ART AND POLEMIC PURPOSE IN GEORGE ORWELL'S FICTION AND DOCUMENTARIES

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Abstract

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The thesis is an attempt to determine the relative success of the task that Orwell set himself: to transform political writing into art. By looking at his fiction and documentaries we shall see how Orwell never quite succeeded in fusing his polemic with fictional or documentary forms. Ultimately, Orwell's fame rests upon his social commentary and not upon his art. If Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four succeed, they do so only as polemic; it is the force of Orwell's vision of the world which touches the fears of contemporary society.

Preface

Orwell lived a varied life: from a police-officer in Burma to a plongeur in Paris and a tramp in London; from an anti-fascist soldier in the Spanish Civil War to a storekeeper in Hertfordshire; from a BBC broadcaster to a recluse on the island of Jura in the Hebrides. His diverse experiences are reflected in the varied output of his writings - he wrote book reviews, journalism, political pamphlets, polemic essays, documentaries, novels, and a political allegory. Throughout his life he was preoccupied with many aspects of propaganda. He maintained that all art was propaganda and every artist was a propagandist. He believed that every artist should be politically committed but that art should not follow a political orthodoxy. Orwell himself wanted to transform political writing into art. The intention of this thesis is to follow the developments in his writing, paying particular attention to the relationship between Orwell's polemic intent and the style and form of his longer works.

Contents

I

From 1931 until 1939, Orwell explored the possibilities of both fiction and non-fiction as forms for articulating those issues he was most concerned to bring to the attention of the reading public. His early fiction will be discussed first because Orwell was primarily interested in his potential as an artist rather than as a journalist, and the literary form that continued to interest him most throughout his life was the novel. Orwell's purpose as a writer was always primarily moral and didactic, pointing out the iniquities of the world with which he came into contact. This chapter will explore how the development of Orwell's novel technique corresponds directly to changes in his polemic subject.

The first three novels, Burmese Days (1934),[1] A Clergyman's Daughter (1935),[2] and Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936)[3] were written before he consciously committed himself to Socialism and these works cannot be considered as politically partisan novels. Rather, they are the result

[1] George Orwell, Burmese Days (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). To be referred to subsequently as BD

[2] George Orwell, A Clergyman's Daughter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967). To be referred to subsequently as CD

[3] George Orwell, Keep the Aspidistra Flying (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968). To be referred to subsequently as KAF

of Orwell's commitment to the task of giving information to the reader about the injustices existing in the contemporary world so as to provoke a moral response and a heightened consciousness of the reader's own position within such structures as imperialism, capitalism, class, religion and education. Although the form of these novels is controlled to a considerable extent by his polemic and didactic intent, Orwell is here mainly interested in using the novel form and the polemic as an artistic venture.

Orwell wrote his first novel, Burmese Days, partly as a result of his own experiences as a headquarters assistant in the Indian Imperial Police. This led him to question imperialism and what it means to live within a system which depends upon the continued existence of oppression in colonial countries. But, clearly he also wrote the book because of his interest in the aesthetic possibilities of the novel form. In 1946 he looks back and describes his literary ambition during the early thirties:

> I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound. And in fact my first completed novel, Burmese Days, which I wrote when I was thirty but projected much earlier, is rather that kind of book.[4]

[4] George Orwell, The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), Vol.1, p.3. referred to subsequently as CEJL

Orwell's moral, social and political concerns in Burmese Days reveal themselves through the development of characters and action within the novel. He attempts to demonstrate exactly how both the oppressed and the agents of oppression can be seen as victims of an inherently oppressive system - imperialism. Through the opposition of two groups, the Burmese and the English, the real nature of the public and official process of colonial rule becomes apparent. Each group is given a clearly defined corporate identity: the white men are the masters and the native Burmese are their servants. In order to show the complexity and contradictions contained within this apparently straightforward imperialist structure, Orwell demonstrates, through an exploration of individual relationships within each group, that there exists no real unity among either the Burmese or the British.

U Po Kyin is created as an embodiment of the contradictions of imperialism for the Burmese: as magistrate of Kyauktada he cheats, blackmails, robs and incites to rebellion his fellow Burmese in order to further his greatest ambition - a prestigious position among the colonisers. In a much less detailed way the ambivalent positions of the ordinary Burmese are at once hostile to the English, yet also envious and admiring, and willing to be corrupted in order to defend white men. Orwell shows, moreover, how the dislocating effect of imperialism is not only evident among

the Burmese but also among the British in Burma.

The Europeans unite together only in order to defend themselves against the Burmese, and there are no successful personal relationships within this group. Mr. Lackersteen sleeps with Burmese women, attempts to seduce his neice and drinks excessively in order to avoid his possessive complaining wife, whose constant whining irritates everyone else at the European Club. Ellis the 'nigger-hater' is an embarassment to the other Europeans with his excessively racist behaviour. Westfield bores everyone. Captain Verrall has contempt for them all but condescends to play around with Elizabeth Lackersteen before discarding her.

Created in opposition to these archetypal Anglo-Indians, is the main character, Flory, an English timber-merchant. His function within the novel is to demonstrate the corrupting and destructive power of the processes of imperialism through his actions in relation both to the English and to the Burmese, and through his introspective revelations. Flory is automatically included in the group of white people whose stronghold is the European Club, but as the individualist hero he remains isolated. His only friend is Dr. Veraswami, an Indian doctor. His relationship with this 'native' is disapproved of by the Europeans and confirms their suspicions of Flory as a 'Bolshy'.

It is through Flory that Orwell shows us the alienating process of imperialism most clearly and in most detail. He is bored and angered by the pukka sahib code by which all the other members of the English community live; a typical drunken scene in the Club leaves Flory disgusted, and shows his isolation from the rest of the white community:

> Flory pushed back his chair and stood up. It must not, it could not - no, it simply should not go on any longer! He must get out of this room quickly before something happened inside his head and he began to smash the furniture and throw bottles at the pictures. Dull boozing witless porkers! Was it possible that they could go on week after week, year after year, repeating word for word the same evil-minded drivel, like a parody of a fifth-rate story in Blackwood's? Would none of them ever think of anything new to say? Oh, what a place, what people! What a civilization is this of ours - this godless civilization founded on whisky, Blackwood's and the 'Bonzo' pictures! God have mercy on us, for all of us are part of it. (BD, pp.31-32)

Orwell's empathy with Flory's frustration is suggested by the way in which Flory's speech and thought, and the author's comment are interwoven in the above passage so closely as to be almost indistinguishable. Orwell is standing back in exasperation at the scene he has created, until finally he demands the reader's moral response: "for all of us are part of it." The polemic and the fiction are successfully combined here because Orwell has not allowed the reader to escape a moral involvement with Flory's plight.

When he sets Flory in dramatic juxtaposition with non-whites, Orwell is continuing his attempt to combine his moral, social and political arguments with fiction. The

following is a typical dialogue between Flory and his friend Doctor Veraswami:

> 'My dear doctor,' said Flory, 'how can you make out that we are in this country for any purpose except to steal? It's so simple. The official holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets...'
> 'My friend, it iss pathetic to me to hear you talk so. It iss truly pathetic. You say you are here to trade? Of course you are. Could the Burmese trade for themselves? They are helpless without you...'
> 'Bosh, my dear doctor... Look at our schools - factories for cheap clerks. We've never taught a single useful manual trade to the Indians. We daren't; frightened of the competition in industry ... the only Eastern races that have developed at all quickly are the independent ones. I won't instance Japan, but take the case of Siam...'
> The doctor waved his hand excitedly. He always interrupted the argument at this point (for as a rule it followed the same course, almost word for word), finding that the case of Siam hampered him.
> 'My friend, my friend, you are forgetting the Oriental character. How iss it possible to have developed us with our apathy and superstition? At least you have brought us law and order. The unswerving British Justice and the Pax Britannica.'
> 'Pox Britannica, doctor, Pox Britannica is its proper name...' (BD, pp.38-39)

Flory and Dr. Veraswami appear together in order to provide the reader with information about how the Empire works (according to Orwell), and to allow Flory, or rather Orwell, an opportunity to indulge in blasphemous feelings about the Empire. But Orwell also wants us to see how Dr. Veraswami's attitudes towards the Empire are evidence of the success of vicious British propaganda which turns colonial subjects against themselves and each other. The dialogue is not convincing as everyday conversation but is structured

as a formal debate. The vigour of Flory's arguments opposed to the humble, almost subservient, arguments of Dr. Veraswami, makes the technique of debate an invaluable tool in showing how imperialism forces insurmountable divisions between people, not only on a political level, but also on a personal level, and the ultimate impossibility of relationships between the two opposed groups, the white rulers and the blacks in Burma. One can see in this scene how Orwell's political and moral purpose dominates his art.

Relationships with native women are defined by the code of imperialism as well, and are therefore equally impossible for Flory. Flory needs a woman because his life in Burma is necessarily lonely; there are no single European women in Kyauktada (until Elizabeth Lackersteen arrives) so he has a Burmese mistress. His relationship with her can only be temporary, yet the liason is-nevertheless frowned upon by the rest of the Europeans. Flory has to buy Ma Hla May and pay for her services; as a result he treats her with contempt. Ma Hla May on the other hand, uses Flory to enhance her status and gain prestige among the villagers as the 'wife' of a white man, but because she knows he will not stay forever in Kyauktada, and would not take a Burmese woman back with him to England, she is forced to extort money from him to provide for her future security. Their brutalisation of

each other is shown as a natural result of the repressive social and economic system of imperialism.

And yet, when Flory tries to establish a relationship with a European woman he is no more successful. A relationship between Flory and Elizabeth Lackersteen may be more plausible, but it is still impossible. Elizabeth is the victim of a similarly vicious class-system back home, and she has come to Burma in a last desperate attempt to find a husband who can save her from impoverishment. In this way the Burmese situation is seen as an extension of the class situation in England. Orwell's attack on such systems appears as a recurring theme in all his novels. It is a subject which is particularly suitable for the symbolist novel because the characters function as representatives of the theme, rather than as fully developed personalities. In Burmese Days these characters exist as demonstrations of Orwell's argument that imperialism reduces people to the level of mere servants of a huge colonial machine. In such circumstances Orwell shows how it is practically impossible to achieve relationships which do not conform to the values of imperialism itself; that is, relationships which are not basically exploitative are impossible here.

Orwell comments further on such relationships in the scene between Flory and Elizabeth when they are together in the jungle. When Flory is alone, the jungle is a symbol of

life and regeneration for him, and the green pigeons represent beauty and freedom:

> The roots of the tree made a natural cavern, under which the clear greenish water bubbled. Above and all around dense foliage shut out the light, turning the place into a green grotto walled with leaves.
>
> Flory threw off his clothes and stepped into the water. It was a shade cooler than the air, and it came up to his neck when he sat down. Shoals of silvery mahseer, no bigger than sardines, came nosing and nibbling at his body...
>
> There was a stirring high up in the peepul tree, and a bubbling noise like pots boiling. A flock of green pigeons were up there, eating the berries. Flory gazed up into the great green dome of the tree, trying to distinguish the birds; they were invisible, they matched the leaves so perfectly, and yet the whole tree was alive with them, shimmering, as though the ghosts of birds were shaking it. (BD, pp. 54-55)

But when Flory goes into the jungle with Elizabeth he kills the pigeons, and in killing them he encourages Elizabeth's destructive will:

> Flory took one of the little green corpses to show Elizabeth. 'Look at it. Aren't they lovely things? The most beautiful bird in Asia.
>
> Elizabeth touched its smooth feathers with her fingertip. It filled her with bitter envy, because she had not shot it. And yet it was curious, but she felt almost an adoration for Flory now that she had seen how he could shoot.
>
> 'Just look at its breast-feathers; like a jewel. Its murder to shoot them. The Burmese say that when you kill one of these birds they vomit, meaning to say, "Look, here is all I possess, and I've taken nothing of yours. Why do you kill me?" I've never seen one do it, I must admit.'
>
> 'Are they good to eat'?
>
> 'Very. Even so, I always feel it's a shame to kill them.' (BD, pp. 156-157)

The incident is not only symbolic of the destructive nature of the relationship between Flory and Elizabeth, it also

functions as polemic for it symbolises and dramatises what the English are doing to the Burmese. When Orwell writes that the green pigeons seem to say "Look, here is all I possess, and I've taken nothing of yours. Why do you kill me?" it is an apt condemnation of the British in Burma. Orwell has placed Flory in an ambivalent position in relation to his own argument. Flory is saying one thing - that one shouldn't kill the pigeons - and yet doing the opposite, to help his affair with Elizabeth. This conflict between Orwell's anti-imperialist attitude and the hero's action results from two conflicting visions which jostle each other throughout the book. On the one hand Burmese Days is about the evils of colonial rule and on the other it is about a malignant "naturalistic" world.

From the very beginning of the novel, we are aware of Flory's inevitable doom: the symbol of his birthmark gives it away:

> The first thing that one noticed in Flory was a hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth. Seen from the left side, his face had a battered, woebegone look, as though the birthmark had been a bruise - for it was dark blue in colour. He was quite aware of its hideousness. And at all times, when he was not alone, there was a sidelongness about his movements, as he manoeuvred constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight. (BD, p.16)

The "mark of Cain" indicates Orwell's sympathetic, if fanciful, concept of his 'hero'. But more importantly it anticipates a basic conflict between the naturalist-determinist theme of a malevolent universe and Orwell's

specific anti-imperialist statements.

The naturalist-determinist theme continues to dominate the argument and the art until finally it seems to be Flory's birthmark, and not imperialism, which is responsible for his destruction. When Elizabeth

> ... thought of his face as it had looked in church, yellow and glistening with the hideous birthmark upon it, she could have wished him dead... It was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him. (BD, pp.263-264)

The damning birthmark is a distraction from the "real" reason why Flory is destroyed, and indicates once again the conflict between the content and the form of the novel. The birthmark is only the outward symbol of Flory's essential individualism. What finally damns Flory is that he continues to believe that individual action can be effective against a highly organised system of repression. The naturalist-determinist theme of the novel has succeeded in suppressing the anti-imperialist argument. The competition of both these themes weakens Burmese Days both as art and as polemic.

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A Clergyman's Daughter, published in 1935, is Orwell's most sustained conscious experiment to combine his social, moral and political propaganda with fiction during this early period. It is an attempt to transform his own direct observations and experiences of life among the tramps, the down-and-outs, and the penny-pinching shabby genteel middle-

class of England, into the form of a novel. In order to present a detailed and factual commentary Orwell creates a heroine, Dorothy Hare, who acts as a surrogate for Orwell in moving the action from one event to another. As a fictional character Dorothy is not successful. She remains a passive creature not at all defined by her experience. Accidents and coincidences are the only way that Orwell can get her from one place to another; her picaresque wanderings are clumsy and episodic.

The virgin daughter of a Rector, Dorothy is manoeuvred by Orwell into potentially dramatic confrontations with tramps and prostitutes; but the confrontations do not reveal her personality at all. Dorothy's presence among the hop-pickers for example, is not essential. This is made quite clear by the way in which Orwell moves quickly and almost unconsciously from Dorothy's experience to his own, indicating that Orwell is recording his own experience all the time. It is Orwell who is giving us the documentary account of the techniques and economics of hop-picking; how much could be earned, the social structure among the pickers, the fact that there was no union and why. Nothing in Dorothy's personality has indicated that she would be capable of seeing situations in this analytical, statistical way:

> Altogether, the farmers had the pickers in a cleft-stick; but it was not the farmers who were to blame - the low price of hops was the root of the trouble. Also as Dorothy observed later, very few of the

> pickers had more than a dim idea of the amount they earned. The system of piecework disguised the rate of payment. (CD, p. 109)

The reference to Dorothy here is clearly a token one; what Orwell wants the reader to know is that the hop-pickers are systematically exploited as a result of the way in which capitalism works, and it is part of his role as omniscient narrator to let the reader know this. The fact that Orwell is clearly on the side of the pickers is suggested by the vitality of the writing; he pays particular attention to their cockney dialect, and the songs which reveal their kindness and their resilience to suffering. These straightforward documentary episodes of hop-picking, tramping and school-teaching, work well as 'pieces' but do not succeed in combining with the story of Dorothy - her search for her identity and her loss of religious faith.

Another experiment within the novel to combine social concerns with fiction is Orwell's presentation of documentary as dramatic dialogue. Complete with stage directions he reconstructs dramatically a typical night spent by hoboes and homeless men and women on the benches in Trafalgar Square. The interest of the scene and its literary and polemic effect again owes much to Orwell's close observation of and interest in cockney dialect, rhyming slang and popular songs.

The dialogue is coarse and vulgar and dramatises the peculiar toughness and brutalisation of a life which is a continuous succession of humiliations and deprivations. Six or seven separate dialogues are occuring simultaneously in this ritualistic and symbolic scene. The scene remains a static tableau, however; each character has a very constricted role - the defrocked priest, mad Deafie, the "Kike", the petty thieves, the ex-prostitute - reveal only fragments of their personality and history: nothing 'happens' in the way of action, but the reader is presented with information about the life of a bum. Daddy ruminates on the life of a tramp:

> When I was a boy we didn't live on this 'ere bread and marg and such like trash. Good solid tommy we 'ad in them days. Beef stoo. Black pudden. Bacon dumpling. Pigs 'ead. Fed like a fighting-cock on a tanner a day. And now fifty year I've had of it on the toby. Spud-grabbing, pea-picking, lambing, turnip-topping - everythink. And sleeping in wet straw, and not once in a year you don't fill your guts right full. (CD, p. 148)

Orwell himself is in no position to comment as dramatist on this, as he has not created any 'commentator' character. Instead, the reader is left to ponder his own moral responsibility for a system which allows the existence of such lives. If such a scene works successfully as a dramatic 'piece', its function within an already fragmented and episodic novel is certainly not to contribute to the movement of the narrative concerning Dorothy, but to present factual, documentary information.

Orwell, in creating Dorothy as the central character, is interested in what happens when she loses her past - her class, her religious faith and her own identity. Like Flory, Dorothy is not only alienated and isolated from those whom she is thrown against by accident, but she is estranged from her own self in that she consistently denies her womanhood, her family and her class of origin. Dorothy is trapped by her past; she can only begin to exist when she loses her identity as Dorothy, the Rector's daughter; as soon as she regains her memory she starts inevitably back along the route from which she came, until finally "though her faith had left her, she had not changed, could not change, did not want to change...". (CD, p.252)

Orwell organises the novel in such a way that there is no possibility of a movement occuring through the conflicts and appositions between Dorothy and the kinds of experiences she has because of course they are not her experiences but Orwell's. The documentary and the social, moral and political exhortations in the novel are for the most part divorced from the fictional narrative. But at the end of the novel Dorothy accepts "that faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable." (CD, p.261) The political implications of her decision indicate that she has replaced religious conservatism with social conservatism. Dorothy's attempt to escape the repression of her class heritage is only temporary; in this

way Orwell demonstrates the ineffectualness of individual action against the entrenched systems of middle-class English society. Orwell is suggesting that for most people in Dorothy's situation this is a more viable alternative to loss of faith than, for example, Marxism. The realism and the documentary quality of A Clergyman's Daughter enable Orwell to make his political statement clear; whereas in Burmese Days the heavy symbolism of the naturalist-determinist theme obstructs the political statements.

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In his next novel, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, Orwell moves away from the experimental combination of documentary and fiction found in A Clergyman's Daughter and returns to a more traditional realist novel form. His main character, Gordon Comstock, attempts a traditional single-handed fight against overwhelming odds - in this instance - capitalism. Symbolism, however, remains an important technique for conveying Orwell's political message, which is clear enough at the beginning of the novel: "There will be no revolution in England while there are aspidistras in the windows." (KAF, p.49) The symbol of the aspidistra as the world of capitalism and all that it demands, haunts Gordon throughout the novel.

Gordon considers himself to be a poet and he refuses to prostitute his talents in the world of monopoly capitalism. He decides that the only way he can carry out his war against

the 'money-gods' is to try and live outside the class-structure and to join the classless world of social outcasts:

> No more blackmail to the gods of decency! Down, down, into the mud - down to the streets, the workhouse and the jail. It was only there that he could be at peace. (KAF, p.209)

This becomes his ideal. But he cannot act to change the system of capitalism from this position; in fact, he discovers that it is difficult to act here in any capacity. He cannot, like the "factory lad", have a passionate sexual life with Rosemary because he feels that even that demands money. He has not, like his friend Ravelston with his private income, the leisure to think in an organized way about large political issues such as Socialism; Gordon can only extend his horizon to the next meal, the next few pennies. Finally, his ideal of living in an area of society untouched by capitalism proves to be an illusion. As Ravelston points out to him:

> The mistake you make, don't you see, is in thinking one can live in a corrupt society without being corrupt oneself. After all, what do you achieve by refusing to make money? You're trying to behave as though one could stand right outside our economic system. But one can't. One's got to change the system, or one changes nothing. One can't put things right in a hole-and-corner way, if you take my meaning. (KAF, p.225)

Gordon only recognises the truth of this when he discovers that he has made Rosemary pregnant. He decides to return to the world he has struggled to reject - the world of the aspidistra in the front window. The symbol of the aspidistra still represents capitalism, but Gordon's

attitude towards the capitalist world has undergone a change. For Gordon, the aspidistra, like the new baby, becomes a symbol of a possible new existence for him. He decides that even if life with Rosemary requires him to take a job in advertising, he is willing to accept that.

Gordon's anti-capitalism has apparently been the political message of the book. But the squalor, discomfort and loneliness of his life outside the capitalist system is depicted with a realism that is calculated to dissuade the reader from sharing Gordon's point of view. In this way Orwell uses realism as a polemic tool. It is no longer the determinist nature of an evil world which can destroy Gordon, as it had destroyed Flory. Gordon is much more in control of his own fate - he could have destroyed himself if he had remained in his squalid room in his fetid bed, but he chose to accept an alternate, if capitalist, way of life. As a political statement Gordon's decision is conservative. This is probably influenced by the form of the novel as much as by Orwell's own political attitudes at that time. The possibilities for Gordon are limited by the symbolist structure of the work; the thematically crucial symbolic aspidistra has to be either destroyed or accepted by Gordon. His attempt to destroy it fails; the only alternative possible within the terms of the novel is that he must accept it.

One thread that runs all the way through these early novels is the consistent reference to Orwell's own

life. Burmese Days is written out of his Burmese experience; A Clergyman's Daughter out of his experience as a tramp and a schoolteacher and Keep the Aspidistra Flying uses his experiences of the world of social outcasts and of intellectual middle-class Socialists. All three books are also based closely on people that Orwell knew; all three provoked a scare over libel. These early novels are primarily aesthetic experiments which nevertheless reveal Orwell's concerns about organized systems of oppression. His main characters fight against imperialism, capitalism, class, poverty and education but their struggle fails because they believe in the possibility of individual action. The theme of individuals fighting against odds is traditional within the naturalist novel, but the three early novels are not entirely successful either as novels or as polemic. The social, political and moral messages disrupt the continuity of the naturalist-determinist and symbolic novel form; while the 'art' of the novels distracts from, and sometimes comes into conflict with, the polemic. Keep the Aspidistra Flying marks the end of Orwell's experiments with purely aesthetic novels and he now turns his attention to presenting his moral, social and political arguments in a form which is part documentary, part polemic and moral essay, and part fiction.

II

Orwell makes use of his own personal experiences not only in his early novels but also in the other longer works written during the period 1933-1939 - Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier, Homage to Catalonia and Coming up for Air. In the "documentaries" and the "documentary novel" Orwell has turned his attention away from the individual hero whose characteristics are brooding introspection and doomed isolation from society. Instead, Orwell writes about his own personal commitment to several different groups of people with whom he decides to identify. In the works under discussion in this chapter we shall see how Orwell continues to use some elements of novel technique but combines it with other forms, such as the polemic essay and documentary, for his propaganda purposes.[1]

[1] In his essay "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda" Orwell explains what he means by the artist as propagandist:

> ... I don't mean a political propagandist. If he has any honesty or talent at all he cannot be that. Most political propaganda is a matter of telling lies, not only about facts but about your own feelings. But every artist is a propagandist in the sense that he is trying, directly or indirectly, to impose a vision of life that seems to him desirable. (CEJL, vol. 2, p.126)

The longer non-fictional works Orwell wrote until 1939 are about class, poverty, Socialism, communism and fascism, and war. These develop directly from the varied, arbitrary experiences of Orwell's own life. But an autobiographical element is not the only common aspect of these books; there are various formal ways in which the books relate to one another. One of the strongest links is the use of novel techniques. In the early novels an isolated hero is created as the narrative focus; in Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier and Homage to Catalonia the focus changes to a narrative persona who is committed to a group. The narrative persona always describes Orwell's experiences, and sometimes Orwell himself describes those experiences. When Orwell writes Coming up for Air, however, the narrative mask is a completely fictional character who gives us his own autobiography, not related to Orwell's own life.

The narrative voice of Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier, Homage to Catalonia and Coming up for Air provides the narrative continuity; he establishes relationships with the other 'characters' who share his experiences. The narrator also establishes a close relationship with the reader so that he can attempt to convince the reader to accept his moral, social and political attitudes. Emotional incitement is often a strong feature of the

narrative persona's function. These are techniques commonly used in Orwell's polemic essays. All four works display aspects in common in that they contain a tremendous amount of detailed documentary information, related to the experiences which the narrative voice describes. We can see how Orwell writes these four works without conforming to academic notions of form, but bases them instead on his personal experiences. This is reflected in the variety of forms which co-exist within each work: novel, essay and documentary techniques.

In Down and Out in Paris and London the narrative persona is that of the struggling, educated writer who disguises himself as a poverty-stricken plongeur while describing his experiences in Paris, and who disguises himself as a tramp while in England. The persona in this work is particularly careful to let the reader know that he is not actually a dishwasher or a tramp - he was not born into that life, nor is he part of it at present - but he did experience it temporarily for a period of time and for a specific experimental purpose. He makes this purpose quite clear at the beginning of Down and Out in Paris and London:

> Poverty is what I am writing about, and I had my first contact with poverty in this slum. The slum with its dirt and its queer lives, was first an object-lesson in poverty, and then the background of my own experience.[2]

He underlines the fact that he himself is separate from the group he exposes and suggests that both polemic and documentary are the primary intentions of the work. Orwell is the outsider observing from the inside, and as such is in a privileged position; he is objectively trusted by the reader because he is not a permanent part of the group he describes. His narrative position in Road to Wigan Pier is based upon the same understanding - the narrator is only temporarily living among the unemployed and the miners; similarly in Homage to Catalonia he is part of a worker's militia in Spain for a specific purpose and for a limited period of time in 1937. On the other hand the reader can assume that Orwell is a faithful reporter of the plongeur's, the tramps', the miners'or the anti-fascist soldiers' opinions and attitudes. In Down and Out in Paris and London when the narrator describes what it is like to be hungry in Paris he assumes that he can speak for the thousands of other people who are near starvation:

2 George Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.9. To be referred to subsequently as DO

> When you have three francs you are quite different; for three francs will feed you till tomorrow, and you cannot think further than that. You are bored, but you are not afraid. You think vaguely, 'I shall be starving in a day or two - shocking, isn't it?' And then the mind wanders to other topics. A bread and margarine diet does, to some extent, provide its own anodyne. (DO, p.19)

This function of temporarily adopting the 'ordinary' man's role is a technique used by Orwell not only in all four "documentary" books, but also in his essays. Because the character of the narrative persona is built up to create an impression of an objective observer, honest, ordinary and truthful, the reader is persuaded to accept his point of view on the general moral and social implications of poverty.

As a reporter, the narrator creates confidence in his reliability by presenting a mass of documentary detail. He includes notes on London slang, a guide to sleeping accomodation in London, some suggestions on how to improve conditions of the tramps, a comparison between the Salvation Army Hostels and the 'spikes', together with vivid character sketches of people like Bozo, Boris and Paddy, anecdotes, apocryphal stories and so on. He meticulously records details which would escape most people. He is a man who could say "I counted the number of times I was called maquereau during the day, and it was thirty-nine." (DO, p.52) Such a reporter is clearly going to be believed when he makes general statements about hotels and restaurants in Paris. The plongeur (he tells us):

> ... is the slave of a hotel or a restaurant, and his slavery is more or less useless. For, after all, where is the real need of big hotels and smart restaurants? They are supposed to provide luxury, but in reality they provide only a cheap, shoddy imitation of it. Nearly everyone hates hotels. Some restaurants are better than others, but it is impossible to get as good a meal in a restaurant as one can get, for the same expense, in a private house. No doubt hotels and restaurants must exist, but there is no need that they should enslave hundreds of people ... Essentially, a 'smart' hotel is a place where a hundred people toil like devils in order that two hundred may pay through the nose for things they do not really want. (DO, p.106)

The above passage illustrates Orwell's rhetorical skills in presenting a one-sided, biased account of what hotels and restaurants in Paris are like, in order to convince the reader that such places are morally objectionable. His assumption that "nearly everyone hates hotels" and that in restaurants people have to pay "for things they do not really want" is used to coerce the reader emotionally through arguments which appeal to "common-sense". In this way Orwell can encourage the reader to share his attitude that the hotel and restaurant business is a repressive and exploitatative system.

The narrator involves the reader further by persuading him to respond emotionally to what he is describing, which is the way poverty affects people's lives. Bozo is a pavement artist whom we meet several times during the book as a friend of the narrative persona:

> When I knew him he owned nothing but the clothes he stood up in, and his drawing materials, and a few books. The clothes were the usual beggar's rags, but he wore a collar and tie, of which he was rather proud. The collar, a year or more old, was constantly 'going' round the neck, and Bozo used to patch it with bits cut from the tail of his shirt so that the shirt had scarcely any tail left. His damaged leg was getting worse and would probably have to be amputated, and his knees, from kneeling on the stones, had pads of skin on them as thick as boot-soles. There was, clearly, no future for him but beggary and a death in the workhouse. (DO, p.148)

The quiet dignity and pride of Bozo is something for which the reader (especially if he is middle-class) can feel sympathy. Other similar descriptions of social outcasts convince the reader that the narrative persona is on the side of the oppressed. At the same time he persuades the reader to share his point of view by denying him an alternate standpoint. When he says:

> The trouble is that intelligent, cultivated people, the very people who might be expected to have liberal opinions, never do mix with the poor. For what do the majority of educated people know about poverty? (DO, p.107)

he encourages the reader to recognise himself as one of those"intelligent cultivated people" who have never experienced poverty. He goes further to embarrass him into agreeing with his opinions:

> And educated people, who should be on his side, acquiesce in the process, because they know nothing about him and consequently are afraid of him... These are my own ideas about the basic facts of a plongeur's life, made without reference to immediate economic questions, and no doubt largely platitudes. I present them as a sample of the thoughts that are put into one's head by working in an hotel. (DO, p.108)

This passage shows one of Orwell's characteristic rhetorical techniques which he also uses extensively in his polemic essays for encouraging the reader not only to identify with the attitudes expressed, but also to respond to the argument in a moral way. The didacticism of the first statement is made acceptable by Orwell's typical method of mock self-effacement in the second. But the final sentence is calculated to assure him the acquiescence of the reader because after all he has worked as a plongeur and they have not. In this way Orwell creates a persona who can bear his moral and social message.

It becomes clear that Down and Out in Paris and London, despite Orwell's declared documentary intention, is made up of a variety of literary forms. The character sketches of Bozo, Boris and Paddy serve as more than simple documentary, for the sketches reveal the author's attitudes towards these people. The narrative proceeds according to a 'plot' structured around the personal experiences of the narrator. The moral exhortation, as in the polemic essays, is to demand that the reader share the narrative persona's own individual attitudes and opinions. But in Down and Out in Paris and London Orwell uses these literary and rhetorical techniques to persuade the reader of the truthfulness of his reports of poverty. Once the reader is convinced of that, there is a chance that he will be morally outraged at the social systems which have been described and will be prompted to act against them. But, because Orwell is not at this

stage of his life committed to any clearly defined political policy, the polemic import of the book does not demand any specific political response from the reader. Down and Out in Paris and London remains only as a moral condemnation of capitalism and poverty.

* * * * * * * *

The Road to Wigan Pier moves further than Down and Out in Paris and London towards becoming a handbook for action, because Orwell's own political commitment is defined - for by 1936 he believes in Socialism. The themes of his early novels, Down and Out in Paris and London, and his polemic essays, developed from his moral rejection of systems of oppression. The theme of Road to Wigan Pier develops out of his political and moral attitudes towards the oppressiveness of unemployment and class prejudice. The narrative persona is correspondingly more complex than he appears in Down and Out in Paris and London, for he declares that he represents in the first part of the book the unemployed, and in the second part, a middle-class educated Socialist. The narrator explains why he went to Wigan:

> ...partly to see what mass unemployment is like at its worst, partly in order to see the most typical section of the working-class at close quarters. This was necessary to me as part of my approach to Socialism ... you have got to take up a definite attitude on the terribly difficult issue of class.[3]

[3] George Orwell, The Road to Wigan Pier (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.106. To be referred to subsequently as RWP

It is both a documentary intention and a means of working out a personal position. The issue of class is "difficult" for the middle-class. This attitude is crucial to the argument of the work; for the persona suggests that the problem to be resolved is of a broad social nature rather than being confined to personal life: class-prejudice rather than individual prejudice.

Through the persona Orwell recounts his experiences as a way of expressing prejudices which are typical of the middle-class. The ambiguous attitude of the middle-class towards the working-class is a result of class myths and prejudices. But no middle-class Socialist would want to admit this prejudice openly and "Orwell's" confession is a technique which forces the reader to confront his own prejudices.

The Road to Wigan Pier is divided into two parts to correspond to the shift from the viewpoint of the narrator's experiences among the unemployed to Orwell's personal experiences of Socialists and Socialism. Part One is a series of documentary observations of the unemployed, together with Orwell's personal responses to his surroundings and the people he meets. There is a narrative continuity which is based on the reporter's own journey through the depressed north. It includes detailed character sketches of people like his landlords the Brookers:

> In the end Mrs. Brooker's self-pitying talk - always the same complaints, over and over, and always ending with the tremulous whine of 'It does seems 'ard, don't it now?' - revolted me even more than her habit of wiping her mouth with bits of newspapers. (RWP, p.15)

But he doesn't stop with graphic detail; he attempts to create an historical political perspective of why people have to live in this way:

> But it is no use saying that people like the Brookers are just disgusting and trying to put them out of mind. For they exist in tens and hundreds of thousands; they are one of the characteristic by-products of the modern world. You cannot disregard them if you accept the civilization that produced them. For this is part at least of what industrialism has done for us. (RWP, pp.15-16)

He ends by asserting a moral responsibility towards poor people like the Brookers in a direct address to the reader so as to involve the latter in his own predicament of compromise and disgust:

> It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you should forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long. (RWP, p.16)

Here, a personal element of autobiography -- Orwell's temporary contact with the working-class, undertaken as part of his duty as a middle-class intellectual socialist -- is projected with the force of a combined moral and political injunction. This combination is new to Orwell's work and his message to his readers is to acquaint themselves with the unpleasant taste of working-class life, but not to linger.

Interspersed with personal, subjective reaction Orwell includes straightforward documentary. He gives us detailed information on the diet, income and expenditure, housing conditions and day-to-day life of the poor. But the figures and statistics do not remain as abstractions of unemployment and poverty; they capture the reader's sympathy for the plight of the working-class when set side by side with the detailed descriptions of the reality of their lives.

The vivid descriptions of the hardships of unemployment avoid transforming squalor into something picturesque, which is always the temptation in documentary, particularly in the cinema and photography. Orwell's persona tells us that "the beauty or ugliness of industrialism hardly matters. Its real evil lies far deeper and is quite uneradicable." (RWP, p.98) It is after all the people who are affected by industrialism that he is concerned about. His experiences of these unemployed people lead him to assert: "I have just seen enough of the working-class to avoid idealiz ing them." (RWP, pp.102-103) On the other hand, he is careful to let his readers know that "there is much in middle-class life that looks sickly and debilitating when you see it from a working-class angle." To balance the presentation of both working-class and middle-class prejudices he argues that the middle-class could perhaps learn something from the working-class. In an

attempt to present an acceptable vision of working-class life to the reader, the persona gives a consciously idealized version of the working-class:

> In a working-class home - I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but of comparatively prosperous homes - you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere ... Especially on winter evenings after tea, when the fire glows in the open range and dances mirrored in the steel fender, when Father, in shirt-sleeves, sits in the rocking chair at one side of the fire reading the racing finals, and Mother sits on the other with her sewing, and the children are happy with a pennorth of mint humbugs, and the dog lolls roasting himself on the rag mat ... (RWP, p.104)

The musings are vague and "romantic" and contradict Orwell's earlier statement that he avoids idealizing the working-class. This contradiction is not resolved, suggesting that Orwell has not yet achieved a balanced control of the polemic developed by the persona. The linear narrative is abruptly dropped, and the narrator moves immediately from part one to part two of the book, where he discusses the more theoretical and abstract problems of Socialism.

Part two of Road to Wigan Pier begins with Orwell taking the reader into his confidence by telling him details of his life which account for his own paradoxical position as a middle-class Socialist. He traces his life in an almost intimate and confessional way, and describes his own particular difficulties in dealing with the working-class. Orwell came from the upper-middle-class and

colonial service background. He admits prejudices that no Socialist would willingly reveal to another. Before entering a common-lodging house in London he recalls:

> ... how I had to screw up my courage before I went in! It seems ridiculous now. But you see I was still half afraid of the working class. I wanted to get in touch with them, I even wanted to become one of them, but I still thought of them as alien and dangerous; going into the dark doorway of that common-lodging house seemed to me like going down into some dreadful subterranean place - a sewer full of rats, for instance. (RWP, p.132)

He explains his own fears and prejudices which he assumes are common among the middle-class and by doing so forces the reader to recognize his (the reader's) own attitudes. Orwell develops his point by showing how middle-class prejudices against the working-class really are prejudices because they contradict each other. He admits that he felt sick at the smell of a group of common soldiers (RWP, p.125) and that he felt physically humiliated beside the strength and the splendid bodies of coal-miners. (RWP, p.21 and p.29) The feeling of physical revulsion at the mythical "smells" of the working-class is contradicted by the myth of their superior physical strength.

Orwell goes on to state his solution for resolving the delicate matter of class problems. He adopts the rather simple technique of flattering the reader into becoming a Socialist:

> And all the while everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. It would at least ensure our getting enough to eat even if it deprived us of everything else. Indeed, from one point of view, Socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already. (RWP, pp.149-150)

His identification of Socialism with common sense, and his assumption that the reader will agree with him is a familiar polemic technique by which he can guide the reader into endorsing the polemic thesis of the Road to Wigan Pier: As Orwell states it "rather paradoxically, in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it." (RWP, p.151)

The second part of Road to Wigan Pier reveals the development from the 'objective' documentary reporter persona to the political propagandist. The tone has changed, the prose has become more assertive and didactic, and the unprejudiced attitude of part one (and Down and Out in Paris and London) disappears. Middle-class left-wing intellectuals, whom Orwell holds responsible for the failure of British Socialism, are seen as "little worms", "verminous little lions" and "mingy little beasts". Orwell reverses the narrative persona's position. After presenting typical middle-class prejudice against the working-class in the first part of the book, he now presents working-class prejudice against middle-class Socialists. He discusses the weakness of British Socialism

from the "popular" point of view of the ordinary man, rather than from any orthodox Socialist position. This fictional narrative persona, as a bridge between the two classes, is a polemic device whereby Orwell can persuade the reader to accept his own unorthodox Socialist position, which is to criticize English Socialists and their definitions of Socialism. Because Orwell does recognise that there are class differences he proceeds to propose a 'popular front' as the only viable way of ensuring the efficacy of Socialism against the evils of fascism:

> Economically I am in the same boat with the miner, the navvy, and the farm-hand; lay the emphasis on that and I will fight on their side. But culturally I am different from the miner, the navvy and the farm-hand; lay the emphasis on that and you may arm me against them. (RWP, p.202)

This is Orwell's hope for "democratic" Socialism. The second part of the Road to Wigan Pier is, after the autobiographical introduction, almost exclusively a series of essays on the condition of modern life, combined with preaching against Socialists and their definition of Socialism and urging his own particular brand of democratic Socialism as a Popular Front in order to conserve all that is good in the English way of life - decency, respect for the individual and so on.

* * * * * * * *

Orwell went to Spain partly to fight against fascism and partly to find out exactly what was happening in the Civil War. In Homage to Catalonia the narrative persona once again (as in Road to Wigan Pier) has a dual rôle: he records his personal experiences as an anti-fascist soldier in the POUM militia in Spain; he is also a recorder of the historical "truth" of the Spanish Civil War which truth, paradoxically, has the effect of condemning communism as well as fascism. As in the two previous "documentaries" the personal experiences of the narrative persona provide the focus for the narrative: in Homage to Catalonia these are Orwell's experiences in the POUM militia, fighting from Alcubierre to Barcelona in 1937. The objective persona presents an understated picture of the war; the perspective is narrowed down to emphasise the observation that the war was mostly periods of hunger, cold and boredom rather than dramatic fighting:

> When we went on leave I had been a hundred and fifteen days in the line, and at the time this period seemed to me to have been one of the most futile of my whole life. I had joined the militia in order to fight against fascism, and as yet I had scarcely fought at all, had merely existed as a sort of passive object, doing nothing in return for my rations except to suffer from cold and lack of sleep ...[4]

But looking back at these months a year later he feels that they:

4 George Orwell, Homage to Catalonia (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.101. To be referred to subsequently as HC

> ... formed a kind of interregnum in my life, quite different from anything that had gone before and perhaps from anything that is to come, and they taught me things that I could not have learned in any other way. (HC, p.101)

The objective way in which the persona is able to present his own personal perspective of his experiences of the war encourages the reader to accept his documentary reporting as the truth:

> It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to go on except a mass of accusations and party propaganda. I myself have little data beyond what I saw with my own eyes and what I have learnt from other eye-witnesses whom I believe to be reliable. I can,however, contradict some of the more flagrant lies and help to get the affair into some kind of perspective. (HC, p.144)

The narrative assertion that a record of the "truth" of the Spanish Civil War is not likely to exist at all disarms the reader into accepting the criteria that Orwell sets us for his own version.

The persona attempts a careful balance between personal experiences of the war and political analysis. At the beginning of chapter five he advises us:

> If you are not interested in the horror of party politics, please skip; I am trying to keep the political parts of this narrative in separate chapters for precisely that purpose. (HC, p.46)

Giving the reader this option is a device through which Orwell can win his trust by appearing not to push any party-line down his throat. By chapter eleven he does not

apologise for devoting a chapter to political analysis, but assumes that his audience will have been persuaded that it forms a proper part of the documentary and will want to know what the POUM is, what Trotskyists are, and how the Communist Party is "counter-revolutionary". He launches into explanatory notes complete with extensive quotations from the press which provide information through careful documentation, and persuade the reader of his truthfulness, his objectivity, his serious research, and thus the historical accuracy of his report.

Propaganda is an important element of Homage to Catalonia because Orwell is concerned to make public his discoveries of the "truth" about Russian communism in Spain. Nevertheless, in a letter to Stephen Spender explaining why he includes what appears to be Trotskyist propaganda he declares:

> I hate writing that kind of stuff and am much more interested in my own experiences, but unfortunately in this bloody period we are living in one's own experiences are being mixed up in controversies, intrigues, etc. (CEJL, vol.1, p.311)

Orwell finds ways of avoiding devoting the work entirely to political propaganda by including pieces of purely aesthetic writing. In Down and Out and Paris and London and the Road to Wigan Pier there is very little conscious 'literary' writing, but it appears quite frequently in Homage to Catalonia:

> Spring was really here at last. The blue in the sky was softer, the air grew suddenly balmy, the frogs were mating noisily in the ditches. Round the drinking-pool that served for the village mules I found exquisite green frogs the size of a penny, so brilliant that the young grass looked dull beside them. (HC, p.77)

As in Burmese Days Orwell is here "betrayed into purple passages". (CEJL, vol.1, p.7) He uses the same rhetorical technique to elevate his own personal war experiences into art:

> When you are creeping at that pace you are aware as an ant might be of the enormous variations in the ground; the splendid patch of smooth grass here, the evil patch of sticky mud there, the tall rustling reeds that have got to be avoided, the heap of stones that almost makes you give up hope because it seems impossible to get over them without noise. (HC, p.87)

Such a description of war-strategy does not contribute to Orwell's declared anti-fascist documentary intention, but is in effect a literary intrusion. These literary embellishments demonstrate Orwell's declared attempt to make political propaganda more personal and at the same time closer to 'art'.[5]

Homage to Catalonia is more than the purple prose of Burmese Days. In an attempt to make his polemic effective Orwell combines a variety of literary forms, which makes the book more than simply documentary and political propaganda. The descriptions -- and there are many --

[5] He discusses his literary aims in the essay "Why I Write", CEJL, vol.1, pp.1-7)

of personal experience are effective as autobiography; the documentary reporting is effective for providing a description of the procedure of the war; the essays on political analysis are effective as "Trotskyist" propaganda and the literary pieces are effective as observations and descriptions of the Spanish countryside and of various people that are befriended by the narrator. But these forms do not successfully combine to produce either an effective work of art, or an effective piece of propaganda, for each form competes for attention, distracting the reader's attention away from the declared intention of recording the objective, historical truth. Orwell probably realises this and for his next work, Coming Up For Air he uses what could be described as fictional polemic or a documentary novel form to give him scope for the possible realisation of both his polemic and his literary ambitions.

* * * * * * * *

In 1938, at a time when Orwell felt that the English way of life was threatened by inevitable war with Germany, he began Coming Up For Air. To write a novel at this time was Orwell's stand against the impending forces of the new European totalitarian states. He told his friend Jack Common about his projected book, Coming Up For Air:

> I am keen to get started with my next novel, though when I came here I had been thinking that what with Hitler, Stalin and the rest of them the day of novel-writing was over. As it is if I start it in August I daresay I'll have to finish it in the concentration camp. (CEJL, vol.1, p.330)

It should be noted that Orwell made no distinction between Hitler and Stalin after the Sino-Soviet non-agression pact.

Orwell describes Coming up for Air as a novel; it is a polemic fiction. He uses the techniques that he has learned through writing his early novels, his "documentaries" and polemic essays, and tries to combine these techniques for his polemic purpose. As in the books discussed earlier in this chapter, the narrator provides the focus for the continuity of events, and the thoughts and moral exhortations expressed in the work. This is because once again it is the narrator's personal life upon which everything is based. The difference in Coming up for Air is that the narrator is a completely fictionalised character. In this way Orwell distances his own personal feelings of despair about the coming war. This is Orwell's first attempt in his novels at a first-person narrator who is also the hero.

George Bowling, the narrative voice in Coming up for Air is a fat, middle-aged, cheerful, insurance agent. He establishes an easy, conversational, even intimate relationship with the reader. As a rhetorical device

the informal and colloquial style is calculated to draw the reader into accepting Bowling's point of view, for "ordinary chaps" everywhere feel as George does. Although he is a representative of the ordinary man, he reveals himself in a very personal way, much as Orwell had confessed things about his own life in his earlier "documentaries": "Here, I'll make a confession, or rather two",[6] and again, talking about his wife: "Why did you marry her? you say. But why did you marry yours?". (CUFA, p.135)

Whereas the narrative masks of the "documentaries" are self-declared representatives of minority groups - social outcasts, the unemployed, the middle-class educated leftist and the English intellectual fighting in Spain - George Bowling claims to represent the 'ordinary' man. He is physically ordinary: fat, false teeth, but no determinist birthmark isolating him. He has an average job as an insurance representative. He has been married for fifteen years, has two children, but is fed up with being a "good" husband and father. He lives in an ordinary poky little suburban house, and like all the other people in the suburbs is generally unhappy and afraid. Suburban life is

6 George Orwell, Coming up for Air (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.80. To be referred to subsequently as CUFA

> Just a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semi-detached torture chambers where the poor little five-to-ten-pounds-a-week quake and shiver, everyone of them with the boss twisting his tail and the wife riding him like the nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches. (CUFA, p.14)

Bowling reminds us of the inferior quality of contemporary life with scepticism and wryness. He selects only those parts of life with which all his readers are familiar - the taste of food, the noise and artificiality, and most of all the loneliness and isolation. George himself, for all his good humour and cheerfulness, is a lonely and isolated modern man.

Bowling's disappointment with life, and the knowledge that England will soon be at war again, prompts him to think more and more about his childhood. The action of the book develops from Bowling's tendency to compare the past with the present. It leads to his attempt to rediscover the peace and stability of his past by visiting Lower Binfield, the place of his birth and his youth. His nostalgia for the past leads him to search for the fishing pool that has haunted his mind since childhood; his memory of it remains clear and vivid:

> The pool was ringed completely round by the enormous beech trees, which in one place came down to the edge and were reflected in the water. On the other side there was a patch of grass where there was a hollow with beds of wild peppermint, and up at one end of the pool an old wooden boathouse was rotting away among the bulrushes.
>
> The pool was swarming with bream, small ones, about four to six inches long. Every now and

> again you'd see one of them turn half over and gleam reddy-brown under the water. There were pike there too, and they must have been big ones. You never saw them, but sometimes one that was basking among the weeds would turn over and plunge with a splash that was like a brick being bunged into the water. (CUFA, pp.76-77)

This passage is reminiscent of the style of Burmese Days; Orwell has returned to a fictional symbolic ideal as part of his political purpose. In trying to make political writing into art Orwell declares that "... anyone who cares to examine my work will see that even when it is downright propaganda it contains much that a full-time politician would consider irrelevant. I am not able, and I do not want to completely abandon the world-view that I acquired in childhood." (CEJL, vol.1, p.6) The description of the pool is not irrelevant to Orwell's political purpose because this world-view of his own childhood is transformed into George Bowling's idealised past. The idealised vision of the past is a bulwark against Bowling's (Orwell's) terrifying vision of the future:

> 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. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces, and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really worship him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke. (CUFA, p.149)

The anticipation of the world of 1984 is clear; Bowling articulates Orwell's own fears of a totalitarian future. But despite his feeling of the inevitability of the "stream-lined men from Eastern Europe" taking over the familiar life, Bowling has the resiliance of a man who would "even in war, revolution, plague, and famine ... back myself to stay alive longer than most people ... I'm that type ...". (CUFA, p.23) And so, Orwell is persuading us, are most people. The survival of the 'ordinary man' is assured.

In all three of Orwell's literary novels, naturalism and determinism control the main character and the action. In Coming up for Air Orwell leaves the isolated hero persona behind and turns more towards social realism. George Bowling is a much more fully explored and developed and a more sympathetic character than the heroes of Orwell's early novels. Bowling establishes a close identity with the reader in an attempt to persuade the reader to combine an anti-fascist and pacifist position, which Orwell believes at this time to be the only tenable attitude.[7] Once again Orwell finds himself in the position of attacking the Left while claiming to believe in democratic socialism "as I understand it." ("Why I Write" CEJL, vol.1, p.6)

7 In a letter to Herbert Read (CEJL, vol.1, p.387) Orwell states that in his opinion the offical Left had already sold out to the war-party.

As a novel Coming up for Air incorporates non-fictional techniques; it tends to alternate between a sympathetic portrayal of Bowling, and Orwell's obvious propagandist intrusions, which appear as straightforward preaching. This propaganda undercuts the 'ordinariness' of the character of George Bowling. The problem with Coming up for Air is that George Bowling as the first-person narrator has control over the narrative. In his autobiographical documentaries, Orwell himself is able to slip in with his polemic message, but in Coming up for Air his polemic has to be presented through George Bowling. Bowling, as a representative of the 'ordinary man' cannot proceed to make complex political analyses without the reader being forced to suspend his willing disbelief in his character. Furthermore, the polemic appears as intrusive preaching and stops the continuity of Bowling's story, which makes the book artistically and polemically unsuccessful. Perhaps this is why Orwell turns to another form for his next work - the animal allegory - a form which is based on documentary 'facts' wrapped up in a fictional allegory: a form in which he could distance himself, and the narrative persona, to avoid undermining the propaganda and the art.

III

Until he wrote Animal Farm Orwell's work was not entirely successful in terms of reconciling art and politics. His non-fictional works, essays, pamphlets, reviews and documentary were didactic pieces discussing moral, social and political issues, but these Orwell felt had reduced him to a sort of "pampleteer". It was the novel form which always attracted him the most as a literary genre because it was

> ... the most anarchical of all forms of literature ... The novel is practically a Protestant form of art; it is a product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual. ("Inside the Whale", CEJL, vol.1, p.518)

Before 1936, however, the social polemic of Orwell's fiction was not always carried successfully by the naturalist-determinist novel form. The fiction, which was consistently based on the theme of individualism, is therefore interspersed with non-fictional lectures which point out the viciousness of various social and political structures such as imperialism, class, religion and capitalism.

During the early war years Orwell turned away from fiction and became involved with journalism and broadcasting for the Overseas Service of the BBC. He felt that the times were not conducive to novel writing. His vision of the 1930's

was of a time when every writer was in some way mixed up in

> ... propaganda campaigns and squalid controversies ... It is almost inconceivable that good novels should be written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy. (CEJL, vol. 1, p.519)

By 1943 however, he decided to return to fiction-writing for a specifically political as well as an artistic purpose. In "Why I write" he stated that:

> Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole. (CEJL, vol. 1, p.7)

Orwell's attack on communism, war and fascism in Homage to Catalonia and Coming Up For Air now becomes in Animal Farm more specifically an attack on Communist Party government in post-revolutionary Russia. Orwell wrote Animal Farm between November 1943 and February 1944, a time when England and Russia were war-time allies against Germany. By the time the book was published in 1945 the war had ended and the British government returned to their pre-war relationship with Russia, intensifying hostility to communism in the "cold war." The climate of hatred or suspicion of communism and Russia in particular, created a market within which Animal Farm and its critique of Stalinist Russia would become very popular; and shortly after publication 10,000 more copies were printed. The book was a success and Orwell quickly became famous on

both sides of the Atlantic.

Since its publication Animal Farm has presented problems for the critics. In his revaluation of the book Tom Hopkinson says that this novel is "one of the two modern works of fiction before which the critics must abdicate".[2] (The other is Koestler's Darkness at Noon). George Woodcock records a similar feeling when he suggests that Animal Farm is an almost perfect fusion of political and artistic purpose which makes critical comment difficult. Woodcock finally concludes that Orwell

> ...succeeded admirably, and produced a book so clear in intent and writing that the critic is usually rather nonplussed as to what he should say about it; all is so magnificently there, and the only thing that really needs to be done is to place this crystalline little book into its proper setting.[3]

If all is so clear one wonders why Woodcock's response is so vague and confused. The purpose of this chapter is to try and discover what is the relationship between Orwell's polemic and his art and how much this contributes to the problems in interpretation of Animal Farm.

The "proper setting" of Animal Farm is defined by Orwell himself in the Preface to the Ukrainian edition (1947). The problems facing British Socialism which he

[2] Tom Hopkinson, "George Orwell: A Revaluation", World Review, June, 1950.

[3] George Woodcock, The Crystal Spirit (Jonathan Cape, 1967). p.156

outlines in The Road to Wigan Pier are topics for discussion in his non-fiction from 1936 on. In Animal Farm, as in Homage to Catalonia, he continues his attempt to strengthen British Socialism, but by the paradoxical method of attacking Stalinist Russia, the only country to have a successful Socialist revolution, and the ideal of some leftist intellectuals in England. As Orwell explains in the Ukrainian Preface:

> ... in my opinion, nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original ideal of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated. And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. (CEJL, vol. 3, p.405)

His most urgent political message in Animal Farm is that to counteract Russia's widespread political influence, Socialists in Britain should take care to "dissociate Socialism from Utopianism" (CEJL, vol.3,p.64) and should not ignore the facts of the purges and other totalitarian methods used by Stalin and the Communist Party in the name of Socialism.

Orwell's polemic is not exclusively concerned with the politics of government, for it deals also with the politics of personal life, that is with human morality in general. Consequently Animal Farm is constructed upon a dual basis - it is a moral tale and a political satire. The moral is that nothing in this world ever changes, while the satire attacks Russian communism. One of the

reasons for the difficulty experienced by critics in looking at this book is that there is a basic conflict between Orwell's statement of the moral purpose and that of the political purpose. Orwell's declared political purpose is to exhort to action, but the moral vision is pessimistic about humanity, for it denies human nature the possibility of ever changing.

In writing Animal Farm Orwell looks towards a form which would reach as many 'ordinary' people as possible. He declares that he wants to explode the "...Soviet myth in a story that could easily be understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages." (CEJL, vol.3, p.405) He aims his political and moral message at a large, even international audience. Because Animal Farm is an animal fable, a traditional and easily assimilable polemic form, it serves Orwell's purpose very well.

As a vehicle for Orwell's political, moral and artistic purposes the animal fable is a form which can simplify and objectify the ways in which humans relate to each other. It is a form in which the weaknesses of human nature can be revealed in a way that points a moral direction for the reader and demands his moral involvement. However, Orwell's fable is clearly not simply a reference to the general state of the world or humanity: the satire is directed primarily against the Communist Party which Orwell believed

had transformed a Socialist revolution into a totalitarian régime. Animal Farm is in the tradition of Swiftian satire in that the reductive strategies are dependent upon allusions to particular contemporary personalities and political situations.

Orwell's primary method of presenting his political satire is through the parody of specific individual personalities of the Russian revolution, as we might expect from a writer who so often declared his faith in the importance of individualism. Napoleon is a parody of Stalin; Snowball is Trotsky; Major is a combination of pre-revolutionary Lenin and the teachings of Marx; and Squealer represents Krylenko. Boxer burlesques the Stakhanovites[4]; Napoleon's dogs stand for the secret police - the dog-OGPU.[5] The pigs are based on the upper ranks of the Communist Party - the Commissars - as Orwell often called them. They use a Marxian language to present a class-struggle between animals as a parody of the way that Marxists describe the conflict between capital and labour. The western capitalist countries are represented in the fable by the humans - Mr. Frederick (Germany) and Mr. Pilkington (England) - who are first pretend to support the pig's régime only in order to doublecross and exploit them.

4 The Stakhanovites were workers in revolutionary Russia who modelled themselves after Stakhanov, whose tremendous capacity for work initiated the idea of creating the worker-hero.

5 John Atkins, George Orwell (Ungar, 1965) p.224

At the beginning of Animal Farm, before the animals' rebellion, the humans and the animals are allegorical reflections of the difference between the ruling class and the working-class. Mr. Jones and his wife are the oppressors and exploiters of the animals who are their slaves. After the pigs lead a successful animal rebellion against their human owners, they gradually adopt the position of the humans and the existing division between themselves and the rest of the animals develops. The pigs take on Jones' role as the exploiter and oppressor; but they play their role much more intensely. Whereas Jones had been idle and incompetent, the pigs channel most of their energy and work into consciously strengthening their position of power over the other animals. The allegory suggests that traditional systems of society such as capitalism may be bad and even oppressive, but the new "totalitarian" system of Communist Russia dedicates itself to a much more efficient and ruthless exploitation and destruction of individualism.

That the pigs are in a position of control within the animal hierarchy is a result of a crucial difference between the pigs and the other animals. The ideology behind the animals' rebellion was entirely of the pig's making and initially arose from the dream of Old Major, the prize white boar. Major pointed out to the animals that it was the humans who were responsible for their suffering. He advised the animals to work towards a rebellion against the

humans: "Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free." [6] The pigs quickly transform Major's message to the animals into a creed of "Animalism" which states all animals are equal. They immediately see ways of establishing a system of control and privileges for themselves where they "could become rich and free," by encouraging the other animals to work for the ideals of Animalism. Right from the earliest days of the rebellion, the pigs' intention is to exploit the other animals and create class divisions.

As in Orwell's earlier novels, a rigid social and political hierarchy is the basis for the relationships between the groups of characters in Animal Farm.[7] Orwell groups the animals so as to emphasise the social and political differences between them. The categories are composed of the ruling pigs; those singled out for individual attention such as Clover, Boxer, Benjamin and Muriel; the groups of "stupider" animals - the sheep, ducks and hens. The rigid hierarchy of Animal Farm demonstrates Orwell's belief that the failure of revolution leads inevitably to exploitation and repression of the majority.

[6] George Orwell, Animal Farm (Penguin, 1960), p.10 Subsequently to be referred to as AF

[7] In Burmese Days it is the imperialist structure of the white sahibs which oppresses the native Burmese and the white colonialist; in A Clergyman's Daughter it is the rigid code of Christianity and the shabby genteel petty bourgeoisie which ultimatately forces Dorothy to abandon the search for her identity and to accept the ambivalent

The detailed attention paid to Clover and Boxer indicates that Orwell is encouraging the reader's sympathy for individual persons as opposed to groups of animals who are presented in only a very general way. This reflects Orwell's fear of "mass" action, but at the same time he realises that individual action is no more successful, as he suggests in his earlier novels. What happens in Animal Farm demonstrates how fragile individualism is in the face of a totalitarian régime. From the first scene Boxer and Clover appear as comfortable and sympathetic creatures:

> Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle-life, who had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal. Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high, and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together... The two horses had just lain down when a brood of ducklings, which had lost their mother, filed into the barn, cheeping feebly and wandering from side to side to find some place where they would not be trodden on. Clover made a sort of wall round them with her great foreleg, and the ducklings nestled down inside it, and promptly fell asleep. (AF, pp.6-7)

Orwell presents this couple with a warmth that is lacking in most of the characters of his earlier novels. Although not clever, they represent the stablility and compasion of the decent ordinary people that Orwell has written about in his documentaries and essays, and they anticipate the ignorant but solid and compassionate proles of Nineteen Eighty-Four.

nature of her existence; once again, in Keep the Aspidistra Flying it is the world of the penny-pinching lower-middle class which controls Gordon's life - his individual anti-capitalist attitude is not viable in a capitalist society and he is finally forced to succumb to its pressures.

But although Orwell encourages our sympathy for these creatures we must be wary. The idealised version of familial domesticity they display obscures the fact that both Boxer and Clover allow themselves to be ruthlessly exploited by the pigs. Orwell specifically reminds us that the pigs' "most faithful disciples were the two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover. These two had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves, but having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments." (AF, p.17) When Boxer mindlessly repeats "I will work harder" while dying from overwork, Orwell is using reverse psychology on the reader to warn us of the dangers of such naivete and blind allegiance to an ideal.

Orwell presents the idealised characters of Boxer and Clover in a deliberately sentimental way. Similarly, the idyllic pastoral visions of the animals are obviously illusions and can easily be undercut or reversed. In their naivete they see their own farm as a most desirable place:

> ... the lone pasture stretching down to the main road, the hayfield, the spinney, the drinking pool, the ploughed fields where the young wheat was thick and green, and the red roofs of the farm building with the smoke curling from the chimneys. It was a clear spring evening, the grass and bursting hedges were gilded by the level rays of the sun... (AF, p.75)

This "romantic" pastoral scene of England is deceptive. Clover's vision of peace and plenty is brought into question by her inner turmoil and discontent:

> ...she did not know why - they had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes... Whatever happened she would remain faithful, work hard, carry out the orders that were given to her, and accept the leadership of Napoleon. But ... it was not for this that they had built the windmill and faced the bullets of Jones' guns. Such were her thoughts, though she lacked the words to express them.
>
> At last, feeling this to be in some way a substitute for the words she was unable to find, she began to sing 'Beasts of England'. (AF, pp.75-76 - my emphases)

Clover recognises that Major's vision of an ideal future has been reversed but she does not understand how or why. In her ignorance Clover can respond to what is going on around her only with a vague feeling. She imagined, in her vision of the future, that the strong would protect the weak; in Animal Farm the reverse is true: the strong exploit the weak. The reason they are exploited, suggests Orwell, is because like Clover they can observe and feel, but they cannot understand what is going on around them. The underlined sentences reveal the key to Orwell's manipulation of the reader in the interest of his polemic. He expresses his judgment of these inarticulate animals by speaking for them. The reader accepts his picture as if Clover had said it herself.

Because Orwell has created Clover, and the majority of the animals, without the ability to present their own point of view, Orwell has to articulate their thoughts for us. This is a polemic device to illustrate that although

Clover responds with sensitivity she is powerless unless she can understand, articulate and act upon those feelings. His didactic point to the reader is that feeling something is wrong is not enough to change anything, it will only result in acquiescene to the prevailing orthodoxy. Clover remains subordinate in the pig's régime because she blindly accepts the orthodox vision of 'Beasts of England' as a substitute for her independent understanding. Orwell emphasises this by making Clover's relation to the reader very remote. Her vision of the future is only a "picture", and it also originates, paradoxically, in the past - "if she herself had had any picture of the future." Also, Orwell puts the narrator in a very powerful position - he is the transcriber of Clover's thoughts, for Clover is unable to present herself to us through words. It is a technique through which Orwell can make a distinction between Clover's foolish and thoughtless idealism and his own anti-utopian point of view.

Whereas Clover's idealism is shaken by what she sees happening around her, Boxer continues to believe that he is still working towards the original aims of the animal's rebellion. Orwell treats Boxer with some sympathy and a certain admiration for his willingness to work towards the ideals of Animalism and equality for all the animals. But Orwell makes it quite clear that it is Boxer's stubborn refusal to recognise what is actually happening on the farm

which leads inevitably to his being exploited more than the other animals, and ultimately ignominiously destroyed by the pigs - his carcass being traded for a case of whiskey. Even when Boxer is confronted with the purges and killings carried out by the pigs, he can only respond like an automaton: "I do not understand it. I would not have believed that such things could happen on our farm. The solution as I see it, is to work harder. From now onwards I shall get up a full hour earlier in the mornings." (AF, pp.74-75) The absurdity of his "solution" makes it clear that Orwell is demonstrating the stupidity of such a naive attitude. Boxer's attempt to take on the physical tasks of the farm almost single-handed is the ultimate Socialist martyr position. Orwell warns the reader how easily that position is exploited by the pigs.

Clover and Boxer represent the failure of well-intentioned but uninformed personal action: Orwell presents another example of animal behaviour. The animals who appear as groups and are not singled out for individual attention are the ducks, sheep and hens. Orwell points out the futility of acting as a group when the hens stage a rebellion against Napoleon's demands that they surrender all their eggs. The Luddite-like attempt to lay their eggs in the rafters in order that they might smash to the ground, results in the death of nine hens and the capitulation of the rest to the absolute control of the pigs. (AF, p.67)

Orwell uses the sheep to demonstrate another possibility for group action. Because the sheep always act together in a silly, mindless fashion they are more easily controlled by the pigs and are selected for special instruction in ways of effectively working against the other animals:

> The sheep were the greatest devotees of the spontaneous demonstration, and if anyone complained (as a few animals sometimes did, when no pigs or dogs were near) that they wasted their time and meant a lot of standing about in the cold, the sheep were sure to silence him with a tremendous bleating of 'Four legs good, two legs bad.' (AF, p.98)

In Animal Farm all collective action is seen to be potentially dangerous: the "lower" animals' working together leads directly to easy exploitation, while the pigs' working together leads directly to their treacherous control. The determining factor in either case is relative intelligence. The pigs are successful because they are clever enough to exploit the other animals. But intelligence and skill without morality or human sympathy lead to corruption and totalitarianism.

What Orwell has succeeded in doing in terms of the fable is to reinforce in the reader an impression that ordinary people (allegorically the sheep, hens, horses and cows, etc.) are ignorant, incapable of understanding and making inductions from their own experience, forget their experience easily, and as a result allow themselves to be manipulated and exploited. Orwell has also allowed his readers to see how a group of clever beings (the pigs) use force (the dogs) in

order to exploit the ordinary people (the sheep, hens, cows, horses etc.). Orwell clearly demonstrates that he believes that both personal and group action by the animals is totally ineffective against the pigs' power. However, Orwell directs his political sympathy neither to the pigs nor to the other animals. The ordinary animals are ignorant and stupid while the intelligent pigs are nothing more than totalitarian thugs. Orwell contrives a situation where the only possible position which is reasonable in the terms of the book, is that of the intelligent outsider. In Animal Farm this position is represented by Benjamin the sardonic observer.

As this chapter established earlier, Orwell structures the farm's social and political hierarchy very carefully and precisely, but significantly Benjamin, like Orwell's earlier heroes, does not fit easily into that society. The reason is that his vision of the future is the only anti-utopian vision held by any animal on the farm. The utopian ideal of the "lower" animals is the "golden future time" detailed in 'Beasts of England', a song which old Major recalled in his dream. The verses promise riches for the future:

> Riches more than mind can picture,
> Wheat and barley, oats and hay,
> Clover, beans and mangel-wurzels
> Shall be ours upon that day.
> (AF, p.13)

Similarly the pigs look forward to their idea of a Utopian future (although ironically reversed) where "the lower

animals on Animal Farm did more work and received less food than any animals in the country." (AF, p.117) Against the optimistic utopian vision and the realistic vision of the possibilities of power is set the pessimistic vision of Benjamin the donkey: "hunger, hardship, and disappointment being, so he said, the unalterable law of life." (AF, p.111)

These three visions coexist and the difference between them is an important part of Orwell's political message. Major's promises of equality and plenty for all the animals are based literally and symbolically upon a dream. It is a dream which is remarkably similar to the tantalizing tales of the sugar-candy mountain told by Moses the Raven. Moses is a parody of religious salvation of whom we are warned to be suspicious. He claims to have seen "everlasting fields of clover and the linseed cake and lump sugar growing on the hedges...". But the narrator reveals:

> A thing that was difficult to determine was the attitude of the pigs towards Moses. They all declared contemptuously that his stories about Sugarcandy Mountain were lies, and yet they allowed him to remain on the farm, not working, with an allowance of a gill of beer a day. (AF, pp.99-100)

The obvious parallel between the exaggerated promises of Moses and Major, renders them both suspicious. While Major's vision is based on unreality (a dream), the pigs' vision is based upon a desire to perfect a system which had already operated successfully in the past for the humans. Benjamin's vision, on the other hand, is based on his observations of what actuallyhappens on the farm at the present time.

The difference in the visions of the higher and lower animals on the farm is based on a difference in intelligence and morality. The pigs utilise the utopian faith of the oppressed group of animals as an instrument towards the realisation of their own ruthless and oppressive political vision. The pigs are intelligent but immoral; the other animals have a moral sense but little, or no, intelligence. Benjamin, however, is different: he embodies both intelligence and a moral sense, and in this way is a key to understanding Animal Farm.

Benjamin provides the only stable and unchanging viewpoint; he has a constant choric funtion.[8] As the choric commentator he stands apart from the rest of the animals. Benjamin is an observer of life, rather than an actor. His mind tends towards passive contemplation and aloof criticism. He is not a character who plans schemes, as the pigs do, even though he possesses an intelligence which is equivalent to that of the pigs. He doesn't assert himself as an individual nor take action along with the other animals because he is convinced of the futility of individual action, and suspicious that the individual will be victimized by group action. When the entire farm is divided over

[8] Ellen Douglass Leyburn maintains that "The point of view is always that of the animals who are being duped." See "Animal Stories", Modern Satire (Harcourt & Brace,1962), p.220. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the "lower" animals are not able to articulate their thoughts and feelings, it is the narrator who steps in and describes them for the reader.

the projected windmill,

> Benjamin was the only animal who did not side with either faction. He refused to believe either that food would become more plentiful or that the windmill would save work. Windmill or no windmill, he said, life would go on as it had always gone on - that is, badly.' (AF, p.46)

This scepticism remains with him; he himself is unchanged by the passing of time. In this way the unchanging nature of Benjamin's consistent outlook reinforces the moral vision of Orwell's polemic - that nothing in society ever does change, still less improve.

Benjamin alone among the animals understands the political ambitions of the pigs; he understands what it means when Squealer is found, paintbrush in hand, at the bottom of the ladder by the wall of the barn where the Seven Commandments were written; Benjamin alone sees that Boxer is being taken to the knackers and not to the vet. His cynicism is the result of his observation that one group of exploiters is overthrown only to make way for another group who will act more ruthlessly, and inevitably those without power will suffer.[9] This is not only what happened in Russia. Through the persona of Benjamin, Orwell elevates his allegory to the level of a universal truth about human nature. Intelligence without morality ensures that

[9] This is the basis of James Burnham's thesis in The Managerial Revolution. Orwell wrote an essay "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution" originally for Polemic which was later reprinted as a pamphlet, in 1946.

a powerful political minority can exploit and repress those without that élite intelligence. Benjamin can only opt for a position outside; isolated, able to make correct analyses, but unable to act upon his understanding because he is alone.

Benjamin is the only animal, apart from the pigs, who has any intellectual and rational consciousness of what is happening around him, and it, together with his lack of power-hunger, leads him to a sceptical, even pessimistic position. Raymond Williams detects a heightened consciousness on the part of the other animals at the end of the book when they can see no difference between the pigs and the humans.[10] This, he maintains, suggests an optimism which underlies the work. But Orwell is being satirical about the "consciousness" of the animals. The narrator tells us that:

> It might be that their lives were hard and that not all of their hopes had been fulfilled; but they were conscious that they were not as other animals. If they went hungry it was not from feeding tyrannical human beings; if they worked hard, at least they worked for themselves. No creature among them went upon two legs. No creature called any other creature 'Master'. All animals were equal. (AF, p. 112)

The irony is clear. Preceeding this statement about how

[10] Raymond Williams, Orwell (Fontana, 1971), p.74.

the animals were feeling, Orwell tells us that "None of the old dreams had been abandoned." (AF, p.111) The animals still continue to dream. The reality of the situation still eludes them, but it does not elude the reader, for the sentence following "All animals were equal" runs: "One day in early summer Squealer ordered the sheep to follow him ...". (AF, p. 112, my emphases). Ultimately it is Benjamin's pessimistic vision of the world around him that is operative in Animal Farm.

One basis for Benjamin's pessimism is his understanding that the rhetoric of the pigs is an important instrument of their power. In Animal Farm Orwell is concerned with what he considers to be the dangerous aspects of Communist Party propaganda: the direct relationship between the perversion of language and totalitarian power. For many years Orwell had been preoccupied with the obvious relationship between language and politics; it is the subject of several polemic essays from the early 1940's until he discusses it at length in "Politics and the English Language" (1947) and Nineteen Eighty-Four. He was aware that the reversals in Soviet policy since the revolution were reflected in the language of official party propaganda. In Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell creates Newspeak, the Party language capable of completely reversing objective truth; but the beginnings of such a language are already evident in Animal Farm. The pigs create a language for the other

animals which is quite different from the language they themselves use: they invent slogans, hymns, lists of statistics and the Seven Commandments - forms that can be memorized and learned by rote, that sound grandiose and mystical but don't require any thought for use. They further their propaganda and manipulate the other animals by reversing the original promises of the revolution in a manner too subtle for any animal, with the exception of Benjamin, to recognise the reversals. Clover and Boxer only have a limited understanding of the pigs' language, but what they <u>can</u> understand are the appeals to the ideals of Animalism, the ritualistic singing and chanting of the Seven Commandments and "Beasts of England". The rest of the animals, however, seldom use language other than the slogans provided by the pigs, which they have learned by rote. Because the sheep could enjoy mindlessly repeating "Two legs bad, four legs good" the pigs easily train them to bleat the reverse "Four legs good, two legs better!" (<u>AF</u>, p.114) because they don't understand what these words mean anyway.

The Seven Commandments are an example of political reversals manifest in reversed slogans. They not only parody the slogans of the Russian revolution in their biblical tone, but their gradual reversal demonstrates that as the political aims of the revolution are corrupted, so the language becomes distorted and mystified to complement

the political reversal. The pigs reduce language to simple slogans for the animals' use, intending to lessen their possible range of expression, and hence prevent a means of criticism of the pig's régime. Because most of the animals have short memories and cannot read, the pigs are able to reverse the meaning of the Commandments to justify their own behaviour simply by adding two words to them:

No animals shall sleep in a bed with sheets

No animals shall drink alcohol to excess

No animals shall kill another animals without cause

Finally, all the slogans of animalism are reduced to one: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others". The meaning of this is a complete reversal of the original statement of the rebellion. Clearly Napoleon's police state uses language to pervert, as an aid to its physical force. This idea dominates Nineteen Eighty-Four where the Party's control of language is one effective means of controlling its members.

Some commentators criticize the extreme quality of Orwell's thesis. The left-wing critics, Walsh and Williams, for example, say that Orwell's portrayal of the majority of animals as ignorant and stupid is an insult to ordinary people, particularly the working-class.[11] Orwell does

[11] The analogy that the animals do represent the working-class is made clear not only in the Preface to the Ukrainian edition, but also in Animal Farm itself. At

stress the animals' stupidity, ignorance and devotion to a utopian ideal; but he does so for his didactic purpose of shaking his readers, even to the point of insulting them, in the hope that the "lower classes" will reject the Russian model of Socialism to prepare a revival of the Socialist movement in England. This declared political purpose, however, is not successfully reinforced by the artistic structure of Animal Farm. This "Fairy Story" demonstrates how, when "lower animals" attempt to work towards an ideal equal society they fail - they are duped and exploited by the pigs. Let us explore this further.

Orwell's political intention in Animal Farm was to destroy Russia's reputation as a Socialist country in order that something approaching "true" Socialism be given a chance to establish itself in England. But the animal fable functions successfully only as a general moral tale about the weaknesses of human nature. As a result Animal Farm points not only to corruption in Russian Stalinism but also to the corrupt nature of man. Because this general moral fable is pessimistic about the human condition it contradicts the declared polemic intention of the political allegory, which is to call to action. In Animal Farm Orwell only succeeds in showing the inevitable

> the end Pilkington, talking about the labour problems everywhere says: "If you have your lower animals to contend with ... we have our lower classes!" (AF, pp. 117-118)

failure of the utopian Socialist vision and the inevitable success of totalitarianism, given man's nature. To use this perspective as a method of propagandising for Socialism risks being misinterpreted as demonstrating the futility of working towards Socialism. As in the three early literary novels, it is the determinism of the artistic form which undercuts the polemic.

The contradiction between the general moral statement and the particular political statement of Animal Farm is further emphasised by the character of Benjamin, who provides the only viable focus in Animal Farm as the carrier of the moral fable. His position is weak in the political fable; he is no match for the power-structure of the pigs and remains isolated and unable to act because, he declares, nothing will ever change. Nothing changes, that is, except roles: the pigs simply strengthen the human power-structure of the oppressors over the oppressed. Benjamin's attitude dominates the work and suggests to the reader that there is no point in doing anything. In this way Orwell's stated polemic intention of persuading people to achieve a Socialist society conflicts with the artistic development of the characters in the moral statement. In Animal Farm the animals' collective action fails, in the face of the collective, intelligent but corrupt action of the pigs. This anticipates Nineteen Eighty-Four where Orwell finally illustrates

the disintegration of the liberal democratic position which he has tried to accept and live with for so many years, through the destruction of its hero, Winston Smith.

IV

The tension between Orwell's desire to succeed as an artist and his belief that his duties as a writer are those of propagandist exists throughout his work, and particularly in Nineteen Eighty-Four. Throughout the early nineteen-forties his essays warned that Communist totalitarianism and other non-liberal systems would lead to the destruction of the liberal-democratic dream of individualism and freedom for the artist and ordinary man alike. He was determined to incorporate his vision within a novel: he reasserted the novel's usefulness as a polemic instrument which not only provides information but can proclaim an urgent warning, and is a traditionally 'popular' form which can reach the widest audience.

Orwell states what his polemic intentions in Nineteen Eighty-Four are in a letter to Francis A. Henson: "I believe that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences."[1]

[1] Francis A. Henson of the United Automobile Workers had asked Orwell questions about Nineteen Eighty-Four. Orwell's letter of reply has been lost, but excerpts were published in Life, 25th July, 1949. CEJL, vol.4,p.502.

In an attempt to combine his polemic propaganda with art, he creates what he describes as "a novel about the future - that is, it is in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalist novel. That is what makes it a difficult job ..." (CEJL, vol.4, pp.329-330) Orwell's choice of this hybrid-form confirms his determination to reach a large audience: naturalism and fantasy are the two forms that dominate popular culture of this century. Yet they are generally believed to be forms opposed in operation - naturalism carries connotations of literal truth and reality; fantasy is understood to be non-realistic. Orwell's reference to the "difficulty" of writing Nineteen Eighty-Four indicates precisely the unusual nature of the form of the work. This successful combination helps account for the resultant success of Nineteen Eighty-Four. On the one hand Orwell can exploit the satiric possibilities of fantasy which allow elements of science-fiction. At the same time his use of the naturalistic techniques and format, familiar from his earlier novels, lends an air of literal reality to the satire and increases the polemic force of the satire.

Most reviewers discuss the polemic content rather than the artistic achievements of the novel. Some judgments attack Orwell's pessimism and anti-humanism;[2] others admire

[2] James Walsh, "George Orwell", Marxist Quarterly, June, 1956.

his attacks on Stalinist communism and British Socialism.[3] The liberal reviewers saw it as a valiant struggle of the individual against an oppressive totalitarian system.[4] Isaac Deutscher later pointed out that "A book like Nineteen Eighty-Four may be used without much regard for the author's intention."[5] So many critics and readers apparently misunderstood the intention of the work, that Orwell was forced to write a dementi shortly after the book's publication:

> My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised in Communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences. The scene in the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasise that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else, and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere. (CEJL, vol.4, p.502)

3 Charles Rolo, "Reader's Choice," Atlantic Monthly, July, 1949. See also: Editorial in Life, July 5th,1949.

4 V.S. Pritchett, New Statesman, June 17th, 1949. And see: "Power of Corruption", Times Literary Supplement, June 10th, 1949.

5 Isaac Deutscher, Heretics and Renegades (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p.35.

Orwell intends Nineteen Eighty-Four to be read as an attack on Stalinist totalitarianism. But, because he sets the novel's action in Oceania, clearly recognisable as shabby war-time Britain, he is also able to expose how the growing state bureaucracy of western capitalist countries can facilitate the introduction and entrenchment of repressive totalitarian systems. The Oceanic system is based on three hierarchical groups. Big Brother represents the supreme power of the state of Oceania. The Party demands absolute love and worship of Big Brother from all members and yet his existence is unknown. Everyone recognises his face which appears everywhere from telescreens to cigarette packages, but nobody, not even the highest ranking Inner Party member, has actually seen him. Orwell creates a structure in which the élite Party, claiming to be the highest state of consciousness, demands fanatical and mindless acceptance of Big Brother and all Party orthodoxy from its members. But paradoxically the proles who in the Orwellian tradition are the unconscious, exploited and repressed majority, are not expected to conform to any of the Party orthodoxy. According to a Party slogan: "Proles and animals are free." [6] The Party is a satiric representation of all orthodoxies and their adherents, both

[6] George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.61. To be referred to subsequently as 1984

political and religious. Orwell's position against orthodoxy is strong throughout his life; he regards it as a betrayal and denial of the individual self; orthodoxy demands mindless acceptance, which can lead to absolute power.

Winston Smith, the central character in Nineteen Eighty-Four, rebels against the Party orthodoxy - he commits the ultimate heresy when he writes in his diary "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER." (1984, p.18) He resembles Orwell's earlier fictional heroes in that he is an individual struggling against a system which oppresses him; but there the resemblance ends. Orwell's attitude towards his "hero" has changed. Unlike the knights of liberal democracy - Flory, Comstock and Bowling - Winston is presented to us as a character whom we should regard with distrust, even contempt. It is this very important change in Orwell's fiction that indicates his own attitude towards liberal democracy: while still wanting to believe in its ideal, Orwell feels that it will probably never be realised. At the same time Orwell expresses horror at the only apparent alternative - totalitarianism.

Within the rigidly hierarchical political structure of Oceania, Winston embodies the very nature of its "doublethink". In the religious analogy that is suggested by the hierarchical structure of Big Brotherdom, Winston appears as the doomed soul searching for redemption. His

relationships with O'Brien, an Inner Party member; with Julia, a fellow Outer Party member with whom he falls in love; and with the proles, reflect the schizophrenic society of Oceania: Winston regards O'Brien alternately as his "Saviour" and as a superior intelligent being, but at the same time feels that O'Brien is mad and will destroy him. Winston seeks his sexual redemption through Julia's sexuality; and yet he expresses contempt for her concepts of rebellion and even entertains violent and sadistic fantasies against her body. Winston regards the proles as the salvation for all humanity, but at close quarter these same people fill him with physical revulsion and disgust. In Animal Farm the dream of Old Major (believed by Clover and Boxer) is shown in sharp opposition to the pessimism of Benjamin and the brutal pragmatism of the pigs' quest for power. Similarly, Winston's idealistic vision of a revolution led by the "immortal" and "valiant" proles, conflicts with O'Brien's vision of a society built upon hatred and fear which will completely destroy the individual consciousness.

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Orwell presents us with a hero who from the beginning is shown to have very little control over the reality of his own experience. This indicates how little Winston is a mouthpiece of Orwell's own polemic. Most of what we know about Oceania in Nineteen Eighty-Four is through

Winston's eyes, but we are not meant to trust Winston's observations. Winston is never quite sure that what has happened to him actually took place. We know from the outset that he has almost no memory of his childhood, (his only recollections are through dreams); he is even unsure whether he is living in the year 1984 or not.

Winston's perceptions are suspiciously contradictory. He first recognises O'Brien's intelligence almost as one experiences a telepathic communication:

> Momentarily he caught O'Brien's eye. O'Brien had stood up. He had taken off his spectacles and was in the act of resettling them on his nose with his characteristic gesture. But there was a fraction of a second when their eyes met, and for as long as it took to happen Winston knew - yes, he knew! - that O'Brien was thinking the same thing as himself. An unmistakable message had passed. It was as though their two minds had opened and the thoughts were flowing from one into the other through their eyes. 'I am with you,' O'Brien seemed to be saying to him. 'I know precisely what you are feeling. I know all about your contempt, your hatred, your disgust. But don't worry, I am on your side.' And then the flash of intelligence was gone, and O'Brien's face was as inscrutable as everybody else's. (1984, pp.17-18)

Remembering this incident with O'Brien and writing of it in his diary, Winston is sure that it happened, and yet "very likely he had imagined everything." (1984, p.18) The untrustworthiness of Winston's interpretations of his life is further evidenced in his first act of rebellion. He does not even notice that he writes DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER over and over for half a page while he has been "helplessly musing." He evidently has little control. Winston is not

created to hold the moral voice of Orwell himself. This is a break from his earlier novels, in which the heroes are used to a varying degree as mouthpieces for the author's message. Orwell has indicated[7] that he intends to parody the gullible intellectual of any orthodoxy. Winston is particularly naive. One look from O'Brien's eye is enough to convince him that the suspected underground organisation against the Party is real:

> ... one thing was certain. The conspiracy he had dreamed of did exist, and he had reached the outer edges of it ... What was happening was only the working out of a process that had started years ago. The first step had been a secret, involutary thought, the second had been the opening of the diary. He had moved from thoughts to words, and now from words to actions. (1984, p.13)

Winston confuses dream and fantasy with reality; confuses a mystical "involuntary" thought with planned political action. Orwell's parody of the confused idealism of English Socialists begins to emerge.

Winston's desperate need to be saved from the contradictions of his existence leads him to embrace power, as a Christian gives himself over to the power of the Church. The symbol of Winston as a Christian heretic reinforces the relationship between power-structure and demand for absolute orthodoxy. When Winston, with Julia, visits O'Brien's apartment it is as the initiate; he confesses immediately: "We are the enemies of the Party. We disbelieve in the principles of Ingsoc. We are thought-criminals. We

7 CEJL, vol.4,p.460 and p.502.

are also adulterers. I tell you this because we want to put ourselves at your mercy". (1984, pp.138-139) It is the confession of a penitent, it is a request and a belief that O'Brien will be his Saviour. The drinking of the wine is followed by a "sort of catechism." (1984, p.140)

The entire scene, however, is clearly intended as parody. Winston and Julia fight against orthodoxy of the Party only to embrace unquestioningly a belief in the orthodoxy of the Brotherhood. They agree to receive orders which they are to obey without knowing why. The transfer from one orthodoxy to another is what Orwell had always feared[8] and he was never surprised when Roman Catholics became Fascist or Communist, or when Communist Party members became Fascist or Roman Catholic. Through exaggeration and reversal of a Christian response to a totalitarian vision Orwell displays an unquestionable irony: when O'Brien speaks of "murder, suicide, venereal disease, amputated limbs, and altered faces... a wave of admiration, almost of worship, flowed out from Winston towards O'Brien." (1984, pp.142-143) Winston is a victim of his own self-delusion. Everything that Winston and Julia agree to do in their sworn allegiance to the Brotherhood is seen by

[8] See Orwell's essay "Notes on Nationalism" written in 1945. CEJL, vol.3, pp.361-380.

the reader as immoral, anti-human behaviour.

Winston has committed himself to work for a future which he will never see. Ironically, he can only conceive of that future in terms of the past. When O'Brien suggests a toast "To the confusion of the Thought Police? To the death of Big Brother? to humanity? to the Future?" Winston replies: "To the past." (1984, p.144) Winston's real commitment is to the past. His flaws as a political analyst and activist are revealed when O'Brien asks him if there is any question that he would like answered. "Instead of anything directly concerned with O'Brien or the Brotherhood, there came into his mind a sort of composite picture of the dark bedroom where his mother had spent her last days, and the little room over Mr. Charrington's shop, and the glass paperweight, and the steel engraving in its rosewood frame ..." (1984, p.145) He retreats into womb-fantasies and nostalgia for the past, rather than creating an image or programme for the future.

Orwell disrupts the linear narrative of the work by introducing extracts from Goldstein's Book. The Book is a literary parody of Trotsky's The Revolution Betrayed [9] through which Orwell presents his attitude to a Marxist concept of power. Goldstein's Book appears attractive

[9] See Isaac Deutscher's essay "'1984' - The Mysticism of Cruelty" in Heretics and Renegades (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969).

but Marxist theory appears as too simplistic a version of history:

> All past oligarchies have fallen from power either because they ossified or because they grew soft. Either they became stupid and arrogant, failed to adjust themselves to changing circumstances, and were overthrown; or they became liberal and cowardly, made concessions when they should have used force, and once again were overthrown. They fell, that is to say, either through consciousness or through unconsciousness. (1984, p.171)

The mock profundity of the style suggests Orwell's scepticism of such truisms. Goldstein's Book also reveals Winston's dilemma: he believes that as a man more intelligent than most he understands how Oceania works, but not why- he cannot comprehend the nature of power. Goldstein's Book in a sense is a hoax; it does not tell the ultimate secret that Winston wanted to know: "He understood how; he did not understand why." (1984, p.173) It does not tell him anything that he did not already know; but the comfort and security that he derives from this is shown to be false and another way in which he deludes himself:

> ... after reading it he knew better than before that he was not mad. Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad. A yellow beam from the sinking sun slanted in through the window and fell across the pillow. He shut his eyes. The sun on his face and the girl's smooth body touching his own gave him a strong, sleepy confident feeling. He was safe, everything was alright. He fell asleep murmering 'Sanity is not statistical' with the feeling that this remark contained in it a profound wisdom. (1984, p.173)

Through a belief in a vague "truth" Winston has convinced himself that he is safe, that he is not insane. But his assumption of security and perhaps also sanity is to be revealed as illusory and false. Orwell uses images that conventionally mean warmth and life, but within this context are shown to be false symbols. The sun is a false sun for Winston because he wants to shut his eyes and believe in safety and sanity while the Thought-Police are watching and waiting to capture him. The sun's promise here, as in the "Golden Country" is not fulfilled, because it is a sinking sun. Orwell is suggesting that it is not possible to continue to believe in the survival of such traditional concepts as security and sanity within a totalitarian society.

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Orwell's polemic technique in undercutting his hero is to place Winston and O'Brien in opposition to one another as representatives of extreme ideological positions, and then show them as <u>both</u> untenable. After Winston's arrest he continues to respond to O'Brien in a contradictory way - hating and loving him, feeling intellectually inferior yet morally superior to him. Orwell concentrates on revealing how Winston's and O'Brien's minds work by setting up debates between them. O'Brien is the anti-materialist and political idealist who maintains that

"Nothing exists except through human consciousness", and that "Outside man there is nothing." (1984, p.213) Winston believes there is a world which exists outside the human mind -- a philosophically materialist position. O'Brien however, is an idealist who believes that reality and power depend on groups, not the individual. Winston, on the other hand, is the embodiment of individual objective struggle against a solipsistic totalitarian power-structure.

Orwell makes it clear that Winston and O'Brien represent the polarities of equally untenable intellectual positions. When O'Brien predicts a world founded on fear and hatred, "a boot stamping on a human face - for ever," (1984, p.215) Winston recoils:

> '... Somehow you will fail. Something will defeat you. Life will defeat you.'
> 'We control life, Winston, at all its levels. You are imagining that there is something called human nature which will be outraged by what we do and will turn against us. But we create human nature. Men are infinitely malleable. Or perhaps you have returned to your old idea that the proletarians or the slaves will arise and overthrow us. Put it out of your mind. They are helpless, like the animals... .'
> 'I don't care. In the end they will beat you. Sooner or later they will see you for what you are, and then they will tear you to pieces.'
> 'Do you see any evidence that that is happening? Or any reason why it should?'
> 'No, I believe it. I know that you will fail. There is something in the universe - I don't know, some spirit, some principle - that you will never overcome.'
> 'Do you believe in God, Winston?'
> 'No'
> 'Then what is it, this principle that will defeat us?'

> 'I don't know. The Spirit of Man.'
> 'And do you consider yourself a man?'
> 'Yes'.
> 'If you are a man, Winston,you are the last man. Your kind is extinct; we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are alone? You are outside history, you are non-existent.'
> (1984, pp.216-217)

O'Brien's arguments are solipsistic, but Winston's stance is empirically insufficient too. Winston, as the last representative of individualist man, is doomed. O'Brien tells him: "The first thing that you must realize is that power is collective. The individual only has power in so far as he ceases to be an individual ... Alone - free - the human being is always defeated." (1984, p.212)

The above passage is very important in revealing a fundamental change in Orwell's moral and political position. The 'Spirit of Man' to which Winston refers is the'human decency' to which Orwell, in company with his earlier fictional heroes, had clung in the struggle against oppression. For many years Orwell had stated repeatedly in fiction and essays that man would survive because of his innate 'decency'. Orwell has now come to the point where he no longer believes in the power of 'decency' and 'liberal democracy' as a means of changing the world. For, unlike his earlier novels, Nineteen Eighty-Four does not encourage our sympathy with the hero who personifies these ideals; instead it demands our suspicion and rejection of him. In the above debate Winston's arguments appear vague and feeble, and O'Brien has no difficulty in making

Winston ridiculous and a victim of his self-delusion.

What finally indicates Orwell's complete rejection of Winston's faith in the methods of liberal democracy is the end of the above scene, in which O'Brien asks: "'And you consider yourself morally superior to us, with our lies and our cruelty?' 'Yes, I consider myself superior.'" Immediately O'Brien plays back a tape of Winston joining the Brotherhood and promising"to lie, to steal, to forge, to murder, to encourage drug-taking and prostitution, to disseminate veneral diseases, to throw vitriol in a child's face." (1984, p.217) Stressing the extent of his moral degredation, Orwell describes Winston's naked, skeletal and filthy body in a way which many critics regard as obsessive. But these critics use Orwell's exposé of filth and squalor only to point to his personal obsessions and neuroses. It is a means by which critics can indulge irrelevant psychological fantasies which avoid looking at how, and for what purpose, the author presents these sordid details. Orwell's presentation of Winston leaves the reader in no doubt as to how far his own disgust for and revulsion from Winston extends.

Another relationship which confirms our suspicion of Winston is his affair with Julia. After meeting Julia Winston achieves sexual fulfillment. But Winston's attitude towards sexuality is perverse. He immediately links sexuality to political action, believing that the

power of sex could somehow subvert the control of the Party. Moreover, he is excited not only by the positive joys of sexual pleasure but also by its implied corruptive potential. When Julia tells him that she has slept with countless Party members: "His heart leapt ... Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with wild hope ... If he could have infected the whole lot of them with leprosy, or syphilis, how gladly he would have done so!" (1984, p.103) This wild reaction to his new sexuality clearly suggests Orwell's parody of Winston, and indicates further the schizoid tensions in Winston's character. His unbalanced attitude towards Julia and sexuality is prefigured when in their first intimate moments together, he tells Julia, "as a sort of love-offering" that "I hated the sight of you ... I wanted to rape you and then murder you afterwards. Two weeks ago I thought seriously of smashing your head in with a cobblestone." (1984, p.99)

Another similar fantasy of Winston's is reported when he is watching Big Brother on the telescreen during Hate Week:

> ... Winston succeeded in transferring his hatred from the face on the screen to the dark-haired girl behind him. Vivid, beautiful hallucinations flashed through his mind. He would flog her to death with a rubber truncheon. He would tie her naked to a stake and shoot her full of arrows like Saint Sebastian. He would ravish her and cut her throat at the moment of climax. Better than before, moreover, he

> realized why it was that he hated her. He hated her because she was young pretty and sexless, because he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so. (1984, p.16)

The reference to Christian fetishism is obvious, and the style recalls No Orchids for Miss Blandish.[10] What is important is the ambiguity of Winston's sexual desires: the result of a contradiction in himself - "He hated her because she was young and pretty and sexless, because he wanted to go to bed with her and would never do so." He is certainly not a normal sympathetic hero.

Orwell establishes a further irony of Winston's self-delusion. Winston believes that his sexual relationship with Julia will supply him the needed basis of emotional security for an individual and politically active rebellion against the Party. Winston treats sex as a political idea more than an intimate act. He is falsely convinced of his superiority to Julia, whom he regards patronisingly as " ... only a rebel from the waist-downwards." (1984, p.127) On the other hand the narrator states of Julia:

> In some ways she was far more acute than Winston, and far less susceptible to Party Propaganda. Once when he happened in some connexion to mention the war against Eurasia,

10 In his essay "Raffles and Miss Blandish" (CEJL, vol. 3, pp.212-224)) Orwell points out that the sadism and corruption so evident in popular American fiction, is related to the emergence of Fascism, power-worship and totalitarianism.

> she startled him by saying casually that in her opinion the war was not happening. The rocket bombs which fell daily on London were probably fired by the government of Oceania itself, 'just to keep the people frightened.' This was an idea that had literally never occured to him ... She also stirred a sort of envy in him by telling him that during the Two Minutes Hate her great difficulty was to avoid bursting out laughing. But she only questioned the teachings of the Party when they in some way touched upon her own life. Often she was ready to accept the official mythology, simply because the difference between truth and falsehood did not seem important to her. (1984, p.125)

Chiefly, Julia displays a practical grasp of the motives, techniques and the truth behind doublethink propaganda that is beyond Winston's reach. For instance, she realises the Oceanic government might easily be responsible for bombing its own cities "'just to keep the people frightened.' This was an idea that had literally never occurred to him." Julia can understand that the difference between truth and falsehood has disappeared in a society where the government has control of all communication and propaganda. This is the sort of practical realisation that is very hard for Winston to accept.

Winston's judgment of Julia is opposite to that of the narrator; Winston thinks that she has no understanding of the subtlety of the Party's control. He feels that "In a way the world-view of the Party imposed itself most successfully on people incapable of understanding it. They could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality ..." (1984, p.128) The narrative establishes

the justice of applying this critique to Winston himself. The irony of this is obvious. His affair with Julia can only remain a shallow imitation of love because of Winston's attitude. He is unable to see Julia's perceptiveness, her close touch with the reality of Oceania. Their relationships serves to demonstrate her pragmatism versus his ineffectual idealism. Orwell places himself at a satiric distance from the reader in order to develop his polemic upon principles far removed from those of Winston. Winston's idealism is shown to be false through his relationship with Julia. One important way in which Winston believes he acts is in reconciling sexuality with political action. But really Julia has no political significance for him; finally, he betrays her, as she betrays him.

The schizophrenic attitudes of Winston Smith, which have been revealed through his relationships with O'Brien and Julia, are reconfirmed for the reader by Orwell's depiction of his relation with the proles. When considering Orwell's polemic, it is especially important to question those critics who believe that Winston's belief that humanity would be saved by the proles is an accurate presentation of Orwell's belief. Because Winston is very evidently a parody of a left-wing English Socialist, we must be very careful in estimating how far he demonstrates

Orwell's point of view. He looks to the proles as the saviours of humanity, just as he looks to O'Brien and Julia to be his own saviour. And yet at the same time the proles are physically disgusting and repulsive to him.

We know about the proles only from the outside - from Winston or from the narrator. Often it is hard to distinguish between these two viewpoints. The proles are described as follows:

> ... the Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules. In reality very little was known about the proles. It was not necessary to know much. So long as they continued to work and breed, their other activities were without importance. Left to themselves like cattle turned loose upon the plains of Argentina, they had reverted to a style of life that appeared to be natural to them, a sort of ancestral pattern. They were born, they grew up in the gutters, they went to work at twelve, they passed through a brief blossoming-period of beauty and sexual desire, they married at twenty, they were middle-aged at thirty, they died, for the most part at sixty. Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and, above all, gambling, filled up the horizon of their minds. To keep them in control was not difficult ... (1984, p.60).

This is clearly not a straightforward quote from the Party manual. Rather it is narrative interpretation which closely coincides with Orwell's boyhood attitudes towards the working-class as "common" people who "seemed almost sub-human." (RWP, p.110) It is stated that "In reality

very little was known about the proles. It was not necessary to know very much." (1984, p.60). Orwell has chosen not to concentrate his novel on the eighty-five percent of the population whom Winston supposes are the victims of totalitarian control, but rather on the fifteen percent who are in positions of varying control. We know nothing of the proles' function in relation to the rest of Oceania; their "heavy physical work" is not detailed, and is evidently not important to the productivity of Oceania. Like the mythical production figures quoted endlessly on the telescreen, their productive work may not exist as far as we know. If this is true what in fact do they do? The "observer" gives us the following information:

> There was a vast amount of criminality in London, a whole world-within-a-world of thieves, bandits, prostitutes, drug-peddlers, and racketeers of every description; but since it all happened among the proles themselves, it was of no importance. In all questions of morals they were allowed to follow their ancestral code. The sexual puritanism of the Party was not imposed on them. Promiscuity went unpunished, divorce was permitted. For that matter, even religious worship would have been permitted if the proles had shown any signof needing or wanting it. They were beneath suspicion. As the Party slogan put it: 'Proles and animals are free.' (1984, p.61)

The narrator chooses to give us this information. But only Winston elaborates the characteristics of love, loyalty, and compassion that he observes solely in the proles. Winston's opinion of the proles veers between admiration

and contempt. By contrast the objective narrative of Nineteen Eighty-Four consistently focusses on the immoral, "criminal" and quiescent behaviour of the proles, rather than the commendable qualities that Winston finds. We are informed by the narrator that the proles have almost no function as far as the Party is concerned:

> All that was required of them was a primitive patriotism which could be appealed to whenever it was necessary to make them accept longer working-hours or shorter rations. (1984, p.60)

In his war-time essay "The Lion and the Unicorn" Orwell writes about the working-class in a similar vein: their "patriotism is profound, but unconscious." (CEJL, vol.2, p.65). The description of the proles is precisely a description of what was demanded of the working-class in England in 1940, and Nineteen Eighty-Four is clearly set, on one level, in war-time England.

It is worth looking closely at Winston's actual contacts with the proles in order to determine his attitude towards them. In trying to discover what life was like before the Revolution, Winston interrogates an old man in a pub in a ridiculously pompous way, reciting orthodox anti-capitalist attitudes. The narrative attitude in this scene is important. Orwell clearly satirizes Winston for ignoring the answers of the prole [11] which inconveniently contradict the Socialist idealism with which Winston is imbued. Orwell employs the techniques of reporting, interviewing and gathering precise information

[11] See p. 93a

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11 For a discussion of this point see Howard Fink's doctoral thesis "The Forbidden Dream: Art and Vision in the fictions of George Orwell". University of London, 1969.

that (in his earlier documentaries) he had used so successfully to engage the reader's trust in himself as narrator. In Nineteen Eighty-Four Winston employs these techniques in his relations with the proles. However, Orwell makes us understand that Winston clearly has no idea of what he is doing. Winston is once again, as with Julia, shown as deluded by his orthodox idealism, and he dismisses the old man's memories as he had dismissed Julia's rebellion. It is possible that Orwell's own loss of faith in the possible realisation of liberal democracy led him to feel contemptuous of the methods that he had used the realisation of his ideals.

The only other close-ups of Winston's contacts with the proles are both with women; an old prostitute and a drunken, vomiting old woman to whom Winston only responds with disgust and horror. In contrast to these, the idealised figure of the washerwoman, observed at a distance, is a static caricature, endlessly hanging out washing while singing an innane Party song. Yet Winston elevates her to a symbol of hope for the future. For him she "had no mind, she had only strong arms, a warm heart, and a fertile belly." (1984, p.175)

> The mystical reverence that he felt for her was somehow mixed up with the aspect of the pale cloudless sky, stretching away behind the chimney-pots into interminable distance ... The proles were immortal, you could not doubt it when you looked at that valiant figure in the yard. In the end their awakening would

> come. And until that happened, though it might be a thousand years, they would stay alive against all odds, like birds passing on from body to body the vitality which the Party did not share and could not kill... . Out of those mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come. (1984, pp.175-176)

The mock heroic tone of Winston's mystical perception of the washerwoman emphasises the delusion of his idealism, and is a parody of the romantic idealism that Orwell despised so much among English Socialists. Ultimately, Winston can only cope with the proles as abstractions. Immediately after his reveries of the washerwoman he is arrested and thrown into a cell with "drug-peddlers, thieves, bandits, blackmarketeers, drunks, prostitutes." (p.182) Winston ignores them and the old woman who takes a fancy to him. Among his fellow prisoners, he displays interest only in Ampleforth and Parsons, his colleagues at the Ministry of Truth. The reconciliation of Winston's dual feelings of disgust and reverence for the proles is achieved by keeping them distanced; although he believes that in the future they will become conscious beings and save humanity, for the time being, while they are unconscious, he can only ignore them.

It has become clear that Winston Smith in no way represents Orwell's moral or political viewpoint. Winston's belief that the hope for the future lies with the proles is not Orwell's position. What is Orwell's position in Nineteen Eighty-Four? He has always been

aware that he embodies all the paradoxes of the middle-class intellectual. He is a man who believes in individualism and yet at the same time recognises the end of that age. His early suspicion of orthodoxy grows into a belief that group action leads to manipulation and oppression. He believes that the Communist Revolution in Russia betrayed the original aims of Socialism. Orwell passionately concerns himself with broadcasting the "truth" through his writings, and yet is involved directly in the propaganda effort of the BBC. Orwell is aware that language and the huge propaganda machinery of governments distort and often reverse the truth. He believes that all art is propaganda and that an artist or critic has to be politically committed, and yet believes that commitment to a political orthodoxy could destroy art. While writing Road to Wigan Pier, conscious of his paradoxical position, Orwell wrote: "in order to defend Socialism it is necessary to start by attacking it." (RWP, p.151) In Nineteen Eighty-Four he is clearly continuing this attack.

To attack in order to defend is within the tradition of satire, but it is Orwell's artistic development of the satire which leads to a confused response in the reader. Given his life which is itself a demonstration of so many paradoxes, it is perhaps not surprising to discover that Orwell's final work is dependent upon an intricate network of paradox, ambiguity and contradiction.

In Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell is attacking Soviet Russia but he is also attacking English Socialism (Ingsoc). The anti-hero, Winston Smith, has faith in the working-class (a Socialist ideal), but he is held in contempt by Orwell. Orwell is trying to expose and satirize Socialist idealism, but he does not encourage hope for any kind of Socialist future; instead he risks being accused of being anti-working-class and anti-humanitarian. He risks this because in order to convince the reader of the objective truth of his warnings he has employed all his earlier successful polemic devices for encouraging the reader's confidence in what he is telling them - reportage, attention to detail, documentary, text-book-like authority, information which invites a moral response. But in Nineteen Eighty-Four these devices are intended to work on a dual basis: to encourage our trust of Orwell the naive observer/narrator, but more importantly to actively engage our distrust of Winston Smith and the Party. But perhaps the reversal is often too subtle and instead what happens is that readers tend to trust Winston, and see him as the tragic hero, instead of the intellectual who is being satirized as a dangerous man who mindlessly grasps one orthodoxy after another, and cannot distinguish between idealism and power.

It is the artistic technique of making the satire in Nineteen Eighty-Four dependent upon so many reversals, ambiguities, paradoxes and contradictions, that causes

the reader to feel lost. Oceanic society is based upon a system of "doublethink", which Orwell defines as "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them." (1984, p.171) The theme of contradiction touches every aspect of life in Oceania: idealism and pessimism, love and hate, the past and the future, fact and fiction, madness and sanity, intelligence and stupidity. The "doublethink" contradictions of power politics are summarized in orthodox Oceanic ideology as a list of reversals:

> War is peace
>
> Freedom is slavery
>
> Ignorance is strength
>
> (1984, p.7)

These reversals, extending directly from the reversals which occur in Animal Farm, are the reflections of Orwell's view of the moral and political dilemmas of contemporary society: the fragility of liberal democratic ideals when confronted by the demands of totalitarian power.

If the satiric art of Nineteen Eighty-Four is not successful then neither is the polemic (in Orwell's terms) because the book is misleading, and has in fact been so often misinterpreted. But on the other hand the work has been successful as polemic in that it develops the instinctive fears of of the world in which he lived. The important fact emerges that Orwell devotes the greater part of

Nineteen Eighty-Four to detailing the success of the Party's methods. We are overwhelmed with narrative evidence of the undiminishing success of that Party in retaining total control. The polemic of Nineteen Eighty-Four demonstrates satirically how pointless Winston's efforts are. Isaac Deutscher thought that Orwell displayed paronoic traits, even a persecution complex, but in view of popular reaction to the book, it becomes clear that in Nineteen Eighty-Four Orwell was articulating a social rather than a purely personal fear. It is necessary for Orwell to repudiate and destroy Winston Smith in order to finally demonstrate how Socialist idealism cannot compete with the new totalitarian power-structures. Perhaps Orwell is repudiating the idealistic hopes that he himself held for the possibility of a democratic Socialist future. But neither can he accept the alternate world of O'Brien and the Party. Orwell's dilemma remains unresolved.

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