perry Anderson,\textsuperscript{50} Jürgen Habermas,\textsuperscript{51} Eric Hobsbawm,\textsuperscript{52} and Walden Bello\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{41} Francis Fukuyama, “The Neoconservative Moment,” \textit{The National Interest} (Summer 2004): 60-61
\textsuperscript{42} Fukuyama, ibid., 58
\textsuperscript{43} The President stated, “This is a new kind of … a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while. And the American people must be patient. I'm going to be patient.” George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President Upon Arrival,” \textit{The White House}, 16 September 2001. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html (27/03/2004)
\textsuperscript{44} It is likely that Iraq’s large oil reserves and American interests in the Middle East were key components in the invasion plans.
\textsuperscript{45} See also Ronald Dworkin, “Terror & the Attack on Civil Liberties,” \textit{NYRB} L, no. 17 (November 6, 2003): 37-41
\textsuperscript{47} Stanley Hoffmann, “On the War,” \textit{NYRB} XLVIII, no. 17 (November 1, 2001): 4, 6
\textsuperscript{49} Thomas Powers, “The Vanishing Case For War,” \textit{NYRB} L, no. 19 (December 4, 2003): 12-17
are ranged against neoconservatives Robert Kagan and William Kristol, Gary Schmitt, Norman Podhoretz, and the AEI’s Danielle Pletka. In addition, books by John W. Dean, Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, Seymour M. Hersh, and Robert Harvey have supplemented Orwell’s premise that politics corrupts. This thesis is greatly indebted to their collective input.

All of the arguments in this chapter — the authoritarian state apparatus, writing and journalism, nostalgia, Englishness, class, and politics — chart the currents, swirls and eddies of my research. I develop each of these themes in successive chapters, tracing

51 Jürgen Habermas, “America and the World: A Conversation with Jürgen Habermas,” an interview with Eduardo Mendieta, Logos 3.3 (Summer 2004).
http://www.logosjournal.com/archives.htm (22/01/2005)
http://www.counterpunch.org/hobsbawm01252005.html (29/01/2005)
http://www.policyreview.org/JUN02/Kagan.html (23/01/2005)
http://www.aei.org/news21033 (01/02/2005)
61 Gore Vidal, Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: How We Got To Be So Hated (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002); Dreaming War: Blood For Oil and the Cheney-Bush Junta (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002)
62 Seymour M. Hersh, Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib (Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin/Allen Lane, 2004)
63 Robert Harvey, Global Disorder (London: Robinson, 2003)
Orwell’s journey from the playing fields of Eton to the fifth arrondissement in Paris, thence to Wigan and on to Spain. The crucial decision to become a writer enabled Orwell to concentrate on issues that mattered. He visited working class communities in the Industrial North, ventured down coal mines, wrote despairingly of a lost Edwardian idyll, and rather disparagingly of class and snobbery. In 1936, he volunteered for the Spanish Civil War, where he fought for the Republican side. He was sent to the Aragon front, and was badly wounded. After leaving hospital, he and his militia friends were targeted and pursued by Soviet agents. When he returned to England, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Before his premature death in 1950, Orwell successfully established himself as one of the foremost writers of his generation.

As a political essayist and journalist, George Orwell was outstanding. In 1938, he was deeply concerned about the growing threat to intellectual freedom in Western Europe. He predicted — correctly — that confrontation with the Fascist dictatorships in Germany and Italy would result in a major war. It was always Orwell’s contention that totalitarian government was imminent unless steps were taken to prevent it. James Burnham the American political philosopher published the first of three influential books around this time. Burnham addressed the consequences of force and coercion for democracy, and plotted the likely new directions of American politics. The Managerial Revolution (1941) allowed him to formulate a strong case for the emergence of an elite

64 Gordon Bowker, George Orwell, 236
66 The Managerial Revolution (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1941); The Machiavellians (London: Putnam and Co. Ltd., 1943), and The Struggle For the World (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947)
managerial class. In his review of Burnham’s book, Orwell states, “The rulers of this new society will be people who effectively control the means of production.”67 Once established, this new managerial class would eliminate capitalism, ruthlessly crush the workers, and ensure that all power (and wealth) was retained solely for their own benefit. Burnham reasoned that in the ensuing vacuum created by the war, the world would naturally divide along three geopolitical fault lines: Europe (Germany), Asia (Japan) and America (Britain and the Dominions).68 Due to its clear technological mastery at the outset of the war, Burnham predicted that Germany would most likely win the European struggle. Although clearly wrong on this point, Orwell remarks, “[I]t does not affect the main argument. Burnham’s geographical picture of the new world has turned out to be correct.”69 The new order that Burnham delineated in his treatise was neither capitalist nor democratic. Expounding further, Orwell adds, “Private property rights will be abolished, but common ownership will not be established.”70 This grim report bears the hallmarks of a ruthless totalitarian state, with a minority ruling cadre and an oppressed proletariat. Although lifted from Stalinist Russia, it is evidently not communist. It is the kind of world that no one desiring self-determination and freedom of expression would wish to see implemented. Burnham’s next book, The Machiavellians, draws attention to the fact that democracy is an illusion, and that democratic society is not possible and probably never has been. Orwell interprets this argument to infer that “Society is of its nature oligarchical, and the power of the

67 George Orwell, “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution,” CEJL IV, 192
68 Orwell, ibid., 192-193
69 George Orwell, “You and the Atom Bomb,” in CEJL IV, 25
70 Orwell, “James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution,” 192
oligarchy always rests upon force and fraud.”  This dismal image of slavery under Burnham’s triumphant managerial class proved irresistible to Orwell. He later resurrected Burnham’s geopolitical demarcations for use in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Much has changed since Orwell pitted Oceania against its rivals in endless economic and military brinkmanship. The final decade of the twentieth century witnessed the end of the Cold War, and the dismantling of the Soviet Eastern Bloc. There were earthquakes, famines, civil wars, cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide, even pre-emptive military engagements. On September 11, 2001, a small group of international terrorists struck in Manhattan’s Central Business District, and several hours later America declared itself at war with terror. Any unnecessary loss of life is deplorable. The tragedy of 9/11 was certainly no Pearl Harbour, yet it did serve as a ‘wake-up call’ to Americans. Christopher Scheer et al. contend that the cataclysmic events of 9/11 provided the ideal opportunity for America to demonstrate its awesome military strength. Scheer et al. also state, “While the Clinton administration viewed the post-Cold War era as an opportunity to create a series of multilateral alliances that would allow the U.S. to cut back on its military commitments, Dick Cheney’s protégés saw a wide-open road to an American empire.” The lesson here is evident. America’s

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71 Orwell, ibid., 193
72 Robert Harvey, Global Power, 6
73 Harvey, ibid., 7
74 Christopher Scheer et al, The Five Biggest Lies Bush Told Us About Iraq (Brooklyn, New York: Seven Stories Press/Akashic Books, 2003), 169
response to 9/11 was planned and anticipated — long before the first jetliner crashed into the first Trade Tower.\textsuperscript{75}

George Orwell matters. Ian Slater argues that a close study of Orwell’s writing is crucial to our understanding of contemporary politics. He states “[Orwell’s] analysis of the extent to which language, as part of the process of power hunger denying equality, may be wilfully corrupted as a tactic in an ever-expanding policy of deception.”\textsuperscript{76} This was the Inner Party’s practice in \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, and the neoconservative element in the Bush administration\textsuperscript{77} also specialises in secrecy, concealment and deceit.\textsuperscript{78} Orwell says of ‘the new ruling class’ in his Burnham review, “‘Dishonesty…’ is the sum of their wisdom.”\textsuperscript{79} Such a rebuke would be entirely wasted on Big Brother, but it frames contemporary political practices accurately. The President has publicly stated that his decisions are incontrovertible: “I do not need to explain why I say things. That’s the interesting thing about being the President.”\textsuperscript{80} Reticence is not the only vice that the Bush administration deploys to good effect: for example, the existence of the still

\textsuperscript{75} The same authors add, “When the Defence Policy Guidance draft cowritten [sic] by Paul Wolfowitz and Scooter Libby was leaked to the \textit{New York Times} in 1992, a horrified Senator Joseph Bidden described it as a blueprint for ‘literally a Pax Americana.’ The document reflected the neoconservative vision for a ‘New American Century,’ a world defined by U.S. military domination over much of Europe and Asia, buttressed by a global ring of military bases, each ready to dispatch troops at the slightest hint of resistance from ‘hostile’ states. It was time, neoconservatives argued, to take advantage of an unparalleleld ‘unipolar moment’ marked by the collapse of the Soviet Union.” Scheer et al, ibid., 168. See also, Ron Suskind, \textit{The Price of Loyalty}, 72-75. Most of this book concerns the documented revelations of Paul O’Neill, President Bush’s former Secretary of the Treasury.

\textsuperscript{76} Ian Slater, \textit{Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One}, 204


\textsuperscript{78} Dean, \textit{Worse than Watergate}, xv


\textsuperscript{80} Dean, \textit{Worse than Watergate}, 20
missing\textsuperscript{81} and (now) wholly discredited weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) in Iraq.\textsuperscript{82} The ill-founded intelligence concerning Saddam’s weapons stockpile was deemed sufficient at the time to precipitate an invasion. In his analysis of Thucydides’ history of \textit{The Peloponnesian War}, Leo Strauss counselled studied and deliberate obfuscation to deceive the populace, since: “Only through proper selection and … arrangement do we get a true picture.”\textsuperscript{83} The inference is that only those with “understanding” are able to interpret history, or reveal hidden truths. This strategy compliments Big Brother’s own methods of suppressing and rewriting history. On the strength of this unsound premise, the war between Athens and Sparta (431-404 BC) supposedly provides technocrats and scholars with a universal ‘one size fits all’ template for the epistemology of Warfare. As a result, Capitol Hill is regularly ‘stone-walled’ by an emboldened and secretive administration, which considers its actions beyond reproach.\textsuperscript{84} There is little in the outward demeanour of these leaders to admire or to emulate, and their political misconduct augurs badly for everyone.

The use of propaganda by Republicans and Nationalists alike during the Spanish Civil War taught Orwell all he needed to know about the workings of political deception. Privately he questioned whether the Spanish war could ever be recorded

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\item \textsuperscript{82} Robert Harvey, \textit{Global Disorder}, xiv-xv
\item \textsuperscript{84} John W. Dean, \textit{Worse than Watergate}, 155
\end{itemize}
accurately. His concern was that the facts might never be known. Orwell states, “I saw … history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various ‘party lines.’” The Spanish dependence on misinformation and outright falsehood to report the progress of the war, pinpoints the uneasy tensions between facts and fiction. In no way is this practice restricted to long ago. The Pentagon is understood to have micromanaged the news in Afghanistan during the Taliban campaign. Doubtless similar practices occurred in the hourly reports released by Washington (and Baghdad) in the early stages of the Iraq invasion. There are always discrepancies in casualty lists in wartime. In post-invasion Iraq, the problems of accurate reportage are magnified because “The U.S. government refuses to keep a tally” of non-combatants. On March 26, 2003, a crowded market in Baghdad was inadvertently bombed, “killing at least 60 Iraqi civilians.” Although tragic accidents (aka ‘blunders’) frequently occur in warfare, the Pentagon categorically denies that they are caused or created by Americans. In the aftermath of the market bombing, “British

86 Orwell, ibid., 352
88 Andrea Buffa states, “The issue of civilian casualties, injuries and detentions, though infrequently covered by the U.S. media, is one of the most important issues to Iraqis.” From the Iraqi perspective, it is difficult to claim compensation for loved ones ‘accidentally’ killed or injured by coalition forces. Iraqi deaths are frequently denied a non-combatant status; also, paperwork routinely goes missing — all of which is hardly surprising in a climate of deep-seated hostility and mutual mistrust. Andrea Buffa, “Anniversary of a Bombing,” Alternet, 25 March 2004. http://www.alternet.org/ (26/08/2004). In a more recent Guardian article, British author George Monbiot reveals that, despite denials by former US commander General Franks, and Donald Rumsfeld, the Pentagon does in fact keep a close record of Iraqi casualties. George Monbiot, “The Media Are Minimizing US and British War Crimes in Iraq,” The Guardian, 8 November 2005. http://www.guardian.co.uk/ (08/11/2005)
89 Andrea Buffa, “Anniversary of a Bombing.”
journalist Robert Fisk found shards of an American missile … confirming the United States’ culpability.” Fisk is well known for his anti-Bush sentiments, and his allegations have been treated with scepticism, nevertheless his discovery (if validated) is disturbing. There have been too many cover-ups of this nature in Iraq. For its part, the United States military has vigorously denied any responsibility for civilian deaths, blaming the Iraqis instead. In the Spanish Civil War, Orwell noted that people were swept along by whatever they read in the papers or heard on the radio — regardless of whether it was true. Why should it be any different with Iraq? Unfortunately, insufficient attention is paid by the US news media concerning the reports of civilian casualties in Iraq, which is surprising given the frequency of news correspondent fatalities in Iraq.

It fell to Orwell to articulate what very few intellectuals in the late 1940s and early 1950s were prepared to acknowledge, namely that all forms of government (including western-style democracies) contain the seeds of tyranny and despotism. The problem was not the immediate dangers posed by Fascism, or by Communism, because

90 Buffa, ibid.
92 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 346
“Orwell saw power politics … [in general] as the major threat to mankind.”\textsuperscript{95} The current Bush administration, which I would describe as elitist and ‘closed,’ has transmuted traditional conservative politics into a shameless grab for power and kudos.\textsuperscript{96} C. Wright Mills would doubtless attribute the origins of such exploitative and ruthless political design — the current American version is itself merely a rejection of “older values and codes” of behaviour — to the “pursuit of easy money and fast estate building.”\textsuperscript{97} While former associate deputy US attorney general John W. Dean asserts, “Not since Nixon left the White House have we had such greed over presidential power, and never before … such political paranoia.”\textsuperscript{98} Dean probably knows better than most what criteria to look for, as he was counsel to Richard Nixon in the events leading up to Watergate. However, the tentacles of fear and repression are not exclusively confined to powerful institutions located in and around Washington DC. America has close allies — Britain and Australia (Orwell’s tripartite Oceania) — where Homeland security issues are important concerns that mask but also perform social insecurities and xenophobias.

The Blair Government (\textit{aka} New Labour) has recently ordered the trialling of a national identity card, which it is alleged will make the UK ‘safer’ for all British subjects.\textsuperscript{99} In April 2004, an article on \textit{BBC News} stated “Home secretary David
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\begin{tabular}{l}
95 Jenni Calder, \textit{Huxley and Orwell}, 8  \\
96 An aphorism attributed to Lord Acton expresses this succinctly, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” (April 3, 1887).  \\
97 C. Wright Mills, \textit{The Power Elite} (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 344, 346  \\
98 John W. Dean, \textit{Worse than Watergate}, 21  \\
99 Charles Clarke — Britain’s (replacement) Home Secretary — recently defended the ID Cards Bill in the \textit{Times}. He states, “[T]he ID Cards Bill that I am introducing today is a profoundly civil libertarian measure because it promotes the most fundamental civil liberty in our society, which is the right to live free from crime and fear.” Put another way, UK citizens are offered a
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Blunkett will set out details of the proposals, which he says could be effective in the fight against terrorism.” The same article also affirmed, “The draft Bill will outline proposals for a national identity register to hold details of all 60 million people in the UK. This will enable a person's identity to be authenticated when they produce their card.” What is not mentioned by the (former) Home Secretary is the likely and doubtless fully intended curtailment of individual rights that such a system will necessitate — a terror alert for instance. There is no mention of what happens to the citizen’s right to their identity if the card is lost or stolen. Without appropriate identification, the ordinary (British) subject would effectively cease to exist. Should the need arise, an unscrupulous government could confiscate property, and freeze bank accounts thereby denying access to basic goods and services. It could even delete (and/or fabricate) data, thereby removing ‘undesirables’ from the electoral rolls. The imposition of a ‘full-blown’ Big Brother State suddenly becomes possible. We enter the world of irrational fear, and ‘nosey’ neighbours; of routine wire taps, and random police searches designed to cower and demoralise legitimate British citizens. Curiously, national opinion polls indicate that Britons are mostly in favour of ID cards. The Economist states, “Britons want cards to help stop illegal immigrants from working or

103 It is likely that teething ‘mistakes’ would be made that would cause grievous problems for bona fide UK residents. Computer technology is effective but it is far from being a perfect and flawless system, as millions of PC users would willingly attest.
using public services, and to fight terrorism and reduce fraud.”\textsuperscript{104} The risks attendant on having one’s privacy undermined by an intrusive State bureaucracy are apparently outweighed by the fear of attack and a (‘traditional’) dislike of foreigners. The apparent willingness of Britons to accept Mr. Blunkett’s (now Mr. Clarke’s) draft ID proposal — recent polls indicate 75-85\% in favour — provides irrefutable evidence of a nation deeply implicated in its own derangement.\textsuperscript{105} It is an example of the Gramscian hegemonomic model in operation.

Despite Scott Lucas’ ludicrous claim that “the world has moved beyond Orwell”\textsuperscript{106} and the Cold War mentality, the valuable insights revealed in \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} and throughout Orwell’s more polemical essays are now desperately needed — perhaps more so than ever. I return to this discussion in stages, as the thesis progresses. My sympathies rest with Orwell, who despite ridicule and hostility from different sections of the left, took upon himself the difficult task of persuading a cynical public of the threats and dangers posed by unaccountable Big Government. It is a thankless undertaking. Historian Keith Jenkins observes, “in a culture nothing is natural. Today we know of no foundations…. We have deconstructed and made arbitrary and pragmatic the connections between word and world.”\textsuperscript{107} Ours is a society ripe for plunder and open to manipulation. A regime modelled in part on Big Brother’s Oceania is logical enough, and entirely probable. What better place to conceal a conspiracy than

\textsuperscript{105} The \textit{Economist}, ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Scott Lucas, \textit{Orwell} (London: Haus Publishing, 2003), ix-x
\textsuperscript{107} Keith Jenkins, \textit{Re-thinking History} (London: Routledge, 1991), 36
under the pretext of democracy threatened? The signs of control, deception and
despotism are plainly discernable in the foreign and domestic policies of the leading
protagonists in the war on terror. I will revisit the exploits of the Bush-Cheney ‘junta’\textsuperscript{108} in the final chapter, and will scrutinise Tony Blair’s Britain in chapter five.

\textbf{On becoming a writer}

To further this analysis, it is necessary to return to Orwell and his commitment to political writing. Through sheer obduracy, Orwell honed his communicative skills, thereby producing a uniquely English cultural and social commentary, written in a plain prose style. His writing was and still is readily accessible, easily identifiable, and unquestionably political in outlook.\textsuperscript{109} The earliest published articles (in French) covered an array of topics — cheaper newspapers, unemployment, tramps, vagrants and indigents, (the novelist) John Galsworthy, and British Imperialism in Burma.\textsuperscript{110} His early novels were not particularly strong, but they confirm the learning of a craft. Orwell maintained that he “wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions … and … purple patches,” but failed (often dismally) in the process.\textsuperscript{111} His early novels, although lacking in artifice, well document the banality of everyday life in the 1930s. Kerr states, “They deal with social institutions and problems, through the medium of personal stories and the drama of character.”\textsuperscript{112} They certainly tend to be semi-autobiographical — his major themes are limited and repetitive, and

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\textsuperscript{108} I take my lead from Gore Vidal, \textit{Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Cheney-Bush Junta}.
\textsuperscript{110} Orwell, \textit{A Kind of Compulsion 1903-1936}, CW X, 119-147
\textsuperscript{111} Orwell, “Why I Write,” 2
\textsuperscript{112} Douglas Kerr, \textit{George Orwell} (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 24
\end{flushright}
predominantly reflect his immediate anxieties and preoccupations.\textsuperscript{113} Orwell’s comprehensive writer’s gaze is especially noticeable in \textit{Keep the Aspidistra Flying} (1936), which features the obnoxious Gordon Comstock.\textsuperscript{114} Throughout much of the novel Comstock struggles to produce superior poetry for publication. Eventually he accepts that his work is mediocre at best.\textsuperscript{115} Comstock was, given his political naivety and lack of purpose, full of unwarranted pride. By refusing to accept the reality of hard work, he ill-advisedly set himself against “the money god” (capitalism) with predictable results. After plummeting to near destitution, alternative reasoning prevails. He marries his pregnant girlfriend (Rosemary), accepts a \textit{decent} job writing advertising copy at £4 a week; rents a flat, buys house furnishings and an aspidistra (the symbol of middle class ‘respectability’), and all ends well. Comstock’s reluctant grasp of easy redemption could not be claimed so easily for Orwell, who was decidedly miserable with his own lot. Biographer D. J. Taylor describes the thirty year old author as “not a happy man … and it shows.”\textsuperscript{116} Comstock too was acutely conscious of failure, and the dismal shabbiness of his existence. In his own words, “Lack of money means discomfort, means squalid worries, means shortage of tobacco, means ever present consciousness of failure — above all, it means loneliness.”\textsuperscript{117} Orwell had experienced all of these concerns and fears in his own meagre hand-to-mouth circumstances. His foremost intention was to become a writer, and that in turn meant effort and hard work.\textsuperscript{118} Like many neophytes before him, he served his apprenticeship in a University of Life. His diverse Curriculum Vitae

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\bibitem{113} Gordon Bowker, \textit{George Orwell}, xi
\bibitem{114} Bowker, ibid., 169
\bibitem{115} George Orwell, \textit{Keep the Aspidistra Flying} (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962), 76
\bibitem{116} D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 130
\bibitem{117} George Orwell, \textit{Keep the Aspidistra Flying}, 37
\bibitem{118} Orwell, “Why I Write,” 1
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provides a fascinating insight into his character and personality. For five years, he was a Colonial Policeman in Burma; he resigned prematurely risking the displeasure of his parents, and then lived among tramps in London. He visited Paris, drank in bistros, slept with ‘strumpets,’ and washed dishes for a living. Back in Britain he tutored, taught in a private school, worked in a second-hand bookstore, and reported on unemployment in the Industrial North. He participated in the Spanish Civil War, and then ran a small village shop in Hertfordshire. During the Second World War, he joined the Home Guard, worked for the BBC and wrote for Tribune, before escaping to the peaceful solitude of Jura, an inner Hebridean island. Although he died of a tubercular lesion in January 1950, his influence and literary reputation remains active.

Throughout his life, Orwell was acutely conscious of his own privileged middle class background and education, and the gaping divide of class consciousness evident at that time in Britain. Orwell was the bitter enemy of cant and hypocrisy — wherever he found it — as well as a firm believer in English moral ‘decency.’ Professor Crick reveals that Orwell’s lack of theory was to prove disadvantageous at times, but that he was more successful reporting on real life topics, his proven metier.\textsuperscript{119} He provided few, if any, useful answers to poverty and unemployment, and was not much of a philosopher — but then he did not contrive to be.\textsuperscript{120} These judgements are raised by writers and academics, perhaps unduly conscious of the gravitas of their own learned status. Before adopting the pseudonym George Orwell, Eric Blair sidestepped university, opting instead for a minor

\textsuperscript{119} Bernard Crick, \textit{Orwell: A Life}, 25
\textsuperscript{120} Crick, ibid., 24
posting with the Imperial police. His friend George Woodcock refers to this as “a turning away from the … career which his ability made appropriate for him.” Actually, it was a straightforward display of poor planning determined in his final years at Eton. Gordon Bowker alleges, “[By] allowing himself to be removed from the specialist [Classics] group, Blair seems to have spoilt his chances of going to university.” He was sixteen when this decision was made. In effect, and partly because of this error, Orwell lived and worked outside of the established order for the remainder of his life. The relief of not having to ‘play the game,’ doubtless eased and accommodated the surprising transition from awkward E. A. Blair formerly of Eton College — ex-civil servant, and second-string novelist — to George Orwell Spanish freedom fighter, author and revolutionary socialist, the working man’s friend.

The decision to write professionally meant rejecting a normative middle class career — reminiscent of Gordon Comstock — in favour of a life of financial hardship and uncertainty. By his own admission, his income for the first year of writing was “barely … twenty pounds.” Orwell’s daily life was a struggle. He had been used to better conditions. His police salary in Burma was quite substantial, around “£65 per month.” Raymond Williams discloses that writing in the 1930s was not considered a

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121 Raymond Williams, Orwell, 7
123 Gordon Bowker, George Orwell, 61
125 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (Frogmore, St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1972), 168
real profession. It was not a career choice to undertake lightly because, “The ‘writer’… had no commercial aims … no social function and … no social content. He just ‘wrote.’”\textsuperscript{126} Orwell was aware of this viewpoint, but did not allow it to deter his purposes. As he discloses in ‘Why I Write,’ the decision was always going to be made, for not becoming a writer would have “outrage[d] my true nature.”\textsuperscript{127} Williams outlined the struggle for self-mastery, with imagery that perhaps unwittingly added to the Orwell mystique:

He developed … through the years of the depression and of fascism …. He became unemployed and penniless: partly because of the early difficulties of becoming a writer, but also deliberately, as a way of cutting his connections with an established and unacceptable social position. He went to Spain to fight fascism; partly, to begin with, as a way of being a writer, but then deliberately, as a way of setting his life against an evil and destructive social force.\textsuperscript{128} This penurious lifestyle, which would eventually rob him of his health and lead to an early death, went some way towards atoning for being born into the ruling class.\textsuperscript{129} As a consequence, Orwell was regarded as a mildly eccentric English character, an authentic ‘outsider.’ As Douglas Kerr suggests, “He did not [seem to] belong.”\textsuperscript{130} Those who met him were often surprised at how harshly he judged himself; it was as though he felt guilty about his ill-health.\textsuperscript{131} The reality is that the untidily-dressed Orwell held to a divergent Weltanschauung, or world view. His stay in Burma challenged his attitudes to Empire, and on his return to England, he forced himself into a life of relentless drudgery

\textsuperscript{126} Raymond Williams, \textit{Orwell}, 31
\textsuperscript{127} George Orwell, “Why I Write,” 1
\textsuperscript{128} Williams, \textit{Orwell}, 34
\textsuperscript{129} George Orwell, \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} (London: Penguin, 2001), 138
\textsuperscript{130} Douglas Kerr, \textit{George Orwell}, 2
\textsuperscript{131} Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 30
and hardship. The majority of affluent observers, those who remembered casual meetings with Orwell, would know little about the ghosts and memories that haunted and propelled him.

During his years in Burma, Blair observed that British Imperialism was of necessity harsh “because only the threat of force can subdue a population of several million subjects.” Such despotism is often subtle, and Britain frequently made use of Indian nationals to brutalise their own people. In his official capacity, Orwell undoubtedly played a minor role in ensuring that this process ran smoothly and efficiently. He states, “For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience.” His experienced eyes were open to the various excesses of Empire. The British were not in Burma to help the native population. They were present for economic reasons. A more contemporary illustration of the colonising effect is found in post-Saddam Iraq with its newly established government. Now that the initial interest over Saddam Hussein’s capture has abated, there is little the hapless Iraqis can do to compel the coalition to leave. Iraq is oil rich: it “has proven reserves of 112 billion barrels — half the Saudi total — and potentially several times more,” so it is unlikely that the US will voluntarily loosen its grip on the country for years to come. In addition, Mr. Bush has frequently restated his ongoing commitment to

132 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 138
133 George Orwell, “How a Nation is Exploited: The British in Burma,” in *Essays*, 3
134 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 138
135 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius,” in *Essays*, 179
136 Robert Harvey, *Global Disorder*, 164
democracy, and the “rebuilding [of] Iraq.”¹³⁷ From the US perspective, there are many lucrative business contracts at stake, alongside the oil deals. The position then, as Albert Memmi contended in 1950s Algeria, is one where “The colonized is not free to choose between being colonized or not being colonized.”¹³⁸ This statement is disarmingly simple. Its meaning is easily overlooked. Colonisation guarantees the disruption and dislocation of an entire way of life. It verifies and confirms the loss of traditional values, languages, customs, purpose, and identity. It necessitates occupation (often by force), the installation of an alien bureaucracy, and the imposition of foreign values, — in this case US-style democracy. Ordinary Iraqi’s from all sides of the religious and political divide must be prepared to endure economic uncertainty, sectarian violence, imposed curfews, and other ‘necessary’ restrictions. These are the standard elements of colonisation introduced by any foreign power. Undoubtedly there was similar fear, resentment and hostility expressed by the Burmese during British colonial rule.¹³⁹

Orwell had a flair for uncovering masked inconsistencies and inequalities. He later denounced the colonial system “as … unjustifiable tyranny.”¹⁴⁰ He was a conscientious individual sickened by countless petty tyrannies, including those he had participated in himself. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that he was ashamed

¹³⁹ George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” in Essays, 18-25
¹⁴⁰ Orwell, Wigan Pier, 134
of the part he had played.\textsuperscript{141} John Flory, the central character in Orwell’s first published novel, \textit{Burmese Days}, killed himself over similar grounds. Clearly, Orwell’s sympathies lay with the underdog, not with the imperial overlord. This attitude also accompanied him throughout his school years. It is understandable that he should react to Colonial rule, as he did to all unfairly imposed authority. His political manifesto, which is outlined in \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier}, freely expresses the anger and the sense of dishonour he felt. Whether he intended to punish himself or simply try and change British society is beside the point. Ironically, George Orwell the nonbeliever, wanted to atone for his sins, and if that necessitated plain living, and a penurious hand-to-mouth existence, then what of it?

Even after half a century, Orwell is still a puzzle and enigma, especially to scholars and intellectuals. Like all writers, later researchers only summon a partial knowledge. Although there are collections of letters and essays, and the content of his semi-autobiographical novels to analyse and dissect, there are no private diaries, no secret journals to expose his innermost thoughts.\textsuperscript{142} Orwell, who was always a loner, was intensely uncomfortable with the idea of people probing too deeply.\textsuperscript{143} George Woodcock believes, “he was inclined to throw up evasive smokescreens” at such times.\textsuperscript{144} His response to interrogation is surely nothing more than residual ‘baggage’ from his school days. All biography is largely guesswork. In Orwell’s case there are cracks and inconsistencies. We do not even know the cadence or tone of his speech.

\textsuperscript{141} Orwell, \textit{Wigan Pier}, 136
\textsuperscript{142} Gordon Bowker, \textit{George Orwell}, 324
\textsuperscript{144} George Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit}, 89
because there is no extant recording of his otherwise “thin … flat” voice.\textsuperscript{145} We merely speculate and try to read the gaps and silences, but we know remarkably little — aside from what Crick calls “the life history and the work.”\textsuperscript{146} What he has bequeathed to historians, journalists and cultural commentators more than compensates for the lack of detail. Orwell’s novels, letters, essays and journalism, especially in the form of Peter Davison’s monumental \textit{Collected Works}, represents an intriguing cultural repository in modern English letters.

\textbf{A journalist at war}

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Orwell was one of a small but spirited group of Independent Labour Party (ILP) members determined to organise a people’s movement to end the fighting.\textsuperscript{147} Whether this “opposition” was to entail armed resistance and actual street fighting is not entirely clear, but it is obvious that nothing of any significance occurred. As Bernard Crick states, “it never came to the caching of arms, only to talk of hiding a printing press.”\textsuperscript{148} However, Orwell firmly insisted that a workers’ revolution was necessary. He states, “What is wanted is a conscious open revolt by ordinary people against inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old.”\textsuperscript{149} However, this peoples’ revolution did not eventuate in his lifetime.\textsuperscript{150} Orwell was an ILP

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\textsuperscript{145} Bernard Crick, \textit{Orwell: A Life}, 416 \\
\textsuperscript{146} Crick, ibid., 433 \\
\textsuperscript{147} George Orwell, “Manifesto: If War Comes, We Shall Resist,” in \textit{Orwell and Politics} (London: Penguin, 2001), 43 \\
\textsuperscript{148} Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 365 \\
\textsuperscript{149} Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” \textit{Essays}, 166 \\
\textsuperscript{150} McKibbin attributes the lack of organized political cohesion among working people to general weariness, conflicting interests between spouses, and basic community
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member for only a short time, because his own attitude to the war and pacifism changed abruptly. At the time of joining, he evidently believed that the party had something unique to offer. He recognises that “[T]he ILP is the only party … likely to take the right line … against imperialist war or … Fascism.”151 What he imagined that contribution was he does not really say. However, he soon realised that the only way to win the war and defeat the Nazis was to fight them. In spite of the change of heart, John Newsinger states there is little doubt that Orwell still believed in the possibility of revolution right up until the latter part of 1942.152 He was reluctant to let go of this imperative entirely, and a popular uprising among the proles continues as a recurring (albeit fading) motif throughout Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Orwell was fiercely determined to hold on to his integrity and independence. It was important, he argued, to retain the ability to “report contemporary events truthfully, or as truthfully as is consistent with the ignorance, bias and self-deception from which every observer necessarily suffers.”153 This is vintage Orwell. The statement reveals his approach to truth, objectivity and reportage. It also indicates his attitude to the stifling effect of full-time employment. Writers are only as honest as their circumstances allow them to be.154 That did not prevent him from ignoring his own advice and joining the BBC (and a local unit of the Home Guard) during the War. After two dull and generally
misspent years with the public broadcaster, he joined the staff at Tribune.\textsuperscript{155} He also quit the Home Guard and started work on \textit{Animal Farm}.\textsuperscript{156} During this period, Orwell’s workload was heavy; there were regular articles for \textit{The Observer} and \textit{The Manchester Evening News}.\textsuperscript{157} Crick adds, “He was an excellent editor of his own copy and was always on time.”\textsuperscript{158} Orwell was probably no different from anyone else interested in the largely unreported commonplaces of life. He was a keen observer of nature, and enjoyed English cuisine and customs, fishing, reading books and gardening. He liked an occasional drink and stimulating conversation with like-minded friends when it could be arranged, but he never allowed his hectic working schedule to be interrupted for long.\textsuperscript{159} As any harassed journalist on the look out for a good story would, Orwell frequently turned these impromptu conversations (which were often monologues) into print.\textsuperscript{160} His prose style also required extensive editing and re-shuffling. Researchers can monitor this process by comparing the final version of \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} with the notes and \textit{Diary} that he kept. Woodcock puts such ‘tampering’ down to Orwell’s concern for “artistic proportion and didactic emphasis.”\textsuperscript{161} It is important to underline that he had very clear objectives in mind whenever he wrote. Christopher Hitchens argues that Orwell’s letters, essays, and reviews have been reprinted because he seldom made “stupid or sinister … silly or credulous or flippant” statements.\textsuperscript{162} He worked hard at mastering his craft, because the writing did not always come easily. Woodcock describes

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\textsuperscript{155} D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 325 \\
\textsuperscript{156} Jeffrey Meyers, \textit{Orwell: Wintry Conscience}, 224 \\
\textsuperscript{157} Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 442 \\
\textsuperscript{158} Crick, ibid., 443 \\
\textsuperscript{159} D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 329-330 \\
\textsuperscript{160} Jeffrey Meyers, \textit{Orwell: Wintry Conscience}, 226 \\
\textsuperscript{161} George Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit}, 64. \\
\textsuperscript{162} Christopher Hitchens, \textit{Orwell's Victory}, 4
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him tenaciously searching “for the right word” or phrase.\textsuperscript{163} In the essay ‘Why I Write’ Orwell concludes, “Good prose is like a window pane.”\textsuperscript{164} It is that renowned clarity of expression that makes reading Orwell so enjoyable. George Woodcock adds, “There are … journalists who can write so truly for their own time that they raise journalism into literature and give it a permanent validity.”\textsuperscript{165} Although Woodcock had Jonathan Swift in mind, it is clear that this blandishment was also meant for Orwell. The proprietor of the \textit{Observer}, David Astor, was equally impressed by Orwell’s prose, and the paper still bases its in-house style on Orwell’s principles of good writing.\textsuperscript{166}

After completing \textit{Animal Farm}, Orwell began work on his final novel \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, devoting his spare time to a series of essays on the writer and the state.\textsuperscript{167} Orwell warns “about the poisonous effect of the Russian \textit{mythos} on English intellectual life.”\textsuperscript{168} Since the Spanish War, where the news was rigidly controlled and distorted by the fascists and the communists,\textsuperscript{169} Orwell had concerns about the future of truth in literature.\textsuperscript{170} Once ‘necessary’ lies and propaganda gain control, there is no need for accuracy, and “good writing stops.”\textsuperscript{171} History becomes impossible under such conditions. In \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, Orwell distils the consequences of living in fear

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\item \textsuperscript{163} Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit}, 266
\item \textsuperscript{164} George Orwell, “Why I Write,” in \textit{Essays} (London: Penguin, 2000), 7
\item \textsuperscript{165} Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit}, 135
\item \textsuperscript{166} Jonathan Heawood, introduction to George Orwell: \textit{The Observer Years} (London: The Observer, 2003), xii
\item \textsuperscript{167} Ian Slater, \textit{Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One}, 185, 189
\item \textsuperscript{168} George Orwell, “The Prevention of Literature,” 382
\item \textsuperscript{169} Orwell, ibid., 388
\item \textsuperscript{170} Orwell, ibid., 392
\item \textsuperscript{171} Orwell, ibid., 388
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and slavery down to its essence. There is no past. There is no future. There is only Big Brother — and he is watching.

Orwell also discovered threats in other areas. American expansionism in the wake of the Great War filled middle class intellectuals with trepidation. It may have been, as Iain Chambers asserts, the fear that English culture was under threat.\textsuperscript{172} Orwell, for example was \textit{ambivalent} about cinema, but his attitude was not entirely inconsistent with his era. The detestable Gordon Comstock in \textit{Keep the Aspidistra Flying} reflects similar sentiments — “he hated the pictures, of course, seldom went there even when he could afford it. Why encourage the art that is destined to replace literature?”\textsuperscript{173} It is hard to imagine a bleaker perspective than Comstock’s. Orwell asserts in ‘Raffles and Miss Blandish,’ that the English language and “moral outlook” is under serious threat from American pulp fiction and films.\textsuperscript{174} He was frequently able to detect minute changes in social and cultural behaviour. As for the popularity of film, Arthur Marwick — citing the English director Lindsay Anderson — records that even in the 1950s “the British … did not take to film as a serious and creative medium in the way in which foreigners did.”\textsuperscript{175} Jeffrey Meyers describes the majority of Orwell’s film reviews as “generally short and formulaic.”\textsuperscript{176} However, reviews offered a regular source of income, and Orwell, presumably always low on funds, gratefully accepted the work. As a self-

\begin{footnotesize}
173 George Orwell, \textit{Keep the Aspidistra Flying}, 78
174 Orwell, “Raffles and Miss Blandish,” in \textit{Essays}, 263
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confessed ‘political’ writer, he was repeatedly faced with the dilemma of whether to present the plain unadulterated facts and be damned; or to adapt (and disguise) them in order to avoid the editor’s rejection slip. A discussion of this ponderous decision emerges in his essay, ‘The Prevention of Literature.’ Orwell, who was certainly not naive about such matters, duly outlined the difficulties in characteristic fashion. He states, “‘Daring to stand alone’ is ideologically criminal as well as practically dangerous.” From a writer’s perspective, the “immediate … enemies” of liberty and freedom of expression foregather around “monopoly and bureaucracy.” The political writer is as likely to be frustrated by proprietors and editors as by a readership more inclined to spend its money on cigarettes and beer. The struggling writer, usually facing some form of looming domestic crisis, is therefore obliged to capitulate and attempt to please everyone, but this represents the death of creativity. Ignoring popular demands automatically invites opposition from those whom C. Wright Mills refers to as “wielders of the patronage of success.” A typical example of editorial resistance involved the New Statesman and Nation’s Editor, Kingsley Martin, who refused two of Orwell’s articles about the Spanish Civil War. Tosco Fyvel, a close friend of Orwell, once described Martin as “gifted but politically slippery.” In this instance, Orwell’s review of Dr. Borkenau’s book The Spanish Cockpit was refused outright, on the

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177 George Orwell, “Why I Write,” 4-5
179 Orwell, ibid., 381
180 Orwell, ibid., 380
grounds that it, “controverts the political policy of the paper.” Martin subsequently stated in his autobiography, “I am not surprised that I did not publish the articles. I knew and liked Orwell … But in rejecting these articles I was for once a realist.” Martin afterwards maintained that had he printed Orwell, the resultant exposure “would have damaged the Republicans [cause].” That much was consistent with his firm personal belief that the Spanish Prime Minister Negrin was undeserving of criticism. Judging from additional remarks made by Martin in a letter to Orwell concerning their “misunderstanding” (dated 10 February 1937), an attempt was made to sort out their differences. However, we know that Orwell “never forgave Martin for his ‘line’ on the Spanish war.” He was so angry that he wrote nothing further for the New Statesman for the next two years. Freelance journalism presupposes a professional relationship between writer and editor(s), which necessitates a certain amount of flexibility and tolerance on both sides. However, in this instance, neither of the protagonists could reasonably afford to back down. Orwell, like Martin, was also placed by obligation into a difficult position. He had little choice as he saw it but to counter the misinformation being circulated by the British press. Orwell had participated in street fighting, and had witnessed the subsequent denunciation of the POUM. He was unable to keep silent.

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184 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, 341-342
187 Martin, *Editor*, 216
188 This is outlined in a footnote in Peter Davison (ed.), *Facing Unpleasant Facts 1937-1939*, CW XI (London: Secker and Warburg, 2000), 120
189 Davison, ibid.
190 Rolph, *Kingsley: The Life*, 227
Kingsley Martin also visited Spain during the civil war, but unlike Orwell, he had no clear idea of the Soviet strategy, and afterwards confessed that he had gravely misinterpreted the situation. By that time, the damage caused by withholding the evidence was complete and could not be undone.

**Dreams of ‘Old England’**

Orwell longed for an England that (arguably) no longer existed outside of the confines of the writer’s imagination. This wistful yearning for a bygone era is reminiscent of John Buchan’s vivid sketches of rural England and the Scottish Borders, in the Richard Hannay adventures. It is a description of life between the wars, where good and evil are more clearly perceived, where England’s international economic interests still straddle the globe, where everyone — rich and poor alike — is socially distinct with a unique purpose and a job to do. Likewise, in Orwell’s ‘photo album’ selections, the scenes are carefully assembled and personalised, “they are … remembered … not just observed.” Peace and tranquillity is central to this stylised land. The inhabitants are industrious, sober-minded, and in the main, ‘decent’ and law abiding; but for Orwell, England is like “a family with the wrong members in control.” He portrays the English as a nation of hobbyists and horticulturists,

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192 Kingsley Martin, *Editor*, 216
193 A picture of rural peace: “The blackthorn was in flower, the rooks were busy in the beeches, the elms were reddening, and the lawns at Fosse were framed in gold drifts of daffodils.” John Buchan, *The Island of Sheep* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1998), 21
194 Roger Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), 66
195 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 164
inveterate stamp collectors, and growers of roses.\textsuperscript{196} Obviously, other countries besides England grow roses and collect stamps. Orwell therefore identifies additional English characteristics, “the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside, and ‘the nice cup of tea.’”\textsuperscript{197} This last reference is especially significant. In marked contrast to ‘excitable’ coffee lovers on the Continent, tea is a peculiarly English institution.\textsuperscript{198} Orwell believed that “tea is one of the mainstays of civilisation in this country.”\textsuperscript{199} Actually, the English acquired the beverage and the custom from India and China. Tea, which reputedly has a soothing and restorative influence on the nervous system, and is good for the heart, promotes a sense of tranquillity and wellbeing. Ignoring these more complex and ambivalent colonial origins, for Orwell the English are, in effect, more staid and level-headed and more logical than Europeans because of tea’s soothing influence. Orwell reminds us that “[England] is a land where the bus conductors are good-tempered, and the policemen carry no revolvers.”\textsuperscript{200} The natural result of this genial beverage (and ideology) is that “No politician could rise to power by promising conquests or military ‘glory.’”\textsuperscript{201} No Hitler or Mussolini would ever succeed in England. It is an endearing, if naive, conceit on Orwell’s part. To understand his politics, writing and agenda requires a comprehension of Orwell’s England in all its banality, smallness and contradiction.

\textsuperscript{196} Orwell, ibid., 141
\textsuperscript{197} Orwell, ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} George Orwell, “The English People,” in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), \textit{As I Please 1943-1945, CEJL III} (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 41
\textsuperscript{199} Orwell, ibid., 41
\textsuperscript{200} Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 142
\textsuperscript{201} Orwell, ibid., 142
The beginning of the twentieth century is a recurring motif in much of Orwell’s writing. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith reads from his copy of Goldstein’s book how poorly the present compares with “the world that existed before 1914.” Bernard Crick considers, “The nostalgia of George Bowling for a happy Edwardian childhood in … *Coming Up For Air*, can be seen as very much George Orwell’s.” Each dramatic scene delineates contented citizens going about their daily business, and doubtless invokes passionate longings for earlier and happier days. Orwell’s writing recalls the best of the Edwardian era, before the jarring hiatus of the Great War changed English rural life. His prose is seasoned with references to more peaceable times, especially the innocence of childhood, where memories of nature predominate: fishing and climbing trees, shooting stones out of catapults, chasing rabbits and collecting bird’s eggs. It is a safe little world of beech woods, hedgerows, quiet rural lanes, and busy market towns. Here, England is still a magical bucolic realm, suffused with warm summer days, strawberries and cream, and that leisurely pre-industrial horse-and-cart pace. It is a modified ruling class perspective, but that is hardly Orwell’s fault. An ex-Public school boy cannot easily forget, dismiss or decentre his social origins, even though the experience may have induced anger and a rejection of English capitalism. Orwell wants his readers to identify with the pure sentiments he is expressing, at least to see them as ‘natural,’ desirable and quintessentially English. The carefree passages of time he describes abound with English images: “solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays,

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202 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 166
203 Bernard Crick, *Orwell: A Life*, 54
204 Here, the past provides examples of purposeful English character to study and emulate. See Paul Readman’s excellent article, “The Place of the Past in English Culture, c.1890-1914,” *Past & Present* 186 (February 2005): 147-199
205 Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 24
smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes.”

This gentle nonsense, drawn from the older cultural ‘memory’ of a rather stolid pleasant pre-war nation, is absolutely essential to the purpose at hand.

In a 1995 overview of cultural studies, Francis Mulhern considers, “all social meanings … eligible for scrutiny.” Nothing — no event, hobby or practice — is without its particular significance as a carrier of social meaning. However, Mulhern adds that contemporary cultural studies theorists (in this instance late twentieth century) have deliberately “set out to challenge the whole system of values that supported the older tradition,” which attracted the Leavis’ and writers like Thomas Mann.

Mulhern argues that the earlier writers and academics were fearful and dismissive of mass culture, seeing it as an “opiate,” whereas contemporary cultural study recognises “that … participation … is active, deliberate, selective, and even subversive.” There is a strong element of individual choice involved in the sampling and consumption of commodities. No one is forced to watch television, listen to the news, or buy compact discs. Orwell believes in the sanctity of the daily social practices, choices and rituals, for his England is a repository for all that it honest and ‘decent.’ He is not suggesting that aspects of it cannot be improved; merely that qualities like — sportsmanship, logical common sense, and traditional values — are admirable, and are of inestimable value. These are characteristics he would evidently like to retain as part of a new English socialism.

206 George Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” Essays, 139
208 Mulhern, ibid.
209 Mulhern, ibid., 34
Orwell and the working class

Eric Blair’s earliest encounters with ‘common’ working people date back to his childhood where, aged six, he played with the children of the local plumber. His mother soon put a stop to this innocent breach of protocol, but he remembered the occasion well. In the late 1920s, Blair embarked on a series of similarly transgressive forays among tramps and London’s dispossessed. A decade later in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, writing as George Orwell, he describes how he met working people in the North, and stayed in their homes. Orwell was favourably impressed with the strongly-built men who worked down the mines in appalling conditions, conceding, “The … job would be as much beyond my power as it would be to perform on the flying trapeze.” He accepted that class necessarily erects protective barriers. It was not just the ruling classes who are uncomfortable with the prospect of change or infiltration. There is a strong sense of belonging and of social acceptance within class borders. Of the miners and other tradesmen he states, “I liked them and hoped they liked me, but I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were aware of it.” It was only with difficulty that he managed “to prevent them from calling [him] ‘sir.’” Orwell frequently felt guilty and self-conscious amongst such people, though by all accounts he need not have. He certainly understood that the concept of class in England was not something easily removed or replaced. Social disparity was deeply ingrained, its origins predating even the Norman Conquest. People are not automatons who can be re-programmed at the flick of a switch. At the time of researching *Wigan Pier*, working people could be

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210 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 117
211 Orwell, ibid., 28
212 Orwell, ibid., 145
distinguished from the middle and upper classes by their physique, clothing, demeanour, housing, humour and speech. Working class men tended to look askance at anyone they considered a ‘toff.’ The practical Orwell understood that his accent and upper-middle class upbringing presented a significant barrier to full acceptance at this level. Social differences were rigorously maintained and exaggerated in cartoon form in magazines like *Punch.* Orwell sensibly concluded that the class problem would not just disappear overnight. The ideology of capital, centring on the accumulation of wealth and the dignity of hard work and production needed unravelling first. Orwell must have entertained considerable doubts as to whether this could be achieved. He laconically observes, “it is almost impossible for me to think of myself as anything but a member of the bourgeoisie.” The fact is that much the same argument could be applied to the working classes, who would have strongly rejected all attempts at tampering and re-classification. Social groupings faced one another over a yawning chasm, and a great deal of common ground needed to be constructed before attempting to bridge the gap.

The Depression affected the working classes more than the upper classes. Orwell and J. B. Priestley met working people, and visited their homes in the 1930s. Priestley visited the Tyneside and Durham, where unemployment was widespread during the Depression. The Newcastle ship building industry was at a standstill, and unemployment had created a pall of hopelessness and despair. The coal industry too had been savaged, and miners were among the long term unemployed. In spite of this, Priestley concluded his *English Journey* on a hopeful note. Conditions were hard in rural areas, and the old centres of

\[\text{\footnotesize 213} \text{ Gordon Bowker, George Orwell, 15}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 214} \text{ George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 118}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 215} \text{ Orwell, ibid., 209}\]
industry in the North were languishing. This could not be denied. Yet new life, in the
form of light industrial centres in the Midlands and the South East were injecting new
life into the economy. Fifty years later, when Beryl Bainbridge and Jack Ramsay
completed English journeys of their own, there was widespread unemployment once
again throughout the country. In chapters three and four, I investigate how poverty and
unemployment has changed Britain in ways that Orwell and Priestley could never have
imagined.

**Orwell and politics**

Since his premature death in January 1950, there have been numerous critical
appraisals and evaluations of George Orwell’s novels, essays and journalism.\(^{216}\) Many
critics have some kind of Orwell sentiments to articulate. Aside from praise and
adulation, mendacity has also been levelled at him — especially from the orthodox
left.\(^{217}\) Orwell has yet to be totally absolved for abandoning (or attacking) ‘the Party,’
even though — as Leopold Labedz astutely observes — it is virtually impossible for
contemporary writers and historians to determine exactly what the terms socialism and
the left “would mean to Orwell” were he alive today.\(^ {218}\) The difficulty arises because the
socialist Orwell — who was fiercely opposed to Stalinism — was also an ardent
opponent of the English Communist Party.\(^ {219}\) Not all critics agree that this problematic
positioning insurmountably blocks a clear interrogation of his politics. Professor Crick

\(^{217}\) Christopher Hitchens, *Orwell’s Victory*, 36
\(^{218}\) Leopold Labedz, “Will George Orwell Survive 1984? Of Doublethink & Double-Talk, Body-
Snatching & Other Silly Pranks” (II), *Encounter* 63, no.2 (July/August 1984): 32
states, “There is really no mystery about the general character of his politics. From 1936 onwards he was first a follower of the Independent Labour Party and then a Tribune socialist,” and so he remained until his death.220 After spending six months in Spain during the civil war, Orwell returned to England — a changed man — to resume his career as a serious political writer.221 He learned vital political lessons from the Spanish war, and was subsequently never deceived by the campaign of lies and misinformation circulated in the press by the Communist Party (CP), as other writers and intellectuals were.222 His friend ‘Tosco’ Fyvel confirms that by 1937 “[Orwell] had recognised the nature of totalitarian Communism” and remained vehemently opposed to it thereafter.223 Yet Orwell was not alone in this rejection of Soviet doctrine. Even the influential “publishing phenomenon” Victor Gollancz finally succumbed to doubt. Gollancz harboured “second thoughts,” about not only the CPs aims, but also concerning the instrumentality of his own Left Book Club (LBC).224 Despite negative criticism levelled at him, Orwell remained steadfast in his rejection of intellectual duplicity. In the essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1945), he rather controversially asserts, “political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible.”225 This can be read as an outright attack on political ideology in general. Apart from his brief commitment to the ILP at the outset of the War, Orwell did not otherwise support local politics.226

220 Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 17
221 George Orwell, “Why I Write,” 5
222 Paul Johnson, Modern Times, 275, 348
224 Introduction to Left Book Anthology (ed.), Paul Laity (London: Victor Gollancz, 2001), xiii, xxviii
226 George Orwell, “Why I Join the ILP,” Orwell and Politics, 35-37
Biographers Stansky and Abrahams have stated, “if ever a man was born not to be anyone’s disciple it was [Orwell].”\footnote{227} They are alluding to the fact that he formed his own opinions and was never afraid to air them publicly in print. Despite the apparent difficulty in fixing his position — was he a revolutionary socialist with conservative inclinations, or an old style English radical like Cobbett? Whatever the outcome of such deliberations, Orwell clearly retained socialist values throughout his life.\footnote{228} Such an argument does not suggest that his insights did not broaden and deepen significantly with time; Orwell was too scrupulously honest with himself not to face up to unpleasant facts.\footnote{229} Yet, posterity has not always reacted kindly to such flighty changeability. In particular, the recent (rather minor) controversy over his list of crypto-communists and fellow travellers\footnote{230} has sparked off renewed antagonisms. Scott Lucas claims, “it seriously undermines the saintly legacy.”\footnote{231} However, it should be pointed out that Orwell made no claims to saintliness, and such a document — it was to begin with a personal and confidential appraisal of a number of persons on the left — merely indicates the complexity of the man. Hitchens concedes, “The list … illustrates Orwell’s private resentments and eccentricities.”\footnote{232} There is ample evidence to support this evaluation in Orwell’s extraordinary prep school essay ‘Such, Such Were the Joys.’ It may well be that we should recognise the foolhardiness of placing false expectations and

\footnote{227}{Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, \textit{Orwell: The Transformation} (London: Granada, 1982), 183}
\footnote{228}{George Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 185-186}
\footnote{229}{Christopher Hitchens, \textit{Orwell’s Victory}, 12}
\footnote{230}{D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 408-409}
\footnote{231}{Scott Lucas, \textit{Orwell}, 136}
\footnote{232}{Christopher Hitchens, \textit{Orwell’s Victory}, 144}
restrictions on an individual who lived out the majority of his beliefs, convictions and contradictions in the public eye.

The following chapter describes Orwell’s sojourn among England’s tramps and dispossessed in the 1920s, as well as his ethnographic study of the unemployed tradesmen and miners in the Great Depression. In The Road to Wigan Pier, Orwell also put the case for English socialism, and challenged his readers to examine their own class prejudices and inconsistencies. Similar concerns were raised by Walter Greenwood in his influential working class novel Love on the Dole and by the novelist and playwright J. B. Priestley. Priestley’s English Journey reveals a broader analysis of England during the Depression, which triggered off a spate of similar publications fifty years later. I also mobilise the writing of the Trinidad born immigrant Sam Selvon, whose novel The Lonely Londoners, underpins the black migrant experience of the 1950s. This is a world that Orwell does not fathom or assess anywhere in his own writing, yet it is important in light of the direction and composition of England and Englishness post 1945. The looting and arson that erupted in British cities during the period 1981-1991 was partly due to racial targeting by the police. Yet such dissonance and difference was not isolated to the Thatcher years. There has been a significant black presence in Britain dating back to the 18th Century (with links reaching back even further to the Roman occupation). It is also important to acknowledge that the working face of Britain has radically altered since 1950, when Orwell died. Consequently, any connection made between the tea-drinking Anglo-Indian (Orwell) and the youthful Brixton ‘rioters’ must be purposefully made. Orwell’s Wigan is wholly distinct from Thatcher’s Brixton. An easy confluence
between Orwell’s rendering of class and later configurations of race-based inequalities cannot be assumed or easily forged. The task of the chapters that follow is to unsettle assumptions, unpick histories and provoke representations. Such a goal is formed through Orwell’s dissident desire to write as — and where — he pleased.
Chapter Two

Going Down to Wigan Pier

Not surprisingly, given the ideological universe he inhabited in interwar England, there is no sense in Orwell of the family as one of the sites of sexual division in the working class, because he takes the standpoint of men, not women.¹

Beatrix Campbell

Orwell’s comfortable identity as a white middle class man was continually challenged in his early documentary set-pieces. Even through these confrontations and moments of aching self-awareness, there are some issues and interpretations that extended and moved beyond his vision. Journalist Beatrix Campbell (1984) has noted his reluctance to address feminist and racial issues,² especially in The Road to Wigan Pier, which purportedly sets out to document the face of working class England. Campbell points to “The fact … that Orwell’s route takes us through a largely white part of England.”³ Yet neither of these omissions is entirely surprising. Orwell, like most of his contemporaries, inhabited an orderly, largely white, patriarchal world. Within that context, women were considered the ‘weaker sex,’ and were not encouraged to aspire to (financial) independence. At the same time, Orwell who was born in India readily

¹ Beatrix Campbell, Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s (London: Virago, 1984), 222
² “Orwell’s socialism comes out of a tradition that hasn’t and won’t represent women.” Campbell, ibid., 233-4
³ Campbell, ibid., 5

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understood that the empire was composed of non-white populations. However, there was no significant influx of migrants from the Caribbean until the late 1940s — and Orwell died in 1950. It is therefore necessary to look elsewhere for insights regarding the migrant face of England at this time — to Sam Selvon’s *The Lonely Londoners*, for example, published in 1956.

During Orwell’s lifetime, the accepted role for women was primarily maternal and domestic. This ideology is strangely at odds with the large numbers of women known to be working in factories and in the textile industry. Priestley’s wartime novel *Daylight on Saturday* (1943) portrays a more complex image of working class England, as does his documentary travelogue *English Journey* (1933). Beryl Bainbridge, who retraced Priestley’s *Journey* fifty years later, found that little had changed — at least in the social landscape — apart from the fact that women now figured in the national unemployment figures. Orwell, while discussing women’s work inside and outside the home, concentrated his efforts on working men, particularly coal miners.

**Down, but never entirely Out**

Eric Arthur Blair’s descent into the world of homelessness and destitution began not long after his abrupt resignation from the Indian Imperial Police in September of 1927.4 He arrived home from Burma to visit his family, handed in a letter of resignation, then moved to a tiny room in Portobello Road (London) to become a professional

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Around this time, Blair began surreptitiously visiting the ‘seedier’ parts of London dressed as a tramp. This was all part of a plan to understand poverty. He states:

I … wanted … to find some way of getting out of the respectable world altogether … I thought it over and decided what I would do. I would go suitably disguised to Limehouse and Whitechapel and such places and sleep in common lodging-houses and pal up with dock-labourers, street hawkers, derelict people, beggars, and, if possible, criminals. And I would find out about tramps and how you got in touch with them and what was the proper procedure for entering the casual ward.

Becoming a casual ‘down and out’ was Blair’s method of expiating the guilt of his former colonial life. He willingly subjected himself to hunger and physical discomfort, “spending … nights in crowded ‘spikes,’” but he returned regularly to ‘normal’ life without arousing suspicion. As confidence in his itinerant’s persona grew, he planned longer excursions, even travelling to Kent with a group of ‘pals’ for the seasonal hop-picking. From the period 25 August to 8 October 1931, he kept a handy diary of these events, where he recorded:

On the night of the 25th I started off from Chelsea with about 14/- in hand, and went to Lew Levy’s kip in Westminster Bridge Road. It is much the same as it was three years ago, except that nearly all the beds are now a shilling instead of ninepence. This is owing to interference by the L.C.C. who have enacted … that beds in lodging houses must be further apart. There is a whole string of laws of this type relating to lodging houses, but there is not and never will be a law to say that the beds must be reasonably comfortable. The net result of this law is that one’s bed is now three feet from the next instead of two feet, and threepence dearer.

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5 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (St Alban’s, Herts: Paladin, 1974), 193-198
7 George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Penguin, 2001), 139-140
8 Gordon Bowker, George Orwell (London: Abacus, 2004), 143-144
9 Sheldon, Orwell, 132
10 Bowker, George Orwell, 128-129
There is a grainy photograph\textsuperscript{12} in Frank Gray’s socio-anthropological study *The Tramp* (1931) that depicts a regulation men’s dormitory in just such a common lodging or ‘doss’ house. Although carefully posed, with beds and inmates clean and presentable, it is likely that sleeping conditions varied considerably depending on the locale. A photograph alone cannot convey much more than a simple and ambiguous visual representation. Orwell and Gray therefore give detailed descriptions of the actual conditions inevitably encountered in cheap accommodation.

Frank Gray describes a typical lodging-house. It usually had a common room with a stove for drying clothes, lockers for valuables, and a limited variety of inexpensive foodstuffs (bread, margarine, cheese, tea and sugar) on sale at the office.\textsuperscript{13} Both observers mention the characteristics — the quirky habits, the unpleasant odours and atmospherics (the farts, groans and loud snoring) — of the various occupants. Some lodging houses were capacious, with several “dormitories containing as many as thirty-five beds.”\textsuperscript{14} Orwell describes one such establishment as “a large, crowded place, with accommodation for five hundred men.”\textsuperscript{15} It should not be presumed that everyone using lodging houses were tramps, petty thieves or beggars. Gray alleges that cheap accommodation of this type was popular with labourers, and unskilled workers, with tradesmen, pensioners, and gentlemen ‘down on their luck.’ It was undoubtedly better to have a warm bed and congenial company than to sleep out of doors. Lodging houses also accommodated a small percentage of single women and in some instances admitted

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\textsuperscript{12} Frank Gray, *The Tramp: His Meaning and Being* (London: Dent, 1931). Facing page 167
\textsuperscript{13} Gray, ibid., 158
\textsuperscript{14} Gray, ibid., 158
\textsuperscript{15} George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Penguin, 2001), 170
\end{flushright}
otherwise destitute families with small children. Such establishments were considered to be semi-respectable abodes by the working poor. There were large numbers of people in Britain between the wars who did not own or rent a home, which made the use of official dosshouses necessary. Gray records that in London alone (1931) there were “163 houses giving accommodation for 16,948 persons,” charging from between 5d to 1s 4d per person a night. These were all licensed and regulated by the London County Council (LCC) under the Public Health Act.

By 1939, London was a sprawling metropolis with an official population of some 8,600,000. Peter Ackroyd asserts that the London County Council was instrumental in the city’s growth and expansion. The LCC oversaw the maintenance of parks, created new housing, and instigated slum clearance. It also provided “scholarships whereby clever children might move on from board schools to grammar schools.” This ideology was deployed to keep alive the contention that in a meritocracy, everyone has an equal opportunity to prosper and succeed. American academic Henry Giroux contends that this doctrine is flawed and misleading, that it is especially unreliable and untrustworthy for late twentieth century (inner-city) young people, especially those from ethnic and racial minorities. Giroux states, “Massive unemployment and diminishing expectations have become a way of life for youth all over North America.”

16 Frank Gray, *The Tramp*, 163, 165
17 Gray, ibid., 157, 163, 164
19 Ackroyd, ibid., 720-721, 723
schooling to a basic level of competence, Giroux asserts that the future for those heading into the twenty-first century appears troubled and uncertain at best.21

Of course, there were plenty of unofficial places for the homeless in the 1930s — vacant lots, derelict houses, stairwells, doorways and passageways, parks and graveyards, and railway stations. There was also Covent Garden, Trafalgar Square, and the Embankment.22 Unfortunately, Gray’s LCC statistics only offer an approximation of the large numbers of destitute and homeless people. Those who habitually slept ‘rough’ or went to church-run emergency shelters could not afford a proper bed. Orwell wrote to a friend from a lodging-house in Southwark, describing two nights spent out in the open.

21 Stanley Aronowitz concedes, “[T]he jobless future is no mere metaphor; it is a high probability for society in the twenty-first century.” Stanley Aronowitz, “Dismantling the Corporate University,” in The Knowledge Factory (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 157. This is established fact, despite positive pledges by the British Labour Party to provide education, training and jobs for school leavers and unemployed youth. Mr Blair states, “Our goal is a Britain in which nobody is left behind; in which people can go as far as they have the talent to go.” He adds, “Britain is now the fourth largest economy in the world. We have a strong economic base and record levels of employment. We have to ensure that everyone shares in this rising prosperity.” See “PM’s Speech on tackling poverty and social exclusion,” 10 Downing Street, 18 September 2002. http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1726.asp (21/02/2005). The difficulty, at least for me, is that these words are hollow-sounding, for the economic cake sharing is never equal. The global economy is not duty bound to provide work for all. The corporate bottom line is to register a profit. John Clarke points out that, “Globalization has changed the economy and the forms and habits of work that are valued in it. Gender roles and patterns of family or household formation have altered. But most importantly for public services, Britain has become a ‘consumer society’ or a ‘consumer culture.’” See John Clarke, “Consumerism and the remaking of state-citizen relationships,” Paper prepared for ESPAnet conference, Oxford, 9-11 September 2004. http://www.apsoc.ox.ac.uk/ESpanet/espanetconference/papers/ppr%5B1%5D.15A.JC.pdf.pdf (27/02/2005). See also, Thomas Frank, One Market Under God (London: Vintage, 2002), 170-219. Frank describes the revolution in management theory that is largely responsible for the changes to working practices. The cycle has moved through manufacture to consumption, — what Aronowitz describes as an emphasis on “buying and eating.” Stanley Aronowitz, “Why Work?” in The Politics of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1992), 242

22 Peter Ackroyd, London: The Biography, 453-454
He originally intended to sleep undercover in the shelter of a nearby church, but abandoned the idea.23

I went to Trafalgar Square and camped by the north wall, which is one of the recognized rendezvous of down and out people in London. At this time of year the square has a floating population of 100 or 200 people (about ten per cent of them women), some of whom actually look on it as their home. They get their food by regular begging rounds (Covent Garden at 4 am. for damaged fruit, various convents during the morning, restaurants and dustbins late at night etc.) and they manage to ‘tap’ likely-looking passers by for enough to keep them in tea.24

George Orwell’s idiosyncratic narrative is distinct from the more serious tone of Frank Gray’s tramping adventures in 1931. There is kindly regard for the genuinely hapless individual throughout Orwell’s London narrative.25 He accepts that tramps are often dirty and despondent creatures, but acknowledges that many down and outs are fairly “decent-looking lads.”26 Gray refers to tramps and vagrants in the opening chapter of his book as “the dregs of humanity — the flotsam and jetsam of society.”27 Although he is merely restating popular conviction there is a hint of disapproval beneath the surface of his otherwise excellent study. Frank Gray’s probing questions produced little more than “a vast mass of totally untrustworthy … information.”28 In fairness, once he started out on his adventures and discovered for himself how tramps and vagrants lived, his comments become more charitable and accommodating.

23 George Orwell, “Letter: To Dennis Collings,” 212-214
24 Orwell, “To Dennis Collings,” 215
25 D. J. Taylor, Orwell: The Life, 93
26 Orwell, Down and Out, 141
27 Frank Gray, The Tramp, 4
28 Gray, ibid., 8
Sex, Lies and Dirty Dishes

In the meantime, Eric Blair underwent a life changing voyage of discovery himself. *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) was pseudonymously released under the name George Orwell. The book is not a novel, but an amalgam of realistic documentary prose reportage and anecdotal material drawn from life. Gordon Bowker describes the writing as “impressionistic autobiography.” He states, “It is the story of a man in disguise. But it is also the story of a man with a highly developed social imagination, an eye to how systems work, who they benefit and who they are designed to fool.” Even the casual reader senses the tensions between George Orwell and ‘I,’ the book’s narrator. *Down and Out in Paris and London* — a book of two distinct parts — contains brief episodic accounts of poverty and dishwashing in Paris, combined with self-conscious forays into homelessness and tramping in London and the South East. The reader is never in doubt that Orwell’s poverty is part of a self-imposed social experiment. Although he spent nearly eighteen months in Paris, it is only the last two or three months that were really uncomfortable for him. Orwell was never seriously impoverished or genuinely ‘down and out’ in his life, and certainly not while living in Paris. Nevertheless, the grimness and the hunger he describes are real enough, even though it was sought out purposefully. His controversial treatise of wealth and poverty, coming as it does from a member of the middle classes, makes fascinating reading. Understandably, Orwell’s well-bred narrator is not always able to remain neutral. There

29 Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 144
30 Bowker, ibid.
31 Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell*, 213
are times when “[he] is no longer a downtrodden plongeur living in a flyblown boarding-house … but the ghost of an upper-class Englishman silently despising the frightful foreigners with whom chance has brought him into contact.”33 The reader is perhaps inclined to forgive Orwell’s brief lapses into snobbery. It is obviously difficult for a class conscious Englishman to resist an opportunity to sneer at uncouth foreigners. The gauche American hotel guests who “eat marmalade at tea, and drink vermouth after dinner” are, to his mind, entirely deserving of derision.34

The Introduction to the French edition — *La Vache enragée* (1935) — contains an important account of Orwell’s approach to nonfiction. This is a translation from French into English, because the original English draft has been lost. Orwell pauses a moment to reflect on the accuracy and overall content of his work.

I think I can say that I have exaggerated nothing except in so far as all writers exaggerate by selecting. I did not feel that I had to describe events in the exact order in which they happened, but everything I have described did take place at one time or another.35

This moment of self-reflexivity is deeply significant. Orwell appeals to his readers, not just to keep an open mind, but also to realise that truth is not a pretty butterfly that can be caught in a net and pinned to cardboard. It is important that he explain the inherent difficulties of faithfully transcribing real life. Memory is selective, and time-frames are elusive. Writing is a form of storytelling, and the reader wants (and needs) to be entertained. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson provide a solution: “[M]emory

33 D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life*, 100
34 Orwell, *Down and Out*, 81
requires a radical simplification of its subject matter … recollections are told from a
standpoint in the present … That demands a selecting, ordering, and simplifying, a
construction of coherent narrative.”36 It is getting at the truth that concerns Orwell. It is a
writer’s (and a journalist’s) job to describe and inscribe with accuracy and clarity. This
is Orwell’s lifelong obsession and concern. I return to this engaging theme in the chapter
on the Spanish Civil War.

Professor Crick cites a similar piece of reflexivity written by Robert Tressell
(real name Robert Noonan) in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1914).37 In his
‘Preface’ Tressell states, “I have invented nothing. There are no scenes or incidents in
the story that I have not either witnessed myself or had conclusive evidence of.”38 Since
the reader cannot easily disprove either statement, they must be taken prosaically at face
value. It is crucial to realise that at the time Orwell considered himself a novelist rather
than a reporter, so he would have seen nothing wrong with employing his fictive
imagination to full advantage. Crick argues that instead of levelling accusations readers
should simply “appreciate the processes of a growing creative imagination.”39 Such
views make more sense when we acknowledge the effectiveness of the scenes Orwell
created from this trademark blend of fact and anecdote. The result is just as he stated in
the French Introduction, these vivid cameos are all drawn true to life and creatively
reinterpreted. In so doing, Orwell also raises an important stylistic point: plain facts

36 Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson (eds.), “Introduction,” in The Myths We Live By
(London: Routledge, 1990), 8
37 Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 187
38 Robert Tressell, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (London: Flamingo, 1997), 14
39 Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 188
often make for dull reading, a truth most journalists readily appreciate. It assists scholars who research his work that Orwell is so frank about his writing, acknowledging that a tale of misfortune is considerably more effective when developed as a human interest story. Had he written a social scientific monograph about poverty, the book would probably never have been published and certainly not circulated widely.

The thought of an ex-colonial policeman voluntarily identifying himself with privation — sleeping rough and associating with tramps — is genuinely surprising, even today. Perhaps that ambivalent and curious revelation is part of what transforms George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* into such a remarkable book. Apart from detailing his daunting hand-to-mouth existence, the narrative reveals rather more of Orwell’s character — or at least his fictional avatar — than he probably intended to display. Dervla Murphy argues that the book represents “the white-hot reaction of a sensitive … compassionate young man to poverty, injustice and the bored indifference of the very rich. It offers insights, rather than solutions; but always insights have to precede solutions.”40 That may be true, but we quickly realise that Orwell’s narrator is naive and wildly impractical. First, he is robbed and then, because he has no money he avoids looking for work. When he is eventually offered a job through the intervention of his Russian friend Boris, he turns it down. He is then forced to apologise to get it back. The narrative discloses that Orwell’s narrator (‘I’) is overly sensitive to the opinions of others (particularly his landlady and friends) and is fussy about hygiene. When a bug

falls into some hot milk, he refuses to drink it.\textsuperscript{41} He is not averse to protecting his privacy either. When his hotel — the Coq d’Or — is burgled, allegedly by an Italian “compositor,” Orwell finds himself badly out of pocket.\textsuperscript{42} However, the account as Orwell described it is evidently untrue. He later revealed what occurred in an annotated copy of the book sent to his friend Brenda Salkeld.\textsuperscript{43} D. J. Taylor verifies that the incident did occur, and the “culprit was a ‘little trollop’ named Suzanne, picked up in a café, with whom [Orwell] was currently infatuated.”\textsuperscript{44} Stansky and Abrahams assert that creative departures from actual events were not at all unusual for Orwell. When recounting his Burmese adventures to friends, “he selected and shaped his material as it contributed to his chosen themes.”\textsuperscript{45} Anything likely to spoil the overall effect or that made him appear foolish (such as his ill-advised sexual liaisons) would likely be omitted in the re-telling.

In his \textit{Down and Out} phase, Orwell was under no obligation to reveal his private life, and so the book is not ostensibly autobiographical. In Paris, he was primarily a spectator, concerned with chronicling the lives and misfortunes of others from a position of safety. Orwell was always free to return home to England whenever it suited. It is one facet of his professional writing to recognize his casual observation of people’s antics, and quite another to be physically and emotionally caught up in the same lifestyle. Orwell sometimes comes across as shy and diffident by nature, but he had been a

\textsuperscript{41} Orwell, \textit{Down and Out}, 14
\textsuperscript{42} Orwell, ibid., 12
\textsuperscript{43} D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 99
\textsuperscript{44} Stansky and Abrahams, \textit{The Unknown Orwell}, 220; Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 198-199; D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 98; Gordon Bowker, \textit{George Orwell}, 112
\textsuperscript{45} Stansky and Abrahams, \textit{The Unknown Orwell}, 155
policeman for five years, so he must have known how to assert (and handle) himself. It is difficult to write convincingly from the outside looking in, yet Orwell transformed his rough notes into a forceful social document. Most well-crafted stories lead to closure, but the narrative of *Down and Out* is jerky and episodic. The book finishes quite inconclusively, with Orwell discussing the treatment of tramps in England, yet offering no real solutions to the vagrancy problems.

**The Dispossessed**

There is an established tradition among English writers to visit the poorer districts of the London metropolis. Charles Dickens\(^46\) plumbed the lower reaches of London in the nineteenth century, often spending hours wandering the damp, fog-laden streets alone at night. Dickens’ *Sketches by Boz*\(^47\) amply illustrates the extent of his insightful reflections on the character of Victorian Londoners. Mark Freeman has compiled a list of other middle class observers,\(^48\) among them: James Greenwood, Beatrice Webb\(^49\) and Olive Malvery.\(^50\) *The People of the Abyss*, written by the American Jack London, strongly influenced Orwell’s approach to the genre of documentary

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\(^{47}\) Charles Dickens, *Sketches By Boz: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1839)


\(^{50}\) Olive Christian Malvery, *The Soul Market, with which is Included The Heart of Things* (London: Hutchinson, 1907); *A Year and a Day* (London: Hutchinson, 1912)
journalism. In 1910, Denis Crane⁵¹ went about disguised as a ‘dossor,’ and “admitted to having found the venture difficult.”⁵² More recent travellers include Orwell⁵³ himself, Frank Gray,⁵⁴ and J. B. Priestley, whose own inimitable English Journey took him to Southampton, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, and Newcastle.

Concern for how the poor fare in adversity has since culminated in a fully established genre. Latterly, Polly Toynbee,⁵⁵ Beatrix Campbell,⁵⁶ Beryl Bainbridge,⁵⁷ John Pilger,⁵⁸ J. G. Ramsay,⁵⁹ Nick Davies,⁶⁰ and Nick Danziger⁶¹ have all contributed towards building a picture of poverty and social injustice. I have drawn extensively from their collective viewpoints and first-hand experiences throughout the body of the thesis. All of these writings and approaches contribute to the resistance and argument that Orwell adopted in his documentary works. It is necessary to show that — rather than being a compiler of outmoded social material — Orwell’s reading of poverty, unemployment and marginalization remains insightful, just as it was at the time of writing.

⁵¹ Denis Crane, A Vicarious Vagabond, (1910). I can find no publishing details for this book. Denis Crane was the pseudonym of journalist Walter Thomas Cranfield.
⁵² Mark Freeman, “Journeys into Poverty Kingdoms,” 107
⁵³ George Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1933); The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937)
⁵⁴ Frank Gray, The Tramp: His Meaning and Being (London: Dent, 1931)
⁵⁶ Beatrix Campbell, Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places (London: Methuen, 1993); Wigan Pier Revisited: Poverty and Politics in the 80s (London: Virago, 1984)
⁵⁷ Beryl Bainbridge, English Journey or The Road to Milton Keynes (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984)
It is not easy to step out of certainty and into the unknown, and Orwell registered doubts, and believed himself an impostor at the start of his adventures.⁶² Steven Marcus thinks he welcomed the hard physical conditions — the cold, discomfort and boredom — treating them as a kind of penance to atone for his Burmese activities.⁶³ There may be some truth in that interpretation, but the appalling food, the dreadful lodgings, and the unsanitary conditions — especially the smells — could not be endured for lengthy periods, even as a penance. Since his journey to Paris, Orwell was never a well man.

In Part II of Wigan Pier, he expressed the desire to “submerge” himself alongside of the oppressed, but (only as it turns out) for the purpose of lending them his voice.⁶⁴ His motivation was always to be a successful writer, and never a professional tramp like the poet W. H. Davies (1871-1940).⁶⁵ It took Orwell some time to marshal enough courage to begin his survey of life among the dispossessed. There was always something superior about his bearing, and no matter how raggedly he dressed, people always noticed his differences and displacement. This did not greatly matter among tramps, who generously thought of him as a gentleman ‘down on his luck,’ but it was different with tradesmen and miners, who frequently responded by calling him “sir.”⁶⁶

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⁶² George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 140
⁶⁴ George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 138
⁶⁶ George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 144-145
Jack Common acknowledged being disappointed at what he described as the “cool built-in superiority of the public school presence.” First impressions can be wrong. The two later became good friends. Unlike J. B. Priestley, who was born and raised in Yorkshire, Orwell was never really ‘a man of the people.’ Although his appearance could be altered, he could not diminish his ‘posh’ accent, nor forget his manners, or soften his general outlook. Possibly Orwell’s background triggered a certain patrician reserve, a disdain for uncouth habits; perhaps too it was just a shuddering distaste for coarseness, dirt and squalor. Whatever his reasons, he deliberately chose to go there. It took several months of trench warfare on the Spanish Front to adjust Orwell’s middle-class sensibilities to an acceptance of close comradeship, as well as the filth and squalor of trench life.

The second half of Down and Out is less convincing. This is hardly surprising because it is an amalgam of several of Orwell’s earlier articles strung together without much drafting or rewriting. Orwell sent the completed Parisian draft to Jonathan Cape the Publishers who rejected it because it was “too short and fragmentary.” Orwell then added the London half of the story, where the narrator discovers that he has no job, and only “nineteen and sixpence” to keep himself for the next month. Unlikely though this is, Orwell stuck with it. D. J. Taylor reminds us that none of this actually happened at the time. There was no job postponement, no friendship with the mysterious person

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67 Common cited Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 204
68 According to Common, “[There] were those embarrassing class signals … the voice, the manner.” Cited Stansky and Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell, 247
69 George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 122
70 Gordon Bowker, George Orwell, 126
71 George Orwell, Down and Out, 128
known as ‘B,’ and when the Parisian adventure was over Orwell simply went home to his parents.⁷² Such an admission would not get his book published.

Therefore, in the literary tradition established by Jack London in *People of the Abyss*, Orwell’s narrator ‘I’ exchanges his own clothes for “some dirty looking rags,” and sets off in search of squalor and cheap accommodation.⁷³ People’s immediate reaction to his ragged appearance reveals much about the social significance attached to dress and status. He states, “My new clothes had put me instantly into a new world.”⁷⁴ Young women, in particular, he noted, responded evasively. Clothing, he decides, makes a difference to people’s perceptions of success and social standing.⁷⁵ His arrival at a dingy lodging house in Waterloo Road provides the reader with a brief sample of Cockney dialogue when Orwell is accosted by a boy at reception, “want a kip? That’ll be a ‘og, guv’nor.”⁷⁶ The lodging house is certainly not pleasant. He describes it having “a sweetish reek of paregoric and foul linen.”⁷⁷ Orwell reveals that the staleness of the air is due to the curious habit of keeping all the windows shut. The bedroom is not large, but with eight beds, and six occupants, the atmosphere is close and very stuffy. Clearly, the room with its various occupants disgusts him. He complains that, “Someone was

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⁷² D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life*, 102
⁷³ Bowker, *George Orwell*, 103; Orwell, *Down and Out*, 129
⁷⁴ Orwell, ibid., 130
⁷⁶ George Orwell, *Down and Out*, 131
⁷⁷ *Paregoric* is a medicine consisting of opium, benzoic acid, camphor, and anise oil … widely used at the time to relieve diarrhoea and coughing in children.
coughing in a loathsome manner in one corner.”

78 Orwell, *Down and Out*, 131
79 Orwell, ibid., 132
80 Orwell, ibid., 133

Next morning he skittishly avoids washing because the basin is filthy. It is hardly an encouraging start. Seeking solace in a nearby coffee shop, he orders that great British dietary staple, “tea and two slices!” So begins the first of many close encounters with London’s indigent population.

**Searching for Wigan Pier**

Following the successful publication of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell turned to writing novels. In rapid succession, he produced *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935), and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936). During this time, he moved around the South East of England engaging in a variety of jobs: private tutoring, teaching in schools, and selling books in a Hampstead bookstore. In early 1937, Victor Gollancz, who published *Down and Out*, commissioned him to assess the immediate effects of wholesale unemployment across Britain’s Industrial North. The result was another documentary prose revelation, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which quickly became a runaway best seller for the Left Book Club (LBC). Gollancz, who was expecting something useful for socialist propaganda purposes, enjoyed the first half, but was surprised and disappointed with the second.

Gollancz’s commission necessitated making a lightening tour of several working class towns in the North. It was expected that Orwell would “enter the world of the
working class, as he had become a tramp and outcast to write *Down and Out in Paris and London.*"\(^{81}\) Orwell rejected the undercover idea,\(^{82}\) and elected to go as a journalist and writer instead.\(^{83}\) He reached Coventry by train from London (31 January 1936), and paid 3/6d for the night — it was “very lousy” — he noted in his Diary.\(^{84}\) While he was away, Orwell was hurriedly making corrections to the manuscript of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* requested by Gollancz prior to publication, so he was extremely busy.\(^{85}\) A quick perusal of day two in the *Wigan Pier Diary* (1 February 1936) reveals Orwell striding purposefully from his inferior Bed & Breakfast heading for the “outskirts” of Birmingham, a walking distance of about 12 miles. His destination Clent Youth Hostel was a brisk 5-mile walk from a village called Stourbridge. The total by foot for that day was approximately 16 miles; in addition he mentions that he spent 1/4d (bus fares), and 2/3d (food). A keen nature lover, he makes time to record some of the bird life he encountered along the way.\(^{86}\) Although there is no mention of these events in the Wigan Pier text, it is apparent that Orwell had decided to keep an accurate log of the journey for his own recollection.

By the 10th February, he had reached Wigan in Lancashire; a month later, he was in Barnsley, to the south of Leeds, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Neither of these destinations was a great distance from Coventry, where he started out at the end of January. Since Orwell did not own a car, and time was limited, he had sensibly decided

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82 Orwell was evidently not a gifted actor.
83 This is very much in keeping with the projection of Orwell as an active political writer.
84 George Orwell, “*Wigan Pier Diary,“ CW X*, 419
85 Orwell, ibid., 425, 433, 434-435
86 Orwell, ibid., 419
on a train, bus, and walking itinerary. Fellow author J. B. Priestley, who conducted a much grander tour of England in 1933, travelled by coach and chauffeur-driven motor car, for his famous *English Journey*. The decision to walk was a concession made to the various unnamed working class ‘contacts’ who acted as Orwell’s tour guides. From what we know of Orwell, street level must have seemed an entirely natural and appropriate way to view the locale. He arrived in Wigan, journalist’s notebook in hand, on 10th February 1936.87

Although Part I of *Wigan Pier* is (arguably) straight reportage,88 Orwell — the aspiring novelist — does allow himself one or two moments of more reflective prose: “The train bore me away, through the monstrous scenery of slag-heaps, chimneys, piled scrap-iron, foul cindery mud criss-crossed by the prints of clogs.”89 It is evocative of the foul acres of refuse thrown up at the sacking of Isengard, in Tolkien’s masterful tale of Middle Earth. Yet even in the midst of this, “the filthy heart of civilisation,” there is reason to hope, for there are still secret places to be found in the otherwise ravaged industrial heartland “where the grass is green instead of grey.”90 Possibly the description is suggestive of Orwell’s political optimism, in that he believed a socialist revolution would ultimately make things right. We do know from the important wartime essay ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’ that he passionately believed in the rights of the working classes, and also in that peculiarly English sense of fair play. He plainly expected that working

87 Orwell, ibid., 421
89 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 15
90 Orwell, ibid., 16
class indignation would eventually boil over to counteract the harmful ministrations of centuries of ruling class greed, and injustice. Whatever his reasons for describing the landscape in this manner, the point is surely that England was not scarred and blighted by wizardry, — as was Tolkien’s Middle Earth. It was ravaged and desecrated by the greed, mismanagement, and arrogance of the English ruling class — Orwell’s bête noire.

In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell hinted at probable reasons for the lack of progress made in providing decent housing for working people. He contends that despite all the “clatter” made by politicians and other concerned persons, “all this talk has led to surprisingly small results.”91 There were evidently roadblocks in place. The eminent nineteenth century American economic theorist Thorstein Veblen firmly believed “the common man is … helpless within the rules of the game as it is played.”92 He inferred that the system invariably favours those with money and property, and punishes and humiliates and marginalises all those without. The significant changes envisaged by Orwell in his wartime essays would take a Cold War to implement. Meanwhile those running “the game,”93 as Veblen euphemistically called capitalism, were continually able to find new ways to prevent the full amount of allocated funding from ever reaching the areas of greatest need in the community.

91 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 59-60
93 The lack of foresight and planning some 47 years later, prompted Beatrix Campbell to angrily retort, “If George Orwell were to return to Sheffield today, he’d see the metamorphosis from spacious if spartan semi-detached suburbias to dense tower blocks.” Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, 34
Orwell does not elaborate on this further. Instead, he cites statistics: the town of Barnsley, for example, “recently spent close on £150,000 on a new town hall, although admittedly needing at least 2,000 new working-class houses, not to mention public baths.” He adds that there is no readily apparent reason for siphoning off such large amounts of public money into projects of this type, but concludes that it happens regularly. A great deal of community aid invariably fails to reach its intended destination — namely the unemployed, the aged, the working poor, and the utterly destitute. Orwell then turns his attention to the shortage of affordable public housing.

Eric Hopkins contends that housing was on the government’s agenda. In fact, there was a housing boom occurring at the time. The new estates were far superior to anything that they replaced — namely the old ‘back to backs’ and dingy closes of the 1840s and 1860s. These new dwellings had proper kitchens, fireplaces, indoor toilets, and even bathrooms with hot and cold running water. ‘Progress’ invariably comes with a hefty price tag, and the council rates for these new houses were significantly higher than before. Rents in some instances were doubled — up from 5/- to 10/- or more, a week — and in addition, there was increased travel time, and higher fares to contend with. There was also a dearth of inexpensive mixed-business corner stores, pubs, and schools in the immediate vicinity, which practically ensured that relocation would mean time-wasting shopping trips to other parts of the city. The dislocation of the older

94 George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 61
96 Hopkins, ibid., 23
97 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 63-64
working class communities is indefensible really. Corporation estates effectively removed working people from their neighbourhoods, and severed family ties. Young families found themselves relocated (often to the other side of town) and separated from close family, and the elderly increasingly found themselves living in dismal isolation. The redistribution affected everyone, from the prosperous corner shop proprietor to the local publican. Many small family businesses were ruined as a result of losing the bulk of their regular passing trade. One can possibly account for banning pubs, but the corner shop with its weekly ‘tab’ system literally kept poorer families alive during hard times. It is difficult to imagine then, the government’s indifference to the hardships suffered as a result of “limiting” the number of small shops per new estate.

**Life on the Dole**

Allegedly, and perhaps conveniently, there are no exact figures for the total number of unemployed people in England during the Depression years. Orwell deduced that no government wanted to have the full extent of its own economic mismanagement revealed while still in office, so the ‘official’ figures are inevitably open to interpretation. Eric Hopkins states that, “At no time, from 1920 onwards were there less than two million registered as unemployed .... The true total in September 1932 has been estimated as 3.75 million.” The crucial point here is that usually only the “heads of families” registered for the dole — the husband being the official ‘breadwinner’ — so when assessing the total number of individuals suffering as a result of unemployment,

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98 Orwell, 66  
99 Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline*, 28-29
then the number affected is probably several times the official figures. In addition, these estimates “did not include agricultural workers, or domestic servants, or the self-employed.” Then, as now, there are those who are undetected by statisticians and welfare agencies. The difficulties are further compounded because harassed government ministers are notoriously difficult to ‘pin down’ to accurate figures. Government is a ‘numbers’ game. The right to remain in office has to be earned. Typically, when pressed for further information, the result is a barrage of hastily assembled statistics, evasive technical jargon, and the inevitable jaded political clichés. Orwell’s own estimate of jobless numbers allows for considerably more than the government’s modest admission that “one in three of registered workers” was without a job. One thing is certain: the figures represented hundreds of thousands of working families without any likelihood of improving their circumstances. Many of those forced into accepting unemployment benefits were working families already trapped in a lifestyle of unremitting poverty. What this means is that the Depression was the worst reversal in fortunes that could possibly have occurred to struggling families already living at or well below subsistence level.

100 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 69
101 Hopkins, The Rise and Decline, 29
102 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 70
103 Laybourn states, “In 1934, there were 8,600,000 families, about 73.5 per cent of the total number of families in Britain, living on less than £4 per week. Six million of these families were estimated to be earning less than £100 per annum — a very low figure indeed considering that the nation’s provision for a family of five in 1935 was 29s 3d (£1 46p) from the Unemployment Assistance Board and 36s (£1 80p) in 1936 — giving an annual income of between £74 and £90 per annum. The majority of these were members of the traditional working class, employed in the staple industries of mining, textiles, shipbuilding, iron and steel and engineering”. Keith Laybourn, “Social Class and Inequality,” in Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain Between the Wars (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990), 139
104 Laybourn, ibid., 140
The unemployment benefit was barely enough to support a single person let alone an entire family. Orwell puts the typical amount at around “thirty shillings a week,” which for a family of four or more appears barely adequate. Orwell puts the typical amount at around “thirty shillings a week,” which for a family of four or more appears barely adequate. The rent alone accounted for a sizeable amount of that, and then there was food, clothing, gas and electricity, and travelling expenses to consider. Orwell claims, “The standard of living in the North is better than in London ... [because] there’s more community spirit.” This sounds like an embellishment, but Orwell had already experienced a taste of life among the poor in London. His opinions were generally formed by direct observation, so it is likely that in the North those he encountered looked after their own. What he learnt from his ‘doss house’ days about sharing was valuable. However, the life of a single man on unemployment benefits is unenviable. There is no one to share the burden, no work to go to, and “a man who pays six shillings a week for his room is not encouraged to be indoors more than is necessary.” That phrase “more than is necessary” simply means outside of the hours normally associated with sleep, plus maybe an hour or so extra for meals and ablutions, depending on the disposition of the landlord. Each day has its difficulties in terms of using up the daylight hours unobtrusively. Often the only solution was to spend the morning ‘mooching’ about. When the weather was inclement, the main occupation involved trying to keep warm and dry. This could be achieved fairly easily by a visit to the nearest public library.

105 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 72
106 Orwell, ibid., 73
107 Orwell, ibid., 74
For the unemployed, a fairly typical day’s ‘work’ entailed a protracted round of job ‘knock-backs.’ Men used to hard work were unable to understand that there were no jobs, and that the times had changed. They did not take to enforced idleness. Orwell indignantly states, “It is absurd to say [the unemployed] ought to be looking for work. There is no work, and everybody knows it.” Despite this recognition, the unemployed were frequently regaled and insulted. The perpetrators of such hostility reasoned, “that the working class have been absurdly pampered by doles.” As a hypothesis, this was (and still is) patently ridiculous. The response to such ideological nonsense troubled Orwell. He states, “the thing that horrified and amazed me was to find [how] many … were ashamed of being unemployed.” Not only was the attack on the unemployed insulting, it was unwarranted. Prior to the First World War, it was assumed that the majority of men would spend their working lives gainfully employed. As Orwell asserts, “They had been brought up to work.” The trouble was that since 1918, the old world had crumbled, and the balance of power in Europe had irrevocably changed. Nothing — so far as the former borders and configurations were concerned — would be the same again. The lengthy dole queues testified to the fact that there was just not enough work to go around. From 1918 onwards, it became obvious too that, “Everyone except the

108 Desperate times required desperate measures. The Jarrow March (1936) was the most notable of the ‘hunger marches’ that occurred at intervals throughout the Depression. Curiously, Orwell makes no significant mention of this. The Jarrow March was tiny compared to the 2,000 strong ‘Great National Hunger March’ of 1932. See Laybourn for details, Britain on the Breadline, 33-34
109 Orwell, Wigan Pier, 76
110 Orwell, ibid., 124
111 Orwell, ibid., 78-79
112 Orwell, ibid., 79
United States, was in debt.”

A consequence of accumulated debts and war reparations ensured that there would be economic hardships worldwide for years to come. Orwell observed that for many people, “getting a job seems about as probable as owning an aeroplane.”

In former industrial centres, places like Durham and Gateshead, close to three-quarters of the male workforce had been without work “for more than five years.” Morale was not greatly helped by irresponsible comments emanating from those financially secure enough to ride out the Depression, who labelled the unemployed feckless, lazy, and incompetent. This type of emotional attack was not new even in the 1930s. Asa Briggs refers to “propagandists who try to persuade their fellow-citizens to develop … social character which will best serve the needs of the day.”

In the nineteenth century, the working class population was separated into discrete categories. Those with good character (employed) were ‘respectable,’ and those with bad character (unemployed) were ‘non-respectable.’ The shame associated with unemployment has continued on from the Victorian era. Although we tend to attribute the meritocratic doctrine of hard work to Samuel Smiles, Briggs notes that it predates Smiles. Aronowitz et al state, “The prevailing myth is that the poor can find work if they really want,” and so long as there is welfare to provide a safety net there will be those who wilfully flout the system. This argument makes little sense. Workers want proper jobs, not

113 Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, 35
114 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 78
115 Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline*, 30
welfare handouts. In Britain, Polly Toynbee found that people are forced to work longer hours for less pay — often at two or more jobs.\textsuperscript{119} In a shrinking job market, employers hold the whip hand.\textsuperscript{120} This is significant because the world of work as Smiles and the Victorians understood it has now changed — possibly forever. As young Harry Hardcastle rudely discovers in \textit{Love on the Dole}, there is little to be gained from looking for a job when there is no work to be found.\textsuperscript{121} Narratives of identity, community and self are inextricably bound up in work (and its absence). Even the supposedly secure middle classes are inextricably caught up in this process. To mobilize the French writer Viviane Forrester, “Torment at the loss of employment is felt on every level of the social scale.”\textsuperscript{122} In a world delineated and defined by wealth and acquisition, unemployment symbolises the kind of individual weakness and failure that invites community disdain.\textsuperscript{123} Unemployment in a consumerist society can lead to a life of crime, or to depression and welfare dependency.

\textbf{Migrants: The Lonely Londoners}

What of the migrant face of working Britain? This question arises from Beatrix Campbell’s critique of \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier}. What is it like to be black and unemployed in a depressed economy? It is likely that Orwell was aware of the arrival of the SS Windrush, which carried the first contingent of migrant workers, even though he was near the end of his life. The West Indian diaspora began arriving in numbers after

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Polly Toynbee, \textit{Hard Work}, 226
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Aronowitz et al., ibid., 32
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Walter Greenwood, \textit{Love on the Dole} (London: Vintage, 1993), 169
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Viviane Forrester, \textit{The Economic Horror} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 41
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Forrester, ibid., 40-41
\end{itemize}
the Second World War, when Britain needed to solve its escalating “labour crisis.”

Susheila Nasta states that well “over 40,000 West Indians emigrated to Britain in search of employment.”\textsuperscript{124} Many of these came with high expectations. The writer Sam Selvon who “was the son of a dry goods merchant, a first generation East Indian immigrant from Trinidad, and an Anglo-Scottish mother,”\textsuperscript{125} was among them. Selvon arrived in London in 1950. Selvon experienced many of the conditions that Orwell would have encountered thirty years earlier: damp draughty accommodation, loneliness, unpaid bills, and tuberculosis. Both men aspired to be writers when becoming established fulltime in that profession was not especially easy. The newly arrived Selvon admits to discovering “peace … beauty and inspiration … in the [British] countryside,”\textsuperscript{126} but he was clearly frustrated by Londoners. He states, “the land did not deceive me as the people did.”\textsuperscript{127} Selvon readily understood the black workingman’s dilemma. In his novels, West Indian immigrants frequently discuss the importance of finding work. Selvon developed a uniquely modified West Indian dialect in his writing. When Moses Aloetta a veteran ten-year London resident takes newcomer Henry Oliver Esq., — otherwise known as Sir Galahad — to the labour exchange, the narration is in dialect: “[A] job is all the security a man have. A job mean place to sleep, food to eat, cigarette to smoke … when a man out of work he like a fish out of water gasping for breath.”\textsuperscript{128} Life was certainly not easy, and endless difficulties arose for black migrants trying to claim a place and security in England. Selvon was amazed by the Londoner’s appalling “ignorance of black

\textsuperscript{125} Nasta, “Foreword,” \textit{Kunapipi}, ix
\textsuperscript{126} Sam Selvon, “Finding West Indian Identity in London,” \textit{Kunapipi}, 58
\textsuperscript{127} Selvon, ibid., 58
\textsuperscript{128} Sam Selvon, \textit{The Lonely Londoners} (London: Longman, 1997), 45
people.” Selvon, who had learned about English history and geography and had read Shakespeare at school, was genuinely perplexed by the illiteracy and the numbers of white people doing menial work. He was often queried about his English: “How well you speak our language! Where did you learn?” Selvon’s 1950s migrant experiences in and around Notting Hill Gate and Ladbroke Grove, contrast effectively with the young Eric Blair living in the Portobello Road thirty years before. While their lives may not conflate or even run a parallel course, there is a definite sense where both struggled to inject a vital sense of realism into their writing. Orwell’s journeys among London’s tramps kept him well supplied with useful material for his prose documentary writing.

Selvon was not predominantly a political writer, although “he felt deeply about many of the … concerns of the day.” His novels and short stories expose the duplicity and the hypocrisy of the English way of life. He wrote about the loneliness of big city living, with a perception as sharp and precise as Orwell’s.

You could be lonely as hell in the city, then one day you look around you and you realise everybody else is lonely too, withdrawn, locked, rushing home out of the chaos: blank faces, unseeing eyes, millions and millions of them. Orwell’s writing — especially his essays — was avowedly political in emphasis and content, as he outlined in ‘Why I Write’ (1946). He plainly wanted to disrupt the status quo with books like Down and Out in Paris and London, and The Road to Wigan Pier. Although he recorded his experiences among the destitute and the unemployed, Orwell was unable to speak (or write) the ‘authentic’ voice of the workingman. This can

129 Sam Selvon, “Finding West Indian Identity,” 59
130 Selvon, ibid., 59
131 Susheila Nasta, “Foreword,” x
doubtless be attributed to self-consciousness. It should also be remembered that Orwell was a well educated middle class writer. His attempts at working class dialogue, when they do occur are always stilted and unconvincing.\textsuperscript{133} Roger Fowler states, “Orwell’s attempts at Cockney produce a kind of Dickensian caricature”\textsuperscript{134} and Orwell’s long-time friend Rayner Heppenstall agrees, “The early novels are poor … especially the low-life dialogue.”\textsuperscript{135} Selvon is the opposite in this regard, for his characters live and breathe realism. In one memorable scene, Moses Aloetta tries to explain the prevailing white attitude towards black migrants: “[T]hey just don’t like black people, and don’t ask me why, because that is a question that bigger brains than mine trying to find out.”\textsuperscript{136} The tenacity of English racism is surprising considering that black communities had lived (and worked) in Britain for several hundred years — long before the \textit{Windrush} generation arrived. Caryl Phillips points out, “Eighteenth-century Britain, at the height of the slave-trade … was a vibrantly, if not altogether successful multiracial country.”\textsuperscript{137} The diarist Samuel Pepys “owned and sold two slaves in the 1670s and 1680s,”\textsuperscript{138} and there are records of traders from Africa who settled in London dating back to the Roman occupation.\textsuperscript{139} Consequently, English citizens have had three hundred years (or longer) to adjust to racial difference. When Stuart Hall arrived in Britain in the 1950s, he discovered that he was unwelcome. He was repeatedly asked, “When are you going

\textsuperscript{133} George Orwell, \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, 79)
\textsuperscript{134} Roger Fowler, \textit{The Language of George Orwell} (Houndmills: Macmillan,1995), 21
\textsuperscript{135} Rayner Heppenstall, \textit{A Blurred Portrait}, 79
\textsuperscript{136} Sam Selvon, \textit{The Lonely Londoners}, 39
\textsuperscript{138} Claire Tomalin, \textit{Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self} (London: Penguin, 2003), 180
\textsuperscript{139} Peter Ackroyd, \textit{London: The Biography}, 705
home?" Reading *The Lonely Londoners*, it is clear that Moses, Galahad and ‘the boys,’ managed racism with gentle humour and wit. Helen Tiffin observes, “Selvon, through his figuration of Moses, offers hilarious, good-humoured, complicated, healing novels of racial and colonial interaction whose radically subversive strategies are hidden ‘under the kiff-kiff laughter.’” My purpose in comparing these two quite different writers, Sam Selvon and George Orwell, is to establish aspects of the migrant experience that Orwell might well have comprehended, even written about, had he been exposed to them. It is curious that Beatrix Campbell — an otherwise shrewdly perceptive observer — should point to the absence of racial content in Orwell’s treatise of working class England knowing that a wide-reaching consciousness of black migration only seriously began in Orwell’s final months of life. Orwell did not spend any writing time in cities like Liverpool, Glasgow or Bristol with bustling seaport traditions, where there were long standing black populations dating back to the slave trade.

142 Even by 1998, Irvine Welsh argued, “there is an assumption implicit in British culture and history that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was a homogenous, and above all, a White society before large-scale immigration from the New Commonwealth in the 1950s and 1960s. This view denies the existence of the long-established Black communities in British cities like Cardiff, Bristol and Liverpool.” This extract and the “Foreword” from Paul Vasi’s *The First Black Footballer* (London: Frank Cass, 1998) was part of Welsh’s desire to increase the popular cultural awareness of this history. His intent is verified. There is not much coverage of historical Black communities in Britain. However, the Birmingham City Council webpage is excellent: “Black History in Birmingham Libraries,” *Birmingham City Council*, 15 February 2005.

Priestley’s English Journey

Orwell was not the only writer willing to delve beneath the surface of working class England. The successful author and playwright J. B. Priestley, who grew up in Bradford, West Yorkshire, and who understood working class culture from the inside, reaches a more hopeful conclusion than Orwell in *Down and Out*, and *Wigan Pier*. Priestley’s *English Journey* (1933) generously supplies a much-needed balance to the artful bleakness of Orwell’s narrative. It was true that much of Britain’s heavy industry was seriously in decline — particularly shipbuilding, and coal mining. Even the traditional English staples of wool, and cotton were struggling to compete with cheaper Indian and overseas imports. Yet there was also a positive side to the Depression, and Priestley found plenty about which to be optimistic. The newly emerging light industrial centres, especially those on the outskirts of Greater London were, by the early thirties, beginning to make money. Priestley evidently enjoyed talking to people, and he visited businesses and factories whenever the opportunity arose. He was interested in industrialization, and in the assembly-line response to hard times. Although the Depression had created poverty, and mass unemployment throughout Britain and much of the world, there was evidence to suggest that full recovery was imminent.

Priestley set himself the immediate task of documenting working conditions throughout England. He did not visit Northern Ireland, Wales or Scotland. He began his epic journey in the prosperous south, armed with the necessities — clothes, guidebook, typewriter, notebook, pencils, eraser, and pipe — travelling by “motor coach.”¹⁴³ This is a luxurious way to travel, enthused Priestley: “as for comfort, I doubt if even the most expensive private cars … are as determinedly and ruthlessly comfortable as these.”¹⁴⁴ Was he joking? It is clear that he actually meant these sentiments, but then such ‘luxury’ would have made a comfortable change from third class train travel for the less affluent. One of the first details to catch his eye was the line of new factories along the Great West Road, “decorative little buildings, all glass and concrete and chromium plate, [which] seem … to be merely playing at being factories.”¹⁴⁵ Art deco did not meet with instant approval, although Priestley was far more optimistic about the new ‘lines’ of popular commodities these same factories produced — “Potato crisps, scent, tooth paste, bathing costumes, fire extinguishers … if we could all get a living out of them, what a pleasanter country this could be.”¹⁴⁶ He is right of course; the country needed readily accessible commodities if it was to make any headway. Large family-owned factories like Wills Tobacco, Bristol, and Cadbury Bros, near Birmingham certainly looked after their employees. Health and safety solutions and adult education schemes were all plainly visible. The staff dining rooms held two thousand employees (or more) at a sitting, and provided a choice of simple, inexpensive main courses and sweets.¹⁴⁷ It is all

¹⁴³ J. B. Priestley, English Journey (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1940), 3 ¹⁴⁴ Priestley, ibid., 3 ¹⁴⁵ Priestley, ibid., 4 ¹⁴⁶ Priestley, ibid., 4-5 ¹⁴⁷ Priestley, ibid., 34
vastly different from the cotton mills and factories of the 1840s — the world of Engels, Dickens, and Elizabeth Gaskell. The modern facilities are undoubtedly impressive. Priestley notices significant numbers of women and teenage girls hard at work on the assembly lines. He is impressed with their cheerful attitude for “Some of the tasks are desperately monotonous.” The working conditions seem reasonable with, “twenty minutes for breakfast and an hour for dinner.” There is also a trained medical team on hand and a dentist. Historian Eric Hopkins cites Cadbury’s progressive approach to worker’s health: “they employed three fully qualified dentists … they had a medical department, with a doctor and three nurses.” Other firms also took similar initiatives. In the early 1930s, Austin’s (the car manufacturers) determined to reduce work-related accidents, and succeeded in doing so by “41 per cent” within a three-year period. This is impressive if the figures offer an accurate representation of events.

As *English Journey* makes abundantly clear, “The England Priestley finds is a mess of conflicts and contradictions.” Priestley declares that in his travels he has found evidence of at least three different England’s — the old rural economy, the Victorian industrial monolith, and the emerging post war industrial complex. Meanwhile back in the old traditional centres of industry — Wales, Lancashire, Yorkshire, the Tyne and the Tees — production had stalled, and the furnaces, and steam

148 J. B. Priestley, ibid., 32
149 Priestley, ibid., 34
150 Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline*, 17
151 Hopkins, ibid., 34
153 Priestley, *English Journey*, 397-403; Baxendale, ibid., 397
hammers were silent. Priestley noted that every street corner has its little huddles of unemployed men and boys, ragged and listless, pallid, and uncertain about the future. New industries, new techniques, new money, and new commodities are required, and Priestley is instantly aware of that while travelling in the south. Why has Britain’s heavy industry been so poorly managed, and where is the compassion for those out of work? In exasperation, Priestley attacks the legions of comfortable middle class women living at ease in London. He fumes, “They should try being a miner’s wife in East Durham.”154 It is this deeply entrenched and class-based ignorance that Priestley wishes to attack in *English Journey*. He corrects the record by offering a new model for English history and geography, to jolt ingrained complacency and assumptions of inequality.

The need for change and social improvement appears to have impressed itself upon Priestley throughout his *English Journey*. Yet he had money to spend in restaurants and bars, and could afford to stay in good Hotels. He travelled the country by motor coach and automobile, blanketed and protected from the elements. The reader can be certain that there were no food shortages for Priestley. He began his Journey in the prosperous South, where plenty of work was to be found. That veneer of cheerful optimism would disappear with alarming rapidity after he arrived in the Northern industrial centres, places like Blackburn, Newcastle, Gateshead, and East Durham. Such glaring contrast provides the beauty, and the persuasive narrative strength of *English Journey*. What is significant about Priestley’s writing is his bluff honesty — “I will confess … that I was not here in Manchester entirely on your business, as readers of this

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154 J. B. Priestley, *English Journey*, 334
While gathering material for the book naturally preoccupies most of his time, he reminds the reader that he is also a successful playwright and novelist. One of his plays is due to open in Manchester the week he arrives there and his journey will have to go on hold for a day or two — which it does. Priestley specifically sets out to write not just another English ‘travelogue,’ but also a factual account of how ordinary people “work and live and play” in difficult times. What other reason could there be to reveal the darker side of the nation, other than to highlight the triumphs of the English character over extreme economic adversity? Priestley was intent on encouraging and inspiring the struggling nation, by offering people a glimmer of hope.

The Road to Milton Keynes

Fifty years after Priestley’s classic undertaking, Liverpool-born actor and writer Beryl Bainbridge was commissioned by the BBC to embark on a celebratory televisual English Journey 1980s style. With a documentary crew in tow, Bainbridge approximated the original Priestley route, filming interviews and writing up travel anecdotes and observations for a book. Bainbridge essentially discovered that despite the passage of time, very little had changed beneath the nation’s affluent 1980s facade. There were more people registered unemployed in 1983 than there were at the height of the Great Depression. The figures are both unsettling and thought provoking. There were 2,498,100 Britons ‘officially’ unemployed in 1933, while in Mrs. Thatcher’s Britain, the

155 J. B. Priestley, ibid., 256
156 Priestley, ibid., 233
157 Beryl Bainbridge, English Journey or The Road to Milton Keynes (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984)
158 Bainbridge, ibid., p. 7
numbers had already reached 3,104,700 and were steadily rising. Unlike the ragged street-corner despondency of the 1930s — we have all seen the grainy photographs of thin shabby men wearing cloth caps — the 1983 dole recipient is more likely to be found indoors (probably in a high-rise apartment block), smoking cigarettes, eating greasy takeaways, and listening to music, or watching videos. Just as it was in Orwell and Priestley’s era, this cynical and disparaging overview is probably based upon the popular misconception that the unemployed are all feckless and incurably lazy, and ‘spoiled’ by welfare. Yet there is clearly little to be gained from ceaselessly wandering the streets in search of work — especially when there is none to be found. Superior technology and better housing allows people greater choice in how they spend their leisure time; consequently the unemployed are just as likely to stay home in difficult times.

For Bainbridge, much of the journey was tough. She has no love of electricity pylons, sprawling housing estates, concrete walkways, or motorways. As one critic suggests, “For all her modesty of intention her view is Martian, and a Martian’s view of one’s own country proves unhelpful.” Perhaps this interpretation has some value but Bainbridge, born in 1933, is old enough to recollect a time when industrialisation had not ravaged and scarred all the landscape. Like Priestley, there were factories and assembly lines to inspect — only now there are fewer employees and considerably more machines. In Longbridge, Birmingham, where the Maestro and the Metro are manufactured, robotic welders do most of the assembly work. With unemployment

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160 Raban, ibid., 28
“running at eighteen percent,” Bainbridge (appropriately) thinks it is madness. A week earlier she had inspected the Imperial Tobacco Company, Bristol. When Priestley visited Bristol, the W. D. & H. O. Wills factory, as it was called at the time, it was located on East Street. Significantly — and I throw this in for effect — both Wills brothers were non-smokers. Bainbridge, who receives the grand tour, wryly adds, “it can’t be easy showing off a tobacco factory.” As was the old Wills factory in Priestley’s era, the Imperial Tobacco Company is completely modern, efficiently run, and pleasantly situated. There is an artificial lake complete with swans, and the extensive gardens are attractively landscaped. Throughout the early 1980s, factory closures and high unemployment ravaged British industry. Most of the repetitive assembly work was (already) done by high-tech machinery. Soon after Bainbridge’s visit, the Bristol workforce was reduced (downsized) to make way for robotic machines to take over production. Incredibly, the 1980s has far more in common with the Depression years than previously imagined. Bainbridge found that 1980s England was just as dejected and world-weary as the generation Priestley encountered, and for similar economic reasons. To fashion this social and economic link further still, it is useful to look at a working class novel, Love on the Dole, written at a time when sixteen year old boys were hired to do a man’s work, and paid at a youth’s rate.

162 Bainbridge, English Journey, 62-63
163 Bainbridge, ibid., 34
164 Bainbridge, ibid., 35
165 Bainbridge, ibid., 34
166 Bainbridge, ibid., 37, 39
Love on the Dole

Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* portrays a popular and deeply moving account of English working class life during the Depression. The novel is set in Salford, Lancashire. Today, that would fall within the Greater Manchester region. Greenwood’s novel highlights the expectations of lower working class life: marriage, family, the community, and work. The harsh reality is that working life has become a continual struggle — a real hand-to-mouth existence. It is doubtful whether any working class family is secure from the shadowy threat of unemployment, and the lure of the Pawnbroker’s shop. These are the plain and discouraging ‘facts’ of life in the 1930s. Greenwood notes that ‘ordinary’ folk rarely live ‘happily ever after’ in these kinds of testing conditions. Young Harry Hardcastle, a somewhat naive apprentice at Marlowe’s engineering works, is bitterly disappointed to discover that his working life is a fraud. There are no significant trade secrets for him to learn; there is not even proper job training provided. No special skill is required to operate one of the new capstan lathes. Once configured, the lathe works automatically. The lad is quickly set straight by one of the older men, Larry Meath:


168 Not unlike young Harry Hardcastle in Greenwood’s novel, the group of working class ‘lads’ in Paul Willis ethnographic study *Learning to Labour*, are fairly optimistic about what the future holds. As they leave school and commence their working lives, Willis wonders how long it will be before reality sets in. He states, “Though the Hammertown lads are, in September 1976, still flushed with the excitement and intensity of movement and having money, and a felt sense of cultural election, we may hazard a guess that disillusion is not far away. The working class culture of which their basic responses are part is not generally one of celebration and mastery. It is basically one of compromise and settlement: a creative attempt to make the best of hard brutalizing conditions.” Paul E. Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids get Working Class Jobs* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Gower, 1988), 107

169 Aronowitz states, “Instead of machining and assembling engine blocks by hand, workers become watchers, regulators, and service mechanics of a machine … [performing] the assembly
‘You’re part of a graft, Harry,’ he said: ‘All Marlowe’s want is cheap labour; and the apprenticeship racket is one of their ways of getting it. Nobody’ll teach you anything simply because there’s so little to learn … Your apprenticeship’s a swindle, Harry. The men they turn out think they’re engineers … but they’re only machine minders.’

Harry dutifully serves out his seven-year apprenticeship, graduating from errand boy to lathe operator. Meath is right of course — there are no trade secrets to be learned. The women who took over male jobs during the First World War proved this by learning the intricacies of ‘engineering’ in a matter of weeks. The Company’s practice, and it was not alone in this, was to lay-off those who had recently completed apprenticeships, promoting the next generation of lads in their place. Though just sixteen, Harry unexpectedly finds himself operating an automatic lathe, bypassing the customary drill press stage entirely, and in the process discovers the realities of working life. Now he is required to work full-time at a man’s job, but for a boy’s wage of only 17/- a week.

Thoughts of the future scared Harry: “Every year new generations of schoolboys were appearing, each generation pushing him and his a little nearer to … manhood and the dole …. Why, the supply of boys was inexhaustible … Marlowe’s could keep going for ever.” This was way and above his ability to control. The constant need for cost-cutting (and downsizing) is not just confined to Marlowe’s engineering works; it is a valid part of improving operating ‘efficiency,’ and is considered good business operations automatically.” Stanley Aronowitz, “Why Work?” in The Politics of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1992), 230

170 Greenwood, Love on the Dole, 47
171 Greenwood, ibid., 47
172 Greenwood, ibid., 70
173 Greenwood, ibid., 91
174 Greenwood, ibid., 92
practice. The Company probably only survives in such a fiercely competitive industry by rigorously reducing numbers. There are of course jobs requiring a degree of skill and expertise — blacksmiths, foundry and furnace-men — but eventually the Company will buy new machinery to replace them too. Marlowe’s engineering is not a Benevolent Society. It is a Business. Reducing the number of employees to make way for wage-saving plant and machinery is normal business practice — but Harry does not see it that way. Marlowe’s is a huge firm, employing some 12,000 people. There is good organisation (time cards and ‘clocking-on’), and workshop safety is in evidence: “white lines, painted on the concrete floor,” and various signs and instructions, although the noise level is extremely high throughout. The furnace room, and the blacksmith’s forge are unpleasant, being overly hot, loud, and dangerous, but the noise in the riveting shop is deafening. As Harry maintains, “Every man [was] stone deaf after a six month’s spell of work here.” There is no universal offer of worker’s compensation for Harry Hardcastle’s generation.

With his apprenticeship finally over, Harry and his fellows are ‘laid off.’ There is no other engineering work to be found in Salford. Eventually he realises that he is a virtual prisoner. His world is restricted to Hanky Park (Salford), where there is no work. Although a victim of unforeseen economic circumstances, and powerless to enact change, he nevertheless grasps what has happened to him and his mates: “Wages

175 These are euphemisms that simply mean ‘unemployment’ for many.
177 Greenwood, ibid., 25
178 Greenwood, ibid., 50
controlled their lives; wages were their masters, they its slaves.” The received wisdom of that era was to look for work in the area in which you lived. The alternative meant tramping the country, sleeping in doss houses, and being treated like a common criminal. In the spikes and casuals that Orwell visited, the authorities locked everyone in cells for the night; rations were a mug of tea and a hunk of dry bread. This would be Harry’s fate too, if he travelled away from home in search of work. It seems incredible that unemployment should have such a dramatic effect upon identity. Paul Willis concedes, “work affects the general social nature of our lives in the most profound ways.” The judging of others by occupation — we evaluate ourselves by the same measure — is heavily dependent upon status and earning capacity. It is the phenomenon of ‘work’ that colonises the myriad definitions of the self and of identity, which also builds false expectations and creates disappointments. Take away the work ethos (and wage packet), with its accompanying sensation of usefulness and cheerful independence, and what remains? As Willis has argued, “It is often forgotten that the main reality for most people … is work and the sound of work.”

179 Greenwood, ibid., 123
180 “Cultural homelessness,” as defined by Aronowitz and Giroux, is an ‘outside’ position whereby school leavers reject, disregard or demonstrably fail to meet the criteria of the socially imposed labels that identify them as specific members of their class. In the rapidly changing working environment (factory closures and outsourcing), the increase of leisure time (recreational tourism), and the barrage of media representations of consumption (icons of success) it is hardly surprising that a generation of young people should visualise themselves differently from their parents and grandparents generation. See, Aronowitz and Giroux, “Working-Class Displacements and Postmodern Representations,” in Postmodern education (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 171. See also Stanley Aronowitz, “Why Work?” 225-252.
182 Willis, ibid., 185
appreciated in the 1930s. Then, whole communities were shattered overnight by the
closure of factory, shipyard or mine. It is probably safe to conclude that the bitter
personal lessons informed by job loss and under employment have still not been fully
absorbed by the ‘godlike’ movers of global capitalism.\(^\text{183}\) What then were the
alternatives for the long-term unemployed in Orwell and Priestley’s world? Some
emigrated to Canada, and the Dominions.\(^\text{184}\) Others went ‘on the road’ in search of
seasonal work, like the ragged tramps of Orwell’s acquaintance. Some, as Greenwood
states, existed by pawnning (and then reclaiming) their clothing and household items, to
supplement the dole.\(^\text{185}\) For the majority of unemployed Britons during the Depression,
life was clearly working against their expectations. The real surprise, aside from the
trauma that enforced redundancy brings to any small community, is how quickly
‘normalcy’ returns once the promise of economic certainty and job stability is re-
established.

The next chapter follows Orwell from the rigors of working class England to
revolutionary Spain — more specifically to anarchist controlled Barcelona. He went
there, along with thousands of other young men and women from all over the world, to
fight against international fascism. Previously, in England, Orwell had developed some
basic hypotheses of how socialism might be applied, but he had never experienced a
truly classless society. That was to change. From the moment he arrived in the Catalan
capital, he knew that he had encountered something worth the struggle. Orwell’s six

\(^{183}\) An excellent polemical and insightful analysis of the contemporary business and corporate

\(^{184}\) Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, 156

\(^{185}\) Later reduced to 15/-, then cut entirely for many by the hated Means Test.
months in Spain stayed with him for the remainder of his life. The Spanish Civil War was the single most important experience of his life. It provided the catalyst that turned him from an aspiring novelist and 'hack' journalist into a significant political writer and talented polemical essayist.
I shall be going back to the front probably in a few days & barring accidents I expect to be there till about August. After that I think I shall come home, as it will be about time I started on another book. I greatly hope I come out of this alive if only to write a book about it.¹

George Orwell

In December 1936, a tall garishly attired Englishman departed London for Spain, to observe and report on the war’s progress. This singular individual was readily identifiable to the enlightened as the unconventional author George Orwell.² Wearing a pair of size twelve boots³ and carrying a heavy portmanteau, he gave the impression of being prepared for every contingency.⁴ Jennie Lee, then a British Labour MP, records a chance meeting with Orwell, which she afterwards described in a letter.

I was sitting with friends in a hotel in Barcelona when a tall thin man with a ravished complexion came over to the table. He asked me if I was Jennie Lee, and if

³ “He wore corduroy riding breeches, khaki puttees and huge boots, I’ve never seen boots that were so large, clogged in mud.” This description of Orwell arriving at Alcubiere on the Aragon front was penned by Bob Edwards who afterwards became an MP in the Labour Party. Cited by Gordon Bowker, George Orwell (London: Abacus, 2003), 207-208
⁴ Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life (London: Penguin, 1992), 312; 324-325. These observations are attributed to Philip Mairet, and to Bob Edwards.
so, could I tell him where to join up. He said he was an author: had … an advance on a book from Gollancz, and had arrived ready to drive a car or do anything else, preferably to fight in the front line. … This was George Orwell.5

Orwell’s war — he subsequently joined a unit of the POUM6 militias — was largely confined to a tiny inactive section of the Aragon front, “just behind the line fronting Saragossa,” some 250 Kilometres North East of Barcelona.7 Douglas Kerr states he served, “first in the mountains near Alcubierre, and later in hills to the east of Huesca.”8 The prevailing atmosphere on the line was one of acute boredom, mingled with the hope that they might soon see some action. Franz Borkenau, an Austrian journalist newly returned to Barcelona in January 1937, adds, “news from this front … was awaited with little eagerness.”9 The war in Aragon had stalled because of an internal power struggle between the PSUC (the communists) and the CNT (the anarchists).10 This eventually resulted in the vicious May Day fighting in Barcelona that same year.11 Orwell states, “the bit of … front that I was on must have been very like a quiet sector in France in 1915.”12 Orwell and his companions whiled away the daylight hours talking politics, smoking cigarettes, and taking in the magnificent mountain scenery.13 It was also bitterly cold. He states, “It was an extraordinary life that we were living — an extraordinary way to be at war, if you could call it war. The whole militia chafed against the inaction and clamoured

6 Workers Party of Marxist Unification (Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista). He registered under the name “‘Eric Blair, grocer,’” Bowker, 204.
7 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia (London: Penguin, 2000), 14; Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 320
8 Douglas Kerr, George Orwell (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 56
10 Borkenau, ibid., 186
11 Paul Preston, A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War (London: Fontana, 1996), 184
12 George Orwell, “My Country Right or Left,” in An Age Like This 1920-1940, CEJL I (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 590
13 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 22-23
constantly to know why we were not allowed to attack.”

To pass the daylight hours there were regular forays into no-man’s-land foraging for food and fuel. This last item was extremely important, since the company were camped outside in the middle of winter.

To the amazement of his English comrades, Orwell was spotted collecting potatoes in full view of the enemy positions. He had apparently worked out the necessary ‘angles’ beforehand, and believed himself to be well out of range of their machine-guns.

Sometimes there was a sporadic exchange of gunfire between the Republican and Fascist lines. Orwell expressed concerns when it came to pulling the trigger on at least one occasion.

At this moment a man, presumably carrying a message to an officer, jumped out of the trench and ran along the top of the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him ... I had come here to shoot at ‘Fascists’; but a man who is holding up his trousers … is visibly a fellow creature, similar to yourself, and you don’t feel like shooting at him.”

This is both a moving and remarkable statement. Once more, as rendered through the first two chapters of this thesis, Orwell’s desire to write a truth for that moment is matched by his capacity to render large social events and ideas such as war, poverty, politics and class significant through minor stories and micro-images. Whether the anecdote is accurately transcribed or designed to make a subtle point is not known, but for that moment, the soldier became a half-dressed man, not merely an enemy.

14 Orwell, ibid., 32. Bowker states, “Behind inaction and lack of decent weapons lay not just tactics but also politics and the efforts of the Communists to marginalise the Anarchists and POUM.” Gordon Bowker, George Orwell, 207
15 Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 28-29
16 Orwell, ibid., 49. Bowker adds, “He had a great belief in the potato as a staple food … He also discovered that at the front the humble ‘spud’ was a valuable means of exchange.” Bowker, George Orwell, 210
18 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” Orwell in Spain, 349
Orwell was not a particularly good shot and obviously did not think much of his chances of killing anyone at that range.\textsuperscript{19} This incident, written in hindsight,\textsuperscript{20} reveals much about Orwell’s training, his eye for ‘decency’ and fairness, even at a time of war. His traditional English education — St Cyprian’s, Wellington and Eton — signified that ideologies of a sporting chance were instilled from an early age. Orwell wanted to introduce the argument that the business of war, although barbarous, is not entirely without positive human qualities. Also, this fragment is remarkably similar to an incident narrated by Robert Graves in his 1914-1918 memoirs, \textit{Goodbye to All That}.

While sniping from a knoll in the support line, where we had a concealed loop-hole, I saw a German, perhaps seven hundred yards away, through my telescopic sights. He was taking a bath in the … third line. I disliked the idea of shooting a naked man, so I handed the rifle to the sergeant with me. “Here, take this. You’re a better shot than I am.” He got him; but I had not stayed to watch.\textsuperscript{21}

Both incidents are of interest to researchers. The decision not to kill an unarmed man is significant. Previously, Orwell likened the lines at Huesca to a “quiet sector” on the Western Front, and Graves’ story certainly supports Orwell’s evaluation. It is also symbolic of gentlemanly behaviour being maintained, even under duress. There would be other chances for engaging with the enemy, and Orwell clearly distinguished himself on several occasions.\textsuperscript{22} In one successful night time sortie, he gave chase to an enemy soldier at bayonet point; he also claimed to have badly injured or killed at least one fascist with a

\textsuperscript{19} George Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 110
\textsuperscript{20} “Looking Back on the Spanish War” was published in June 1943.
\textsuperscript{21} Robert Graves, \textit{Goodbye to All That} (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1981), 112
\textsuperscript{22} Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 327
well-aimed grenade. Orwell’s account infers that his company was ready to fight when an opportunity arose.

A kindred martial attitude was not universal among literary figures. The poet Stephen Spender, when encouraged to join the International Brigades by Harry Pollitt, the British Communist Party secretary, declined. He states, “I could not see what qualifications I had as a soldier.” He was however persuaded to travel to Spain as a journalist. A close friend of Spender’s — Jimmy Younger — also failed to display the right martial attitude: “He had come to Spain on an impulse, but now he knew that he did not want to die for the Republic.” Doubtless, there were other recruits who felt much the same way as the hapless Younger, who was subsequently imprisoned for his troubles. There were unsettling rumours that the International Brigades were under internal scrutiny by the communist political commissariat. Dissent was a punishable offence, and men became cautious — especially about writing letters home. A number of Orwell’s comrades were British, mainly working class men, Union representatives, and Independent Labour Party (ILP) members. The life that Orwell describes so vividly in *Homage to Catalonia* bears little resemblance to modern concepts of warfare. He is

23 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 69-70, 74. One former comrade states, “When the grenade was thrown, ‘a scream was heard and Orwell said: ‘That’s got one bastard,’” cited Bowker 212.
25 Spender, ibid., 184
26 Spender, ibid., 191
27 Spender, ibid., 204-205
29 Nelson, ibid., 373
30 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, 326
frequently at his best as a writer with this blend of reportage and documentary style realism.

There are specific difficulties and concerns for journalists reporting from a war zone. Kate McLoughlin states, “Truth is at a premium in the confused conditions of war, and war writing, like no other genre, is subject to the test of authenticity.”31 Orwell understood that. War reportage raises multiple questions. For example, what constitutes reportage?32 Should journalists be embedded with the army, or allowed to roam freely? What about censorship and even-handedness?33 Who is ultimately responsible for the war correspondent’s safety? (Journalists are regularly killed in a war zone).34 In at least one respect, war reportage has changed little in sixty years. Both sides in the Spanish Civil War made extensive use of propaganda and disinformation.35 It is, arguably, a journalist’s job to search out and report real events — but in wartime is that really possible?36 In

31 Kate McLoughlin, “Hemingway on War,” *The Hemingway Review* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 111
33 Maria Trombly, “Ethics and War,” *The Quill* 89, no. 10 (December 2001): 15
34 Joel Simon, “Journalists face risks,” *The Quill* 92, no. 1 (January/February 2004): 18
36 “The events set down here did happen. But on rereading this reportage, my memory becomes alive to the other things, which also did happen and were not reported. ... largely because there was a ... thing called the War Effort.” John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War* (London: Pan Books, 1975), 8
contemporary arenas — like Iraq and Afghanistan — the Pentagon is careful to control the flow of information that gets back to the public.37

Orwell was clearly frustrated, and angered, by the lack of reliable information coming out of Spain.38 He once claimed of this period, “History stopped in 1936.”39 Beginnings and endings are both important. Orwell became a different writer after the Spanish Civil War. His notions of ‘the enemy’ became at once sharpened, and diffused. It was not merely that lies had been told, atrocities invented, the past extinguished, it was the belief that it was considered reasonable to do so. Orwell was not prepared to accept an explanation that affirmed a lowering of journalistic standards. He also took strong exception to a line of poetry written by W. H. Auden,40 which suggested that murder was — in certain circumstances — justifiable.41 For Orwell, this statement ran contrary to the truth42 — murder is never acceptable — and Auden’s statement was therefore all the more

37 Carl Sessions Stepp, “Information as a Weapon Against Terrorism,” American Journalism Review 26, no. 1 (February/March 2004): 56
38 It was not just the Spanish press that irked Orwell. He also took exception to the credulousness of foreign writers and intellectuals, among them Auden and Spender. Bowker states, “He also complained that the war was being misrepresented in the English press which was repeating the Communist line uncritically”. Bowker, George Orwell, 218
39 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 351
40 The offending line ran: “To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death, / The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder.” In Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 2nd edition (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press), 160. A full transcription of Auden’s poem ‘Spain’ is found in Robin Skelton (ed.) Poetry of the Thirties (London: Penguin, 2000), 133-136
41 Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 2nd edition (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 160-161
42 Orwell was outraged. He states, “I have seen the bodies of … murdered men — I don’t mean killed in battle, I mean murdered. Therefore I have some conception of what murder means.” In George Orwell, “Inside the Whale,” in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), CEJL I (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 566. More revealing still is, “Mr. Auden can write about ‘the acceptance of guilt for the necessary murder’ because he has never committed a murder, perhaps never had one of his friends murdered, possibly never even seen a murdered man’s
contemptible. He later regretted some of his remarks, and submitted an apology in true Orwell fashion.43

The durable effects of misleading wartime propaganda have been nuanced and far-reaching for the Spanish people. Franco’s victory, when it came, ushered in years of political ‘disappearances,’ concentration camps and slave labour.44 In Franco’s Spain, the “sins of the fathers” were indeed visited on future generations.45 Life under the dictatorship was one long denial and rewriting of the past.46 As Helen Graham affirms, “The defeated cast no reflection. No public space was theirs.”47 The Fascist victory in Spain meant forty years of authoritarian rule.48 To the outside world, “It was … the victory of international fascism over ‘atheistic communism’ and ‘decadent’ capitalist democracy.”49 To the defeated, Francoist Spain was hell on earth. The repressive totalitarian themes of Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four were largely shaped by his experiences in Spain. Totalitarian themes — Big Brother’s policy of perpetual war and the Bush coalition’s war on terror — have also affected and directed my research. The war in Spain was, and remains, a model of political propaganda, which serves as a template for

43 “Some years ago I described Auden as ‘a sort of gutless Kipling.’ As criticism this was quite unworthy, indeed it was merely a spiteful remark.” George Orwell, Inside the Whale and Other Essays (London: Penguin, 2001), 31
44 Helen Graham, “Coming to Terms with the Past: Spain’s Memory Wars,” History Today 54, no. 5 (May 2004): 29
46 Graham, “Coming to Terms with the Past,” 30
47 Graham, ibid.
subsequent war coverage. The Pentagon ‘spin-masters’ are eager to present a less brutal, and more suitable televisual representation of warfare. Unlike Vietnam, there are few flag draped coffins to be seen, no visible American dead (or wounded), few reliable statistics of casualties, and Mr. Bush has stated that the war is peace. (For security reasons) the truth cannot be told about this war.50

In the Spanish Civil War, Orwell and his comrades fought for entirely different reasons. Theirs was a dedication born out of innocence (‘altruism’), a belief that the world could be changed (‘shaped’) for the better. The Aragon front in the winter of 1936/7 was clearly not about rapid troop deployment, tank battles, and aerial bombardments. There were no televised disinformation sessions with Secretary Rumsfeld in the 1930s. As Orwell observes the militia unit was poorly equipped for fighting. Most of the men did not have proper uniforms or boots, let alone dependable weapons. Orwell’s rifle (a Mauser) was over twenty years old.51 Its moving parts were badly worn, and nearly all his ammunition was unreliable.52 No wonder he was doubtful about ever hitting the target. It was not at all uncommon for locally manufactured cartridges to misfire or jam in the breech.53 Yet none of this mattered — the cold, the boredom, or the inactivity. Being in Spain and on the front line was what counted for Orwell and his companions. They were standing alongside destiny, defending the democratic ‘free world’ from the fascist dictators. Later, back in England, when Orwell attacked the many falsehoods written

50 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 353
51 “They had no artillery, their weapons were antiquated German Mausers, and most casualties were self-inflicted.” Bowker, George Orwell, 206
52 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 33-34
53 Orwell, ibid., 20
about the war, he “encountered a wall of silence and hostility: the left [...] evidently] did not want to hear. It preferred to believe what he saw as a falsification of history.” 54

Orwell was disturbed by this response, and devoted the remainder of his life to creating exemplary political journalism.

Taking Sides

This is essentially a chapter that investigates why the overthrow of fascism in Spain mattered politically, and how it fused and formed Orwell’s later writing and political attitudes. In 1936, Orwell, along with thousands of other young ‘internationals’ volunteered to fight for the Republican cause in Spain.55 The rationale for this decision is perhaps difficult for contemporary readers to understand, especially in light of the later carnage and destruction of the Second World War. Eric Hobsbawm’s belief that, “fascism meant war [...] which of itself is a] convincing reason to fight,”56 is valid in its way, as is Paul Preston’s broad assertion that the majority of volunteers viewed the war as “the last great cause.”57 Even A. J. P. Taylor’s assessment that the war was “a great international question,”58 has merit. Yet none of these sufficiently explains why innocent blood must be shed to ensure peace. There are no satisfactory answers to such sweeping historical questions. International Brigade veteran Carl Geiser observes, “Between 1922 and 1931 fascism arose in Italy, Greece, Spain, [and] Lithuania … Poland, Portugal and

57 Paul Preston, A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War, 6
Yugoslavia.” The volunteers for the most part were anti-fascist, although a small number from Britain and America fought for the Francoists. There were a number of women, Annie Murray among them, who volunteered to care for the wounded. Murray, a member of the British Communist Party, wanted to “help the Spanish people.” Another, Salaria Kea O’Reilly, was the first African-American nurse to serve with the International Brigade. She states, “I was so excited over going to Spain I did not realize that many other Negroes had already recognized Spain’s fight for freedom and liberty as a part of our struggle too. I didn’t know that almost a hundred young Negro men were already fighting Hitler’s and Mussolini’s forces there in Spain.” Salaria Kea O’Reilly was badly wounded and forced to return home, but she only died in 1990.

Men and women from all over Europe and the Americas flocked to Spain for myriad reasons. They were drawn from every conceivable background, trade and profession. Orwell states, “When the fighting broke out on 18 July it is probable that every anti-Fascist in Europe felt a thrill of hope.” Naturally, Orwell included himself in this category, since he had been warily monitoring the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany for some time. A year later and safely returned to England, he states in a letter to his friend Rayner Heppenstall, “What I saw in Spain did not make me cynical but it does

60 Paul Preston, *A Concise History*, 125
64 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 189
make me think that the future is pretty grim … I still think one must fight for Socialism and against Fascism, I mean fight physically with weapons.” It was Orwell’s belief that fascism represented a greater threat to freedom and democracy than socialism. In a letter to Amy Charlesworth, Orwell expressed the belief that “Fascism has no real opposite except socialism.” The inference being that right wing capitalism and fascism — in Orwell’s eyes — are much too closely related to separate cleanly. With hindsight, this insight is perceptive. The other view in circulation at that time was that General Franco simply responded to a perceived communist threat. Koestler maintains that there was no such threat, at least not in 1936, and that this was propaganda aimed at placating neutral countries like France and England. In fact, blaming the communists was a ploy much used by would-be despots to justify their actions. Most notably, Hitler gave this as his main reason for seizing power in Germany. Koestler states, “I fancy that if there were no Communists the dictators would have had to invent them.” With Germany threatening international security, A. J. P. Taylor supposed that, “Most British ‘experts’ on Spain … inclined to Franco’s side.” Orwell did not commit to this view, and not long after Franco’s failed coup in July 1936, he determined to travel to Spain. All that remained to accomplish in England at that time was to send the completed draft of The Road to Wigan Pier to his publisher.

68 Koestler, ibid., 127
69 A. J. P. Taylor, English History, 484-485
Scott Lucas, who is rarely well disposed to Orwell or his politics, believes he “enlisted more out of a general desire to help than any well-defined conviction.”71 If Lucas is correct then Orwell had no clearly established political affiliations or insights worth noting, either then, or afterwards. The same charge should apply to anyone who volunteered to fight in Spain on impulse. The reality is that many did not know what they believed, any more than they knew what to expect. Antony Beevor asserts that many of the young unemployed British communists, who enlisted in the British battalion “had little notion of what warfare really meant.”72 They were obviously in for a considerable shock. Paul Preston adds, “it was a ‘bastard of a war.’”73 Ignorance was hardly the case with the Italians and Germans who had fallen foul of fascism at home.74 These were mainly desperate individuals without a country. It was different too, for Britons and Americans,75 and also for Orwell. Was it to fight or write?76 He later states, “my particular generation … became conscious of the vastness of the experience they had missed.”77 He was referring to being too young for the First World War, and of feeling incomplete as a result. Spain provided him with the perfect antidote: an opportunity to kill fascists and to expel any residual notions of unworthiness. George Woodcock states, “one can reasonably assume that he went there with some hope of joining in.”78 Orwell’s true motivation may

71 Scott Lucas, *Orwell* (London: Haus, 2003), 41
73 Paul Preston, *A Concise History*, 127
74 Preston, ibid., 123
75 Preston, ibid., 124
77 George Orwell, “My Country Right or Left,” in *Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000), 135
78 George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit*, 136
never be known, but it is understood that the ensuing encounter crystallised his political life, and affected him deeply. D. J. Taylor states, “Spain politicised Orwell in a way that no previous stretch of his life had managed to do.” In the essay ‘Why I Write’ (1946), Orwell explains that he wrote Homage to Catalonia out of “a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice.” Once again he identified with the oppressed. Prior to Spain, Orwell had been a lacklustre novelist who despised class restrictions, attacked inherited wealth, nepotism and privilege, and struggled to promote a democratic form of English socialism. He returned to England a fully-fledged political writer with a kaleidoscope of Spanish images and visions in his head and an ardent desire for justice and social change.

The impressions of the people’s revolution Orwell witnessed in Barcelona remained with him. He later remembered, “It was a time when generous feelings and gestures were easier than they normally are.” This visualization flooded into his World War II pamphlets and essays, and the desire for revolutionary change even found its way into Nineteen Eighty-Four. He believed that the redistribution of resources and the breakdown of class barriers, needed to be articulated and widely circulated. He had witnessed revolutionary zeal up close, and had liked what he had seen. Orwell believed that change of this magnitude was something “worth fighting for.” Yet, Britain and France remained aloof and watchful during the hostilities — rightly so according to David

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79 A report from a communist informer states, “He has little political understanding. He is not interested in party politics, and came to Spain as an Anti-Fascist to fight Fascism.” Cited Bowker, George Orwell, 217
80 Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 133
82 George Orwell, “Why I Write,” in Essays, 5
83 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 351
84 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 3
Pryce-Jones. The same could not be said of Germany and Italy. Hitler and Mussolini, sensing “that a Nationalist Spain would be a useful Mediterranean ally against France,” supported General Franco’s rebels with aircraft, tanks, trucks, and troops. Russia too was drawn into the war, and supplied the newly elected government with ‘advisors,’ tanks and munitions, but Stalin’s help was to be “paid for by ... the Bank of Spain.” With the aid of foreign intervention, what started out as a routine military coup “[escalated] into full-scale war.” Crucially, Britain and France refused to be drawn into the conflict. With enormous debts and loss of life resulting from the First World War, Hobsbawm argues that England — though nervously apprehensive of Hitler — “could not afford another [protracted] war.” They simply ignored the sabre rattling, and (ineffectually) placed an embargo on all arms shipments bound for the Republic.

No European country was able to prevent its citizens from volunteering, and some fifty thousand from over fifty nations fought on the Republican side. Many of these volunteers had no prior connections to the country, but it was widely believed that, “Spain was ... the battleground which would decide the future.” Others besides republican

88 Carr, ibid., 16
91 Eric Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 153
92 A. J. P. Taylor, English History. 485, 489
93 David Pryce-Jones, “Experiment in Terror,” 47
94 Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War, 182
sympathisers fought and died in Spain. However, there were much smaller numbers of volunteers who elected to join and fight with Franco’s nationalist forces. General O’Duffy and his 700-strong Irish Catholic battalion were foremost among these. It is a somewhat fanciful desire, this ‘meddling’ in the internal domestic affairs of another country for the purpose of changing history — regardless of whether the participants are republican or nationalist in sentiment. General O’Duffy and his battle group were sent off with the blessing of the Irish Catholic Church. The tone issuing from the pulpit sounds strangely reminiscent of President Bush’s rhetoric at the start of his evangelical ‘crusade’ against terror.

The Rosary is more powerful than weapons of war …. Let us pray that the destruction of civilisation may be averted, that Christ may live and reign, and that Communism [now ‘terrorism’] and the power of Satan [evil] on earth may be brought to naught.

The summoning of religion to reinforce the clean divide between good and evil has been employed from the very beginning of human existence. David Thomson believes that the challenge, “To … fight for Spanish democracy was a call that evoked warm response in many young men thirsting for some such opportunity of action.” Orwell was among those who responded to the call, straightway enlisting in the POUM militias. He later states in ‘My Country Right or Left,’ “I am convinced that part of the reason for the

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95 Paul Preston, *A Concise History*, 125
97 President George W. Bush, “Today We Mourned, Tomorrow We Work,” *The White House*, 16 September 2001. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/ He states, “My administration has a job to do, and we’re going to do it. We will rid the world of the evil-doers. We will call together freedom loving people to fight terrorism.” In the same speech the President (perhaps for the benefit of evangelicals) also states, “This is a new kind of … evil … This crusade, this war on terrorism.”
98 The Dean of Cashel, cited O’Duffy, Preston, ibid., 125
fascination that the Spanish Civil War had for people of about my age was that it was so like the Great War.”¹⁰⁰ Years of training in the cadet corps at school, and his years in the police had prepared him for action. However Orwell was soon to discover that his real task was not to kill Fascists but to engage in a war of words with the left.

**The Defence of Madrid**

The siege of Madrid is now remembered for the callous and indiscriminate aerial bombardment of civilians by the German Condor Legion.¹⁰¹ At the time though, it successfully captured the attention and the imagination of the world. Michael Seidman refers to Madrid as “one of the most dramatic episodes of the entire conflict.”¹⁰² Geoffrey Cox — a British journalist working for the *News Chronicle* — was based in the beleaguered city from October to December of 1936. From Madrid, Cox dispatched glowing accounts of heroic resistance, balanced by informative descriptions of daily life. Gollancz’s Left Book Club later selected and published the *Defence of Madrid* (1937). Cox’s narrative ambles along entertainingly but sections of it are devoted to sensationalism rather than to an objective treatment of fact. In the opening chapters, Cox reminds his readers that were it not for the Soviet recruited International Brigades, and for Russian support, Madrid would probably have fallen within days. He was certainly right, for the Russians supplied modern tanks and aircraft.¹⁰³ The local republican militias,

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¹⁰⁰ George Orwell, “My Country Right or Left,” 590
¹⁰³ Helen Graham, “Spain Betrayed? The New Historical McCarthyism,” 365
although brave, were poorly trained and ill equipped.\textsuperscript{104} There did not appear to be much in the way of a defensive plan in evidence. Even the Government was uncertain of the final outcome, and Largo Caballero, the Prime Minister, hurriedly moved his headquarters away from the skirmishing to Valencia.\textsuperscript{105} Hugh Thomas states, “It was announced that administration could not be carried on in a war zone.”\textsuperscript{106} Caballero left the city’s defences in the care of General Miaja and a hastily assembled junta.\textsuperscript{107} In the intervening years, a mythology has arisen about the International Brigade’s role in the defence of Madrid. While it is true that the city was under intense military pressure at this time, historians now tend to play down the overall significance of the International Brigades’ effectiveness during the siege. Paul Preston believes, “They were one component of a heroic effort which involved the whole population.”\textsuperscript{108} Whatever the Internationals’ ability, Madrid was relentlessly pressured by Varela’s African troops. Having fought their way to the south-west of the city, the Moors seized the airport on November 4.\textsuperscript{109} Two days later, they “were right on the edge of Madrid.”\textsuperscript{110} Professor Raymond Carr, an authority on the Spanish Civil War, bluntly declares that “Franco’s army on the march to Madrid in the late summer of 1936 cut through the green militia units ‘like a knife through butter.’”\textsuperscript{111} Franco — The \textit{Generalísimo}\textsuperscript{112} as he was later branded — was slow to press home his

\begin{thebibliography}{112}
\bibitem{104} Geoffrey Cox, \textit{Defence of Madrid} (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1937), 26
\bibitem{105} Cox, ibid., 48
\bibitem{106} Hugh Thomas, \textit{The Spanish Civil War} (London: Penguin, 2003), 460
\bibitem{107} Paul Preston, \textit{A Concise History}, 117
\bibitem{108} Preston, ibid., 128
\bibitem{109} Antony Beevor, \textit{The Spanish Civil War}, 193
\bibitem{110} Frances Lannon, \textit{The Spanish Civil War}, 47
\bibitem{112} Preston, \textit{A Concise History}, 133
\end{thebibliography}
advantage. His field commanders, — Mola, Varela, and Yagüe — delayed further action until 8\textsuperscript{th} November. Cox’s narrative depicts the situation in beleaguered Madrid at fever pitch. There were wild rumours of a Nationalist Fifth Column circulating in the city, thanks to a casual remark attributed to General Mola, and Colonel Varela’s African veterans were edging closer by the hour. With the Prime Minister safely ensconced in Valencia, and the city in the care of a Defence Junta, the future for Madrid looked bleak. When the nationalists crossed the river Manzanares, the defenders realised that the city would most likely be lost. However, the local militias succeed in blocking Varela on the western outskirts of the city, at Casa de Campo. The following day a large detachment of International reinforcements arrived — General Kléber’s XI Brigade and Cox notes that the city’s morale visibly improved. However his upbeat assessment of the capacity of these untried foreign troops was inaccurate. Antony Beevor wryly observes that the Internationals “were no more skilful at mounting attacks than the [regular] militias.” The following day, huge losses were inflicted upon the newcomers in the deadly fighting at Casa de Campo. News of the slaughter seemingly made little difference to the irrepressible Cox. He simply states that in Madrid “Trained men [were

113 Antony Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 193
114 Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 459
115 “Mola established his headquarters at Avila. When asked by a group of foreign journalists which of his four columns would take Madrid, he replied that it would be that ‘Fifth Column’ of secret nationalist supporters within the city. This unwise phrase was a justification for endless murders within the capital.” Thomas, ibid., 456; and see Geoffrey Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, 39
116 Frances Lannon, *The Spanish Civil War*, 48
117 Lannon, ibid., 47
118 Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 198
119 Geoffrey Cox, *Defence of Madrid*, 66
120 Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 198
121 Beevor, ibid., 199
now] facing trained men.” On November 13, another detachment of International troops arrived, the XII Brigade. These were further supplemented by a column of Spanish veterans 4,000 strong, led by the popular but ill-fated Buenaventura Durutti, whose men were fresh from the Aragon front. Many of these were to die in the fierce fighting in the University City. Durutti himself died in mysterious circumstances just a couple of days after his arrival.

Reporting from the front line in wartime — whether it is Madrid, Sarajevo, or Baghdad — is difficult, dangerous and problematic. Most accounts of the fighting that reached England during the Spanish Civil War were hard to verify, and local news sources frequently presented a biased perspective. Orwell records that, “The Daily Mail, amid the cheers of the Catholic clergy, was able to represent Franco as a patriot delivering

122 Geoffrey Cox, Defence of Madrid, 76
123 Arthur H. Landis states, “Durruti (sic) had long been known as the one strong personality within the Anarchist movement to advocate the cooperation of all Left parties, a unified command within the military; and this within a regular army,” in Spain: The Unfinished Revolution, 272. The circumstances surrounding his death are still shrouded in mystery; was it by sniper, one of his own men, or merely a tragic accident?
124 Cox, Defence of Madrid, 107
125 Hugh Thomas, The Spanish Civil War, 471
126 The statistics are sobering: “A total of 36 journalists were killed worldwide as a direct result of their work in 2003, a sharp increase from 2002, when 19 journalists were killed. The war in Iraq was the primary reason for the increase, as 13 journalists — more than a third of this year’s casualties — were killed in hostile actions. In fact, according to statistics compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists, the death toll in Iraq was the highest annual toll from a single country since 24 journalists were killed in Algeria in 1995.” Joel Simon, “Journalists face risks,” Nieman Reports (Winter 2004): 18
127 “The very concept of objectivity is continuously contested in practice,” says John Eldridge, in Glasgow University Media Group, News, Truth and Power (London: Routledge, 1993), 6. It is, for example, difficult to imagine a documentary without a point of view, or an unposed portrait. Journalists, as much as filmmakers and photographers, have a viewpoint and an understanding of events, and it is disingenuous to infer otherwise. What matters most is how that viewpoint is managed.
his country from hordes of fiendish ‘Reds.’” Statements from Orwell, which identify how newspapers were constructing and organizing truth and reality, confirm the continued need for open debate over journalistic objectivity. More recently Brent Cunningham states, “It is important … for reporters to understand their biases, to understand what the accepted narratives are, and to work against them as much as possible.” This was clearly not occurring at The Daily Mail (or anywhere else) in the Thirties. The reality was that General Franco was leading a military coup against a democratically elected coalition government, the complete reverse of The Mail’s statement. On 9 May 1937, Orwell wrote to Victor Gollancz voicing exasperation and disbelief. He states, “The stuff appearing in the English papers is largely the most appalling lies.” There were journalists from Europe and the Americas reporting from Spain. The American writer Ernest Hemingway dispatched self-conscious literary copy from a variety of wartime ‘hotspots,’ including Valencia, Barcelona and Madrid. McLoughlin states, “War inspired Hemingway to his greatest inventions.” His wartime journalism, redolent of his novels and short stories, is lavish with well crafted lines: “At the front … the noise came as a

128 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 190
129 Brent Cunningham, “Re-thinking Objectivity,” CJR, issue 4, July/August 2003. http://www.cjr.org/issues/2003/4/objectivity-cunningham.asp (11/12/2004). Of course, there are also other matters at stake besides objectivity. “Punditry and bias are all symptoms of a far more insidious malady affecting journalism: the profit motive. While all news media have become victims of the bottom line, television news organizations have capitulated most to the pressures of their corporate owners, who have proven willing to sacrifice standards, ethics, professionalism and the public trust to make more money.” Bonnie M. Anderson, “Journalism’s Proper Bottom Line,” Nieman Reports (Winter 2004): 51
130 Cunningham, “Re-thinking objectivity.” On the serious matter of objectivity, Geneva Overholster asserts, “Ideological leanings are not in themselves harmful. It is deceit that is wrong — the false presentation of one’s intentions. No one should be allowed to get away with hoodwinking the news consumer.” Geneva Overholster, “The Inadequacy of Objectivity as a Touchstone,” Nieman Reports (Winter 2004): 53
131 John Newsinger, Orwell’s Politics (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 42
133 Kate McLoughlin, “Hemingway on War,” 114
heavy coughing grunt”;134 “The machine gun and rifle fire made one solid crackling whisper in the air”;135 “A man is singing hard-voiced in the street below and three drunks are arguing when you fall asleep”;136 “The Ebro delta has a fine rich land, and, where the onions grow, tomorrow there will be a battle.”137 Hemingway’s stylish staccato rhythms presented vivid — albeit literary — snapshots of the tensions and the awfulness of war. It is pure entertainment.138 Stephen Spender encountered this larger-than-life American in Valencia.139 Deeply appreciative of Hemingway the creative artist, he was intrigued by his roistering public persona. The politically ambivalent poet Spender mused, “I wondered how this man, whose art concealed under its apparent huskiness a deliberation and delicacy like Turgenev, could show so little of his inner sensibility in his outward behaviour.”140 Spender toured much of the country and was impressed by the quality of the individuals he met. He states, “There was always … the sense of living so dramatically within the moment that everything else was forgotten.”141 It seems that life takes on greater meaning when the individual is forced outside of the perimeters of safety.

Journalism and the intellectual analysis of events in Spain during the war was — according to Orwell — wholly less than adequate. In particular, those on the left (Auden and Spender in particular) were taken to task in Orwell’s essay ‘Inside the Whale.’

135 Hemingway, ibid., 275
136 Hemingway, “A New Kind of War,” ibid., 276
137 Hemingway, ibid., 303
138 Kate McLoughlin, “Hemingway on War,” 113
139 Stephen Spender, World Within World, 198
140 Spender, ibid., 198
141 Spender, ibid., 200
Why the Spanish Civil War mattered

The Spanish Civil War mattered because it ultimately affected the future of Europe.\(^{142}\) As Preston asserts, not only was Spain the dress-rehearsal for the Second World War, it was also the beginning of a newer, bigger (technological) war.\(^{143}\) Franco’s refusal to assist Hitler when World War Two broke out undoubtedly saved Britain and France from being overrun.\(^{144}\) More significantly for this thesis, the war offered the victorious Francoists a perfect opportunity for rewriting Spanish History. Helen Graham states:

> When the military phase of Spain’s civil war ended on April 1, 1939, the Franco regime sought to institutionalize its victory and establish control through the Manichean division of Spaniards into victors and vanquished, by methods that included the manipulation of public memory.\(^{145}\)

This included the sanctioning of extra-judicial murder, imprisonment, torture, rape, labour gangs, the appropriation of republican children by the State, and a campaign of slander, public humiliation, false accusations and denouncement.\(^{146}\) It was quite properly a tale of bloodshed and expiation, of horror and the denial of truth. All of that was still to come.

In July 1936, when faced with fending off the unwelcome reality of a military coup, the newly elected coalition government\(^{147}\) stirred — or rather the Spanish working people

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\(^{142}\) Paul Preston, *A Concise History*, 5
\(^{143}\) Preston, ibid., 5
\(^{145}\) Helen Graham, “The Spanish Civil War,” 320
\(^{146}\) Preston, *A Concise History*, 217-222; Graham, “Coming to Terms with the Past,” 29-31
\(^{147}\) The coalition was barely five months old when the army revolted, but it had legitimacy — and the numbers — on its side. Landis states, “[T]he Popular Front of the Spanish Republic was brought to power by the majority mandate of the people.” The tally awarded 4,838,449 votes to
rose up in a bid to protect their rights.\textsuperscript{148} The republic was at first curiously reluctant to arm “factory workers,”\textsuperscript{149} but with the alternative likely to be an oppressive conservative military junta and a return to feudalism, they relented. Nobody wanted to see power fall into the hands of the opposition party either (CEDA).\textsuperscript{150} Viewed in this light — as a democratic defence of liberty — the Spanish Civil War developed into a protracted struggle against the excesses of hereditary wealth and privilege. A people’s revolution was in the making in Barcelona. Newsinger declares that the “popular uprising had dealt the generals an unprecedented blow that makes the failure of the July coup one of the most heartening events in modern working-class history.”\textsuperscript{151} No doubt this was because a peoples’ revolution stirs the emotions as it symbolises the weak resisting the strong. The conflict struck an immediate response in the hearts and minds of the proletariat everywhere, including “unemployed miners” in Britain.\textsuperscript{152} Antony Beevor confirms that, “Almost 80 per cent of the volunteers from Great Britain were manual workers who either left their jobs or were unemployed.”\textsuperscript{153} Thousands of intellectuals and workers from all over Europe and the USA also descended on Spain to join in what was perceived as a crucial fight for democracy — freedom and liberty. This commitment may impress upon the contemporary mind as sheer romanticism, but as Hobsbawm explains, these men and

\textsuperscript{148} Ian Slater, \textit{Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One}, 127
\textsuperscript{149} Slater, ibid., 127; Bernard Crick, \textit{George Orwell: A Life}, 308
\textsuperscript{150} The Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas or CEDA was a right wing nationalist party.
\textsuperscript{151} John Newsinger, \textit{Orwell’s Politics}, 42
\textsuperscript{152} A. J. P. Taylor, \textit{English History}, 487
\textsuperscript{153} Antony Beevor, \textit{The Spanish Civil War}, 181
women were fighting for a common cause. Carr also believes that the willingness to take up arms was determined by “the prospect of creating a [new] modern democratic society.” Equally important was the need to unite against the forces of ‘evil,’ which was how fascism was perceived by many in England.

Orwell was completing the final draft of *Wigan Pier* when the war started. He argued strenuously for socialism over fascism. Socialism was ‘good,’ fascism inherently ‘bad.’ He states, “As I pointed out earlier, the advance of machine-technique must lead ultimately to some form of collectivism, but that form need not necessarily be equalitarian; that is, it need not be Socialism.” With Fascism overrunning a growing number of European countries, Orwell realised that the ultimate goal was a totalitarian world. Fascism appealed to capitalists and conservatives. He states, “It has been able to pose as the upholder of the European tradition, and to appeal to Christian belief, to patriotism and to the military virtues.” Fascism was everything that socialism was not. He later expounds this more fully in ‘The Lion and The Unicorn.’

Socialism aims, ultimately, at a world-state of free and equal human beings. It takes the equality of human beings for granted. Nazism assumes just the opposite. The driving force behind the Nazi movement is the belief in human *inequality*. The struggle in Spain was likely to prove important to European stability, as Orwell maintains in his pro-socialist *Wigan Pier* argument. He warns, “As I write this the Spanish

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154 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 160
155 Raymond Carr, *Images of the Spanish Civil War*, 7
156 Ian Slater, *Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One*, 129
157 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 200
158 Orwell, ibid., 199
159 Orwell, ibid., 200
160 Orwell, ibid., 199; Also, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 352
161 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 106
Fascist forces are bombing Madrid.”\textsuperscript{162} Europe risked being engulfed. Something needed to be done. Without waiting until after the Christmas holidays, the recently married Orwell “pawned his share of the Blair family silver” — what little there was of it — and set off for the Spanish front.\textsuperscript{163} Orwell had grasped only the theoretical and practical possibilities of socialism at this time. He had never experienced socialism close up. Spain showed him that a people’s revolution was possible, and the excitement of that moment changed his life.

\textbf{Localised Revolutionary Zeal}

Seen through Orwell’s eyes, Barcelona was a city that had successfully thrown off the oppressive yoke of class-based servitude, and adopted a colourful — ‘revolutionary’ — facade. Frances Lannon states, “he was exhilarated by his experience of revolutionary Barcelona … where a new, classless society seemed to be being created.”\textsuperscript{164} Although there were obvious signs of poverty all around, Orwell points out that the general atmosphere was carefree and buoyant.\textsuperscript{165} He was greatly encouraged by the revolutionary zeal, and the sense of easy “equality and freedom” in evidence.\textsuperscript{166} He cheerfully states, “Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonious speech had temporarily disappeared.”\textsuperscript{167} This impressed him greatly since at home he habitually attacked the English ruling class, and sided with the workers.

\textsuperscript{162} George Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 159
\textsuperscript{163} Bernard Crick, \textit{Orwell: A Life}, 312
\textsuperscript{164} Frances Lannon, \textit{The Spanish Civil War}, 75
\textsuperscript{165} Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 4
\textsuperscript{166} Orwell, ibid., 4
\textsuperscript{167} Orwell, ibid., 3
Orwell, always acutely conscious of the gradations of class difference in spite of his socialism, was utterly delighted. He was “in love with the spirit of radical egalitarianism,”168 thrilled by the absence of any pretence of snobbery and social hierarchy. As Newsinger states, “he could at last meet the working class on equal terms.”169 This uniformity also had a downside. In the Lenin Barracks where the militias were billeted, physical comforts were negligible. Orwell confirms, “We ate at long trestle-tables out of permanently greasy … pannikins and drank out of a dreadful thing called a porrón.”170 Barcelona was in the throes of a revolution and nobody was overly fussy about personal comforts, except perhaps George Orwell.

Barcelona’s exhilarating atmosphere of anarchy, intellectual freedom and class equality, which he described in some detail, could not last. Indeed, it was already winding down even as Orwell arrived.171 Franz Borkenau noted earlier in his diary (13-14 September 1936), “Compared with August the town is empty and quiet; the revolutionary fever is withering away.”172 With a few deft and colourful brush strokes, Orwell created a powerful atmosphere of purpose and determination, based solely on first impressions. The Barcelona he depicts is a city of blaring loudspeakers, brightly coloured revolutionary posters, ransacked churches, and friendly, denim clad workers.173 The main objection is that he barely had time to digest the sights and sounds of what was for him then an unfamiliar city. Michael Seidman argues that Orwell could not have had time to take in

168 Stuart Hall, “Conjuring Leviathan: Orwell on the State,” 219
169 John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics*, 45
170 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 6
171 John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics*, 45
172 Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit*, 169
173 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 3
the details. Giving the lie to Orwell’s glowing account, Seidman states, “beneath the surface of the militant’s revolution, a great mass of wage earners remained indifferent to the goals of ‘working class’ organizations.”\footnote{Michael Seidman, “The Unorwellian Barcelona,” \textit{European History Quarterly} 20 (1990): 164} When he returned to the city for a spell of leave after several months at the front, Orwell immediately noticed that the atmosphere had changed.\footnote{Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 82} He could find no trace of his former perceptions, for everyday life had apparently returned to pre-war conditions.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 88-9} The middle classes had returned in force, and shops sold an already dwindling supply of luxury goods at greatly inflated prices; well-dressed couples promenaded conspicuously, “sleek” cars appeared on the streets, and smart hotels and restaurants did a roaring trade.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 89, 93} Seidman argues that numbers of ordinary workers, most of them union members, had simply exploited the Barcelona situation: shirking their responsibilities, refusing to pay union fees, electricity bills, even rent, in order to survive.\footnote{Michael Seidman, “The Unorwellian Barcelona,” 169} Orwell had not realised any of these circumstances when he arrived.\footnote{Seidman, ibid., 167}

It was not until after the war, and only after reading the distortions of the International Press, that the many different pieces of the Spanish puzzle fell firmly into place for Orwell.\footnote{Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 200} He later admitted that the scenes of “equality” that he had initially witnessed were perhaps not as widespread throughout the country as he first imagined.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 210} George Woodcock maintains that Orwell thereafter carried a grudge because of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[175]{Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 82}
\footnotetext[176]{Orwell, ibid., 88-9}
\footnotetext[177]{Orwell, ibid., 89, 93}
\footnotetext[178]{Michael Seidman, “The Unorwellian Barcelona,” 169}
\footnotetext[179]{Seidman, ibid., 167}
\footnotetext[180]{Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 200}
\footnotetext[181]{Orwell, ibid., 210}
\end{footnotes}
Communist Party betrayal of the POUM militias — and rightly so.\textsuperscript{182} Professor Davison points out that in light of recent information there is little doubt that the “liquidation” of the Trotskyists had been planned from the outset. Davison reiterates that, “As far back as October 1936 — before Orwell had even set out for Spain — Alexander Orlov, head of the NKVA (sic)\textsuperscript{183} in Spain, assured his Headquarters that ‘the Trotskyist organization POUM can easily be liquidated.’”\textsuperscript{184} In fact, the plans were already drawn up and waiting to be implemented at the time of Orwell’s arrival in Spain. This information was unavailable and unknown to Orwell, although he was canny enough to realise that the attack on the POUM when it did occur, was deliberately planned. It took tremendous courage to negotiate the perilous times in Barcelona at the height of the communist purge. Hindsight is a useful teacher. Orwell was pensive about Spain and the war for some time after his return to England. As a result of which he earned the lasting enmity of the English Communist Party because of his outspoken critical journalism.

\textbf{Putting Socialism in context: experience over theory}

Prior to making his decision to go to Spain, Orwell espoused a doctrine of radical socialism. He used much of the second half of \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} to marshal his favourite pro-Socialist arguments. There were gaps in his reasoning because (although he understood socialism in theory) he had little experience as to how socialism worked in practice. His research had taken him into the homes of working families in the North of England, and he had spoken with them and transcribed their lifestyles. The majority of

\textsuperscript{182} George Woodcock, \textit{The Crystal Spirit}, 17
\textsuperscript{183} The NKVD, and the GPU were both forerunners of the KGB (the Secret Police).
\textsuperscript{184} Peter Davison, ed. \textit{George Orwell: Facing Unpleasant Facts}, 32
these folk were union members, ILP and Labour Party supporters rather than Communist Party members. It was not until he arrived in Barcelona a few months later, that he actually witnessed a popular socialist movement. In Chapter XI of *Wigan Pier*, he lists what he believes are the main objections to socialism. These are the common misconceptions aired in conversation. They are not necessarily correct, but they are valid in terms of his argument. Scott Lucas ungenerously refers to this as “a sustained attack on the organised activism of socialists.” Lucas fails to mention the fact that Orwell is deliberately ‘ruffling feathers’ — “for the moment I am *advocatus diaboli*.” If socialism is to be accepted as a viable alternative to capitalism, then it must be able to withstand a sustained attack. That is his reason, method and imperative. Orwell assures the reader that these antagonisms have arisen from countless discussions with socialism’s detractors. He argues that the main obstacles to conversion are the socialists themselves. Orwell has a genuine talent for writing unflattering ‘lists’ in relation to those he dislikes. Here he includes “every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, ‘Nature Cure’ quack, pacifist and feminist in England.” Is it any wonder, he argues, that ‘ordinary’ working people are put off by such “mingy” specimens as these? There is more complexity to his argument of course. Party members employ terminology that ‘ordinary’ people do not necessarily use or understand. He supports this

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185 Scott Lucas, *Orwell*, 38
186 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 160
187 “Therefore, rather paradoxically, in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it.” Orwell, ibid., 160
188 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, ibid.
189 Orwell, ibid., 161
190 Orwell, ibid.
191 Orwell, ibid., 162
by claiming, “The English are not intellectual.”\textsuperscript{192} For Orwell socialism needed to construct and reproduce the authentic voice of the average citizen. It must appeal to the man or woman in the street.\textsuperscript{193}

A specialist and technical vocabulary clearly does have its place, and working people are fully capable of understanding complex matters. It is often necessary to develop a concise and precise line of argument to display compelling evidence to advantage. Yet sometimes specialist knowledge (jargon) requires ‘translation’ as it moves to more divergent contexts. There is little to be gained — for instance — from the stilted Trade Union gobbledygook espoused by the likes of Fred Kite in the Peter Seller’s comedy \textit{I’m Alright Jack} (1959). Clearly Orwell had little time for specialist Marxist debates or language, or for the idealistic leftist prose of wealthy intellectuals like Strachey.\textsuperscript{194} In fact Orwell’s idealised working man has far more use for his instincts than the books of educated comrades. Obviously, there are consequences (penalties) for replacing experience with expertise, or opinion with research, yet it suits Orwell’s arguments to conflate these terms. A working man already knows implicitly that something is wrong with the capitalist system. There is little need for him to struggle through the complexities of a book to find it, even though he sometimes lacks the vocabulary and context in which to defend and define his concerns. Orwell affirmed that, “To the ordinary working man … Socialism does not mean much more than better wages

\begin{footnotes}
\item[192] Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” \textit{Essays}, 140
\item[193] George Orwell, \textit{Wigan Pier}, 163
\item[194] Orwell, ibid.
\end{footnotes}
and shorter hours and nobody bossing you around.”195 The difficulty in translating between aims and agenda, goals and outcome is inherent, because revolutionary change surely involves more than paying lip service to ‘the cause.’

A successful revolution, at least to begin with, requires full acknowledgement and understanding of socialist tenets if anything of value is to be achieved. Socialism, if it is applied fairly, ultimately changes the way all the people live and work. This was evidently why the vibrancy of the Barcelona streets came as such a shock to Orwell.196 It appeared that in Spain even those without formal education were fully awakened (aroused) to the implications of change. He states, “Nobody said ‘Señor’ or ‘Don’ or even ‘Usted’; everyone called everyone else ‘Comrade’ and ‘Thou,’ and said ‘Salud!’ instead of ‘Buenos días.’”197 There was an air of unsuppressed excitement and expectation, even though there were fuel and food shortages.198 People actually had faith in the socialist catchphrases.199 The bourgeoisie had been ousted, and the city belonged to the people.200 There was a desire to remake all citizens as equal and create a revolutionary change to the state.201 Fervour brought about and through direct experience was the missing ingredient to Orwell’s Wigan Pier argument.

195 George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 163-164
196 Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 2
197 Orwell, ibid., 3
198 Orwell, ibid., 4
199 Orwell, ibid., 4
200 Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 351
201 Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 3
202 Orwell, ibid., 4
Encapsulating the events leading to War

It is impossible to explore fully, in the context of a single chapter, the intricate chain of events — the historical and political twists and subtleties — that produced the Spanish Civil War. Paul Preston describes the decline of the pro-fascist “Catholic authoritarian party’s” defeat of the ‘left-Republicans’ in the crucial November 1933 elections; the explosive retaliatory miners “uprising in Asturias in 1934,” so brutally crushed by General Franco; rising unemployment, strikes, evictions and wage cuts for agricultural workers, which culminated in the left regaining power in February 1936. Following this string of events there had been a number of emotionally-charged uprisings. Peasants “in Salamanca and Toledo” invaded farms, and “in Cordoba and Jaen” fields, orchards, machinery, farm buildings and livestock were seized. The oppressed “day-labourers” (braceros) were ‘merely taking’ what they believed was rightfully theirs — a rough socialist justice. It was time for CEDA and the monarchists to respond. Raymond Carr states, “Soon after the February 1936 elections, junior officers and a group of generals believed that the time for action had come.” Orwell adds that when the war erupted (July 17, 1936), the brutalised, starved and evicted peasantry simply turned on the

202 Hugh Thomas required well over 900 pages to do the matter justice in his classic treatise, The Spanish Civil War.
203 CEDA
204 Paul Preston, A Concise History, 42-44
205 Preston, ibid., 55-56
206 Preston, ibid., 45
207 Preston, ibid., 58-59
208 Preston, ibid., 63
209 Raymond Carr, Images of the Spanish Civil War, 9
wealthy. Catholic churches were looted and vandalised (allegedly nuns were ravished),
and priests beaten and murdered; such was the vengeful spirit of the working classes.210

Years of pent-up fury over unfair treatment and exploitation turned into
retribution. Orwell’s vivid depiction of middle class greed in Barcelona sums up the main
reason for working class anger: “A fat man eating quails while children are begging for
bread is a disgusting sight.”211 In Catalonia the militant blue-collar union, the CNT, closely
affiliated through necessity with the Anarchists (FAI), desperately wanted to seize the
moment and transfer factory ownership to their own members. Orwell states, “they aimed
at workers’ control and [were] not [interested in] a parliamentary democracy.”212 He
asserts they were “Uncompromisingly [hostile] to the bourgeoisie and the Church.”213 It is
doubtful whether much would have come from this position had the Communist Party not
intervened. The POUM and FAI were minority parties, already dangerously out of step
with the Spanish Communist Party, which received its orders (and funding) directly from
Moscow.214 Where Spain was concerned, Stalin was opposed to a popular uprising. This
(doomed) strategy however, was the declared aim of the Anarcho-Syndicalists. Revolution
was definitely not part of the Spanish Communist Party plan either. Stalin’s propaganda
was so successful that “Outside Spain few people grasped that there was a revolution;
inside Spain nobody doubted it,”215 but by then it was already too late. Orwell adds, “It
was the Communist thesis that revolution … would be fatal, and that what was to be

210 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 190
211 Orwell, ibid., 95
212 Orwell, ibid., 204
213 Orwell, ibid.
214 Orwell, ibid., 193
215 Orwell, ibid.
aimed at in Spain was not worker’s control, but bourgeois democracy.”216 This, it was decided, would best serve Russia’s foreign policy.217 Unlike the Anarchists, and the POUM, who had no long-term policies outside of workers control of the various trades, the Spanish Communist Party had “a definite practical policy” for the whole country. This goal — put simply — entailed “getting on with the war,” which made plenty of sense to Orwell.218 Left to their own devices, the unions would push for higher wages, and shorter working hours, which would ultimately harm overseas investment and the economy.219 Under FAI leadership, the economy would implode. The Communists however, appealed to the better-educated (politically savvy) republican middle-classes, on account of their sound economic management policies.220 Orwell also believed that the Communist Party’s long-range strategies were infinitely superior to those of the Anarcho-Syndicalists and the POUM combined. In order to silence dissent, reduce friction, and gain ascendancy in the Government, the Communists needed to disarm and discredit the Anarchists, which they quickly and effectively did in 1937.

**Manning the Barricades**

In his own words, Orwell “ignored the political side of the war” when he first arrived in Spain.221 He had little trouble identifying the common enemy — Fascism — and declared himself willing to fight against it; but his political education did not really

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216 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 193
217 John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics*, 44
218 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 205
219 Michael Seidman, “The Unorwellian Barcelona,” 170
220 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 205
221 Orwell, ibid., 188
begin until a week’s leave spent in Barcelona (May 1937). Soon after his arrival in the 
city, the ugly confrontation threatening between the Anarchists and the Communists flared 
up into actual fighting.

Heavily armed police occupied the CNT-controlled telephone exchange.222 There 
was a spontaneous response from working-class Barcelona as a general strike 
quickly gripped the city, hundreds of barricades were erected and armed CNT 
members took to the streets. The spirit of July had resurrected.223

The Anarchists believed that it was the Communists rather than the Government who 
issued the order to take over the exchange.224 After hearing sporadic gunfire, Orwell and a 
friend decided to investigate, and set off in the direction of the POUM headquarters.225 He 
described the scene as he found it: “All over the building, on the stairs and on the 
pavement outside, small knots of people were standing and talking excitedly.”226 From 
outside came the sounds of gunfire; inside, an officer tried to restore order, while someone 
else distributed guns and ammunition. Orwell stayed there for a while, but grew hungry 
and went out in search of food. Under direct orders from Georges Kopp his commanding 
officer, Orwell spent “three days and nights” guarding the POUM headquarters from the 
roof of a tall building opposite. He recalls, “I was in no danger, I suffered from nothing 
worse than hunger and boredom, yet it was one of the most unbearable periods of my 
whole life.”227 One can only wonder how he must of felt, sitting there pondering what was 
happening to his beloved revolution. With little to do, he passed the time reading a

222 These were the ‘blue-collar’ Anarcho-Syndicalists. 
223 John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics*, 50 
224 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, 331 
225 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 102 
226 Orwell, ibid., 103 
227 Orwell, ibid., 111
selection of inexpensive “Penguin paperbacks.””\textsuperscript{228} After a period of seeming inactivity, life returned to normal, although the barricades remained in place. Orwell came down from the roof and went back to his hotel. He had only fired one shot in anger.

John Newsinger states, “The accuracy of Orwell’s written account so soon after the events … cannot be seriously disputed.”\textsuperscript{229} Orwell grasped that the Spanish Communist Party did not want a revolution but rather surprisingly they wanted a return to democracy. In fact, they were more interested in serving their political masters — “securing an alliance with Britain and France” — than they were in aiding the revolution in Spain.\textsuperscript{230} As he afterwards described events, “Communists everywhere are in alliance with bourgeois reformism.”\textsuperscript{231} Peter Davison states, “The vision of a socialist society that he experienced on first arriving in Barcelona was not destroyed by Franco; it was betrayed by his Communist allies.”\textsuperscript{232} This revelation must have caused Orwell considerable disappointment. He had been very impressed by the freedom and goodwill that he encountered in Barcelona upon arrival. It struck him at the time that the Republic was manfully “facing destiny with its eyes open.”\textsuperscript{233} Close to five months later, while manning the Barricades, he realised that it had all been for nothing. The Communists, intent on reversing the gains achieved by the anarchists and Trade Unionists in 1936, pressured the Government to arrest the POUM leadership.\textsuperscript{234} Negrin, the new Prime Minister, was

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{228} D. J. Taylor, \textit{Orwell: The Life}, 222
\bibitem{229} John Newsinger, \textit{Orwell’s Politics}, 50
\bibitem{230} Newsinger, ibid., 44
\bibitem{231} George Orwell, “Spilling the Spanish Beans,” 216
\bibitem{232} Orwell, \textit{Facing Unpleasant Facts}, CW XI, 35
\bibitem{233} Orwell, “Caesarean Section in Spain,” \textit{Orwell in Spain}, 327
\bibitem{234} Orwell, “Eye-Witness in Barcelona,” 58
\end{thebibliography}
directly responsible for issuing the orders, but the Communist Party in all likelihood instigated the events.\textsuperscript{235} It was their secret police who made the arrests, and their guards who patrolled the streets. Orwell states, “The accusation of espionage against the POUM rested solely upon articles in the Communist press and … of the … secret police.”\textsuperscript{236} With the realisation of this betrayal, Orwell’s political apprenticeship could be said to have formally ended.\textsuperscript{237} He later recounted in \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, how distasteful a thing it is to delve into party politics — “it is like diving into a cesspool. But it is necessary to try to establish the truth, so far as it is possible.”\textsuperscript{238} The main difficulty of course is verification.

Most of the propaganda techniques (lies and innuendo) used by the Soviet press are well known in 2005, but at the time they appeared scandalous. Orwell went into considerable detail in order to expose the vicious hate campaign that was directed against the POUM. The organisation was accused of ‘spying’ for Franco — of being Fifth Columnists — and was denounced ( ludicrously, in Orwell’s view) as ‘Trotskyist.’\textsuperscript{239} For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the use of that term, the POUM were erroneously labelled “Anarchists” in the press.\textsuperscript{240} Much capital was made from public ignorance of the facts and of the underlying political issues at stake.\textsuperscript{241}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[235] Raymond Carr, \textit{Images of the Spanish Civil War}, 12-13
\item[236] George Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 244
\item[237] Orwell, ibid., 127, 131
\item[238] Orwell, ibid., 216
\item[239] Orwell, ibid., 227, 240, 245-246
\item[240] Orwell, ibid., 230
\item[241] Orwell, ibid., 235
\end{footnotes}
A Journalist at War

Orwell was badly wounded soon after he returned to the front at the conclusion of his week’s leave. He was shot through the throat by a sniper.242 Luckily, the range was rather less than 200 yards, and the bullet was hot enough to cauterise the wound.243 He was fortunate because it had narrowly missed the vulnerable carotid artery. Orwell’s wife Eileen, who was based in Barcelona, telegraphed his father, “ERIC SLIGHTLY WOUNDED PROGRESS EXCELLENT SENDS LOVE NO NEED FOR ANXIETY.”244 The wound, although damaging, healed sufficiently well and Orwell recuperated in hospital before returning to Barcelona with discharge papers. It was June 20, 1937, and he had been in Spain for approximately six months. With his wound mending, Orwell was in grave danger, although unaware of it at the time. He was still confident that he would be able to leave the country. What he did not know was that the Secret Police had them both under surveillance. Just days before his discharge from hospital the hotel room where Eileen was staying was raided and all of his papers (including his Aragon diary) were taken away for appraisal.245 Neither of them realised that a report was being prepared which described the Orwell’s and several other prominent Britons as “confirmed Trotskyists.”246 It appears extraordinary how far the Communist Party was prepared to go to discredit its so-called enemies.

242 Orwell, ibid., 137
244 Bernard Crick, Orwell: A life, 336
245 Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 178-179
246 Orwell, “Escape from Spain, 23 June 1937,” in CW XI, 31
Orwell had much to say about Spain. It had affected him deeply. His bullet wound would remain a constant reminder. It was in Spain that he first truly “believed” in socialism. 247 At the same time, the street fighting and barricades (3-6 May 1937) which precipitated the wholesale destruction of the POUM left him deeply disillusioned. He was not aware of all the details, but was canny enough to work out for himself that the seizure of the Telephone Exchange was a deliberate and provocative political move. John Newsinger describes how the initiative was undermined by the FAI.

The POUM leader Julian Gorkin … and his comrades had argued that now was the last opportunity they would have to settle accounts with the Communists and their bourgeois allies. 248 There was a problem however; the anarchist’s (the FAI) were not in favour of opposing the government — instead they voted for a return to work. Ultimately the decision on the part of the anarchists not to resist played right into the SCPs hands. By June, Largo Caballero had been toppled, and the Soviet ‘puppet’ Negrin was inserted into office. Immediately after the changeover, the POUM was outlawed. As the final days of Orwell’s war drew to its nail-biting climax, dozens of his militia comrades were indiscriminately rounded up and imprisoned. Even Georges Kopp, the Russian born Belgian national who was also Orwell’s commanding officer was imprisoned.

After a dramatic train ride and a nervous border crossing into France, Orwell, his wife and two English ILP colleagues headed for home. 249 Once there, he wrote disparagingly that the “war has probably produced a richer crop of lies than any event

248 John Newsinger, Orwell’s Politics, 50
249 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia, 179-184
since the Great War.”250 He strenuously objected to the deliberate use of misinformation (or ‘spin’) by journalists for political purposes, believing it to be both immoral and unethical. This he discussed more fully in ‘Looking Back on the Spanish War’ (1942). Orwell thereafter maintained that the failure to disclose all the ‘angles’ stifled objectivity. He insisted that the conspiracy of lies and distortion deployed by both Republicans and Nationalists alike inhibited the possibility of a true and accurate history of the Spanish Civil War ever being compiled.251 Newspapers even reported fictional accounts of battles in some instances.252 One can only imagine Orwell’s response to the standard of reportage from the Falklands,253 the Gulf War (Desert Storm),254 and the NATO bombardment of Serbia and Kosovo. Quite likely he would have been scandalised by reasons given for the invasion of Iraq.

The business of war attracts revenue for corporations close to governments.255 In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the renegade Emmanuel Goldstein, analyses and exteriorizes the Inner Party’s theory of warfare in a forbidden publication. He states, “war involves very small numbers of people, mostly highly-trained specialists, and causes comparatively few casualties.”256 This predates contemporary warfare by some fifty years. In Oceania’s

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250 George Orwell, “Spilling the Spanish Beans,” 301
251 Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 353
252 Orwell, ibid., 352
256 Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 164
economy, war is the main export. The large rival superstates Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia, “are permanently at war and have been so for the past twenty-five years.”

Thus war represents an operation with no immediate end in sight. Orwell obviously kept the Cold War in mind as he wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but it is difficult for the contemporary reader not to equate Goldstein’s theorising with Mr. Bush’s war against terror. With the latest advances in (destructive) technology — ‘smart bombs,’ pilotless ‘drones,’ and precision laser sighting — warfare in the twenty-first century has been transformed for pleasure and for profit into prime-time ‘infotainment.’

The end result is still the same — death, destruction, and mayhem. Yet, when it is edited and evocatively conveyed in colour, war produces huge profits for the arms manufacturing fraternity.

Despite the clinically detached marketing strategies employed by the Pentagon and the British Ministry of Defence (MOD), war is still a brutal, dirty business. Is it possible to sanitize something so abhorrent? Orwell states, “Bullets hurt, corpses stink, [and] men under fire are often so frightened that they wet their trousers.”

Killing other human beings can never be satisfactorily explained away by artful rhetoric, or excused as ‘expedient’ (or just) by Presidents and military pundits. Orwell presented an unromantic (‘gloves off’) appraisal of ‘modern’ warfare. Soldiers are mostly cold, frightened, and tired. There is no glamour attached to soldiering. The abruptness of death is beyond

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257 George Orwell, ibid., 164
260 Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 345
261 Orwell, ibid.
even Hemingway’s stylish prose. Orwell accused the English press of hypocrisy.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 345} The \textit{News Chronicle} and the \textit{Daily Worker} traded on people’s ignorance.\footnote{Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 235} He presented his own eyewitness account of the May Day barricades to even the ledger.

Orwell discussed propaganda at length in \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, admitting the problems that any worthwhile journalist faces in explicating fact from fiction. The difficulty arises, “because of [a] lack of non-propagandist documents” made available.\footnote{George Orwell, ibid. 227} Clearly, the Spanish Communist Party had the most to gain from a Republican victory, and the outlawing of the POUM militias and the suppression of the revolution in Barcelona merely hastened the Party’s ascendancy. The Soviets had invested huge amounts of capital in setting up the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920, with the understanding that total obedience to Moscow was considered obligatory.\footnote{Paul Anderson and Kevin Davey, “Moscow Gold?,” \textit{New Statesman} (7 April 1995): 26} Stalin also took pains not to upset Britain or France by his involvement in Spain.\footnote{T. R. Fyvel, \textit{George Orwell: A Personal Memoir} (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982), 73} This helps explain the paralysed revolution, and the resulting pro Soviet bias in the English press. Communist Party pressure also accounts for the difficulties that Orwell (the political correspondent) subsequently experienced as he tried to release a fuller version of events.

There is no real reason to suppose that Stalin was greatly interested in Spain, though he offered to back the Republic from the outset. Historian Paul Johnson claims that
the Soviets “regarded [the war] mainly as an international propaganda exercise.”267 This is plausible, for Eric Hobsbawm confirms that the decision to back the Republic “enormously raised the [international] prestige of the USSR,” they being the only ones to do so openly.268 Britain and France (perhaps wisely) chose to remain aloof from the ensuing struggle — it was certainly less costly at the time.269 The war provided Stalin with easy access to the large Spanish gold reserves. He systematically stripped the Republic (and therefore Spain itself) of two-thirds of its reserve in payment for Soviet advisors, tanks, planes and munitions. Franco also managed his financial liabilities skilfully, securing credit with the Reich, which thereafter retained a keen interest in seeing him safely into power.270 The opposite was true of Stalin, who lost interest. Johnson states:

By the autumn Stalin had extracted the last ounce of propaganda value … had completed his purge and was already thinking of a new deal. … He had also got all of the Republic’s gold. So he cut off aid, and Franco was able to open his last Catalanian offensive, just before Christmas.271

The reality was, that with the Soviets no longer advising the Government, or supplying munitions, the Nationalist forces, gradually gained control of the country. Franco’s army was better trained, equipped, and properly led, and by the end of January 1939, the war was over.272 As Helen Graham has shown in recent scholarship, Franco’s regime was dedicated to burying and hiding truth. What occurred in the long years after the war — the murders and vilifications — is only now beginning to surface. It is especially significant that Orwell should be the one to warn us of what to expect from the Francoists. He had

267 Paul Johnson, “The High Noon of Aggression,” 330
268 Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 159
269 Hobsbawm, ibid.
270 Paul Johnson, “The High Noon of Aggression,” 332
271 Johnson, ibid., 338
272 Raymond Carr, “Introduction,” *Images of the Spanish Civil War*, 20
witnessed the strangulation of truth and the death of history, and the experience shocked him to the core.

Words and writing frame the ideology of war. Narratives of victory and defeat are delineated and composed of powerful iconic images. Words are like bombs and bullets; they are capable of destroying a life — they are also powerful creative forces for good: “In the beginning was the Word.” Orwell understood the authority and value of words, largely because he had witnessed the denial of truth at the height of the Spanish Civil War. For Orwell, Spain was a turning point — an epiphany — and thereafter he vowed to pursue and unmask intellectual dishonesty wherever it was to be found. Orwell’s antipathy to communism is also directly traceable to his final weeks in Spain. He was deeply affected by the senseless death of Bob Smillie — something he was unable to forgive. Lasting hostilities were kindled as a result of his outspoken opposition to Soviet treachery. Significantly, Orwell was able to move beyond his earlier naivety concerning Stalin’s foreign and domestic policies, whereas Pollitt and the English Communist Party rank and file were not. In the next chapter, I pursue Orwell’s nostalgic vision of rural England and its traditions. He was at heart happiest when living at home in England. As a writer, he was aware of the need for careful editing and the skilful arrangement (manipulation) and presentation of words. Memory, history and truth are

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274 He was the grandson of Robert Smillie, a leader in the Scottish Miners Union. Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, 336; Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 208
275 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 170-171
fundamental to his writing. He wanted to change people, to cause them to look inwards, to reject the status quo, and that required employing appropriate words and phrases. Presenting the known facts was always an integral part of his writing. Orwell devoted the remainder of his life to learning and fine-tuning the art of persuasive political writing. The result is that his collected essays and journalism are among the finest examples available in the world of letters.
probably, that our chief job is inventing words. But not a bit but it'll be a lot smaller before we've finished with it. The Party of it! We're destroying words — scores of them, hundreds of them, hopes not to leave any word in existence that's likely to become every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. The Party obsolete before 2050. The great wastage is in verbs and adjectives. hopes not to leave not a single word in existence that will become My job is the adjectives. Of course you realise that I'm only one of obsolete before 2050.

thousands - tens of thousands. Every day I talk over the telescreen with people in Melbourne and Durban and Washington. The whole thing is a miracle of co-ordination. They say that not a single word goes into the Dictionary until Big Brother has passed it personally.

He paused to bite hungrily into his bread & swallowed a couple of mouthfuls, then continued almost at once, with a sort of pedant's passion. His thin dark face had become animated, and his eyes had lost their mocking expression and become almost dreamy.

"It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. It isn't..."
Chapter Four

Nostalgia: Truth and Memory Revisited

[M]ost people do not arrange their memories with dates as markers.¹

Paul Thompson

We can only conjure the past through contemporary contexts. All understandings of those events must filter through present perceptions.²

Leanne McRae

Few critics deny that genuine doubt arises over certain passages of Orwell’s documentary prose. The convergence of fiction and non-fiction, creativity and authenticity, is a provocative trigger of debates about the limits and trajectories of journalism.³ Jayson Blair’s recent departure from truth and reality at The New York Times offers a timely warning and has pedagogic value, but it is by no means an isolated occurrence.⁴ Fraudulent reportage reinforces the readerships’ general mistrust of the

¹ Paul Thompson, The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society (St Alban’s, Herts: Paladin, 1977), 17
² Leanne McRae, “Changi: Dangerous Adventures in Memory,” Metro Magazine 139 (2004): 75
profession. In Jayson Blair’s case, lying in print also reveals the considerable temptations and pressures connected with high-profile professional journalism. This discussion is significant, for Orwell’s reputation was build upon a foundation of straightforward honesty and clear unadorned prose. In the short essay ‘Why I Write,’ as the title suggests, Orwell sets out his guiding principles. Speaking of the catalyst for his theorising (Homage to Catalonia) he states, it “is of course, a frankly political book, but in the main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form. I did try very hard … to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts.” It is a confession revelling in ambiguity and contradiction, but it demonstrates his awareness of the volatile and fraying edges of words like accuracy, truth, evidence and documentation.

A writer has a duty to draw upon words and ideas of lasting value, but great writing must also consider aesthetics. Orwell believed in objectivity, which raises much thought and questioning for theorists and researchers who follow his career. In Homage to Catalonia, he intended to write a truth, not an ideology. In Spain, Orwell believed that there was propaganda to countermand — the denial of truth. Concerning denial, as opposed to mere dissemination and obfuscation, Ross Chambers insists that, “To deny is

6 I return to this important debate later in the chapter.
to recognise, indirectly, what one refuses directly to see … the more vehement or 
adamant the denial, the more clearly it constitutes such an acknowledgement.”
Hurtling forward in time and remaking the context, President Bush’s rhetoric concerning 
the invasion of Iraq and the missing WMDs is a stunning application of Chambers’ point. 
I shall return to this “war on language” (and the war in deed) in chapter six. Obviously, 
there is much to debate about the historical and journalistic value of Orwell’s writing. 
Historian Robert Pearce questions whether he is a trustworthy reporter, citing statistical 
and chronological errors and inconsistencies in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. These have 
emerged from a rigorous comparison of the published text with the diary notes that 
Orwell kept at the time. 
Professor Crick, seeking to be conciliatory, is more even handed. He states, “To question the literal truth or straightforwardness of some of his 
 writings … is … to notice how his skill as a writer … [has] made some of us willing to accept his partly imagined worlds as literally true.” The reader, in this case Crick, is 
(always) complicit to Orwell’s intentions. We find the Orwell that we need for our 
context and politics. Pearce argues that Orwell’s school essay ‘Such, Such Were the 
Joys’ (1947), differs considerably from contemporary accounts written by Cyril 
Connolly, Gavin Maxwell, and Alaric Jacob, who attended the same prep school in 
Eastbourne, Sussex — St Cyprian’s. This is hardly surprising. Connolly’s prep school 
reminiscence is certainly different in tone and in emphasis, but difference alone is

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11 Chambers, ibid., 171 
12 Robert Pearce, “Revisiting Orwell’s Wigan Pier,” *History* 82, no. 267 (July 1997) 
13 Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life, 36 
insufficient reason to mistrust Orwell’s version entirely. In *Enemies of Promise* (1938), Connolly readily admits, “[Orwell] saw through St Wulfric’s,15 despised Sambo and hated Flip but was invaluable to them as scholarship fodder.”16 Connolly, a more self-indulgent personality than the aloof and at times deeply cynical Eric Blair, was apparently unfazed by the restrictive school routine. As a result, his introspection is more generous and forgiving. Pearce would rather credit Alaric Jacob, who was certainly no friend of Orwell’s,17 with the more balanced perspective. Jacob states, “The truth as I saw it was that the Wilkes family, for all their faults, were not monsters and that the education they offered was, within the cramped ethos of that time, admirable.”18 Curiously, Pearce overlooks the fact that Jacob, like Orwell in *Such, Such Were the Joys* is also indulging an adult reminiscence of distant boyhood. Why should Alaric Jacob’s ‘balanced’ reflections be any more valid than Orwell’s vehemence? In deference to the vigorous tone of Orwell’s essay, Clive James compares it to “panels by Hieronymus Bosch.”19 Different writers approach the same subject matter discovering separate Orwell’s for their context. It seems that Alaric Jacob was more able to overlook the discomforts of school, whereas Orwell was not.

Orwell doggedly asserts that his own memories of the school were uniformly bleak and harrowing. His tone throughout is angry and disapproving, “As for St

15 Orwell referred to the school by its correct name of St Cyprian’s.
17 Alaric Jacob, “Sharing Orwell’s ‘Joys’ — But Not His Fears,” in Christopher Norris (ed.), *Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the left* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 69
18 Jacob, “Sharing Orwell’s ‘Joys,’” 72
Cyprian’s, for years I loathed its very name so deeply that I could not view it with enough detachment to see the significance of the things that happened to me there.”20 It is important to stress that the typical English preparatory school at this time (and well into the 1950s and 1960s) was “a fairly dismal place.”21 That is an understatement — I hated my first year at preparatory school.22 There was loneliness and the disruption of home life to negotiate, not forgetting frequent dormitory, desk and locker ‘inspections,’ appalling food, and the ridiculous ill-fitting uniform.23 School life was also quite bizarre. I have vivid memories of one small boy who thought (and acted) as though he were a train. During recess, he could be observed quietly building up a head of steam in a siding, or shunting about in a rail yard of his imagining. His younger brother was quite normal and had no such ambitions to transform into transport. Being thrust into so alien an environment — the British preparatory system — was shocking for all of us. Pearce infers that Orwell lied,24 using the cover of his otherwise dependable honesty as a shield.25 It is hard to imagine how Pearce confirms this deceit with such certainty. Orwell’s motives appear to be those commonly associated with pure spite. He clearly detests all memory of St Cyprian’s and intends to write it out of his system. The essay is a vehicle for Orwell’s rebuttal of a cultural elitism built solely upon nepotism, snobbishness and economic superiority. As Slater maintains, “he held the upper classes

22 I should point out that my parents first sent me away to boarding school (pre-prep.) two years earlier than most, aged six-and-a-half. I learned self-reliance from these experiences, but have always believed that boarding school should be reserved for the mid-to-late teens rather than primary and pre-teens children.
23 Parents of ‘new boys’ were encouraged to buy clothes a size or two bigger to allow for growth, hence in that first year shorts and pullovers were always ridiculously baggy.
24 Robert Pearce, “Truth and Falsehood,” 385
25 Pearce cites Richard Hoggart, ibid.
guilty of actively creating an acceptance of inequality.”26 St Cyprians was part of an educational system that shamelessly denigrated pupils from less wealthy families. For this and other related ‘crimes,’ Orwell neither forgave nor forgot. This essay cannot be explained away as a work of fiction.27 Such an explanation is too convenient. The damage to St Cyprians (now defunct) reputation, whether Orwell’s essay is true or not, is impossible to retract. Our function as researchers is to understand how his words, politics and ideas travel through time, rather than manage the impossible task of looking for accuracy from a long-departed era.

Recreating the past as it actually happened is not possible. Understanding history and the trajectories of historiography — the writing of history — is a more realistic goal. More recently, Piers Brendon reviewed two new Orwell biographies in The Guardian. He finds that the exaggerated “awfulness” of the Orwell school narrative is now firmly entrenched in popular memory28 — where it will undoubtedly remain. Thus the Orwell mystique is saved up for future exploitation. The St Cyprians incident should be put down to Orwell’s ‘take’ on the world in which he came of age. He is not the first writer to have hated school, or to have attacked privilege, and he will surely not be the last — Humanum est errare.

26 Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 2nd edition (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 78
27 Pearce, “Truth and Falsehood,” 385
This chapter tracks and unravels the entrails of Nostalgia, Memory and History, — all of which forms an integral part of George Orwell’s writing. Questions concerning truth, denial and falsehood in journalism — and therefore in written history29 — initially arose for Orwell during the Spanish Civil War. He doubted whether an accurate account of the war was indeed possible given the blatant propagandist influence of the Spanish press. In one of his *As I Please* columns he states, “Accurate figures, objective accounts of what was happening, simply did not exist.”30 This omission infers that future generations of Spanish school children would grow up with an errant (or variant) version of wartime events. Franco’s ‘official’ history of the Spanish Civil War was little more than a defilement of factual reality. The Francoist narrative, remarkable in its fraudulence, was also unassailable, since only the foolhardy would dare to confront the dictatorship openly. Plainly then, words can be harnessed for unprincipled causes. Ross Chambers recognises that,

> Language per se is a neutral entity, remarkably tolerant of what is done with it and resilient when it suffers damage; it is the warfare conducted with and by means of words that can do lasting historical damage.31

Orwell reached a similar conclusion after his years working for the BBC. He readily appreciated how easily ‘ordinary’ non-technical language could be mobilised and manipulated for overtly political (and frequently duplicitous) purposes. In a 1945

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29 Jenkins states, “There is no possibility that any historicization of ‘the past’ can ever literally be true, objective, fair, non-figural, non-positioned, and so on.” Keith Jenkins, “On Disobedient Histories,” *Rethinking History* 7, no. 3 (2003): 367. This raises inherent difficulties for everyone. Is there an objective truth? Yes, there is. I agree with Eric Hobsbawm, “We cannot invent our facts,” but it is difficult to argue, especially in light of Jenkins’ rhetorical legerdemain. See *On History* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 6


31 Ross Chambers, “The War of the Words,” 171
Tribune essay, Orwell sets forth the equation most commonly used for determining an unreflective and accommodating public. He states, “Whenever A and B are in opposition to one another, anyone who attacks or criticises A is accused of aiding and abetting B … Therefore, say the supporters of A, shut up and don’t criticize: or at least criticize ‘constructively,’ which in practice always means favourably.” This automatically creates ethical problems for journalists seeking to present the available facts truthfully. Contemporary examples of ‘A’: ‘B’ reasoning arises whenever the Bush Administration releases an updated statement on the war in Iraq, or pressures smaller nations to comply with US foreign policy. Dissenting views are quashed, ridiculed or denied, and the overall quality of professional journalism suffers as a result. By resorting to already existing stock phrases and glib new slogans, the White House realises that the general public is unlikely to hear what is actually being stated or claimed. The impassive unemotional terms — ‘collateral damage,’ ‘selective targeting,’ ‘friendly fire,’ and ‘regime change,’ — are on the surface, unlikely to cause offence. Chambers argues that these contain within themselves assertions of denial and acknowledgement. Thus, each carefully worded catchphrase outwardly disguises the likelihood of death and or serious injury, while harbouring an embedded warning. ‘Friendly fire’ — though a

33 George Orwell, “Through a Glass Rosily,” 53
34 He adds, “And from this it is only a short step to arguing that the suppression and distortion of known facts is the highest duty of a journalist” (Orwell, ibid.)
36 Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 206
37 The Federal and State police in Australia prefer to use the term “fatally wounded” in place of the more direct “dead,” “killed, or “murdered.”
38 Ross Chambers, “The War of the Words,” 176
euphemism for accidental weapons discharge by coalition or allied soldiers — still signifies death and wounding, and the weasel-worded ‘collateral damage’ actually refers to civilian casualties. The term ‘regime change’— no matter how benevolent and dispassionate it sounds — amounts to a “deliberate and violent overthrow of an internationally recognised national government.”39 The substance of these and similar deceptions, which are repeatedly undertaken by the Bush administration, are also found throughout Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.40 It is disconcerting for the modern reader to recognize Orwell’s Principles of Newspeak applied to a contemporary (and supposedly) democratic setting. The purpose of Newspeak — it should not be forgotten — was “to diminish the [individual’s] range of thought.”41 Citizens of Oceania were not (and in the contemporary setting of the war against terror are still not) encouraged to think for themselves. New words and stock phrases gradually supplanted more traditional use and signification, thereby enabling the State to tighten its control over every area of life. By outlawing serious thought, Big Brother and the Party ruled unopposed. Orwell was gravely concerned about the corruption and abuse of language and in light of the euphemistic ‘spin’ and rhetorical tautology currently emanating from

39 Chambers, ibid., 177
40 While it is not my intention to equate Mr Bush’s Presidency with totalitarian government, it is difficult to ignore his administration’s lack of openness and its readiness to supplant truth with its own version of events. In fact the administration requires very little in the way of external argument to establish the Big Brother parallels. For more on the style of the Bush-Cheney government, see John W. Dean, Worse than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush (South Yarra, Victoria: Hardy Grant Books, 2004), 194-198.
Washington, Westminster and Canberra, researchers, writers and journalists should seriously heed his warnings.42

This chapter amasses integral elements of Englishness and representations of the rural working class drawn from *Coming Up for Air*, the third of Orwell’s three novels about everyday life in pre-War England.43 In the novel, Orwell compares and contrasts the carefree days of childhood innocence with his darkest fears and forebodings — the coming war with Germany. Central protagonist George (‘Fatty’) Bowling returns to Lower Binfield, the rural market town of his youth, for some rest and recreation. Bowling wants instant relief from the pressures and responsibilities of family life. Instead, he finds himself a stranger in the town of his birth. The locals (most of them ‘migrants’ from other parts of the country) do not recognise his surname. Bowling’s illicit holiday — he does not inform his wife of his intentions — plunges him into gloomy prognostication. He realises that the past is extinguished. There is no way back to Paradise Lost. Nobody remembers ‘the old ways,’ and the solid Edwardian values are no more. More disquieting for Bowling, is the encroaching certainty of the present, with its mock Tudor beams and touristy tea shops. ‘Progress’ is not to be thwarted. There is already imported American culture, literature, music and film, and factory produced tinned foodstuffs in the city. With the likelihood of war, Bowling unhappily realises that there is little that he or anyone can do about it. The bombing planes44 — a recurring

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42 I return to the contemporary usage of language, rhetoric and deception as it is currently applied to the war on terror, and post-war Iraq in chapter six.
43 Douglas Kerr, *George Orwell* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 24
44 “The first warplanes I ever saw passed quite low over Hunslet in the middle Thirties, about a dozen twin-engined bombers droning slow and grim; an amazing sight from a world we only
motif — will assuredly come. For Bowling, the future is fast approaching, wrapped in barbed wire and accompanied by a machine gun soundtrack.

**An Edwardian childhood**

Through the effects of memory, George Bowling is spirited back to the dusty family shop in the High Street, Lower Binfield, around the time of the Boer War. He is five years old. His brother Joe is seven. Everything comes flooding back to him in considerable detail — the smell of sainfoin chaff, ‘Nailer’ the family dog, and ‘Jackie’ the bullfinch in his cage.\(^{45}\) Time passes and with its passing comes increased consciousness of a child’s surroundings. Bowling remembers watching his mother rolling out a lump of dough on the kitchen table.\(^{46}\) Her flowing movements seem so natural and effortless.\(^{47}\) The kitchen is his mother’s exclusive domain;\(^{48}\) seeing her there — rightfully in charge — seems perfectly natural to a young child.

When you saw her cooking you knew that she was in a world where she belonged, among things she really understood. Except through the Sunday papers and an occasional bit of gossip the outside world didn’t really exist for her.\(^{49}\) This is in no way intended to be insulting or disrespectful. John Stevenson asserts life for the majority of working class woman is “bounded by home, close kin and the

\(^{45}\) George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 35-36
\(^{46}\) In a fascinating exegesis of the ‘domus’ based on 17th century Dutch painting, Bart Verschaffel argues that although women are traditionally associated with domesticity (the hearth and the kitchen) the woman’s position is more ambiguous. See, “The meanings of domesticity,” *The Journal of Architecture* 7 (Autumn 2002): 288
\(^{47}\) Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, 49
\(^{49}\) Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*, 49
immediate neighbourhood … the sources of new ideas and information were strictly limited.”50 A tidy, well managed home was an important social asset in a closely knit community.51 In 1900, it was understood that a woman's work52 was centred on the home and domesticity.53 There was little time for leisure. Even in 1963, Hoggart stated, “The wife’s social life outside her immediate family is found over the washing-line, at the corner shop, [and] visiting relatives.”54 A mother was responsible for cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children.55 She was also financially dependent on her husband. If she was a single working mother, the financial difficulties were greatly magnified. Hoggart states in his engaging autobiography, “Our mother had quite literally to count every penny. When you see a woman standing in frozen, clutching misery whilst tears start slowly down her cheeks because a sixpence has been lost and difficult readjustments have to be made, you do not easily forget.”56 In the Judaeo-Christian schema, marriage was (and still is) considered “a hierarchical relationship.”57 It would take second wave feminism to create an awareness of the complex and diverse

50 John Stevenson, British Society 1914-45 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984), 160
51 Bourke, “Housewifery in working-class England,” 180
52 Anne Lise Ellingsæter, “Women’s right to work: The interplay of state, market and women’s agency,” NORA 7, nos. 2-3 (1999): 111
53 Bourke states, “Although … women continued to spend some time engaged in paid employment … they increasingly came to define themselves … as housewives. Furthermore many seemed pleased to do so.” See, “Housewifery in working-class England,” 168. The demands are incessant, “It is characteristic of domestic work that it often involves performing several tasks simultaneously — caring for a child, washing up, and cooking lunch may all be done at the same time.” Bridget Anderson, “Just another job? Paying for domestic work,” Gender and Development 9, no.1 (March 2001): 26
54 Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1963), 35
55 Orwell, Coming Up for Air, 50
56 Hoggart, “Potternewton,” 44
experiences of working class women. The Bowlings are shopkeepers, and therefore lower middle class, a position that allows George’s mother a certain amount of freedom. She can afford to hire domestic help, although she eschews the idea, but Katie Simmons — a local girl — is paid to take the boys for walks. Lower working class households are less financially secure than the Bowlings, and low paid factory work for women helps supplement the meagre family income. The availability and incidence of light factory and office work for women increased noticeably between the wars. This change to paid work mildly surprised the novelist/playwright J. B. Priestley during his 1930s tour of England.

Priestley should not have been so surprised. It was not unusual for Edwardian women to find work outside the home. Alastair Reid states, “before 1914, over two million women had already worked in substantial numbers outside the home, not only in domestic service in other people’s homes, but also in manufacturing.” These figures

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59 George Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 51
60 Selina Todd, “Poverty and Aspiration,” 122
61 I discuss Priestley’s book in greater detail in chapter two.
increased to three million once the war commenced, and “had reached almost five million” by 1918.\textsuperscript{63} Grindingly hard work with disproportionate rates of pay for men and women was de rigueur for both sexes. Beatrix Campbell takes issue with Orwell for failing to include Wigan’s “pit brow lasses” in his chapter on coal mining.\textsuperscript{64} That was not the case with a visitor from an earlier era, the minor English poet and voyeur A. J. Munby, who was greatly attracted to the women’s strong bodies.\textsuperscript{65} Although there was opposition to women working at the mines, Campbell notes with satisfaction that in Wigan, the pit brow lasses remained at the job until “after nationalisation.”\textsuperscript{66} Working women however, were not treated with deference by men, but were expected to maintain the family home as well as complete their demanding shifts at the mill. On the subject of working class domesticity, Richard Hoggart states, “It is a hard life, in which it is assumed that the mother will be ‘at it’ from getting up to going to bed: she will cook, mend, scrub, wash, see to the children, shop, and satisfy her husband’s desires.”\textsuperscript{67} Marriage viewed from this perspective was a grossly unequal partnership, a kind of slavery.\textsuperscript{68} Not even the wife’s earnings, if she worked outside the home, were rightfully hers, but were “owned and controlled by her husband.”\textsuperscript{69} Orwell is extremely careful to avoid any suggestion of inequality and unfairness in the elder Bowling’s household. He reserves his cynicism and frustrations for George and Hilda in Ellesmere Road.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{63} John Stevenson, \textit{British Society 1914-45}, 83

\textsuperscript{64} Beatrix Campbell, “Orwell - Paterfamilias or Big Brother?” in Christopher Norris (ed.), \textit{Inside the Myth, Orwell: Views from the Left.}” 129

\textsuperscript{65} Beatrix Campbell, “Baths and Bosses: the Miners,” in \textit{Wigan Pier Revisited}, 99-101

\textsuperscript{66} Campbell, ibid., 100

\textsuperscript{67} Richard Hoggart, \textit{The Uses of Literacy}, 42

\textsuperscript{68} M. L. Shanley, “Marital Slavery and Friendship,” 165

\textsuperscript{69} Shanley, ibid., 167

\textsuperscript{70} George Orwell, \textit{Coming Up For Air}, 7, 137
However, he was familiar with the exiguous lifestyle of the working poor, and described the squalid conditions, the inadequate housing, and despair in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The conditions such as he found in Sheffield and Barnsley in 1936 were awful. He recognises that “a woman is only a poor drudge muddling among an infinity of jobs” in an oppressive atmosphere. Conversely, Lower Binfield, in the prosperous south, is not like that. It is a buoyant market town with a hotel and shops, and the Bowlings are seed merchants. Only the hapless Katie Simmons ends in poverty in *Coming Up For Air*.72

The modest Bowling family business was struggling, but not because of profligacy or mismanagement — the year was 1913 — and ‘progress’ was a sign of the times. British manufacturing was still “strong” — especially in textiles and shipbuilding.73 George’s father was unable to compete with the giant seed retailers Sarazins, with its gilt lettering, eye catching advertisements, and extensive range of patented poultry mixtures, seedlings, tools and related agricultural implements.74 They eventually stole the trade from everyone in the area, and would have ruined George’s father had he survived the war years. George adds, “Father, with his dusty old shop and his refusal to stock new lines, couldn’t compete … and didn’t want to.”75 By the time young George was fifteen, all thoughts of Grammar school were abandoned, and he was apprenticed to “old Grimmett, the grocer, who wanted a smart lad … immediately.”76 It meant wages and an unexpected new direction for his life. In the Bowling household,

71 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 54
72 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 41
73 Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians*, 184
74 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 94
75 Orwell, ibid., 95
76 Orwell, ibid.
like many of that era, education and learning took a backseat to the more pressing need to earn a living. George reveals, “[T]here were practically no books in our house. Father had never read a book in his life, except the Bible and Smiles's Self Help,” 77 both of which espoused the virtues of character, independence, thrift and hard work. 78 This lack of training in mental acuity tidily conflates with a comment made by an old World War I veteran, who stated:

In those days our brains weren't developed enough to understand what the war meant. Most of us thought that it would all be over by Christmas. Well, Christmas came and went. 79

His point being that it was unusual for working people to receive much formal education, as a result they easily exploited. University education in the years leading up to the Great War was for the privileged few. For the working classes, “the official leaving age was fourteen,” and this was followed by entry into the workforce. 80 Life was simpler, shorter, and harsher for working folk. They had modest goals that incorporated work, marriage and family, leading to old age (the workhouse), and death. Leisure activities and spare time for intellectual pursuits were kept to a bare minimum.

The young farm labourers, miners and textile workers who died in the Flanders mud by the thousand were not trained to think and show initiative; their duty was to obey their officers (and ‘betters’). The Somme, Passchendaele, and Ypres put a stop to

78 Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 91
80 Paul Thompson, The Edwardians, 71
such foolishness. Life was of a distinct order and texture for the working classes in the years leading up to the Great War. Arguably, much has changed over the years, with significant improvements in housing and public transport, social services and health care, education, and general working conditions. Yet one factor remains more or less constant throughout — the way that wealth (or the lack of it) directly affects the lifestyles of the different elements of the social scale. With the faintest acknowledgement to Disraeli’s *Sybil* (1845), Orwell declares, “Economically, England is certainly two nations, if not three or four.”81 He adds that in spite of the imbalance the English believe themselves to be united as a nation, that this is their great strength.82 The reason for the disparity in wealth suggests more than just earning capacity, since the aristocracy, and the children of business magnates traditionally inherit the bulk of their wealth. John Stevenson states, “Three-quarters of the population of Britain, some eight million families, would, in 1937, if they had sold everything they possessed, have realized less than £100 each — for all intents ... they were essentially propertyless.”83 According to Stevenson, the top end of the scale, the extremely wealthy 5 per cent, “owned 79 per cent of all wealth.”84 In Britain between the Wars, immense wealth rather than skill and ability, coupled with an entrenched system of old school cronyism and outright nepotism is what sets the upper classes apart. Their extravagant displays of wealth represent the highest form of cultural and symbolic capital. Orwell blasted English capitalism mercilessly in ‘The Lion and the Unicorn.’ British Industry is accused of putting self-interest before the defence of the country. He states, “Right at the

81 George Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 146
82 Orwell, ibid.
83 John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, 330-331
84 Stevenson, ibid., 330
end of August 1939 the British dealers were tumbling over one another in their eagerness to sell Germany tin, rubber, copper and shellac — and this in the clear, certain knowledge that war was going to break out in a week of two.”85 It amounts to placing profit (greed) before the good of the country. Orwell’s denunciation appears to have failed. The differences in wealth and earning capacity have continued unabated since the 1930s, and if anything, the rich have gotten richer still.86

Journalist Polly Toynbee reveals the current figures that delineate the top from the bottom on the social scale. Toynbee places the median salaries of a small number of UK company directors at around £416,000 per annum.87 She contrasts this figure with the national median income for the remainder of Britain’s workforce, which “is only £390 a week or £20,280 a year.”88 Toynbee points out that the wages of 3.5 million people (the working poor) subsist on considerably less than that, often on a weekly wage of £164.89 The old class based hostilities may have abated (or retreated) since 1945, but life in Britain still favours the rich at the expense of the working poor. Toynbee cites a model middle-management response to poverty: “I believe in this modern age that everyone has their opportunity. Everyone who really wants to reach their goal is free to do it.”90 The fact that the privileged speaker is “among the 0.5 per cent richest earners in

85 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 162
87 Polly Toynbee, Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 208
88 Toynbee, ibid., 6-7
89 Toynbee, ibid., 178
90 Toynbee, ibid., 207

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the land” does not appear to register with him. He is still greedy for more. Many of the working poor are struggling with two or more jobs, and working extended hours to achieve the basic minimum wage. This can be jeopardised by illness, an unexpected bill, or the sack. Toynbee went out of her way to discover the nature of poorly paid working conditions. The result is a disturbing book, *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain* (2003).

It is unconscionable that wealth and success is blithely attributed to personal application and ‘up-skilling’ (adult learning). *Meritocracy* may sit well with the wealthy, many of whom have inherited wealth, but it is a cruel joke for the working poor. Toynbee strongly asserts, “[T]he children of the left-behind … will never become the new homeowners of tomorrow.” Is there really a ‘choice’ available to a working mother with two children at pre-school age with the rent in arrears, and a pile of unpaid bills? If she is desperate she can conceivably work as a prostitute; or as Toynbee more often discovered, she can work incredibly long hours for low pay. Meanwhile who will look after the children if she cannot afford childcare? Toynbee notes that,

> The modern myth that class is dead and education and advancement are open to all is not particularly modern. It is a delusion Orwell records among the well-off, and many reactionary voices pretended to believe it a century before him.

Orwell avoids addressing poverty in *Coming Up For Air*, because George Bowling is middle class and upwardly mobile. Instead, he concentrates on marriage and inner-outer suburban living, and Bowling’s desire to escape.

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91 Toynbee, ibid.  
92 Polly Toynbee, *Hard Work*, 227  
93 Toynbee, ibid., 209  

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Married Life and Suburbia

If you’re married, there’ll have been times when you’ve said to yourself ‘Why the hell did I do it?’ and God knows I’ve said it often enough about Hilda.94

At the outbreak of the Great War (1914) Bowling, like most of his generation, volunteers immediately. Four years later, when he is demobbed, it is as a junior lieutenant with prospects of his own. He becomes a moderately successful Insurance salesman, like thousands of his demobbed peers, on a wage of “Five to ten quid a week.”95 Before the war, Bowling’s expectations are greatly restricted. He can either become a seed merchant like his father or change direction and become a master grocer like old Grimmett. Now, in the newly emerging post-war economy, he realises that the prospects of his class have vastly improved. He maintains he has “passed right out of the shop-keeping orbit.”96 Consequently, when he is offered a sales job representing a successful Insurance firm, he moves away to Ealing, a suburb in West London. He can even afford to play social tennis. Bowling also finds time to chase after the daughter of a retired Anglo-Indian official.97 They marry, and Bowling suddenly realises that he is trapped. There is always plenty of work for an insurance salesman, and the Bowlings move to a leafy suburban estate. The Insurance industry is busier than usual, and George is promoted to Inspector. He spends time travelling the country, and he sometimes indulges in extra-marital liaisons.98 Bowling is clearly not happy or fulfilled by domestic life, and who knows where circumstances would have taken him if not for his “new false

94 George Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 137
95 Orwell, ibid., 10
96 Orwell, ibid., 129
97 Orwell, ibid., 136-137
98 Orwell, ibid., 142-143
teeth.” Orwell, ibid., 3

99 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 188

100 Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 197

101
chilliness, the bright red brick everywhere, the temporary-looking shop windows full of cut-price chocolates and radio parts. It was just like that.\textsuperscript{102}

The towns mentioned in the list are on the outskirts of London. Orwell and Priestley both refer to the new factories and light industry that sprang up at the end of the Depression.\textsuperscript{103} Yet despite Bowling’s gloomy foreboding, old rural England is not vanished entirely. Ground level is the logical place to begin to search for clues.\textsuperscript{104} Local historian W. G. Hoskins\textsuperscript{105} records stumbling across a “deserted medieval village, in the upland pastures of south Leicestershire” in 1930.\textsuperscript{106} He devoted a lifetime to fieldwork and discovery “both in towns and in the countryside.”\textsuperscript{107} It really means that any perceived sense of loss that Bowling may have experienced was entirely subjective. He barely has time to gather up the threads of his former life. The past lies hidden just below the surface waiting to be uncovered, but Bowling fails to notice it.

Two days I spent just wandering around the old landmarks … And all that time I never ran across a soul that knew me. I was a ghost, and if I wasn’t actually invisible, I felt like it.\textsuperscript{108}

It is an uncomfortable feeling not being acknowledged or recognised. Bowling feels hopelessly lost and disorientated. He imagined that returning to Lower Binfield would enable him to pick-up where he left off twenty years earlier. But small towns change. Nothing remains unaltered indefinitely. No one remembers him or even recognises the Bowling surname. He is a total stranger — or perhaps a ghost — ignored by all. Clearly,

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\textsuperscript{102} Orwell, \textit{Coming Up For Air}, 192-193  \\
\textsuperscript{103} J. B. Priestley, \textit{English Journey} (1933); George Orwell, \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} (1937)  \\
\textsuperscript{104} “[I]t is the normal starting-point of local history.” Raphael Samuel, \textit{Island Stories: Unravelling Britain}, Theatres of Memory Vol. II (London: Verso, 1999), 219  \\
\textsuperscript{105} “[History on the ground,’ originally almost a personal obsession with W. G. Hoskins and Maurice Beresford, monitoring the lost villages of medieval England is now a whole industry.” Samuel, ibid.  \\
\textsuperscript{106} W. G. Hoskins, \textit{Fieldwork in Local History} (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), 29-30  \\
\textsuperscript{107} Hoskins, ibid., 11  \\
\textsuperscript{108} George Orwell, \textit{Coming Up For Air}, 210
\end{flushright}
Bowling has been deceived by nostalgia. In most linear narratives, time flows inexorably onwards (like a river) with the rapidly moving surface of the waters allowing no possibility of ever returning to exactly the same spot. Not everyone agrees with the comparison: "Time may be more like a room than a river … it may be more boxed-in." Bauman maintains, "Time is no longer a river, but a collection of ponds and pools." Such imagery presents an absorbing analogy — that of time frozen and confined within four walls, or collected into isolated reservoirs. The conceit would allow that time is knowable or at least traceable, in the same way that mathematical tables are knowable, or the contents of a room are apparent to the occupants. Also in relation to time, and perhaps (even) anticipating the shock of negation and failure, Genevieve Lloyd quite sensibly asserts, "Our separation from things in space can have deep emotional effects. But it does not have the unthinkability of the lost past [failure] or the indeterminate future [uncertainty], the strangeness of the presence of what did not exist." Predicting the future, like retaining the past, is approaching the realm of the impossible and the (largely) unknowable. For George Bowling, change merely means an unwelcome comparison — the old with the new — and an acute sense of loss over the old ways.

The Mill Farm had vanished, the cow-pond where I caught my first fish had been drained and filled up and built over … It was all houses, houses, little red cubes of houses all alike, with privet hedges and asphalt paths leading up to the front door.

112 George Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 211
Probably today we would consider them ‘quaint,’ but to Bowling (and doubtless Orwell), they were hideous. They represented a backwards step. Orwell did not want everything to remain exactly the same as it had before the Great War. He was not interested in tradition for tradition’s sake. He understood the need for a healthy economy, for increased efficiency, and for raising the standard of living for working people. He just wanted more thought applied to the whole process of modernization. This line of reasoning is pursued in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, when he contemplates the impact that machinery will have on the English lifestyle: “Mechanisation leads to the decay of taste, the decay of taste leads to the demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanisation, and so a vicious circle is established.”113 Fighting words, but he must have realised that the influx could not be easily halted. Doubtless, his target is capitalism, and its exploitation of the working classes for financial gain. While the multiplication of advantages (profit) for a select few is demonstrably unfair, the destruction of an entire way of life is unconscionable.

Bowling is more of an idealist. Although he appreciates that people have to live with mechanisation and mass produced commodities, he desires the countryside to stay the same, as it was when he was a boy.114 Developers and landlords — naturally enough

113 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 191
114 It is not difficult to imagine why so many are drawn to distant childhood memories, or to an imagined (traditional) historical past. In many ways nostalgia is safely reassuring, because it bears little resemblance to the (frequently troubling) present. For a further example of profound nostalgia for the countryside, see Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford, a trilogy* (Oxford: OUP, 1988). Thompson’s delightful book brings to life a vanished bygone era, and preserves its memory, with considerable attention to detail. The book depicts the proud joys and hardships of thrifty self-reliance. In Australian parlance it describes the pioneering life of the 1880s, only the setting is a quiet rural backwater somewhere in Oxfordshire. Orwell too was not exempt from
— have other ideas. Orwell realised that it was impossible to return to Eden. In *Wigan Pier* he describes the impracticality, and the foolishness, of trying to revert to “handwork” in a “machine age.”\(^\text{115}\) George Bowling complains and mistrusts all things ‘modern,’ but he knows that soon he will have to return home, and everything will be as it was before his ‘escape’ to Lower Binfield. Perhaps it has allowed him an opportunity to work through his deepest misgivings about the direction of the world. There was a war coming, Fascism was on the rise, and, judging from the response, nobody, apart from Bowling, appeared greatly perturbed. His parting shot is filled with despair.

One thing, I thought as I drove down the hill, I’m finished with this notion of getting back into the past. What’s the good of trying to revisit scenes of your boyhood? They don’t exist. Coming up for air! But there isn’t any air. The dustbin that we’re in reaches up to the stratosphere.\(^\text{116}\)

This is a strong indictment of the failings of contemporary life. There is little doubt that, when Bowling faced the Establishment, it took enormous courage, but there was never a likelihood of winning. It is the ethos, the principled fight against injustice (and progress) that motivated him. Although D. S. Savage might find it unacceptable, it is clear that Orwell, whose own determined struggle plunged him into a life of unnecessary economic hardship leading to tuberculosis, was inspired by the desire to rid the world of ‘tyrants.’ I do not regard Orwell as a man incapable of seeing himself unadorned, as Savage maintains, or of being unable to communicate that state to others.\(^\text{117}\) The fact is

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nostalgic revelry. The childhood section in *Coming Up For Air* is of considerable interest to anyone remotely curious about village life at the turn of the twentieth century. Nostalgia may well appeal on the page, but the reality of life without basic amenities and citizen’s rights palls in comparison with our own privileged era.

\(^{115}\) George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 186-7

\(^{116}\) Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 230

that Orwell is always a realist, who is prepared to tackle the difficult questions, and yet
still retains his sense of irony (and humour) to the end.

History, Recall and Memory

The parameters and boundaries of history have been under dispute since the
disciplinization of the field. Leopold von Ranke staunchly proclaimed history as “The
strict presentation of the facts.”118 Raymond Williams is more upbeat and flexible. For
Williams history is “an [updated] account of past real events.”119 Neither of these views
captures the complex deployment of the word in the era of heritage ‘management.’ Keith
Jenkins believes “that history is a discourse about, but categorically different from, the
past.”120 In fact, ‘official’ history is artificial, in that it is a fabricated bricolage of
consensual knowledges. Orwell appreciated the subtleties of this readily enough. In the
novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, Winston Smith spent the greater part of his working day
reconfiguring and rewriting the past.

This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to
books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons,
photographs — to every kind of literature or documentation which might
conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost
minute by minute the past was brought up to date.121

In Nineteen Eighty-Four, history is always someone else’s version of events. It is very
seldom that all the pieces of the history ‘jigsaw’ sit easily together. There is no master

118 Leopold von Ranke, “Preface: ‘Histories of the Latin and Germanic Nations from 1494-
119 Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana,
1988), 146
120 Keith Jenkins, Re-thinking History (London: Routledge, 2003), 7
121 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983),
39
cartography. Roland Barthes maintains, “Historical discourse does not follow reality, it only signifies it; it asserts at every moment: this happened, but the meaning conveyed is only that someone is making that assertion.” In a suspicious age, mistrust has undermined the likelihood of there being an unbiased narrative. There is no shapeless body of historical data waiting to be sorted and presented. ‘The past’ per se does not exist. Only stylised politicised historical interpretations are available.

Winston Smith — Orwell’s anti-hero — instinctively understood that “history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary.” Smith’s job was to present a seamless continuity to ruling Party ideology: “Day by day and almost every minute the past was brought up to date.” He invented the past to order — layer by layer, and thread by thread. Not surprisingly, a great deal of the historical account (as we know it) comes to us via surmise. The Greeks considered history a necessary part of the science of Rhetoric or persuasive speech. Thucydides — for example — states, “[M]y habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.” While such radical transcriptions operate effectively in a novel, as definitions — though evocative — they
provoke real difficulties for historians struggling to uncover an accurate version of the past. Chris Ward states, “Explanations must be ‘plausible,’ we say: good historians produce plausible accounts, bad historians implausible ones. But what makes an account plausible?” More to the point, how do historians come by their facts? Clearly, there will be silences and omissions. For Greil Marcus anything that does not — in some way — assist the transmission of power is simply ignored and forgotten. He states, “Events that do not change shape … or that occur outside the normal circuits in which power is exchanged, outside the normal circuits of legitimacy … do not make history at all.”

That being the case, then history is selective and elitist. As Orwell would have it, “History is written by the winners.” An eyewitness account of the First World War may well have anecdotal value. It is certain to be of interest because there are only a few veterans still living, but factual evidence of this type needs to be verified from official sources. Anecdotes rarely capture full and accurate information. All history is imperfectly formed. Elliott J. Gorn states, “Behind the confident prose and flowing narrative, a good historian is painfully aware of how much has been left out.” Written history is not the final arbiter of truth. The statement may appear obvious, but it frequently defies closer scrutiny. Newspapers encapsulate the latest news. They should not lay claim to infallibility. The information is ‘good’ on the day. Sometimes the information is greatly simplified, dependant on the readership and the newspaper’s

127 Chris Ward, “What is History? The Case of Late Stalinism,” Rethinking History 8, no. 3 (September 2004): 439-458
129 George Orwell, (No. 18) “As I Please,” 110
130 Recommended is Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory (Oxford: OUP, 2000)
editorial priorities. There may well be silences and omissions. Often reportage needs updating and revision. After a suitable delay, the archived news provides the historical researcher with useful information, background details, commentary, and eyewitness accounts from yesteryear. With the passage of time, even the tabloid news gains credibility. E. H. Carr reminds us that, “history is what the historian makes.” Facts do not stand alone. They require interpretation. After rummaging through archives, a pattern usually emerges, but data is always open to interpretation. Carr’s statement confirms Winston Smith’s palimpsest musings: news is composed of a patina of worn headlines, erasures and ‘scratchings.’ History is whatever historiography determines. When the war on terror is accomplished, all of the official statements and political viewpoints will be available for reinterpretation as history. Now is not the time to attempt such a work. It is wise to remember that there will always be divergent and dissenting viewpoints. No one’s truth stands alone. Carr also states, “the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.” I am not inferring that history is invented, but that history is always politically motivated. The border between fiction and non-fiction, and the historian’s creativity in summoning imagined pasts, is dynamic and under patrolled.

Events from my early childhood — going to School, the town where I lived, and my family — contribute to the cultural knowledge base that frames the interpretations of this doctoral research. The late Raphael Samuel believed, “History is a house of many

133 Carr, ibid., 18
134 Keith Jenkins, Re-thinking History, 13
mansions and its narratives change over time.” He was suggesting that there are other histories waiting in the wings, and not all of them are called forth. These experiences — referred to as ‘histories from below’ — overtly delineate my words and represent me — if I choose to record them. As a small boy, I sat opposite Sir Winston Churchill on a cross-Channel flight to France. That is personal memory, not history. Although Mr. Churchill is part of English political and wartime history, my sitting across the aisle from him is not a recorded historical fact. Nothing eventuated from the encounter that could be of any interest or value to humanity — no ribbons were cut, no ships launched, no speeches made. For a number of years, I had one of his (partially smoked) cigars as a treasured possession. My Churchill anecdote is merely an interesting personal recollection. History cannot be gathered directly, like picking wildflowers, because it requires recording, storing, mediation and interpretation at some later date. No one knows ahead of schedule what will later constitute historical relevance.

History invokes many meanings. It is the past brought near, and made accessible. Jenkins states, “Unlike direct memory (itself suspect) history relies on someone else’s eyes and voice; we see through an interpreter who stands between past events and our reading of them.” Even after researching a topic, there is no way of confirming if (all) the details are correct. It is like two people discussing ‘big’ cats but failing to make their meaning clear: one imagines a fat ‘tabby,’ the other a majestic tiger. Barnard and Delbridge state, “The phonemic sign-shape can be reliably exchanges (sic) but it is very

135 Raphael Samuel, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain, 204
136 Samuel, ibid., 207
137 I recently sold the cigar, and the proceeds partly funded the writing of this thesis.
138 Keith Jenkins, Re-thinking History, 14
hard to know accurately the concept to which it is linked in the sender’s mind is replicated in that of the receiver.”¹³⁹ Students painting from still life may view the same scene — a vase of flowers or a bowl of fruit — from different perspectives. E. H. Carr argues, “the historian is … moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts.”¹⁴⁰ This difference of perspective and outcome may also happen at the scene of a fire or an explosion. Orwell warned his readers that such distortions occurred in the Spanish Civil War. In a book review for the New English Weekly, Orwell cites the model Catholic version of events: “Franco is a Christian gentleman, the Valencia Government are a gang of robbers, the Badajoz massacre didn’t happen, Guernica was not bombed but wantonly burnt by Red militiamen — and so on.”¹⁴¹ What is the result of this debate? Interpretation is required in response to all historical writing. All history is, indeed, historiography. The truth is always subject to impersonation, and truth often resides between the lines.

**Memory and Nostalgia**

Much of Coming Up For Air is a tale of growing up in rural England. The plot moves between two time frames, the early 1900s and the late 1930s. It is decidedly nostalgic in perspective. Nostalgia is a sentimental longing for past events. Memory attempts to retrieve the past from the grip of the ideologues shaping the present. For David

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¹⁴⁰ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* 24
¹⁴¹ George Orwell, *Orwell in Spain*, 297
Lowenthal, nostalgia is perceived as “memory with the pain removed.” It wants to return us to the safety of the past. The word has its roots in the Greek — nostos, a return, and algos, pain. In the 17th Century ‘nostalgia’ was likened to a physical illness, which in later years became associated with homesickness. Lowenthal maintains that nostalgia has since become “the universal catchword for looking back.” In a cultural sense, this is evidenced in the great numbers of churchyards (reminders of the dead), museums (repositories for ancient artefacts) and statues (eulogising persons and political events). As Lowenthal appreciates, “we … live among relics from previous times. The past surrounds and saturates us.” The contemporary world is steeped in traditions, ceremonies, religious observances and cultural practices. Some of these behaviours and practices are relatively recent inventions, like “the pageantry which surrounds [the] British monarchy in its public ceremonial manifestations.” Frequently though, the origins of cultural practices are much older. More significant perhaps than cultural heritage is the crucial role played by individual memory. Everyone remembers something from their past. Our memories are seldom shared by others. They are subjective, and “feel like private property.” Memory needs to be recalled. Deeply embedded memory may well require an external agency or ‘trigger’ — a sound, a smell, a colour — and in this it is purely associative. Lowenthal advises, “Sharing and

142 David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, 8
143 Lowenthal, ibid., 10
144 Lowenthal, ibid., 11
145 Lowenthal, ibid., 4
146 Lowenthal, ibid., 185
148 Lowenthal, Foreign Country, 195
validating memories sharpens them and promotes their recall.” Aids to recollection take many forms. In *Coming Up For Air* the catalyst is supplied by “A newspaper headline and a whiff of horse dung.” One moment ‘Tubby’ Bowling is confidently sauntering along the Strand in London smoking a cigar, the next he is unexpectedly projected back to his childhood through a series of vivid images induced by King Zog’s wedding. Within himself, Bowling is a small boy again, and the year is 1900. He is back in Lower Binfield the Oxfordshire market town where he was born and raised. Understandably, the experience gives him a shock.

The past is a curious thing. It’s with you all the time, I suppose an hour never passes without your thinking of things that happened ten or twenty years ago, and yet most of the time it’s got no reality.... Then some chance sight or sound or smell, especially smell, sets you going, and the past doesn't merely come back to you, you're actually in the past.

Bowling realises that momentarily he inhabits two different worlds simultaneously. One is the real world of marriage and disappointments, bills, mortgages, automobiles and blaring radios. The other quieter mimesis is the lost world of his childhood. By allowing detours into distant memory, he is in fact allowing these long hidden events to speak again. Johnson et al believe that “Memories … are strangely composite constructions, resembling a kind of geology,” and like fossils of the mind, they await re-discovery. Bowling likens this experience to taking a huge gulp of cleaner purer air. This is Orwell’s point, because in memory the past is always in sharper focus, and more

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149 Lowenthal, ibid., 196
150 Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell*, 250
151 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 27
152 Orwell, ibid., 27
154 Popular Memory Group, ibid., 211
155 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*, 31
immediate. The colours and smells are also more vivid and potent, the children’s laughter more pleasing, and the world a more likeable place.

*Coming Up For Air* is a novel in which Orwell marshals his thinking about the past (in the form of his lost Edwardian childhood), and negotiates an uneasy truce between nostalgic reminiscence and the present. Bowling’s imagined future is dominated by the imagery of war and fascism, armies, bombs and propaganda. This chapter reveals how memory is filtered through nostalgic revelry, and balanced by pragmatic renderings of the present. History is written by individuals. As Hayden White points out, “figures and discursive turns … more imaginal than conceptual, are necessary to the constitution of history’s objects of interests.”156 Remove the historian and the charm and immediacy is lost. All that remains are the facts. To express and articulate salient details from one’s past is to narrate a highly individualistic story. The mature writer and the schoolboy of Orwell’s *Such, Such Were the Joys*, are at loggerheads. They are not only sharply separated by years, but also by experience. That particular (angry) essay could not have been written by a child. Writing the past involves a highly selective memory. To narrate a believable story necessitates the introduction of some kind of plot.157 Memory may be about real persons and real events, but there needs

157 Lloyd introduces an important consideration: “Time has to be dealt with in the construction of plot.” Genevieve Lloyd, *Being in Time*, 12
to be a direction, flow and purpose to narrative for it to succeed. Truth requires an editor.

As a journalist, Orwell understood that it was his responsibility to give people the facts, regardless of his own preconceptions. As a political writer, he also recognized that those same facts could be arranged and presented in several different ways. Orwell deliberately stripped away the tawdry veneer of class and prejudice in his search for authenticity. His descriptions of English pubs, real ale, diet and poverty, work and unemployment, health, housing, working in the mines, all contributed something unique to his reportage. Yet access to this lifestyle was not his right from birth. He was well educated and a member of the middle-classes. His documentary reportage — *Down and Out*, *Homage to Catalonia*, and *Wigan Pier* — were ‘editing room’ masterpieces, rather than pure cinéma vérité. The woman described from the train window in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a classic example of his approach to factual reportage. Although the scene is lifted from its original context and placed into another, it remains a powerful example of his (ultimately) realist documentary prose style.

*Coming Up For Air* resurrects Orwell’s habit of closely scrutinising his own fears and prejudices in novel form. George Woodcock asserts, “None of Orwell’s

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158 Stories have a beginning, middle and end. Lloyd adds, “Narrative concerns action. It is through its power to ‘refigure’ past and future action that it allows us to reshape our worlds, to carry the past into the future.” Lloyd, ibid.

159 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 15; Robert Pearce, “Revisiting Orwell’s *Wigan Pier*,” *History* 82, no. 267 (July 1997): 418-419

160 It was nevertheless a scene he had witnessed and recorded in his diary. George Orwell, “*The Road to Wigan Pier* Diary 31 January-25 March 1936,” in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.) *An Age Like This 1920-1940*, CEJL I (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 202-203
characters is a self portrait,” but concedes that ‘Tubby’ Bowling often “manages to give
voice to an extraordinary number of Orwellian thoughts.”161 He is evidently concerned
about the aftermath of war. He knows that he is too old to fight.162 There is a sense of
inevitability to Bowling’s prognosis — hence all the talk of ‘rubber truncheons’ and
jackbooted soldiers. The world he envisions is the world of Big Brother. Kerr argues,
“Coming Up For Air is historical because it has a sense of the future, and that future
might be different.”163 Orwell felt that war with Germany was inevitable. He
occasionally made inappropriate jokes about barbed wire and concentration camps in
letters to his friends, but it was worrying nonetheless.164 Bowling, who anticipated an
‘all-out’ bombing war, revealed grim forebodings should Germany win.

[It isn’t the war that matters, it’s the after-war. The world we’re going down into,
the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the
rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day,
and the detectives watching you while you sleep.]165

Orwell also uses the same fear-inducing iconography in essays, and letters to friends. In
‘Writers and Leviathan’ (1948) he states, “This is a political age. War, Fascism,
concentration camps, rubber truncheons, atomic bombs, etc. are what we daily think
about, and therefore to a great extent what we write about, even when we do not name
them openly.”166 As an overtly political writer, Orwell used every means available to
warn the British public. To return to the introductory section of this chapter for a
moment, and Pearce’s accusation that Orwell lied or refrained from revealing a balanced

161 George Woodcock, The Crystal Spirit, 63
162 George Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 174
163 Douglas Kerr, George Orwell, 35
164 George Orwell, Letter: “To Francis Westrope,” in Peter Davison (ed.), Facing Unpleasant
165 George Orwell, Coming Up For Air, 157
166 George Orwell, “Writers and Leviathan,” 453
perspective. What Pearce (and others) apparently fail to recognise is Orwell’s desire to provoke and challenge his readers. He was not writing history. In the essay ‘Such, Such Were the Joys,’ literal truth does not matter, objectivity does not matter. The essay is bitter, accusatory and very angry. It is difficult to be entirely factual and objective under such circumstances. Orwell was (re-)writing his past — expunging its poison from his system. In a sense, he was also exorcising the past in *Coming Up For Air*. The past is dead. Even George Bowling makes this realisation. There is only now (the present), and the future, and the future is of the most concern. Taken to its logical extreme, Bowling’s jackboots and rubber truncheons emerge again more forcefully in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Bowling’s dystopian vision — it is Orwell’s as much as it is Bowling’s — is the central theme of the thesis. As I have stated early in chapter one, Big Brother’s invasive State finds form and peculiar expression in Mr. Bush’s war on terror.

In the following chapter, I look at the alienation and disruption brought about by the post-industrial reconfiguration of Britain’s economy. The effect of joblessness and inactivity has weighed heavily upon successive generations of school-leavers — those under-prepared for the harsher realities of (approaching) adulthood. Nick Danziger set out on a journey across Britain that included Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. As is standard practice for all such time travellers, Danziger sought access to the hidden pulse of the nation. He was not prepared for the thousands hopelessly trapped between their immediate circumstances and despair. He states, “Few of the youngsters and grown-ups I met on my travels had the shell of success: they moved about restlessly, living a life of uncertainty. They were at the gates to the arena, looking at the river of
gold that never arrives.”¹⁶⁷ In a world that potentially offers so much, a large proportion of humanity is being left behind. Many of these reside in developed countries with strong traditions of labour. Danziger, along with other British authors — Jack Davies, John Pilger, Beatrix Campbell, and Polly Toynbee — discovered a hidden Britain, one that barely makes the news headlines unless it figures as part of the breakdown of law and order. Orwell made a similar journey to Wigan in 1936. He was looking for quantifiable evidence of the exigencies of poverty and joblessness in the wake of the Depression. Deep down he hoped to find evidence of a grass-roots political movement, one that would produce a revolution similar to the one he later witnessed in Spain. Ironically, this English revolution did not occur in his lifetime. I pay particular attention to the so-called ‘Riotous Decade’ of 1981-1991, which best represents the anger and futility Orwell desired. It took a major war to finally return the British economy to the black, and provide remedial assistance (and jobs) for the legions of unemployed workers. The following chapter expresses and comments upon the anarchist sentiments of a minority. They remain a community adrift in a sea of complacency and despair with no one to turn to but themselves.

Chapter Five

Class Wars and Anarchy in (post) Thatcherite Britain

We realised that they hated us, but we could never understand why, and naturally we set it down to pure, vicious malignity.¹

George Orwell

In 1991, British author Jack Ramsay set out to analyse the consequences and aftershocks of a decade or more of Tory economic management in the nation’s industrial heartland. The result — England, This England — was similar in scope and emotional intensity to J. B. Priestley’s classic English Journey (1933). Ramsay discovered that traditional nineteenth century icons of heavy industry — places like Newcastle, Gateshead, and Middlesbrough — were as gloomy as they had appeared to Priestley in the early Thirties.² These Northern centres of industrialisation — mainly shipbuilding and coal mining — had never (fully) returned to their former use and/or capacity. Hall and Jacques catalogued the ‘cutback’ phenomenon as “the so-called transition from ‘Fordism’… to ‘post-Fordism,’”³ which delineated the Thatcher-Major years. Beatrix

¹ George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Penguin, 2001), 117
² In terms of Newcastle’s decline in the early 1990s, Ramsay states, “I … wondered afterwards what on earth had really changed, apart from a few superficial details.” J. G. Ramsay, England, This England: In the steps of J. B. Priestley (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), 324, 336
Campbell observes that Sheffield, once the acknowledged centre for British steel production, shed some 44,000 jobs during the Thatcher era. Like other industrial centres similarly affected, Sheffield has since been forced to reinvent itself by modernizing its economy and reconfiguring its workforce. Downsizing and closures occurred throughout the Northern industrial region, affecting every aspect of daily life for single people and families. In April 1982, unemployment figures for Manchester had reached 32 per cent. Eric Schlosser states, “The greater Manchester area (which has a population of about 2.5 million) lost almost a fifth of its manufacturing jobs during the 1980s, and more than 125,000 people moved away.” Ramsay suggests that workable solutions for the legions of unemployed across Britain had stalled, especially the creation of new jobs. He notes that the country “might already have reached the point of no return.” In all likelihood, it meant that a sizeable segment of the workforce might never again find employment within its own lifetime. Orwell had already seen evidence of this disturbing trend back in 1936.

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4 Sheffield’s reputation was historically centred on industrial labour. It was (and still is) a utilitarian ‘red-brick’ (working class) locale. Beatrix Campbell necessarily describes it as “a landscape for labour — mass housing on steep hills … where men (mainly) made machines and special steels.” Campbell, “New Times Towns,” in Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (eds.), *New Times: The Changing face of Politics in the 1990s*, 286
5 High quality (stainless) steel is still manufactured in Sheffield; the production technique is technologically advanced, and the industry is fiercely competitive. See, J. G. Ramsay, *England, This England*, 133-137
6 Beatrix Campbell, “New Times Towns,” 287
7 Campbell, ibid., 286-290
9 Schlosser, ibid.
10 Ramsay, *England, This England*, 77
11 George Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 78
of this magnitude produces a new category of deprivation called “Social exclusion.” It occurs when meaningful participation within the community is blocked (often) due to inadequate life skills. Contributing factors also include: low income, general poverty, and lack of education, reduced employment opportunities, poor housing, depressed neighbourhoods, crime, family breakdowns, and ill health. Social exclusion places an almost insurmountable barrier in front of struggling communities. Nick Davies describes the searing hopelessness of this kind of lifestyle.

Life is queuing for giros, propping up a wall on the corner of a street, sleeping till the afternoon and watching telly till dawn. Life is nothing. It is being pregnant for no reason, being jobless with no hope. It means nothing. It has fallen apart.

It is not difficult to nominate and locate several urban communities directly affected by social exclusion. Toxteth, Meadowell, Blackbird Leys, Tottenham and Brixton are possibly the most notorious, but there are others. This chapter highlights the glowering community anger that sparked the infamous ‘Riotous Decade’ of the Eighties and Nineties. It was the performative residue of the Sex Pistols ‘Anarchy in the UK,’ a

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13 Batty, ibid. The article states, “By the mid-1990s Britain had more children growing up in unemployed households than anywhere else in Europe, and the highest teenage pregnancy rate.”
14 Tackling poverty has always been high on the Blair Government’s list. As to whether it is possible to bring about lasting change of the nature outlined in Mr Blair’s speech is open to question. He states, “Our goal is a Britain in which nobody is left behind; in which people can go as far as they have the talent to go; in which we achieve true equality — equal status and equal opportunity rather than equality of outcome.” See, “Prime Minister’s speech tackling poverty and social exclusion,” 18 September 2002. http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page1726.asp (21/02/2005)
media intensified orgy of spontaneous looting, rioting, vandalism, murder and arson. Orwell’s vision of ‘decent’ Englishness had seemingly been lost along the way.16

Localised decentralised community anger was plainly not what Orwell had in mind when he argued for a people’s revolution in Part III of the ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’ (1940).17 He conceived of a concerted ‘grass roots’ political movement — something more effective than the existing Labour Party — led by the emerging new “middling class” of managers and skilled technicians.18 The result was to be English democratic socialism (as distinct from Russian communism), and the end of the capitalist monopoly at home and abroad. This would also necessitate self-rule for India. He called for a more even distribution of wealth, “a limitation of incomes,”19 the nationalisation of industry (coal and steel), and educational reform.20 Orwell’s ‘English Revolution’ was doubtless naive political idealism. It was also doomed to failure from the outset, a case of wishful thinking seriously out of kilter. The English were not Spanish peasants, and Orwell was no Buenaventura Durutti.21 There would be no armed attacks on the Establishment’s forces, no manning of barricades, no blood spilled on the pavements.

16 “A quarter century after Punk, England is still dreaming, its New Labour consensus brittle, fearful, beset by demons both imaginary and real. It is fair to relate the government to the country partly because of the sheer weight of the May 1997 election victory, but also because national identity has been an explicit project of New Labour — the ‘reclaiming of the flag’ for modern Britishness, the wresting of it away from malign Thatcherite nationalism.” Jon Savage, England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock, (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), ix
17 George Orwell, Essays (London: Penguin, 2000), 171
18 George Orwell, Essays, 174
19 Orwell, ibid., 176
20 Orwell, ibid.
21 Antony Beevor, The Spanish Civil War (London: Cassell, 2004), 83-87
In this chapter, I present an England that, although it had undergone considerable socio-economic development, still suffered very grave (and largely unresolved) domestic problems. British citizens needed jobs, affordable housing, adequate educational facilities, racial and gendered equity, equality and justice. A new so-called ‘under’ class had arisen thanks largely to the economic policies of the Thatcher Government: it was regional, young and sometimes very angry. Several British writers and journalists went in search of this ‘hidden’ Britain. They presented a unique view of a localised working class nation under siege. The more traditional working class communities — those visited by Orwell, and J. B. Priestley, and portrayed so starkly by Walter Greenwood — are as far removed from the drug-infested crime-laden gang-terrorised housing estates of Sheffield, Salford, and Newcastle as the past is from the present. Danziger states, “Two [new] classes are being created: the educated and the uneducated.” The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the demise of Trade Union power, and the downsizing (or closure) of the coal, steel, and ship building industries. Seen as part of a bigger picture, back-to-back Conservative Governments were intent on strengthening the widening gap between rich and poor. Polly Toynbee, in her later debunking of conditions in Tony Blair’s ‘Low-Pay’ Britain, shows how hard it is to survive (legally) on the minimum wage. This chapter slots into the overarching premise of this thesis that Orwell’s gloomy view of the future was not the result of a dying man’s

22 Among them: John Pilger, Beatrix Campbell, Nick Davies, Nick Danziger, Paul Harrison, Jack Ramsay, and Beryl Bainbridge.
23 See Nick Danziger, Danziger’s Britain: A Journey to the Edge (London: Flamingo, 1997)
24 Danziger, ibid., 7
depression, but a prediction based on an understanding of the aims (if not the theory) of
global capital.

Long-term unemployment bestows social stigma on those affected by it. It
combines notions of unworthiness and shame, mixed in with anger and self-blame. In
1980, according to The Guardian, Britain recorded its “highest unemployment figures
since 1935.” Joblessness, along with its visible characteristics — run-down
neighbourhoods, vandalism, drugs and petty crime — was highly visible throughout the
British Isles, despite attempts to hide poverty behind trendy architectural facades.
Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, (Glasgow, Scotland) and Sheffield have all
undergone considerable economic renewal since the Thatcher years. Nevertheless, it is
worth remembering that in 1996 the UN released a startling report which “found that
Great Britain had the most unequal society in the West, with the poorest two fifths of the
population receiving a smaller share of the nation’s income than … any other
industrialised country except Russia.” Although the UN statement sounds like it is
describing another Britain, there is ample documentary evidence — books, journalism,
reports — to support its central thesis.

25 Viviane Forester, The Economic Horror (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 4
http://www.guardian.co.uk/northsouth/article/0,2763,1369820,00.html (14/02/2005); Helen
Carter and Peter Hetherington, “‘Terrific’ Liverpool carries off key accolade,” The Guardian, 5
(14/02/2005); Regeneration - Greater Manchester.
http://www.northwestplc.com/regeneration/manchester.htm (14/02/2005); David Ward, “Forget
Paris and London, Newcastle is a creative city to match Kabul and Tijuana,” The Guardian, 2
(14/02/2005)
The signs of industrial decline and depression are most evident in heavily industrialised cities like Newcastle. When Priestley visited the Tyneside sixty years earlier, the impact of large scale redundancy was immediate and obvious. The ‘idle’ workforce was plainly visible on the corners of every street. Many of the large Shipyards were already silent or facing imminent closure. Priestley reluctantly concluded, “Nothing, it seemed, would ever happen here” again. Sixty years later, Jack Ramsay’s impression of the city’s sprawling dormitory suburbs — Gateshead, Jarrow, Wallsend — “was of an immense bleakness.” He wondered at the grey concrete purposelessness of the acres of identikit homes. Ramsay also pondered the psychological changes that had occurred among the city’s disillusioned and dole dependant residents. In particular, Newcastle’s reputation for car theft, or ‘twocking’ (taking without consent), bothered him. Ramsay quickly realised that this reputation for car crime was entirely deserved. He recalls, “what truly amazed me … was how quickly I came upon an incidence of car crime.” Recovering his composure, Ramsay notes that the angry (often) judgmental tirades in the daily press were frequently wide of the mark. At best, the emotive headlines proved little more than effective sales strategies for the tabloids. Newspaper editorials consistently failed to mention that ‘twocking’ was essentially an angry “response to an economic crisis,” a response to the lack of jobs for young people. There was undoubtedly petty regional crime throughout the 1930s, but joyriding in

29 Ramsay, *England, This England*, 77
31 Ramsay, *England, This England*, 71
32 Ramsay, ibid., 70
33 Ramsay, ibid., 67
34 Beatrix Campbell, *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places* (London: Methuen, 1993), 303
Newcastle represented, as it did elsewhere, a highly visible expression of class-based anger, with much more at stake than simple covetousness.  

Howard Parker demystifies joyriding. It is about “excitement, competition, status and adrenalin-pumping stimulation.” It is an attempt by susceptible young men to reproduce the lifestyle of success represented by advertising and Hollywood movies otherwise denied them by poverty and unemployment. It is a new form of class war, a “War against the law.” In short, this youthful anger forms the basis of an all-out assault against ‘normalcy,’ — a war against traditional English values.

Orwell publicly explored the potential of revolution in ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’ (1940), but twocking and drugs, and vandalism are plainly not what he had in mind. The vibrant atmosphere and easy comradeship of Barcelona early in the Spanish Civil War, with everyone equal — that was Orwell’s vision. In Spain, the people’s righteous anger had been directed against the establishment — the church, the greedy landholders and the army. Hugh Thomas describes those who wanted change — the ‘enlightened’ middle and hard-pressed working classes — being “maddened by years of insult, misery and neglect, intoxicated by the knowledge of the better conditions enjoyed by their class comrades in France and Britain.” However, Spain was backward and illiterate in 1936, compared to the leading countries in Europe, so there was a sense of purpose and determination about reaching for a better life. The Spanish workers wanted

35 Ramsay, England, This England, 70, 72
37 Ramsay, England, This England, 36
38 Nick Davies, Dark Heart, 78
relief, and were prepared to spill blood to attain it. The same organised determination could not be attributed to Britain, either in the lead up to World War Two, or during the disorderly Thatcher-Major years. Most of the housing estates described in this chapter were war zones during the ‘Riotous decade’ — no go areas for outsiders. Dangerous for residents, visitors and local businesses, Orwell would have barely recognised these events as occurring in England. His nostalgic vision of a peaceable nation of ‘decent’ rural shopkeepers, finally roused to justifiable anger over petty injustices and inequality, is very different from the rigors of life in and around a graffiti plastered urban Tower block. This should be retained in mind when reading Orwell in the twenty-first century. It is not that his work is outmoded — the anger was always there — it is that the England Orwell knew and loved is no longer possible in a global economy.

Ramsay frankly admits that his “initial impression of Newcastle had not been good.” He believes that much of the alleged ‘youth crime’ was preventable. What the city needed was jobs. There are enormous coal reserves in the Newcastle region. Many of the disused mines would still be operational were it not for the Government backed closures. The seemingly ‘natural’ progression from coal to gas to nuclear power, instigated by the Blair Government, reeks of political opportunism and ‘under-the-counter’ deals. Years of industrial decline and social degeneracy, of anger and deeply felt resentment, must eventually find some form of civil expression. However, the incidence of young males (South Asian, black and white) participating in organised

41 Ramsay, *England, This England*, 70
42 Ramsay, ibid., 77
crime was not only restricted to Tyneside. A perusal of the Yellow Pages in any sizeable town or industrial area in Britain reveals a steady increase in security options available nation-wide. Crime or ‘gangster capitalism,’ is a highly profitable (though illegal) form of business venture. In many instances, it is perceived to be the only available option for Britain’s lower class citizens. Nick Davies’ intensely disturbing book, *Dark Heart: the Shocking Truth about Hidden Britain* (1998), and Nick Danziger’s *A Journey to the Edge* (1997) compile detailed testimony of countless young people who hold to this view. Significantly, Jack Ramsay interprets crime as a symptom of industrial decay, which can be directly linked to the rusting hulks and “smashed concrete” piers — the shattered dreams — of the weed infested shipyards along the Tyne. Where once there was activity, bustle, and industry, “The din of working machinery and the noise of riveters”, now there is just a profound and drawn-out silence. The plaintiff cries of seagulls serenade the Newcastle of Ramsay’s acquaintance. It is a city reverberating with sullen anger over its lost skills and traditions and daily menaced by youthful joyriders.

**What happened?**

The journey from full and ‘meaningful’ employment, the ideology at the heart of production line Fordism, to enforced redundancy and the resultant loss of identity in the

43 Ramsay, ibid., 79
44 This phrase ‘gangster capitalism,’ emerged in conversation over coffee with Professor Steve Redhead mid 2003.
45 Ramsay, *England, This England*, 76
46 Ramsay, ibid., 80
47 Ramsay, ibid., 80
post-Fordist world, is not an easy transition. For the once-proud inhabitants of Tyneside, with their unique working history, the sense of loss is almost beyond comprehension. Beatrix Campbell states in *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places* (1993) that “full employment had been sacred in postwar Britain until Thatcherism created levels of mass unemployment unseen in the postwar era.” The prospect of nearly four million Britons without a future, or the hope of a regular income, produced a violent reaction whose reverberations echoed ominously in those communities hardest hit by mill and pit closure. Incredibly, Britain’s unemployment figures in the early 1980s are higher than the figures registered at the height of the Great Depression, when Priestley undertook his *English Journey*. No wonder Jack Ramsay found Newcastle unsettling; the anger was too raw, too immediate, too close to the surface. Working class areas, especially those plagued by crime and vandalism were also the recipients of unwelcome heavy-handed policing. Journalist Hugo Young blamed the police for triggering the explosive racial violence in Brixton and Tottenham. Externally imposed restrictions and night time curfews inevitably produce strong reactions and in some instances lead to open revolt. Car theft is not an ideal way to make a political statement, but it is an uncomfortable reminder that the world is not a happy or even a safe place, especially not

49 Beatrix Campbell, *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places*, 303
for the marginalised poor. The end of the nineteen-eighties saw the emergence of a new sociological trend — the ‘underclass.’ John Pilger believes that ‘labelling’ a person or a community in this way is a subterfuge, designed primarily to hide the real causes of poverty — corporate greed, competition, and selfishness — by shifting the blame for ‘failure’ back onto the individual.

Virtually overnight Britain’s most vulnerable citizens, the homeless, the dispossessed and jobless, became widely known as dole “scroungers.” They were the new lumpenproletariat — unremarkable citizens not even useful to political economists, except as a stimulus for welfare cutbacks. Within British society — meaning the commonly adopted “institutions and relationships” where deserving citizenship is measured by personal achievement and accumulated wealth, those without measurable capital are deemed social pariahs. ‘Underclass’ is a derogatory exclusionary label used for individuals who have demonstrably ‘failed’ in life, who have allegedly “created [the

52 The use of this deeply problematical term in Britain can be attributed to visiting American sociologist Charles Murray. In an AEI paper published in 1990, Murray states his basic premise: “Since 1989, I have been using three indicators as a concise way of tracking the underclass: criminality, dropout from the labor force among low-income young males, and illegitimacy among low-income young women.” Putting that another way, for Murray, the underclass are the ‘undeserving’ poor. Charles Murray, “The Underclass Revisited,” American Enterprise Institute, 1 January 2000. http://www.aei.org/publication14891 (23/11/2005). Murray expands on this in an article published by the Sunday Times: “By underclass, I do not mean people who are merely poor, but rather people at the margins of society, unsocialized and often violent. The chronic criminal is part of the underclass, especially the violent chronic criminal. But so are parents who mean well but who cannot provide for themselves, who give nothing back to the neighborhood, and whose children are the despair of the teachers who have to deal with them.” See, Charles Murray, “The British Underclass: Ten Years Later,” The Public Interest, Fall 2001. http://www.thepublicinterest.com/archives/2001fall/article3.html (23/11/2005).


55 Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana, 1988), 291
conditions of their own poverty.”56 This deeply flawed argument resonates with middle class meritocracy. Journalist Polly Toynbee, who wanted to experience low-paid employment opportunities first hand, discovered that some employers in Britain actively exploited whatever wages loopholes they could find. One woman Toynbee quizzed while working in a cake factory — even though she was from the EU “and [subsequently] not an illegal worker,”57 — was deliberately paid less than the minimum wage. The inference being that even the protective measures of a minimum hourly rate failed the individual worker. Toynbee concluded that had the woman, or anyone else in a similar position, complained she would have lost her job.58 Any contract between unscrupulous employers and a floating unskilled casual workforce allows for below minimum (cash-in-hand) wages. The acknowledged rules of this kind of employment discourages whistle-blowing. It can be argued that although the law exerts pressure on employers to comply with the minimum wage, the necessity of finding work — particularly unskilled — exerts yet other pressures. This arrangement necessitates complicity. Where the demand for work is greatest, those with bills and mortgages allow themselves to be exploited. This has nothing to do with deliberately choosing to fail, and everything to do with injustice and negligence on the part of the Government of the day to police its wage laws. Instead of receiving recognition and support, the unemployed are subjected to opprobrium. This is compounded by feelings of shame, whereby the jobless are encouraged to “consider themselves … responsible for their own situation.”59

Viviane Forrester argues that this merely serves the authorities’ purposes, since a

56 Murray cited Campbell, Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places, 308
57 Polly Toynbee, Hard Work: Life in Low-pay Britain (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 176
58 Toynbee, ibid.
59 Viviane Forrester, The Economic Horror, 5
discouraged demoralised workforce rarely voices its grievances publicly.\textsuperscript{60} Orwell also understood exploitation. He discovered the vexations associated with hard work (long hours for low pay) while working in a Paris hotel in the late 1920s. He argued that low paid (exploited) workers are frequently too tired to do much more than work and sleep.\textsuperscript{61} As a result, the exploitation continues unchecked.

\textbf{Orwell’s revolution}

Like many of those affected and outraged by the Great Depression, George Orwell was profoundly angry too. He had painstakingly assembled an understanding of the root causes of working class anger from years spent passing himself off as a tramp, and from his \textit{Wigan Pier} research. Also, he had experienced anarchist-controlled Barcelona for a brief (yet wonderful) moment in 1936/37. For Orwell, the heady effects of Anarchist Catalonia with blaring non-stop propaganda, buildings plastered with colourful political posters, and its army of blue clad workers never entirely subsided. It was his unwavering belief in the political good sense of the Spanish working classes that encouraged Orwell to embrace socialism more fully, as he explained in a letter to Cyril Connolly.\textsuperscript{62} He hoped that righteous class-based anger would serve to unite the working classes in England, and bring to an end centuries of upper class intrigue and social injustice. This was anger that the intellectual left entirely failed to grasp or comprehend. Yet significantly, the English working classes did not live up to Orwell’s rigid

\textsuperscript{60} Forrester, ibid., 6
expectations, and failed to produce active dissent in his lifetime. He had reasoned that some kind of a revolution was needed if England was ever to survive the war, but whether that would entail lengthy (and ultimately bloody) street fighting is entirely a matter for conjecture. In ‘The Lion and the Unicorn,’ he argued that capitalism had substantially failed to help the English people prepare for the war.\(^6\) British capitalism evidently had its own agenda — insatiable greed —, which ran at variance with the needs of the rest of the country. Orwell argued that only through revolution could Fascism be defeated. Socialism, to his mind, was the only political system capable of producing the right kind of result — world peace. With hindsight, as Jack Ramsay contends, we now know that Orwell was misinformed about the political will and intentions of the English working classes and completely wrong about the advantages of socialism.\(^6\) He recognised the grievances and supported the workers’ cause, but there was to be no English revolution. Orwell was ahead of his time in that he realised that envious resentment would spill out into the streets — which it did during the Thatcher and Major years. Revolution (even a peaceable one) is something that Tony Blair’s New Labour, and to a lesser degree Mark Latham (‘Mutualism’) and the ALP here in Australia (2003),\(^6\) have tried to head-off and curtail. Mr. Blair’s Third Way seeks to

\(^6\) Ramsay, England, This England, 325
\(^6\) Labour lost the 2004 election under Mark Latham’s leadership. Mr Latham has since been forced by illness to retire from politics, thereby paving the way for Mr Beazley to return to the Party’s top job. It is fair to say that Latham’s personality and policies did not convince the electorate of his suitability, and Labour under Beazley has returned to moderation. See, Catherine McGrath, “PM - Beazley aims to rekindle interest in Labour,” ABC Online, 28 January 2005. http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2005/s1291432.htm (15/02/2005). Catherine McGrath, “PM - Latham's demise,” ABC Online, 18 January 2005. http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2005/s1284215.htm (15/02/2005). In addition, “Latham
dampen down dissent, and to mobilise localised community-based politics to prevent such a people’s revolution from ever occurring. Meanwhile, the contemporary world has all but lost sight of the ‘tea-and-two-slices’ mentality that defined the (angry, hungry) unemployed labourer of Orwell’s Road to Wigan Pier. Capitalism, in its American guise, with strategically placed expressways, shopping malls, cinema complexes, and fast food outlets has robbed us of the capacity to recall or to imagine the world of our forebears. In a compelling analysis of large-scale retail outlets John Goss advises, “[S]hopping has become the dominant mode of contemporary public life.” Commodity fetishism (the need to purchase) has supplant ed basic common sense and human virtue. The jostling global ‘free-for-all’ known as commerce has indelibly affected the contemporary consciousness.

Work stability is tenuous, fractured and outdated. Ours is an ‘illusory’ world where image and lifestyle is important. We have jumped to a post-industrial (post-work) era while still retaining the illusion of the old Fordist model. Viviane Forrester states, “We are still fiddling with the vestiges of that world, busily plugging gaps, patching up emptiness, fudging up substitutes around a system that has not just collapsed but vanished.” We present glossy airbrushed superficiality to the unwary Third World

67 Jon Goss, ibid., 18
69 Viviane Forrester, The Economic Horror, 2
nations in place of ‘civilisation.’ Traditional everyday activities and social mores have subsequently changed immeasurably from those of the Orwell-Priestley era. The loss is ours, not theirs. Today’s global citizens are exposed to alarming levels of poverty, crime and financial uncertainty, which exist in the wake of plenty. Unemployment, drugs, as well as theft, violence, graffiti, vandalism, mental illness, and increasing bouts of depression and alienation assault us at every turn. English (and Australian) working class traditions that were once carefully built around work, extended families, and the neighbourhood, has changed irrevocably. Successive UK Governments and policy makers are responsible for the wholesale closure of shipyards, factories, and mines. Urban Planners have bulldozed entire neighbourhoods erecting tower blocks in their place. The worship of mammon has wreaked havoc on communities, families and individuals alike. The reality is that for the so-called ‘underclass,’ the past no longer really matters — and for most people under thirty — the period between the two world wars now seems to be hopelessly old fashioned and inconsequential. The tragic outcome

70 In reality it is a ruse to entrap them. To mobilize Bello, “Capitalism constantly erodes man and woman’s being-in-nature (creature) and being-in-society (citizen) and, even as it drains them of life energy as workers, it moulds their consciousness around one role: that of consumer.” Walden Bello, “The crisis of the globalist project and the new economics of George W. Bush,” McPlanet Conference, Berlin, 27 June 2002. http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/bello/crisis_globalist.htm (22/01/2005).


of this dénouement is envisaged and further developed by Orwell in the disturbingly
dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Oceania is a state without individual history or memory. I have maintained
throughout this thesis that Orwell’s primary concern as a writer was for freedom of
speech — and the desire for objective truth. During the Spanish Civil War, he had
objected to the barrage of lies and propaganda that would ultimately leach into written
history. Events that never occurred were destined to become fact.73 He noted in A
Clergyman’s Daughter (1935) how the poorest families were generally without books or
learning.74 The same applied to many of the miners in Wigan Pier.75 British citizens
were unaware of the extent of their marginality. Lies could be substituted for truth and
no one would be any the wiser.76 Orwell developed this theme to its logical conclusion
in Nineteen Eighty-Four. The proles enacted their lives with little comprehension or
recognition of a traditional past, and no progressive expectations for the future. Life
under Big Brother was uniformly grey and one dimensional:

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

Beyond the pleasure principle

The twenty-first century’s inability to focus beyond the very recent past (only a
decade or two at most) is troubling. By ignoring even our recent past we are ultimately

73 George Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” in Orwell in Spain (London: Penguin,
2001), 352. Think also about the Jessica Lynch chronicles, and Saddam Hussein’s WMDs.
74 Ian Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 61; George Orwell, A Clergyman’s Daughter
(Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), 196
75 Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, 76
76 Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 61
robbing not only ourselves, but posterity, of the prescience of mind that archival memory usually generates. Doubtless with this in mind, Jack Ramsay travelled in search of traces of (an older) England. He discovered that the urban cityscape had changed considerably — in some instances even dramatically — from the ‘grimy’ Thirties. Yet squalid living conditions especially for those on welfare or working part-time jobs remained relatively unchanged. There was inadequate housing, appalling poverty, and a sense of brooding hopelessness and despair.77 Homelessness was on the increase. David Batty of The Guardian concurs, “in the early 90s there were about 2,000 people sleeping rough in London every night.”78 Ramsay detected a noticeable increase in lawlessness: particularly vandalism, graffiti, ‘twocking,’ and drug dealing in inner city housing estates. He noticed that crime was increasing. This is not greatly surprising with high unemployment, and bored angry young men with no money and plenty of time on their hands. Cambridge researcher David Dickinson found that “Men between the ages of 17 and 25 constituted almost 70 per cent of adult convictions and cautions for burglary in 1990.”79 Although unwilling to admit to there being a direct link between crime and unemployment, Dickinson acknowledges that joblessness does play its part. Ramsay visited Toxteth in Liverpool, the scene of several weeks of indiscriminate law-breaking in July 1981.80 Seeking to expose its causes he alleges it is ludicrous “to [expect] that unemployed young men living in a society that continually sensationalizes the power of money … will sit peaceably at home reading books like schoolboys.”81 It is a well-

77 Ramsay, England, This England, 13
80 Ramsay, England, This England, 33
81 Ramsay, ibid., 36
considered point, for emulation (in this instance the desire to possess the culturally iconic) provides a powerful stimulant to crime.

Approaching the problem from yet another perspective, author Jeremy Seabrook concludes, “We are perpetually dissatisfied” with what we have, and desperate for what we lack.82 There will continue to be community anger and violence whenever resources are so unfairly divided. Ramsay indicates that only a small minority is responsible for violence. Whilst it is unpleasant and frightening, such aggression probably acts as a safety valve. Unfortunately the anger and frustration is likely to return. Although looting cannot ever be pardoned or condoned, extreme poverty is a legitimisation for such behaviour.83 Ramsay’s inference is all too familiar: “The growing brutality of modern society is connected to the workings of capitalist economics … and nobody except an idiot … would claim it as otherwise.”84 Strong feelings — and a belief that life is not fair — give rise to public expressions of discontent. During the Toxteth riots, cars and local shops were specifically targeted and firebombed (within a relatively small and restricted area) by gangs of boys and young men. The known facts have doubtless been greatly distorted by the news media, to the annoyance and chagrin of many of Toxteth’s otherwise orderly residents.85 Others besides Ramsay, Pilger, and Seabrook, have written extensively on the dangers of urban living. In the wake of Britain’s now infamous summer of riots, Beatrix Campbell claimed that politicians were unable to appreciate the intensity of feeling involved. Campbell states, “After the 1991 riots, no

82 Jeremy Seabrook, “For Richer Read Poorer,” The Ecologist, 22 December 2002
83 Ramsay, England, This England, 14
84 Ramsay, ibid., 41
85 Ramsay, ibid., 44
political party sponsored any discussion in any neighbourhood about what the people had lived through.” 86 The physical circumstances, the looting and firebombing, attracted little more than condemnation and vitriol from the Police and Downing Street. With that response in mind it is just conceivable that government does not greatly care, so long as the violence is isolated and contained.

**England my England**

Doubtlessly, Orwell longed for barricaded London streets and crowds of angry workers busily energized by the disruption of the status quo. By 1944, he had reluctantly conceded that although the English working classes wanted relief, they had neither the political will nor the imagination to bring such changes about. He states, “[P]eople want profound change, but they do not want violence.” 87 Coming as it does after his Spanish war experiences, this assessment is crucial to understanding Orwell’s politics. The English people, so he believed, were inherently law abiding and far too decent to allow wholesale violence to occur. In his mind England was still the land of the “red pillar box.” 88 The point is that in the 1940s, the English could not be agitated like the Spanish workers in Barcelona. Instead, their anger was tempered by hope. At best, the English working classes would opt for a peaceful resolution to their long-standing grievances. They wanted “steady jobs and a fair deal for their children,” not fighting and bloodshed.

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86 Beatrix Campbell, *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places*, 303
and death in the streets.\textsuperscript{89} This was Orwell’s England. He recognised the need, but was honest enough to accept defeat on the English revolutionary front. Although he considered the possibilities of socialist revolution, not everyone agrees that Orwell was committed to purist socialist values. This is because he was generally hostile to those publications on the left that consistently refused to denounce the damaging role played by the Soviets in Spain. Orwell claimed that papers like \textit{The News Chronicle} and \textit{The Daily Worker} unfairly sided with the Politburo, rather than exposing their duplicity. Scott Lucas, from the University of Birmingham (UK), refers to Orwell as “an anti-communist liberal,”\textsuperscript{90} but perhaps that best describes the period two to three years before his premature death, when he had further tightened his anti-Stalinist position. In spite of contrary opinions, Orwell’s politics remained more to the left than the right until his death.

The general election in 1950, fourteen years after Orwell penned his \textit{Wigan Pier} manifesto, captured an unprecedented eighty-four per cent of voter participation. This enthusiastic turnout was clearly good news for the British Labour Party, which snapped up forty-six per cent of the vote to the Conservatives forty-three.\textsuperscript{91} However, voter confidence has dipped markedly in the interim fifty years. Since Mr. Blair’s landslide victory in 1997, interest in politics (and political parties in general) has steadily declined. Younger voters in particular show less political inclination and enthusiasm than their

\textsuperscript{89} Orwell, “The English People,” 15
\textsuperscript{91} Alan Sked and Chris Cook, \textit{Post-War Britain: A Political History} (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), 95
parents and grandparents. In reference to the 2001 election figures, Peter Kellner states,

Most under-30s feel detached from the world of parties and governments. They do not feel any tribal loyalty towards any party, nor do they feel that the act of voting makes much difference. They see neither a partisan nor an instrumental case for making the journey to the polling station.

An earlier example of this downward trend occurred in Newcastle’s West End which “averaged just twenty per cent” of the available voter turnout. These figures relate to more secure times. Events post 9/11, especially the circumstances surrounding Britain’s involvement in Iraq, has cost Mr. Blair and Labour dearly. A September 2004 article in the Observer claims, “Less than a third of the electorate is satisfied with Blair's performance.” The same article also states, “According to MORI's analysis for the Fawcett Society, confidence in Blair is now as low as that experienced by Margaret Thatcher in the last 18 months of her premiership.” Of course, this does not mean that

92 The 2001 General Election provided yet another landslide victory for Labour — their second in a row. Although Labour received 42% of the vote to the Conservatives 32.4%, there was a considerable reduction in voter turnout. Pippa Norris states, “turnout plummeted, from 71.5% to 58.4%, the lowest since the khaki election of 1918. Four out of ten voters stayed home so that any electoral mandate was grudging and tepid, vitiating the sense that the public had given the government a fresh popular mandate and that Labour had won the electorate's 'hearts and minds.'” Pippa Norris, “Apathetic Landslide: The 2001 British General Election,” Parliamentary Affairs 54 (2001): 569. Norris’ interpretation is instructive: “Rather than displaying an enthusiastic endorsement of the Labour Party, the public seemed resigned to giving the government another chance to get it right ... and to fix basic public services like schools, hospitals and trains.” Norris, ibid., 570


96 Worcester, ibid.
Labour will lose the next election, but it does mean that voter confidence in the Government is low.\textsuperscript{97} The article also mentioned that support for the Conservative Party was poor. Clearly, the onus for such a disappointing result rests with the political parties themselves. It could be argued, that although working people are constantly clamouring for an improved lifestyle — job security, higher wages, improved healthcare, lower mortgage interest rates — this does not necessitate their involvement in the political process. Beatrix Campbell has noted that increasingly it is the women who make the initial effort to lobby local councils over funding for play areas, and residents’ services, while the men shy away.\textsuperscript{98} Campbell also verifies that on Meadowell — a Tyneside estate that erupted into violence in the 1990s — although there was grudging acceptance by men on the estate that changes were necessary, the majority were clearly uncomfortable with the idea of women committing themselves to local politics.\textsuperscript{99}

Seemingly the residents of housing projects only ever suspend their major differences when there is something too great to ignore. The large crowds that demonstrated against the poll tax in Trafalgar Square provide an example of this kind of solidarity, but it is all too rare in a culture where men and women traditionally occupy different political, social and economic roles.\textsuperscript{100} It is a classic working class narrative, where the men bring


\textsuperscript{98} Beatrix Campbell, \textit{Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places}, 230

\textsuperscript{99} Campbell, ibid., 230, 248

\textsuperscript{100} Campbell, ibid., 242
home the pay, and women are isolated at home.\textsuperscript{101} Change in working class communities is generational.

\section*{This is a Class War}

During the Eighties and early Nineties, the anarchist-inspired \textit{Class War} — perhaps in the (mistaken) belief that it alone was responsible for voicing popular dissents — maintained a continuous barrage of spiteful invective against the Conservatives. Recoiling in dismay from the paper’s provocative and inflammatory prose, others on the left with more political savvy regarded all such publications — and \textit{Class War} was prominent among them — as futile exercises. By employing polemic slogans such as, “the poor die, the rich get treated,” and “the rich flaunt their lives of luxury in our faces,”\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Class War} added (understandable) anger and invective to British working class experience. However, their capacity to understand and theorise how and why Margaret Thatcher was voted into office was much less developed. The anger that \textit{Class War} sought to exploit was real, not imagined. Surveys have estimated that by the end of the 1990s, almost a quarter of Britain’s population (some 14 million people) were living on or below the breadline.\textsuperscript{103} Compared with figures compiled in the 1930s, these are equally depressing statistics.\textsuperscript{104} As for the anger, it is no longer — was it ever — the case that poor people are unable to quantify their predicament from books and outside

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Campbell, ibid., 233
\item Ian Bone, Alan Pullen and Tim Scargill (eds.), \textit{Class War: A Decade of Disorder} (London: Verso, 1991), 104
\item Nick Davies, \textit{Dark Heart}, 140
\item The numbers of families living in extreme poverty in Britain is of very grave concern. For figures relating to the Depression see, Keith Laybourn, \textit{Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain Between the Wars} (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1990), 139
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
sources. In the nineteenth century, there were high levels of illiteracy. Now, even the poorest households possess television and radio. *Class War* was outraged because they knew that the Thatcher Government was lying about government Welfare provisions.\(^{105}\)

In 1983, just like in 1936, the dole was totally inadequate, and virtually impossible to sustain life.\(^{106}\) In 2003, Polly Toynbee discovered that the minimum wage was also too low. Concerning Britain’s poor Toynbee states, “They will never own their own homes, never save more than a pittance, never have pensions to make them independent in old age. Illness or accident will plunge them downwards, yet they work on until they die young.”\(^{107}\) At the other extreme, a tiny fraction of the population — the technical, professional and managerial class — is earning more than it can absorb. Since the early nineteenth century, these and similar injustices have been encountered and endured by the working classes on a daily basis. Working people, especially in 1980s England, understood the situation readily enough: life is tough, and there is not much evidence of social justice or mobility for those without powerful political connections. Orwell nostalgically traced the demise of the Old World economy right back to “The spring of 1914.”\(^{108}\) What *Class War* evidently failed to appreciate at the time was the extent to which the world would change under the directives of the World Trade Organization and the new global capitalism.

Viviane Forrester, somewhat controversially, suggested in her book *The Economic Horror*, that the long-term prospect of paid employment for the majority of

\(^{105}\) Davies, *Dark Heart*, 141

\(^{106}\) Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, 9

\(^{107}\) Polly Toynbee, *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain*, 13

(in this instance) French citizens was already under threat of permanent disruption.  

This is deindustrialization, or post-industrialization, which has devastated former centres of production throughout the world. In Britain, whole communities have been adversely affected. Danziger states, “entire families and neighbourhoods [have] been wiped off the job map. They are not equipped to deal with the destruction of [the] past by politics and competition and the pace of technology.” Those with long traditions of hard work and enterprise, Sheffield, Newcastle, Bradford, Manchester, Coventry and Birmingham, were all adversely affected. Men with a narrow range of specialist skills were unable to find work outside of their immediate area of expertise and training. Frequently this had devastating results on wellbeing and mental health. Whole communities imploded under the strain. Traditionally work provides the individual with the tangible means of securing valuable social and economic status within the democratic state. Waged employment supposedly provides access to the necessities of life — food, shelter, and clothing — and allows a viable, if not an entirely secure future for unborn generations. Yet the very foundations of paid work (of legal employment) are under siege. As we cede rights to G8, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank and other bodies allowing them to tamper with prices, trade, and finance, the world radically changes. Of one thing we can be quite certain, when the rich nations are responsible for sharing out portions of the cake, the vast majority of smaller nations will

109 Viviane Forrester, *The Economic Horror*, 4-5
111 Nick Danziger, *Danziger’s Britain*, 53
have to settle for crumbs. Forrester states that work, as a commodity and tool of capital, is no longer sustainable or is a profitable supplement to the economy.\(^\text{114}\) Indeed, the long established tradition of ‘honest toil’ for the majority (and it is not just France that will suffer) is literally “vanishing into thin air.”\(^\text{115}\) Work, recognised as a necessary means of income and support, and certainly traceable from the earliest years of the Industrial Revolution, is continuing to undergo a profound and disturbing metamorphosis. Much of Britain’s ‘production’\(^\text{116}\) has already been moved ‘offshore.’\(^\text{117}\) Orwell recognised early that the left also played a key role in sustaining the exploitation of “cheap coloured labour”\(^\text{118}\) in the colonies. This hypocrisy enabled ‘democracy’ in Britain and Europe to function as normal. He claimed, “the majority of left-wing politicians and publicists are people who earn their living by demanding something that they don’t genuinely want.”\(^\text{119}\) The giant multinationals are reaping the rewards of this same strategy.

The drawn out campaign of urban violence envisaged by *Class War* has not emerged in any sense as predicted. *Class War* stated, “By 1999, the urban war will be a permanent feature of everyday life in every benighted city on this septic isle.”\(^\text{120}\) It is true that a number of randomly unconnected (small-scale) ‘riots’ occurred during the

\(^{114}\) Viviane Forrester, *The Economic Horror*, 7

\(^{115}\) Forrester, ibid., 1


\(^{117}\) Nick Danziger, *Danziger’s Britain*, 8


\(^{120}\) Bone et al, *Class War*, 59
years that the paper was in existence, but it is unlikely that these incidents were directly attributable to its aggressive stance. It is far more likely that the ‘riots’ were localised responses to extremely unwelcome (and irresponsible) policing.\footnote{Jolyon Jenkins, “Spoiling for a fight,” \textit{New Statesman & Society} 4, no. 168 (13 September, 1991): 16} Housing estates are not pleasant or productive places to live. Most people recognize the problems of such locations, but violent confrontation, firebombing shops and terrorising elderly residents (as Beatrix Campbell has pointed out) is not the best way to improve local conditions.\footnote{Beatrix Campbell, \textit{Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places}, 97} It does not create employment opportunities. The obvious answer is that nobody in British politics sees any long-term gains coming from purposeless violence and political mayhem. Blair’s Britain leaves few spaces for unpopular rage and anger. Such squeezing of alternatives is one of the causes for the gradual demise of \textit{Class War} and with it the prospects of extremism and anarchy as a political alternative to the Tories and the Labour Party. It is doubtful too, whether anarchy has ever proven to be effective in securing economic advantage for working class communities. Hindsight has shown that it did not succeed for very long in Spain during the Civil War. Anger without a comprehensive political strategy in place will prove unproductive.

The idea of revolution in England is not without precedent, or unwarranted. There have been riots, minor skirmishes, unrealised ‘popular uprisings’ and ‘massacres’ — we should be mindful of Peterloo — as well as more peaceable gatherings, marches and demonstrations throughout England’s colourful history. Orwell himself supposed that some form of popular uprising would be required if lasting social justice were ever

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
  \bibitem{} Beatrix Campbell, \textit{Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places}, 97
\end{thebibliography}
to be implemented in England. He stated and restated this belief on a number of different occasions.

[If] the problems of western capitalism are to be solved, it will have to be through a third alternative, a movement which is genuinely revolutionary, i.e., willing to make drastic changes and to use violence if necessary, but which does not lose touch, as Communism and Fascism have done, with the essential values of democracy.123

Orwell did not envisage any real alternative to socialism, but then he did not foresee the way in which capitalism and western style democracy would colonise the free world after the war. He did however warn of the spread of American popular culture, which must have posed a considerable threat to “his notion of Englishness.”124 Orwell did not live long enough to see America (fully) emerge as a world super power capable of challenging the military might of the USSR. He did not witness the Kennedy years, or Vietnam, the landing on the moon, or Nixon’s Watergate scandal. He was perhaps mercifully spared the (post) colonial intensification of global economic disparities, instant coffee, tea bags, pre-sliced bread, and television. Yet he clearly supported the idea of social revolution in England. It is ironic though that much of what he envisaged for working people — particularly access to jobs and a better education — did actually eventuate.

To Orwell, it often appeared necessary to reduce the shadowy world of politics, and English capitalism in particular, to its basest form — greed, incompetence and the abuse of power. In this interpretation he is merely confirming a widely accepted working

124 Dominic Strinati, An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture (London: Routledge, 1997), 25-27
class theory that at heart capitalism and the democratic political system is noticeably weighted in favour of the rich and powerful. As Richard Hoggart understood, “The working-classes are at ground-level in the economic jungle.”125 There is nothing remarkable in such an appraisal. During the Depression unemployed miners and disgruntled tradesmen frequently observed that “rich people seem to have thousands to spend on dresses and banquets and every other form of self-aggrandisement,” while working people starved.126 It is a statement that implies a fundamental lack of understanding, for what else is one to do with wealth? Veblen would doubtless claim that such extravagance, if indeed that is what spending necessitates, is merely the result of long accustomed pecuniary habits.127 Having attained wealth and prestige, it is quite logical (and therefore surely acceptable) for the privileged to display their monetary advantage whenever possible. Working class households (even during lean times) are likewise given to hospitality. Veblen perceptively notes that this process has a competitive edge “the propensity for emulation is probably the strongest and most persistent of the economic motives.”128 It means too, that conspicuous consumption has become such a necessary part of everyday life that those on low-incomes also spend liberally whenever possible. Hoggart glowingly refers to the 1950s English ‘housewife’ who — despite straightened resources — purchases little “extravagances” for the family’s tea.129 Money is of no use if it is not spent.

128 Veblen, ibid., 82
129 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 134
The breakdown of neighbourliness and community in Britain’s working class neighbourhoods is overt. Several of the so-called ‘trouble spots’ during the ‘Riotous Decade,’ notably “Oxford, Cardiff and North Shields,” had no previous history of violence; others like London’s Brixton undoubtedly had.130 Many of the Meadowell protagonists were young unemployed men; a significant element of England’s newly designated ‘underclass.’131 Some were ‘lads’ as young as eleven years old, who terrorised housebound and elderly residents, committed burglary, stole cars, and prevented any lasting community effort from succeeding.132 Campbell asserts that they refused to “share space” (and facilities) with the other residents, that is they denied other residents the expression of community interests. Essentially such behaviour is an attempt to assert a lost male dominance, but in an environment where work and the family structure have long-since changed, this attitude is clearly no longer tenable.133 It is clear from the results of Lord Scarman’s enquiry following on from the 1981 Brixton riots, that the police, whose heavy-handed presence (and institutionalised racism) sparked the trouble, had little idea how to prevent potential riot situations from escalating.134 Every violent conflagration inevitably has a point of origin. In Brixton, the violence was attributed to racial harassment, a series of tactical blunders on the part of the police. Upper management in the Met heeded Lord Scarman’s advice very reluctantly, and additional (and unnecessary) violence broke out again in 1985 and 1991.135 Very often, the media’s role is indirectly supportive of the Government’s position on law and

130 Jolyon Jenkins, “Spoiling for a fight,” 16
131 John Pilger, Hidden Agendas, 110
132 Beatrix Campbell, Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places, 241
133 Campbell, ibid., 230-231, 243
134 Beatrix Campbell, ibid., 106-107
135 Jolyon Jenkins, “Spoiling for a fight,” 17
order. Editorials allegedly speak for the community at large. They frame and delineate the community’s fears and expectations. In the Handsworth ‘mugging’ (1972), the troubling considerations of “youth/innocence versus adulthood/the law” came into play. Concerning the upsurge of ‘youth crime,’ the media harboured, exhibited and mobilised strong ideological views pertaining to law and order. It needs to be understood — even if it is not entirely accepted — that the news media seeks to ‘represent’ balanced public opinion. Yet newspapers remain businesses that have a readership to be considered. Sales are important to any businesses survival. The best of editors is rarely impartial. More than that, the media is part of the democratic infrastructure, and democracy is a series of negotiated responses. Returning to the racial conflagration in Brixton, situations involving an uncontrollable mob require a “trigger” or a “flashpoint,” which may be defined as an “unreasonable” occurrence that releases an angry response from a community. In the 1985 Brixton riots, which followed, the neighbourhood erupted angrily because “A black woman had been shot by the police.” Actually, the term ‘riot’ in these instances is emotive and generally unhelpful. Initially the situation is more like an angry remonstration, an intense desire for justice, rather than a breakdown of established order. With improper policing large scale angry gatherings of this type have real potential to escalate into full-scale physical

136 Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan), 86
137 Hall et al., ibid., 85
138 Stuart Hall et al., ibid., 83-84
139 Hall et al., ibid., 88
141 Jolyon Jenkins, “Spoiling for a fight,” 16
confrontations. Campbell asserts that the Tyneside ‘riots,’ though they were frightening, “did not represent revolt [but] were simply larger displays of what these neighbourhoods generally had to put up with,” on a daily basis. If not for intimidation, harassment and unwelcome attention from the police, it is likely that the Tyneside neighbourhoods would not have exploded. Doubtless, the same could be claimed for each of the community outbreaks during the 1980s and 1990s.

Much has changed since Orwell pondered the likelihood of peaceful social revolution. In the 1930s, England still represented freedom; it was where one experienced the “sensation of breathing a different air.” For Orwell, the English character was inherently decent. Its citizens were generally law abiding, and the solution to most potential crises could be settled over “a nice cup of tea.” By the 1980s, ‘decency’ had given way to discontent. With rising unemployment, due to the mine and factory closures, and the break-up of working class communities, the British proletariat was no longer inclined to seek a peaceable solution to its long-standing grievances. As Class War stated, “We’re not gonna stay sulking away in our estates and ghettos, schools, factories and dole queues, out of sight and out of mind any longer … We are on

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144 Beatrix Campbell, “Riots of Passage,” New Statesman and Society 7, no. 300 (29 April 1994), 9
145 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 139
146 George Orwell, “A Nice Cup of Tea,” in S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds.), CEJL III, 41
the WARPATH.”147 Seen from this jaundiced perspective, the British proletariat evidently wanted change and was preparing to take the Government on. Yet, just as Orwell misread the political situation in 1940, so did the editors of *Class War* fifty years later. There was no violent revolution; instead the class rebellion was restricted to a series of relatively small-scale ineffectual skirmishes (aka ‘riots’). In the 1990s, while much of the world looked on, the former Yugoslavia imploded over ethnic and religious differences. These events were precipitated by the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union. Britain — rather remarkably — considering the influx of different nationalities in the past fifty years or so, has stopped well short of protracted Balkans-style violence. Still, even ‘peaceful’ Britain has had moments of racially-induced conflagration. Events brought about by economic uncertainty and the prospect of long-term unemployment (perhaps in part attributable to Tory mismanagement during the Major years) has scarred several inner-city landscapes. Beatrix Campbell also states that were it not for the dubious tactics employed by the police in Bristol, Brixton and Tottenham in the 1980s, there probably would not have been any rioting.148 The fact that English citizens looted and firebombed their own neighbourhood is surely of real concern to their neighbours. It could easily happen again. England requires a great deal of self-examination still, if Mr. Blair’s dream of “empowering all our people” is to be realised.149

147 Ian Bone et al., *Class War*, 3
148 Beatrix Campbell, *Goliath: Britain’s Dangerous Places*, 97-122
‘Blair’ on Blair: Eric and Tony

The year 2003 marked the centenary of Eric Blair’s birth, and proved a productive year for George Orwell enthusiasts. Official observances produced a flurry of activity, with University conferences, television documentaries, political commentary, and several recently completed biographies all jostling to correct errors, pose new questions, and fill in the gaps. Considering that Orwell’s skill only became widely acknowledged in the penultimate year of his life the response is quietly impressive. Although his prodigious talent was hard-won,150 there is something irresistible about the literary legacy of the tall, consumptive Englishman. As Geoffrey Wheatcroft states, “no illustrious corpse has been fought over so vigorously as George Orwell’s.”151 The result of this debate is more apparent when we consider the political mileage wrested and fabricated from his journalism, essays, and dystopian futurology. Those situated at either end and indeed even at the centre of the political spectrum have at one time or another adopted Orwell as spokesman of their cause. As Wheatcroft believes, Orwell’s “politics remain endlessly open to interpretation.”152 The rush to co-opt Orwell in light of the opening events of the twenty-first century, and the crackdown on personal liberty worldwide, should not greatly surprise anyone. In Britain, the common political ground shared by the two Blairs — Eric and Tony — has become an established topic of conversation. Ben Pimlott noted in a Birkbeck College lecture “Orwell is particularly

150 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell (St Albans, Herts: Paladin, 1974), 198
152 Wheatcroft, ibid.
acceptable and quotable to the Blair entourage because of his attitude to class.\footnote{153}{Ben Pimlott, “Mr Blair and Mr Blair,” \textit{New Statesman}, 23 October 2000. \url{http://www.newstatesman.com/200010230018.htm} (4/02/2005)} It may be that George Orwell shares much more with Tony Blair than just a surname. Orwell’s liberal attitude to responsible government and peaceable (‘decent’) community life is a ‘gift’ for New Labour’s speechwriters.

Orwell organised his favourite themes around earlier visions of England and Englishness, focussing particularly on individual “freedom and equality.”\footnote{154}{David Wykes, \textit{A Preface to Orwell} (London: Longman, 1987), 8, 15} These views are presented in the significant post-war essay ‘The English People’ published 1947. He states, “[a] nation is using its capacities to the full when any man can get any job that he is fit for.”\footnote{155}{George Orwell, “The English People,” 33} This forms a central part of the Blair Government’s thinking in its bid to create equal opportunities for all of its citizens. Mr. Blair states, “We are building an enabling state founded on the liberation of individual potential,” which also carries the idea of participation.\footnote{156}{Tony Blair, “My Vision for Britain,” \textit{The Observer}, 10 November 2002. \url{http://observer.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4543389,00.html} (8/11/2003)} This is especially true of the job sector. By December 2000, the government was able to announce that its New Deal for unemployed youngsters was working. The figures sound impressive: “250,000 long-term unemployed young people into jobs … under budget and ahead of time.”\footnote{157}{Polly Toynbee, “Painted into a corner,” \textit{The Guardian}, 1 December 2000. \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4099085,00.html} (8/12/2003)} Talk of “a lost generation” traceable to the jobless 1980s, hordes of young people with “no prospect of a job” in the near future, further added to Labour’s glowing list of achievements. The Blair Government looked set for a second term of office. From his \textit{Wigan Pier} days, Orwell was perfectly aware of

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\item[154] David Wykes, \textit{A Preface to Orwell} (London: Longman, 1987), 8, 15
\item[155] George Orwell, “The English People,” 33
\item[157] Polly Toynbee, “Painted into a corner,” \textit{The Guardian}, 1 December 2000. \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,4099085,00.html} (8/12/2003)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the need for job creation, and of the negative effects of joblessness on the local community. He states, “The life of a single unemployed man is dreadful,” because there is nothing to occupy his time or his mind.158 Aimlessness is ultimately destructive, as my father frequently stated. Orwell’s account of poverty and unemployment is almost palpable. It is also accessible in its frustrations; he might well have been commenting on a typical non-working day in the life of an unemployed British teenager in 1985.

Tony Blair admits that he stands for the redistribution of “power, wealth and opportunity,” in a socially responsible and individually accountable Britain.159 His ‘England’ (not unlike Orwell’s) is meritocratic and heavily reliant on responsibility, where differences in “sexuality, gender and race” do not impede the individual’s progress.160 I strongly suspect that Orwell would have agreed with much of this in principle. Tony Blair has recently equalled Mr. Atlee’s record of six years of “uninterrupted Labour government,”161 and in that time New Labour has implemented an impressive sounding list of achievements. Britons have a “statutory minimum wage for the first time,”162 and crime figures are down and have stabilised.163 The economy is healthy; welfare and social services have been radically transformed, and Britain is seen

158 Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, 74
162 Increases to the hourly rate are set to rise, although still falling short of £6 per hour. See, Tania Branigan, “Minimum wage to rise above £5,” The Guardian, 26/02/2005. http://politics.guardian.co.uk/election/story/0,15803,1425909,00.html (27/02/2005)
to be “playing a leading role” in Europe and in world affairs.\textsuperscript{164} In education, literacy has improved at Primary level, and the aim is to do the same at Secondary level. Mr. Blair also asserts, “a million children have been taken out of poverty.”\textsuperscript{165} Despite such achievements, Tony Blair still has detractors, among them John Pilger, who called the PM “An effete Tory by another name, running a Thatcherite administration.”\textsuperscript{166} No government can long afford to alienate members of its own party, yet Tony Blair has shown scant regard for traditional Labour.\textsuperscript{167} He leads an administration dedicated to internal reconstruction and change.\textsuperscript{168} Under Blair’s leadership, devolution has transferred “limited self-government” to Wales and Scotland, which is something that Orwell clearly envisaged and desired.\textsuperscript{169} In addition to developments on the mainland (a Scottish parliament and an Assembly in Wales) there is the added prospect of a joint Catholic-Protestant government in Northern Ireland. With such enlightened developments as these, what does being English — and not just in Orwell’s modality — mean now? Englishness, in a generic and cultural (rather than a purely racial) sense is something that must be thoroughly addressed by the Blair government if more extreme forms of nationalism are to be avoided. The answer is unlikely to be found in the

\textsuperscript{168} For Blair’s critics, New Labour represents change, but in all the wrong areas: “New Labour has, more than any other government, been responsible for dissembling and dishonouring the notion of the truth, corroding the quality of our public life and contributing to the growing cynicism towards politics.” Jacques, ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} George Orwell, “The English People,” 34
policies recently marshalled by Michael Howard. Caryl Phillips asserts, “Racism was rooted into British society long before the era of the slave trade.” Race (and therefore racism) is still a pivotal concern in Britain, although now the criteria have broadened somewhat to include refugees and asylum seekers. Racial tensions occur whenever people from different countries of origin live in close proximity. The Guardian cites the Lytchet Way estate (Essex) where the attitude of some east European refugees has generated considerable ill will with other established residents. Yet it is unrealistic to expect migrants to change their behaviour overnight. Phillips cites the “hostility” towards West Indian migrants in the 1950s, because they wore “loudly coloured shirts and ties,” and had different customs and habits. The fact that West Indians were legitimate British citizens was overlooked. A number of difficult questions relating to race, identity and belonging are raised by devolution. David Hayes argues, “The mainstream English majority… need to be comfortable in their own skins,” and presumably in their own land as well. Regional identity is not just for the Scots, Welsh, and Irish to develop; the English also need to re-connect with and in some instances


173 Caryl Phillips, “A Dream Deferred,”111

maybe even to re-determine some cultural footings of their own. Black and Asian Londoners are English too.

Orwell foresaw the need for wide-ranging social change. In ‘The English People,’ he noted a growing need “for … equality and a tendency … for surface differences between class and class to disappear.” He considered class to be “an obvious evil,” especially when it prevented working people from engineering a more favourable position for themselves. Finding and placing the right person in the job at hand, regardless of social background, served as a useful template. Orwell drew up a three-part proposal to ensure that permanent social and fiscal changes would be implemented. Characteristically, since the plan had the plain-living Orwell’s approval, those at the top of the social ladder would be asked to make the biggest sacrifices. Heading the list was “a scaling-up and scaling-down of incomes.” Orwell, who had never experienced real wealth in his formative years, consistently failed to appreciate the dismay and hostility that such changes to the bank accounts of England’s wealthiest citizens would create. The establishment of economic and social equality would also necessitate the ruling elite’s relinquishment of power. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved outside of bloodletting. Yet Orwell’s oft-repeated and greatly feared imagery of “jackboots” and “rubber truncheons” (Fascism) would surely never happen.

175 George Orwell, “The English People,” 33
176 Orwell, ibid.
177 Orwell, ibid., 33
178 Orwell, ibid.
179 John Pilger, Hidden Agendas, 2
in moderate England. In addition to regulating the future distribution of wealth and property, Orwell also proposed that educators learn to distinguish between ‘brain’ and ‘brawn.’ Those best suited to book-learning, should be encouraged to continue their education, while those more predisposed to the industrial arts should be steered in that direction. Doubtless, the young Winston Churchill would have agreed wholeheartedly with Orwell’s logic. Earlier in his own career, Orwell had chosen to join the Indian police rather than pursue a degree at University. It was a decision that had placed him in unnecessary financial difficulty for the majority of his life. Orwell also wanted every trace of class removed from language, calling for “a manner of speaking that is definitely national … not merely… a copy of … the upper classes.” In this instance, he looked to the classless modality of American speech patterns, only something more appropriately applicable to English conditions.

Tony Blair, with his well-modulated speech pattern, would shudder at the thought of upsetting Britain’s wealthy business community. Mr. Blair aims to establish a higher standard of living for everyone, especially those who are struggling. However he has skilfully resisted being drawn on the topic of extravagant executive salaries; in September 2001 he “firmly ruled out any consideration of wealth or incomes at the top.” He freely admits, “The Labour party stands for a more equal society,” but evidently that does not mean reviewing big business. Mr. Blair recognises that Britain’s

180 George Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 145
181 Winston Churchill, My Early Life (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1972), 46
182 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 34

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economy requires that Government continue to “be kind and considerate to capitalism.”184 Under New Labour, the business community is expected to be self-regulating, especially where executive salaries and severance payoffs are concerned. The Prime Minister concedes that there needs to be “some correlation between the rewards … and the performance of the company.”185 Surely this is an ironic statement. Ideally, the business community would regulate its own affairs. Tony Blair may well be cautious when it comes to keeping on side with the British electorate, but it is for a reason. His vision is for a vibrant self-regulating community that ‘pulls together.’ So his attitude to business is completely in line with New Labour’s “Rights and responsibilities” for all, which expects appropriate behaviour at either end of the social spectrum.186 Not surprisingly, Mr. Blair’s hands-off approach to the corporate world has recently generated an enquiry into the need for executive salary capping. There is currently a strong resistance to large-scale payoffs, and a growing hostility and unwillingness among company shareholders to award “seven-figure salaries” to poorly performing executives.187 The reason for their anger is simple enough, as “US style remuneration packages” ultimately affects the company, which in turn means the individual shareholders.188 The Blair government is therefore putting together measures to ensure that executive payoffs are sensibly “capped at six month’s salary.”189 It is however increasingly difficult to reconcile Orwell and Blair when considering executive pay.

186 Tony Blair, “My Vision for Britain,” The Observer, 10 November 2002
187 Oliver Morgan, “Crackdown on ‘fat cat’ riches,” The Observer, 27 April 2003
188 Heather Connon, “Garnier: fattest cat of all,” The Observer, 24 November 2002
189 Oliver Morgan, “Crackdown on ‘fat cat’ riches.”
The Orwell-Blair ‘comparison’ — in some instances — appears to work well on paper: jobs, childcare, the dismantling of class, better housing, higher pay, decency, and law and order. Yet it is unlikely that someone as prickly and opinionated as Orwell would feel entirely comfortable with the rainbow hued ‘socialism’ of Tony Blair. The rich in New Labour’s England remain largely unfettered, while the poor, those relegated to housing estates and boring jobs, have been offered the equivalent of a ‘meaty bone’ to keep them occupied. Orwell’s vision always entailed a redistribution of wealth. His plan was to tax high incomes “out of existence,” something that Tony Blair is understandably wary of activating. Social equality is an issue without a foreseeable resolution, for while the possibility of individual wealth remains nobody who possesses it wishes its removal.

It appears that Orwell allowed his own political agenda — seeking an end to privilege, the debunking of class, and the overturn of capital — to overwrite the yearnings of the English working classes. He mobilised his arguments into a simple polemical set piece to outline the injustices of the British social system. In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell established that the working classes demanded socialism, even though many did not understand its basic tenets. Orwell stated that ‘ordinary’ working people required jobs, improved health care, fairer social security, better housing, and secondary education. He added, “Everyone who knows the meaning of poverty … is on

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190 George Orwell, “The English People,” 33
192 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 163-4

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the Socialist side, potentially.” Orwell, ibid., 202
 Well, that is easily claimed, but it is not necessarily true. Orwell frequently returned to the notion of social justice in his writing. During the war years, when the rationing of foodstuffs and other essential commodities made life difficult, it did not prevent the rich (or anyone with black market contacts) from eating well, dining out, or enjoying a drive in the countryside. The ‘ordinary’ working classes — the ‘proles’ — on the other hand, simply made “do without” any form of luxury. For Orwell, such behaviour brought back vivid memories of Spain. Commenting on Anarchist controlled Barcelona in 1937 Orwell called it “a town in which the wealthy class had practically ceased to exist.” In the space of only a few months, he found the city returned to bourgeois conditions. While the wealthy citizens dined in style the poor were obliged to queue “for bread, olive oil, and other necessaries.” Orwell was deeply affected by these powerful working class encounters in Spain, and the anger felt was not something that he could easily relinquish. He returned to the dichotomies of privilege and deprivation in the novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, where the shabby middle-aged civil servant Winston Smith expressed the desire (but never publicly) for an end to Big Brother’s despotic regime. Smith hoped that the proles, “those swarming disregarded masses, 85 per cent of the population,” would spontaneously rebel and overthrow the much hated authoritarian Party structure. He desperately wanted to retrieve the recent past from the memory holes at the Ministry of Truth, where he worked. Regrettably,

193 Orwell, ibid., 202
196 Orwell, ibid., 93
197 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 64
Smith’s utopian idealism — like Orwell’s socialist revolution — failed to materialise, for the proles, who had no political aspirations were strangely indifferent to the Party’s excesses. As long as they were permitted “films, football, and beer” they were content to inhabit the periphery. Only the elderly remembered the relatively halcyon days of class-based servitude before Big Brother and the revolution. Smith understood all of this, yet it did not prevent him from desiring change, after all his thoughts — or so he believed — were still his own.

**Economic New Times**

An understandable collision of theory and political dreaming was discernible among leftist intellectual groups at the tail end of the Thatcher years in Britain. The Labour Party was, in the words of one critic, “adrift, rudderless … unhinged by the dissipation of the [working] class, and hanging on to the driftwood of trade unionism.” Sivanandan attributes much of the ensuing confusion of the traditional left to an overly rigid “old Marxist” orthodoxy, which failed to appreciate how much the world had changed in the wake of the demise of the former USSR. In 1988, Stuart Hall had expressed similar concerns regarding Labour’s evident inability to address “the changing class composition of our society.” Even though the cloth cap and the head shawl had vanished, there were still those in the Party reluctant to upgrade their

198 Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 65
200 Sivanandan, ibid., 24
thinking. Historically, class-related interests have never remained static, and class was certainly never as simplistic as Marx had framed it. In Engels’ survey of Manchester in 1840 for example, the arrival of boatloads of poor Irish immigrants brought considerable pressures to the established labour market. Eventually this influx of unskilled labour lowered hourly rates of pay, increased working hours, and produced a deluge of inferior housing. This continuum of social instability — as Hall explains — has more recently been re-drawn along sexual, racial and gendered demarcations. Hall argues, “There have always been … divisions and fracturings … under an advanced capitalist division of labour.” This translates to a completely new mode of Labour Party, a diverse mix in fact with quite different expectations and requirements. With the recognition of diversity comes the responsibility to provide a meaningful political methodology, since clearly the old Labour doctrines will no longer suffice. The new look Party — as Hall and colleagues argued in the 1980s — must respond to the urgent needs of young people; it must combat organised crime, drugs, and racial discrimination on the housing estates; and meet the requirements of working women.

Most of these issues simply did not exist in the 1930s and 1940s. The reason is that Britain has undergoing significant change and renewal since the Depression. Paul

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204 A. Sivanandan, “All that Melts into Air Is Solid: The Hokum of New Times,” 22
205 Stuart Hall, “Crisis and Renewal on the Left,” 201

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Barker argues that our “Cities [like our citizens] are becoming hollow to the core.”206

The demand is for new centres of employment and industry, and Labour needs to listen closely to its constituents, or once again take a back seat to Tory hegemony. Seen from that perspective, New Labour under Tony Blair’s leadership must be something of a revelation to Labour’s once disillusioned critics. Since becoming Prime Minister, Tony Blair has stated:

I do not conform to the traditional political stereotypes because I don’t believe in them. We are not crypto-Thatcherites. We are not old-style socialists. We are what we believe in. We are meritocrats. We believe in empowering all our peoples.207

This indicates that New Labour has indeed made some necessary adjustments, and learned from the failures of its recent past. It is certainly an important admission, and one that reveals how far the Labour Party — under Tony Blair’s leadership — is prepared to travel to make sure of the British vote. The Party has broadened its appeal and developed its profile — no longer does it symbolise the cloth cap.208 Clever marketing has transformed Labour, making it relevant to the challenges of a new millennium. Lees-Marshment and Lilleker maintain the process was “more an updating than an outright rejection of the historical other.”209 Tony Blair is by his own admission centre-left,210 which is about as far from traditional democratic socialist values as it is possible to be and still remain on the left. Yet he has survived a barrage of internal

209 Lees-Marshment and Lilleker, ibid., 207
210 Lees-Marshment and Lilleker , ibid., 209
criticism in the wake of the invasion of Iraq and the death of Dr David Kelly. As the longest serving Labour Prime Minister, Mr. Blair is planning for a third term of office.  

Closing down the mines

Britain’s economy has changed dramatically since Orwell wrote The Road to Wigan Pier. Traditional ‘heavy’ industries — steel production, shipbuilding and coal mining — have (some would argue ‘of necessity’) undergone significant contraction and loss of prestige in order to satisfy the whims of speculators, politicians, and the changing world economy. Many of these ‘improvements’ — now tragically irreversible in the case of deep coal mining — are not easy to verify or interpret because, in terms of the sheer hardship created by pit closures the government’s logic is unfathomable. The available statistics barely convey the enormous sense of loss, of income, wellbeing and status, which the coal producing regions have been forced to sustain. Orwell described his unemployed miners “gazing at their destiny with … dumb amazement.” In a paper discussing the decline of industry in Britain, Waddington and Parry assert, “When the mines were nationalised in 1947, there were 958 collieries in the United Kingdom.”

This was only ten years after Orwell travelled up to Wigan. The number had been


212 George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier, 79

savagely reduced to 317 by 1968 (due in part to an increasing world reliance upon oil) and to just 17 in 2000.\textsuperscript{214} These figures are astonishing seeing that it was “coal [that] powered Britain’s economy.”\textsuperscript{215} Britain, which still has enormous untapped coal reserves, remains uncertain. The question is why has the industry been targeted?

The demise of the United Kingdom’s collieries has been attributed to the “vindictiveness” of Mrs. Thatcher’s government, although John Major is equally to blame.\textsuperscript{216} In 1992, the (then) president of the Board of Trade, Michael Heseltine announced the Tories decision to close down thirty-one “of the nation’s remaining 50 deep” collieries.\textsuperscript{217} Pat Coyne, writing in the \textit{New Statesman \& Society}, expressed utter incredulity at Heseltine’s decision:

What do you do with an industry that has tripled labour productivity in a decade, has maintained one of the most consistent and successful investment programmes in British industry, sustains one of the UK’s few equipment manufacturing sectors of genuine world class and whose production costs are half to a third of that of its nearest European equivalent? You close it of course!\textsuperscript{218}

The Heseltine closures cost an estimated 30,000 British jobs within the confines of the coal industry alone.\textsuperscript{219} Various ancillary trades and services — all of them indispensable to production and delivery — were also affected. Newspapers like \textit{The Daily Mirror} calculated the unemployment figures as high as “70,000 jobs in areas where there is no

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\textsuperscript{214} David Waddington and David Parry, \textit{ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{216} John Pilger, “Here’s to the new Dad’s Army,” \textit{New Statesman \& Society} 6, no. 283 (17 December 1993): 16(2) \\
\textsuperscript{217} Waddington and Parry, “Managing Industrial Decline,” n.p. \\
\textsuperscript{218} Pat Coyne, “Mining disaster 1992: 30,000 lost,” \textit{New Statesman \& Society} 5, no. 224, (16 November 1992): 12 \\
\textsuperscript{219} Coyne, \textit{ibid.}
\end{flushright}
other work.” The British public was aghast, quite understandably so, given the huge numbers of newly unemployed. In a TUC organised protest rally, some 200,000 people, chanting moderately unpleasant truths about the government’s ‘hit man’ — “He’s a bastard, He’s a swine. What’s his name? HESELTINE” — marched through the rain-soaked streets of the British Capital. Yet, despite this very public outcry, Heseltine’s relentless “contraction” of the mining industry went ahead as proposed. Perhaps the lack of organised resistance within the coal industry was partly due to “enhanced redundancy payments.” Few miners were (or have ever been) in a position to ignore a lump sum temptation. Governments are often accused of stupidity (especially by the press), but this is seldom an accurate assessment. Mr. Heseltine fully appreciated that — given sufficient financial inducement — even the most disgruntled British miners would consent to closure (and their own redundancy) meekly enough. This certainly proved to be the case in 1992. Of course there were exceptions, most notably the Tower colliery in South Wales — and something of a success story — where “228 miners and 11 management” brought-out the ailing mine with money from their redundancy payments. Most other British pits closed without a struggle.

Throughout its chequered history, mining has negotiated its way through strikes and disputes, stop-outs, pit closures and assorted hardships. The closely-knit structure of the archetypal mining community — knowing the precarious nature of supply and

demand — has always tended to look after its members. John Cummings “a former miner” and MP described how his family, which had worked in the mine at Murton for “six generations … looking after the weakest … providing homes … welfare halls and recreation schemes.”224 With contraction of the industry and forced redundancy, everything changed. The sense of community in regional mining centres has almost vanished and many locals feel themselves distanced from “village affairs.”225 The government closures, happening as they have to an industry “upon whose shoulders nearly everything … is supported” would no doubt surprise Orwell.226 In The Road to Wigan Pier, he described the dangers experienced working at the coalface. He also witnessed the ravaging effects of pit closures and unemployment, but in 1936 he could not have envisaged the miseries brought about by privatisation. Wounds of such magnitude do not easily heal of themselves, as the devastated villages and mining communities throughout the country bear witness.

J. B. Priestley correctly assessed in 1933 that the future of Britain’s coal industry was precarious (and uncertain) at best:

How many members of Parliament could give even the roughest description of the organisation and working of a coal-mine? How many voters could answer the simplest questions about the hours of work and average earnings of a miner?227

At the same time British coal was readily acknowledged by many as the ‘backbone’ of the nation. Without it — certainly this was true in Priestley’s era — there would be no electricity, no heavy industry, (steam) trains would not run, and the general populace

226 George Orwell, Wigan Pier, 18
would probably freeze to death in winter. It is well to remember coal’s past history in light of more recent (1980s) Conservative attitudes. In a stirring polemical essay ‘Heartlands to wastelands’ (1992), John Pilger argued the case for retaining the mines. He was amazed that an industry that already prided itself in producing “the cheapest coal in Europe” was to be privatised. Privatisation in a rapidly dwindling industry, he argued, would simply open the door to increased competition, which would flood the country with even cheaper coal from abroad. In an already dangerous industry like mining, this would mean greater risk-taking, and more accidents, as individually owned companies vied with each other to produce more coal for less money.

Whatever possessed successive British governments to abandon a readily available, relatively clean and economically viable industry like coal? Such a decision is still difficult to unravel. Eric Hopkins alleges that the Conservative Party (under Mrs. Thatcher) planned to revenge itself for Edward Heath’s shock loss in the 1974 polls. Arthur Scargill and the Unions were held accountable for Mr. Heath’s demise, although the Arab/Israeli war and the unexpected rise in the price of oil precipitated the event. Britain’s growing dependence on oil from the Gulf States accounted for fifty per cent of its energy requirements, and as a consequence of the war, “[oil] imports were cut by 15 per cent.” With oil supplies in dangerously short supply, petrol rationing was

228 John Pilger, “Heartlands to wastelands,” 10
229 Pilger, ibid., 11
231 Alan Sked and Chris Cook, Post-War Britain: A Political History (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1979), 318
implemented, and there were violent clashes between motorists and authority.\textsuperscript{232}
Looking back over the ensuing sequence of events, the dispute takes on a grimly macabre quality. It is plain that (in part) the government’s defeat was attributable to determined opposition from the British trade unions, which forced a General Election.\textsuperscript{233}
Paul Johnson cites the aggressive tactics of the Yorkshire miners’ leader Arthur Scargill (later the NUM president) who “threatened to make syndicalism, rather than parliamentary democracy, the ruling force in Britain.”\textsuperscript{234} The National Union of Miners (NUM) issued a ban on overtime in support of a delayed pay claim. With a cutback of coal production this led to national electricity shortages.\textsuperscript{235} The transport unions joined the fray; the result was chaotic. Coal and coke could not be delivered to power stations, electricity workers “began a work to rule,” and under considerable pressure to find a solution the government stubbornly refused to back down.\textsuperscript{236} A standoff between the unions and the government resulted. A three-day working week was mooted because of power shortages, ensuing talks ended in failure, and the Heath Government stalled and prevaricated.\textsuperscript{237} It was a tense time. Under continued union pressure the Prime Minister was forced to call a General Election.\textsuperscript{238} The Conservatives lost, and the fate of the Coal industry, and many thousands of British citizens and their families was sealed. In retrospect, even the redoubtable Arthur Scargill unwittingly played straight into the hands of a future Tory government.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sked and Cook, ibid., 318
  \item Sked and Cook, ibid.
  \item Sked and Cook, \textit{Post-War Britain}, 319
  \item Sked and Cook, ibid., 319-20; Eric Hopkins, \textit{The Rise and Decline}, 135
  \item Eric Hopkins, \textit{The Rise and Decline}, 221
  \item Eric Hopkins, ibid., 136
\end{itemize}
In 1940, Orwell believed that an English revolution was inevitable, that only socialism could win the war and save the economy. He longed for an England that was equitable and democratic: a nation that had ceased class exploitation, and knuckled down to the serious business of building a fairer and better world. It may be that his political vision was flawed, and overly simplistic, yet he was prepared to live meagrely until such times as the English working classes were delivered from poverty, endless toil, and drudgery, and the rapacious mendacity of capitalism. He may not have envisaged (and probably would not have condoned) the violence of the ‘Riotous Decade’ but he would have acknowledged the need to challenge Government incompetence. Looking back over these events it is clear that the battle for jobs and social equality in Britain (and elsewhere) is far from over. As Jeremy Seabrook observed, “The poor … long to be relieved from an insecurity that threatens … with perpetual eviction.” This is equally the case in Britain, Europe, Africa, and even the prosperous United States. So long as global capital remains in the hands of an elitist minority, the world will continue to be unwholesome for the majority of its inhabitants.

This context is precisely how our wealthy overlords — the global economists, the G8 nations, the WTO, the multinationals, and the World Bank — have decreed that it remain. George Orwell, in his undisputed role as champion of the underdog, and author of Nineteen Eighty-Four, would shake his head and grimace angrily to himself. He warned of the world’s political trajectory. This chapter has also shown how Orwell

239 Jeremy Seabrook, “For Richer Read Poorer,” The Ecologist, 22 December 2002
could be wrong in his short-term political predictions, but correct in his overall thinking. There was no need for violent revolution. Most of the changes that Orwell outlined in the 1940s — industry, education, welfare, wages, and empire — were accomplished in ways he could not possibly have anticipated. The majority of these occurred in the normal outworking of the democratic process over a period of fifty years.

In this thesis, I have introduced a chain of events and political ideas linking *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the emergent authoritarian style of government favoured by George W. Bush in the wake of 11 September 2001. Chapter one outlines the obvious similarities between Big Brother’s policy of perpetual warfare, and President Bush’s ongoing war against terror. Despite the fact that the Cold War is over, the world is arguably more dangerous now than when the Iron Curtain was in place. In the final chapter, I gather the shards of meaning strewn throughout this thesis. I put the case that Orwell’s nightmarish vision of a deeply divided and secularised world remains as pertinent now as it was in the Cold War era that triggered it. Orwell’s writing offers us a useful guide to understanding terror and terrorism, and helps us comprehend the darkly contradictory spaces between these words.
Chapter Six

Big Brother’s global war on ‘terror’

For whatever its satirical [worth] or other virtues, fiction is a dead loss if it does not present an imaginary world which is deeply believable.¹

Robert Conquest

This chapter was originally conceived and written in the months immediately preceding the invasion of Iraq and the ousting of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Much of that earlier work stands. However, the nature of news and the accelerated culture we espouse means that much of the original content has been battered by changing circumstances, and footnotes have subsequently been added or updated where necessary. Such a process is important, especially in a thesis about Orwell where writing and journalism predominates. The rapidly changing narrative creates an awareness — through both form and content — of the various pitfalls and requirements that are necessary in attempting to log and verify the intense topicality of truth, news and politics. George Orwell’s writing — like his politics — underwent continuous improvement and adjustment throughout his lifetime.² Summarising Orwell’s career, Christopher Hitchens states, “He never enjoyed a stable income, and never had a completely reliable publishing outlet. Uncertain as to whether he was a novelist or not, he added to the

² Bernard Crick, George Orwell: A Life (London: Penguin, 1992), 16-17
richness of English fiction but learned to concentrate on the essay form. Thus he faced the competing orthodoxies and despotisms of his day with little more than a battered typewriter and a stubborn personality.”3 In this imperfect world, not everything can be successfully manipulated or stage managed to full advantage; that includes engaging in warfare, as much as it does in researching and writing a scholarly thesis.

President Bush and his coalition allies went to war on the false premise4 that Iraq posed a specific ‘threat’ to the United States and in a more general sense to the ‘West.’5 The Bush Administration’s version of events has since been discredited by the

3 Christopher Hitchens, *Orwell’s Victory* (London: Penguin, 2002), 7-8
4 Thomas Powers, “The Vanishing Case for War,” *The NYRB* L, no. 19 (December 4, 2003): 12-17. The litany of lies and misleading statements concerning WMDs finally ground to a halt. Iraq possessed no weapons stockpiles, had no nuclear pretensions, and gradually (and reluctantly) the facts began to emerge. In Britain, the PM Tony Blair was forced to concede that he had misled the British people, while in the USA, President Bush was adamant that he had made the correct decisions. See, “UK’s Iraq intelligence ‘badly flawed.’” *ABC News Online*, 14 July 2004. http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200407/s1154129.htm (15/07/2004). The long awaited Butler report (UK) did not place blame for misleading the public onto any one individual, but conceded that Iraq “did not have significant - if any - stocks of chemical or biological weapons in a state fit for deployment nor developed plans for using them.” In the USA the weapons hunt was quietly abandoned after months of fruitless investigation: “Iraq WMD search ended,” *Reuters*, 12 Jan 2005. http://www.reuters.co.uk/newsArticle.jhtml?type=worldNews&storyID=652955 (29/01/2005). The Reuters article states, “The Duelfer report concluded that Iraq had no stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons and its nuclear program had decayed before last year's U.S.-led invasion, in findings contrary to prewar assertions of the Bush administration. The Washington Post said the White House had been reluctant to call off the hunt, holding out the possibility that weapons had been shipped out of Iraq before the war or well hidden inside the country. Bush, who subsequently said that he was ‘right to take action’ in Iraq, had cited a growing threat from Saddam's weapons of mass destruction as the main reasons for overthrowing the Iraqi president.” Clearly no such ‘threat’ existed, which surely casts serious doubt on the Bush administrations suitability to hold office.
5 The President states his case for going to war: “After eleven years during which we have tried containment, sanctions, inspections, even selected military action, the end result is that Saddam Hussein still has chemical and biological weapons and is increasing his capabilities to make more. And he is moving ever closer to developing a nuclear weapon.” George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President on Iraq,” Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2002. http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html (17/12/2004). My italics.
emergence of a leaked British memo. The Bush administration, unlike its allies, appears slow to accept any burden of guilt or responsibility for the violence done to the Iraqi people in the name of democracy and evangelical fervour. There are close affinities and kinships between Mr. Bush’s unchallenged war on terror and the principles of unending warfare that Big Brother waged in Nineteen Eighty-Four. Because of this convergence, and for reasons laid out in this chapter, I have argued that Orwell’s nightmare vision of a polarised secularised world remains applicable, even after the conclusion of the Cold War era that framed it. David Wykes, describing the overall state of mind in Oceania states, “The atmosphere is one of general fear, yet everyone proclaims happiness and fulfilment.” That description is not greatly removed from our own experience of reality in 2005, as we struggle to accept that the world has ‘changed,’ but life still continues through vistas of terror and terrorism — through natural disaster and hurricane. What follows is a contemporary reading of the shifting world events post 9/11, inflected through and edging around the perimeters of Orwell’s classic dystopian nightmare. In this chapter, I assemble much-publicised events from Iraq to illustrate the manipulation

9 David Wykes, Preface to Orwell (London: Longman, 1987), 135
and the denial of truth by the military for propaganda purposes. What Ross Chambers has termed “rhetorical warfare.”\textsuperscript{11} This contest can take the form of overt nonsense, as in the continued insistence on the existence of WMDs,\textsuperscript{12} or pure fable, as in the story of Private Jessica Lynch.\textsuperscript{13} Either way, the denials and false assertions, are indicative of the Pentagon’s penchant for workable ‘game plans.’\textsuperscript{14} In chapter four, I discussed facets of nostalgia, memory and history, which are important elements of Orwell’s writing. What would happen to objective truth and journalistic ethics after Spain? Orwell thought that he knew, and the result was \emph{Animal Farm} followed by \emph{Nineteen Eighty-Four}. Thereafter he determined — and succeeded — to turn political writing into an art.\textsuperscript{15} In chapter five, I included the work of writers and journalists searching for traces of old England — traditional family values, community spirit, hard work and industrial leadership. These are all concepts and ideals that Orwell, Priestley, and Greenwood would have understood and been comfortable with. For their part, various contemporary observers found alienation, poverty and anger. Would Orwell have understood the anger that stirred unemployed school leavers into auto theft and community violence? It is impossible to know, but he visited the very worst that 1930s England had to offer, and

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{12} Here is Scott McClellan’s reply to a direct question about WMDs: “The weapons that we all believed were there, based on the intelligence, were not there and now what is important is that we need to go back and look at what was wrong with much of the intelligence that we had accumulated over a 12 year period … and correct any flaws.” Cited John Shovelan, “US ends hunt for WMDs in Iraq,” \textit{ABC Online AM}, January 13, 2005. http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2005/s1281459.htm (25/01/2005)
\item\textsuperscript{13} Steve Ritea, “Jessica Lynch’s story: A Little Too Perfect?” \textit{American Journalism Review}, (August/September 2003), http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=3091 (25/01/2005)
\item\textsuperscript{14} Ross Chambers, “The War of the Words,” 180
\item\textsuperscript{15} George Orwell, “Why I Write,” in \textit{Essays} (London: Penguin, 2000), 5
\end{footnotes}
was sympathetic towards those who were trapped into lifestyles of misery and hopelessness.

**What did Orwell fear?**

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell provides his readership, and by extension, posterity, with a frightening and highly charged vision of tyranny on earth. The story is fiction, but the novel represents an embodiment of “how ideas are incarnated in experience.”\(^{16}\) Orwell describes a state, which prevents, outlaws, and destroys ordinary human relationships.\(^{17}\) As Jenni Calder asserts, “Non-corporate behaviour cannot be tolerated. People are categorized, and within the categories there is little to distinguish them.”\(^{18}\) The plan is to turn everyone out of the same mould. Orwell’s book represents the direst threats imaginable, and posits the awful consequences of an unopposed (elitist) autocracy, with considerable realism and attention to detail. None of this is new. Human beings living together in social organization have ever been at the mercy of the dominant few, whether a monarchy or priesthood, a ruling elite or a plutocracy. The transition of institutional power is not as many believe based on ability or merit. It is unlikely that such a transference is even democratic. As Chomsky reveals, real power is transferred “by willing subordination to

\(^{16}\) Judith N. Shklar, “Nineteen Eighty-Four: Should Political Theory Care?” In Stanley Hoffmann (ed.), *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 341


\(^{18}\) Jenni Calder, *Huxley and Orwell: Brave New World and Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), 17. This form of anonymity (namelessness) is far removed from the smiling denim clad anarchy that Orwell experienced in Barcelona during the civil war.
the systems of actual power and loyalty to their operative principles.”

As in all other areas of life there are established rules, with strict obedience to the Party’s guiding principles foremost among them. O’Brien patiently spells out some of these rules for Winston Smith while supervising his ‘cure’ (torture). He also passes sentence on the hapless Smith, whose life is now in grave danger. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us: so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him …. We make him one of ourselves before we kill him.

By far the most troubling aspect of tyranny — from Orwell’s point of view — is the corruption of language. Slater states, “his analysis of the extent to which language, as part of the process of power hunger denying equality, may be wilfully corrupted as a tactic in an ever-expanding policy of deception,” is perhaps his most important achievement as a writer. Orwell believed his message important enough to disguise as a novel, hoping (no doubt) that it would serve as a warning to future generations. Life on Airstrip One — formerly Great Britain — presents a grim scenario that perpetuates the regimes of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. O’Brien, the one character who comes closest to personalising Big Brother, unambiguously confirms that the Inner Party’s central objective is terror. The imagery is ominous: “If you want a picture of the future, imagine

19 Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2003), 6
20 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1983), 218
21 Orwell, ibid., 219
22 Ian Slater, *Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 204
23 Slater, ibid., 189
a boot stamping on a human face — for ever.”24 Clearly, this is evidence of insanity on O’Brien’s part.25 The purpose of Nineteen Eighty-Four is to describe totalitarian rule with as much intensity and realism as possible. Orwell wanted us to view it with loathing. Herein is a world where “people find themselves cut off from the past as a matter of deliberate policy.”26 The dominant Western power Bloc Oceania is controlled by the despotic Big Brother and a ruling elite, which governs through the inculcation of a deep-seated fear of truth.

The novel’s entire economy is based upon deceptions, lies and distortions. Consider the flawed and troubling premise that “WAR IS PEACE.”27 Slater explains that in autocratic government “it is necessary for the leadership to constantly reinterpret past policy (history), so as to justify even the slightest deviation in present policy.”28 A government of this type can therefore never admit to making a mistake.29 It relies upon

24 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 230
25 John Newsinger, Orwell’s Politics, 130
27 Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 27
28 Slater, Orwell: The Road to Airstrip One, 203
29 On the topic of ‘mistakes,’ of interest here is the friction arising between President Bush and Pat Robertson during the recent election campaign. See, “No casualties? White House disputes Robertson comment,” CNN, 21 October 2004. http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/10/19/robertson.bush.iraq/ (28/02/2005). Here is an account of what (allegedly) occurred: “Robertson, an ardent Bush supporter, told CNN in an interview Tuesday night that he urged the president to prepare the American people for the prospect of casualties before launching the war in March 2003. Robertson said Bush told him, ‘Oh, no, we’re not going to have any casualties.’ More than 1,100 American troops have been killed in Iraq since the invasion, most of them battling an insurgency that followed the overthrow of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. Sen. John Kerry, Bush's Democratic challenger, quickly seized on Robertson's account. Kerry's campaign issued a statement Wednesday challenging Bush to say whether the 700 Club founder and 1988 GOP presidential candidate was telling the truth. ‘We believe President Bush should get the benefit of the doubt here,’ Kerry spokesman Mike McCurry said in a news release. ‘But he needs to come forward and answer a very simple
the management of the ahistorical paradox, whereby the past must be seen to fit not only into the present, but also justifies it. Of particular interest to contemporary readers is the fact that the same distortions are still in current circulation. President George W. Bush confirmed as much in a recent Washington speech. Mr. Bush, who was detailing his overall strategy on how to ‘defeat terror,’ to a group of homebuyers and investors, stated:

I just want you to know that, when we talk about war, we're really talking about peace. We want there to be peace. We want people to live in peace all around the world. I mean, our vision for peace extends beyond America. We believe in peace in South Asia. We believe in peace in the Middle East. We're going to be steadfast toward a vision that rejects terror and killing, and honors peace and hope.  

This section of Mr. Bush’s speech sounds like an open endorsement of Big Brother’s infamous slogan. These words are surely less than candid. The object of fighting a legitimate war is conceivably to bring about a state of peaceful equilibrium, but the rationale behind the war against terror is not widely known. What, for example, does the President really mean by, “We believe in peace?” If he believes in peace then why fight an unnecessary war? As Rampton and Stauber point out “The blurring of

question: Is Pat Robertson telling the truth when he said you didn't think there'd be any casualties, or is Pat Robertson lying?” McClellan said Bush did meet with Robertson in Nashville before the invasion, as Robertson recounted. But McClellan said Bush always has recognized that war ‘requires sacrifice’ and that there would be American casualties. In a statement issued Wednesday afternoon, Robertson restated his ‘100 percent’ support for Bush's re-election and said he began and ended his CNN interview ‘with my warm endorsement and praise of President Bush.' But he did not back away from his comments.” At the time of writing this footnote 2,098 US troops have been killed in Iraq, and another 15,568 wounded in action. See the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count website for the latest updates. http://icasualties.org/oif/ (24/11/2005).

31 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 27
boundaries between truth and myth certainly did not begin with the current Bush administration. Disinformation has been a [recognised] part of war since at least Alexander the Great.”33 Even though that may be historically verifiable, doublespeak has no place in democracy, nor in the United States, which prides itself on open, accountable government. Possibly, as Gore Vidal has expounded on numerous occasions, the USA is not a democracy at all, and never has been.34

Abbott Gleason reiterates the general perception that the ideology espoused by the Inner Party in Orwell’s novel was based upon the former Soviet Union. Although memory of Stalin is now little more than a fading residue of the Cold War era, the principles of perfidy, ruthlessness, and terror that his name engenders remain intact. During the Cold War, the ‘West’ — Oceania — was fearful of communism, which represented the end of free enterprise and the free market economy. This is a view, which was once universally credited. Not surprisingly, Gleason reads Nineteen Eighty-Four “as a product of the latter 1940s,” which in essence it was.35 Such a perspective conforms to general principles of common sense in that nothing observably threatening — at least not in Orwell’s totalitarian sense — emerged in 1984. Remember that the Plasma screen television — surely the offspring of Orwell’s ‘telescreen’36 — had not then been invented. The novel, to all intents, represented a past (Orwell’s present) thrust forwards into the readily foreseeable future — a harmless enough enterprise. However, a

33 Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush’s War on Iraq (Sydney, NSW: Hodder, 2003), 68
34 Gore Vidal, Dreaming War: Blood For Oil, 5
35 Abbott Gleason, “‘Totalitarianism’ in 1984,” 145
36 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 7
simple surface reading of the more obvious technological (and surveillance) iconography of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is no longer valid. Simon Davies, a director of Privacy International, a London based surveillance watchdog states, “Surveillance has now become an inbuilt component of every piece of information technology on the planet, we've got a long way to go to wind the clock back.” In 1998, Privacy International awarded ‘Big Brother’ awards to those United Kingdom corporations that most resembled Orwell’s oppressive State apparatus. Privacy International — in honour of Orwell’s anti-hero Winston Smith — also awarded ‘Winstons’ to individuals “who had fought to protect privacy.”

The surveillance industry has noticeably flourished in the last half-decade. Since September 11, spy-technology has extended across the globe, and surveillance and monitoring tools — biometric scanners, satellite listening devices, and CCTV — are now in daily use ostensibly to prevent ‘terror.’ America — not surprisingly — is in the forefront of this push towards total planetary surveillance. Privacy International asserts, “the United States has led world efforts to ensure that all communications technologies have built-in surveillance capabilities and to prohibit the manufacture and use of

39 Nuttall, “Watching Big Brother.”
equipment that cannot be eavesdropped upon.” In the novel, Oceania (an amalgamation of the USA with Britain and Australia serving as its annex) is under continuous internal threat from its foremost enemy — the shadowy and elusive Emmanuel Goldstein. A renegade ex-Inner Party member, Goldstein is described as “the enemy of the People.” There are figurative allusions here to the Saudi renegade and fugitive Osama bin Laden, the CIA trained terrorist mastermind. Most of the immediate action takes place on Airstrip One in the capital city London. The lowest class of citizens — the ‘proles’ — live in abject poverty and are unable to fathom (or even expound to one another) the true extent of their disenfranchisement. They are daily shocked and numbed into compliance by the Police, and do not greatly care for lost freedoms (now largely forgotten) so long as they are left alone. Gleason delineates the totalitarian state as:

[A] society in which political power is in the hands of a dictator or ‘leader’ and a non-traditional ruling elite; the mass of the population was not only politically powerless but deprived of all intellectual and cultural resources save those allowed (or insisted on) by the state, as well as being terrorized and isolated to a hitherto unprecedented degree by the government’s enormously developed intelligence and police apparatus.

Prior to writing Nineteen Eighty-Four, Orwell’s greatest political fear is Fascism. The threat of dictatorship is depicted via the novel’s martial imagery “The dull rhythmic

41 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 15
43 Abbott Gleason, “‘Totalitarianism’ in 1984,” 148
tramp of … soldier’s boots.” Consequently, institutionalised ‘terror’ is a recurring motif in Orwell’s novels, and is never far from the surface in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

If this grimy texture and intimate detail seems shocking, there is good reason. Jenni Calder advises, “It should be remembered that [Orwell] deliberately described the bleakest eventuality he could imagine because he so desperately did not want it to happen.” That is not to assume that the terror described in the book could not occur. Seen from the perspective of two major war(s) in Europe, and the developments in Stalinist Russia, Orwell considered Humanity everywhere fully ripe for exploitative dictatorship. His assessment of the unscrupulous politician’s goal of unchecked power for its own sake was remarkably prescient. Significantly, Orwell chose to operate within the borders of a futuristic novel, rather than remain confined to yet another polemical essay. The result of this decision meant that Orwell had effectively ‘drawn a line’ under his career as a novelist, as George Woodcock intimates; he had come to the end of that particular road. Orwell and his publisher Fred Warburg deliberated carefully over the title. Should they call it The Last Man in Europe, as Orwell had originally intended? Warburg decided that 1984 was better, but Orwell favoured Nineteen Eighty-Four and the publisher acquiesced.

44 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 16
45 Jenni Calder, Huxley and Orwell, 14
47 Gordon Bowker, George Orwell (London: Abacus, 2004), 380
Big Brother’s Oceania is not a place that any sane person would voluntarily wish to inhabit. Jenni Calder refers to the bleak grey London of Airstrip One as a realm of nightmares rather than a place of dreams, and so it remains. The book opens discordantly with the clock “striking thirteen” and Orwell’s white middle-class ‘anti-hero’ Winston Smith wearily climbing the stairs to his meagre apartment on the seventh floor of Victory Mansions. The frightening grey world that Orwell describes, with its heady “atmosphere of secrecy and betrayal … arrest, disappearance, torture, [and] forced confession,” is not so far removed from the real. Theodore Dalrymple discovered that many people living behind the Berlin Wall had read Orwell. He states, “I found that everyone … who had read the book … expressed immeasurable admiration for it and marvelled that a man who had never set foot inside a communist country could … describe the physical environment so well.” Significantly, Winston Smith’s careworn life of ceaseless toil in this bleak unforgiving environment also applies to countless thousands of exhausted deprived, defeated low-income citizens in contemporary Britain. Here is how Nick Danziger, a London-based photo journalist, described his first impressions of a housing estate in Brixton.

From the walkways mined with dog excrement I look up into a window. Most interiors are invisible behind net curtains, in others I see bleak rooms with rarely a wardrobe or a chest of draws to break up the regular lines of the matchbox-like

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48 Calder, *Huxley and Orwell*, 7
49 A futuristic beginning to Orwell’s unsettling narrative.
50 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 7
51 Douglas Kerr, *George Orwell* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 76
52 Theodore Dalrymple, “The Dystopian Imagination,” in Janet Witalec (ed.), *Contemporary Literary Criticism* 168 (Detroit, Michigan: Gale, 2003), 50
spaces; I see a bare light bulb hanging from a ceiling; I see walls distempered to a flaking brown, patched with damp.  

Danziger was writing about London in the late 1990s, not describing Victory Mansions in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with its stale odours “of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.”  

As he travelled throughout the length of the country, Danziger found shocking evidence of poverty and destitution among Britain’s poorer citizens. In the ‘Introduction,’ he confessed that he “sometimes felt intimidated and frightened”;  

although fortunately for Danziger, he was never harmed.

Questions must be raised of British citizenry and their sense of equity if such large numbers of its citizens are forced to live in depressing filth and squalor. Evidently, there is great resentment and anger just below the surface, in the main due to the insurmountable gap between the rich and the poor. There is good reason for this, as Polly Toynbee points out, “The people at the bottom will never get any nearer the top.”  

Toynbee’s assertion may very well be correct. I suspect that such a prognosis would not have greatly surprised Orwell. After his brief survey of the North, he concluded in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that the answer to poverty lay in socialism for, “Nothing else can save us from the misery of the present [unemployment] or the nightmare of the future [Fascism].”  

Sixty six years on and British capitalism still only provides the barest subsistence living for non-English speakers, single women, and the poorly educated, 

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53 Nick Danziger, *Danziger’s Britain* (London: Flamingo, 1997), 12  
54 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 7  
55 Danziger, *Danziger’s Britain*, 2  
57 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin, 2001), 204  
58 Toynbee, *Hard Work: Life in Low-Pay Britain*, 203-204,  

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while it overpays and rewards those in top managerial positions.\textsuperscript{59} The restrictions and ‘barriers’ to success remain largely intact as Toynbee so rightly contends. Quite clearly, the children of the rich do “not start out equal in the next generation.”\textsuperscript{60} It is doubtful too, whether there are any prosperous, middle class families who choose to live on dilapidated housing estates in Britain.

I have continually accentuated the theme of grinding unrelenting proletarian poverty throughout the thesis, because it is one of the topics of greatest importance to Orwell. He desperately hoped that life would improve for working people, even though he was unable to propose any workable methods of bringing this about outside of socialist revolution.\textsuperscript{61} Throughout \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, Winston Smith also looked forward to the day when the proles would rise up and overthrow Big Brother. “\textit{If there is hope ... it lies in the proles}” — he wrote in his diary.\textsuperscript{62} However, the novel ends badly for Smith. He and his lover (Julia) are arrested and taken to the Ministry of Love (and tortured). After months (possibly even years) of incarceration and abuse, culminating in a horrific ordeal with a rat in Room 101 personally supervised by O’Brien, Winston is finally ‘cured.’ The frail and broken-spirited Smith is released — an object lesson to all he comes in contact with thereafter. He is allowed to tease out his final allotted days in ‘peace,’ supplemented with chess — “White always mates”\textsuperscript{63} he discovers, — and

\textsuperscript{59} Toynbee, ibid, 207-208
\textsuperscript{60} Toynbee, ibid., 211
\textsuperscript{61} John Newsinger, \textit{Orwell’s Politics}, 75
\textsuperscript{62} Orwell, \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four}, 64
\textsuperscript{63} Orwell, ibid., 249
frequent glasses of oily Victory gin in the ubiquitous Chestnut Tree café.\textsuperscript{64} Such, we imagine, is the fate of all who presume to oppose Big Brother.

Much of Orwell’s political message is still potent. It resonates powerfully like the great spiritual warnings delivered by the biblical prophets,\textsuperscript{65} but there the likeness ends. Governments that promise peace, prosperity, and equality when there is no lasting ‘peace’ and security to be found (especially for the poor), should not be trusted. Seers and prophets, including opinionated radicals and social ‘misfits’ like Orwell himself, are generally clear-eyed individuals who possess intellectual and moral courage, and the ability to resist the pressures of massed public opinion. Men and women such as these are seldom deceived by outward appearances, or swayed by cunning and deceitful rhetoric, or by political ‘spin.’ Their words and actions resonate with meaning and significance, — which perhaps makes their position more dangerous. Professor Allan Patience states — and he could easily have been describing Orwell himself:

They warn and berate us, sometimes with extraordinary sympathy and solicitude. They are not always right. Nor are they easy to get along with. They do not live by bread alone, nor are they easily brought. They are driven by ideas rather than relationships or materialist rewards.\textsuperscript{66}

In contradistinction, \textit{false} prophets and (some) politicians are an entirely different more enduring collective. All prophecy is based upon imagery and language skills. Orwell’s emphasis throughout \textit{Nineteen Eighty-Four} centres on language. It is the manipulation

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\textsuperscript{64} Orwell, ibid., 248-249
\textsuperscript{65} George Orwell, (No. 57) “Letter to Brenda Salkeld,” in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds.), CEJL I (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 164
\textsuperscript{66} Allan Patience, “The treason of the universities,” \textit{AQ} (March-April 1999): 16
of words for political expediency that concerns him the most.\textsuperscript{67} He outlines the techniques most commonly resorted to in ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1946) — “euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness .... Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.”\textsuperscript{68} None of this should trigger surprise in a world where civilian deaths are described as ‘collateral damage,’ and the (illegal) invasion of a nation is nothing more than ‘regime change.’ In an essay essentially about words, lawyer Julian Burnside states, “Language is as powerful now as in 1933: it can hide shocking truth, it can deceive a nation, it can hand electoral election to the morally bankrupt.”\textsuperscript{69} The Bush administration — by way of useful illustration — with its globally hegemonic interests, its international arms supremacy, dense rhetoric, and policy of “noble lies”\textsuperscript{70} readily falls into this category.

Oceania’s economy — indeed it was the economy of all three of Orwell’s imaginary States — was built upon perpetual war. Yet it was a warfare far removed from the massed infantry and artillery emplacements of the First and Second World Wars.\textsuperscript{71} Goldstein’s book describes Oceania’s war as an economic ruse, “it is always the same war — one must realise … that it is impossible for it to be decisive.”\textsuperscript{72} War is a

\textsuperscript{68} George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language,” in Essays, 356
\textsuperscript{71} George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 164
\textsuperscript{72} Orwell, ibid., 164-165

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lucrative industry, albeit one in which no democratic Government would necessarily wish to advertise its involvement. In the US alone “the military-industrial complex” is earning billions of dollars for profit-hungry companies like “Bechtel … Halliburton, Lockheed-Martin, Chevron Texaco and the Carlyle Group.” In August 2004, President Bush ’signed-off’ on a $417 billion Defence Appropriations Bill. A number of senior Bush advisors, including the vice president Dick Cheney, have a financial interest — and a lifestyle to back it — in maintaining US Government war contracts in faraway places like Afghanistan and Iraq. It is no wonder then with such enormous profits to be gained, that the neoconservatives support pre-emptive war wherever it may be occasioned. Just as Big Brother did not disclose the true purposes of war, neither does the Bush administration disclose its real reasons for waging war on terror. Examine the contemptuous disregard for accumulated knowledge and international opinion exhibited by Richard Perle, a disgraced member of the Pentagon’s Defence Policy Board, made not long after the invasion of Iraq.

The predictions of those who opposed this war can be discarded like spent cartridges. You remember them? We will kill hundreds of thousands. We will create thousands of new terrorists. The Arab world will rise up and set the region aflame. Tony Blair and George Bush knew better.

75 For additional information regarding Vice President Cheney’s relationship with Halliburton, see William D. Hartung, How Much Are You Making on the War, Daddy? (Sydney: Bantam, 2003), 23-43
Thousands of unnecessary deaths later (perhaps tens of thousands, if non-combatants are included), and the only valid response to Perle’s intellectual profanity is one of revulsion, anger and disbelief. The reality is that the ‘invasion’ of Iraq was founded on a flurry of lies: the newly created Iraqi interim government is hopelessly out of its depth, the presence of US troops is generally resented, and the coalition of ‘the willing’ (surely a misnomer) is disintegrating. Militants and radical Islamists from inside and outside Iraq are fighting an insurgency, and the killing, hostage-taking, and suicide-bombing is far from over. Yet this, we are told, is ‘democracy in the raw.’ The parallels between the neoconservative ideologies espoused by Perle and Big Brother’s disgraceful misrepresentations extend beyond their original fictional context. This idea of three great powers facing each other off in a bid for supremacy — developed by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — was something that James Burnham had envisaged in 1940. Orwell was highly critical of Burnham’s views generally, but he appears to

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78 Robert Harvey, *Global Disorder* (London: Robinson, 2003), xiv
82 See Orwell’s review of “The Managerial Revolution” in CEJL IV, 198-199
83 John Newsinger, *Orwell’s Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 127
have agreed with him in this instance — hence in Nineteen Eighty-Four, Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia are locked in perpetual conflict and reciprocity, with neither side coming out the outright winner.

The Voice of Dissent

Just as in Big Brother’s Oceania, contemporary America also has its legions of welfare dependent ‘proles.’ These are ordinary citizens struggling to survive in an immensely prosperous, economically secure nation. Polly Toynbee alleges, “The US has had a minimum wage since the 1930s, but the ‘90s boom has been fuelled by a real terms fall in low wages: the low-paid now earn only 91% of what they did thirty years ago.” Poverty and joblessness can be minimised and decentred from the political agenda of a country in a state of war. Since 9/11, the US has set its sights for war. Fear of terrorist bombs has become part of life in a country that previously was impervious to fear. Ordinary Americans are scared to voice an honest political opinion, especially one that is critical of the government or the nation as a whole. This is not without good reason, as Nancy Chang alleges,

[T]he Bush administration has taken steps to silence political dissent. Attorney General John Ashcroft, the top official in charge of enforcing the laws of the United States, has challenged the patriotism of those who oppose the administration’s policies.

Former Attorney General Ashcroft has stood by this programme, and would-be protesters have been cautioned and interviewed by the FBI, and warned not to

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84 Newsinger, ibid.
86 Nancy Chang, Silencing Political Dissent (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 15
participate in demonstrations. It is an all out attempt to frighten and subdue American citizens — to negate and undermine individual freedom of speech. The Attorney General’s work has not stopped with the conflation of dissent and treason. Academics and keynote speakers, among them Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), are currently refused the right to lecture on some US campuses, and a prominent moderate Muslim academic Tariq Ramadan has been forced to resign his professorship over visa difficulties. It seems that the US Government is determined to appear to be in control of its borders from now on.

There were surveillance cameras in situ around the Trade Towers in September 2001, but they were seemingly unable to prevent the impending ‘terror’ attacks. There is also evidence to suggest that the FBI and other intelligence agencies received advanced warning of the attacks, but did not investigate further. The Committee later set up to look into the 2001 attacks, concluded that: “The 9/11 attacks were a shock, but they should not have come as a surprise [because] ... Islamist extremists had given plenty of warning that they meant to kill Americans indiscriminately and in large numbers.”

has subsequently questioned whether it is possible to wage war against “an abstract noun.”

So too, has the erudite expatriate American author Gore Vidal, who has frequently offered tantalizing insights into American politics, and the function of its law and intelligence agencies. In his essay, ‘The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh,’ Vidal posits a very plausible explanation for the emergence of home-grown ‘terrorist’s’ like McVeigh. Vidal submits that McVeigh — a decorated Gulf War veteran — determined to blow up the Murrah Federal Building “in retaliation” for the massacre of the Branch Davidians, exactly two years later. Vidal also points out that the FBI (and Attorney General Reno) badly mishandled Waco, and that the tragedy was preventable. In the ensuing (gas, fire, and) gun battle “more than eighty cult members were killed,” including twenty-seven children. Vidal adds, “It was a great victory for Uncle Sam, as intended by the FBI, whose code name for the assault was Show Time.” Admittedly, much of Vidal’s work is deliberately provocative and polemical. He evidently enjoys

93 Sometimes referred to as ‘the last angry man’ (an interesting parallel with Orwell’s ‘The last man in Europe’), Gore Vidal has been outspoken on the topic of American politics for some years. In the tradition of George Orwell, Vidal is a superb polemical essayist, who possesses an insider’s familiarity with the corridors of American power. He is never afraid to ask hard questions of the Government of the day — whether it be the Clinton administration, or latterly, George W. Bush’s neo conservatives. See, Marc Cooper, “The Last Defender of the American Republic? An interview with Gore Vidal,” LA Weekly, 5-11 July 2002. http://www.laweekly.com/ink/02/33/features-cooper.php (5/02/2005); Also, see Tony Jones, “Vidal is a lonely genius, Carr says,” ABC Lateline: Transcript. 14 February 2005. http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2005/s1302665.htm (15/02/2005)
95 See McVeigh’s “longhand notes, dated April 4, 2001,” Vidal, “The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh,”108-110. The FBI, however, effectively denied McVeigh the right to publish or make a public statement. Vidal asserts: “From the beginning, it was ordained that McVeigh was to have no coherent motive for what he had done.” Vidal, ibid., 86
96 Vidal, ibid., 84-85
97 Vidal, ibid., 85
causing consternation, but he is far too articulate and intelligent to deal in half-truth, and
innuendo. He states:

[We] have an anti-terrorism act, which literally suspends our Bill of Rights and the
constitution. No president would sign it, it had just been sitting there for years —
it had emanated from the Department of Justice, which is in charge of the FBI.
Within a week of the Oklahoma City bombing Clinton signed it ‘for the protection
of the state and of the people,’ using the exact language that Adolph Hitler used …
after the Reichstag fire of 1933 ‘for the protection of the state and the people.’ I
thought that was an unhappy coincidence.98

Vidal has long held the belief that the US Government (regardless of party affiliations)
intends to dispense with the Constitution as it currently stands. There are certainly
obvious reasons for doing so if Orwell’s Big Brother (autocracy) is to take over the
democratic process. Some of Vidal’s statements may read as sensationalist, but this
researcher has discovered that his claims are readily verifiable. As for the assertions
concerning police and agency bungling, dishonesty and cover-up, there is ample
evidence to substantiate these too.99

Vidal cites three disturbing examples from James Bovard’s Lost Rights (1994).100
Bovard alleges that in Garland Texas (1991) Kenneth Baulch was shot by masked police
“who kicked down the bedroom door” of his trailer where Baulch “had been sleeping
next to his seventeen-month old son.” He was then shot in the back, a fact that was never
satisfactorily explained. Vidal then cites “the cold blooded federal murder of two members of the Weaver family at Ruby Ridge.” The Weavers crime was that they wanted to live in isolation (in the woods), away from mainstream America. They were shot by FBI agents during a raid. These are shocking examples of sanctioned killings which surely have no place in a democracy. Vidal’s underlying premise is that the US government is ‘shredding’ the Bill of Rights as part of its ongoing war on drugs, terror, and tax fraud. In order to possess freedom, individual rights and liberties must be drastically curtailed. Read into that what you will. The USA currently has a hard-line interventionist foreign policy. It has also introduced the USA Patriot Act, and established the Department of Homeland Security. In the process, America appears to have taken an irrevocable step towards autocracy. The Bush administration, with its strident approach to global politics, and its crackdown on internal law enforcement,

102 Vidal, ibid., 68 -69. See also, Anderson, “License to Kill.”
103 Vidal, ibid., 60, 80-81. David Lohr summarises the events: “In August of 1992 Americans tensely watched as events began to unfold on a remote ridge in Northern Idaho, involving a white separatist family and the FBI. Eleven days after it had begun, a 14-year-old boy, a 42-year-old mother, a federal marshal, and one yellow Labrador retriever had all been shot dead.” *RANDY WEAVER: SIEGE AT RUBY RIDGE* by David Lohr. Tru TV Crime Library - Criminal Minds and Methods.
104 Gore Vidal, “Shredding the Bill of Rights,” 49-82
lends itself to unflattering comparisons with Big Brother. In Orwell’s novel, citizens were under constant surveillance, and could be arrested on hearsay and ‘disappeared.’ Everyone espoused the official Party jargon; every form of difference, dissent and intellectual freedom was outlawed; and Oceania was perpetually at war with one or the other of its two main rivals — Eurasia and Eastasia. The attacks on Washington, New York (and the plane that crashed in a solitary field in Pennsylvania) have evidently unsettled heartland America. Nobody should be greatly surprised at the exaggerated response to terror. People were angered, and deeply shocked at the senseless killing of ‘innocents.’ What has not been made clear is Mr. Bush’s administration’s agenda. Perhaps a fearful nation is more easily manipulated. The uncertainty in the wake of September 11 provided the Bush administration with an effective opportunity to introduce the rigorous USA Patriot Act (I), which further erodes besieged Constitutional freedoms.

Patricia Williams refers to the “Constitutional crisis — that is, the encroachment of … historical freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures” that Homeland Security and the USA Patriot Act have recently bequeathed to the nation. Of course there are other issues as well: breaches to the First and Fourth Amendments represent just the beginning of security ‘crackdowns’ for ordinary citizens. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell envisaged neighbours spying on neighbours, children reporting their

106 Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, *Weapons of Mass Deception*, 143
107 Patricia Williams, “This dangerous patriot’s game,” *The Observer*, 2 December 2001. http://observer.guardian.co.uk/libertywatch/story/0,1373,610367,00.html (5/12/2001)
parents to the police, an end to dissent and intellectual freedom, and alarming powers of arrest and detention granted to all branches of law enforcement — especially the dreaded Thought Police. A much fuller account of this mode of behaviour is to be found in Solzhenitsyn’s frank disclosure of the Stalinist regime, *The Gulag Archipelago* (1974). Yet incredibly few ponder the implications of such repression for our own times. It is almost as though we read the words, but we do not want to believe or accept that such events could happen to us. Gore Vidal reveals his concerns for the US Constitution in his essay, ‘Shredding the Bill of Rights.’

The Fourth [Amendment] is the people’s principle defense against totalitarian government; it is a defense that is now daily breached by deed and law.108

Democratically elected government rarely indulges in overtly heavy-handed tactics with its own citizens without good cause. Smart governments practice a hegemonic approach to authority. However, since 9/11, the desire to prevent further terrorist attacks has edged the country closer to voluntarily giving up its own precious freedoms in the name of preserving Homeland Security.

Major centres throughout the USA have greatly increased monitored surveillance systems; the newly bolstered ranks of the National Guard can be deployed at a moment’s notice, while private security companies ceaselessly patrol major ports and airports. I am reminded of the incessant watchfulness behind the massively barred gates of Mordor, in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Those sites (or ‘potential targets’) deemed to be most at risk — the Pentagon, the White House, State and Government buildings, historical

landmarks, military bases, nuclear power plants, dams and water resources, industrial facilities, — are under continuous surveillance.

It is difficult to predict the immediate legacy of global events post 9/11. However, one interpretation is clear: the USA is no longer the land of the free and the home of the brave. Few countries on earth are more closely guarded and security conscious at present than is the United States. Mr. Bush confidently refers to (and walks among) ‘the American people’ as though they were personal friends as well as fellow compatriots.\(^{109}\) Yet there are deep national divisions over the war in Iraq. Gore Vidal believes that the President has eroded international goodwill and brought his country

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into disrepute. He states, “The entire world is horrified by what we do.”\(^{110}\) Not only have Bush and Cheney plunged the United States into an unnecessary foreign war, they have also undermined the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Constitution. At the same time they are required to protect their citizens at home. Oceania had its Ministry of Love “which maintained law and order,”\(^{111}\) and America has the newly created Department of Homeland Security. It is ironic that Stalinist Russia should have had a similar institution known as the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Solzhenitsyn reminds us that this was the training ground for Gulag administrators.\(^{112}\) Describing daily life under Stalin, Sheila Fitzpatrick likened conditions to “a school of the strict type, probably a boarding school” where “pupils accept the premise that, however unpleasant the educational process … it is ultimately for their own good.”\(^{113}\) A similar acceptance of hardship and ‘belt-tightening’ confirms the resolve of many of the President’s supporters from the American heartland. Yet the belief that terrorist bombs can be prevented simply by implementing draconian legislation and colour coded alerts is weak and implausible.

The Bush administration, along with strong support from Britain’s Tony Blair and to a lesser extent from Australia’s John Howard — dubbed by the media the “Coalition of the willing” — has elected to intervene forcefully in the Middle East. The

\(^{111}\) George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, 9
\(^{112}\) Alexander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago (Glasgow: Collins, 1974), 3
\(^{113}\) Sheila Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism: ordinary life in extraordinary times: Russia in the 1930s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 226-227
latest buzzword for what is occurring is “effects-based warfare.” To be more specific, the strategy entails precision bombing, followed by a ‘liberating’ invasion (surely an oxymoron) of Iraq. After the recalcitrant Saddam has been dealt with, what will there be to prevent the United States from intervening in the domestic politics of bordering countries? Clearly the task is beyond the United Nations. The war in Iraq openly undermines the United Nation’s fragile raison d’être and it exposes the inability of such a loosely knit body to act as the world’s referee. Doubtless America has its own set agenda in this regard.

A handful of left commentators have sought to justify the American invasion on the grounds that it would bring to an end the human rights violations of the Saddam regime. This may prove to be a by-product of the American invasion — though at a huge and far greater cost than non-intervention — but it was never the main intent, simply one of the pretexts.

The formidable display of sophisticated weaponry in the Gulf region during the build-up to war — two battle fleets, 1,000 aircraft, an immense stockpile of ordinance, and 150,000 ground troops — has a secondary purpose. It is designed to show the United Nations that America does not require permission to act on its own behalf outside of its own borders. In 1945, Orwell warned, “tanks, battleships and bombing planes are inherently tyrannical weapons.” He argued that when powerful nations developed hi-

http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4676787-103677,00.html (19/12/2004)
tech weaponry they would also prove despotic. This certainly appears to be the direction that the United States is adopting under the leadership of President Bush.

Gore Vidal is recognised as a contemporary critic of American hegemony. According to Vidal, the United States of America is not a democracy in the Founding Father’s sense. Arguably, it never has been. It is “a kind of armed Republic” bristling with all manner of sophisticated technological weaponry. In addition, former Cold War and NATO stalwarts France and Germany have incurred considerable American displeasure over their failure to support the USA in its time of need, and it is likely that some form of fiscal ‘punishment’ will be meted out at a later date. Does this spat indicate that America’s current defence strategy no longer requires NATO and the old European alliance? What kind of a world does the allegedly Christian George W. Bush envisage as he clears the airwaves of terrorism and political dissent, and reduces the whole world to outposts in the US empire?

118 Gore Vidal, “Mickey Mouse Historian,” in *Dreaming War*, 157
119 Gore Vidal talks to Ramona Koval, “Gore Vidal and the Mind of the Terrorist.”
Imposing Democracy in Iraq

What Big Brother and Washington principally have in common is a lack of hard evidence to support the need for their respective wars. Then again, authoritarian governments do not need to give any reasons for their actions. Washington’s immediate focus has been to stabilise Iraq’s oil reserves, restore utilities and electricity, which they have tackled with remarkably little success, and to engineer Iraqi democracy. Much greater reconstruction is required before Iraq is considered a safe place to live. The Bush administration has discovered to its chagrin that pre-emption looks simple enough on paper, but is extraordinarily difficult to achieve in practice. As Martin Jacques points out:

The occupation of Iraq has taught the US, not to mention the world, that overweening military power is not invincible, but on the contrary, is as vulnerable as ever when it tries to occupy another people's country. Such was, and remains, the lesson of anti-colonial struggle.

Evoking a positive interpretation, Saddam Hussein is incarcerated and awaiting trial, and there is an interim Iraqi government in place, but this has been achieved at an enormous cost to Iraqi civilians (and American prestige). Initially the long term American interests in the region appeared likely to include pressurizing Iraq’s neighbours — principally Syria and Iran — although that may have changed somewhat. The President also hopes to broker a peaceful resolution to the spiteful conflict between Israel and the

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123 This has been clearly demonstrated in the leaked Downing Street Memos.
124 Martin Jacques, “A Year of thwarted ambition.”
Palestinians. Much of the original Iraq planning appears to have gone horribly wrong. What seems incredible about the strong push for punitive measures in Iraq — ‘we are running out of time,’ the Bush administration admonished the Security Council before plunging ahead regardless — is the fact that few scholars outside of the USA were convinced of the appropriateness of such a war.

Events have since shown that the post-hostilities period was poorly planned, and it is a moot point as to whether the powerful American juggernaut will succeed. Some ten million people worldwide demonstrated before the war, to little effect at the time, but the war remains unpopular. The Bush administration, in such a context, needed to make argument, present a body of evidence and display expert opinion.

There are countless stories of the way in which American troops shoot first and ask questions later. The Americans don’t even bother to count the number of Iraqi dead. When Bush and Blair insist that the Iraqis should determine Saddam’s fate, by Iraqis they mean their own quisling Iraqi regime. The Guantanamo camp is an affront to human rights worldwide. Civil rights have been rolled back in the US in the name of the fight against terror. And, of course, there are no weapons of mass destruction: truth is the first casualty of war - and imperial ambition. It is difficult to imagine the US and Britain ever enjoying the same kind of respect again in their claim to be the mantle of democracy and human rights.

Iraq might well have qualified as a ‘rogue state’ in Mr. Bush’s eyes, but it is unlikely that Saddam Hussein possessed any sizeable stockpiles of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (WMDs). Certainly former UN chief weapons inspector Richard Butler in the 1990s did

129 Martin Jacques, “A Year of thwarted ambition.”
not find nuclear warheads, and Hans Blix in 2003 and his associates failed to uncover any conclusive evidence. Iraq has significant oil deposits, so a change of government would undoubtedly help the US stabilize the Middle East, and ensure that oil continues to flow where it is most needed. President Bush underscored his country’s interests when he stated in his American Enterprise speech, “A new regime … would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region.” Such a statement requires interpretation. Does Mr. Bush intend the democratization of Iraq to intimidate rather than inspire other (unruly) Arab States? Or is his intention simply to gather (monetary) support for the war? American citizens — the faceless 120 million — who did not vote for Gore or Bush in 2000, allegedly do not greatly care whether their government is lying to them, so long as the perception of doing right is there. All governments remain silent, shift and mould interpretations, or lie, but public disinformation flowing from the White House is of such a scale that the consequences remain enormous. It should not be forgotten that Governments also control the flow of information, and the United States is little different from Oceania in this regard. David B. Deserano outlines the confluence between the White House and the Media in American politics.

Corporations and the US government have spent many decades and hundreds of billions of dollars researching how best to effect the American people. Much of this information is kept secret from the public (in the case of corporate research, it is their private property) and what is known has come from the more recent work done by scholars around the world – work that is dramatically under-funded by comparison. So, the information available to the average citizen – including the aforementioned academic scholars – is radically less than that which is available to the producers of media or information campaigns.135

This is a disturbing insight coming from a nation that advocates freedom of the press, open democracy and the dissemination of information as readily as it peddles Coca-Cola and McDonalds. Doubtless Orwell would have been fascinated by the current Pentagon ‘spin,’ with its opaque rhetoric, and talk of ‘smart bombs,’ ‘dirty bombs,’ ‘collateral damage,’ ‘friendly fire,’ ‘fire fights,’ and ‘WMDs.’ In his post-war essay, ‘You and the Atom bomb,’ Orwell makes a distinction between the strong and the weak: those with ‘bomber planes’ and those with only rifles and grenades. He alleges, “A complex weapon makes the strong stronger, while a simple weapon so long as there is no answer to it a — gives claws to the weak.”136 Orwell spent time in Spain during the Civil War, fighting with the POUM militia, so he had some experience of his topic. He fought alongside of farm labourers, old men and boys, many of whom had never even handled a rifle, let alone fired one. Obviously it costs money — a lot of money — to develop, produce, and purchase hi-tech weaponry. But, is it money well spent — that is, can such expenditure ever be justified? Here, for the record, is Orwell’s judgment: “tanks, battleships and bombing planes are inherently tyrannical weapons, while rifles, muskets,

long-bows and hand-grenades are inherently democratic weapons.”137 In effect, it means that strong countries are in violation of international law when they use superior force of arms138 to fulfil their expansionist ambitions.

Poorer countries are generally unable to keep up with the ongoing expense of large-scale armament unless they have powerful allies.139 They stick with rifles, machine-guns, mortars and grenades, and engage in relatively low level military objectives against similarly armed opponents. These ‘small fry’ Nation States pose no serious threat to the major player(s). Actually they — and there are dozens scattered around the world — are far more likely to become victims of post 9/11 police actions, especially if they are perceived to be undemocratic or problematic. What will finally happen to Libya, Iran, Syria, and the Emirates after Iraq is democratised is open to speculation. Surely the Bush administration was plotting or conspiring to invade Iraq even before 9/11.140 The English word conspiracy (from the Latin, coniuratio, -onis), suggests not only painstaking deliberation and determination, but malice aforethought. John W. Dean has accused President Bush of failing “to deal honestly with the American people regarding his true agenda.”141 What little is known about the build up to war has come from meticulous investigative journalism, rather than the White House. Something

137 Orwell, ibid., 24
138 The USA’s hi-tech invasion of Iraq was essentially a non-contest. It was also an event that most of the world witnessed on television.
139 Wealthy nations such as Germany and Japan were effectively (and constitutionally) demilitarized at the end of World War Two (Potsdam, July 1945). Clearly, at the time, the logic was to prevent further threats to world peace from the Axis powers.
141 John W. Dean, Worse than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush (South Yarra, Victoria: Hardie Grant Books, 2004), 131
is clearly wrong with the reasons underpinning Mr. Bush’s war on terror. It may take years before the complexity, and justification of this time is fully made known — long after this and other dissatisfactions are submitted. What of the current whereabouts of Osama bin Laden — Big Brother’s arch nemesis, Emmanuel Goldstein — is he alive or dead? After Afghanistan, a new scapegoat was needed to fill the embarrassing lull in America’s vengeful war. The Iraq plan is not new; it has actually been on the Bush family agenda since Desert Storm, when George H. W. Bush Senior failed to oust Saddam in 1991. While it is an established fact that Hussein is a despot who doubtless deserves some mode of censure for human rights abuse, what harm has he done to the USA? President Bush and the coalition attacked him for no precise or verifiable reason. There are international laws in place forbidding premeditated aggression, but in the Bush administration there is a disregard for international law. As Dean maintains, “International law is only a problem if you respect it.”142 How the charges levelled against Saddam managed to deceive Tony Blair and John Howard remains open for debate.

When James Burnham’s ‘The Managerial Revolution’ appeared in 1941, Orwell raised several important points, many of which are currently applicable. Firstly, “Power worship blurs political judgement because it leads, almost unavoidably, to the belief that present trends will continue.”143 The discussion centred on the probable outcome of the Second World War. Germany was winning when Burnham wrote this piece. Orwell believed that Burnham was incorrect. Does it really follow that might is right, as the

142 Dean, ibid., 135
143 George Orwell, “The Managerial Revolution,” CEJL IV, 207
USA appears to believe; and does that belief give powerful nations — like the USA — a mandate to intervene in the division of the world’s commodities? In Nineteen Eighty-Four, Oceania (read America, Britain and Australia) was perpetually at war with Eurasia and Eastasia for reasons that are extremely complex and difficult to fathom. Orwell allowed Burnham’s three super States to filter into Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Most Americans … would prefer to see the world divided between two or three monster states which … could bargain with one another on economic issues without being troubled by ideological differences. Such a world-picture fits in with the American tendency to admire size for its own sake and to feel that success constitutes justification.144

The current American administration has tethered its success to military might. It is inconceivable that anything less than an outright victory in Iraq (and throughout the Middle-East) will satisfy the White House. This kind of thinking is a mistake from Orwell’s perspective, because it implies that America believes itself to be invincible. If this misconception leads to the USA meddling in the affairs of other nations, then who is to stop them? With his customary precision, Orwell unerringly places his finger on the pulse of twenty-first century global politics.

[Burnham’s] theory has been much discussed, but few people have yet considered its ideological implications — that is, the kind of world-view, the kind of beliefs, and the social structure that would probably prevail in a state which was at once unconquerable and in a state of ‘cold war’ with its neighbours.145

This review was written in 1945. It is significant that President Bush’s Republican government — close to sixty years later — actually appears intent on pursuing this same hard-line foreign policy. Where the former Soviet Union concluded at the end of the Cold War, the United States, under the leadership of George W. Bush has continued in

144 Orwell, ibid., 208-9
145 Orwell, “You and the Atom Bomb,” CEJL IV, 26
much the same vein. The President has long since drawn his nostalgic line in the sand. Does anyone outside of Texas really have cause to remember the Alamo? The denunciation of countries glibly labelled an ‘axis of evil’ can be modified but it cannot be recalled. Mr. Bush’s statement that the US was engaged in a ‘crusade’ against terror — subsequently downplayed by the then press secretary Ari Fleisher — was interpreted by many in the Muslim world as a thinly veiled threat of a religious war.146 Mr. Bush intends to bully smaller countries into line with US Imperial foreign policy. Does he also mean to include all Muslim countries? The new package is designed to pummel the world’s economy into a more acceptable shape for Corporate America. Since the bombing of the mountain caves in Afghanistan, there are now fewer places for extremists to hide. The end result of all this flexing of military muscles though is plain enough: one is either for the USA or against them — and there is little identifiable middle ground remaining.147 This is how schoolyard bullies deal with potential opposition, by creating an almost palpable climate of fear.

The USA has a history of aggression and covert interference dating back to Berlin in 1948-49.148 Gore Vidal lists twenty pages of engagements of various kinds in

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148 Gore Vidal, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*, 41
his book, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace* (2002). These include the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962-63, the Gulf of Sidra, Libya in 1981, and Eagle Claw/Desert One in Iraq 1980. America is one of only a handful of countries that has refused to ban the use of land mines against ground troops. Mines are also deadly effective punitive weapons against the unregulated movement of animals and civilians. Rumours suggest that the United States has not entirely ruled out the use of nuclear missiles in a perceived threat or direct military confrontation either. To date, they are the only nation on earth to have already deployed these weapons on a largely defenceless civilian population. The Pentagon reasons that ‘war is war’ (if reasonableness is a viable term to attribute to military planners), and that ‘anything goes’ in warfare — landmines, cruise missiles, ‘daisy-cutter’ bombs, ‘bunker-busters,’ and defoliants included. They dislike the idea of facing chemical weapons, but evidently have no qualms about using napalm, cluster bombs, and defoliants to reduce areas of potential threat. Although no significant caches of chemicals have so far been discovered in Iraq, other than those

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149 Vidal, ibid., 22-41
151 These are reputedly a firm favourite with Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld. According to *New Scientist*, “The US already has conventional earth-penetrating bombs, which destroy underground targets by burrowing 10 metres or more … before detonating. But they can’t get through rock or reach deeper, toughened bunkers. So the Pentagon and the National Nuclear Security Administration have spent $23 million on a study of a ‘robot nuclear earth penetrator’ (RNEP) that can cut through 30 metres of rock.” See, “Bunker-Busters Are Back,” *New Scientist* (12 February 2005): 6
previously unearthed by UN inspectors before the current crisis, the US frequently announces their ‘probable’ existence, and the likelihood of their use. It has since been confirmed by Charles Duelfer, in his official report to the US Senate October 6, 2004, that Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction.\footnote{Mark Oliver, “Iraq had no WMD,” The Guardian, 6 October 2004. http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,1321019,00.html (6/10/2004)} Iraqi troops carried gas masks into battle, although no one has yet mentioned that this might have been to protect them from a perceived American chemical attack. The psychological war continues unabated; it is a grotesque game of brinkmanship that the US cannot afford to lose. So why the headlong rush to precipitate a war with Iraq, when millions of ordinary citizens around the world have clearly registered their disapproval? Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated in an interview in August 2002, “I think the main problem here is whether this [war] is our number one priority or whether our number one priority is fighting terrorism.”\footnote{“Next Move,” Former Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright and Henry Kissinger debate their views of a potential invasion of Iraq with Ray Suarez, Newshour, 22 August 2002. www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec02/iraq_8-22.html (26/08/2002)} At least Albright has approached the problem pragmatically. She knows that Iraq is a country that has effectively been contained (to a very considerable extent) by the UN imposed sanctions, after the Gulf War in 1991. Most of Hussein’s more recent exploits were against fellow Iraqis. We have heard the grisly stories of murder and atrocity.\footnote{Ann Clwyd, “See men shredded, then say you don’t back war,” The Times Online, 18 March 2003. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/ (24/12/2004)} Hussein continued to harass the Kurdish minority in the North and until just prior to war, to resist the call for more weapons inspections; but he has also been forced to curtail his weapons program. This sequence of events is not known for certain, but it seems unlikely that Iraq ever moved beyond the planning stages for acquiring
nuclear weapons capability.\textsuperscript{157} Once the US invasion began, the Iraqi army simply melted away, leaving the country in the hands of the bewildered coalition forces. Stage Two (resistance) was then enacted in the form of kidnapping and suicide bombing. This indiscriminate bloodletting has escalated, with casualties mounting. The newly ‘liberated’ and soon-to-be-democratic Iraq is currently a nation without voice or direction. Its immediate future does not appear to offer much hope for a people longing for internal peace and stability. With daily power cuts, drinking water shortages and eight hour petrol queues, American liberation surely leaves little to be desired. There is a long way to go before the region can settle into modernity, let alone normalcy or nationhood.

In a lucid essay written in 1945, Orwell marshalled his thoughts on the topic of nationalism. He had participated in the Spanish Civil War, fighting Fascism with the POUM — the loosely affiliated Marxist/Trotskyist Unification Party militia. There had even been a wound, so he was writing from personal experience.

A nationalist is one who thinks solely, or mainly, in terms of competitive prestige … at any rate his thoughts always turn on victories, defeats, triumphs and humiliations.\textsuperscript{158} Orwell realised that the real casualties of (any) war — and the only “true enemies of fascism” — were the workers.\textsuperscript{159} This was because they alone would endure the worst of


social change and fluctuating fortunes, whereas the wealthy middle class would continue
to prosper, much as it had done before the war. Orwell had caught glimpses of this while
on leave in Barcelona: “the blue overalls had almost disappeared ... Fat prosperous
men, elegant women, and sleek cars were everywhere.”\textsuperscript{160} Gone too, was the feeling of
euphoria and of common interest, of classlessness, that he had witnessed only months
earlier. It was as though the world had changed overnight. The obvious parallel here
with New York and Washington after 9/11 is profoundly unsettling. There are three
basic rules — three commonalties — that nationalists everywhere allegedly have in
common. Orwell lists them as ‘obsession,’ ‘instability,’ and ‘indifference to reality.’
Under the third heading, indifference to reality, he states

\begin{quote}
Actions are held to be good or bad, not on their own merits but according to who
does them, and there is almost no kind of outrage ... which does not change its
moral colour when it is committed by ‘our’ side.\textsuperscript{161}
\end{quote}

There are concerns that the US might well resort to the same kinds of shabby tactics and
methodology previously only held to be applied by their enemies. It seems that these
anxieties are well grounded. President Bush has already stated, concerning the hurriedly
assembled antiterrorist bill, “in order to win the war, we must make sure that the law
enforcement men and women have got the tools necessary, within the Constitution, to
defeat the enemy.”\textsuperscript{162} What concerned Orwell in 1945, and it should concern us in 2005,
is that a freely elected government should even contemplate letting loose such draconian
measures to begin with. He then confirms, “Nationalism is not to be confused with

\begin{footnotes}
\item Stephen Ingle, \textit{Orwell: A Political Life}, 1993, 72
\item Orwell, \textit{Homage to Catalonia}, 2000, 89
\item Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” 356
\item Anne E. Kornblut and Glen Johnson, “Bush eyeing terrorists, not ‘nation-building,’” \textit{Boston
\end{footnotes}
patriotism.”\footnote{George Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” 355} Evidently some individuals imagine that the two terms are interchangeable, when clearly they are not. *Patriotism* is the more benign of the two. It is merely an enthusiastic “devotion” to a particular lifestyle, geographical location or culture.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 355} *Nationalism*, on the other hand comprises more disturbing elements, being in its simplest form “inseparable from the desire for power.”\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 355-6} It is not necessary either, that such misplaced “loyalty” is restricted to a physical location, because it could just as easily be a religious affiliation, or even racial in motivation.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 356} What is immediately apparent about nationalism though, is the hard competitive edge that affects everything in its path: nationalists seldom believe themselves wrong and perhaps not surprisingly their raison d’être is to win.\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 357} Orwell notes that in an upsurge of nationalism, the first casualty is invariably the truth. He states “Much of the propagandist writing of our time amounts to plain forgery.”\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 364} Orwell wrote this piece in May 1945, and it was subsequently published in *Polemic*, in October of the same year. It has been asserted that nationalism will not brook any contradictions, and that it must win at all costs. Orwell then adds, “Material facts are suppressed, dates altered, quotations removed from their context and doctored so as to change their meaning.”\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 364} There is more: “One has no way of verifying the facts, one is not even fully certain that they have happened.”\footnote{Orwell, ibid., 365} This should by now sound disconcerting to contemporary readers. An examination of the official statements from Washington since July/August 2002, particularly concerning
Saddam Hussein and al Qaeda, reveals the accuracy of Orwell’s statement. The spin
doctoring relating to the war on terror, and in particular to ‘rogue states’ such as Iraq, is
exactly his point. Here is Richard Perle’s reading of the situation in America.

[Q:] What do you think September 11 did to the American psyche?

[A:] I think September 11 has changed almost everything about the way
Americans see the outside world and outside the United States very few people
have fully appreciated the extent to which American attitudes have been changed.
There is a very strong consensus now supporting the use of force to deal with
terrorism including, especially, the use of force against States that harbour
terrorists which comprehends the possibility of significant military actions. It
would have been very difficult to gain support for that approach before September
11 and now it will be difficult to contain the strong desire of the American people
to strike pre-emptively rather than run the risk of being struck. 171

It is significant — and deeply ironic too — that someone of Richard Perle’s background
should purport to speak so readily for ordinary American citizens. A prominent member
of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and former US Assistant Secretary of State
(1981–1987), Perle is one of twenty AEI members currently ‘on loan’ to the Bush
administration. He is also disgraced ex-“chairman of the defence policy board at the
Pentagon and chief architect of the ‘creative destruction’ project to reshape the Middle
East, starting with the $90bn invasion of Iraq.”172 The irony is due to the fact that Perle
— who “is not actually a public office holder … is unelected, unaccountable, and does
not have to declare his business interests” — is probably as unfamiliar with ‘ordinary’

171 Jonathan Holmes, “Four Corners: Interview with Richard Perle,” ABC Online, 18 February
(15/02/2005). Since the commencement of the war, Perle has been accused of having a conflict
of interest and, under pressure, has resigned his lucrative position. Seymour M. Hersh, Chain of
Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib (Camberwell, Victoria: Penguin/Allen Lane,
2004), 200-201

http://www.guardian.co.uk/0,3858,4618087,00.html (6/03/2003)
Americans and the banality of middle class life, as they are of him. What in fact is most disturbing about Richard Perle is his unofficial influence within the Bush administration. Perle is a spin-doctor. Examine the statement “There is a very strong consensus now supporting the use of force to deal with terrorism.” Perle continues, “It would have been very difficult to gain support for that approach before September 11.” This implies that the Bush administration always intended to force the issue with Iraq, but needed the nation’s mandate and a suitable opportunity.

September 11, 2001 clearly shows that (violent) dreams do come true. Actually, Perle had been considering the state of the Middle East for several years. He once wrote an important paper to that effect, “A clean break: a new strategy for securing the realm,” in 1996. It is difficult to ignore the pivotal role played by the American news media, in shaping public opinion. This is evident looking back on the weeks immediately following 11 September 2001. Every day American households were bombarded with images: the enormous pile of twisted metal and smoking debris, the yawning gap in the Manhattan skyline, the faces of grieving relatives, plus dozens of poignant human interest ‘stories’ depicting resolution, courage, and determination. There were also updated lists of the dead and missing to contend with, including hundreds of photographs. After the coalition had crushed the Taliban in Afghanistan, and America had turned its attention on Iraq, the job of persuading the American people was once again in the capable hands of the networks. The newly stoked fires of American

173 Whitaker, ibid.
175 Holmes, ibid.
176 Brian Whitaker, “Right takes centre stage.”
nationalism — fanned by Fox and CNN presentations — allows live satellite television
coverage of war and other atrocities into people’s living rooms. David Deserano points
out that there is only so much visual repetition that human beings can absorb. He states,

> With the image … the brain instantly processes it as truth, which means
> information presented in a visual format has a much greater impact on the
> unconscious. Over long periods of time, recurring imagery has a built-up effect on
> the viewer which allows for unconsciously conceived notions of truth to manifest
> as though from nowhere.\footnote{David B. Deserano, “Information Control For Social Manipulation.”}

With Perle and the Washington Hawks having achieved their initial goal of securing
public support via the networks, the war with Iraq soon appeared to be over before it had
begun. In his 2003 State of the Union speech, President Bush warned that there were
grave dangers: “Before September 11, 2001, many in the world believed that Saddam
Hussein could be contained … But chemical agents and lethal viruses and shadowy
that the war on terror was working well: “We have the terrorists [al Qaeda] on the run
and we are keeping them on the run. One by one, the terrorists are learning the meaning
of American justice.”\footnote{Bush, ibid.} This propagandist slogan is for domestic consumption. There
can be little satisfaction in the current terrorist body count (despite Mr. Bush’s
optimism) until bin Laden is captured. Why get excited over the mice? The cat has
slipped through the mesh.

There is a disturbing sense of unreality underlying the administration’s whole
approach to disclosure. In his State of the Union speech Mr. Bush states, “Evidence from

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\end{itemize}
intelligence sources, secret communications, and statements by people now in custody, reveal that Saddam Hussein aids and protects terrorists, including members of al Qaeda.”180 Dealing with these thoughts at the time, I concluded: it has not been authenticated that Iraq has chemical weapons in the quantities and denominations cited by Washington. There is no way of knowing whether Iraq has backed terror organizations — or is considering doing so in the future — because there is no evidence available. Evidently the Iraqi leader has more pressing things on his mind right now, or he would tell us himself. So this is a president not only attempting to gull Americans, in the manner described by Orwell, but is intent on shoring up an extremely dubious foreign policy at the same time.

If Orwell’s assessment that “Nationalism is power-hunger tempered by self-deception”181 is valid, then there is reason to be concerned about the radical shift in US international policy post 9/11. There is one ‘official’ reason why the US has displayed such belligerence towards Iraq at this time. Outrage at the attacks on the Pentagon, and the destruction of the Trade Towers has fuelled the fear of further terrorist attacks. In a radio address made soon after the main event, a truculent George W. Bush menaced the entire (Islamic) world with the words: “Those who make war against the United States have chosen their own destruction.”182 Clearly, the President was articulating what people wanted to hear, but his words also signalled his government’s ready willingness

180 Bush, ibid.
181 George Orwell, “Notes on Nationalism,” 357
to confront ‘evil’ wherever they found it. Ominously, much has happened since Bush’s September 2001 radio speech. Top of the President’s ‘hit list’ in 2001, was the renegade Saudi national, Osama bin Laden, founder of al Qaeda, who was allegedly safely ensconced somewhere in Afghanistan. A hastily combined coalition force effectively dealt with the ruling Taliban regime in Afghanistan — a government that the United States wholly refused to acknowledge. Numerous al Qaeda suspects were killed or captured, and survivors airlifted to Camp Delta, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. Their ultimate fate is heavily shrouded in secrecy. The Taliban themselves are dispersed and dispirited, and the whereabouts of bin Laden — much like Goldstein himself in Orwell’s novel — is somewhat of a mystery. No one appears to know whether he is dead or alive.

President Bush has long since shifted his focus from Afghanistan to Iraq (and thence to the Middle East). With the invasion concluded, the urban guerrilla postwar struggle for Iraqi hearts and minds is yet to be won. Many believe the incursion into Iraq was to complete the work George Bush Senior failed to achieve in the Gulf War of 1991; a matter of Bush family pride. Others argue that the USA wants to control the Gulf region, or even that Israel’s security is back of everything. Given Mr. Bush’s

184 Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber, Weapons of Mass Deception, 42
tendency to religion, it is even likely that he envisions himself as a man of destiny.\textsuperscript{187}

Either way, it is likely that there is far more to the narrative than that which is officially in circulation. The American eagle, which had its tail-feathers so badly ruffled on September 11, does not yet even begin to understand why its country is hated.\textsuperscript{188}

Unquestionably, George Orwell had an ability to express unpopular sentiments in a popular way. Although he has been dead for over fifty years, he is still widely read and respected as an essayist and political writer. This thesis began as a study of Orwell’s writing in terms of his contribution to critical cultural studies. That was waylaid by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, when the Trade Towers were destroyed by Saudi dissidents and exiles based, we are told, in Afghanistan. Orwell matters today because he unswervingly faced up to the unpleasant realities that formed and directed the major events of his era. As a writer, Orwell was concerned for the truth. This was only possible in a political structure that allowed freedom of speech. We need Orwell, because he is able to assist us as we make sense of the post Cold War world. He is the acknowledged expert on fear and terror. Orwell comprehended plutocracy and despotism, not just the external apparatus, but also the internal motivations that drive such regimes. He lived through troubled times; there were wars and rumours of war, which culminated in a forty years war that was not a war. While he was clearly not a prophet in the biblical sense, he has left behind a body of work that contains an incremental warning about power.

\textsuperscript{187} The impetus of the Bush administration’s Middle Eastern policy calls to mind W. B. Yeats’ poem ‘The Second Coming.’

Without George Orwell’s timely intervention in 1948, it is likely that the global Big Brother would have stifled individuality and freedom before the smouldering ruins of the Twin Towers punctuated popular culture.
Conclusion

By January of 1950 George Orwell was dead. He left behind an enduring and extraordinary legacy in the form of collected essays, letters and journalism, novels and documentary reportage. Perhaps his most significant book in light of recent world events is the dystopian *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a tale of lies, hatred, hubris and absolute political power. The world of Big Brother is still the one we most readily associate with Orwell’s name. Latterly, reality television has appropriated the phrase, slicing away the fear and loathing, and (rather curiously) re-branding surveillance with celebrity status. It should be noted that futuristic novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* do not always depict entirely imaginary worlds. They take ink and colour from the well of life. George Levine states of realism in general, “The style … is plain, direct … and thick with the details of the phenomenal world … realism is free from the constraint of poetic ordering.”¹ This attention to detail and absence of form is what makes Airstrip One an entirely believable place. It must also be said of realism ² — convincing though its terrain might be — that it is not (and cannot ever be) the same as real life. It is an ideology, an interpretation, a re-presentation of an image. Ian Watt suggests that the effect of “the novel’s realism does not reside in the kind of life it presents, but in the way it presents it.”³ This is certainly true of a book as important as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which contains the germ (or seeds) of totalitarian government and proletarian despair. In

moving between fiction and non-fiction, journalism and history, this thesis has established that, “The fictional garb of a work does not diminish its explanatory force.”

That such a statement emerged from a Thatcherite-enclosed, hyper-conservative *Encounter* article is significant. Yet even from this origin, it is important to confirm a novel as a powerful way to claim attention. Fiction does not necessarily mean ‘made up,’ but offers a creative intervention in popular culture. It is ‘home-truth’ presented in a more acceptable guise — one where the reader sees others rather than self. More attention should be placed on such popular cultural imaginings.

Throughout the thesis, I have addressed Orwell’s (often polemical) contribution to print journalism, his delight in some of the less well publicised aspects of everyday life (‘mating toads’ in the Spring), and his documentary style treatment of poverty, unemployment and the Spanish Civil War. In the final chapter, I have discussed the striking dialogue between the Big Brother State as envisaged by Orwell, and the contemporary — post 9/11 — America of George W. Bush. As Scott Lucas reminds us, “Oceania was clearly modelled on an American superstate.” In form and force, the United States has become faintly and ironically resonant of the Soviet regime it sought to destroy in the Cold War era. Significantly, just as in the novel, two of Mr. Bush’s closest allies — Britain (Airstrip One) and Australia — are also part of Oceania.

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7 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 164
book, Oceania is perpetually at war with one or the other of two giant states — Eurasia and Eastasia. The convergent argument is not difficult to establish in light of the ongoing war on terror, Homeland Security and terror alerts, the palpable fear of arrest and torture, and the bitter fighting in Iraq.

My reading of Orwell dispenses with the notion of his being wrong about the threat of totalitarianism. Although he was not prepared to accommodate his critics by stating that the nightmare world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was inevitable, the book was the work of imagination, he does however acknowledge, “that something resembling it could arrive.” In this thesis, I have taken Orwell at his word, and observed and researched his resemblances, images, synergies and style.

The thesis also considers the role and significance of the critical and dissenting writer and intellectual in the socio-political arena. It is a role with which Orwell himself was deeply concerned throughout much of his life. He states in ‘The Prevention of

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8 Orwell (or rather Emmanuel Goldstein) states, “To understand the nature of the present war — for in spite of the regrouping which occurs every few years, it is always the same war — one must realize in the first place that it is impossible for it to be decisive.” Orwell, ibid., 164-165. The Orwellian concept of perpetual warfare is also closely monitored in the closing moments of Michael Moore’s polemical anti-war documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Moore cites Orwell directly to strengthen his point. See *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Writ., Prod., and Dir. by Michael Moore, Columbia/Tri Star Pictures, 2004 (video recording). However, not everyone agrees with Moore’s interpretation of events. In disgust, Christopher Hitchens states, “Fahrenheit 9/11 is a sinister exercise in moral frivolity, crudely disguised as an exercise in seriousness. It is also a spectacle of abject political cowardice masking itself as a demonstration of ‘dissenting’ bravery.” One can only speculate about Hitchens’ views concerning the correct treatment of ‘enemy combatants,’ and the Bush administration’s adoption of surveillance and tightened Homeland Security. See, Christopher Hitchens, “Unfairenheit 9/11: The lies of Michael Moore,” 21 June 2004. http://slate.msn.com/id/2102723/ (22 March 2005)

Literature’ (1946), that “freedom of the Press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticise and oppose.”\textsuperscript{10} Orwell’s primary aim was always to remain unimpeded by editorial bias and restriction. It is a writer’s job to engage in politics. As a result, I have deliberately set out to work in the spaces — the margins, nooks, and corners — that are situated between cultural studies and cultural journalism. I have addressed the principled challenge of Orwell’s best known documentary prose — The Road to Wigan Pier. Throughout the text he asks, are words really enough? Is the political writer, and here I include Orwell, obligated to do any more than just provide readers with disturbing critical insights into the downside of capitalism? Some Orwell critics are of the opinion that he had little to offer the working classes politically. Scott Lucas dismissively refers to him as “the armchair general,”\textsuperscript{11} and points to the fact that he made no advances in his political thinking after the 1930s.\textsuperscript{12} This would be a legitimate objection if Orwell were an academic researching the trajectory of the left rather than a novelist and freelance journalist. It should be remembered too that Lucas, with hindsight and the benefit of the latest scholarship at his disposal, knows far more about British politics than Orwell did at the time of writing. Of course he made mistakes. He unaccountably failed to predict Labour’s ‘landslide’ victory in 1945. He kept a list of alleged Nazi sympathisers, which he showed to a Government office, and he was enduringly critical of his own side (the left) of politics.\textsuperscript{13} Those inconsistencies, errors, and paradoxes made him a better writer, and added depth and dynamism to his politics.

\textsuperscript{11} Scott Lucas, Orwell, 63
\textsuperscript{12} Lucas, ibid., 73
\textsuperscript{13} Lucas, ibid., 75, 105, 136
He took risks; he believed in social justice and was prepared to suffer for his views. For Orwell, writing was an art and a craft.

McNamara and O’Keeffe are full of praise for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “It seems astonishing that Orwell's critics have refused to face the simple truth about this book. It is a moral treatise. Nobody can overlook that its theme is the triumph of evil. What people seem unable to face up to is that it contains a Theory of Evil as a political category.”

Good versus Evil remains the compelling reason for contrasting the American regime with the Big Brother State. In the thesis, I underscore the ‘shredding’ of the Bill of Rights and the resultant loss of individual citizen’s rights. I also discuss the consequences of the war on terror, the *new Cold War*, which emerged fully formed as a pre-emptive doctrine out of the smoking twisted debris of the downed Trade Towers in New York City. My emphasis centres on the United States’ bitter struggle with militant Islam, and its ineffectual hunt for the 6' 5" Saudi mastermind — the wily Osama bin Laden (*alias* Emmanuel Goldstein).

The global war has necessitated the creation of the USA Patriot Act(s) I & II, turned the naval base at Guantanamo Bay Cuba into a holding pen for international terrorists, and allowed the torture of Iraqi insurgents in Abu Ghraib prison. America has also used the war to legitimise the use of an array of technological spying and tracking devices to secure its borders. Body scanners that can see through clothing are (soon to be) used in airports; Satellites and CCTV cameras

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16 George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 15
search the crowded streets for ‘suspects’ (face recognition); the use of biometrics technology for passports and security passes ensures that people are exactly who they say they are, and the FBI conducts home searches, email scans and phone taps with impunity. We have also seen the rise of conservative evangelical Christianity and its powerful influence on American politics, and possibly the most overtly evangelical US President since the nation’s Founding Fathers.\textsuperscript{18}

I began this thesis in chapter one by offering as a point of argument and debate that Mr. Bush’s war on terror, and Big Brother’s policy of never ending war with Eurasia and or Eastasia, are convergent. This is a controversial statement, but one that George Orwell assists in forming. Then, I examined the emergence of George Orwell the overtly political writer. For Orwell, truth is paramount, yet even Orwell is guilty of manipulating chronology and events to strengthen his narrative on occasion. A close reading of \textit{The Road to Wigan Pier} and the \textit{Diary} that he allegedly kept at the time provides sufficient proof of this practice. The flaw — perhaps it is partly influenced by Robert Flaherty\textsuperscript{19} — is part of the charm of Orwell’s ethnographic documentary work. Chapter two follows Orwell down among the itinerant underclass in Paris and London. Although not overtly political at the start of his writing career, by the time he completed his \textit{Wigan Pier} field trip, Orwell was turning his thoughts to socialism. In the same chapter, I introduce the work of fellow authors J. B. Priestley, and Walter Greenwood, who also wrote about England during the Depression with great passion. I then discuss

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19} See William Rothman’s analysis of Flaherty’s methodology: “Nanook of the North,” in \textit{Documentary Film Classics} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-20
\end{flushright}
the work of Sam Selvon, whose 1950s-1970s novels and short stories encapsulated the black Londoner’s experience. The work of Beatrix Campbell, especially *Wigan Pier Revisited*, has added much to the Orwell discussion. Orwell was largely silent about women’s experience during the Depression, and race. These matters were outside of Orwell’s ken, and are necessary to bring balance to a chapter about English poverty and marginality. Chapter three encapsulates Orwell’s Spanish Civil War experiences. In Spain, Orwell’s theoretical socialism was challenged by the realities of revolutionary (anarchist) Barcelona. Here too, Orwell saw through the Soviet myth. He returned to England a dedicated revolutionary socialist. His outspoken criticism of Stalin’s betrayal of the Catalan revolution earned him the ire and lasting contempt of Harry Pollitt and the English Communist Party. Orwell was wounded in Spain and on his return to England, he determined to master the art of political writing. Chapter four delves into the dual processes of writing memory and recording history. Orwell was concerned that the political manipulation of language would lead to the demise of objective truth. He returned to this theme in a series of essays about writing, language and literature. The corruption of language and the death of history also figure prominently in the beast fable classic *Animal Farm*, and also his final novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Orwell, the overtly political author was intent on warning his readership. The world was a dishonest place. If there were no objectivity, what would become of recorded history? This was too terrible to contemplate.

In chapter five, a different England emerges from the twin influences of Depression and War. In the 1980s and 1990s, three contemporary English writers —
Beatrix Campbell, Jack Ramsay, and Beryl Bainbridge — sought the remaining traces of 1930s England. What they found was an unemployed, demoralised underclass citizenry, living on graffiti tagged housing estates, just moments away from immolation. Under the Thatcher and Major governments, Britain’s heavy industrial base had been privatised, downsized, and abandoned. Hundreds of thousands of British subjects were unemployed, betrayed, and ignored. Anarchy was in the air. During the early stages of World War Two, Orwell had hinted at the need for revolution. However, it is unlikely that he would have sanctioned the events subsequently recorded as the ‘Riotous Decade.’ These events point to a steady flow in the direction of anarchic chaos. I have found the work of John Pilger, Jack Davies, Nick Danziger, and Polly Toynbee to be helpful in unmasking this ‘hidden Britain.’ Would Orwell have understood the pressures of late twentieth century life? We will never know. What is certain is he would have seen the emergent negatives as playing into the hands of politicians. Internal decay provides the perfect opportunity for the return to Big Government. In Nineteen Eighty-Four, Oceania’s subjects were so highly regulated that they had lost the ability to think or act (independently) for themselves. This is the foundational argument of the thesis, and the heart of the discussion in chapter six.

Throughout much of his life, Orwell attacked class, privilege, money, and government, along with the basic assumptions of capitalism. He questioned why it is that the poor are consistently denigrated and undermined, when it is the system — democracy and capitalism — that creates the misery and poverty. He purposely set out to experience life on the road for himself, joining London’s homeless vagrants, sleeping
on the Thames Embankment, staying in temporary shelters and Casual Wards. He even went to Paris to try his hand at writing, whilst living a Bohemian lifestyle. Orwell discovered that there is little purpose in being ‘outside’ of capitalism, yet millions of people on a daily basis find themselves socially excluded and pushed to the edge of despair. Even the awful Gordon Comstock in Orwell’s third novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, realises the futility of struggling alone against the money system.\(^{20}\) Nobody is spared from desire; Charles Murray’s ‘underclass’ is also affected by consumerism, and continually made conscious of its need and lack. No one is a complete ‘outsider’ in life, although Orwell somehow managed to speak as both as insider (Eton and upper-middle class) and from a position of marginality (tramp, ‘plongeur,’ and struggling writer).

The responsible writer needs to provide a framework of hope, something for all citizens to grasp and apply. Responsibility and intervention inevitably intertwine, especially for a writer of Orwell’s intellectual acuity. He needed to develop his thoughts further, to take his arguments to the next level. It is not enough to merely observe and bear witness to injustice. Orwell needed to write — actively and methodically — to combat greed and inequality. The redistribution of wealth needs to be thought through if it is ever going to take place. Otherwise it is like the preacher who talks a lot about Christianity but fails to lead people to Salvation. Without the dynamic of contrition, repentance and restitution the message is empty and meaningless. In the process of thinking aloud in print, Orwell’s essays, novels and journalism sparked an avalanche of works in a similar vein from (mainly) British journalists, and filmmakers also concerned

\(^{20}\) George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962), 254
with the same basic questions. Jonathan Culler reminds us that, “A work exists between
and among other texts, through its relations to them.”21 Political writing in the hands of
an Orwell is a weapon for good. He was prepared to go to any lengths to warn of the
things to come. Although aesthetics was always important to him, plain prose served
him best of all. I have stated that Orwell was a pivotal British writer whose work has
been instrumental in keeping governments honest. Others have summoned his name and
followed his example. I have cited Gore Vidal, John Pilger, Beatrix Campbell, Jack
Davies, Polly Toynbee and many others.

Without Orwell’s influence, it is doubtful whether investigative journalism, and
in Vidal’s case, the art of the political essay, would have travelled as far since the 1950s.
For sheer breadth of interest, and straightforwardness of expression, Orwell stands
alone. However, he would be gratified that so many others have also (and in addition to
his own work) exposed the flaws and highlighted the errors of global capitalism. He
wanted to prevent the kinds of surveillance techniques that we are now daily subjected
to. Without him, it is doubtful whether we would even be aware of the dangers resulting
from Mr. Bush’s war on terror. He has provided a language and narrative of dissent.

Orwell was not alone in his quest for justice for the poor, the marginalised, and
the unemployed. We sometimes need to grasp the bigger picture. Douglas Kerr notes
Orwell’s repeated failure to convert the oppression he experienced into something
positive. He states, “It has often been pointed out that Orwell’s fiction, from Burmese

Days to Nineteen Eighty-Four, tells and retells the story of a failed attempt to escape from various forms of oppression.” Raymond Williams arrives at much the same conclusion: “Orwell’s important writing is about someone who tries to get away but fails.” The point being that Orwell never satisfactorily overthrows the inherent difficulties involved in taking on the Establishment. It requires money and influence, and stability to fight injustice effectively. Orwell never joined a political party, formulated no real plan of action to combat class inequality, and arrived at no solid theoretical platform to work from. He also failed to arouse revolutionary sentiments in the proletariat. True, he recognized the gulf between the classes, but he did not appear to have practical answers. The working poor were no better off even though Orwell succeeded in opening the eyes of interested middle-class readers. There remained structural inequalities for the British working class family in terms of education and lifestyle until the emergence of the Macmillan Government in 1957. Up to a point, I accept that with insights drawn from observation comes a certain responsibility to act. Orwell chose not to when he wrote The Road to Wigan Pier. He used the book as a means to explain how he felt about injustice and why, rather than to provide a reasoned attempt to change it. His reluctance to produce a theoretical framework has earned contempt and strong criticism from the left. It may be, as Richard Johnson has suggested, “culture involves power and helps to produce asymmetries in the abilities of

22 Douglas Kerr, George Orwell (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2003), 28
23 Raymond Williams, Orwell (London: Fontana, 1971), 39
24 That is if you discount his brief association with the ILP at the beginning of WW 2.
25 Williams, Orwell, 63
26 Scott Lucas, Orwell, 74, 76
individuals and social groups to define and realise their needs.”\textsuperscript{28} It is more difficult to develop a theoretical base for change. I have asserted that — far from being politically naive as claimed by more hostile critics like Williams and Lucas — Orwell was shrewd and perceptive about governments and power. In a 1939 book review, written at a time of great political uncertainty, he states we are quite mistaken in “the idea that common sense always wins in the end …. we cannot be sure that this is so. It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two and two will make five when the Leader says so.”\textsuperscript{29}

I take the interdisciplinarity of cultural studies seriously. I do not follow one paradigm or theoretical trajectory. George Orwell deserves a mobile, fluid and reflexive engagement. How I have approached the writing of this thesis — from the modality to the referencing style and the provocative and dangerous explorations of journalism — takes its impetus and courage from Orwell. The way this doctorate is written is part of the argument. Like Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg, I am not interested in reinforcing “any of the formalised disciplinary practices of the academy.”\textsuperscript{30} There are legitimate grounds for these choices, as I work within culture and communication which of itself is fiercely resistive of systematization. As Grossberg maintains, “The power of cultural

\textsuperscript{28} Richard Johnson, “What is cultural studies anyway?” 76
\textsuperscript{29} George Orwell, “‘Power: A New Social Analysis’ by Bertrand Russell,” in CEJL I (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971), 413-414
studies has always been its refusal to construct itself as a theoretical position.” Orwell
remains inspirational in maintaining such a plurality, paradox and contradiction.

Cultural studies scholars are not anchored, neither are its borders patrolled as they are in Physics, Mathematics or even Musicology. This diffusion and plurality of cultural studies does pose difficulties. As Simon During explains, “cultural studies is a discipline continuously shifting its interests and methods because it is in constant and engaged interaction with its larger historical context and because it cannot be complacent about its authority.” That does not mean that everything qualifies as a significant cultural artefact or is worthy of study. However, the possibilities remain broader than in most academic disciplines.

Orwell — as cultural critic and commentator — has often been decentred in discussions of cultural studies. Indeed, the great scholarship of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall offer an easier graft to the contemporary narratives of cultural studies. Orwell presents profound theoretical paradoxes and contradictions, providing few simple answers to difficult questions. My reading of Orwell is that he is an essayist and political journalist; one for whom the writing — the experiment — is always far more important than searching for a workable solution — the application. Perhaps this doctoral research could be met by the same

31 L. Grossberg, “The Scandal of cultural studies,” in Lawrence Grossberg et al., It’s a Sin: Essays on Postmodernism, Politics & Culture (Sydney: Power, 1988), 9
charge. After all, the problems arising from the Westminster system of Government, or indeed the underfunded University sector in Australia, cannot be overcome in a day. Orwell is also an influential novelist, whose crowning achievements include *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. His primary task as a journalist was to convince a disbelieving world of the residual dangers of political rhetoric. In Spain, he had already witnessed the death of historical truth and journalistic objectivity.

This is a doctorate *about* words. It is about history, memory, and interpretation. It is also about political journalism, and writing. I endorse Johnson’s claim that “Cultural studies must be inter-disciplinary (and sometimes anti-disciplinary).” Why is my work important? Why should it be read? What constitutes an original contribution to knowledge in the George Orwell industry? Indeed my time, location and digitized source materials and interpretative research methods have already provided some answers to these questions. Unless scholars and academics learn to move and feel comfortable outside of orthodoxy, to take risks, to ask the difficult questions, the fruits of research and scholarship will be impaired. The field of human endeavour will remain safely predictable and (ultimately) largely unexplored in the areas that matter. When Big

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34 Richard Johnson, ibid., 79
35 A great deal of current (and archival) journalism and ‘opinion’ has been sought during the researching of this thesis. While every care has been taken to ensure that URLs are correct at the time, it is impossible to prevent broken links, or articles subsequently moved to archives requiring payment for access. Speeches and statements made by key political figures are indicative of policy and do not necessarily represent the (actual) thoughts of the individuals concerned. This is especially the case with President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, who employ professionals to issue press releases, write speeches, and develop their media personas.
Brother is watching, intellectual courage in difficult times remains a prerequisite for scholarship.
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1 Since this thesis has been extensively annotated by footnotes throughout, I have endeavoured to make the bibliography more ‘user friendly’ than would otherwise be the case in a scholarly (formal) document of this kind. I have divided compiled material into works by/or about Orwell, and works written by other authors. Regarding the section entitled: ‘Selected essays, letters and journalism,’ I have provided a list of all the individual letters, essays, and articles cited, even though many of these are also to be found in other Orwell anthologies. The aim is to simplify (and facilitate) the range of available choices for the reader. Most, if not all, of these can in fact be found in the four volume Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (CEIL), edited by S. Orwell and I. Angus. However, I have also used several additional volumes edited by Peter Davison hence the variations. In the lengthy section: ‘Newspapers, journals, Presidential speeches, and online essays,’ I have accumulated a great deal of on line material. At the time of drafting, all URLs are as accurate as possible. It should however be noted that internet ‘links’ do break, and articles do go missing. Occasionally too, journal articles and newspaper reportage gets moved to closed archives and becomes subject to a retrieval fee. However, I managed to find everything here with relative ease, and without the need to pay for it.
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