Purposeful Plainness: The Politics of George Orwell's Prose Style

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Abstract

This master's thesis aims to explain how to read George Orwell as a writer and prose stylist who strived to make political writing into an art. It studies how textual effects of his prose style connect with his political agenda. Through engaging with his own meta-commentary on language, scholarly arguments, and close readings of his texts across genres, the thesis identifies central stylistic characteristics of his plain prose style and explains how they function politically within his texts. Through simplifying words and syntax while also being highly sentient to readers' developing responses, Orwell constructs engaging and perplexing textual effects that, while deriving aesthetic pleasure on their own, also induce the reader toward agreeing with him politically. Considering the political push behind his prose style, the thesis also engages in the critical conversation surrounding the truthfulness of Orwell's observational reportages. By analyzing several of his major reportages, it suggests that Orwell's truthfulness is not hurt by, but *dependent* on his 'propagandized' approach to writing. Finally, the thesis provides an extended interpretative analysis of propaganda in *Animal Farm* (1945), pointing to key ways Orwell's satirical style functions in the service of political beliefs. It concludes by suggesting that the issue of propaganda in the beast fable lies not on the liars themselves, but on the willingness of being deceived. Such a finding urges us as readers to think critically about how we approach Orwell's plain narratives considering their underlying propagandistic push. In short, the thesis argues that Orwell's plain prose style is thoroughly propagandistic while simultaneously enabling a remarkable truthfulness, a combination which contributes to the fallacy of interpreting his political commentary as the plain truth.

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Introduction

“What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.” (Why I Write” 1084)

(i)

Of all the things George Orwell is celebrated for, two things stand at the forefront. One, his reputation as a master of the plain style. Two, his striking political commentary. I want to look critically at how the two merge. My main agenda is to explain how to read Orwell as a writer and prose stylist who strived to make ‘political writing into an art’.

Stylistically, Orwell is celebrated for his crystal clear and unpretentious prose. It is effortless to read, as if looking through a windowpane. One never gets lost amid his sentences because they are constructed in a way where words flow seamlessly into each other, presenting thoughtful arguments with an ease of expression that gives pleasure in its mere plainness. Take these following quotes as a demonstration. The first four are his personal observations, the last two from fictional novels.

“Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing.” (“Charles Dickens” 135)

“As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.” (“The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius” 291)

“One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that: no ordinary man could be such a fool.” (“Notes on Nationalism” 882)

“In trench warfare five things are important: firewood, food, tobacco, candles and the enemy. In winter on the Saragossa front they were important in that order, with the enemy a bad last.” (*Homage to Catalonia* 23)

“ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.” (*Animal Farm* 88)

"Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth." (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 78)

Instead of saying that Dickens is a great writer who we should all learn from, Orwell presents him as someone who is worth the effort of *stealing*. He delivers his admiration through a negatively associated action; the disconnect is surprising and enables his appreciation for Dickens to truly stand out. The next sentence contains a similar disconnect. By employing the phrase 'highly civilized' followed by the more primitive 'trying to kill', the syntax creates a contrast that is exciting to experience. It is also comical to read because the underlying tone is seemingly logical; as if being highly civilized naturally belongs together with a desire to kill. The next sentence is pleasurably paradoxical: no one is a bigger idiot than a member of the intellectual elite. Readers are also inclined to derive enjoyment from the next sentence, as Orwell includes 'the enemy' on a list of important things to have in trench warfare. Not only that, but he puts them at the bottom. His description serves an aesthetic purpose, but putting the enemy at the bottom also serves a larger point: it emphasizes how horrific the conditions of trenches are, how crucial basic items become. In *Animal Farm's* most famous line, Orwell plays with the word 'equal', suggesting that it is a quality that some can have to a larger extent than others. It is both elegant and pleasurably simple, while showing how language can be rendered pointless and misused. Finally, the line from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contains only four words per clause, yet conveys an extremely clear case of how history is rewritten.

Although these quotes are from different works and genres, they have one thing in common: Orwell's plain prose style. They have the same simple aesthetic to them. That is, the prose is concise, short, clear, lexically simple, and syntactically well-flowing, often with an underlying hint of irony. Among scholars Orwell is widely accepted as a master of the plain style, and some have even called him the most influential prose stylist of the twentieth century (Meyers 169). Regardless of genre, then, plainness is the major stylistic aspect of Orwell's prose style.

Politically, Orwell was an unrelenting critic of all forms of totalitarianism. A totalitarian state is commonly understood as an oppressive political system in which the state is in absolute control, robbing all autonomy and liberty of its citizens. Orwell paid special attention to the *intellectual* control such a system involved. On the aim of totalitarianism, he stated: "The totalitarian state tries, at any rate, to control the thoughts and emotions of its subjects at least as completely as it controls their actions" (Literature and Totalitarianism

362). His fundamental political concerns were totalitarianism, perversion of power, censorship, propaganda, deception, corruption of language, abandonment of artistic expression, erasure of individual liberty, and elimination of objective truth. These concerns are connected to the time period he wrote in; the 1930's and 40's. The historical context is the rise of Fascism in Europe, and the fear that it brought with it. Fascism, the extreme-right political system which emphasizes nationalism, oppressive state control and dictatorial leadership, was rising in Europe at the time lead through Mussolini and Hitler. Orwell's major fear was that Fascism would come to take over England and rid the entire world of justice, fairness, and liberty. The victory of Fascism would mean the end of society and all the good things it had produced, including literature. Art that did not fit the agenda of the current despot would vanish from the face of the earth. Power would be the only thing of significance. He was an outspoken anti-imperialist and a dedicated Socialist. Political commentary, then, was at the core of Orwell's writing. To him, the world was facing the greatest ideological battle humanity had ever seen – pure evil against goodness. Or as he saw it, Fascism against Socialism.

Both of these things – Orwell's plain prose style and political commentary – are compelling topics to study on their own. Where I want to put my focus, however, is on the *merging* of the two. Arguably, Orwell's stylistics in isolation are not as revolutionary compared to his contemporaries. For a long time he was in fact embarrassed by his own writing when comparing it to his contemporaries. James Joyce, D.H Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and T.S. Eliot were all titans of modernism who put their emphasis on formal experimentation, on aesthetics, and they are today regarded as masterful technicians. Orwell, on the other hand, was not a pure technician. In fact, in letters to his friends he expressed despair over his own stylistic inferiority after having read Lawrence's work, and even more so after reading Joyce's *Ulysses* (Meyers). As a result, he was brutal in his self-criticism and regarded himself as a failure for a long time. However, the rise of Fascism made him reconsider what art was about. It convinced him that literature could no longer be about mere aesthetics – art had to be political. He convincingly explains why in "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda": "You cannot take purely aesthetic interest in a disease you are dying from; you cannot feel dispassionately about a man who is about to cut your throat" (351). Fascism was too big an existential threat for art not to take sides. It demonstrated that literature was not detachable from politics. Thus, the notion of 'art for art's sake' no longer held for him. The nature of art was not just to existentially *be*, but to politically *do*. It had to push a set of values in some way. Interestingly, then, he came to insist that "All art is propaganda" ("Charles

Dickens" 173). After the rise of Fascism, he saw aesthetics and propaganda as two equal forces pushing, balancing, and fulfilling each other. In contrast to what we today call the high modernists, then, his arena became the *political* aesthetic. Literature, in Orwell's view, could not be detached from society, history or politics. Aesthetics always had a purpose.

This master's thesis, then, investigates Orwell's plain prose style in relation to his political agenda. It intends to explain how his plainness, in addition to being easy and pleasurable to read, is rigorously political. We might speak of a 'purposeful plainness' behind Orwell's prose style. In a literal sense, such a phrase points to that Orwell's plain aesthetics are employed deliberately. More importantly, however, lies the sense that there is an underlying *political* push behind Orwell's prose. Purposeful plainness, in this sense, captures the idea that his plain aesthetics are doing something political within his texts. Let us look at commentary Orwell himself made about his reasons for writing. In the essay "Why I Write", published in the literary magazine *Grangel* in 1946, he provides fascinating metaphors for the process of writing:

> Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist or understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall for attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane. I cannot say with certainty which of my motives are the strongest, but I know which of them deserve to be followed. And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally. (Why I Write 1085)

This passage is first and foremost pleasurable to read. His choice of metaphor for writing a book is that of 'a long bout of some painful illness'. The only reason for going through such suffering is an irresistible inner 'demon'. His negative choice of words perplexes the reader: *why*, then, would he make it his sole mission to make political writing into an art? In one way, he is being funny; designing an aesthetic effect that derives pleasure in the reader. But he also constructs a deeper tension. By describing the process of writing as such a painful endeavour, he is inviting us to see his texts not just as pleasurable art, but as intense *struggles to convey.* He has got something deep within – arguments, sensations, political ideas –

constantly being pushed forward by his inner demon. At the same time, he says that to write anything readable one needs to 'efface one's own personality', which, quite surprisingly, is a modernist ambition aligned with the high modernists he is reacting against. This could perhaps point to a conscious effort to balance his own direct political argumentation with the more subjective *experience* of art. Concluding that 'Good prose is like windowpane', then, is a matter of creating clear prose that allows the reader to not just see, but *experience* what Orwell struggles to convey politically. I want to take a close look at that windowpane; to study how his plain prose interacts with readers and shapes our experience, pushing us in a certain direction. I want to find out how his stylistic and formal choices – the simple lexical nature, well-flowing syntax, surprising twists, comical exaggerations and colourful figurative language – merge with his intention to promote political arguments.

Some central questions arise from my interest in Orwell's purposeful plainness. First, what characterizes Orwell's plain prose style? How does it connect with his political agenda, and what textual effect are created as a result? Second, how does his underlying political agenda relate to his ideals of honesty and truthfulness? More specifically, can we trust what he is saying if we know that he is always pushing us in a certain political direction? Third, how should we as readers approach Orwell's plain prose style today, 70 years after his death and long after the political issues of his time have passed? In order to shed light on the relationship between his plainness and agenda, I intend to divide my thesis into three chapters. The first chapter will be concerned about characterizing his prose style, where I make the case that it should be understood as propagandistic. The second chapter asks the question of how Orwell's propagandistic plainness affects the reliability of him as a truthful reporter. The third chapter provides an interpretative analysis of propaganda as a theme *Animal Farm,* focusing on its significance in our post-Trump political climate.

(ii)

Before I move on to clarify how I intend to carry out my agenda by more closely explaining what I do in each chapter, I first want to provide some biographical context on Orwell as well as introducing the primary texts I am working with.

In 1903, Orwell was born as Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, India. He grew up in England where he was discovered from an early age to have academic talents. Blair, however, displayed little interest in school and decided as a young adult to apply as an imperial officer in Burma. In the five years he spent there, he saw the effects of imperialism first-hand, and became unbearably ashamed to be a part of the system. In 1927, after five

years, he retired from his position and returned to England with a renewed disgust toward imperialism and a clear anger toward poverty. In fact, he felt a strong need to emerge himself *in* poverty, and decided to live as a tramp. In 1933, he released his first book called *Down and Out in Paris and London,* which depicted his experiences while living in deep poverty in those cities. Crucially, he decided to release the book under the pseudonym 'George Orwell'. His first biographer, Bernard Crick, suggests in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* that the reason for choosing a pen name was "partly to avoid embarrassing his parents, partly as a hedge against failure, and partly because he disliked the name Eric, which reminded him of a prig in a Victorian boys' story". In any case, in some fundamental sense, the choice of using a pen name was rooted in a desire of separating his personal identity from the persona he wanted to exhibit. Where Blair the individual came across as reserved and tentative, Orwell the persona was bold and assertive. And under the persona of George Orwell, he went on to write sharp-witted political essays and insightful novels using his iconic straightforward style. In 1936 he left England to fight in the Spanish civil war, very nearly killing him. The height of his writing career came in the 1940's, where he produced texts at unprecedented rates. In 1945, *Animal Farm* was published and launched him into worldwide fame. It was followed four years later by his most famous novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, increasing his popularity even more. But where his political criticism was at its all-time sharpest, his health had never been frailer. He died of tuberculosis at the early age of 46, just months after the release of *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* By this late stage of his life almost no one called him by his real name anymore. In many ways Eric had merged with George over the years. Even his new wife, Sonya, had taken 'Orwell' as her last name. Still, in 1950, he was buried as Eric Arthur Blair, signifying that although the individual had died, his persona would live on. Today, George Orwell is regarded as one of the major English writers of the twentieth century, his voice remaining as clear and sharp as ever.

When it comes to Orwell's work, it is split into two categories; novels and essays. Since my aim is to explore Orwell's general *prose style* in relation to his political agenda, and not just one work, I cannot limit myself to either category. I need to look across genres in order to better grasp the plain style as a whole. This presents me with a problem. Choosing too few primary texts means that I would explore the relationship between one or two works and their relation to his politics, and not his style as a whole. Conversely, if I choose too many primary texts, my analysis of each gets too vague. What I have chosen to do, then, is primarily focus on *six* texts that I explore the larger topic of stylistic plainness and political agenda within. I

will include more of Orwell's writing to emphasize points, especially in chapter one, but the main structure is based around the following texts:

- **Chapter one:** "As I Please 32"
- **Chapter two:** "A Hanging", "Shooting an Elephant", *Homage to Catalonia,* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*
- **Chapter three:** *Animal Farm*

Below I frame each text and provide a brief explanation on what they are about and in what context they exist in.

1: "As I Please" was a series of articles Orwell wrote while working as editor for the Socialist magazine *Tribune* from 1943-1947. Each week Orwell would write an article about varying topics. Most often they would be political, but as the name insinuates he would write about whatever topic he wanted. I choose the 32nd installment of the series, published 7th July 1944, for two reasons. First, it represents one type of Orwell's non-fiction: direct political commentary. Secondly, it contains aesthetics that connect in interesting ways to his political agenda. The larger topic of the article is censorship in modern England, and how it takes on a non-official veiled form that still hurts culture nonetheless. The text will be used in the context of making an argument about Orwell's prose style.

2: "A Hanging" was one of Orwell's earlier writings. It was first published in the literary journal *The Adelphi* in August 1931. "A Hanging" is one of Orwell's non-fictions, more specifically an observational reportage. An observational reportage differs from other forms of journalism in that it clearly stages the writer as an observer to the event. Orwell is situating himself in the text as an eyewitness. This reportage depicts one of his experience in Burma while serving as an imperial police officer. It tells the story of the execution of an Indian local carried out by several imperial officers, among them himself. Politically, it is important to remember that at the time of writing, Orwell was an outspoken anti-imperialist. He hated the idea of exploiting other countries and he especially hated being a part of it himself. Underlying all his writings about Burma is the sense that what he is doing is wrong. "A Hanging", then, is very much a political anti-imperialist piece of writing. I am interested in its merge of plain style and political argument.

3: "Shooting an Elephant" shares many characteristics with "A Hanging". It also an observational reportage depicting one of Orwell's experiences in Burma. It was published in the literary journal *New Writing* in 1936. This essay is perhaps Orwell's most famous

observational reportage. It tells the story of a time he had to shoot an elephant in Moulmein as part of his job. The story follows him as an elephant has caused mayhem and killed a local. Orwell is called in to handle the situation. He grabs a rifle and heads out to find the animal. Although having no intention of shooting it, he also feels that the context of his role as an imperial officer demands it. In the story, he describes a conflicted self that ultimately is pushed forward by the will of the native crowd to kill the elephant. As with “A Hanging”, I am interested in the narrative’s merge of plainness and political argument.

4: *Homage to Catalonia* is Orwell’s journalistic reportage of his time fighting in the Spanish civil war. It was first published by *Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd* in 1938. As mentioned, Orwell saw the 1930’s rise of Fascism as *the* existential threat of his time. When Franco attempted to overthrow the government of Spain, Orwell saw it as his moral duty to resist Fascism. He applied to fight on the republican side along with communists and anarchists. To him, this was a clear fight between good and evil, and he wanted to fight for the former. In practice however, the situation in Spain was not as simple as a fight between good and evil. Although believing he fought alongside communists and anarchists against the common enemy of totalitarianism, it later turned out that he was actually fighting for just an alternative totalitarian power. That is, Soviet Communism had no intention of letting the republican side free after defeating Fascism – they wanted to seize power themselves. Orwell’s agenda in the book is to convey his experiences and reflect upon the war’s events. I am interested in how the book is stylistically different from his essayist-reportages, and how that affects the trustworthiness of his reporting.

5: *The Road to Wigan Pier* is Orwell’s reportage on the living conditions of Northern England in 1936. This area had been particularly hard struck by the economic depression, with huge unemployment rates, and Orwell was sent by his publisher Victor Gollancz for the *Left Book Club* to study the conditions of the especially poor industrial areas. The book is divided into two parts. The first contains Orwell’s observation as he travels around Northern England, providing a close and powerful view into what poverty was and what it did to people. It describes poverty and despair in varying situations. From the poor lodgers at a house he stayed in, to the extreme working conditions and underpayment of miners, to the mere appearance and smell of the people living around him. The second part is a direct political commentary which bases itself on the first half. It talks about the nature of Socialism, why it had failed in England, and what he thought would make it prosper. This book is arguably what really pushed Orwell towards Socialism. I am interested in the book in terms of how its observational account is influenced by Orwell’s radicalism.

6: *Animal Farm* is a novella that is written as a beast fable. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines beast fable as a short narrative with a clear moral "in which animals talk and act like the human types they represent" (10). This text was what finally launched Orwell into a literary success. Originally published by *Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd* in 1945, the book contains a fairy story about an animal revolution against their human oppressors. The story is about how the initial idealism of animal equality become corrupted by the revolutionaries themselves. By using power, propaganda, and violence, pigs are able to exploit the situation for their own benefit. By the end of the book, the circle is closed by them wearing hats and carrying whips in their trotters; they have become the new oppressors. These turns of events represent a political allegory and satire of the Russian revolution. *Animal Farm* provided a devastating critique against the Soviet Union in a time where many of Orwell's leftist contemporaries sympathized with the regime. Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often looked upon as Orwell's masterpiece, *Animal Farm* contains the most perfected case of plain prose in all of Orwell's works. The combination of plain prose and clear political purpose makes it the fiction that I want to focus on for Orwell's purposeful plainness. I am interested in how the book portrays propaganda and how that holds up in today's age 70 years after Orwell's death.

(iii)

The focus of chapter one is to characterize Orwell's plain prose style. It clarifies what it *is* as well as providing an argument for what it is *doing*. The first part of the chapter provides insight into the stylistics itself, focusing on Orwell's own meta commentary. Orwell had clear thoughts on what good and bad prose consisted of. Good prose had to be concrete, concise, and most importantly clear. He even created a stylistic rule set for how to achieve this. Afterwards, I explain *why* Orwell is pushing prose in this direction, focusing on his ideological dispositions. What follows is a scholarly based discussion on what Orwell's plainness is *doing*. William E. Cain gives us insight into the *aesthetic* doings of his plainness. Loraine Saunders provides insight into its *political* doings. The chapter makes use of each of their arguments to provide a close reading of "As I Please 32", from which it concludes that Orwell's plainness itself should be understood as propagandistic. The third scholar, Roger Fowler, helps us scope this argument in relation to genre. He provides insight into how Orwell's personal polemic is ubiquitous throughout all genres he wrote in, achieved through what Fowler calls 'The Orwellian Voice'. Based on the perspective of these three scholars, as

well as my readings using their arguments, the chapter argues that Orwell's plain prose style, although seemingly windowpane-clear, is actually ubiquitously propagandistic.

Where chapter one argues that Orwell's plainness is propagandistic, chapter two asks the question of how this affects the reliability of his observational reportages. Orwell's reportages find themselves on a balancing point between factuality and artistry. On the one side you have the idea of his reportages being non-fiction, meaning they portray real places, people, and events. On the other side you have their literary aspect; Orwell's creative writing, his fictionalized form of reality, shaping the narrative in a certain direction. We know that language cannot create a perfect replication of reality. Orwell's literary approach to storytelling will unavoidably be fictionalized. It is a literary account – it is a form of art. However, when we consider his propagandistic plainness, as well as his own perspective of all art *being* propaganda, the question emerges if his fictionalized version should be considered truthful. How does his artistic fictionalizing affect the trustworthiness of his observational reportages? I look at this issue through analyzing four of his most influential reportages: "A Hanging", "Shooting an Elephant", *Homage to Catalonia* and *The Road to Wigan Pier.* Early on, the chapter identifies a 'propagandistic' strategy of fiction that Orwell employs in the first two. It proceeds to discuss how the employment of this strategy affects the truthfulness of the reportages. After the discussion, the chapter shifts its attention to the stylistically different *Homage to Catalonia* to show how it is similar to its essay-counterparts. In the end, I defend Orwell's truthfulness across the reportages because they serve the same deeper journalistic aim. The final part of the chapter emphasizes the subjectivity of Orwell's account. By analyzing *The Road to Wigan Pier,* it emphasizes that defending Orwell's truthfulness means that we also have to recognize his radicalism.

The third chapter explores *Animal Farm's* portrayal of propaganda as well as contextualizing it in the political atmosphere of 2021. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines propaganda as the "systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view". Orwell understood systematically misleading information as one of the core tools of totalitarian states, making it one of his primary political concerns. However, he also believed that all art was itself a form of propaganda. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines the term "propagandist literature" as "a didactic work which is obviously organized and rendered to induce the reader to assume a specific attitude toward, or to take direct action on, a pressing social, political, or religious issue of the time at which the work is written" (91). Literature that is clearly made to induce the reader into a political attitude was to Orwell, in contrast to propaganda on its own, fully

desirable. In short then, we could say that he wrote propagandist literature critiquing political propaganda. When I later refer to Orwell's plainness as propagandistic, I am referring to the second definition. That is, his prose style induces readers to assume a specific political attitude, not necessarily in a misleading manner. In discussions about propaganda and Orwell, the main choice of primary text for many scholars is *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Therefore, before moving on to *Animal Farm,* chapter three starts to providing insight into what scholars have said about the novel's treatment of propaganda. However, since my thesis is focused upon Orwell's plain prose style, I want to put my emphasis on *Animal Farm*. The rest of the chapter explores its portrayal of propaganda, providing insight into how Orwell's style functions in the service of his political beliefs. It does so by analyzing the character of "Squealer", the propagandist minister on the farm. The chapter as a whole provides an argument for how to approach Orwell's commentary today, where the immediate allegorical functions of the beast fable is not apparent, enhancing its relevancy in our post-Trump era.

Chapter one: Characterizing Orwell's prose style across essays and novels

The purpose of chapter one is to characterize Orwell's prose style. It starts by characterizing what the plain style *is* before moving on to what it is *doing*. The chapter attempts to demonstrate how Orwell's plain aesthetics are filled with political purpose, from which it concludes that his prose style should be understood as propagandistic.

1.1 Orwell's push for plainness

Few authors have had such strong opinions on prose style as George Orwell. In fact, he presented it as something core to his character: "So long as I remain alive and well I shall continue to feel strongly about prose style" ("Why I Write" 1084). My intention in this first sub-chapter is to explain his strongly held beliefs - what is plain prose and why is he pushing for it?

In 1945, Orwell published an essay on language that would come to define his entire status as a major prose stylist. "Politics and the English Language" is today regarded as one of his most influential essays (*Norton Anthology of English Literature*). The larger argument of it is that there is a fundamental problem in modern prose. He sees a growing trend of

staleness of imagery and lack of precision in sentences. This happens through the tendency of replacing carefully chosen words that convey a certain meaning with empty "ready-made phrases". These are certain predetermined units of words you put together to form a sequence. Orwell explains, "prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house" (956-957). What he calls prefabricated hen-house phrases can be everything from well-known metaphors like *stand shoulder to shoulder with*, to verb-replacing phrases like *exhibit a tendency to,* to individual words like *Fascism,* all losing imagery due to overuse. Orwell admits that these phrases have at one point been fresh and vivid, but as he says in another essay, they have become "thought-saving devices" that have "the same relation to living English as a crutch has to a leg." ("The English People" 635). Instead of actively thinking for the right image – letting our meaning choose the words – we now simply have to assemble pre-made language chunks together like Lego, creating a seemingly nice and intellectual rhythm of sentence. This process has clearly taken place, in his own example, when people write "*In my opinion it is not a justifiable assumption that"* instead of "*I think".* The modern trend of prose, he concludes, is a movement away from concreteness.

To counteract the trend of staleness and lack of precision, "Politics and the English Language" ends by providing a direct stylistic rule set for *good* prose:

1) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
4) Never use a passive where you can use the active.
5) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
6) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous. (966)

The rule set as a whole is a call to simplify and to cut, to strip down the delivery of meaning to its essentials. Notice that it is negatively stressed. That is, he wants us to 'cut out' and 'never use' instead of urging us to 'include this' and 'use more of that'. The focus is to strip down, to make sentences as *plain* as possible in order to clarify meaning. When we are talking about Orwell's plainness, then, we are talking about his constant effort to lexically

simplify. If a writer could use fewer words to get your point across, that was the way to go. Simple language was the tool you should use to deliver even the most complicated ideas. *Especially* the most complicated ideas. Complex syntax and Latin phraseology was the enemy of clarity, muddying the path between an idea and its delivery. Following his stylistic ruleset would enable your prose to achieve what Orwell ultimately strived for: *windowpane clarity*. And the impression of windowpane clarity is exactly the notion you get from reading his best texts. It is certainly the defining stylistic quality that his own prose style has been widely celebrated for (Roney; Woodcock). The simplicity is perhaps at its most notable in *Animal Farm*. Take this character description of Benjamin the donkey as an example:

> Benjamin was the oldest animal on the farm, and the worst tempered. He seldom talked, and when he did it was usually to make some cynical remark – for instance he would say that God had given him a tail to keep the flies off, but that he would sooner have had no tail and no flies. Alone among the animals on the farm he never laughed. If asked why, he would say that he saw nothing to laugh at. (2)

The passage works well put in relation to his stylistic rule set. First of all, there are no worn out metaphors present (in fact, no metaphors at all). The action is straightforward. No individual word is longer than three syllables. As for the choice of words, none of them are unnecessary or foreign. The sentence structure is short and syntactically simple. There is no passive voice. Despite these stylistic choices the character description does not come across as lackluster as we get a clear sense of who Benjamin the donkey is. We get to know that he is old, cynical, and through his reluctance to laugh we get a sense of his pessimism. This extreme simple form of storytelling remains true throughout the entirety of *Animal Farm*. This book, together with "Politics and the English Language", launched Orwell's reputation as a master of direct and crystalline prose (Rodden and Rossi). Today, Orwell is still regarded as the face of the 'plain style'.

Orwell is not the only author that has ever written 'plainly'. Referring to the general plain style, critic Hugh Kenner writes that "Swift in the eighteenth century, George Orwell in the twentieth, are two of its very few masters" (261). Jonathan Swift, the writer of *Gulliver's Travels*, is also famous for a prose style that is satiric, laconic and spare. Orwell himself regarded it as exemplary. The mix of ironic tone and simple syntax has made Swift the typical writer one points to as Orwell's literary model. Still, 'Orwellian' is a widely used term that signifies a certain distinctiveness. When it comes to the difference between the two,

literary scholar John Carey points out that it lies in their respective use of irony. Swift's version is more resentful. Orwell's insults, instead of leaning toward Swift's bitterness, are delivered in what Carey calls "the timing of a stand-up comic (xvi). The critic Julian Symons, who knew Orwell personally, makes a similar argument on the difference between the two. "Behind Swift's satire is hatred of humanity, at the back of Orwell's a basic optimism about the ability of human beings to improve their condition" (Introduction to *Animal Farm* xxii). What sets Orwell's plainness apart, then, is the good-natured exaggeration, as if a friendly wink is lying underneath to soften the blow from his irony. Consider the following passage from *Wigan Pier*, Orwell's study of Northern England in 1936, where he satirizes the current state of Socialism. Notice the underlying optimistic tone behind his harsh irony:

> The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that Socialism, in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle classes. The typical Socialist is not, as tremulous old ladies imagine, a ferocious-looking working man with greasy overalls and a raucous voice. He is either a youthful snob-Bolshevik who in five years' time will quite probably have made a wealthy marriage and been converted to Roman-Catholicism; or, still more typically, a prim little man with a white-collar job, usually a secret teetotaller and often with vegetarian leanings, with a history of Nonconformity behind him, and above all, with a social position which he has no intention of forfeiting. The last type is surprisingly common in Socialist parties of every shade; it has perhaps been taken over en bloc from the old Liberal Party. In addition to this there is the horrible – the really disquieting – prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together. One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex maniac, Quaker, 'Nature Cure' quack, pacifist, and feminist in England." (118)

The description of these so-called Socialists is harsh, exaggerating, almost offensive, but also undeniably funny. He sets the passage up as if young snob-Bolsheviks and closeted vegetarians are destroying the good cause of Socialism; one fruit-juice at a time. Accusing someone of having 'a history of Nonconformity behind him', as if that would be some horrible revelation, or characterizing a person as a 'sandal-wearer', derives aesthetic pleasure in itself. These are not worn out metaphors or stale similes. Although sentences are longer than in *Animal Farm*, they are also lexically simple and well-flowing. Perhaps most notable, however, is Orwell's constant effort of not using stale imagery. He provides simple and

funny images, easily visualized, comically toned. We could criticize him for employing a foreign phrase, but his last stylistic rule does hold that the rules can be broken. Considering that *Wigan Pier* is written almost a decade before he made the rule-set, it might also be the case that the specifics of his beliefs had yet to be developed. Where the passage can be seen as merely an aesthetically pleasing mockery of fake Socialists, a crucial aspect of it lies in what it accomplishes. Orwell's aim is not to mock vegetarians or Roman-Catholics; it is to promote a political point. By pointing out the stereotypical flaws of Socialism's current following, he emphasizes the argument that Socialists should start focusing on attracting more *dedicated* followers. The comical imagery he provides emphasizes that need.

In order to understand why Orwell is pushing for plain prose, we need to understand how it is connected to his political position and ideological disposition. At his core, he was a Socialist who idealized the working class. Throughout all his work, he exhibits a clear bias toward the poor and downtrodden. His irony is often directed at upper class elitism, power hungry political forces, and academic intellectualism all cut off from the physical reality of common people. To him, the proletariat possessed desirable moral, cultural, and political values over their higher-class counterparts, and he regarded them with a sense of awe and admiration. Himself having grown up in what he called the lower-upper middle class, he also inevitably watched the proletariat from a distance. This was something he was painfully aware of, and attempted on many occasions to deliberately seek discomforts like poverty and hunger (Boyer; Crick *George Orwell: A Life*). In fact, while researching for *Wigan Pier,* he begged on the streets at one point although he could afford not to.

The idealizing of the lower classes became a central reason why he pushed for plain writing. In the essay "The English People", he says that "language […] suffers when the educated classes lose touch with the manual workers" (636). The scholar Roger Fowler points out that the tension between spoken and written language was core to Orwell's stylistic ideal. In different essays, among them "Propaganda and Demotic Speech", Orwell addresses the conflict between written and spoken language. Spoken language is inherently more colloquial, ordinary, and concrete than its written counterpart. Indeed, one could say that it is more aligned with (the desirable) proletarian values. Orwell saw the difference between talking and writing as so fundamental that, in a letter to his friend Jack Common, he called them "two different languages" (20 April 1938: *CEJL*, 1, 348). A major goal for his writing, then, became to push prose toward ordinary spoken English. That is, the vernacular, clear, concrete, colloquial, and visual nature of popular spoken English. In this way, plainness itself was about more than merely aesthetics; it communicated moral and political virtue. This

underlying push for proletarian virtue is a core reason why he strived for prose to be like that windowpane: clear, concrete, precise, visual, ordinary. Put another way, the plainness has political roots.

In addition to political reasons for pushing prose toward plainness, Orwell also had cognitive arguments for doing so. He regarded the modern trend of prose as dangerous for mainly three reasons (expressed in "Politics and the English Language"). First, it promoted dishonesty as it became easier to give foolish ideas a scientific air or to dress up underlying biases. Second, it could disguise evil actions through euphemisms and vagueness; naming things without creating images of them. Third, it lead us into losing sharpness of thought by rendering us unconscious of our own speech. In short, ready-made language went beyond being bad prose; it created cognitive problems.

Summarized, Orwell's plainness is characterized by a consistent effort to lexically cut and simplify in order to reach the ultimate goal of windowpane clarity. His ground for pushing prose in this direction is his ideological disposition in favor of the working class, and because he sees plain prose as promoting a more transparent and honest public discourse, while keeping our sharpness of thought intact.

1.2 Aesthetic Perversity

We now have a clear sense of what Orwell's plain style is and why he advocates for it. The critical conversation surrounding Orwell's plainness is not so much focused upon debating what it *is*. In large, there is a general consensus that Orwell's plainness is characterized by lexical simplification, uncomplicated syntax and a general 'windowpane' sense of clarity. Instead, the critical conversation lies one step beyond, in the implication of the plainness; what it allows Orwell to do. When it comes to the implication of Orwell's plainness, most of us will readily agree that it creates comprehensible sentences that flow well. Where this agreement usually ends, however, is on the deeper question of what those well-flowing sentences are performing upon readers. In other words, what the plainness is *doing* in the text. Whereas some are convinced that the plainness points inwards in form of an aesthetic experience, others maintain that it has external political implications. What remains, then, is to investigate what Orwell's plainness is *doing.* In order to get a good grasp of this, I intend to summarize and use the arguments of three major Orwell-scholars. The following sub-chapters will each be dedicated to one respective scholarly argument. The first one will

be William E. Cain's account of aesthetic perversity. The second will be Loraine Saunders' argument on political purpose. The third will be Roger Fowler's argument about the Orwellian voice. Each argument is used to undertake a close reading Orwell. The texts I use are "As I Please 32", "Can Socialists be Happy?", *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* respectively.

This first sub-chapter will be about conveying William E. Cain's views on the *experience* of reading Orwell, and how Orwell's 'perversity' plays a central role in shaping that experience. This will help provide insight into how Orwell's syntax is operating, which, I believe, can be characterized as being perverse.

In "Orwell's Essays as a Literary Experience" William E. Cain argues that the effect of Orwell's plainness is that he induces readers into a self-assessing, discomfiting, exploratory form of thought and feeling. This exploratory form of thought and feeling constitutes what Cain calls the 'literary experience' of reading Orwell. Orwell's sentences flow so effortlessly into his observations and arguments that he seems to be thinking and reflecting right on the page. The result is that as the reader moves from word to word, Orwell's 'thinking' is absorbed, and we end up connecting with the arguments through the matter-of-fact aesthetic of the prose. The result, then, is that the reader experiences a sort of reflective thinking themselves. In Cain's perspective, the effect of Orwell's plainness is that it transfers Orwell's reflecting on the page into a form of self-reflection in the reader. At its core, he sees Orwell's prose as ultimately pushing the reader toward an independence of vision and integrity of mind that he compares to the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The effect of the plainness is not only that *ideas* are well articulated; a *way of thinking* itself is being conveyed. Cain explains, "It is his sharpness of thinking, not elements of style, which Orwell intends to enact for and instill in readers." (77). In other words, Cain is saying that the experience of reading Orwell entails a mode of reflective thinking. Orwell is not just formulating his arguments as clearly as he can; he is inviting readers into experiencing a form of reflective thinking themselves The readers think through an implicit logic that he sets up. Cain is suggesting not only that Orwell's plainness guides the reader's thoughts, but influences them to think in a certain direction. If this is the case, then that means Orwell must have a larger literary strategy for creating an intimate connection between his mind and the mind of the reader.

Such a strategy can be identified in another of Cain's scholarly essays. In "Orwell's Perversity: An Approach to the Collected Essays", he argues that Orwell's manner of writing is *perverse*. Because 'perversity' is often understood to mean unacceptable sexual behavior,

one might think that Cain is suggesting a twisted sexual interpretation of Orwell's writing. However, Cain refers to it as "the persistently oppositional and contradictory turns of his thinking, patterned in the style" (215). This means that perversity is a way of labelling Orwell's operation of mind, giving him his special vitality as a cultural critic. When talking about Orwell's writings as being perverse, Cain is not referring to specific themes in his writing per se. Instead, he is interested in the general shifts in his thinking, and what effect this renders upon the reader. He understands Orwell's perversity as a fundamental "eagerness to destabilize and unnerve the reader" (221). It manifests itself as a constant nudging, teasing, twisting and turning of ideas and sentences. Sometimes that means being purposefully contrarian. A major point for Orwell's perversity is that he is doing these things with specific aesthetic goals in mind. Cain explains that, "[Orwell] is an exceptionally honest writer, but he is indeed a writer, agile and crafty; he is attuned from start to finish to the expectations and responses of readers to his sentences, and he is working with *that* every step of the way" (221). In other words, he sees Orwell as paying very close attention to the *developing responses of the reader* as they move from one word to the next. Readers are always unconsciously responding to words, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs as they read. Cain suggests that Orwell uses this to create specific aesthetic effects. By setting up the 'ground' the reader has to walk, Orwell is able to design aesthetical effects that ultimately create the sense of exploratory thought. Put simply, at the most basic level, Orwell builds up a sense of consensus just to purposefully thrust a spear of anticonsensus into it. The central event to perversity, then, is setting up some variation of a *reversal.*

Again, I want to emphasize that Cain believes the effect of Orwell's plainness is the literary experience it creates: the self-assessing, discomfiting, exploratory form of thought and feeling he induces readers into. *Perversity,* then, his eagerness to destabilize and unnerve, is the tool he uses to create an aesthetic experience that accomplishes exactly that.

If we look at Cain's argument in relation to Orwell's literature, it gives us insight into what his plainness is doing. The following passage is the introduction to a journalistic article he wrote for the socialist newspaper *Tribune,* in which he describes how a historical book burning made him feel as a boy.

When the Caliph Omar destroyed the libraries of Alexandria he is supposed to have kept the public baths warm for eighteen days with burning manuscripts, and great numbers of tragedies by Euripides and others are said to have perished, quite irrecoverably. I remember when I read about this as a boy it simply filled me with enthusiastic approval. It was so many

less words to look up in the dictionary – that was how I saw it. ("As I Please 32" 679)

Orwell describes how a terrible cultural tragedy made him extremely happy because he did not have to learn as many words. In Cain's essay on literary experience, he provides a short reading of this passage where he emphasizes the *experience* that readers go through as they read the lines. The words 'perished' and 'destroyed' builds up a charge that is contrasted by 'enthusiastic'. The effect, as Cain points out, is that Orwell surprises us into a shift in our thinking, making us aware of our thoughts, feelings and responses.

If we add to Cain's observations by looking at the passage as *perverse*, we can get an even closer grasp on what Orwell's plainness is doing. When we encounter the words 'perished', 'destroyed', and 'irrecoverably', Orwell is setting the ground for a *reversal*, which is completed as we move through the phrase 'enthusiastic approval'. In addition to what Cain says about Orwell inducing us into a certain way of thought, we can see that the reason for this experience lies in Orwell's underlying desire to unnerve and destabilize. Crucially, that destabilization has an aspect that Cain does not point out: Orwell is designing a syntax that leads us as readers to agree with him. When he says 'that was how I saw it', the aesthetic effect of the passage is used to emphasize that Orwell's perspective was immature and wrong, something that the reader is left agreeing with. Not only has Orwell induced us into a certain way of thinking about the book burning, but he has used an aesthetic effect in order to align his perspective with ours. Reading this passage through the lens of perversity, then, reveals that his syntax is inherently focused on, and playing with, the readers' developing responses, resulting in the reader aligning his perspective with that of Orwell. In this case, he built up a sense of tension and relief with the result of us smiling at his childish perspective on a cultural tragedy. We have been induced a clear train of thought – and we agree with Orwell that his attitude was hopelessly naïve.

Cain refers to perversity only in Orwell's essays. However, his observations are not limited to only those. For example, notice the perversity, Orwell's underlying aim of destabilizing the reader and shaping our way of thinking, in the following sentence from his most famous fiction, the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). The protagonist Winston Smith believes himself to be in a private setting, and is about to do something he knows is not accepted by the dictatorial state:

> The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp. (8)

The same principle of setting up the syntax with a clear reversal in mind is present. Orwell starts by describing a very ordinary action. It is followed by an assurance that it is not at all illegal, yet the syntax completely turns when describing how it is still punishable by death. The reader is not only surprised not only by the harsh punishment described, but by Orwell's syntax itself. Like we saw in "As I Please 32", Orwell's plainness is driven forward by the aim of destabilizing and unnerving.

The question that remains is whether the textual effect has any other function than a mere aesthetic one. As mentioned earlier, critics do not agree on what Orwell's plainness is doing. Cain is focused upon the aesthetic implication of it. I am in two minds about Cain's perspective. On the one hand, I agree that there is clear presence of destabilizing and unnerving: Orwell is indeed constructing specific aesthetic effects in the reader, inducing us into a certain experience. On the other hand, I am not so sure if the consequences of this are limited to that of a subjective 'literary experience'. Considering Orwell's ideological disposition, I find it probable that the stylistic strategy serves a larger political function. Looking at our next scholar points us in exactly that direction.

1.3 Political Purpose

In *The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell* Loraine Saunders argues that Orwell's plain prose style is fundamentally channeling political purpose. She understands Orwell as a proletarian writer who employed stylistic choices to promote his political purposes. She focuses mainly on his novels, but also includes central essays. By categorizing him as a proletarian writer, Saunders foregrounds the importance of Orwell's sympathies with the ordinary man; the people he believed to be vital to the cause of Socialism. His political ideas were fundamentally driven by his sympathy for the lower classes. The interesting part of his prose style, to Saunders, is how it *fuses art with propaganda*. That is, how his choice of words, syntax and descriptions are both aesthetically pleasing while consistently promoting his sympathy for Socialism and other political agendas. She observes that "when Orwell's texts are scrutinized one can begin to appreciate how every word is placed in accordance with

some design" (33). In making this comment, Saunders urges us to consider that the aesthetic effects of Orwell's words, syntax, sentences, and tone are deeply political charged. For example, she points out a difference between his drafted sentences and their finalized form (35): Instead of using the drafted 'one seemed to have not an instant to spare' Orwell would change it to 'The work took hold of you and absorbed you'. Saunders' point is that in going from a formal to personal account, Orwell is inviting the reader share the experience, increasing the emotional connection to the argument he is trying to make. She believes that these sort of aesthetic choices are ways he propagandizes his political ideas; he finds an aesthetic 'package' for delivering his political agenda. The simple choice of words, the flowing rhythm of sentences, aesthetic effects, are all put there for this politically purposeful reason. The main point is that Saunders views Orwell as a mix of an artist and a propagandist; underneath his aesthetic choices lies a political purpose.

Saunders' argument coincides with perspectives Orwell held himself. On the topic of what motivates his writing, he comments in "Why I Write":

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. (1084)

Orwell is saying that the starting point for his writing is an always an underlying political objective. Saunders elaborates by arguing that this political purpose is the core of his prose style. If Saunders' claim holds true, then that means the aesthetic findings we made in "As I Please 32" should have larger implications than a literary experience. They should, in some way, forward a political purpose. The implication of Saunders' argument is that we cannot look at a specific passage, sentence, or syntactical unit in isolation, identify a theoretical concept and declare its aesthetical effect upon the reader. In order to capture what Orwell's plainness is doing, we have to look outwards instead of inwards. Therefore, in order to better grasp what Orwell's plainness is doing, let us dive further into "As I Please 32".

When looking at the same passage from "As I Please 32" through Saunders' argument of political purpose, it reveals a deeper rhetorical nature. So far, we have found that the passage is playing with the readers' developing responses, and that it constructs specific aesthetic effects through an eagerness to destabilize, resulting in readers aligning their

perspective with Orwell. However, we can add to this finding by looking at the larger political context. The larger argument in the text is that there is a presence of a tragic unofficial censoring of the press in modern England, which ultimately decides what people get to read. Orwell makes it clear that there is no authoritarian censorship, but official 'requests' and general agreements that shape what would and would not do. Without naming any specific works, he also argues that this unofficial censorship now extends to books. With this larger argument in mind, we can discover that the aesthetics of the introductory passage has a larger function: England could reflect the great Caliph Omar in that they both decide what people read, what vocabulary is used, and what words remain unknown. The burning of the libraries becomes the veiled censorship that England is putting on newspapers and books. And thanks to the witty presentation of the introductory passage – the reader already knows the matured perspective. Orwell rhetorically emphasized 'that was how I saw it', communicating the naiveté of the other perspective. Only childlike thinking could lead us to view Caliph Omar (and England) as creating a desirable effect. The practice of veiled censorship is as preposterous as the burning of Alexandria libraries.

Furthermore, by examining historical context we can discover that the political agenda goes even deeper. Let us look at the time this journalistic article was published – July 1944. That is exactly the time when Orwell is struggling with something strikingly related to what he is writing about in this article – he is struggling with getting *Animal Farm* published. Orwell had severe problems publishing this novel because it was labeled as something that 'would not do' due to England's current alliance with the Soviet Union against Germany. In particular, the harsh criticism against the Soviet Regime made publishers and editors reluctant to publish it. The book was rejected by various publishers, including T.S Eliot and Orwell's longtime publisher Victor Gollancz. Again, the introductory passage has already demonstrated (and made us smile in the process) the immaturity of the other perspective. Unless we want to be like child-Orwell we must surely see that such an approach to censoring literature is tragic. He has used perversity to induce readers into taking a very specific stance on a political issue of his time. Let us recall how *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defined propagandist literature: "a didactic work which is obviously organized and rendered to induce the reader to assume a specific attitude toward, or to take direct action on, a pressing social, political, or religious issue of the time at which the work is written" (91). In a fundamental sense, Orwell's *aesthetics* are doing exactly that; inducing readers politically. If we follow the line of logic in this article, it is only fair that T.S Eliot, Victor Gollancz, and all the other publishers take back their statements and publish *Animal Farm*. What would

previously appear as the obvious right perspective has now become a specific political standpoint.

At this point, our analysis of a funny passage from an Orwell essay reveals that he is stupendous at merging style with agenda. Cain's theory of perversity was extremely useful because it helped us capture the developing responses of the reader as they read in real time. But by focusing solely on the literary experience of Orwell's plainness, he overlooks the deeper *function* that the developing response has. The function lies not only in creating self-reflective thought in readers, but in pushing them toward a specific political direction. It was only when we merged Cain's perspective with Saunders' argument that we revealed Orwell's plainness as fundamentally advancing his political agenda. His focus on playing with the readers' developing responses, the concreteness, perversity, and comical tone now displays itself as being politically rhetorical. Summarized, Orwell's windowpane plainness reveals itself, by designing specific aesthetic effects to promote a political agenda, to be an elegant politically persuasive tool. This discovery did not happen automatically from reading his text alone. In fact, we needed knowledge about the stylistics and aesthetical effects of his prose, larger political agenda, and historical context to fully grasp what is happening in this short passage. In its mix of aesthetics and political purpose, I argue that Orwell's prose style is fundamentally propagandistic. That it, his plainness constructs aesthetical effects that induces readers into agreeing with him politically.

1.4 The Ubiquitous Orwellian Voice

Underlying all the genres Orwell wrote in is his desire to convey something political. Although greatly varying his narrative technique, there is also a steadiness to the author's voice laying behind the prose. In one sense, that voice is hard to capture because he is growing and changing with time. For example, his clear contempt for totalitarianism specifically would not become clear until after his experiences in the Spanish civil war. There are, however, some core characteristics we can identify throughout: his anti-imperialism, anti-intellectualism, sympathy towards the lower classes, rejection of authority, a general leaning in favor of egalitarianism, individual liberty, and call for common decency. His authorial voice is distinctive in that it draws on very specific experiences he had throughout his lifetime. He wrote books and essays based on them; from imperialism in Burma, to poverty in Northern England, to trench warfare in Spain. Arguably, you can always sense the underlying presence of Orwell with a steady set of values. At the same time, his texts changes

greatly in accordance with genre. Sometimes he would write as himself, either directly speaking to the reader or providing a narrative. Other times he would write books in third person-narration, where he would furthermore change between external and internal focalization.

Having just argued that Orwell's plainness uses textual effects to 'aesthetically propagandize' his politics, I now want to develop this generalization across genre. This will be done by looking at a third scholarly perspective on Orwell's style, as well as providing readings of passages from "Can Socialists be Happy?", *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. The first one is an essay written in *Tribune* in 1943, the literary magazine he was the editor of at the time. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is his most famous novel, telling the story of a dystopian future of utter totalitarianism. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) is one of Orwell's lesser known novels, containing the story of Gordon's Comstock's lonely war on capitalism. The point of this final sub-chapter is to demonstrate how Orwell's propagandistic plainness is retained throughout his works while adapting stylistically in accordance with genre.

Most critics divide Orwell's writing into two main camps; essays and fiction. There is an ongoing debate in Orwell-scholarship on which one represents the 'essential Orwell'. On the one hand, we have critics such as Cain and Carey that argue that the essays are where Orwell's true talent lies, in his precise observation, his striking political commentary. On the other hand, we have critics such as Saunders that contends that his fiction is as textually rich as even his best essays. Discussing Orwell's style, then, can quickly lead us into focusing on only one of these categories. For our purposes, however, when studying his prose style as a whole, we need to look toward a scholar that analyzes the plainness across genres. The world-renowned linguist Roger Fowler, who specialized in stylistics, dedicated a study for exactly that purpose.

In *The Language of George Orwell,* Roger Fowler argues not only that Orwell's prose style is inherently polemical, but he also analyses how the political argumentation comes to life stylistically across genre. Although not using the term 'propaganda' to describe it, Fowler is similar to Saunders in his claim that Orwell's plain prose style is fundamentally a device for forwarding political agenda. 'The Orwellian voice', as Fowler calls it, is a set of techniques Orwell employs to give his prose a colloquial quality, creating the sense of clarity while also being filled with literary rhetoric and personal polemic. In the essays, Fowler shows that Orwell is employing himself as the focalizer, presenting arguments in a direct manner with a high degree of authority using simple action verbs and few adjectives, creating

a sense of closeness. He writes with unmarked modality, meaning he is describing with no degree of uncertainty, for example presenting a highly subjective opinion as if it was a basic fact. His observations are often negatively charged – he is criticizing something - giving the impression of a writer full of passionate opinions who knows the better alternative. In his analyses of Orwell's fiction, Fowler shows that the style changes stylistically *while* forwarding the same underlying polemic. Some of the strategies pointed out are stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse, verbs of perception, all being employed in order to have the *frame* as external narration while still forwarding the personal polemic of the essays. Fowler explains the Orwellian voice as follows:

[The Orwellian voice] is at its purest and most observable in the essays, but it is not a uniform quality always totally characterizing the writing: it is an impression, a model which readers will recognise under a variety of forms of expressions. Cues are placed in writings within different registers so that the reader can sense the overt, or the underlying, presence of the distinctive Orwellian voice with its consistent values. (42)

Within the plain style, Fowler argues that Orwell plants certain cues or stylistic markers that enables the reader to sense his individuality, or an idiolect. To understand Fowler's argument more easily, we can look at the Orwellian voice as a guitar: Even though being *one* guitar, it is still capable of playing many different songs (genres). What enables it to play different songs are the use of its strings (stylistic markers). The strings can be used very differently for each song, but in the end they all sound like a guitar. Likewise, for Fowler, all Orwell-texts sound like Orwell; they all promote his personal polemic. Because Fowler's study is linguistically focused, he goes to great length at showing how that idiolect is achieved linguistically. For our purposes, what is significant about the argument of the Orwellian voice is that it provides an understanding of how Orwell's texts changes stylistically with genre in order to retain his personal polemic.

Let us employ Fowler's concept of the Orwellian to see how Orwell's propagandistic plainness adapts when we switch genre. Let us first take a look at a passage from the essay "Can Socialists be Happy?". In this essay from 1943, Orwell is addressing his beliefs on what happiness is, and what a Socialist 'ideal world' looks like. Notice the high degree of authority in his tone:

> Nearly all creators of Utopia have resembled the man who has toothache, and therefore thinks that happiness consists in not having toothache. They wanted to produce a perfect society by an endless continuation of something that had only been valuable because it was temporary. The wiser course would be to say that there are certain lines along which humanity must move, the grand strategy is mapped out, but detailed prophecy is not our business. Whoever tries to imagine perfection simply reveals his own emptiness. (509)

In this passage, we can see that Orwell's personal beliefs are manifested very directly. He argues that writers who have tried to represent eternal happiness have fundamentally failed because they are only able to imagine it in terms of contrast. He then argues that this fact should shape how socialists approach the idea of an ideal world. First and foremost, the same tendency we found before of using aesthetical effects to promote his polemic is present. This is manifested in two ways: One, the somewhat comical picture of using a toothache-analogy for explaining Utopia-literature. Two, the syntactical simplicity of that analogy. That is, the basic structure of 'toothache versus no toothache' and 'happy versus not happy', is pleasurably simple. It bases his argument on enjoyment. Remember, the picture is then used to forward Orwell's perspective on what a Socialist's approach to happiness should be; the aesthetic effect serves a political purpose. In general, his opinions are indeed very directly communicated. A key part of the argumentation in his essays, then, is the direct and authoritative stance on subjects using aesthetic effects purposefully to emphasize his larger point.

Orwell's subjectivity changes to a more indirect form when we go to his fiction, while still keeping the same political purpose behind the plainness. "Broadly speaking," Fowler states, "Orwell's fiction, as it develops, moves toward an increasing use of focalization by central character, although the framework of external narration, and an Orwellian view of the world, persist." (140). In making this remark, Fowler is suggesting that instead of using the authorial 'I' from his essays, Orwell merges character consciousness with narrative voice in order to channel his polemic. Merging character and external narrator is a narrative technique called "free indirect discourse". Free indirect discourse is a way of telling stories where a character's thoughts are merged with the narrator's voice. The effect is a third person narration with the advantages of first-person storytelling, where the text seamlessly moves between the telling of the narrator and the consciousness of the character. Through this form of discourse, Orwell is arguably able to let the Orwellian voice shine even though the 'I' from his essays is removed. Let us take a look at a passage from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where

Winston reflects on himself in relation to the dictatorial state Party. Notice the use of free indirect discourse:

“The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease of which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong and he was right. The obvious, the silly and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth’s centre.” (84)

In this passage, we see Winston’s thoughts and the narrative voice blend into each other through moving from description to direct thought without any markers or indicators. Going from a descriptive sentence that starts with ‘His heart sank as he thought’ to ‘And yet he was in the right!’, and ‘The solid world exists, its law do not change” demonstrates the sudden shift from external to internal. We get to feel Winston’s despair in his own helplessness against the power of the Party. He fears the Party intellectual who would crush him in a debate even though he *knows* his position to be true. He tries to hold on to his core belief that power cannot corrupt basic objective truth. And everything is presented in a blend of character consciousness and external narration. Interestingly, if we view this technique in relation to Orwell’s essayist political commentary, we can see the same values are being promoted. Like Winston, Orwell was hugely concerned about centralized power diminishing individuality (“Literature and Totalitarianism”). Like Winston, he frequently criticized and satirized the ‘English intelligentsia’ and their dishonest language (“The Freedom of the Press”). Finally, like Winston, he was genuinely concerned about the concept of objective truth fading out of the world (“Looking Back on the Spanish War”). Consequently, I believe it is legitimate to argue that free indirect discourse enables, at least in this case, the voice of the personal essayist to keep shining through even though the narration has switched to third person. In short, free indirect discourse is not just an effective technique for narrative flow; it is an effective propagandistic tool for promoting Orwell’s political agenda.

The use of free indirect discourse is not unique to Orwell, but Orwell uses it for something unique. As Fowler points out, free indirect discourse had been used many times before by English novelists. In addition, the general shift away from omniscient authors toward the psychological inner of protagonists was a key part of contemporary modernist

experimentation (where writers such as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, and Marcel Proust were front runners). But considering Orwell's firm belief of all art being propaganda, the unique thing for him is how he uses such a formal technique for a political purpose. It enables him to frame the stories as internally focalized while also retaining his external political persona with potential for remarks and irony.

However, a significant objection to my argument arises from concluding that Orwell uses free indirect discourse to propagandize his political agenda. That is, the problem of narrative voice versus authorial voice. A story's narrator is not the same as its author. Even though free indirect discourse *can* be used to channel Orwell's own values, it does not mean that it always *will* be. Take this passage from *Keep the Aspidistra Flying,* featuring the extremely prejudice Gordon Comstock, as an example. In this segment, Gordon is working in a book shop and helps different customers find a book when they enter. Notice the same presence of free indirect discourse:

> Ping! Shop bell. Gordon turned. Another customer.
>
> A youth of twenty, cherry-lipped, with glided hair, tripped Nancifully in. Moneyed, obviously. He had the golden aura of money. He hadn't been in the shop before. Gordon assumed the gentlemanly-servile mien reserved for new customers. He repeated the usual formula:
>
> 'Good afternoon. Can I do anything for you? Are you looking for any particular book?'
>
> 'Oh, no, no weally.' An R-less Nancy voice. 'May I just *bwowse?* I simply couldn't wesist your fwont window. I have such a tewwible weakness for bookshops! So I just floated in – tee-hee!'
>
> Float out again, then, Nancy. Gordon smiled a cultured smile, as booklover to booklover.
>
> 'Oh, please do. We like people to look round. Are you interested in poetry, by any chance?'
>
> 'Oh, of course! I *adore* poetwy!'
>
> Of course! Mangy little snob. There was a sub-artistic look about his clothes. Gordon slid a 'slim' red volume from the poetry shelves. (261-262)

Here we can identify the same type of merging character consciousness with narrative telling. In this case, however, Gordon's internal dislike for the new customer is especially extreme. In fact, it is so prevalent that it shines through every single line except his own dialogue. The

description of ‘Nancy’s’ appearance, personality, and even direct sentences are all blended with Gordon’s extremely pessimistic perception. The passage also makes use of the colloquial ‘hadn’t’ for narrative description instead of the more proper ‘had not’. In this case, it would be unadvisable to view the merging of narrator and character as a tool for directly incorporating Orwell’s own voice in. As Martha C. Carpentier points out, Orwell’s use of free indirect discourse should also be understood as a stylistic effort to imitate James Joyce, whom he admired tremendously. Therefore, decisively saying that certain formal techniques such as free indirect discourse have a dedicated propagandistic function, is problematic.

I do hold, however, that reading Orwell as generally adapting his polemic into the prose style of his novels still works well. Gordon Comstock, as a character, is a miserable man who declares war on the capitalist system, or ‘the money God’. He comes across as bitter, self-harming, resentful, and full of prejudice. Passages like the one above emphasize the resentment of that character. Although it is a mistake to view free indirect discourse as a tool for directly incorporating Orwell’s voice in, there is an undeniable autobiographical aspect to Gordon. In fact, when comparing Gordon to commentary Orwell made about himself, aimless resentment is precisely the commonality you get. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* was written around the same time as *The Road To Wigan Pier*. In the latter, Orwell provides autobiographical insight into how he viewed himself at the time. Compare the characteristics of Gordon as a character to Orwell’s reflections upon his past self: “At that time failure seemed to me to be the only virtue. Every suspicion of self-advancement, even to ‘succeed’ in life to the extent of making a few hundreds a year, seemed to me spiritually ugly, a species of bullying.” (*Wigan Pier* 100-101). In other words, Orwell has experienced the same resentment of money and success, the same desire to remain a failure, and the same bitterness towards people making money (to the point of calling it ‘bullying’). Consequently, the passage above can be seen as Orwell satirizing his own prior political naiveté. He points out the flaws of Gordon’s method of resisting capitalism. He demonstrates that naïve idealism only leads to resentment and misery. In this sense, Orwell *is* forwarding polemic. As Fowler emphasizes, the Orwellian voice is an underlying *impression* in Orwell’s prose, not a set of specific tools with dedicated functions. Free indirect discourse can certainly be part of a larger impression even though it should not be viewed as a direct integration of Orwell’s voice.

To sum up the case of what I believe Orwell’s plainness is doing, then, let us track my argument back to the three scholars. Cain helped us find that Orwell’s plainness pays especially close attention to the developing responses of the reader, which enables him to

design specific aesthetical effects. Saunders helped us expand upon these aesthetical findings, revealing that they are highly politically purposeful. This points us in the direction that Orwell's plain prose style is operating on the edge between art and propaganda. In fact, I believe it makes the case that Orwell's plain prose style is best understood *as* propagandistic. Finally, Fowler has now helped us scope the presence of propaganda in relation to genre. That is, he argued that Orwell's prose style exhibits *personal polemic ubiquitously across genres.* This helped us find out how the aesthetical propagandistic elements of Orwell's plainness adapts itself stylistically in accordance with genre, instead of just being reserved for either essays or novels. Put shortly, Orwell's plainness is ubiquitously propagandistic.

Based on Orwell's own meta-commentary, varying scholarly perspectives, as well as my own critical readings of both his essays and fiction, I conclude that Orwell's plain prose style is propagandistic in that it constructs aesthetic effects to induce readers politically. Despite its impression of windowpane clarity, it is consistently forwarding his political agenda. Stylistically, it is characterized by a lexical simplification, syntactical ease of flow, and vivid imagery. Yet the plainness is also highly sentient to the developing responses of the reader, creating aesthetic effects for specific political purposes. This makes me understand his plainness as performing an 'aesthetical propaganda' upon the reader. Finally, this aesthetical propaganda consistently adapts itself in accordance with genre and context, but always retains Orwell's idiosyncratic voice. His plainness is, with exceptional nuance, mixing minimalist aesthetics with political propaganda.

Chapter two: The truthfulness of Orwell's observational reportages

Considering the argument that Orwell's plain prose style is fundamentally propagandistic, the purpose of chapter two is to investigate how this affects the truthfulness of his observational reportages. The chapter attempts to demonstrate that, despite being factually inaccurate and promoting political arguments, Orwell's reportages should be understood as truthful accounts. This is because his propagandized strategies of fiction are what enables him to carry out his objective of conveying the scenery of his mind.

2.1 The issue of Orwell's observational truthfulness

In *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell's book on the Spanish civil war, he describes a sequence in the streets of Barcelona where there is a growing confusion among foreigners about whom is fighting whom, and which group holds what building. There is, however, a hotel regarded as a neutral ground that is filled with a diverse selection of people; Army officers, journalists, various political suspects, wounded men, refugees, and what Orwell describes as a "fat, sinister-looking Russian, said to be an agent of the Ogpu [Soviet secret police]" (121). Inside the hotel the Russian agent is deliberately giving false accounts on a recent attack:

> The fat Russian agent was cornering all the foreign refugees in turn and explaining plausibly that this whole affair was an Anarchist plot. I watched him with some interest, for it was the first time that I had seen a person whose profession was telling lies – unless one counts journalists. (127)

As the passage above clearly insinuates, Orwell regards the Russian agent as dishonest through his means of framing a situation into benefiting his agenda. He is a spy: his political agenda is to frame the events of reality into fitting the narrative his country wants to make. Surprisingly, the image of the fat Russian is then used to attack journalists' integrity. Stylistically Orwell is again being perverse; he knows the surprising effect of comparing Russian agents to reporting journalists. Yet a clear argument also comes across, namely his skepticism of journalism. In his view, English journalists were much like the Russian agent in reporting falsely on the events of the war. However, if we consider Orwell's own characteristics, he is arguably quite similar to both the agent and the journalist: he is always writing with a political agenda in mind, and he is a journalist who reports on events. An issue arises whether *his* coverage of events should be considered truthful.

Orwell's own reportages have often been celebrated for their vivid observational detail and honest delivery. Yet chapter one demonstrated ways in which Orwell's plainness exhibits a form of aesthetical propaganda. And with the style's ability to adapt personal polemic to genre, I am interested in diving into how it connects with the genre where accuracy and honesty is most crucial - observational journalism. If Orwell's descriptions are in a sense propagandistic, can we trust what he is saying? More specifically, should his observational accounts be regarded as trustworthy? The core role of a reporter, in general, is

to strive for accurate and truthful reportages. Do Orwell's reportages accomplish this? In short, what is the relationship between his propagandistic plainness and his reporting? The texts I intend to study to shed light on these questions are his four most known and influential journalistic reportages. They are the essays "A Hanging" and "Killing an Elephant", and the two reportage-books *Homage to Catalonia* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*. They all include the same type of observational realism, with Orwell himself as narrator and focalizer, seemingly reporting his experiences. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* writes that literary realism has an intended effect on the reader of representing "life and the social world as it seems to the common reader" (333). Many critics have argued that this type of realistic essayist-writing is where Orwell's true talent lies: in his precise observation, his literary realism, and his insightful moral and political commentary. In short, I am interested in finding out how Orwell's propagandistic plainness affects the trustworthiness of his observational journalism.

The recent term 'Creative Nonfiction' captures the central nature of Orwell's reportages. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* writes that the term suggests "a hybrid that involves facts, research, and information while using the resources and strategies of fiction, poetry, biography, and autobiography in shaping its material" (1619). Orwell's reportages find themselves on a balancing point between factuality and artistry. On the one side of his accounts, we have the nonfictional aspect. That is, Orwell portraying real events, in real places, based on real facts in concrete historical context. Liam Julian believes that Orwell's reportages "are powerful because they are presumed to be authentic" (51). They exhibit the sense of telling in detail how the events actually happened. On the other side, we have the artistic side of the reportages. That is, Orwell's creative telling of the events, his narrative techniques, his fictional shaping of reality. The accounts are neither fully factual nor fully fictional. What we can say for sure, however, is that Orwell's account is an artistic one. And as I mentioned in the introduction, Orwell believed that all art is propaganda. He believes that art needs to push a political objective. That means he wanted his art to stage particular situations that promoted political arguments. Considering this, as well as my own argument that his plainness is propagandistic, the question arises to what extent he is being trustworthy in his observations. The central question that arises, then, is how Orwell's propagandistic plainness is present in his reportages, and how it affects his trustworthiness.

Critics disagree on the question of Orwell's trustworthiness, and have been doing so over time. Some doubt that the detailed descriptions of the execution in "A Hanging" and whether Orwell actually shot an elephant in "Shooting an Elephant", while others believe Orwell's descriptions to be accurate. In *Homage to Catalonia*, there is the issue of how much

Orwell's lack of understanding of the conflict affected his descriptions. On the one side, we have critics who generally defend Orwell's accounts. Julian Symons argues in the introduction to *Homage to Catalonia* from 1989 that even through half a century of historical research, Orwell's recorded account "emerges almost unscathed" (xi). Jeffrey Meyers takes a similar perspective on "A Hanging". Liam Julian quoted him in saying "there is no question" that he based it on "close observation of an actual event" (50). In 2007, Saunders also fundamentally defended Orwell's truthfulness in his accounts. She believes that Orwell's fictionalizing of events does not hurt his fundamental truthfulness as a reporter. From these perspectives, Orwell's observational journalism reflects a high degree of truthfulness to events. On the other hand, however, some scholars suggest that the reportages are more political than truthful to reality. In 1988, Alok Rai argued that the character of 'Orwell' is a best understood as a fictionalized persona who writes with a "disarming transparency" (9), making his account of reality *seem* trustworthy while in fact being polemical. Another critic, Hugh Kenner, was in 1989 even harsher in his attack against Orwell's trustworthiness. He writes, "Orwell, so the prose says, had shot an elephant; Orwell had witnessed a hanging; Orwell at school had been beaten with a riding crop for wetting his bed. The prose says these things so plainly that we believe whatever else it says. And none of these things seems to have been true" (268). A similar skeptic of Orwell is found in Carl Freedman. In 1981, he focused on Orwell's plain language, concluding that it is fundamentally "dangerous and ideologically loaded" (328) because it provides oversimplified images of complex situations. He believes that genuinely nuanced political arguments should take the complexity of situations into consideration instead of ideologically masking them through plainness. Liam Julian argued in 2009 that Orwell's extreme political bias obscured him from taking in observations that could have challenged his already established beliefs. From these perspectives, then, we would have to view Orwell's reportages as mainly cases of political literature and not truthful depictions of events. We know that Orwell wanted art to push us towards a certain objective, but his journalistic reportages also carry with them the power of depicting actual events. The tension of the reportages is, as Liam Julian writes, "not that the reader asks Orwell for objectivity, but he does ask that Orwell describe scenarios *truthfully*" (51, my emphasis). In short, we have a tension between the transparent and honest reporter and the politically oriented propagandizing artist. Orwell was quick to point out others' lies and euphemisms, but as the tension among scholars show, it is not self-evident where he himself falls upon his own criteria.

Although Orwell's work is consistently separated into fiction and non-fiction, a closer look suggests that they are hard to distinguish from one another. Orwell is in an interesting place as a writer because he frequently switched genre. On the one side, the boundaries between them are clear: his novels represent fiction and his essays and journalism represent non-fiction. Yet some scholars have suggested that it is hard to distinguish between fact and fiction throughout his work. Kenner writes that "It is clarifying to reflect that the language of 'fiction' cannot be told from that of 'fact'. Their grammar, syntax, and semantics are identical. So Orwell passed readily to and fro between his two modes, reportage and fiction, which both employ the plain style" (268). In other words, because Orwell's plainness stays consistent, Kenner believes the clear cut between his fiction and non-fiction is not as obvious as it would seem. Take Orwell's most famous fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as an example. On the one hand, it is clearly manifested as a work of fiction. On the other, it contains huge amounts of connections to actual historical events. In *Orwell: Life and Art*, Jeffrey Meyers points some of these out. He argues that the false confessions of Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* draws to the false confession of Holtzman, David and Berman-Yurin during the purge trials in Russia, where they were accused of plotting with Trotsky. He also shows how the two-minute hate of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reflects the Nuremberg rallies in Nazi Germany. The ministry of love draws lines to concentration camps. Big brother himself can be understood as a merge between Stalin and Kitchener. Meyers points out a huge list of themes, events and people that reflect reality in Orwell's time. His conclusion is that although a fiction, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should really be understood as a realistic portrayal of Orwell's time.

Orwell's other major fiction, *Animal Farm*, is even more direct in its connection to reality. The entire book is a political allegory to an actual historical event: the Russian Revolution. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines historical and political allegory as a narrative "in which the characters and actions that are signified literally in their turn represent, or 'allegorize,' historical personages and events" (8). In *Animal Farm*, the place, people and events of the Russian revolution are represented in a fictionalized and simplified form, but they very much reflect a concrete historical reality. Orwell uses animals to reflect specific persons or groups. As Morris Dickstein points out, old Major is Karl Marx. Napoleon reflects Joseph Stalin. Snowball is Leon Trotsky. The horse Boxer reflects the working class. The raven symbolizes religion. Through using these simplified characters to represent the forces of the Russian Revolution, Orwell is able to make a point about how socialist idealism

can gradually become corrupted by power to the point of turning into tyranny. Each animal in the fable serves a function in this larger argument. They are part of his plain aesthetics.

I emphasize the direct relationship between his fiction and reality because, interestingly, Meyers' argument seems to be reversible. That is, where Orwell's fiction contains traces of reality, his non-fiction can be seen as containing traces of fable. For example, one would think that artistic use of animals is reserved for Orwell's fiction. As *A Glossary of Literary Terms* pointed out, using animals to convey a morale is a typical trait of beast fables. But it turns out that narrative use of animals also extends to Orwell's journalistic reportages. Specifically, "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant" each use an animal as part of their storytelling. What I intend to do in the following sub chapter, then, is look at how Orwell employs animals as strategies for delivering his political agenda.

2.2 The merge of propaganda and art in "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant"

Starting with "A Hanging" and then proceeding to "Shooting an Elephant", I want to provide insight into how Orwell's essayist-reportages merge with his political agenda. In both narratives he is reporting on his experience while serving as an imperial police officer in Burma (now Myanmar). "A Hanging" depicts his observation of one time he witnessed a hanging. The reportage starts off with orienting the reader about the situation:

> It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard. We were waiting outside the condemned cells, a row of sheds fronted with double bars, like small animal cages. Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water. In some of them brown silent men were squatting at the inner bars, with their blankets draped round them. These were the condemned men, due to be hanged within the next week or two. (16)

This opening orients the reader on many things. First and foremost, it provides a vivid picture of a depressing jail yard where condemned men are waiting to be executed. Descriptive realism is used to give readers a feel into the soaked and cramped state of the place. Orwell also orients us of the seemingly simple discourse of the story, using 'we' to indicate both his own and presence and focalization. In other words, we are following his perspective,

thoughts and sensations. All in all, from the very beginning of the story, the sense of detailed realistic observation is present. Orwell's detailed awareness of his surroundings continue as the story goes along. Notice how Orwell's account, although seemingly straightforward and realistic, starts to display a fictionalizing aspect from early on:

Eight o'clock struck and a bugle call, desolately thin in the wet air, floated from the distant barracks. The superintendent of the jail, who was standing apart from the rest of us, moodily prodding the gravel with his stick, raised his head at the sound. (16)

Orwell starts to give detailed accounts of not only the events unfolding, but when, in what order and the causation between them. Whether or not the superintendent actually raised his head at the sound of a bugle call at eight o'clock is impossible to know, yet the description comes across as highly realistic because of the logical chain of events creating a sense of plausibility. The effect is that the reader gets a sense of progression, of linear development, of one thing leading to another, making us 'see' the event as logical and trustworthy. In other words, the reader is inclined to infer that the observation is authentic. Although the narrative on the surface level is Orwell's factual observations, the presence of a more creative telling is found in his omniscient voice. That is, through Orwell's observational eye claiming to know the emotions of others. He describes that the superintendent is 'moodily' prodding the gravel. For increased factual accuracy he could have written 'I thought the superintendent looked moody when he prodded the gravel with his stick'. Instead, Orwell's subjective observation is merged with narrative telling. It creates a matter-of-fact aesthetic to his flow and demonstrates his commitment to imagery, narrative and syntactical fluency over exact factuality. The impression of a plain windowpane clarity is prioritized over factual accuracy in describing the scene.

The artful side of Orwell's telling grows as we encounter the story's animal. While Orwell and a crew of men marches the prisoner towards his place of execution, a dog appears. Notice the contrast between the dog and the rest of the situation:

A dreadful thing had happened–a dog, come goodness knows whence, had appeared in the yard. It came bounding among us with a loud volley of barks, and leapt round us wagging its whole body, wild with glee at finding so many human beings together. It was a large woolly dog, half Airedale, half pariah. For a moment it pranced round us, and then,

before anyone could stop it, it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face. Everyone stood aghast, too taken aback even to grab at the dog. (17)

The dog is presented as a mere realistic observation on Orwell's part. He provides the reader with information about its breed and believable behavior. But more importantly, it serves a definitive artistic purpose. After the grim atmosphere Orwell has painted so far, the sudden presence of a naïve wagging dog ('come goodness knows whence') comes across as a splash of paint on an otherwise colorless picture. The contrast between its energetic curiosity and the depressing group of men marching towards an execution emphasizes the despair of the situation. Orwell's omniscience continues, this time in form of the dog. He describes it as 'wild with glee at finding so many human beings together', creating the effect of understanding not only the emotions of the dog, but also the reason for this emotion. Although creating a feeling of plausibility, Orwell's *account* of reality is much more artistically oriented than the straightforward account gives the impression of being.

In in the climax of the story, as the prisoner is hanged, the dog reveals its ultimate function as an objective correlative. Notice how the event of the hanging is merged with the reaction of the dog:

There was a clanking noise, and then dead silence. The prisoner had vanished, and the rope was twisting on itself. I let go of the dog, and it galloped immediately to the back of the gallows; but when it got there it stopped short, barked, and then retreated into a corner of the yard, where it stood among the weeds, looking timorously out at us. We went round the gallows to inspect the prisoner's body. He was dangling with his toes pointed straight downwards, very slowly revolving, as dead as a stone. (19)

The dog is the only agent expressing any kind of shock or remorse from the event. By showing the transformation from its initial naïve idealism to confused fear from witnessing the hanging, the dog becomes the literary object the text relies on for emotional impact. In short, it becomes a tool for creating an atmosphere, for conveying a sensation. This strategy is perhaps best described as the presence of what T.S Eliot calls an "objective correlative" ("Hamlet and His Problems"). Eliot describes it as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked". The core of objective correlatives it that they serve as tools for creating a particular

emotion. In the context of “A Hanging”, the dog might very well be understood as that tool. Instead of Orwell explaining what he felt during these events, he constructs the *sensation* through the object of a dog. 13 years later, Orwell notes in an essay: “I watched a man hanged once. There was no question that everybody concerned knew this to be a dreadful, unnatural action.” (As I Please 47 771). I believe that the dog, whose instinct outweighs any social understanding, serves as the tool for capturing that ‘unnaturalness’ everyone felt. Put shortly, in “A Hanging”, the dog functions as an objective correlative conveying the tragic atmosphere.

Having demonstrated how the dog serves a definitive artistic purpose, “A Hanging” shares a central characteristic with *Animal Farm*; animals are highly purposeful for Orwell’s objective. Even though the dog behaves more realistically than the ones on the farm, the sense of political purpose is still there. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell uses them to forward arguments about the wicked nature of Soviet Communism. In “A Hanging”, the dog captures the unnaturalness of the execution and can be seen as Orwell’s larger despise for imperialism. And if the dog is in fact an objective correlative capturing the unnaturalness of imperialist executions, then the literal actions Orwell describes also take on political meanings. For example, let us look on this passage where Orwell tries to control the dog.

> It was several minutes before someone managed to catch the dog. Then we put my handkerchief through its collar and moved off once more, with the dog still straining and whimpering. (17)

On the one hand, this could be taken as a mere factual account of what happened. On the other hand, however, if the dog symbolizes the unnaturalness of performing an execution, then we could see the dog’s resistance as Orwell’s own humanity straining against him. The image of the dog being chained by the handkerchief and kept under control is the image of Orwell chaining his natural instinct to help the prisoner they are about to hang. He is acting as an imperial police officer, and in that action he is suppressing his humanity. The result is inner whimpering. He is part of a system which hangs prisoners and his common decency is screaming against it. The story, although seemingly being a windowpane clear account into an event, is also a story foregrounding Orwell’s internal disgust with imperial death sentences. The point is not merely that he uses techniques of fiction in a non-fiction; it is how the technique can be seen as serving political purpose.

The events of the narrative – the story – is quite straightforward. It starts in a depressing jail yard, from which they transport a prisoner, hang him, and then walk back. The discourse – the telling of the story – I believe is more political than it gives the impression of being. The dog serving as a contrast to the depressing group of men is not merely an aesthetic effect enabling emotion – it is integrating a political argument about imperialism into that emotion. In the end of the narrative, when Orwell writes about how they all reacted to the hanging, notice how the dog and men are presented as in different stages of consciousness:

The warders unfixed bayonets and marched away. The dog, sobered and conscious of having misbehaved itself, slipped after them. (19)

Contrast this to the humans' reaction:

I found that I was laughing quite loudly. Everyone was laughing. Even the superintendent grinned in a tolerant way. "You'd better all come out and have a drink", he said quite genially. "I've got a bottle of whisky in the car. We could do with it." (20)

The dog is described as 'sobered' and 'conscious of having misbehaved' while the men react by laughing and drinking. Orwell's sentences are extremely short and simple, while setting up a perverse scenario: why is the dog, and not the men, conscious of having misbehaved? The illogical gap creates tension, emphasizing the need for Orwell and his group to sober up. Getting sober, in this context, means waking up to the evils of imperialism. In short, the aesthetic plainness integrates a political purpose.

Similar politically oriented strategies of fiction are found in Orwell's most famous reportage, "Shooting an Elephant". In this reportage, Orwell tells the story of a time he had to kill an elephant as an imperial officer in Burma. It starts off with him being sent to look for an elephant that had been causing mayhem in a local bazaar. He grabs a rifle for self-defense, with no intention of shooting. When he arrives at the scene, however, it turns out that the elephant had killed a local person. This produces an enormous crowd that makes Orwell feel pressured to use the weapon nonetheless. Even though he is reluctant to use the weapon, he observes:

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for

a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes – faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. (46)

Notice how the same tendency of omniscient author is present in this reportage as well. In this case, the knowledge of the narrator goes beyond understanding the feelings of one single superintendent or a dog. It now 'reads' the emotions of several thousand people at once. The narrative voice explains what they all feel and why. Again, this could easily have been made more factually accurate, but Orwell is prioritizing the sense of clarity and vivid imagery over factual accuracy. As readers, we are provided with logical and plausible sense of progression. We easily 'see' the situation through the windowpane, and that allows him to build up vitality for his following political argument:

And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. (46)

This passage demonstrates that Orwell's realistic descriptions are fully merged with political purpose. He has already provided us with clear context of the situation, including an omniscient account of both his own feelings and that of the natives. Now, that tension is used to make an argument about the meaninglessness of imperialism. His straightforward account of events gives the impression of being merely observations while actually setting up his political conviction. Still, we are only halfway into the narrative, and Orwell has yet to find the elephant.

When we eventually encounter the elephant, we can argue that also this animal is an objective correlative emphasizing Orwell's political purpose. Upon finding it, he hesitates, and shoots it multiple times. The following passage describes the suffering of the dying elephant as he moves closer to inspect it. Notice how the emotion is conveyed through the animal as an objective correlative:

> He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open – I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock. (49)

The passage exhibits an impressive ability to describe what Orwell observed. His attention to every detail of the suffering animal provides brutally clear and realistic imagery. Most importantly for our purposes, however, is the object through which the emotion is delivered; an animal. Arguably, the situation itself and not the elephant could be seen as the objective correlative. But considering, as Liam Julian points out, that Orwell refers to the animal several times as 'he' instead of 'it', he is consciously humanizing the beast. In other words, the text puts special attention on the elephant's agency rather than the situation it is in. Because of the personification of the elephant, a deep sympathy for 'him' is evoked in the reader, and a desire to end his suffering.

If we consider the elephants function as an objective correlative, we can discover that the passage is not just a case of Orwell skillfully describing what he observed, but actually an emotional device on which he constructs his argument against imperialism. It is important to remember that Orwell's actions in the narrative are driven forward by imperialism – his role as an officer in it and the crowd witnessing his actions. If the reader feels a deep sympathy for the elephant, and its suffering is a direct result of imperialism, then that means the reader has an emotional reason for resisting imperialism. Describing the elephant as dying 'in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further', with blood welling out 'like red velvet', all with tortured gasps continuing 'as steadily as the ticking of a clock', emphasizes Orwell's helplessness. Everyone, including the imperialist himself, is miserable in the system. Orwell does not need to describe what he felt; we can feel it. And

considering the political context, we can *feel* his argument against imperialism. Core to objective correlatives is that instead of *describing* emotion, they *evoke* it. And in this case, Orwell *evokes* political emotion. More than being a documentary reportage, then, “Shooting an Elephant” is a literary work which uses specific strategies of fiction in order to create emotionally moving imagery, with the ultimate goal of conveying a political argument about imperialism.

My analyses suggest that “A Hanging” and “Shooting an Elephant” exhibit the impression of describing authentically and realistically, while actually being cases of Orwell’s stylistic effort to merge propaganda with art. His plainness provides vivid and realistic imagery, but it also, in a less obvious manner, promotes his political agenda against imperialism. Trying to capture exactly which details are true and which one are fictional becomes a case of speculation. Instead, it seems sensible to conclude the reportages lean towards being more literary than factually oriented. Even if the dog turned out to be real, we can criticize the journalistic accuracy for having a narrator that knows its emotions. If the elephant turned out to be real, we can criticize the journalistic accuracy for presenting it using such ‘literary’ depictions. Conversely, if the dog or elephant turned out to be imaginative literary constructions, we can certainly criticize the journalistic accuracy for adding untrue elements to a reportage. At any rate, then, we can criticize Orwell’s journalistic accuracy. Regardless of the factuality of the events, then, Orwell’s *account* includes a purposeful artistic approach pushing it towards propaganda. My ultimate point is that, in his reportages, Orwell employs omniscient storytelling and objective correlatives in a politically purposeful, and not merely documentary, way. The question that remains is whether or not Orwell’s ‘propagandized’ approach means that he should be considered untruthful.

2.3 Orwell’s truthfulness: How his propagandized strategies enable conveying the scenery of his mind

Instead of viewing Orwell’s ‘propagandistic’ telling of events as evidence of him being dishonest, we could instead view it as what enables his truthfulness. In assessing the question of Orwell’s truthfulness, I am going to point to the perspective of Orwell-scholar Peter Davison, who suggests that the vital part of Orwell’s reportages lies not in their factuality, but in their imaginative aspect.

Thus far I have made the case that although seemingly authentic reportages of events, Orwell’s observations become propagandized through employing politically purposeful

strategies of fiction. Specifically, I have identified the animals as objective correlatives as well as demonstrating how they are used politically in the narrative. In addition, the narrator, although seemingly being focalized only through Orwell, actually leans towards omniscience by knowing the emotions of others. All in all, this leads me towards regarding Orwell's accounts as more oriented towards an ideological argument than actual depictions of events. In making this conclusion, I am making a similar move to Alok Rai in *Orwell and the Politics of Despair*. Rai also understands Orwell's accounts of reality as behind a layer of polemic. However, he goes one step further by arguing that Orwell himself should be understood as a fictional creation. That is, the Orwell we encounter in the novels and essays is a literary construction entirely separate from the individual who wrote them. Rai's argument is that Orwell's mediating persona is inherently fictional. Consequently, all his texts become fictional accounts, even though the "disarming transparency" (9) of his plainness makes it seem like reality. Although I agree with Rai up to a point, I cannot accept his overriding assumption that Orwell himself is a fictional creation. I believe a better approach would be to understand Orwell's account as *containing* fiction, and to separate that argument from the idea of his account *being* fictional. In other words, Rai and I agree in seeing Orwell's account of reality as polemical, but disagree on the scope of it.

Although Orwell's reportages make use of politically oriented strategies fiction, they also have deep roots in reality. Logically speaking, if a journalistic report contains propagandized fiction it would insinuate that the reporter is not being honest. In this way, Orwell's approach may hurt the idea of him reporting truthfully. Yet there are undeniable ties to reality to all of Orwell's reportages. First of all, he *was* placed in Burma for five years as an imperial police officer from 1922-1927. Both essays I have analyzed are placed during this time. In addition, we have recent solid evidence that directly supports the events of "Shooting an Elephant". That is, when Orwell was placed in Moulmein in 1926, the local newspaper *Rangoon Gazette* reported of a shot elephant (Saunders 140). This newspaper report points out key details that align with not only the major events of Orwell's depiction, but also smaller details. Other Orwell reportages, such as *The Road to Wigan Pier,* which depicts a powerful peek into the harsh consequences of unemployment in 1936 Northern England, or *Homage to Catalonia,* depicting his experiences of fighting in the Spanish civil war, are also unavoidably deeply embedded in real events. Considering these factors, I believe it would be far too simple to label Orwell's reportages as cases of fictional literary propaganda. His account is firmly rooted in concrete historical events and places.

Therefore, before arriving at the conclusion that Orwell's propagandized account makes his journalistic reportages untrustworthy, we have to look at his *use* of the fiction. As we have seen, the emotional impact of the Burma-reportages is fully dependent on Orwell's strategies of fiction: Without the literary use of the animals, the reportages would report without its striking emotional impact. Taking the fictionalizing parts away to fully reflect facts would rid the texts of their central atmospheres. Arguably, taking the atmosphere away is equally dishonest for representing the events truthfully. What arises, then, is the complex issue of how to represent an event truthfully. Focusing on facts will ensure that a reportage remains 'factually' true, yet it can miss conveying the 'feel' of an event. Conversely, focusing on sensations will ensure that the reportage stays true to the 'feel' of an event, yet it can lack factual accuracy. With this issue in mind, in order to more meaningfully assess the question of Orwell's trustworthiness, we have to understand *his* perspective on this dilemma; at what his objective is.

When asking what Orwell's objective is, Peter Davison suggests that we should look into the essay "The Prevention of Literature" for answers. Here Orwell states that an imaginative writer "may distort and caricature reality in order to make his meaning clearer, *but he cannot misrepresent the scenery of his mind."* (937, my emphasis). In other words, what matters for Orwell is *not* to what extent he represents reality accurately, but that that he stays true to the imagery of his mind. Davison addresses some of the connections between actual events and Orwell's account on them. He points out that the idea of fictionalizing may carry with it negative connotations such as to lie or forge, but he stresses that Orwell's creative strategies were not attempts to falsify. Considering Orwell's dedication to scenery over factuality, Davison defends Orwell's truthfulness. "Orwell's fictionalizing" he states, "is acceptable because the 'truth' being offered is independent of the artistic reorganisation" (43). Perhaps when approaching the issue of Orwell's truthfulness, we should consider it in terms of how he conveys scenery instead of facts. If we take Davison's argument into consideration, the 'truth' being offered in the Burma-reportages might very well be Orwell's *sensations* of a hanging and a tortured elephant, conveyed through objective correlatives, even though the facts may not be accurate. Although *reporting* external events, the reportages' primary function is that of aesthetic experiences.

Orwell's observational reportages are first and foremost aimed at conveying the scenery of his mind. The scenery of his mind in reporting two events from Burma will inevitably, based on his hands-on experience, be political. Put another way, he is not *trying* to deceivingly 'smuggle' a political agenda into his reporting of an event. Conveying the

scenery of his mind truthfully *means* conveying something political. From this point of view, we can hold the perspective that Orwell *did* employ propagandized fiction in his reportage-genre, but break away from the notion that this made him deceptive or untruthful. As a result, although I believe his journalistic reportages *contain* inaccurate facts that promote his political agenda, I would not call his observational journalism untruthful or untrustworthy.

2.4 Factual accuracy and the renewed stylistic approach of *Homage to Catalonia*

Orwell's book on the Spanish civil war, *Homage to Catalonia*, is both similar and dissimilar to the previous reportages. Like "A Hanging" and "Shooting an Elephant" the book forefronts a political argument. The central argument Orwell makes here is to convey the Communists' betrayal of the republican side of the conflict. The book describes Orwell's experiences in the war and conveys how the P.O.U.M, the militia group he was a part of, were being framed as Fascist traitors by their Communist allies. The book was controversial in that it conveyed Orwell's belief that the enemies in the Spanish civil war did not only come from the Fascist right, but equally from the Communist left. Orwell became a man who vividly criticized 'his own' side.

The striking difference in *Homage to Catalonia* compared to other reportages, however, is that it foregrounds factual accuracy. Orwell was shocked to see the degree of deception in the war's journalistic coverage. He stated that about nine-tenths of what was written on the subject was untruthful, and that "[n]early all the newspaper accounts published at the time were manufactured by journalists at a distance, and were not only inaccurate in their facts but *intentionally misleading*" (137, my emphasis). Being intentionally misleading was the major unforgiving sin for Orwell. Until now, this perspective had allowed him to make use of fictional elements in his reportages: as long as he did not mislead the reader, facts could be adapted. But the share amount of factual inaccuracies in the reports of the Spanish civil war made him reconsider his relationship to truth and prose style. Commenting on his approach when writing the book, he reflects:

> My book about the Spanish civil war, *Homage to Catalonia*, is, of course, a frankly political book, but in the main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form. I did try very hard in it to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts. (Why I Write 1084)

Here, Orwell insinuates that his usual fact-adaptable reporting style was laid aside in *Homage to Catalonia* in order to represent the unvarnished truth. This detachment of style does indeed create a very a different reading experience than the more literary air of “A Hanging” and “Shooting an Elephant”. Instead of merging his observable eyes with narrative omniscience for seamless storytelling, he now forefronts his lack of knowledge both of facts and the emotions of others. He now writes that *“so far as one could judge* the people were contented and hopeful” (4). His friend “*seemed* very anxious to recruit” him (102). Amidst a thrilling war scene, after throwing a bomb against the enemy, he admits to “*forget where that one went*” (71). Even descriptions including his wife, whom he most likely would be able to recognize emotions of, are affected by this new focus on factual accuracy. When he depicts himself as walking into a hotel and seeing her in the lobby, he writes: “She got up and came towards me *in what struck me as* a very unconcerned manner” (165, my emphases). Contrary to the other texts, Orwell consistently incorporates phrases to emphasize his limited role as an outside observer. The seamlessness between reporter and narrator we saw earlier has disappeared. Despite this intrusive change to his prose style with emphasis on factuality, Orwell *warns* the reader of his inaccuracies. “Again, I must inevitably have made mistakes of fact, not only here but in other parts of this narrative. […] I warn everyone against my bias, and I warn everyone against my mistakes. Still, I have done my best to be honest” (231). He does try to strive for factual truth, but he also knows that his experience is only a fragment of the bigger conflict. There is, in other words, an extreme awareness to factual accuracy in *Homage to Catalonia* that is not present in the other reportages.

Despite the focus on factual accuracy, Orwell’s book should not be understood as trying to give a definitive account of the events of the war. In “The Truths of Experience”, which addresses Orwell’s major reportages such as *Homage to Catalonia*, Margery Sabin argues that Orwell’s aim is to move the reader outside their own realm of experience, while also clearly foregrounding the limitations of his own perspective. She writes that “Orwell acknowledges the limitations of his experience and access to truth; but he also insists that truthfulness begins by overcoming the comfort of the familiar, whether it be rooted in the limitations of personal experience and taste, or the habit of accepting the official stereotypes of newspapers and other forms of propaganda” (44). Put another way, Orwell aims to put the reader into a new situation where they can expand their knowledge while also understanding that they are experiencing a partial account. In this sense, Orwell’s truthfulness comes from wanting to situate the reader into his (foregrounded) partial experience.

As an example of where Orwell's limited knowledge gives an inaccurate account of the political situation in Spain, historian Paul Preston points to Orwell's understanding of Barcelona as he returns there from the front. Preston writes that "In Barcelona, social and political hostilities had been mounting for some months. The tension that Orwell encountered when he arrived in April was not the result of communist malevolence but of economic and social distress." Preston points to a multifaceted reasoning for the rise of tension. Compare that to a passage where Orwell describes the atmosphere of Barcelona at the time:

> For under the surface-aspect of the town, under the luxury and growing poverty, under the seeming gaiety of the streets, with their flower-stalls, their many-coloured flags, their propaganda-posters, and thronging crowds, there was an unmistakable and horrible feeling of political rivalry and hatred. People of all shades of opinion were saying forebodingly: 'There's going to be trouble before long.' The danger was quite simple and intelligible. It was the antagonism between those who wished the revolution to go forward and those who wished to check or prevent it – ultimately, between Anarchists and Communists. (103)

Orwell is describing the atmosphere of increasing tension before concluding why as 'quite simple and intelligible'. His perspective is that it comes from a clash between Anarchists and Communists, which, as Preston showed, is factually inaccurate. Based on this, one might conclude that Orwell's account is not truthful. However, if we consider Orwell's artistry in integrating *the scenery of his mind*, the notion of an untruthful account falls short. The passage begins by a long sequence of subordinate clauses which provides insight into the atmosphere of the time. By listing objects, moods, and people, he is inviting the reader to *experience*, to 'see' the streets at the time as if through the windowpane. He is in a sense situating the reader into Barcelona, before arriving at the main clause which conveys the 'hatred' underlying it all. When stating that everyone was saying 'There's going to be trouble before long', it is not a literal description but part of capturing an atmosphere of paranoia. He is mistaken in the reasoning, but, crucially, the atmosphere he experienced is elegantly conveyed. Politically, *Homage to Catalonia* wishes to emphasize the later betrayal of the Communist side. The aesthetic experience of reading passages like this, internalizing the feeling of the conflict, increases the emotional impact of that coming betrayal. Readers have in a sense *felt* the paranoia of Barcelona, which makes the people who take advantage of the chaos, such as the fat Russian spy, come across as especially contemptible. If we recall the

aesthetic effect of that spy-passage, the ‘perverse’ comparison of the Russian to journalists, it emphasizes Orwell’s contempt for everyone who deceivingly portrays narratives they know to be untrue. The crucial part of Orwell’s account lies not in explaining exactly what happened and why, but in conveying how it *felt*.

Because *Homage to Catalonia* makes a stylistic effort to integrate facts with narrative, the instinctive reaction might be to regard it as more truthful than for example “A Hanging”. Still, if we consider that Orwell’s overarching *aim* is to convey the scenery of his mind, concluding one reportage as more honest than another is perhaps a mistake. *Homage to Catalonia* is, despite its stylistically factual orientation, first and foremost an artistic attempt at conveying certain imagery and sensations. In other words, the overarching objective is precisely like the other reportages. In order to emphasize the importance of scenery, let us look at a description of life at the war front, where Orwell depicts a scene of his allies shouting demoralizing mantras at the opposing fascist trenches. Notice the consistent focus on conveying the *sensation* of the event.

The man who did the shouting at the P.S.U.C. post down on our right was an artist at the job. Sometimes, instead of shouting revolutionary slogans he simply told the Fascists how much better we were fed than they were. His account of the Government rations was apt to be a little imaginative. ‘Buttered toast!’—you could hear his voice echoing across the lonely valley—‘We’re just sitting down to buttered toast over here! Lovely slices of buttered toast!’ I do not doubt that, like the rest of us, he had not seen butter for weeks or months past, but in the icy night the news of buttered toast probably set many a Fascist mouth watering. It even made mine water, though I knew he was lying. (45)

Orwell is not just depicting the event; he is also attaching a sensation to it. Like the dog in “A Hanging” captured the atmosphere of an execution, the lonely scream of toast captures the atmosphere of life in the trenches. Phrases such as ‘voice echoing across the lonely valley’ and ‘in the icy night’, together with the somewhat comical imagery of screaming ‘buttered toast’ at fascists, demonstrate that Orwell is not interested in adapting a straight ‘objective’ journalistic style even when striving for factual accuracy. Put another way, even his most factually accurate reportage is primarily focused on the creation of imagery and conveyance of sensations. In large, the renewed focus on factual accuracy certainly creates a stylistic difference in that the book reads differently than the others, but it does not change the fundamental truthfulness of his account. The focus is consistently on representing *the scenery*

of his mind over conveying facts. Consider this sentence from *Homage to Catalonia*, describing dawn as “the first narrow streaks of gold, like swords slitting the darkness, and then the growing light and the seas of carmine cloud stretching away into inconceivable distances” (42). This is a reporter whose honesty prioritizes imagery over facts. And as we have seen, all the reportages are rich in imagery. Therefore, although stylistically different, I do not think *Homage to Catalonia* is fundamentally more honest the other reportages.

Orwell’s description of imaginary toast can help us conclude on the nature of his observational truthfulness. Consider how he points out that the news of buttered toast made his mouth water even though he knew it to be false. Imaginative toast making his mouth water is the image of his observational depictions conveying true sensations even though we understand its political fictionalized element. Orwell maneuvering the reportage-realm with a fundamental awareness to fact, fiction, purpose and ‘intentional misleading’ is what I believe creates his observational truthfulness. If we recall the quote with the fat Russian spy, I believe Orwell and the spy differs in one crucial way. The spy is *disrepresenting* reality – he knows what is true and deceivingly changes it to fit his agenda. Orwell leans more towards *misrepresenting* – adapting facts in order to convey the larger (politically shaped) truth of his experience. He is not always factually right, but his reportages are truthful in that they convey the scenery of his mind. To put it shortly, I believe that his journalistic reportages should be regarded as truthful, not in spite of, but *because of* their propagandized fictionalizing. It is what allows him to carry out his objective of conveying the scenery of his mind. Figuratively speaking, his observational journalism is intended to water the mouths its readers, not merely report of toast.

2.5 Radicalism and *The Road to Wigan Pier*

When reading Orwell’s work one can quickly start to feel that he is right about a lot of things. He is often pointed to as a figure of common sense, and as I will show in the next chapter, a prophet of truth. But when looking at Orwell’s actual political beliefs, he also displays himself as having radical opinions. He was not just someone who wanted a more egalitarian or fairer society, but he was convinced that the age of capitalism was ending, and that a radical Socialist Party should emerge, taking full ownership of economic planning and all means of production, in addition to redistributing existing wealth. He was radical in the sense that he held much stronger political beliefs than one often gets the impression of when reading about him. When defending the truthfulness of his reportages, then, I think it is

important to take this into consideration. As an example of a typical presentation of Orwell, let us look to *The Norton Anthology of English Literature's* introduction on him:

> The book [*Wigan Pier*] pleased neither the left nor the right, for by now Orwell was showing what was to become his characteristic independence of mind on political and social questions: he wrote of what he knew firsthand to be true and was contemptuous of ideologies. He never joined a political party but regarded himself as a man of the uncommitted and independent left. (2605)

Norton's quote works great at capturing a core aspect of Orwell's Socialism. It is certainly accurate to say that Orwell showed a 'characteristic independence of mind', considering that after the Spanish civil war he was a dedicated Socialist while also being a relentless anti-Communist. As Ian Williams points out about Orwell's political position, "[his] incisively unforgiving attitude to the Soviet Union made him an uncomfortable partner for some of the Labour left" (108). In other words, Orwell's political position made him a unique leftist intellectual at the time. But *Norton's* description of him also lacks a bit of nuance. In addition to signifying that Orwell was liberated from ideology, they state that he never joined a political party. Orwell did in fact join multiple political parties. In "Why I Join the I.L.P" he gives his reason for listing into the Independent Labor Party. Under the Spanish civil war he joined the P.O.U.M (The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). Eventually he left both, but later explicitly pronounced his support for the conventional British Labour Party. That is, in a letter to Francis A. Henson, he emphasized his support for the party while commenting on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter)". Thus, *Norton's* statement that he 'never joined a political party' is not just factually wrong, but in portraying him as 'contemptuous of ideologies' and 'uncommitted and independent', they also contribute to downplaying the opinions of a man who held very strong leftist opinions on what society should be.

The tendency of downplaying Orwell's radicalism goes beyond *Norton*. Historically, Orwell's contemporaries often idealized him after his death. Selwyn Boyer's conclusion on Orwell was that he "supported and fought for the rights of men – for their needs and aspirations." (100). Isaac Rosenfeld wrote that: "Orwell was fair, honest, unassuming and reliable in everything he wrote" (170). Recently, Jason Cowley of New Statesman wrote that "Orwell was a rebel but never a revolutionary" (40). One would perhaps think that unspecific celebration of Orwell's political character is absent from modern criticism. But even scholars

such as Cain, whom I dedicated an entire sub-chapter to in the last chapter to, exhibits the same general tendency. In his essay on literary experience, he writes: “We *honor* Orwell for political positions he held and expressed in his essays about the issues of his time” (85, my emphasis). In suggesting that we ‘honor’ Orwell for his political beliefs without specifying exactly which opinions we are honoring, Cain contributes to a general idealization of Orwell’s viewpoint. In general, there are few in Orwell-criticism who make a point of, or at least dwell much upon, his more controversial perspectives. One of the exceptions is Thomas Pynchon. He argues that although Orwell regarded himself as a general member of the dissident left, “Orwell’s politics were not only of the Left, but the left of Left.” (vii). In making this remark, Pynchon emphasizes the *degree* of Orwell’s leftist political beliefs. David N. Smith recently made a similar argument. In “The Political George Orwell” he writes that “the degree to which Orwell was steeped in the crosscurrents of radical politics has been routinely underestimated”. In other words, Smith is not only agreeing that Orwell’s politics were radical, but he also argues that the radicalism is consistently overlooked. Pynchon’s and Smith’s focus on the radical nature of Orwell’s politics stands in sharp contrast to much of what has been written about Orwell, which often merges applaud of literary craftsmanship and political ideas. I agree with Pynchon and Smith on Orwell being exceedingly left-leaning, a point that needs emphasizing in the discussion of his reportages since so many still overlook his radicalism.

In order to more meaningfully defend the truthfulness of his observational journalism, then, I believe its radical element should be addressed. As I have tried to show, Orwell’s techniques and aesthetics pushes readers in a certain political direction. Even though Orwell is being truthful in conveying the scenery of *his* mind, how should *readers* approach his account knowing about his political push? I will now turn my attention to Orwell’s other reportage-book, *The Road to Wigan Pier.*

Orwell believed that “[a]bove a quite low level, literature is an attempt to influence the views of one’s contemporaries by recording experience” (The Prevention of Literature 937). The attempt to influence through recorded experience is perhaps not more clear than in *The Road to Wigan Pier*. This book is an observational account on the living conditions of the 1936 working class people of Northern England, where unemployment had struck particularly hard as a result of the depression. The book was intended as a study of unemployment in Northern England on behalf of his publisher Victor Gollancz. As a result, the observation is more fragmentary than before, as Orwell jumps from place to place and incorporates extracts from notebooks, general statistics, and reflections upon events. Still, the

observational passages themselves are strikingly similar to "A Hanging", "Shooting an Elephant", and *Homage to Catalonia*. He describes a variety of things, from the poverty stricken lodgers at Mrs. Brooker's house, to the horrific working conditions of coal miners, to depressing slum houses in between. In everything he depicts, there is an underlying assumption that the poverty and living conditions he describes are morally reprehensible.

Although it is clear that Orwell wants to convey the dreadfulness of what he has experienced, it is not self-evident what exactly his account is pushing us towards. Consider the descriptive detail of a slum girl's face as he passes her on a train:

> She looked up as the train passed, and I was almost near enough to catch her eye. She had a round pale face, the usual exhausted face of the slum girl who is twenty-five and looks forty, thanks to miscarriages and drudgery; and it wore, for the second in which I saw it, the most desolate, hopeless expression I have ever-seen. It struck me then that we are mistaken when we say that 'It isn't the same for them as it would be for us,' and that people bred in the slums can imagine nothing but the slums. For what I saw in her face was not the ignorant suffering of an animal. She knew well enough what was happening to her – understood as well as I did how dreadful a destiny it was to be kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe. (12)

On its own, this passage portrays the despair of a single individual Orwell encountered in his journey. His windowpane account provides a detailed view into her suffering as he passes her on a train. Although arguably such a prolonged detailed description based on a split second of observation is highly unlikely, its textual effect is still a feeling of plausibility. It provides a descriptive detail and vivid imagery that makes the realities of the horrid slums feel real. It also establishes an emotional bond between the reader and the event, in this case to the slum girl and her life of poverty in Northern England. He is not merely interested in reporting the girl; he wants you to feel her despair and the oppressing injustice she is put into. Based on this passage alone, then, it might seem that Orwell's agenda is that of emotionally connecting with the slum-girl, thus raise awareness of the hopelessness of poverty and unemployment.

However, if we take a step back and consider Orwell's radicalism, we will see that slum-girl passage grows beyond its function of connecting the reader emotionally to poverty. First, notice the extremeness of Orwell's political conviction presented later in *Wigan Pier*:

> To sum up: There is no chance of righting the conditions I described in the earlier chapters of this book, or of saving England from Fascism, unless we can bring an effective Socialist party into existence. It will have to be a party with genuinely revolutionary intentions, and it will have to be numerically strong enough to act. We can only get it if we offer an objective which fairly ordinary people will recognize as desirable. Beyond all else, therefore, we need intelligent propaganda. Less about 'class consciousness', 'expropriation of the expropriators', 'bourgeois ideology', and 'proletarian solidarity', not to mention the sacred sisters, thesis antithesis, and synthesis; and more about justice, liberty, and the plights of the unemployed. (157)

In this short conclusion reflecting on the events he has described, Orwell demonstrates the striking degree to which his observations are politically radical. In writing that 'there is no chance of righting the conditions I described' followed by a clause that starts with 'unless', he is suggestive of that the entire point behind his observation is to move the reader towards desiring a *specific* political change. The underlying purpose becomes clearer in the next clause, using his observation as a reason for bringing 'an effective Socialist party into existence'. He goes on to describe how this must be a strong party of 'genuinely revolutionary intentions'. Put another way, in order to right the wrongs of what he has observed, a strong and revolutionary Socialist party must emerge. We begin to see that the purpose behind Orwell's observations is not just political, but radically so. Strengthening his radicalism is his perspective on how to accomplish such political change. That is, through 'intelligent propaganda'. He believes that intelligent propaganda is needed in order to push Socialism to a position where ordinary people would recognize it as a necessary and desirable system. Such a form of propaganda needs to move away from Marxist bickering and towards down to earth issues such as 'the plight of the unemployed'.

The slum-girl passage, then, grows beyond raising awareness to poverty and unemployment; it is also a push for Orwell's radical remedy. The stunningly detailed and emotionally moving descriptions of life in Northern England are meant to establish an emotional bond not just to poverty, but to revolutionary Socialism. What is on the surface level a strikingly detailed account of what Orwell observed, is also a carefully crafted argument for Orwell's revolutionary Socialism. The image of the girl kneeling in the bitter cold in a slum backyard becomes an argument against the capitalist system as a whole. We can feel her despair that comes as a consequence for the economic system she is put into. She becomes, like the dog or elephant, a device on which Orwell crafts an argument.

In short, I believe *The Road to Wigan Pier* demonstrates two things. The first is that Orwell's observations are not, and neither meant to be, merely recordings of events: He observes and reports with a clear intent to move and influence politically. His coalescence of observation and direct political commentary into the same book illustrates to what extent his observation is inextricably politically oriented. The second thing it demonstrates is the radical nature of Orwell's politics. He was not just an independent left-leaning political figure; he was left of the Left. He believed revolutionary Socialism was the remedy for England's various problems, and that 'intelligent propaganda' was a legitimate way of getting there. In short, his observations were political and his politics were radical.

When defending the truthfulness of Orwell's observational account, then, I believe it is vital to recognize this radicalism. If we do not recognize it, but rather assume him to be reporting neutrally, our finding of propagandized fiction strongly insinuates that he is being untruthful. Such an approach would be understandable, as fictionalizing with a political intent quickly leaves associations toward dishonesty. In addition, the windowpane clarity leaves an impression of objectivity – of telling it 'as it is'. But if we approach the reportages with a clear recognition of his lack of neutrality, the conclusion we draw can be vastly different. I believe the key in defending his truthfulness lies in understanding the reportages as a windowpane into an internal experience instead of an external event. As I stated earlier, he is not attempting to 'smuggle' a political agenda into his reporting. Conveying his experience truthfully *means* conveying something political. If we do not start by recognizing his biased political footing, then the propagandistic spins of his accounts will come across as biased and untruthful representations. If recognized, however, the way Orwell lays out the scenery of his mind is nothing but admirable.

The fallacy of the plainness is that it can give the impression of Orwell representing the event with objective clarity - 'as it was'. Even though this is a profound literary achievement, the reportages should instead be seen as representing the event with *subjective* clarity - 'as it was for Orwell'. If we recognize the subjectivity of his accounts, then we can start appreciating and admiring him for what is a remarkable observational truthfulness. Paradoxically enough, Orwell's truthfulness is dependent on his propagandizing.

Chapter three: Rethinking propaganda in *Animal Farm* today

The primary purpose of chapter three is to provide an interpretative analysis that foregrounds the role of propaganda in *Animal Farm.* The chapter attempts to show how Orwell's satirical style operates in service of political beliefs. It also provides an argument for how to approach Orwell's commentary in our own age where the immediate allegorical functions of the narrative are not apparent.

3.1 Orwell's fear of totalitarian propaganda

Orwell believed propaganda to be an inevitable part of art. In one of his longer essays called "Charles Dickens", he provides meta-commentary on his approach when analyzing literature. Notice how Orwell emphasizes that underlying all art is the author's intention:

> I have been discussing Dickens simply in terms of his 'message', and almost ignoring his literary qualities. But every writer, especially a novelist, *has* a 'message', whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it. All art is propaganda. Neither Dickens himself nor the majority of Victorian novelists would have thought of denying this. On the other hand, not all propaganda is art." ("Charles Dickens" 173)

For Orwell, looking closely at a work of art means looking at how authors manage to merge aesthetical effects with their underlying intention. When referring to 'all art' as propaganda, it emphasizes his belief that art always pushes for an objective. To him, the aesthetical choices an author employs do not simply exist, but they serve an intention the reader internalizes. But, crucially, with just a simple reversal of subject and object, Orwell emphasizes that propaganda on its own should not be confused with its presence in art. In fact, it was one of his primary political concerns.

Thus far I have focused on the type of propaganda Orwell himself employed and desired – its artistic side. I now want to turn my attention to the type he condemned and even feared. His most famous fictions, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, both contain vivid arguments against political propaganda. Interestingly, they are anti-propaganda texts that are also, according to Orwell's own definition, works of propaganda themselves. An interesting

issue that arises is how Orwell's anti-propaganda message merges with his own propagandistic plainness. This chapter seeks to provide an extended reading of propaganda as a theme in *Animal Farm,* suggesting how Orwell's satirical style functions in promoting political arguments.

Before moving our attention to *Animal Farm*, we should address its bigger brother. In order to understand the type of propaganda Orwell feared, we need to look at *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* treatment of the topic. The topics of interest are the nature of propaganda, its objective, its practical implications in society, and how language is used as a tool for reaching the ultimate end objective.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is set in a dystopian future where the world is controlled by three superpowers: Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. The novel explores Winston Smith's life in Oceania, where totalitarianism is in complete control. Oceania is divided into a hierarchy of three levels. On top we find the intellectual elite called the Inner Party, in the middle we have state workers called the Outer Party, and on the bottom the remaining working class called the proles. Reigning over all three classes is the iconic despot of Big Brother. He is the image of the ultimate authoritarian figure with his face displayed everywhere. Robert Paul Resch states that *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* ideological project is to "represent the destruction of human individuality and human community by a totalitarian state." (141) Playing a central role in this project is Big Brother's use of propaganda.

Nineteen Eighty-Four displays propaganda at its absolute worst. In "Propaganda and Surveillance in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: Two Sides of the Same Coin", Michael Terrence Yeo provides a careful examination of its nature and ultimate objective. The significant thing about propaganda in the novel, according to him, is its totalitarian nature. The state's propaganda is taken to "totalizing limits" (51) in its attempt at seizing political control over all aspects of life, including people's actions, speech, thoughts, and values. Every medium of communication is used to its maximum potential for controlling citizens. Yeo distinguishes between two main types of propaganda in the novel; propaganda of fact and propaganda of fiction. Propaganda of fact is where blatant lies are passed on as facts. The facts are not just simply false; they are knowingly false and used to propagate specific values. The citizens are manipulated into not just accepting false facts, but also absorbing their implied value judgements. In other words, the lies are not the main focus – it is the beliefs they form when being absorbed. The second type, propaganda of fiction, is where propagated values are designed into works of art. Where the former makes people believe false truths and thus shape their value system, propaganda of fiction manufactures

aesthetic experiences designed to do the same thing. Propaganda of fiction is found through giving aesthetic experiences while simultaneously pumping in political conviction. In both cases of propaganda, Yeo points out, the recipient is unaware of receiving political messaging.

Furthermore, Yeo shows how propaganda is inherently connected to surveillance in the novel. Surveillance works as both as an external policing function, such as the 'telescreens' who records everything citizens do, but also in an *internal* sense where individuals are adapting their behavior according to their *belief* of either being watched or being in a private setting. When the despot Big Brother is found on posters all over with printed words 'Big Brother Is Watching You', that is true for both propaganda and surveillance: He is watching, and the individual is convinced of being watched, thus adapting behavior. The ultimate goal of propaganda in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, then, is to propagate values, and to ensure complete and eternal orthodoxy to Big Brother.

The ones who carry out the practical deeds of propaganda in this society is the Outer Party, of which the protagonist Winston Smith is a member. Winston works in the Ministry of Truth, in the Records Department, where his daily job is to eradicate historical documents and substitute them according to the wishes of the State. In providing insight into Winston's daily job, Orwell sheds light on the systematized nature of totalitarian propaganda. Douglas Kerr points out that systemized propaganda was something Orwell himself had experienced when he worked with radio broadcasts at BBC from 1941 until 1943. At this time, with WW2 roaring, the threat of Japanese invasion of India was an ever-growing threat. England feared that their Indian subjects would not remain loyal in the crucial time of war, something that was thought to possibly cost them the war. While Orwell worked in radio broadcasts at BBC, they were in supervision by the Ministry of Information, who he had to provide scripts to before broadcast. The goal was to promote the idea that it was crucial for India to remain loyal to the English Empire. Orwell, who saw defeating the Axis powers as absolutely crucial to stop the rise of worldwide Fascism, found himself also contributing to Royalist propaganda that his heart screamed against. His experiences in Burma had left him as an outspoken foe of imperialism, but the war pushed him towards promoting it. Kerr argues that these experiences served as the model for the Ministry of Truth that Winston works in. However, where Orwell's contribution to systematic propaganda was rooted in a fight *against* Fascism, Winston's contribution is rooted in its triumph. The state of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seeks (and is successful in its attempt) to destroy the idea of an autonomous individual, thus controlling every aspect of life, including thoughts. People have stopped being able to make

sense of their own world, thus relying on Big Brother to do it for them. In this world, the state is in control of what constitutes reality. Propaganda has successfully propagated its values, and is on its way to ensure complete and utter orthodoxy to Big Brother.

At the center of the vision of an eternal orthodoxy to Big Brother lies the language of Newspeak. Newspeak is a new language being designed by Party intellectuals to limit lexical and semantic range so extensively that it becomes impossible to think unorthodoxly. It ensures loyalty through rendering anything else linguistically impossible. If you lack the words to express it, resistance to Big Brother is an unthinkable idea. Newspeak is a vision of a perfect language; a state of total propaganda. Ultimately, it seeks to destroy language as a tool for meaning.

Interestingly, while being Big Brother's most powerful weapon for totalitarian propaganda, Newspeak shares a characteristic with Orwell's stylistics; they both seek to linguistically cut and simplify. On the one hand, Orwell's construction of Newspeak warns us against the dangers of reducing language to its barest form. On the other hand, as I showed in chapter 1.1, Orwell calls for all writers to cut and simplify their language. In other words, the man who illustrated the danger of an overly plain language is also the man who made six concrete rules for plain prose. Orwell wanted, in the words of John Rodden "the simplicity and economy of Newspeak without its distortions and semantic impoverishment" ("*Nineteen Eighty-Four* at 70" 25). The similarity between Newspeak and his own stylistic advice creates a tension for his approach to propaganda. Scholars disagree on whether he managed to separate the impoverishing nature of Newspeak from his own plainness. The scholar Carl Freedman is skeptical and believes the two to reflect the same fundamental tendency; reducing range of thought. He sees Newspeak as a direct "parallel" (333) to Orwell's own stylistic advice. He argues that where the bareness of Newspeak seeks to reduce semantic range, Orwell's plainness accomplishes exactly that, just unconsciously. However, other scholars disagree with this conclusion. Michael Scrivener and Louis Finkelman argue that Orwell's plainness does not diminish any range of thought, but rather opens up for addressing complex issues comprehensively. We find a similar argument in Stephen K. Roney, who argues that Orwell's plain prose is a much better platform for communicating meaning than its complex counterpart.

Considering the range of tone and topical subject matter Orwell is capable of conveying, it seems too simplistic to argue that his plainness diminishes range of thought. Although I concede that Newspeak and Orwell's plainness are connected in their means of simplifying language, I still insist that they serve entirely different ends. Newspeak seeks to

fully establish orthodoxy, while Orwell's plainness seeks to effectively communicate meaning. Listen to Orwell's own assessment: "To write in plain, vigorous language one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly one cannot be politically orthodox" (The Prevention of Literature 939). In their opposing aims of political orthodoxy, Newspeak and Orwell's plainness should not be seen as two versions of the same tendency.

In summary, then, propaganda in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is characterized by a completely *systemized and totalitarian* approach to propaganda. It seeks to control not only information and actions, but thoughts, values, and feelings. Objective truth does not exist, facts are fabricated, art made solely for the purpose of propagating the 'right' values. The end goal, embodied by the language of Newspeak, is to ensure complete and eternal orthodoxy to the head of the state.

In terms of thematic continuities on propaganda between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm,* they both present a clear and vivid despot behind it all. In Oceania that despot is Big Brother, while on the farm it is the pig 'Napoleon'. Both despots set out to control their citizens through propaganda, violence, fear, and surveillance. Lies are presented as facts, ensuring that citizens behave a certain way. They both demonstrate Orwell's contempt for what he called "organized lying" (The Prevention of Literature 935), which he regarded as core to totalitarian systems. But there are also significant differences between the two. Where *Nineteen Eighty-Four* takes place long after Big Brother seized power, *Animal Farm* shows a gradual process into such a system. Crucially, this a beast fable that is also clearly a satire. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines satire as "the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (352). The satirizing of propaganda is found in the charismatic rhetorician 'Squealer'. He is a pig who serves the role as propaganda minister on the farm, second in command after Napoleon, and has the role of manipulating news and information to the other animals. Through him, we witness how an idealized animal revolution gradually turns into a state of utter totalitarianism.

3.2. The gradual totalitarian nature of propaganda in *Animal Farm*

Animal Farm's approach to propaganda is widely different in terms of scope, tone, setting, and complexity, while also retaining the same underlying argument against it. Orwell himself wrote 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" ("Why I Write" 1085). If Orwell's stylistic plainness cannot be divorced from his political agenda,

then his portrayal of propaganda *in* his most perfected work of propagandistic art is of special interest.

In the very beginning of the story, shortly after the old boar named Major holds his speech urging the animals to rebel against the human tyranny, he dies. His ideas, however, live on and the rest of the animals follow through on his call. They force the farmer Mr. Jones out and establish a new and better farm ran solely by animals. Fueled on adrenalin and a feeling of intense fellowship, the animals envision a life of prosperity and liberty. The pigs, being the most intellectual animals, take it upon themselves to work out the ideology of 'Animalism'. Ideology, according to *The Glossary of Literary Terms*, is "the beliefs, values, and ways of thinking and feeling through which human beings perceive, and by recourse to which they explain, what they take to be reality" (204). In the context of the farm, Animalism is supposed to ensure eternal equality, liberty, and fairness. The pigs work out seven unalterable commandments by which every animal has to live. They are as follows:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal. (16).

The pigs, however, given their new position of power, quickly begin to circumvent the principle of absolute equality. From early on, they start to assume the role of leadership and make use of propaganda to justify their increasingly firm grip on society.

Morris Dickstein points out that the decent into totalitarian propaganda is personified by the character "Squealer". As a propaganda minister, I believe Squealer has a few core functions in the narrative. That is, he manipulates facts to the crowd with the intent of propagating values, he justifies the shift from democracy to dictatorship, and he ensures obedience by the crowd through the threat of physical force. The first time we encounter him he is introduced as follows:

The best known among them was a small fat pig named Squealer, with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice. He was a brilliant talker, and

when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was somehow very persuasive. The others said of Squealer that he could turn black into white. (9-10)

From the very start, Squealer is presented as a clever pig who possesses a unique charisma. His skipping and whisking combined with well-chosen words enable him to master the art of persuasion. What we are dealing with, then, is a gifted rhetorician. Very shortly after establishing the principles of Animalism, the pigs break them by taking the cow's milk and ripened apples for themselves. This is where we first see Squealer's propaganda in action. The cleverness and deceptiveness of his justification is nothing but admirable:

'Comrades!' he cried. 'You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig. We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Do you know what would happen if we pigs failed in our duty? Jones would come back! Yes, Jones would come back! Surely, comrades,' cried Squealer almost pleadingly, skipping from side to side and whisking his tail, 'surely there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?' (23)

In this segment of sheer eloquence, we witness Squealer's ability to turn 'black into white' in practice, which in this case is the ability to frame an obvious dishonest action as an act of sacrifice. Through starting with the word 'Comrades', his initial move is to position himself on equal terms with the animals. However, this sense of equality is only an illusion, as his rhetoric exhibits superiority. He does not foreground the action that has taken place (the pigs have taken the milk and apples), but rather points to the naiveté of the animals for believing they did so in a dishonest manner. He proceeds to give them a very logical reason why, thus 'filling' in the animals on their ignorance. Orwell is integrating clauses that, to the reader, emphasizes Squealer's dishonesty. By including '(this has been proven by Science, comrades)' in a parenthesis, as well as adding 'cried Squealer almost pleadingly, skipping from side to side and whisking his tail' Orwell is inviting the reader to notice the strong deceptiveness. Squealer then uses the lie to promote the position of the pig 'as brain workers'

which the farm depends on. In Yeo's terms, he is pushing propaganda of fact – deliberately lying while also propagating specific values of promoting the pigs' status of importance. Finally, he is inciting fear into the crowd by threatening with the return of human tyranny. However, at this early point in the fairy story it is only an empty threat. Still, the animals are so afraid of human tyranny returning that they accept Squealer's justification and move on.

In addition to lying while propagating values, Squealer justifies a shift into dictatorship. At one point there is a major dispute among the leading pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, about the building of a windmill. Snowball believes it will drastically improve life on the farm, while Napoleon thinks it is a ridiculous idea. Just as it is about to be democratically decided that the building of the windmill *is* to take place, Napoleon initiates a coup. He uses large indoctrinated dogs to chase Snowball away, while establishing himself as the dictator. The rest of the animals are shocked, but Squealer's justification is again elegant:

> 'Comrades,' he said, 'I trust that every animal here appreciates the sacrifice that Comrade Napoleon has made in taking this extra labour upon himself. Do not imagine, comrades, that leadership is a pleasure! On the contrary, it is a deep and heavy responsibility. No one believes more firmly than Comrade Napoleon that all animals are equal. He would be only too happy to let you make your decisions for yourselves. But sometimes you might make the wrong decisions, comrades, and then where should we be? Suppose you had decided to follow Snowball, with his moonshine of windmills – Snowball, who, as we now know, was no better than a criminal?' (36)

Again, Squealer is able to turn a despicable action that everyone is terrified of into a moral act in perfect accordance with utilitarian principles. This time however, the propaganda is used to justify a severe cut of liberty. He justifies Napoleon's dictatorship in that the animals would have made the wrong decisions on their own. Where propaganda was previously used to secure own resources, it is now shifting towards directly influencing the other animal's negative liberty – their freedom against external constraints or rules. This gradual totalitarian turn becomes emphasized in Squealer's next declaration. Three days after Napoleon's coup, he announces that the windmill is to be built after all. Squealer explains to the crowd that Napoleon was actually never opposed to the windmill, but rather *pretended* to be in a sly maneuver to get rid of the dangerous influence of Snowball. In this next passage, notice how the threat of physical violence has appeared in Squealer's propaganda:

> This, said Squealer, was something called tactics. He repeated a number of times, 'Tactics, comrades, tactics!' skipping round and whisking his tail with a merry laugh. The animals were not certain what the word meant, but Squealer spoke so persuasively, *and the three dogs who happened to be with him growled so threateningly*, that they accepted his explanation without further questions. (38, my emphasis)

Physical force manifests itself in two ways; through Squealer's employment of militarized terms and through the threat of dogs. Employing the word 'tactics' gives an impression of a specific action serving a specific end, typically in a war context. The aim is not to achieve some larger well-being on farm, in which case a broader word like 'plan' or 'strategy' would be more natural, but to get rid of Snowball. Squealer's choice of words starts to create a sense of enemies and allies, of good animals and bad animals. In addition to his militarizing lexical choices, he now has the threatening dogs standing behind him. They become a form of surveillance that ensures his propaganda is believed. The tone is of course wildly different than that of 'Big Brother Is Watching You', but the fundamental nature of propaganda is starting to become similar: they both provide information while demanding a certain behavior. Due to the threat of violence, viewing the world through the connotations of 'tactics' starts to internalize. At this point, the beginning of a military dictatorship on the farm has been established, and it is moving towards the despotism of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Although the rest of the animals still feel an unease, the new threat of military surveillance oppresses any urge to resist.

After Napoleon's coup, Squealer's propaganda continues to develop its totalitarian tendency. By the end of the story, he is not just rhetorically manipulating reality, but outright creating false realities through blatant lies. Snowball, for example, went from being an 'Animal Hero, First Class' at the beginning of the story, to becoming a 'traitor' who tried to sabotage the victory of animals, to finally being an outright 'enemy' who had always been openly fighting on the enemy's side. Whatever the animals witness, has witnessed, or think they have witnessed, Squealer is there convince them how what they think is not the case. At the same time, the threat of physical violence has continued to materialize. As Morris Dickstein puts it, "[a]t each stage the machinery of propaganda goes hand in hand with the threat of force" (141). In other words, as the scope of propaganda grows, so does the amount of violence. By the end of the story, both propaganda and violence have grown so large that the animals have no choice but to accept everything they hear. Anyone who is accused of treason are slain on the spot. What was once seven unalterable commandments of Animalism,

becomes the famous single doctrine: “ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS” (88).

Together, Big Brother and Squealer create a unified whole demonstrating the nature of totalitarian propaganda. Where Big Brother represents propaganda at its absolute most horrific, Squealer represents it in terms of its gradual decent into totalitarianism. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* society, organized lying has come so far that it is the only truth. At this point, we have long passed the point where a Squealer is even necessary. There is no point in persuading a crowd with elegant lies because the crowd is already under complete and utter control. Big Brother is the only truth, and no one in this society has ever or will ever resist him.

Based on the totalitarian turn of events in *Animal Farm*, Orwell is obviously criticizing Squealer's propagandistic language. But considering the perspective that Orwell's plain prose style is also propagandistic, a question that arises is how their respective forms of propaganda differ from each other. They are both persuasive with language. They both employ effective rhetorical strategies; Orwell through his aesthetic plainness and Squealer through his skipping and whisking. They both have clear political arguments they want to forward. They both misrepresent facts as a means for accomplishing this objective. They both try to persuade an audience. However, if there is one defining difference between their respective forms of propaganda, I believe lies in their underlying moral purpose. As I concluded in chapter two, Orwell is, *through* his propagandizing, in essence a very truthful writer. I believe that, as Jeffrey Meyers formulated, “Orwell derived his clear style from moral integrity” (186-187). Squealer's clear style, in contrast, is derived from pure deceitfulness. Where Orwell's propaganda comes from a wish to genuinely convey the political scenery of his mind, Squealer's aim is that of mere manipulation. He is not just misrepresenting facts, but *disrepresenting* reality in order to secure own privileges. If we recall chapter two, disrepresentation is exactly what Orwell criticized the Russian agent and journalists on the Spanish civil war for. What Orwell is criticizing is not merely the act of misrepresenting facts (something that he himself is guilty of), but the underlying *purpose* behind that misrepresentation. Squealer embodies exactly the kind of immoral purpose that creates the dangerous propaganda Orwell fears.

Contrary to what may seem on the surface level, then, I do not believe that Squealer represents Orwell's general satire of propagandistic language. He knows that his own language is propagandistic. Instead, I believe it is the intentionally deceitful use of propagandistic language he critiques. The type that creates false realities and can lead us, as

in this case, into totalitarianism. Squealer's propaganda is not artful or aesthetic. It does not allow him to stay true to the imagery of his mind or otherwise serve a higher artistic purpose; it is just propaganda. It is rooted in lies, intentional misleading, immoral purpose. Through Orwell's plain prose in *Animal Farm*, Squealer becomes a sort of warning. He can be seen as the very embodiment of Orwell's fear against *gradual* totalitarian propaganda.

3.3. The rise and problem of St. George

Orwell's warning against totalitarian propaganda has continued to live on from the moment *Animal Farm* released to this very day. At his time, where the majority of leftist intellectuals were Soviet-sympathizers, Orwell became the figure of a man who saw through the façade and told the truth about the dirty realities of the system. In one sense, then, Orwell's anti-totalitarian warning is a very specific criticism of a concrete system from his time. However, the appeal and relevance of his commentary only continued to grow as time went on, from the Cold War era and until our present day.

After his death in 1950, as the cold war hardened, *Animal Farm* (in combination with *Nineteen Eighty-Four)* was used to paint a picture of the totalitarianism behind the iron curtain. After the fall of the Berlin wall, Orwell's 'prophesy' turned out to be uncannily accurate. As the public got insight into the corruption and horrific conditions of the great Socialist state, Orwell's was seen as the person who was right all along. Today, we see a rapidly growing technological society bringing with it personalized algorithms surveilling and forming our every move. We also see increasing totalitarian tendencies across the globe, most recently in Orwell's own Burma (Myanmar). In 2017, direct political lying got a new term when President Trump's senior advisor Kellynne Conway referred to the false statement of Trump's inauguration crowd being larger than that of his predecessor, not as a *lie* but as an 'alternative fact' (Wedge). In many ways after his death, then, Orwell's relevance seems only to increase. He has been pointed to as an intellectual presence more alive today "than he was during his own lifetime" (Rossi and Rodden 10). In the words of Jason Cowley, Orwell today remains "a truth-teller, a clear-eyed scourge of totalitarianism and a prophet of our new age of fake news, surveillance capitalism and the bio-surveillance state" (39). The same perspective is found in Jeffrey Meyers who declares Orwell as one of history's "prophetic moralists" (187). In short, although having roots in very specific conflicts of his time, Orwell has become a symbol of an enduring truthteller on totalitarian propaganda.

Although Orwell's reputation is a result of *what* he said, an often overlooked aspect is *when* he said it. In "How Orwell Became 'A Famous Author'", John Rodden dives deeper into how Orwell achieved his reputation as an enduring truthteller. He explains that more than anything, the *timing* of Orwell's death was the biggest factor of it. He died as a fierce anti-communist front warrior, just a month before Joseph McCarthy and the 'red scare' entered American political life, muddying the moral righteousness of this perspective. Furthermore, after his death, contentious issues such as the Cold War and Vietnam War arose that would have demanded controversial side-taking. Had Orwell lived longer, he would have had to take specific stances on these issues that could very likely hurt the conception of him as the general teller of truth. Conversely, had he died a couple of years before he did, and thus not being able to write *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* he would have remained entirely unknown. In short, the timing of his death, coming right after his unrelenting attack of Communism, but also before he with time would have had to nuance it, served as the golden ticket for his posthumous reputation. Soon after 1950, people on all sides of the political spectrum started to claim Orwell as a frontrunner for their own claim of truth. Orwell became synonymous with the warner; the man who had held the right perspective. In the words of Rodden, he was launched into "secular sainthood" (28). He became the idealized *St. George* still celebrated today.

From the reputation of an enduring truthteller it is not hard to see how Squealer's deceitful propaganda remains relevant in 2021. He effectively encapsulates something core to large scale lying and totalitarian tendencies that transcends his historical allegorical function. His deceptiveness can for example be applied to various world leaders. Vladimir Putin, for instance, made the interesting claim his political opponent Alexei Navalny, who was attempted assassinated by the nerve gas Novichok, in fact poisoned *himself* (Steinbuch). Despite this claim, Navalny was still imprisoned upon re-entering Russia. Conversely, Squealer's deceptiveness can also be applied to Western leaders. In "The Road to Revolution", Jason Cowley points to Donald Trump as a direct example of the continued relevance of Orwell's warning in *Animal Farm*. He states that "Orwell understood something fundamental about the malign effects of oppressive state power and about how political language can be distorted and manipulated so that falsity is claimed as truth, even in liberal democracies – especially in liberal democracies; just listen to the bluster of Donald Trump" (40-41). In making this remark, Crowley is connecting the nature of Squealer's totalitarian propaganda to the idea of 'alternative facts' Conway infamously named in 2017. His point is that *Animal Farm* captured something essential about organized lying and totalitarian

tendencies through the simplicity of its message. He believes Orwell remains a timeless truthteller.

There is, however, a problem with the enduring appeal of St. George. Since his death, Orwell has been used as a defense for about every ideology conceivable. The concept of claiming Orwell for your own is well known among Orwell-scholars. Martin Tyrell points out different terms that have been used for it, from ‘bodysnatching’ to ‘big tent’ authorship. Regardless of name, the action is the same: enlisting Orwell as a frontrunner for your own ideology. This creates a problem for *Animal Farm*. The book is Orwell’s most perfected case of propagandistic art. It merges his most extensive case of stylistic plainness with clear political purposes in all characters, events, and places. But its extreme plainness could also be a fallacy. The problem with satires, in the words of Bernard Crick, is that “they depend greatly on the contemporary references which time can erode or misconceive, and warnings depend on plausibility in the circumstances of the day (now often misunderstood, underestimated or re-imagined)” (“*Nineteen Eighty-Four:* Context and Controversy” 148). For *Animal Farm* in particular, when critic William Empson received a copy, he warned Orwell that the book might risk taking on unintended meanings on its own (Dickstein; Symons) This was in fact exactly what happened. Since his death, *Animal Farm* has been claimed by conservatives, liberals, socialists, marxists, libertarians, anarchists, all alike in their claim that ‘Orwell was right’. But crucially, Orwell’s criticism of Soviet Socialism was a very specific criticism from within the Left, putting emphasis on the dangers of centralized systems with the presumption that Socialism itself was not the problem. As time went on, his art endured while his intention faded away. The result is that we are left with a perfected piece of ‘propagandistic art’ functioning as political propaganda for all sorts of ideologies.

3.4 The windmill problem of *Animal Farm*

For the next sub-chapter, I will explain how the windmill sub-plot functions allegorically, while contrasting it to how it exhibits a structural liability of being misused, thus increasing the risk of losing a meaningful relevancy today.

On the one hand, Orwell’s plainness is what gives vitality to *Animal Farm’s* political commentary. The unrelenting satire on Soviet Russia is as clear as day, where a character such as Squealer perfectly captures the slyness and deceitfulness of totalitarian propaganda. Orwell’s overarching aim of fusing political and artistic purpose into one whole comes across in every word of the narrative, making it his most perfected case of propagandistic art. On the

other hand, however, the plainness can also be seen as a shortcoming. In “Getting to ‘No’: Snowball’s chance, Animal Farm, and ‘Exemplary Truth’”, Guy Patrick Cunningham argues that *Animal Farm’s* main weakness is its open susceptibility for being read through different political lenses. Although he concedes that the novel exhibits timelessness in its argument against totalitarianism, it is also a mockery of a system that no longer exists: The Soviet Union. As the world moves away from the historical event of Soviet Communism, Orwell’s political target also fades. Cunningham believes that the absolute focus on totalitarianism creates a weakness. The book is strikingly clear in what it is *against*, but vague when it comes to what it is *for*. In Cunningham’s own words, this “means the book can be used to shield bad ideas. Since Orwell only offers us a ‘no,’ we are free to fill in the ‘yes’ for ourselves.” In other words, *Animal Farm* is an absolute mockery of totalitarianism, but the definition of what totalitarianism *is* depends on the reader. Nothing inherent in *Animal Farm* contradicts different readings of what Orwell is satirizing. Consequently, Cunningham sees Orwell as an effective teller of ‘no’, but he believes that the lack of ‘yes’ hurts it as a missed opportunity at being a more effective satire.

Cunningham’s argument that *Animal Farm* leaves an overly interpretative ‘yes’ can be applied to the novel’s anti-propaganda theme to reveal a structural weakness in its narrative. Arguably, the most important object of *Animal Farm* is the windmill. In order to ease their life in the future with luxuries such as electricity and hot water, the animals start a major project to build a windmill. Originally planned by Snowball, but taken over to Napoleon after his seize of power and exile of his political opponent, the windmill is a consistent focus in the story. Orwell uses much effort to illustrate how the building process is extremely demanding and cause of a lot of suffering. If anything, the windmill represents the overarching collective goal of the farm. It is the cause that binds the animals together in their suffering through a shared feeling of purpose. During the building process, however, the stormy weather one night knocks the windmill to ruins. All the animals are in despair, and Napoleon seizes the opportunity to denounce his political opponent:

‘Comrades,’ he said quietly, ‘do you know who is responsible for this? Do you know the enemy who has come in the night and overthrown our windmill? SNOWBALL!’ he suddenly roared in a voice of thunder. ‘Snowball has done this thing! In sheer malignity, thinking to set back our plans and avenge himself for his ignominious expulsion, this traitor has crept here under cover of night and destroyed our work of nearly a year. Comrades, here and now I pronounce the death sentence upon Snowball. 'Animal Hero, Second Class,' and

half a bushel of apples to any animal who brings him to justice. A full bushel to anyone who captures him alive!' (46)

As we saw previously, the word 'Comrades' is immediately followed by filling the other animals in on their ignorance, thus exhibiting a sense of superiority. Phrases such as 'in sheer malignity', 'ignominious expulsion' and ''traitor', followed by 'justice' and 'captures', strengthens the illusion of allies and enemies while propagating ideas on what it means to act righteously. To the reader, Orwell's choice of plain but extremely loaded words comes across as hyperbolic – we understand that he is emphasizing Napoleon's deceiving rhetoric. Adding the fact that the text has previously showed how the expulsion of Snowball was entirely unjustified, this scene comes across as clearly mocking Napoleon's deceptiveness. Not only does he lie about the windmill, but he uses it to urge the crowd to join his cause against the accused traitor. On its own, then, the passage contains a rhetorical situation with three main parts. A totalitarian leader (Napoleon) who uses a windmill (collective desire) to falsely accuse a traitor (Snowball). The reader is inclined to infer a disgust at the totalitarian leader.

The target Orwell had in mind at the time have faded with time. But as Dickstein shows, the character of Napoleon was Stalin, Snowball was Trotsky, and the object of the windmill represented "the rapid industrialisation of the Soviet Union" (143). The animal's exhausting building of the windmill under Napoleon satirizes Stalin's 'Five-Year Plan' for rapid industrialization, which resulted in multiple famines and the death of millions. At the time of writing, the above passage worked great as a satirical allegory to the blatant dishonesty of Stalin as he expelled Trotsky and denounced him as a traitor. However, considering Cunningham's argument about the overly interpretative 'yes', we can in the modern day begin to see how this passage easily drifts away from its original intention. The passage contains a fixed rhetorical situation that critiques totalitarian deception. If our core political conviction lies in viewing President Donald Trump as an authoritarian, for example, this passage could be used as an effective critique for exactly that purpose. Consider the following quote from Trump's speech on January 6th, right before the storming of the US capitol:

And Mike Pence is going to have to come through for us, and if he doesn't, that will be a, a sad day for our country because you're sworn to uphold our Constitution. Now, it is up to Congress to confront this egregious assault on our democracy. And after this, we're going to walk down […] to the Capitol, and we're going to cheer on our brave senators and

congressmen and women, and we're probably not going to be cheering so much for some of them. Because you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength and you have to be strong. (Trump, video time-stamp: 56:21)

In this speech, President Trump is denying his defeat in the election, and setting up Vice-President Mike Pence as a traitor to their won election if he goes through with formally accepting the outcome. Trump urges the crowd to join him in his cause, and to march down with him towards the Capitol. If we view the windmill quote in relation to this speech, it can be seen as reflecting the authoritarian leadership of Trump. That is, he is manipulating the crowd to his own benefit, and pointing out a shared enemy who is destroying their collective cause, their windmill. From this perspective, Trump is Napoleon, their 'won' election is the windmill, and Pence is Snowball. Put another way, we have the same roles with an authoritarian leader, a shared collective cause, and a falsely accused traitor. From this perspective, *Animal Farm* would be a clear critique against Trump's authoritarianism.

However, the problem of Orwell's plainness is that the exact same passage can be used for the opposite purpose. That is, as a case *for* Trump. If our core political conviction lies in the other camp, for example a deep distrust of the Democratic Party, then the passage could be used to reflect their authoritarianism. Let us look at the following quote from President-elect Joe Biden's speech on January 7th, the day after the storming:

The past four years, we've had a president who's made his contempt for our democracy, our Constitution, the rule of law clear in everything he has done. He unleashed an all-out assault on our institutions of our democracy from the outset. And yesterday was but the culmination of that unrelenting attack. (Biden, video time-stamp: 1:20)

After President Trump's claim of voter fraud immediately succeeding the election, the narrative spread through the American people. In what Philip Bump of the Washington Post calls 'the lie that lingers', he points to a poll suggesting that, as of January 2021, as many as three out of ten Americans adhered to the claim that Biden's win was illegitimate. Even though polls should not be seen as providing exact numbers, we know that President Trump's claim did influence many. In fact, 147 members of the House of Representatives voted to sustain objections to selected election results (Yourish et al.). If our ideological presupposition is that President Trump is in the right, then the windmill passage would no longer reflect a mockery of his authoritarianism. Instead, president-elect Biden is the one who is manipulating facts when denouncing him as an enemy of democracy. From this

perspective, Biden is using the shared cause of democracy to denounce a traitor, all the while forwarding his own political position. Napoleon, in this case, is President-elect Biden. The collective cause of the windmill is democracy, and the falsely accused traitor is President Trump. From this perspective, *Animal Farm's* windmill quote is mocking the totalitarian propaganda of Biden. My point is that in both of these readings, *Animal Farm* stays consistent in its mockery of the authoritarian leader, but the target of the mockery is entirely dependent on the reader. There is nothing inherent in the narrative that meaningfully distinguishes *who* the danger of totalitarianism applies to. An anti-Trumpist and a pro-Trumpist could both look upon the same passage and declare: 'Orwell was clearly right'.

Where Cunningham sees the overly interpretative 'yes' of *Animal Farm* simply as a "missed opportunity" at being a more effective political satire, I believe the problem goes deeper. In an age where individuals are increasingly exposed to content and opinions within their comfort zone through digital echo chambers and personalized algorithms, I think we face an ever-growing issue of *Animal Farm* displaying a vulnerability of being misused. What we are faced with, I believe, is the windmill problem. That is, a structural vulnerability in *Animal Farm* of being used to propagandize any political agenda. Orwell's original intention fades away, but his status as a truthteller remains. *Animal Farm's* persuasive rhetorical situations, like the Napoleon – windmill – Snowball dynamic I have demonstrated, also remain. Consequently, we face the paradoxical risk of Orwell's most perfected work of propagandistic art being used to propagandize dangerous ideas. The appeal of Orwell's propagandistic plainness, then, goes beyond his own Socialist agenda. He himself declared that "[e]very line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it" (Why I Write 1083). *Animal Farm* is only successful in accomplishing the former. Even if the intention is to promote Socialism, the plainness hinders it. Ultimately, then, as we fade more away from the realities of the Russian Revolution, and more towards our age of disinformation and echo chambers, *Animal Farm* is at increasing risk of becoming an effective tool for *precisely* the type of dishonest propaganda Orwell despised.

3.5 An alternative approach to propaganda in *Animal Farm*: the crowd's active role

How, then, could we interpret propaganda in *Animal Farm* without succumbing to the fallacy of 'this is exactly what St. George warned us about'? I believe the answer lies in shifting our focus away from Squealer and unto the rest of the animals.

In "The Art of the Lie? The Bigger the Better", Andrew Higgins points out an aspect of political propaganda that is less talked about – the active role of the receiver. In discussions about propaganda, the liars themselves tend to be in the spotlight. Indeed, when a populist leader provides enormous reality shifting lies, the headlines and topic of discussion naturally falls upon the liar. Higgins, however, points out that a crucial part of propaganda is actually the *willingness to be deceived*. He states: "Lying as a political tool is hardly new. But a readiness, even enthusiasm, to be deceived has become a driving force in politics around the world, most recently in the United States." In making this remark, Higgins shifts the focus of propaganda away from the liar to the person being lied *to*. He points out that at an increasing rate, people are *willing* to accept not just small lies, but colossal untruths. That is a major part of the problem of political propaganda: not just the leader who tells the lie, but the crowd who accepts it.

Higgins' perspective, I believe, can help us move away from the windmill problem. Let us try to shift the problem of propaganda in *Animal Farm* away from on Squealer and unto the animals themselves. Below I repeat the very first introduction of Squealer:

> The best known among them was a small fat pig named Squealer, with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice. He was a brilliant talker, and when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was somehow very persuasive. The others said of Squealer that he could turn black into white. (9-10)

The main focus of the passage is of course on Squealer himself. However, the crucial part is arguably the last sentence. That is, 'The other animals have said that he could turn black into white'. The text shows that from the very start there is an *awareness* among the animals that Squealer possesses the ability to shift even the most obvious truisms. They *know* that he has a way with words that is deceptive. In other words, the text prompts readers to reflect upon the way the animals become complicit in totalitarian systems they *know* to be corrupt.

In the very first act of corruption, Orwell foregrounds the crowd's complicit role. After the animal rebellion and the seven commandments of Animalism are established, the feeling of patriotism is high. Just as the pigs lead the animals out to the hayfield to harvest, the cows display a sore need of being milked. Before going to the hayfield, then, they are milked and produce five full buckets. Notice how the other animals are not oblivious to what is happening:

> 'What is going to happen to all that milk?' said someone.
>
> 'Jones used sometimes to mix some of it in our mash,' said one of the hens.
>
> 'Never mind the milk, comrades!' cried Napoleon, placing himself in front of the buckets. 'That will be attended to. The harvest is more important. Comrade Snowball will lead the way. I shall follow in a few minutes. Forward, comrades! The hay is waiting.'
>
> So the animals trooped down to the hayfield to begin the harvest, and when they came back in the evening it was noticed that the milk had disappeared. (16-17)

In this passage, Napoleon's deceptiveness is clearly displayed through 'placing himself in front of the buckets'. But the text is also suggestive of the crowd's passiveness. When the first reaction after seeing the buckets is 'What is going to happen to all that milk?' the text demonstrates their ability to not just perceive, but to ask critical questions. Napoleon is able to distract, but they still notice the change when they return; the buckets are gone. Crucially, by employing the phrase 'it was noticed', Orwell is not only orienting the reader directly on the animals' awareness, but also emphasizing their passiveness through the syntax itself. That is, 'it was noticed' is a passive sentence, directly going against Orwell's own stylistic advice. The clause contains no clear subject, thereby emphasizing everyone's lack of attention. By employing such a lifeless clause, Orwell is contrasting Napoleon's active lie with the animal's passive mind.

As previously shown, Squealer will later justify that all milk and apples will be reserved for the pigs. Right after this speech, which ended by threatening with the return of the farmer Jones, the text turns to the animals' reaction. Notice it emphasizes the process of being convinced:

> Now if there was one thing that the animals were completely certain of, it was that they did not want Jones back. When it was put to them in this light, they had no more to say. The importance of keeping the pigs in good health was all too obvious. (23)

The clause ‘when it was put to them in this light’ demonstrates that they *do* at feel a sense of injustice, while also actively buying into the rhetoric. One could argue that this is because they are simply ignorant, but, crucially, the text has showed their explicit awareness of Squealer’s ability to ‘turn black into white’. They open themselves to receiving propaganda despite *knowing* it to be deception.

As the story goes along, the text continues to point out the crowd’s lack of critical awareness. When Napoleon announces that the farm is to start trading with human neighbors, something hitherto forbidden, confusion spreads. In Squealer’s justification, notice how the focus seems to be primarily on him, while at the same time emphasizing the role of the animals:

> Afterwards Squealer made a round of the farm and set the animals' minds at rest. He assured them that the resolution against engaging in trade and using money had never been passed, or even suggested. It was pure imagination, probably traceable in the beginning to lies circulated by Snowball. A few animals still felt faintly doubtful, but Squealer asked them shrewdly, "Are you certain that this is not something that you have dreamed, comrades? Have you any record of such a resolution? Is it written down anywhere?" And since it was certainly true that nothing of the kind existed in writing, the animals were satisfied that they had been mistaken. (42)

If we view the passage on its own, Squealer clearly comes across as the character in focus. He is the active agent who *sets* the animals’ minds at rest; he is the one who actively convinces. But, significantly, when shifting our lens of propaganda from the agent to the crowd, we can see that a central part of the passage is the animals’ willingness to accept lies. When Squealer ‘set the animals’ minds at rest’, what is also happening is the animals’ act of letting their minds be set. Squealer assures – but the animals become ‘satisfied’. Where we previously saw direct questions such as ‘What is going to happen to all that milk’, we now see descriptions of a few feeling ‘faintly doubtful’. As we move through the narrative, the ability to separate lie from truth becomes harder.

As time progresses, the lie becomes bigger and bigger, and resisting becomes harder and harder because of the threat of physical violence. But even at late stages of the book, where the threat of violence is high, the text is suggestive of the animals’ active role. Upon being told that Snowball actually never earned the title ‘Animal Hero, First Class’, the

reaction is as follows:

> Once again some of the animals heard this with a certain bewilderment, but Squealer was soon able to convince them that their memories had been at fault. (63)

Again, the instinctive reading of this is to view Squealer as the active agent. He is the one who *convinces* the animals that their memories are at fault. But equally, the animals are also in an active state of *being* convinced. Orwell emphasizes this by employing the phrase 'once again', suggesting an unfortunate pattern of repetition. Again and again the animals demonstrate a willingness of being deceived. They always react with initial bewilderment, they *know* that things are not as they are told, but upon hearing a plausible explanation they become 'satisfied' and move on.

At every stage of the corruption, then, is a lack of *critical* awareness to the events unfolding. The crowd accepts the lie and moves on. And the lie grows bigger and bigger until it ends in totalitarianism. As a whole, the text is suggestive of an intellectual indifference that allows the pigs to go forward with their behavior. If a major part of propaganda lies in the *willingness* to be deceived, then a major problem in *Animal Farm* is the animals themselves. The crucial aspect of Squealer's lie, then, is not the lie as such – but the willingness to accept it. By the end of the book, the lie has become so huge that it is no longer possible to distinguish it from the truth. Listen to the final sentence of the book, as the animals look through the window on the farmhouse and see pigs and humans together:

> The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again: but already it was impossible to say which was which. (93)

The human tyrants are sitting together with the pig tyrants, and the animals are no longer able to distinguish them from one another. One would instinctively blame the pigs for this turn of events. That is, their lying, deceitfulness, and lust for power. But standing on the other side of the windowpane, the animals are of equal blame. They were the ones who remained passive and accepted lies at every stage of the corruption process. As a result, they now find themselves in the despotism of *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* Ultimately, although the problem of propaganda in *Animal Farm* instinctively falls upon Squealer – it is actually on the animals themselves.

If we shift our focus on propaganda away from Squealer, *Animal Farm* grows beyond its easily exploited warning against totalitarian propagandists. We now see it as a reflection of the danger of *being* deceived. The notion that Orwell is providing some sort of fundamental truth about dangerous propagandists is too easily exploited. Instead, I believe we should view *Animal Farm* as putting us on guard against the *lie*; to call it out when we encounter it. Had the animals acted upon their awareness of the lie, totalitarianism would not have been able to grasp its claws on society. Ultimately then, in addition to being an allegory to the Russian Revolution and a showcase of the dangers of totalitarian propaganda, *Animal Farm* is a reminder to meet narratives with critical awareness. The windmill scene does not provide us with a timeless truth on totalitarian leaders. Frame the windmill one way, and you have truth. Frame it a bit different, and you have an entirely different truth. However, shift the focus from the liar to the crowd, and the windmill inclines us to think critically upon the narratives we are given, to call out lies when we see them.

Meeting narratives with critical awareness also applies for reading *Animal Farm* itself. In order for Orwell's book not to be misused into mindless ideological quarrelling, its plainness should be constantly challenged. *Animal Farm's* perfected simplicity is tempting to take as a case of St. George, of an enduring literary icon providing us with a fundamental truth. This urge is important to resist, even in cases where Orwell feels uncannily prophetic. *Animal Farm* is an elegantly crafted propagandistic piece of art. Instead of viewing it as an enduring truth on totalitarian leadership, we should view it as a call for critical awareness. In our age of increasing tendencies of echo chambers and disinformation, such a reminder to stay on guard against the lie remains invaluable.

Finally, how does shifting our focus on propaganda in *Animal Farm* matter when it comes to Orwell's prose style? I believe it can help illuminate how we should approach Orwell's texts knowing that they are propagandistic. Shifting our focus on propaganda away from the agent and onto the receiver inclines us to think critically about the plainness we encounter in Orwell's narratives. In the same way that the animals in *Animal Farm* should challenge the propaganda they encounter, so should readers who encounter Orwell's plainness. We should reject the idea of Orwell's windowpane clarity articulating the 'truth' about anything. Orwell's plain prose style is elegantly politically persuasive. And as the events of *Animal Farm* demonstrates, such a rhetorical quality needs to be met by an active mind. I have argued that Orwell's plainness is fundamentally propagandistic. I have also argued that it enables his truthfulness. I have now demonstrated the mistake of overly idealizing his commentary to the point of regarding him a truthteller. The combination of his

plainness exhibiting both propaganda and truthfulness simultaneously can quickly lead us down a path of celebrating his commentary as the plain truth. Such a fallacy can be resisted by constantly challenging his plainness; however obviously true his argument might seem.

Conclusion

This master's thesis set out to explain how to read George Orwell as a writer and prose stylist who strived to make political writing into an art. The first chapter focused on characterizing his plain prose style across genres. By first looking at Orwell's own meta-commentary on language, we found that his prose style is fundamentally the result of a conscious effort to lexically and syntactically simplify in order to reach the ultimate goal of windowpane clarity. His reasons for pushing prose in direction come from his working-class oriented ideological disposition.

After understanding the basics of what Orwell's plainness *is*, scholarly perspectives helped provide insight into what it is *doing* within his texts. William E. Cain pointed inwards in form of an aesthetic experience. He argued that Orwell's plainness designs specific aesthetic effects through perversity, inducing readers into a larger literary experience of exploratory thought and feeling. Loraine Saunders, on the other hand, pointed outwards in form of a political implication. She argued that Orwell's plainness is fundamentally an elegant rhetorical tool for channeling political purpose. Orwell's aesthetical choices, according to her, is a way he propagandizes his political objective. Through using both Cain's and Saunders' arguments, the chapter showed through a close reading of "As I Please 32" how Orwell's aesthetical choices serve political aims. I concluded that Orwell's prose style, although seemingly windowpane clear, is actually propagandistic in that it induces readers into agreeing with him politically. Finally, the last part of the chapter focused on scoping this argument in terms of genre. By using Roger Fowler's argument on 'the Orwellian Voice', it showed how Orwell's polemic adapts from his essays to novels. In the end, the chapter argued that Orwell's plain prose style is characterized by, despite its impression of windowpane clarity, being ubiquitously propagandistic.

Chapter two investigated how Orwell's propagandistic plainness affects the truthfulness of his observational reportages. Considering that his reportages have an especially powerful rhetoric behind them in that they are presumed to be authentic, a tension arises between the idea of a transparent and honest reporter and the politically oriented propagandizing artist. By

analyzing “A Hanging” and “Shooting an Elephant”, the chapter suggested that Orwell employs animals as objective correlatives in order to evoke political emotion, thus serving as ‘propagandized’ strategies of fiction. In the following discussion of how this affects Orwell’s truthfulness, the scholar Peter Davison pointed out how the imaginative aspects of Orwell’s reportages are what is crucial; how he conveys the scenery of his mind. Considering this perspective, I concluded that Orwell’s truthfulness is *dependent* on his propagandized strategies of fiction; they are what allows him to convey his experience.

The second chapter continued pursuing the issue of observational truthfulness by looking at *Homage to Catalonia*. It made the case that although foregrounding factual accuracy, the book’s truthfulness comes from its imaginative aspect. Even when Orwell is factually wrong, his descriptions exhibit truthfulness through the conveyance of his *experience*. The main argument is that Orwell’s reportages should be regarded as truthful, not in spite of, but *because* of their propagandized fictionalizing. The last part of the chapter emphasized Orwell’s subjectivity. His plainness gives the impression of telling things ‘as they are’. But as I tried to show in a discussion of *The Road to Wigan Pier,* Orwell’s viewpoint is far from neutral. In fact, his opinions were in many ways radical. His plainness gives the impression of providing a windowpane view into exactly how the event happened. If we manage to reject this impression, and instead understand his plainness as providing a windowpane view into *his* experience, we can regard his observation with admiration for its truthfulness instead of skepticism for its propagandized spin. The chapter concluded that a recognition of his radical subjectivity is key to defending what should be understood as a remarkably truthful reporter.

The third chapter provided an interpretative analysis of propaganda in *Animal Farm*. It pointed to key ways Orwell’s satirical style functions in the service of political beliefs. By first looking to what scholars have said about propaganda in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the chapter provided insight into the kind of totalitarian propaganda Orwell feared. Afterwards, it pointed to ways in which his anti-propaganda commentary comes to life in *Animal Farm* through the character ‘Squealer’. By engaging with scholarship that foregrounds the fallacy of St. George – the idea of Orwell as a timeless truthteller and scourge of totalitarianism – I demonstrated how a sub plot in the story exhibits a structural vulnerability of being used to propagandize any political agenda. This suggests that as we move further away from the concrete issues Orwell criticized at his time, and deeper towards the age of digital echo chambers and personalized algorithms, his most perfected case of propagandistic art paradoxically enough stands in increasing danger of becoming an effective propagandistic tool for any purpose. However, by pointing to how Orwell prompts readers to reflect upon the

way different groups become complicit in totalitarian systems they know to be corrupt, I showed how that fallacy can be counteracted. By shifting our lens of propaganda away from the propagandist and onto the crowd, I suggested that the actual problem of propaganda in *Animal Farm* lies not on Squealer, but on the willingness of being deceived.

Lastly, the thesis concluded by suggesting how this alternative reading of propaganda in *Animal Farm* illuminates how readers should approach Orwell's plainness knowing that it is propagandistic. Shifting the focus on propaganda from the agent to the crowd urges us as readers to think critically about, and more importantly, to challenge Orwell's plainness – however obviously true his arguments might seem. In short, the thesis argues that Orwell's plain prose style is thoroughly propagandistic while simultaneously enabling a remarkable truthfulness, a combination which contributes to the fallacy of interpreting his political commentary as the plain truth. Such a finding urges us to think critically about how we approach plain narratives, not just in Orwell's works, but anywhere in our subjective world of digital echo chambers and personalized algorithms.

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