George Orwell
Into the Twenty-first Century

Edited by
Thomas Cushman and John Rodden

Paradigm Publishers
Boulder • London
2004

39. Orwell, *CEJL*, 2:56.

40. Volume 4 of the *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* reprints many of Orwell's best-known and most-admired pieces from 1945 to 1950, including "The Prevention of Literature," "Politics and the English Language," "James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution" (as well as a later piece on Burnham), "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver's Travels*," "How the Poor Die," "Lear, Tolstoy, and the Fool," "Writers and Leviathan," "George Gissing," and "Reflections on Gandhi."

41. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:6.

42. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:17.

43. Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

44. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:116.

45. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:22.

46. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:24, 4:29.

47. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:32.

48. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:220

49. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:290.

50. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:463.

51. Rees, *George Orwell*, 111.

52. Hugh Kenner, "The Politics of the Plain Style" (1984), in *Mazes: Essays* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989), 261–69.

53. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:41.

54. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:51.

55. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:124, 4:125.

56. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:63; see also 4:158.

57. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:398; see also 4:409.

58. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:66; see also 4:135.

59. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:240.

60. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:410.

61. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:267.

62. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:137.

63. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:360.

64. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:399–400.

65. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:248–49.

66. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:222.

67. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:247.

68. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:350.

69. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:276.

70. Orwell, *CEJL*, 1:3.

71. Orwell, *CEJL*, 4:253.

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Prescience and Resilience in George Orwell's Political Aesthetics

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This essay attempts to work through Orwell's writing to delineate some recent developments in left-wing theory and to open out some areas that need attention. The argument will not work pragmatically within politics or sociology but with the political implications of art and knowledge, and it deals largely with rhetorical strategies.

We are all aware of the European context for the way that Orwell's writings rehearse before the event the left-wing agendas of the past fifty years. Throughout the early to mid-1930s, he was concerned with the issue of proletarian art and its production and consumption, just as this preoccupied thinkers in the 1950s to 1960s. He became obsessed with the totalitarian tendencies in authority around the end of the 1930s and developed many of the arguments about overdetermination that are also found in the work of his contemporaries Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser writing into the 1970s. Unlike them, he moved on in the early 1940s to investigate ways of challenging authority from within, dispelling any hope for the effectiveness of anarchy, ideas that we find in the work of the later Michel Foucault or of Ernesto Leclau and Chantal Mouffe in the 1980s. And in his last works, Orwell despaired about the cynicism and passivity of political relativism in an early critique of the effects of ahistorical postmodernism so rife in the early 1990s.[1]

Orwell even leaves clues about the problems that will arise about global culture and what I have elsewhere termed the impact of Global State Apparatuses (GSAs) on the nation-state structure of liberal social contract aesthetics.[2] But although this is an important issue, it is more difficult and more helpful in the long term to look instead at what his writing is contributing to specific, materially located, political-aesthetic concepts today. Orwell's thinking doesn't just stop with postmodernism. Concurrent with his entire trajectory of political thinking that offers such an incisive critique of both neo-Marxism and hyperliberalism, he's working out practical strategies, strategies embedded in his work as a craftsperson with words.

I would like to use Orwell's writing to delineate current thinking among radical and left-wing groups concerned to develop a wider access to political, cultural, social, and scientific power. Although I know comparatively little about left-wing

politics on a national or broadsheet scale in the United States, many of the groups whose work is drawn upon in this essay are based in the United States, Canada, and Latin America. They are working at the coal-face of words and arguments where you have work before going out into the street and onto the page: they are hammering out a vocabulary. Hence this analysis may well contribute to the debates raised by others in this volume, but it will come from a slightly different location. Yes, Orwell explores the impossibility of proletarian literature and proletarian power, the overdetermination of bourgeois art and liberal politics, but he doesn't leave it at that. He moves on through to a critique that bears all the hallmarks of the current philosophical interest in standpoint epistemology (the sophisticated kind), situated knowledge, the political theory of deliberative democracy, and what I term situated textuality.[3]

What all of these moves have in common is a radical critique of the three primary philosophical issues underlying the humanism of the liberal social contract from the late seventeenth century. First, the autonomous individual who is also universal man: the individual with an essential self predicated on notions of the universal/relative split. Second, rationalism: the process of arguing as quest, working in a decreasing tree structure, lopping off extraneous branches as one gets closer to the "end," that so often becomes reductive. Third, the face-off between subjective and objective knowledge: the idea that what we know is either objectively "true" for all people or subjectively relativist. The implications of these elements for verbal craft are widespread but center on the fact that within this system language is considered inadequate to the communication of reality and therefore we have to transcend it: the artist is our hero continually risking the inadequacies of communication out on the rim of reality (4:87).

Depending on their discipline, the recent moves produce critiques of the modes of production and consumption in politics, science, and sociology, but in the category of aesthetics the analysis is only thinly developed. Political philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabib, or Nira Yuval Davis have contributed substantially to a re-thinking of the need for differentiated public spaces within which people who do not normally get access to making an impact on political power can not only learn how to do so but also begin to do so.[4] People interested in the social study of science such as Hilary Rose[5] or Sandra Harding[6] have, with a number of others, begun to draw a fascinating picture of post-Einsteinian science, what scientific knowledge might look like if we paid acute attention to the involvement of the observer in the experiment: asking, What would African science look like? What would feminist science look like? What would Native American science look like? Writers such as Doreen Massey,[7] working on human geography and sociology, or Lorraine Code,[8] working on radical philosophy, have asked about differentiated concepts of logic, time, and space that require us to jettison the concepts of universal/relativist as tied to a particular ideology that prevents attention to current democratic needs. This kind of thinking offers a radical and sound challenge to liberal social contract humanism

However, having produced critiques of the modes of production and consumption in their different disciplines, each gestures toward material practice. For example, those interested in standpoint theory or situated knowledge in the sciences gesture to the arts[9] and deliberative democratic political theory gestures on and off to "story" or "rhetoric."[10] But in effect none of them seem to grasp what Orwell

grasped wholly: that the "arts," that "story," is just as liable to be compromised in the liberal social contract as, for example, scientific discourse or political debate. There is a sense that because we all tell stories we all know how they work. So I offer one proviso: none of these areas of politics, science, or knowledge can exist without communication, and what is desperately needed for advance in any of the areas under consideration is an idea of a differentiated public voice[11] or a situated textuality. What this essay proceeds to explore is how Orwell is clear about the limitations of art and has much to contribute to the area of situated textuality, which is what I have termed the kind of art that all of these investigations are calling upon, and upon the modes of production and consumption that make it possible or impossible.

POLITICS AND "ART"

Throughout the late 1930s Orwell is obsessed with countering the claims that proletarian literature can exist in a bourgeois state structure. He notes in a review of a book by Phillip Henderson that "To the Communist, good literature means 'proletarian literature.' (Mr Henderson is careful to explain, however, that this does not mean literature written by proletarians; which is just as well, because there isn't any)" (1:289). To his working-class friend Jack Common Orwell writes, "As to the great proletarian novel, I really don't see how it's to come into existence," and continues by citing the different languages people use and laying down language change as the foundation for any change in literary aesthetic (1:348). But even Common only partially manages to write in a "proletarian" manner: "much more than most writers of this kind he preserves his proletarian viewpoint" (1:371). In a slightly later 1940 essay on Dickens, Orwell notes that "If you look for the working classes in fiction, and especially English fiction, all you find is a hole" (1:455). Novelists mostly show "class" by how they treat women, for example if they are working class, women are, he notes, considered "fair game" as sexual objects (1:479).

After his experiences in Spain, Orwell turns squarely to the issue of the influence of politics on art, saying that in a time of revolution, specifically a time of conflict between fascism and socialism, all art is propagandic but not all propaganda is art (1.492). But there is the problem that party politics brings to the surface, "the struggle that always goes on between the individual and the community" (2:161). In a liberal state we have the illusion that we are autonomous, and in literature "we instinctively take the autonomous individual for granted" (2:161), asking them to be true to their feelings, to be sincere. But under totalitarian regimes (fascist or communist) the individual is forbidden to think some things and required to think others, because totalitarian states work through an all-pervading ideology. As Althusser was to delineate two decades later, Orwell describes this complete ideology as one trying "to govern your emotional life as well as setting up a code of conduct. And as far as possible it isolates you from the outside world, it shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison" (2:162). Totalitarian ideology is different from earlier structures of ideology because it sets up dogmas, or what the new Marxism of the 1960s called representations,[12] only to change them according to the needs of "power politics":

(2:163). This is all very well, but for Orwell the issue is that socialism, in getting rid of the economic autonomy of the individual, may well end up getting rid of the creative autonomy of the individual, in effect depriving them of liberal agency and ending up like totalitarianism. And in this early part of the Second World War, Orwell could not imagine any agency that was not liberal.

The conscious shaping of representation by the state is mimicked and exacerbated by advertising, and prior to the coming into being of totalitarian states, advertising is an index of the contradictory interchange between individuals and structures of power. For example, Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* layers advertising over poetry as a form of personal control over his world. Both Marx and Freud worked on the assumption that privileged people, the citizens of nation-states, would always be able to intersect with power, while the marginalized or excluded were subjected to the whims of those with "human rights." With the consolidation of large international power structures, strategies for representation become integrated into nation-state strategies for economic power, displaying on a public level contradictions that have to be repressed by citizens because they can no longer do anything about them. Intimations of this growing sense of powerlessness in face of representation are found in Orwell's complaint that by 1944 advertisements had begun to reappear on the streets, conveying offensive social messages that implied, for example, that most people had "a secret fantasy life" (3:216) in which they like to imagine they are part of the upper classes even though they know they can't be. What is more telling is that these ads are replacing "ministry" announcements, calling attention to the cohabitation between the state and big business. Any conscious shaping of representation becomes too big for the individual, and the relation between the state and those with political rights changes. If a totalitarian state emerges, like the Leviathan predicted by Hobbes it overdetermines the representations allowed to people who count as citizens so that they, too, become subjected, become subjects.

In a system like this the concept of "rights" disappears—one is lucky to have a representation. But in the not-yet totalitarian state of the 1940s, the fact that what privileged people call human rights are in effect "special rights" that others do not possess is still an accessible concept.[13] "Rights" indicates the ability to change the representations offered by the state for the way one lives. For example, the fact that gay and lesbian individuals have been able to begin to legitimate a homosexual way of life indicates not that they should have special rights because they are different, but that they are able to make a recognized claim on general human rights. Others, such as those living in poverty, have not been successful in making this claim and are still usually "dealt with" by being apportioned so-called special rights. The poor also find it exceptionally difficult to change the representations of them on offer by the state, for example that they are usually shiftless and irresponsible.[14]

Orwell's insight into just who can and cannot affect representations, incidentally sheds light on the concept of hegemony popularized by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau[15] by offering one explanation for the activity of participation within strong ideological power structures that the early Foucault called "discursive." The only way that people will be able to affect the ideology of a neoliberal state structure that has such strong control over representation is if they speak the language of that state. They need to use its accepted rhetorical strategies, in other

words those of the bourgeois liberal, and enter the discursive realm in which representations are contested and confirmed.[16] By definition, working-class people are alienated or marginalized by the use of bourgeois strategies, hence the plethora of special interest groups that can exclude the issue of class: gender, sexuality, ethnicity, ability. Class would complicate things, and it does appear to continue to do so.

Today we rarely use the word "bourgeois," which used to be a relatively unembarrassed critical term for a defensively privileged middle class. The culture and way of life indicated by the term is now so widespread in Western nations that it is more usually called the liberal social contract. Orwell frequently notes the convergence in class aspirations especially through the mass media and the clothes people wear (1:340, 2:97, 3:44). The bourgeois way of life is a general aspiration for many people, largely driven by the condition of women because the key signifier of the bourgeois household is the leisured woman, the woman who does not have to do housework, around whom the service society is built. Orwell acknowledges this problem early in his writing, noting that without mechanical aids to housework, equality for women is neither possible nor imaginable (1:455). Later, shortly after his wife left her job to work in the home looking after their adopted son, he takes off in an "As I Please" article on housework as "uncreative and life-wasting" (3:376), for which he can find only three solutions: we simplify our lives, or we assume that "it is entirely natural for the average woman to be a broken-down drudge at the age of thirty," or we rationalize the interior of our houses with the intelligence we have spent on transport systems (3:376). He suggests that we either encourage communal dishwashing services or eat out of paper cartons, but he admits that the problem is that some people will have to become full-time dishwashers, something he would have recognized as problematic and unpleasing, having worked as a dishwasher himself.[17]

We don't use the word "bourgeois" precisely because it is a class signifier that underlines, despite general aspiration, the inequality of those who serve. Yet of course this is partly an illusion that has to do with ignoring the rest of the world. Just as Orwell pointed out consistently that the bettered condition of the working class from pre-1914 to post-1945 was built on the continued exploitation of imperial holdings, so the bettered condition of women and men in the West from pre-1950 to today has been built on the continued exploitation by global economics and transnational corporations of less-industrial nations. The signal difference between the category "woman" and that of "working class" is that the latter is by definition peripheral to economic power, whereas some women are economically privileged and therefore in a position to prosecute advance and change available representations. Trade unions were supposed to do this for the working class, but they have been systematically repressed in a manner that may be a warning to women despite the categorical differences (for example, Iran or Afghanistan when they pulled back from "westernization").

Bourgeois Art

In the nation-state structure of early twentieth-century England, and for the preceding two hundred and fifty years, the only individuals with the leisure and money to be able to make "art" or "literature" were those who were also classified

as "citizens" within the liberal social contract.[18] This very small proportion of the population, rising to around 15 percent by the end of the nineteenth century, consisted of private people, working largely in isolation from each other according to the commentators on art and dealing with truths and feelings unique to the autonomous individual. These people produced bourgeois art, or art within nation-state ideology. They were part of the privileged group that ruled the nation, and they acted as the licensed transgressors of the representations allowed to citizens within the state. However, because they were so close to centers of power, their transgressions, although valuable in themselves, usually fell well within the boundaries of acceptability.[19] As Orwell explained, to be recognized as an artist a person had to write in this way, and increasingly since education became more accessible in the 1890s, people from other classes—he suggests D. H. Lawrence—had learned to produce bourgeois literature (2:55ff). As he notes in "Why I Joined the Independent Labour Party" (1938), "The time is coming . . . when every writer will have the choice of being silenced altogether or of producing the dope that a privileged minority demands" (1:343).

Orwell articulates this analysis in detailed commentary from 1936 to 1940, culminating in the statement from the interview "The Proletarian Writer" (1940): "I don't believe the proletariat can create an independent literature while they are not the dominant class. I believe that their literature is and must be bourgeois literature with a slightly different slant" (2:54). He also recognizes that with the franchises of 1918 and 1928 people in England were claiming rights not only to political power via representative democracy but also to cultural power. However, the way that many of them speak cannot be "heard," and what they might speak about cannot yet be "said" because there has been no previous articulation and others cannot recognize the words.[20] Orwell notes that a number of writers have managed to get into print details about the lives of the working class, and he mentions Robert Tressel's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist* as a key text (2:56). But he goes on to say that speaking about the kitchen sink smelling "won't last as long as the siege of Troy" (2:58). Hence working-class writers, and others trying to write outside "bourgeois art," will have to focus more on language and form to convey the alterity of their way of life and thinking.

But, Orwell also has much to say about morally responsible bourgeois writing, as well as about writing from those who have never had access to cultural power who pose a different set of issues to the question of proletarian power. In "Why I Write," an influential if conservative essay, he lays out the terms of moral responsibility for the autonomous individual (bourgeois) writer, who uses rational prose and striving for objective truth to reality. He notes that writers of this kind are often selfish, "gifted, wilful people who are determined to live their lives to the end" (1:25). They are interested in the "perception of beauty in the external world, or . . . in words and their right arrangement" (1:25), and have a desire to "see things as they are" and to push the world in "a certain direction" (1:28).

Bourgeois artists are selfish because they have to resist ideological pressure, but their isolation leaves them less able to offer alternatives (see also 2:162). They are interested in beauty and words in the right order precisely because "beauty" is a philosophical concept that only works within defined parameters; words have to be in the "right" order because we usually don't recognize something as beautiful until we have been taught to recognize it as such. These artists see things "as they are," but if the only way of seeing is rational the art becomes blinkered and narrow.

And Orwell offers elsewhere a critique of the wish to push the world in a "certain" direction when he deconstructs "certainty" as working on self-evident bases, taking things for granted with a Marxian false consciousness that argues for the absolute truth of something that it has itself defined.

Yet Orwell also has the imagination to recognize that bourgeois art and liberal humanism is only one way of doing things. If the artist in the social contract nation-state is a subject writing against or over their subjectivity, discursively shifting representations that tie people down but/and able to do so only to the extent that they are complicit in the hegemony, then the working-class writer or any newly enfranchised artist has no subjective representations to shift, only the shadows of other people's representations that they used to fill. What we have here is an analysis that is sprung from the implications of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century franchises: people throughout England suddenly gained access (technically) to political power but also to something many were aware aware of, access to cultural power.[21] What did that mean? Among other things it means access to cultural power that is controlled by those controlling the means of production and consumption, and for Orwell as a writer in the first half of the twentieth century this means printing (nonelectronic) and publishing.

Orwell, Printing, and the Media

Orwell was fascinated by the print media and by conditions of publishing. He writes extensively about issues of distribution for magazines and pamphlets (3:326), of the impact of the cost of novels, and the need for libraries, borrowers, and bookshops (3:38–39, 2:43). The essays are filled with discussions of the role of the reader and consumer of printed material, their education, the coteries they form, what they can afford to pay for, and what they want to read. Presciently commenting on the argues of the following half century dealing with state support for the arts, Orwell argues the pros and cons of patronage, whether ideologically controlled (mainly via rich sponsors) (3:265, 4:82, 4:237), commercially controlled (by market forces) (3:265), or institutionally controlled (by government) (4:82, 4:237). Often with his own writing in focus, he talks about the network of rewards and favors, the old-boy network of reviewers and editors that silently puts pressure on the writer. There is explicit and perceptive analysis of big business, of the way the printing industry and the publishers intersect with and respond to advertising and finance. And he is unusually honest about the pragmatics of writing; echoing Virginia Woolf's comments on the need for a room of one's own, he adds that it must be a warm room at that and with no interruptions (4:237)—hence within the capitalist nation-state that he lives, writing can only be accessible to the middle class.

Well before Marshall McLuhan and coincident with Herald Innis, Orwell was elaborating on print as the capitalist medium par excellence that requires all the money for an investment up front before you know if you can sell the product. He also had the wit to understand that printing and publishing was the most significant factor aiding and abetting the liberal social contract state and that it had done so since the Renaissance (4:88). It is, like the contract, based on the autonomous individual of the "author" (1:576; see also his comments on the value of an authorial "name," 2:38, 3:170), concerned to employ rational devices in its emphasis on

the reality effect of realism as well as fantasy (3:257, 4:92), and aiming at objectivity or the production of the knowledge needed to maintain the representations of ideology. Because capitalism is central to his analysis, he notes that it has a similar effect on film and radio. He talks frequently and at length of the problem of commercial control (2:381) and of the monopoly over these modes of production (1:105–6, 4:82). But at the same time, just as he recognizes a moral responsibility for the bourgeois artist (as above), he recognizes the positive impact of printing and publishing (2:326) and the positive potential for film and radio to offer the media that will make alternative verbal art possible in the future (2:24, 3:38–39).

GENRES OF WRITING

Orwell's essays carry out this development of an analysis of production and consumption, what became fifteen years later "histoire du livre" and is now big business in arts departments, in terms of an exploration of the novel, of folk literature and of verse, these genres separating more and more into what he calls "prose" and what he calls "poetry."

Orwell's primary study of the novel is found in "Inside the Whale," for understanding the novel is being inside the whale. The large generic structures of post-Renaissance realism produce a genre that is too ideologically bound, too determined, too predictable, finally too open to ideological power (1:568); and it is interesting that all Orwell's fictional work is a series of generic experiments with the realistic novel. Against his late 1930s' conviction that totalitarian power is inevitable he argues, "The autonomous individual is going to be stamped out of existence" and with this destruction of liberalism goes writing, for "*as a writer* he [the creative writer] is a liberal": "The literature of liberalism is coming to an end and the literature of totalitarianism has not yet appeared and is barely imaginable" (1:576). Yet the point of this essay is not only to reiterate his thoughts on bourgeois liberalism but also to suggest that there is a choice in how one might respond to the dilemma. On the one hand he places Henry Miller, who although a good stylist simply accepts that he will live "inside the whale," cosily and passively, accepting the womb of totalitarian politics. This is the idea that we are all made up of other people's words (Beckett,[22] Barthes[23]) lying at the heart of the ahistorical aesthetic, which Orwell later accurately describes as the coming political condition for Anglo-European cultures (3:437, 4:89, 4:469–70). On the other hand he places James Joyce, who comes to stand for an alternative response to liberal aesthetics because he has dared to write something that has never been written before: "Here is a whole world of stuff you have lived with since childhood, stuff which you supposed to be of its nature incommunicable, and somebody has managed to communicate it. The effect is to break down, at any rate momentarily, the solitude in which the human being lives" (1:543). Literature is a liberal concept, only valuable within its own framework, and if you remove the framework you remove the value. Joyce's ability is to build a world "outside space and time," which is necessary if one is not to be trapped back into either the liberal bourgeois or the totalitarian. At the same time both of these writers are contrasted to the mechanistic and formulaic propaganda novels that Orwell fears will result from too much toeing of the party line. Hence the essay posits three positions: the liberal artist such as Henry Miller (who comes to represent the passive condition of the [postmodern] artist) (4:136), the alternative in James Joyce, and formulaic propaganda (see also his comments on mechanization and the formulaic structure of books [4:92ff]).

The essays also offer an acute analysis of "folk literature." The comments in "Boy's Weeklies" (1:105–6) criticize both the weeklies and women's magazines for being too ideologically bound because they are too commercial. In a later "As I Please" column he notes that women's magazines may argue the moral superiority of the poor but are, in fact, a deadly form of "escapism," "a sublimation of the class struggle" (3:230–21). In contrast are the smaller, more specifically targeted periodicals, such as *Exchange and Mart* (1:106), which, because they exist only for a specific community, are closer to their readers and reflect their needs and interests. Donald McGill's postcards may be subversively vulgar but they are founded on the institution of marriage (2:193). Kipling's books may be a challenge of "good-bad" writing, but they are basically popular because they are full of platitudes (2:229). But there is a different impulse behind the ballads, work songs, war songs, broadsheets (2:58), and jokes (see also 3:327–29) of the more localized press with smaller circulation. What Orwell's comments outline is that these forms are either un-self-consciously compromised by ideology or self-consciously and commercially so. The analysis distinguishes between folk literature and popular culture, the former being nonironic and the latter ironic, and in this it explains why popular culture fits so neatly into postmodernism while folk literature is anathema.

Neither analysis, of the novel or of folk/popular literature, helps Orwell's thinking as much as his growing understanding of verse and poetry. At first he is not that interested in what verse has to offer, which is not surprising when you look at his fairly banal Georgian efforts from the 1930s (1:148, 1933). In my opinion he would probably have made a good concrete poet, someone who still believes in the print medium but wants to radically rearrange it, like Sterne, Thackeray, Ford Madox Ford before him, and bpNichol and countless text-messagers after. But working at the BBC from 1941 to 1943, often on productions with poets and dealing first-hand with the oral medium of radio,[24] he seems to come to a completely different idea of what poetry does with words, which gives him a tool for understanding what could be different from the bourgeois art typified by realistic prose.

POETRY AND VERSE

In "The Prevention of Literature" poetry is, importantly, despised by the authorities (4:90). Therefore, in a classic standpoint argument, it is not as open to their control. The essay argues that poetry is about form rather than content, which is a crude way of saying that it works on grammar and syntax rather than genre, on the taken for granted detail of the text (see also his despairing comments that much work on language comes from a "half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes" [4:156]) rather than on the larger more commercially recognizable aspects that often define where a book is placed on a shelf. And possibly most significantly, he argues that poetry is "composed cooperatively by groups of people" (4:90).

Drawing from a series of essays from the middle of the 1940s, a sophisticated attempt to articulate the conditions of an alternative verbal practice begins to

emerge. If we look first at what precisely we do when we work on words in "poetry": first, we invent new words, to deal with the parts of our experience that are practically unnameable to language (2:17); second we move beyond the chess board world of rationalism and direct reference, to dreams, that disordered stream of nameless things, so nameless they could be thoughts or feelings or images (2:18); and third, we use demotic speech rather than stilted bookish language in an upper-class accent, speech with spoken and oral rhythms and rules (3:163) (here there is an implication that the written is tied too much to print and the ideological, whereas the spoken is not and so there is more scope for difference).

To focus even further on these elements Orwell specifically sets prose up against poetics (3:164). He comments, "Prose literature as we know it is the product of rationalism, of the Protestant centuries, of the autonomous individual" (4:92). Prose writing is filled with dead metaphors, false verbal limbs, pretentious diction, and meaningless words (4:156). But through poetics these become "new words," appropriate syntax and grammar, demotic speech, and concrete reference (4:156). Poetry and poetics are there to make us attend to these elements, and here Orwell turns to Shakespeare, whose writing is "chaotic, detailed, discursive" and interested in "the actual process of life" (4:338). Orwell is insistent on *detail* being at the heart of this new kind of writing. A sample of his own early writing demonstrates the hunger: "He pushed the door open and entered the room. A yellow beam of sunlight, filtering through the muslin curtains, slanted on to the table, where a matchbox, half open, lay beside the inkpot" (1:24). The consistent love of detail is found in his early appreciation for the work of James Joyce (1:546) or his praise for the "intimate day-to-day pictures" of the Spanish revolution in *Red Spanish Notebook* by Mary Low and Juan Brear (1:321).

THE NEW POLITICS AND THE NEW "ART"

In view of the collective work that Orwell suggests, his insistence that the new writing has to be from an individual's experience can appear as a direct contradiction. The essay I am writing is not concerned to speak about the concurrent political developments in Orwell's thinking at this time. But as a direct result of the Dunkirk evacuation and the massive response by the British populace, he developed the idea of a socialism that is neither totalitarian nor capitalist, in which the individual loses economic freedom but not intellectual freedom (2:164), and reconceived the notion of the "individual." The essay "The Lion and the Unicorn" talks about the way war brings home to the individual that he is not altogether an individual (2:114). The apparent contrast between the collective action of writing and the importance of individual experience, which in the early work is called a contradiction between the individual and the community in liberal bourgeois culture (2:61), is in this new kind of socialist culture a necessity: the individual is necessarily part of a group of people—they are necessarily situated with respect to one another (3:160).

Hence the increasing praise for the "truthfulness" and "sincerity" of autobiographical elements in otherwise unremarkable writing. He praises "Good Bad Books" for "their lack of shame in writing autobiography" (4:39), reclaims Herbert Read as "memorable" when he draws on experience and uses "autobiographical writings" (4:73), rescues Leonard Merrick when he describes *"his own* adventures in Paris" (4:74), and offers cautious praise for Henry Miller's "slab of unpretentious autobiography" (4:87) in *The Cosmological Eye*—or, as in "The Prevention of Literature," he states that "literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience" (4:87), using the underlying autobiographical impulse that he notes in himself in "Why I Write" (1946) as a sort of "continuous 'story' about myself" (1:24). This focus on autography, that English studies has seen for the past twenty years in its reclamation of the autobiographical genre, of the journal, diary, and letter, is a key marker of a new political consciousness in aesthetics.

If this is what it is to work differently with words, there is still the issue of how we do it. Orwell's essays suggest that we write in this way in order to communicate, to speak to others about things not understood between people, to show meaning in an unmistakable form and to share its value (2:24). In effect it doesn't have value beforehand because there was no communication in which to recognize it. This is a version of the question generated by the gesture to the arts by situated knowledge and deliberative democracy: if we do not understand how to communicate the differentiated voice/space/time/logic, there can be no material basis for the development of the philosophy into action. For example, how can you have effective knowledge without communication of knowledge? Second, we work on words in a collective: words have to be recognized by others as worth being used to name; nameless feelings that come into recognition have to be those that some human beings have in common (2:25), and they have to collectively decide on the appropriateness of the sound, physical form, and gesture they take on. Words have to work across class, and "Language ought to be the joint creation of poets and manual workers" (3:46; see also the comments on the "best" nonsense poetry being produced "by communities rather than by individuals" [4:68]).

Third, this different kind of work with words may occur in a number of ways, but it has to be primarily through education (3:295). This conclusion is one reached by any serious thinker interested in social change from Plato to Erasmus, and like them Orwell links education to equality and democracy (3:46–47). Education is necessary to understand the verbal skills necessary for the new collective individual to use, in other words education is needed to understand poetic action, to acquire what Orwell calls "taste" (2:380). In contrast to Herbert Read, who believes that beauty is "absolute," Orwell counters that "one's aesthetic judgement is only fully valid between fairly well-defined dates" (4:72). "Taste" is socially learned and all people can be educated past "bad" taste in order to participate in culture (2:380). This kind of education can be learned not only at school but also through other media, and he claimed that part of the work of the periodical *The Tribune* that he edited (3:355) was to educate all classes to the importance of poetry partly because it gives us information we didn't have before and therefore makes us think, but also because it opens up new ways of thinking.

Poetry and poetics offer a concept of the writer as a collective individual who is not autonomous, a writer who is the artist in every person. This writer is someone able to deal with chaos, disorder, and dream to say things that are not-yet-said, rather than someone attempting to represent the world through realist strategies that bolster up the ideological status quo. This writer is someone speaking from personal experience that is neither objective and universal nor subjective and

relativist but situated. The delineation of such a writer is effectively a delineation of a differentiated public voice—and one of the most precise to exist in philosophical thinking today—and it calls for a different kind of reader. This writer is not a solution for the proletarian writer but a change for all people under a nonliberal and nontotalitarian socialism.

If this is Orwell beginning to delineate the verbal work of the situated textuality necessary to situated knowledge, deliberative democracy, and any conceptualization outside the universal/relative dichotomies of Western philosophy, his ability to define its modes of production and consumption was more limited. He knew how to critique the modes of bourgeois art and liberal social contract capitalism, but he only gives us hints such as the few words on film and radio and the importance of the oral medium. The 1940s were arguably the cusp before the disappearance of the oral in the United Kingdom or its shift away from individual tellers and the human body into the state-controlled media. There are his observations that poetry has a small audience, which is an important recognition of the niche marketing that has begun today to develop in scale as people realize that they cannot possibly read all the books that are published and are "good." We increasingly construct our own particular reading communities; many of us do so via the Internet, a development that Orwell could not have been expected to foresee. In effect, until the twentieth century, most verbal craft valued as "art" was produced by privileged writers addressing a very small group of similarly privileged people who could afford to buy their work. What Orwell did foresee was that verbal craft could only develop democratically though responses by producers that would target smaller groups of people and construct consumption on the basis of smaller markets. At the time, publishing would have found this commercially threatening, but today a book can be produced, even by a small press, to recoup its costs with as few as fifty buyers.

Orwell also makes offhand comments in a late essay on soil erosion and pollution indicating that writerly conviction may come from a collective political stance rather than individual egoism. But by far the most substantial of his discussions on modes for production and consumption of verbal craft different to bourgeois art concerns the effects of education. The impact of education in the potential of language to construct alternative ways of living is usually cast solely in terms of the vision of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and propagandic manipulation. However, as noted above, education can also open potential out rather than close it down. There is a consistent strain of inquiry in Orwell's later essays concerning democratic access to verbal craft that implies that if all people can be intelligent readers they can also be writers. As he notes in "A Controversy," "In a healthy society everyone would be an artist of sorts" (3:294).

This finds its most specific form in Orwell's interest in worker writing groups and in writing correspondence courses. For example there is the letter from a woman in a mining village about the pressure to write about domestic issues and not about socialism (3:290). Both she and Orwell self-consciously discard the distinction between her as a woman and her as a socialist as an egalitarian move of the kind that informed 1960s and 1970s feminism. In this Orwell was being politically correct for his time, if not when he comments that the writing instructor must have been a woman. But it is important to recognize his absolute conviction that all people should have access to education in the skills of verbal craft.

Discussion

Because the essay I am writing has addressed politics and aesthetics there may be some who find it esoteric. I would argue that it is an account of a radical approach to social policy in education: one that argues that the artist is not a special case and that anyone can produce art. It is an important blueprint for cultural power that is based on shifting the three elements at the heart of the liberal social contract, drawing attention to the fact that cultural power is part of political power, that there is a need to change the political and economic control of the means of production of cultural power, and hence to shift the entire economic system.

Orwell claimed that this shift was revolutionary, but not modeled as most revolutions are on something that has come before. He never recognized that this exploration added up to an analysis, and he was never convinced he'd seen or heard any of it—this practice that I have called situated textuality. Yet he moves from "In the future it is possible that a new kind of literature, not involving individual feeling or truthful observation, may arise, but no such thing is at present imaginable" (4:92), to "It is [not] too much to hope that the classless society will secrete a culture of its own" (4:517). Of course we don't have a classless society, so we'll never know. But we are still part of bourgeois culture and Orwell's observations on how that might diversify, if not change, are, in today's increasingly transcultural societies, not just highly relevant but vital.

Notes

1. *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell,* ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 4:136. Hereafter volume and page numbers for quotations from Orwell's work will appear in parentheses in the text.

2. For an analysis of this, see Lynette Hunter, "Unruly Fugues," in *Interrogating Cultural Studies: Theory, Politics, and Practice,* ed. Paul Bowman (London: Routledge, 2003), 233–53.

3. See Lynette Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing: Situated Textualities in Science, Computing, and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 1999), chaps. 5 and 6.

4. See Seyla Benhabib, ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); see also Nira Yuval Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1997).

5. Hilary Rose, *Love, Power, and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

6. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

7. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

8. For example, Lorraine Code, "How to Think Globally: Stretching the Limits of Imagination," in *Decentering the Centre: Philosophy for a Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World,* ed. Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

9. See Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing,* chap. 5.

10. The political philosopher Iris Young explores this issue in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

11. See Lynette Hunter, "Listening to Situated Textuality: Working on Differentiated Public Voices," *Feminist Theory*, special issue: Gendering Ethics/The Ethics of Gender, ed. Linda Hogan and Sasha Roseneil, 2:2 (August 2001): 205–18.
12. See Diane Macdonnel, *Theories of Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
13. For a provocative early discussion of the interchange between special rights and human rights, see Carol Pateman, *Democracy, Freedom, and Special Rights* (Swansea: University of Wales, Swansea, 1995).
14. For an analysis of this, see Hunter, "Unruly Fugues," 233–52.
15. See Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).
16. See Young, *Intersecting Voices*.
17. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1933/75), 51ff.
18. See Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, chap. 6.
19. 19. See Lynette Hunter, *Literary Value and Cultural Power* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), especially chap. 7.
20. See Hunter, *Critiques of Knowing*, chaps. 1 and 6.
21. Lynette Hunter, "George Orwell's Blood and Marmalade: Nation-State Ideology in a Print Society," in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Longmans, 1997), 202–16.
22. Beckett, "I'm in words, made of words, others' words," *The Unnamable* in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (Paris: Olympia Press, 1959), 390.
23. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Literature in the Modern World*, ed. Dennis (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991/1967).
24. See *Orwell, The War Commentaries*, ed. William John West (London: Duckworth, 1985).

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Outside/Inside: Searching for Wigan Pier

MARGERY SABIN

I start with a peculiar twist on the topic of Orwell's "enduring influence." I was searching the Internet using Google the other day for current references to Orwell's book about the unemployment conditions in the industrial north of England *The Road to Wigan Pier*.[1] More specifically, I was trying to get a better handle on the Wigan Pier of the title, understanding only imperfectly that there was a joke in it. Briefly within the book, and still not completely in a later BBC broadcast of 1943, Orwell explained that Wigan Pier doesn't exist, and didn't exist in 1936 when he made a special journey to see it.[2] He knew the phrase, he says, from the music hall comedians who had ironically linked a tumble-down coal loading jetty going into the Leeds-Liverpool canal with more popular seaside recreational piers. Even the ruins of that dilapidated plank of wood were gone by the time Orwell got to Wigan. Orwell understood the "joke" made popular by music hall comedians to have first been a piece of grim local humor. I was hoping to find this sequence explained more exactly somewhere on the Internet.

Instead, I was astonished to find a dozen Web sites attesting to the fact that Wigan Pier now *does* exist—as a "restored and refurbished" heritage museum on an 8½-acre site, bordering a thoroughly cleaned-up canal. A central feature is a hall named "The Orwell": "the perfect venue for your wedding or private party."[3] Costumed actors in the museum "bring history to life performing short scenarios," the museum Web site explains. "At Wigan Pier, whatever your age, sex, or nationality you are sure to find something which will remind you of a special time or a favourite thing."

How nasty a joke on the question of Orwell's influence is the "restored and refurbished" Wigan Pier? It is safe to guess that Orwell would have been of at least two minds, a feature of his thought that I will say more about later. On the one hand, he would have had to give one cheer that the fame of his book had created a remarkable opportunity of postindustrial commerce for at least a portion of the community that he had seen in 1936 suffering the prospect of permanent unemployment. Any new prosperity could hardly be regretted by anyone genuinely moved, as Orwell was, by the earlier poverty and hopelessness he recorded. But