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Ameya Tripathi

ABSTRACT: How did Orwell arrive at his rules for writing in "Politics and the English Language"? Here, I offer a modernist archaeology of the essay, showing how it emerges from *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Concrete words such as "shale" and "shingle" served as a material currency to resist the impressionism of the travel writing of Lawrence and Forster, or the abstraction of Marxist discourse. Orwell's ambivalence towards modernist introspection, at times shared by Empson, Jameson, Woolf, Pound, and Cunard, drove him towards a materialist and nationalist theory and practice of language and prose form.

KEYWORDS: Late modernism, Orwell, anarchism, travel, pastoral, prose style

> In prose, the worst thing one can do with words is surrender to them. When you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly, and then, if you want to describe the thing you have been visualising you probably hunt about until you find the exact words that seem to fit it. When you think of something abstract you are more inclined to use words from the start, and unless you make a conscious effort to prevent it, the existing dialect will come rushing in and do the job for you, at the expense of blurring or even changing your meaning. Probably it is better to put off using words as long as possible and get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures and sensations. . . . The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness.[1]
>
> —George Orwell

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The maxims from George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language," with their rules for good writing have been repeated so often, and across so many contexts, that they have long been divorced from the essay, let alone from any analysis of Orwell's prose style. Preferring concrete, Anglo-Saxon words over abstract, Latinate ones, being economical, and using clear images have become mantras for writing courses and political programs. For some, the essay demonstrates not only virtuous writing, but also virtuous thinking, because, as Orwell argues, "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought" (Orwell, "Politics," 137). However, the origins of the essay—how Orwell settled on these rules and this austere prose poetics—remain little understood.

In this article, I offer a modernist archaeology of the essay, showing how it emerges from Orwell's documentary writing in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). Orwell developed his prose style in opposition to both Marxist discourse and sentimental poverty tourism, neither of which he thought adequately represented working-class life. Like the novelist Arthur Calder-Marshall, who, Elinor Taylor notes, called for intellectuals to write in popular speech against the "arid jargon of the Marxist theoretician and the idiosyncratic expressivity of the modernist," Orwell found much writing about the working-class wanting.[2] Rather than endorsing Orwell's views on language, I disabuse the notion that these rules and values for writing are in any way neutral, and show how they are birthed in debates about modernism and socialist realism. Orwell's opposition to the idea of mass luxury, especially tourism, and deep ambivalence towards modernist experimentation, formed his prose style and later poetics. By reading his documentary works in this light, we can both understand the historical origins of these popular rules for writing, and his approach to the problem of the middle-class author writing about manual labor.

Orwell is often read with reference to radical essayists such as William Hazlitt, or social explorers such as Henry Mayhew and Jack London.[3] On such readings, he is a "uniquely autonomous writer," ambivalent towards modernism.[4] Alex Woloch notes that Orwell resists "two extremes . . . high modernism or socialist realism."[5] Kristin Bluemel describes Orwell as "intermodernist" and Patricia Rae uses both "late modernist" and "anti-anti-modernist."[6] However, when it came to the nascent genre of documentary writing as it distinguished itself from travel writing, Orwell's concerns were not so unique. Both modernists, such as Ezra Pound, and those grappling with socialist realism, such as William Empson and Storm Jameson, professed their doubts about writers luxuriating in introspection and flights of interiority.

Orwell's response to literary impressionism is to write in a mimetic style, modelling his prose on the cramped-ness and hardness of working-class spaces, whether in a boarding house in Wigan, or foraging for wood with anarchists in Aragón. Woloch attributes Orwell's nonconformity, with either high aesthetics or committed politics, to how his prose mimics the "provisional nature" of his deliberative, democratic socialist pattern of thought (Woloch, *Or Orwell*, 47). Orwell was indeed a cogitative thinker. His studiedly unpretty, staccato style imitates the rhythms and procedures of manual labor. This prose work ethic informs his most famous essay. From the very beginning

of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell finds himself rudely shocked by a hard world, "I had to sleep with my legs doubled up; if I straightened them out I kicked the occupant of the other bed in the small of the back."[7] With the semi-colon where it is, the sentence doubles up, coiling before kicking out. Sentences such as these slow down any leisurely reading pace. Changes of pace and rhythm give a sense of the anxieties of working-class life, and concrete words such as "shale," "cannel," "coal" and "shingle" become a material currency that militates against either abstraction or literary impressionism. Orwell's ambition as a writer is to replicate in language the manual laborer's facility with physical stuff. To do so, he remakes the figure of the manual laborer in the image of the writer.

This mimetic strategy raises several issues. How can a writer, who sees, thinks, and writes, imitate a coal miner, who crawls, digs, and carries? The former requires a high degree of introspection and reflection, knowledge work that takes the form of propositions, while the latter requires contact with the physical world, manual work that takes the form of practices, or know-how. Moreover, how did Orwell arrive at judgments of what kind of prose exhibited a non-political, transparent "concreteness"? In other contexts, concreteness could be deployed for hyper-masculinist ends. Recall, for example, Ezra Pound, who told writers to "Go in fear of abstractions," praising the "harder" language of writers such as James Joyce while damning the "flaccid" writing and "emotional slither" of effeminate men.[8] Orwell's persistent antagonism with the figure of the soft, cosmopolitan intellectual suggest several intersecting anxieties about how masculinity interacts with class, gender, and sexuality. Before Orwell wrote so constructively and programmatically, as in his 1940s essays, he was an antagonistic thinker. To understand how his prose style developed, it is necessary to look at his objections to travel writing and pastoral, and the consumer culture of mass luxuries.

The Road to Wigan Pier as Anti-Travelogue

Orwell went to Wigan in February 1936 on commission from Victor Gollancz, publisher and founder of the Left Book Club. Orwell walked in the footsteps of not only the Victorian social explorers, but also the new domestic anthropology of Bronislaw Malinowski, Geoffrey Gorer and Tom Harrisson. Mass-Observation began in nearby Bolton in the following year. The tradition Orwell explicitly rejected was travel writing and pastoral. Travel occurs not only across space, but as Claude Lévi-Strauss observes, upwards "in social hierarchy" as well.[9] The possibility of a temporary escape upwards in class was advertised across travel literature and tourist guidebooks. If travel writing promised a class escape upwards, the nascent genre of documentary writing required digging downwards along the class hierarchy. In Orwell's own documentary works he struggled to find a tenable position for himself as a self-described "lower-upper-middle" class writer to speak authoritatively about working-class life (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 111). As Bernard Schweizer argues, Orwell travelled "to transcend the boundaries of his 'native' bourgeois ideology" (Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road*, 18).

"Inside the Whale" and "Charles Dickens," which both appear in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (1940) take aim at the travelling middle-class writer across a range of literary genres. In "Inside the Whale" Orwell criticizes A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), the high modernist poets, and the "Auden-Spender group" for failing to write seriously about work. Because "the rentier-professional class was ceasing. . . to have any real relationship with the soil" they pursued a romanticized idea of manual labor: "Unless he has to do it himself a boy is not likely to notice the horrible drudgery of hoeing turnips, milking cows with chapped teats at four o'clock in the morning, etc., etc."[10] In "Charles Dickens," Orwell remarks that in Dickens's novels "anything in the nature of work happens off-stage" (54). Dickens can "wonderfully" describe an appearance but not "a process." His "vivid pictures . . . are nearly always the pictures of things seen in leisure moments . . . through the windows of a stage-coach. . . . Everything is seen from the consumer-angle" (57). The "stage-coach" alludes also to Priestley. In his ambivalently envious and self-reproaching criticism, Orwell is in fact discussing both authors, and in his own wry manner, himself: "When he writes about Coketown he manages to evoke, in just a few paragraphs, the atmosphere of a Lancashire town as a slightly disgusted southern visitor would see it" (57). Admiring Dickens's simile of the "piston of the steam-engine" that works "monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness," he cautions, "An engineer or a cotton-broker would see it differently; but then neither of them would be capable of that impressionistic touch about the heads of the elephants" (57–58).

The Road to Wigan Pier is written in the shadow of J. B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1934). Comparing the two is instructive. Priestley begins his travelogue sitting in a motor coach, precisely calibrating his class status. He mocks the "decaying landed country folk, with their rattling old cars," doubting if they "are as determinedly and ruthlessly comfortable as these new motor coaches" which are "voluptuous, sybaritic" and have "annihilated the old distinction between rich and poor travellers."[11] If he was a revolutionary, he would be "bitterly opposed to the wide use of these vehicles" as they would placate the working-classes (Priestley, *English Journey*, 3). Priestley is neither in a motor-car, nor on foot; he is right in the middle. His choice signals a desire to make the comforts of middle-class life more widely available, what Melba Cuddy-Keane has described in Virginia Woolf 's work as a kind of "democratic highbrowism."[12]

By comparison with Priestley, when Orwell goes to Wigan he is on foot. When he talks to the coalminers, they use "travelling" not to refer to leisure, but the arduous crawls they undergo to get to and from the coalface. When Orwell does mention a train, it is as a rare luxury on an otherwise strenuous trip, "for the passenger in an express train . . . his journey is an interregnum, a kind of temporary death" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 232). Like Priestley, Orwell believes these temporary flights of luxury mollify insurrectionary feeling. Unlike Priestley, who celebrates the plush coach's availability for broadly imagined, growing middle-class, Orwell notes that luxuries were not at all equally accessible. As part of his research for *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), Orwell went hop picking, as many of the urban poor did. In his diary, he observed that "it was humiliating to see that most of the people here looked on it as a holiday—in fact, it is

because it is regarded as a holiday that the pickers will take such starvation wages."[13] Orwell directly connects economic exploitation to the ideal of a holiday, a luxury for all.

As Paul Fussell argues, travel occupies a midpoint on a spectrum between exploration and tourism, unknown and known.[14] By contrast with exploration or some kinds of travel, tourism is a commercial activity to a known destination where leisure is a kind of packaged commodity, a trend gradually advanced by the Baedeker and Michelin guides. For modernist writers, tourism marked a degradation from leisurely travel, which still had a connection with exploration and adventure, as Suzanne Hobson shows in her readings of Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster.[15] Tourist literature promises a hypermobile, acquisitive approach to seeing landscapes. Woolf abhors the star-rating system of the guidebook produced, in particular its "drive to economy: its attempt to save the traveller the time and expense it would require to undertake a preparatory study of the literature about the monuments and sights on her itinerary" (Hobson, "Looking All Lost," 35). Forster notes that in reality "it is impossible as well as sacrilegious to be as quick as the Baedeker" (23). At its worst, tourism obliterates true aesthetic appreciation. Orwell shared the misgivings of modernists about the reductive nature of the guidebook and acquisitive nature of modern tourism, criticizing the relentless background music of resorts for preventing "the onset of that dreaded thing, thought."[16] He remained, as he admitted in the part two of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, "both a snob and a revolutionary" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 172). As he later explained, the title phrase "Wigan Pier" referred to an ironic joke that local music hall comedians made about the ugliness of the industrial districts.[17] There was no pier to be found in Wigan; only a staithe feeding coal onto barges. From the very title it is clear the text functions as an ironic anti-travelogue heralding the end of post-war travel.

Fussell argues that interwar travel writing was a genre of post-war convalescence. During World War I, the British government admonished travelers with signs reading "UNNECESSARY TRAVELING USES COAL REQUIRED TO HEAT YOUR HOMES" (Fussell, *Abroad*, 10). In the years after the war, the travel industry boomed. The presence of "leftover troopships" made for cheap pleasure cruisers (72). The excess purchasing power of the English tourist drew attention. To the Italian, D. H. Lawrence fulminated, every Englishman is "a coal fiend and an exchange thief."[18] In 1925, the Shell Oil Company's "See Britain First on Shell" campaign featured Stonehenge, in a stylized imitation of J. M. W. Turner's painting, by poster artist Edward McKnight Kauffer. [19] The image offers a modern interpretation of the pastoral, using abstract forms to assemble, and promise, a British landscape easily accessible to those with a motorcar. The increased mobility that came with motorcars encouraged an acquisitive attitude to sightseeing, promising a temporary escape from social reality. This fleeting escape, Orwell noted, meant that "you could quite easily drive a car right across the north of England and never once remember that hundreds of feet below . . . the miners are hacking at the coal. Yet in a sense it is the miners who are driving your car forward" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 34).

By "mass luxury," I refer to more than mass tourism. Mass luxury includes, first, a wider set of consumer goods which deter revolution, and second, the popular escapist

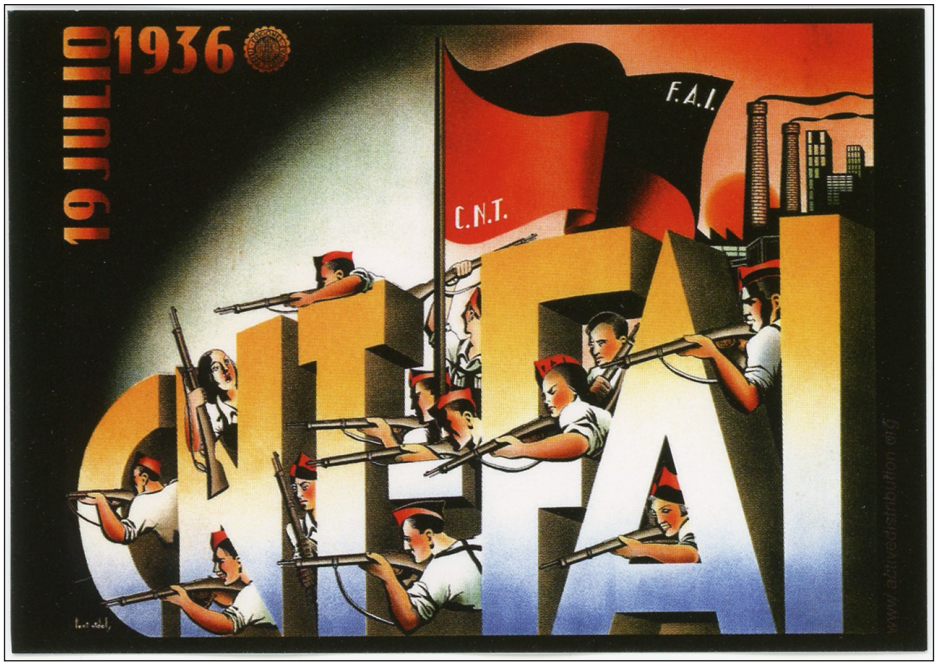

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Fig. 1. "F.A.I – C. N.T.," political sticker (1936), Barcelona. Courtesy of the Richard F. Brush Art Gallery, Street Art Graphics Collection, St. Lawrence University. Distributed by Active Distribution, licensed for noncommercial use.

practice of reading travel books, which were also cheap consumer goods. For Orwell, mass luxury has an important political function: "Trade since the war has had to adjust itself to meet the demands of underpaid, underfed people, with the result that a luxury is nowadays almost always cheaper than a necessity . . . it is quite likely that fish-and-chips, art-silk stockings, tinned salmon, cut-price chocolate . . . have between them averted revolution" (90). His criticism anticipates Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry, and as such a range of literary genres inside and outside of modernism are in his sights. The problem with both the abstract writing of the sociologist, which aggregates, and the impressionistic writing of the literary observer, which alludes, is that neither point, deictically, points outwards to an object, as concrete writing purportedly does. Orwell's economic critique closely resembles his criticism of both abstract and impressionistic language in "Politics and the English Language": "Long words and exhausted idioms" are "a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow" ("Politics," 137). He acknowledges one can take this critique too far, citing the American economist and social theorist Stuart Chase, whose *The Tyranny of Words* (1938) vociferously insisted on abandoning all political jargon. It is no coincidence that Chase was a critic of consumerism and a close colleague of Thorstein Veblen, theorist of conspicuous consumption. Note Orwell's anachronistic description of Dickens, in 1940, for seeing everything "from a consumer-angle" (Orwell, "Dickens," 57).

For Orwell, the escapism provided by pastoral travel writing was itself a mass luxury. As David Farley observes, the burgeoning travel book industry involved not only impressionistic landscapes but also sensuous flights of interiority, an "intermingling of external, physical travel with internal psychological journeys."[20] Such inward journeys seemed increasingly indulgent with the onset of the Great Depression, multiple wars in Ethiopia, Spain, China, and Czechoslovakia, and the decision in 1931 to abandon the Gold Standard, reducing the purchasing power of Brits abroad. Orwell latched on to this anti-travel, anti-indulgence mood. As British writers sought to interpret calls for "proletarian literature" from the Soviet Union, critics such as William Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935) and Virginia Woolf in "The Leaning Tower" (1940) all asked what proper role the urban middle-class writer had in a decade preoccupied with proletarian culture.[21] Was the introspection of the observer and their commentary useful, if the main purpose of the author was to document in a time where documentary photography and film's objectivity was prized? Taken to its logical extreme, did the call for proletarian literature obviate the need for the middle-class author altogether?

Coal Landscapes

In "New Documents" (1937), her essay-manifesto for *FACT* magazine, Storm Jameson protests against the introspection of the middle-class observer. The worst "is the dreadful self-consciousness" of the writer: "There is the woman raking ashes with her hands and here I am watching her!' . . . . The emotions are no doubt unavoidable. There is no need to record them. Let him go and pour them down the drain."[22] She satirizes the modernist writer, writing "no more peeling of the onion to strew the page with layer after layer," and insists, "No commentary—the document is a comment" (Jameson, "New Documents," 16). Instead, "as the photographer does, so must the writer keep himself out of the picture" in order to produce "the literary equivalent of the documentary film" (18). Jameson's demand for no commentary is consistent with the "anti-modernism" officially endorsed by the Communist Party, who were hostile to "'impressionist' writing that effaced tough social realities" (Rae, "Orwell's Heart of Darkness" 78). Rae terms Orwell an "anti-anti-modernist" because, despite modernism's read-as-bourgeois penchant for interior consciousness, Orwell defended the role of authorial introspection. Indeed, Orwell experiments with Joycean sections like "Wandering Rocks" in *Down and Out* and *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935).

Orwell and Jameson share a desire to say something about the inner consciousness and feelings of working-class people, but proffer different approaches. Jameson wanted to be rid of the observer's responses in exchange for an omniscient observer who can transcend their interiority; whereas for Orwell, those responses "are *part* of a social 'fact,' a part we ignore at our peril" (Rae, "Orwell's Heart of Darkness," 78). In a review of D. H. Lawrence's short stories, Orwell envies Lawrence for his "power of understanding . . . people totally different from himself, such as . . . clergymen and soldiers—one might add coal miners."[23] The close correspondence between the types

mentioned and the titles of Orwell's books suggests his complex feelings about Lawrence's writing. In Lawrence's stories, Orwell marvels, "everyone can make contact with everyone else, and class barriers, in the form in which we know them, are almost obliterated" (Orwell, 'The Prussian Officer', 32) Transcending class barriers was a goal shared by both travel and documentary writers, but Orwell situated himself in his own position between Jameson's anti-modernist strictures against indulgent commentary and, in his own understanding, the modernist psychological journeys of writers such as Lawrence.

Curiously, the scene of *The Road to Wigan Pier* which attracts the most critical attention is the one where Orwell is surely guilty of the "self-consciousness" which Jameson rails against, After describing a woman unclogging a drain-pipe, who he apparently sees from at train, Orwell remarks that 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" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 18). This differs markedly from his diary: "At that moment she looked up and caught my eye, and her expression was as desolate as I have ever seen; it struck me that she was thinking just the same thing as I was."[24] In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he places himself "almost near enough to catch her eye," when he was in fact walking at close quarters flanked by seven N. U. W. M. guides, as Raymond Williams protests, indignantly, in *Orwell* (1971). By excluding the guides, Williams argues, Eric Blair creates the fiction of George Orwell, the middle-class observer who has a particular prerogative to interpret working class life, "an isolated writer exposed to a suffering but unconnecting world."[25] For Keith Williams, cinema enables this distance. By putting himself behind a train window, Orwell interpolates "a transparency framing the woman exactly like a lens, but also a barrier to close contact."[26] However, what Orwell's diary entry suggests is that it is the fact of eye contact that gives him the confidence to declare she was "thinking just the same thing as I was" (Orwell, "The Road to Wigan Pier Diary," 178). Isn't it often confirmatory eye contact that gives us confidence that we know what the other is thinking—instead of a desolate expression that just glances past our own gaze? Perhaps the dash in the phrase "to her—understood as well as I," makes legible their mutual recognition. In the text, Orwell shrinks from this eye contact, away from any possibility that she might be watching him. By placing himself on the train, Orwell reads her as stilled in a photograph from a safe distance, rather than describing any ongoing interaction. Laura Marcus argues the scene employs the "grammar" of film, its cinematic take from a train redolent of early cinema.[27] Elsewhere, I argue the scene borrows from a scene in Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903), which deeply impressed upon Orwell as a schoolboy.

Nevertheless, the primary reason Orwell puts himself on the train in the scene is not to imitate cinema, but to indict both himself and his complacent, coal-consuming middle-class reader in a critique of leisurely travel. His fictionalized train glimpse emphasizes how socially immobile the world remains for this woman. Unlike her, he can escape. That escape, however, is predicated on several assumptions about travel and gender, as the next paragraph shows. The snow-covered landscape where the train

takes Orwell produces a coded relief, "In a crowded, dirty little country like ours one takes defilement almost for granted. Slag-heaps and chimneys seem a more normal, probable landscape than grass and trees . . . . But out here the snow was untrodden and lay so deep that only the tops of the stone-boundary walls were showing, winding over the hills like black paths" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 18–19). Having reflected on the young woman "kneeling there in the bitter cold, on the slimy stones of a slum backyard, poking a stick up a foul drain-pipe" in the previous paragraph, the escape afforded by the train allows his troubled conscience to seemingly move on. He remembers that "D. H. Lawrence, writing of this same landscape or another near by, said that the snow-covered hills rippled away into the distance 'like muscle.' It was not the simile that would have occurred to me. To my eye the snow and the black walls were more like a white dress with black piping running across it" (19).

Whereas Lawrence's Midlands prose is coded and gendered in complex ways, Orwell here renounces any erotic landscape description for a conventional, chaste image where the virginal countryside offers a pastoral relief from the harrowing image of the miserable, sullied woman in the industrial slum. Orwell does not shy away from writing about women doing manual labor, but this labor is typically represented as "defilement." As Nick Hubble notes, Orwell's understanding of the role of women in industrial capitalism was dated, given that factory women had led and organized major strikes.[28] His misogyny and related homophobia are well known.[29] In both *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia* hard textures are masculine and soft ones are effeminate. Orwell concludes the latter describing the southern England as "probably the sleekest landscape in the world" whereas the industrial towns are "far away, a smudge of smoke and misery hidden by the curve of the earth's surface" juxtaposing the softness of matronly southern England with the hardness of the northern districts.[30]

The train journey out of Wigan establishes the paramount importance of coal mining, and with it, hardness over softness. Coal mining scars the landscape and takes precedence over other kinds of labor, including social reproduction. By putting himself on a train, he leaves behind other potentially fascinating subjects in the first chapter: the mill-girls, newspaper-canvassers, pensioners, the unemployed, and the Brooker family's lodging house. Mr. Brooker does the housework because Mrs. Brooker is disabled. Orwell reports Mr. Brooker has a "hatred of this 'bloody woman's work', as he called it," but soon, he moves on to begin the second chapter with "Our civilization, *pace* Chesterton, is founded on coal, more completely than one realizes" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 21). Orwell's landscapes, pockmarked by coal, interspersing snow and slum, stream and slag-heap, rebuke pastoral and related literary genres which hide the process of coal production, and enable a culture of mass luxury which stymies revolution. It is with this imperative to undermine pastoral—albeit on his partial account of it—that Orwell goes down into the mining tunnels.

Orwell goes down the mines with some trepidation: "At the start to walk stooping is rather a joke, but it is a joke that soon wears off" (26). Many sentences begin with an expectation soon punctured by reality. Suspensive sentences and paratactic (but still subordinated and relational) clauses slow the process of reading to dramatize the steps involved in coal production. As he says, "When you think of the coal-mine you think of depth, heat, darkness, blackened figures hacking at walls of coal; you don't think, necessarily, of those miles of creeping to and fro" (29). The staccato rhythm of the prose and the syntax mimics stopping, or expectation that is confounded, "coal; you don't think, necessarily," with the punctuation shifting the rhythmic weight of the sentence, affording the materiality of the prose to show something of the physical experience of creeping in the tunnels.

Orwell was daunted by the miners' productivity, "[I]f I live to be sixty I shall probably have produced thirty novels, or enough to fill two medium-sized library shelves. In the same period the average miner produces 8,400 tons of coal; enough coal to pave Trafalgar Square nearly two feet deep" (43). Books and coal: apples and oranges. Why would Orwell make as notably invidious a comparison as that? Even if a writer worked a miner's exact hours at the exact same work rate they would never produce as much sheer matter. Nevertheless, he makes the comparison to impress on the reader that in general, coal miners work harder than writers and produce more. Moreover, the good they produce, fuel, is more essential: the coal will "supply seven large families with fuel for over a hundred years" (43).

Orwell's comparison is only the most extreme example of a series of attempts to unsettle our understanding of the "work." Both miners and writers are first workers who produce output. This isn't to flatten out class distinctions—coalmining, he says, "would kill me in a few weeks" (33). For Orwell, class is not a born characteristic, but instead accrues through the callousing activities of hard work. Those who do hardly any manual labor are softened to the point where they cannot do such a job. After the sheer effort simply of getting to the coalface, "you have to sprawl in the coal dust and get your strength back for several minutes before you can even watch the work in progress with any kind of intelligence" (27). Admitting he cannot do his own labor of observing, let alone their manual labor, in the miner's workplace, Orwell admits their gentle teasing in the text, "your miner friends notice the stiffness of your walk and chaff you about it" (28).

Joe "Jerry" Kennan, a National Unemployed Workers Movement guide who took Orwell down the mines, recounts the story more colorfully. In an interview, he describes lanky Orwell in the tunnels, "the way he took the roof bent a number of girders! We hadn't gone more than 300 yards when Orwell just didn't duck his head quick enough. It didn't knock the helmet off; it knocked him down. He was flat out. Then we revived him, got him round . . . there were three occasions altogether in which he was completely out."[31] Orwell does not report that he lost consciousness. Kennan adds, "by the time we landed there, Orwell was unquestionably exhausted . . . I remember him lying

down on the coal on the floor and I said to him, 'It's a so-and-so-good job they don't want you down here for to write a book about mining.' I said, 'The roof would bury you'" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 132). Orwell does not report what Kennan specifically said in his blackly humorous way: that he would not be able to write his book in the mines. The only example of something close to it is Orwell's truncated quotation, "('How'd ta like to work down pit, eh?' Etc.)" (28).

Orwell's remarks take on a new resonance in the light of Kennan's comments. Re-reading the question after Kennan's interview suggests that Kennan may not simply be asking, how would you like it to be a coal miner, but instead: "how would you like it if you had to write your book down here?" After all, why not write at the site of field-work? The question in full is more subversive of Orwell's authority. Let alone working as a coalminer, without Kennan's help, Orwell would not even be able to write in the coalmine, literally floored by the task. As Kennan says, "the roof would bury you." It is impossible to determine whether he remembered Kennan's remark, or another like it, but the morbid humor of the comment that the roof would *bury* Orwell leaves its trace. He imagines his own life's work, and with it, his death, outdone by thousands of tons of coal that would certainly pave over (or bury) "two medium-sized library shelves" (43). We can now think of the many etceteras, truncating quotations as outwardly displaying knowing confidence and familiarity, but inwardly censoring emasculating episodes. For Raymond Williams, the omission of the guides is the biggest failure of *The Road To Wigan Pier*. Orwell does praise the N. U. W. M., but does not quote them, failing to create a "structure of feeling" (Williams, *George Orwell*, 52).

Without including anything further than Kennan's light mockery, Orwell does confess his deep dependency on the miners. He never says he lost consciousness but does include his falls. He couches his feelings of shock by implying his reader would be exercised, too. The inclusive second person, "you" is both self and reader addressed. In the diary, Orwell says "I had vaguely imagined wandering about in places rather like the tunnels of the Underground," but this becomes "this frightful business of crawling to and fro, which to any normal person is a hard day's work in itself; and it is not part of the miner's work at all, it is merely an extra, like the City man's daily ride in the Tube" (Orwell, "Diary," 210; Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 29). Suggesting he and the reader—both "any normal person"—have similarly limited experience and knowledge, Orwell says the experience would knock both of them out and leave them unable to their job.

As he tries out the activities of the miners, the physical world intrudes, "You try walking head down as the miners do, and then you bang your backbone" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 28). He forgives himself, "even the miners bang their backbones fairly often . . . in very hot mines, where it is necessary to go about half naked, most of the miners have what they call 'buttons down the back'—that is, a permanent scab on each vertebra" (28). The rhetoric of "even the miners" makes the case that his experiences are, although neither objective nor written by a miner, typical enough to be representative. He legitimates his observations by so fully participating he even gets their bruises. There is another important function of these bruises that imprint themselves on the text. It isn't only the scabs, but the coal dust itself which cannot be removed,

entering "every cut . . . the skin grows over it and forms a blue stain like tattooing . . . getting the dirt out of one's eyelids is a ten minutes job in itself" (36, 37). The phrase "job in itself," which Orwell also uses for the crawl to the coalface, is used again for the washing, another unremunerated work-related activity. As few miners can access a pithead bath, most spend the week "completely black from the waist down" (37). Even when the coalminers' closeness with coal is glorified, such as the fillers, who "look like iron hammered iron statues–under the smooth coat of coal dust which clings to them," these portraits show the total absorption of work into all aspects of their life (23). The textural matter of mining unsettles typical ideas of work and class. It isn't just the physicality of mining itself, but the encumbrances, the housework, bathing, and injuries, which demonstrate how much a miner's life is dominated by their work.

One suspicious, but fair, reading of Orwell's exclusion of the guides is that he had a narrow sense of what the working classes were like. In his diary, he notes Kennan "lives in a decent Corporation house . . . but is more definitely a working man," the new public housing Kennan lives in nearly disqualifying him from working class status (Orwell, "Diary," 174). He is displeased by miners putting on middle-class airs or espousing revolutionary language. The Meades family, while of working-class origin, have learned middle class disgust—they "were faintly scandalized to hear I had been in the common lodging house" (173). He has great difficulty getting the miners to stop calling him "Sir." Mrs Meade "pronounces the word 'comrade' with manifest discomfort" (173). Reflecting on his previous efforts such as *Down and Out*, he remarks "nothing is easier than to be bosom pals with a pickpocket . . . but it is very difficult to be bosom pals with a bricklayer" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 186).

In "Inside the Whale," Orwell puts it bluntly, "by being Marxised literature has moved no nearer to the masses" (Orwell, "Inside the Whale," 163). Orwell's sense that something foreign—the abstract language of Marxism—has seduced the English working class becomes a powerful driver of the nationalism in "Politics and the English Language" (1946) with its preference for Anglo-Saxon over Latinate words. Although he did try to help the working-class writer Jack Common, his sense of proletarian literature does not necessarily call for working class writers to represent themselves: "It is doubtful whether anything describable as proletarian literature now exists . . . but a good music-hall comedian comes nearer to producing it than any Socialist writer I can think of" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 207). John Gross argues that the pieces collected in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays* (1940) create a rival myth of the worker: "[I]t would be hard for anyone who went along with the main drift of these essays to respond with much conviction to the square-jawed stereotypes of the revolutionary poster."[32] As Hubble suggests, for Orwell such a "rival myth" was the "only way to counter the myth of the 'Worker' as deployed by both communists and Tories" (Hubble, *Proletarian Answer*, 176). One year later, writing about the police repression of anarchists in Barcelona, Orwell makes his position explicit: "I have no particular love for the idealized 'worker' as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on" (*Homage*, 132). Orwell's recourse to physicality, "flesh-and-

blood," suggests a somewhat more charitable reading: Orwell certainly was interested in how working-class communities connected to one another, the "actual political and social networks" Williams seeks (Williams, *George Orwell*, 53). However, these are often expressed in terms of physical objects and sensations rather than the speech of guides. Williams might have sympathized. In 1976, he revised his explanation of how one identifies structure of feeling. Rather than only being "forms and conventions" that emerge, it was now important to add that art and literature become "inalienable elements of a social material process."[33] As Stuart Middleton explains, Williams reformulated his idea in "quasi-Marxian" terms to rebuff claims that he was becoming conservative about the role of the critics as regulators of popular cultural expression.[34] Orwell depicts such a social and material network in his scenes of coal-scrambling.

Coal-Picking and Scavenging Prose

While Orwell's crawl down the mining tunnels has received much critical attention, other kinds of unpaid subsistence work outside of capitalist wage relations, such as housework or coal-scrambling, have rarely been discussed. It is important to contextualize how the unemployed were viewed. The National Government of 1931 introduced the Means Test to make welfare conditional. Advocates of the Means Test spread the myth of the idle unemployed. Councils sent assessors into homes to determine a claimant's eligibility. The Test was hated by the working-classes and encouraged a toxic climate of snitching.[35] Means testing proposed the State as a vehicle to organize society fairly; community organized activities such as coal scrambling manifest a kind of order unaccounted for by both capitalist Conservatives and Socialist state planners. In *Down and Out*, Orwell argued that begging was work, and in *The Road to Wigan Pier* he understands the miners as an underemployed population working to survive. Economists such as J. M. Keynes had described the "structurally unemployed": those who had skills, but were excluded by seasonal dips in the market.

Despite working for the mines, coal miners regularly struggled to buy the good they produced. Orwell notes coal had become so scarce that it has led to "an extraordinary custom called 'scrambling for coal'" which, he says in the mode of an ironic tourist guide, "is well worth seeing. Indeed I rather wonder that it has never been filmed" (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 101). Coal is so scarce that "competition" has led to the "custom" of scrambling, where men together jump onto a coal train. They know they won't each make it, but it makes sense to organize these activities as a group, "with a wild yell a hundred men dashed down the slope to catch her as she rounded the bend. Even at the bend the train was making twenty miles an hour" (102). After the coal-scramblers have gotten their coal, the pickers sift through it:

> The men were shovelling the dirt out of the trucks, while down below their wives and children were kneeling, swiftly scrabbling with their hands in the damp dirt and picking out lumps of coal the size of an egg or smaller. You would see a woman pounce on a tiny fragment of stuff, wipe it on her apron, scrutinize it to make sure it was coal, and pop it

> jealously into her sack. Of course, when you are boarding a truck you don't know beforehand what is in it; it may be actual 'dirt' from the roads or it may merely be shale from the roofing. . . . but there occurs among the shale another inflammable rock called cannel. . . . It makes tolerable fuel, not good enough to be commercially valuable, but good enough to be eagerly sought after by the unemployed. . . . Now and again, for form's sake, the colliery companies prosecute somebody for coal-picking. . . . But no notice is taken of the prosecutions–in fact, one of the men named in the paper was there that afternoon–and the coal-pickers subscribe among themselves to pay the fines. . . . That scene stays in my mind as one of my pictures of Lancashire: the dumpy, shawled women, with their sacking aprons and their heavy black clogs, kneeling in the cindery mud and the bitter wind, searching eagerly for tiny chips of coal. (102–4)

Unlike the middle-class intellectual, for whom coal is "black stuff that arrives mysteriously from nowhere in particular, like manna except that you have to pay for it," the coal-pickers have a good knowledge of what counts as coal (34). If it is not, they use cannel, an "inflammable rock" which is not a saleable commodity but which can still be used resourcefully. While some detritus in the Brooker's boarding house provokes disgust, these non-smelly, difficult to classify objects become symbols of working-class resilience and of the ability of workers to organize on their own, outside the margins of conventional work. Until 1842, pit brow women had been legally employed by colliery companies to pick coal from dirt, but now they illegally forage through the dirt the colliery companies deem worthless. As Jacques Rancière observes, under capitalism, "work is not a gift that the proletarian could contribute . . . work . . . is his alienation, not something he divests himself of but something that comes to him from outside: the bourgeois people are the ones who *give* work."[36] Therefore, work not given by bosses but still undertaken is subversive. Although phrases such as "of course" and "Now and again" are knowing in tone, steering us through the passage, working in the mode of a confident tourist guide, the eye is animated and nervous (isn't what they are doing illegal?) before becoming reassured, scanning the scene, sorting through images, acquiring concrete objects that are difficult to classify. Now excluded from the world of employed work, the structurally unemployed are even more at the mercy of the bourgeoisie, hoping they do not punish this behavior.

In "Politics and the English Language," Orwell describes clear language as both physical, with the injunction to use concrete words referring to objects, and visual. The writer should "get one's meaning as clear as one can through pictures and sensations" (Orwell, "Politics," 138–39). As replete with concrete words as this scene is, its organization has a stop-motion quality, not as a film, but as a series of pictures. The past tense is modulated by the modal "would" (in "you would see") suggesting a viewer with agency, an eye electing to scan over one particular part of the scene (like a close-up or separate cut-out image), and the past progressive tense (shoveling, kneeling, searching) indicating multiple points in time. The second person address shifts the modality of certain sentences, and allows for characteristic interruptions with a change of tense ("Of course, when you are boarding the truck"). More than simply syntax and rhythm imitating movements in cramped spaces, as in the case of the tunnel passages

and the boarding house, Orwell's interjectional prose style, with its deictic, temporal modifiers ("Now and again", or in the tunnels "—and getting there is a job itself: I will explain that in a moment—") show the non-chronological order in which events are represented (Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 22). His paratactic prose, with its semi-colons suddenly changing the pace, does not tidy up the messiness of working-class spaces for a smoother read. Instead, as the archaeologist collects objects, Orwell collects terms—cannel, shale—imbued with concrete and earthy reference, and jostles about the reader with swift changes of pace across a paragraph.

Orwell's snapshots, flitting from one part of a scene to another, are juxtaposed with a steady panorama at the chapter's conclusion: "Meanwhile all round, as far as the eye can see, are the slag-heaps and hoisting gear of collieries, and not one of those collieries can sell all the coal it is capable of producing. This ought to appeal to Major Douglas" (104). C. H. Douglas argued that workers were not paid enough to buy the goods they made and that the excess of production capacity over purchasing power largely stemmed from producers hoarding to create scarcity.[37] The unexpected economic recovery after the 1931 National Government abandoned the Gold Standard bolstered confidence in ideas of state intervention and monetary policy. Permitted to discuss a more dematerialized economy, with the printing of cheap money enabling rapid house building, economists such as Douglas theorized systems such as Social Credit, which proposed to adjust price to ensure workers could buy what they made. By contrast to documentary literature, tourism and travel literature were premised exactly on this excess of purchasing power for the consumer and the strength of the pound. It is in this economic context that Orwell engages with questions of materiality, but his is a materiality outside money. Orwell finds a currency in the coal-chips workers collect.

Closing this chapter with a panorama, "as far as the eye can see," Orwell doubly rebukes documentary and capitalism. His critique extends to film producers, such as the General Post Office Film Unit, led by John Grierson. Films such as *Coal Face* (1935) and *Night Mail* (1936) drew on ideas of a managed, harmonious workforce in cities interspersed with shots of a pastoral, idyllic countryside. For Orwell, the coal producers and filmmakers are similarly culpable. Just as the coal producers could allocate coal more fairly, filmmakers and writers could distribute their powers of representation far more equitably. While writers might have relatively more freedom than filmmakers (not relying on substantial funding from a studio) even documentary writing, according to Orwell, rarely covers these kinds of activities by the unemployed which demonstrate resilience, organization, and self-sufficiency. Calling attention to the inadequacy of documentary media, its inability to represent unpaid and residual labor on the margins of our conventional understanding of work, leaves open a space for his writing.

Noting Orwell's criticisms, the publishers at the Left Book Club included two photographs of coal-picking at the slag-heaps taken at mines in Wales. Orwell was already in Spain and not consulted on the photographs which, it was explained, were to counter the reflective passages and autobiographical part two and make the text "fully documentary."[38] However, as photographer and friend Billy Brandt remembered, "when Orwell saw the finished book he was very upset about the pictures and insisted that

they should be taken out of all later editions."[39] The only capture of coal scrambling and picking, Orwell's rhetoric suggests, is reposed in the writer—the writer who refuses to work according to the disciplinary parameters of the social explorers, anthropologists, travel writers, photographers, or filmmakers—instead envisioning himself as buried by the sheer mass of coal mined by workers.

A more charitable reading of Orwell's omission of the guides shows that he was interested in the activities and networks of miners, but that he described them in his own physically imprinted prose. He contrasts the representational inadequacy of documentary writers with the self-sufficiency of miners. He is more invested in the resilience of the working class and the concrete life of hard work than the intra-politics of the professions of writing and political activism. If we think of literacy as facility with words, the facility of the working-classes with objects challenges an altogether too easy way of ventriloquizing their lives and concerns.

This reading is compatible with the suspicious explanation that Orwell had a narrow view of the working-class: the activists somehow did not count because of their doctrinaire Communism and the foreignness associated with their abstract Marxism. As Peter Hitchcock explains in a reading of Marx, writers were drawn to abstraction because of the fear that "any trace of the aesthetic is evidence of a bourgeois contagion."[40] Overly literary descriptions of labor, even if an attempt to recover the "social substance" of the commodity, risked a new commodity fetishism, which would construe class as a "thing" when in fact it is a "relation . . . which puts a heavy burden on representation" (Hitchcock, "They Must Be Represented," 23). Like Orwell, Marx wants to "convey how an unseen relation nevertheless constructs a social reality" but Marx "resists a representational imperative by pointing to use value's absent presence in exchange" (23). By this form of "logical subtraction . . . labor value is 'seen' as a congealed residue of human labor in the abstract," instead of any visual or physical description of labor (23). As Hitchcock notes, this is an "ingenious approach to the labor theory of value, an approach whose main objective is to get materialists to think beyond the tactile presence of the commodity to labor's integral role in the commodity's potentiality." By contrast, Orwell developed an aesthetic of materiality, drawing attention to the "tactile presence" of coal, whether in the hands of a consumer by the fireplace or among scavenging coal pickers. He finds a form of social relations, as Marx calls for, and networks, as William demands, in the way workers handled the concrete objects of coal chips and cannel, and in their organization, as the coal-pickers "subscribe among themselves" to pay any fines. In so doing, he remakes the manual laborer in the image of the resilient and autonomous writer.

Shortage in Spain

Typically read as a belated World War I memoir, *Homage to Catalonia* has far more in common with the peacetime documentary of coalmining, *The Road to Wigan Pier* than we might think. Orwell alleged that his Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista

(P. O. U. M.) militia, a non-Stalinist Marxist group, were subject to an artificial shortage of food and munitions in a manner entirely reminiscent of colliery companies hoarding coal. If in Lancashire the culprit was the capitalist boss, in Aragón the culprit were Stalinists who did not want to give Orwell's "Trotskyist" militia anything that would empower them.

Critics did not expect a book about poverty and shortages in the context of the Spanish Civil War. In his response to Nancy Cunard's questionnaire in *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (1937), Ezra Pound says Spain is an "emotional luxury for sap-headed dilettantes"; if only she and her readers would "study the circuits of international trade" they would know it was a lost cause.[41] The phrase "emotional luxury" belittles Spain as less a war than an excuse for some adventurous travel. Pound's cynicism admits little difference between political reportage and travel books. Hybrid works such as W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland* (1937) were indeed blurring this distinction. Romantic Spains, sold in Baedeker guides, remained popular, and Orwell avers a tourist sensation in *Homage to Catalonia*—but only once he had his discharge papers did he feel "a little like a tourist . . . I seemed to catch . . . a sort of far-off rumour of the Spain that dwells in everyone's imagination . . . Moorish palaces . . . cathedrals, cardinals, bull-fights, gypsies, serenades—in short, Spain" (*Homage*, 218).

Although writers such as Ernest Hemingway had an experience closer to a tourist jaunt, staying in hotels, Orwell's main experience of the war with the maligned P. O. U. M. had more in common with his trip to the Lancashire coalmines six months earlier than any holiday. Orwell aimed to join the International Brigades, but suspicions about his elite status from the Communist Party of Great Britain meant he instead enlisted with the P. O. U. M.[42] He hoped he might be able to belong among the young, semi-literate Spanish volunteers, who were less likely to discern his posh status as quickly as the Lancashire miners. His pose did not work for long. Local commander Josep Rovira was under no illusions as to Orwell's background.[43]

There was a marked difference between tourism and the daily work that Orwell did. In Wigan, Orwell challenges the idea that the structurally unemployed are *unemployable* or idlers, showing how they are working to survive. On the Front, he finds himself engaging in activities similar to those of the unemployed, as "there was practically no firewood to be had . . . we were . . . scrounging for fuel" (Orwell, *Homage*, 30). As in the case of the coal-pickers, "the eagerness of our search for firewood turned us all into botanists. We classified according to their burning qualities every plant" (30). While one might be fined for coal-picking, "if the Fascist machine-gunners saw you they gave you a drum of ammunition all to yourself . . . you went on gathering reeds, however; nothing mattered in comparison with firewood" (31). Within six months Orwell had gone from watching Lancashire women scavenging for coal chips to himself foraging for firewood on the hillsides of Aragón.

When the military in Barcelona rebelled in favor of Franco in July 1936, the anti-fascist militias overwhelmed the Capitanía General, telephone exchange, and other strategic sites. Quickly the CNT-FAI unions had full control of the city.[44] By May 1937

the anarchists were under siege from the Communists with a food shortage. As Orwell claimed, if the Catalan government returned strategic posts and "promised to put an end to the food profiteering, there is little doubt that the barricades would have been down in two hours," but "ugly rumours were flying round . . . we saw the low grey ships of warships closing in upon the harbour" which, they later learned were in fact "British destroyers" (Orwell, *Homage*, 146). In the anarchist account of the war, the shortage of food and ammunition from Madrid and their only major foreign backer, the Soviet Union, with the collusion of Britain and France, were the primary reasons for the Republican defeat. Orwell would later concede that the non-intervention of other powers was a more significant factor than the shortage, which, in fact, affected Communists too. At the time, anarchists and non-Stalinist Marxists countered the allegation that their egalitarian methods of military organization were to blame for the defeat, pointing to the shortage as an example of how both the capitalist democracies and the Soviet Union deserted workers, leaving them to forage.[45]

Orwell brought a camera to Spain, hoping to exert more authorial control over the production of *Homage to Catalonia* than *The Road to Wigan Pier*. When in hospital, he found it was missing. He explains the theft of his camera as the inevitable effect of shortage" so that the lack of images in the text is a direct consequence of the shortage all Barcelona residents felt. He challenged the propaganda of a chaotic regime under the anarchists in a similar manner to how he challenged the myth of the idle unemployed. Whereas in Lancashire the unemployed scramble for coal, behind the barricades this subsistence and resistance activity becomes more organized:

> As soon as it was dawn the people downstairs began building two barricades, one outside the Comite Local and the other outside the Hotel Falcon. The Barcelona streets are paved with square cobbles, easily built up into a wall, and under the cobbles is a kind of shingle that is good for filling sand-bags. The building of those barricades was a strange and wonderful sight; I would have given something to be able to photograph it. With the kind of passionate energy that Spaniards display when they have definitely decided to begin upon any job of work, long lines of men, women, and quite small children were tearing up the cobblestones, hauling them along in a hand-cart that had been found somewhere, and staggering to and fro under heavy sacks of sand. In the doorway of the Comite Local a German-Jewish girl, in a pair of militiaman's trousers whose knee-buttons just reached her ankles, was watching with a smile. In a couple of hours the barricades were head-high, with riflemen posted at the loopholes, and behind one barricade a fire was burning and men were frying eggs. (Orwell, *Homage*, 135)

In a shortage economy of black markets and bribes, he "would have given something" to be able to get his camera back and photograph this organization. The detail of the "kind of shingle" under the cobbles of the Barcelona streets that are used for the sandbags is the supreme moment of worker autonomy and self-sufficiency, surpassing the flammable cannel and coal chips that make "tolerable fuel" at the coal heaps. Although he says he wishes he had his camera, his writing does something different from what a photograph (capturing an instant) might. This is a canny piece of rhetoric, acknowledging that there is something in the visual scene the medium of writing can-

not capture, while writing goes about collecting tactile words. Without the camera, Orwell's concrete language, past progressive tenses, and close-ups pay tribute to the facility of the residents with the shingle under the cobblestones.

Orwell collects words referring to concrete objects, saturating his account with earthy symbols of worker autonomy. The children mucking in, and the idyll of a fire behind the barricade where men are frying eggs, valorizes the resourcefulness of the working-class, but this scene goes one step further than the coal-scrambling example: the barricade makers do not rely on any networks of trade or industrial economy; they are not foraging on the margins of what capitalism might put to waste. For Orwell, revolutionary Barcelona, both in its political propaganda and in practice, offers the utopian possibility of a worker run city where the self-sufficiency of workers is not pitiful. Here, the shingle symbolizes the potential of both the Catalan working class and their major worker organizations, and a broader, international movement of volunteers to resist and to organize their own supplies.

The barricaded building scene challenges a metropolitan ideal of labor organized by industrial capitalists. Orwell's scenes expose the wastefulness of ostensibly well-organized industrialized capitalism. At no point does he disavow introspection entirely. Instead, his prose bears an imprint of his physical experience, absorbing, bruising, and then scavenging for the material particulars of working-class life, with stop-start prose rhythms breaking up a smooth read and introducing anxiety, hesitation, and semi-colons and dashes confounding expectation. Concrete words become a kind of material currency that resists impressionism or abstraction. In the dematerialized economy of the 1930s, championed by Keynes and Douglas, Orwell's engagement with materiality signals a desire for a kind of nationalist worker-literacy, a literacy and facility in things rather than words, digging down to an essential substrate that intellectuals are liable to miss. As he describes it, this practice amounts to a "defense of the English language . . . when you think of a concrete object, you think wordlessly" (Orwell, "Politics," 138).

By "thinking wordlessly," Orwell means thinking without the "prefabricated" jargon that would become satirized as Newspeak (170). His scenes of object collection are his attempt to think according to the practices of workers, learning from their facility (or literacy) with the physical world which the intellectual lacks. This practice remains loaded with classist assumptions, but it represents an oppositional alternative to either developing a middle-class literacy to read the working-class, or to the project of finding and training working-class writers who, in Orwell's view, in the process of accessing intellectual elites and becoming *au fait* with Marxist discourse, soften their accent and lose the callouses on their hands. *Homage to Catalonia* opens and closes with two speechless handshakes, the first with the Italian militiaman, the second with an official that Orwell hopes will rescue his imprisoned comrade. Instead of handling coal "like manna" by his fire, Orwell's documentary practice and evolving theory of political language demand that the writer witnesses, collects, and touches both the tactile commodity and the workers. Refusing the temporary upwards escape of travel writing, Orwell instead goes downwards to learn from workers. He eschews the luxurious impressionism of travel for an introspective prose style saturated with the material

particulars of working-class life, and, although he takes cues from photography, uses writing to produce a varied series of tactile and visual stop-motion sensory experiences under his absolute authorial control. In Barcelona, his scene recovers the labor of the revolutionaries, which is not only desperate subsistence work, but instead a utopian example of workers' organization.

Such a recovery of the material world shares much in common with the late modernist outward turn. For Orwell, recovering subsistence work such as scavenging and organizing presages his nationalist and revolutionary plan for Britain. In 1938, he signed a manifesto, by Leon Trotsky, André Breton and others, that stated that to develop intellectual creation the revolution must develop an "*anarchist* regime of individual liberty . . . the artist cannot serve the struggle for freedom unless he subjectively assimilates its social content, unless he feels in his very nerves its meaning and drama and freely seeks to give his own inner world incarnation in his art."[46] Orwell saw an analogue in the organization of the Barcelona anarchists and Wigan miners for what writers had to do in their prose. He hoped in his diary, "if only we can hold out for a few months, in a year's time we shall see red militia billeted in the Ritz."[47] Although that kind of worker-organized occupation never came to pass, a trace of it remains in "Politics and the English Language" with its insistence on concrete words, economy, and a self-sufficient, even autarchic, resistance to travel writing and Marxism. The essay is not only a criticism of totalitarian bureaucracy, but Orwell's specific (and indeed at times unfair) critique of introspective writing and the way it sponsored a culture industry of escapist mass luxury that functions as an opiate of overthinking, staving off revolutionary action. Or, as Orwell put it in response to José Ortega y Gasset, "There is one way of avoiding thoughts . . . and that is to think too deeply."[48]

Notes

1. George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," *Horizon*, April 1946, in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), 4:127–40, 4:138

2. Elinor Taylor, *The Popular Front Novel in Britain, 1934–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 43.

3. Bernard Schweizer, *Radicals on the Road: The Politics of English Travel Writing in the 1930s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 18.

4. Kristin Bluemel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intermodernism in Literary London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.

5. Alex Woloch, *Or Orwell: Writing and Democratic Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 119.

6. Bluemel, *Radical Eccentrics*, 2; Patricia Rae, "Orwell's Heart of Darkness: The Road to Wigan Pier as Modernist Anthropology," *Prose Studies* 22, no. 1 (1999): 71–102; and Patricia Rae, "Late Modernism and the Spanish Civil War," in *A History of 1930s British Literature*, ed. Benjamin Kohlmann and Matthew Taunton (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 345–61.

7. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: V. Gollancz, 1937), 6.

8. Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), in *Literary Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954), 3–14, 12; also see Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'Virile Thought': Modernist Maleness, Poetic Forms and Practices," in *Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19–37, 24.

9. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 85.

10. See George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," in *Inside the Whale, and Other Essays* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940), 131–88, 148; "Charles Dickens," 9–88.

11. J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: W. Heinemann, 1934), 4, 3.

12. Melba Cuddy-Keane, *Virginia Woolf, the Intellectual and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

13. George Orwell, "Hop picking," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, 1:52–71, 1:66–67.

14. See Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37–50.

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