

# The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell

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

Lorraine Saunders

THE UNSUNG ARTISTRY OF  
GEORGE ORWELL

*For my mother*

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*Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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First published 2008 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Saunders, Loraine

The unsung artistry of George Orwell : the novels from  
Burmese days to Nineteen eighty-four

1. Orwell, George, 1903–1950 – Criticism and interpretation

I. Title

823.9'12

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Saunders, Loraine.

The unsung artistry of George Orwell : the novels from Burmese days to Nineteen eighty-four / by Loraine Saunders.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7546-6440-6 (alk. paper)

1. Orwell, George, 1903–1950—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PR6029.R8Z78126 2008

828'.91209—dc22

2007046689

ISBN: 978-0-7546-6440-6 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-3155-5182-1 (ebk)

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# Preface

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

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

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

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



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

Loraine Saunders  
Liverpool  
30 August 2007

# Acknowledgements

I would first like to give a warm thank you to Professor Peter Davison who kindly proofread the final manuscript, spotting many errors and tidying up many loose ends. Peter's help and support throughout the time that I have known him has been fantastic, and I shall ever be in his debt for the assistance he has given me. Many of the footnotes in the book are thanks to Peter's keen eye for detail. I thank Sheila Davison too for all her support, which has been wonderful. I wish to thank Ann Donahue, Meredith Coeyman and Whitney Feininger at Ashgate for all their editorial labours. I would like to thank Ruth Rands for running an expert eye over the finished text. I would like to thank The Orwell Archive, UCL Library Services, Special Collections for allowing the use of the 'Orwell at typewriter' photograph for the cover illustration – Steven Wright was extremely helpful. Thanks also to Ben Walker, representing the Vernon Richards Estate, for granting permission to use the Orwell image. I would also like to thank Pauline Chase at Liverpool Central Library for all her invaluable help. I would like to thank David Seed, Douglas Kerr, Karl Simms, Andy Sawyer, Bernard Beatty and Nick Davis for their encouragement and advice over the years. Thanks to Faisal, Omar, Hamza, Ghazi Jnr and Jane Shaker for their enthusiastic interest. Thanks also to the Heaton girls, Ella, Amber, Niamh and Ezme, who have promised to take a keen interest in George Orwell when they grow up. And last, but not least, a big Thank You to John, Siobhan, Evan, Shannon, Alfie, Alan, Trish, William, and Oliver for all their enthusiastic encouragement.

# List of Abbreviations

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

# Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(1936) imagines civilisation dying ... and Orwell was just as gloomy with his friends'.<sup>11</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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