Fiction, Politics, and Historiography: The Interwar Novels of George Orwell and Graham Greene

A thesis submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Tufts University

May 2016

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Abstract

George Orwell and Graham Greene's Interwar novels directly reflect the social, political, and psychological issues facing Great Britain after WWI. Greene and Orwell were both products and chroniclers of their time. Social inequality and bias, fears of future international conflict, the defense of democracy, Socialism, labor concerns and unemployment, colonialism and end of empire, British education and class structure, racism and xenophobia, and the search for a moral framework through ideologies were all subjects documented by Greene and Orwell in their thirties writing. This thesis also analyzes how and why Orwell's work is seen as more historically relevant and what politics and research methodologies inform that assessment. As Orwell and Greenes' historical relevance has been largely defined by their reputations the thesis attempts to explore how those reputations evolved and how publication, criticism, and political exigency have affected their use as historical sources.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Howard Malchow for all his help in advising me on this thesis. His feedback throughout the process provided invaluable help in source material, direction, and clarifying my argument. Our discussions were fundamental in my thinking through, defending, and defining my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Malchow, Dr. Elizabeth Foster, and Dr. Julia Genster, for serving on my thesis committee. I appreciate their time being part of the defense and particularly their specific and useful comments on the thesis itself. Finally, I would like to thank my family for all of the support and encouragement they have given me over the months I was working on my research. Their generosity and understanding throughout the process gave me both motivation during low points and a helpful sounding board during the high ones.

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Fiction, Politics, and Historiography: The Interwar Novels of George Orwell and Graham Greene

Introduction

The use of primary sources is a necessity in studying the past—with novels particularly fascinating and useful artifacts for research and analysis. Novels, and the writers who create them, often explore concerns of the specific era in which they are written, whether it be daily living conditions, government policies, or war, through direct and specific detail that cannot be found in raw data alone. These details (or lack thereof) provide a sense of what the culture sees as important, irrelevant, or not worth acknowledging. Just as a historian amasses data by studying documents, records, and statistics, a period's novels tap into the emotional, psychological, social, and intellectual atmosphere of the time. Novels document contemporary attitudes and unconsciously reveal contemporary preoccupations. Literature, by the very choice of style or genre, reflects telling trends and interests of the era in which it is written. Historians can examine how an author's work reflects the particular social class, educational background, and political context the author comes from, using novels to better understand

subconscious biases in an author's work and how that reflects the particular views of the author's social class. For historians the reaction to novels, both critical and financial, reveals the tastes of intellectual and public readers of an era.

One of the authors most frequently cited by historians is George Orwell. Born Eric Blair, Orwell wrote fiction and nonfiction books examining what he perceived as shortcomings in Britain in the interwar era, including British colonialism in Asia, the living conditions of the working class, and the overall political consciousness of the British people. He is best remembered, however, for his critique of totalitarian governments—notably the Soviet Union and its determination to be the single and only form of Socialism. From *Burmese Days* to *1984,* Orwell's work is considered required reading for anyone wanting better to understand the first half of the twentieth century and its struggle with ideology.

Another author from the period, Graham Greene, remains largely neglected by historians. Greene is recognized for his thrillers and more introspective "Catholic" novels, with human conflict and feelings of jealousy, lust, faith, or cynicism set in a contemporary world. But historians rarely cite Greene's work. The question is why a writer like Greene is largely overlooked while Orwell is continually and consistently referenced. This thesis intends to explore these two writers and their historical relevance. By examining Orwell's and Greene's fiction in the 1930s, and the critical reactions to them, readers will better understand the particular issues afflicting Great Britain at the time, the challenges the nation faced, and the attitudes Britain clung to. Both Greene and Orwell's work is rooted

in, and reflective of, a specific social and political milieu.

In discussing British literature of the 1930s it is important to appreciate how fiction worked to document social and political events of the day. After World War I there was a growing interest in art that reflected "reality"—in 1930s Britain many "people read a novel to acquire factual knowledge..."[1] Orwell's novels, which directly comment on social conditions of his time, are a perfect example of this and are often cited. Yet Greene's work in the thirties is rarely analyzed historically, distancing him from such peers as Orwell, W. H. Auden, and Evelyn Waugh.

The reason for Greene's neglect in historical research, as well as Orwell's recognition, is in large part due to the interest in Orwell's journalistic writing. Throughout his life Orwell wrote reportage in which he directly details conditions existing in Britain and argues overt political points. Greene, on the other hand, for several years described his work as "entertainments." Early in his career Greene himself emphasized the thematic issues he presented, downplaying direct political commentary in his writing, partly out of his need to appeal to a wider audience. This categorization of his work as merely "entertainments" allowed critics and others to label it as popular fiction with little if any social relevance. Reception of Greene and Orwell's work is also affected by political interests. Orwell's later writing critiquing totalitarianism is used by both the Right and the Left to defend their positions. In contrast, Greene, politically, has come to be seen

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1 Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939*. New York: Norton Library. 1963. 298.

as simply anti-American. His open distaste for the policies of the United States, very evident in his later, more openly political books, affected his popularity and interest in the United States until only recently.

This thesis is not focused on showing how Orwell is more or less historically relevant than Greene, but instead examines how historians pick certain authors as valid historical sources out of the political exigencies of the time they are writing. Both Orwell's and Greene's novels are psychological portraits of Britain in the thirties. For all his claims that he was just creating thrillers and entertainments, Greene's work explores the social, moral, and psychological effects of Interwar Britain on the individual. Whether it is the limitations of British bureaucracy, the loss of pre-war morality in the race to survive in a new, industrial, and more ruthless world, or the foreigner's view of Britain, Greene's novels trace what he saw as a loss of moral clarity in a declining Great Britain.

George Orwell: From Blair to Orwell

The key to understanding and placing George Orwell is to study his work as an evolving view of the world. Born Eric Blair in British India in 1903, the son of a colonial officer in the Opium Department, Orwell described his family as part of the "lower-upper-middle class."[2] This very specific, if somewhat ambiguous, status may have become apparent to young Eric when the Blairs moved to England and he went to St. Cyprian's, an expensive Public school in East Sussex. Blair, from an early age, saw himself as above the working class. It was not until

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2 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Harcourt Press: New York. 1972 (1937) 121.

his experience at St. Cyprian's that he saw himself as completely distinct from the upper class. Because Blair was very intelligent and proved successful at his earlier convent school, St. Cyprian's allowed him to attend at half price, partly on the assumption he could earn a scholarship to university.[3] His enrollment at St. Cyprian's was therefore contingent on his maintaining high grades, good attendance, and an appropriate work ethic. These conditions are part of the reason why Blair came to loathe his time at St. Cyprian's. Because he was expected to win a scholarship, Blair was constantly struggling to succeed at school, while the special conditions of his attendance also made him painfully aware of his social standing among his peers. While he was under constant pressure to succeed he was surrounded by boys, clearly less intelligent than he, getting by simply because of their openly flaunted wealth.[4] Blair's growing resentment towards the wealthy, as well as an already established bias against the lower classes which he had inherited from his family, became a key part of his understanding of the world—an understanding he would examine throughout his life.

After St. Cyprian's, Blair attended Eton, where he performed moderately well, then took up work as a policeman in Burma with the help of his father. There are several reasons why Blair decided to become a colonial policeman. While he somewhat enjoyed his time at Eton, he often felt trapped at school, as he had been in St. Cyprian's, and wished to escape the social climate of upper class academia.

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3 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell.* Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1972. 26-31.

4 Stanksy and Abrahams, The Unknown Orwell. 66-7.

Burma was particularly enticing to Blair as a police officer in Burma had good pay and a relative amount of independence in overseeing his district. At the time it also appealed to Orwell's patriotism and his belief in the ideals of the British Empire.[5] This support for British colonialism would not last long.

Blair journeyed to Burma in 1922 and would stay for five years. During his time in Burma, Blair quickly became frustrated by the racial and class stratification of a colonialism consisting of a strict class structure and tiring social pretenses.[6] Even more appalling to Blair was the treatment of the native Burmese by the British, which he witnessed firsthand. In Syriam, Blair saw how the British Burma Oil Company killed wildlife through the sulfur dioxide it released in extracting its oil.[7] This was one small example to Blair of the realities of British colonialism. Instead of the noble Empire bringing prosperity and progress to the Burmese, Blair saw British colonialists not only distancing themselves from the natives, but exploiting both the people and the land for their own benefit. As Jeffrey Meyers states, “In Burma, his Etonian detachment, skepticism and anti-establishment spirit came to the fore, and the longer he stayed, the more tainted he felt.”[8] Blair would vent his feelings of frustration by creating a story out of his experience, which developed one of his strongest skills as a writer, his close

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5 Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2000. 44-5

6 Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* Harper Collins: New York, 1992. 104-5.

7 Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. 59-60.

8 Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. 72.

observation. As Peter Stansky and William Abrahams point out, Blair was "in fact, consciously or not, already a writer-in-embryo: he could watch, observe, listen, and judge. Experience, his own or another's, was something he put to use; it became part of the nonstop "story" he was telling to his listening self."[9] This story would eventually become *Burmese Days.*

Immediately after his stay in Burma Blair returned to Europe and began living as a tramp in London and Paris. Blair came home interested in the conditions of the poor and how they were viewed by other classes, and he believed he could only write accurately about the poor if he lived like them—a great challenge for Blair who had a severe obsession with cleanliness. The next few years of tramping not only gave Blair material for his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, but also taught him to sympathize with the poor, without any of the middle class contempt that he had had before.[10]

Blair would make the transition to Orwell when *Down and Out* was about to be released in 1932. Claiming he wanted to avoid potential embarrassment to his family because of the book's contents he created the alias "George Orwell."[11] Blair's decision to create this pseudonym also allowed him to fully embrace his developing iconoclastic view of the world through a new identity. As Stansky and Abrahams state "it was not the name that mattered: it was the self, the essential

9 Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell.* 185.

10 Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. 78-85.

11 Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. 102.

second self, under the name, which had been set free."[12] The combination of his own hostility towards the upper social classes, his experiences in Burma, and his time as a tramp gave Orwell the perspective to confront the dangers of authoritarian power, the struggles of the working class, and the problem of class distinctions as a fundamental element in British social thought.

Burmese Days: Unmasking the Dark Side of Colonialism

At the beginning of his career Orwell focused more on the psychological consequences of social and economic conditions and less on direct political commentary. His novel, *Burmese Days,* released in 1933, provides a good example of this. Perhaps in part inspired by E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India,* Orwell goes even further than Forster in criticizing not only the concept of British colonialism but also condemning British character.[13] The novel depicts British imperialism in Burma through the perspective of James Flory, a British colonial officer struggling with his growing disillusionment. While mostly a satire lampooning the ugliness of "cultured" British officialdom, Orwell's plot provides a complex understanding of how colonialism is poisonous to the colonizers as well as the colonized. Flory shares challenges similar to what Orwell himself faced in Burma. Orwell loathed the system Britain had established in Burma, yet he stayed and worked inside that system for nearly five years, primarily because

12 Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell.* 307.

13 Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation*. 1st ed. 114.

of the good pay, simply keeping his feelings to himself.[14] Flory acts in the same way.

At the start of the book Flory is a maverick in the British colonial social world as he befriends a native, Dr. Veraswami, and finds the attitude of his fellow settlers oppressive. The colonists interact only with each other in their country club, looking down on the native population and ostracizing men like Flory for attempting to interact with the Burmese. Flory is embittered by the many restrictions on how he should think, feel, and act.[15] The Club itself contains a variety of characters who reveal the crass and hypocritical attitudes of many Britons in colonial outposts. Ellis, a violently racist club member, vehemently opposes any attempt to allow the Indian Doctor Veraswami to join the Club and is described as being someone "who should never be allowed to set foot in the East."[16] Mr. Lackerstein is a notorious drunk who repeatedly sexually harasses his niece, Elizabeth, yet is an accepted member of the club regardless of his drunkenness and extramarital affairs.[17] Even the genial head of the Club, Mr. McGregor, simply follows a set sense of decorum in how he appears to other Club members, never enforcing any real sense of moral conduct.[18]

The members of the Club embody the hypocrisy found not only in Britain's

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14 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 105-6.

15 George Orwell, *Burmese Days.* Harcourt: New York 1972 (1933) 69-70.

16 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 23-4.

17 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 175.

18 Orwell, Burmese Days. 27-8.

colonial thinking, but also in the British sense of morality and respectability. Members look down on native Burmese, obsess about themselves and how they appear, and do nothing about the wrongs committed by their fellow members. These characters exemplify the ugly side of imperialism yet accept each other as simply following standard British social norms. To Flory, the ability to think in Burma is prohibited and "You are free to be a drunkard, an idler, a coward, a backbiter, a fornicator; but you are not free to think for yourself. Your opinion on every subject of any conceivable importance is dictated for you by the pukka sahibs' (white man) code."[19] Orwell examines how stifling British colonialism could be—even to the colonialists. It did not matter what a person's actual thoughts and behavior were, no matter how crass: as long as fellow colonialists accepted the ideals of imperialism they were an acceptable part of society. Anyone who sympathizes with the native population or directly critiques the status quo, however, is ostracized. In the novel Orwell condemns men who are aware of the evils of colonialism, yet do nothing, just as he had done—Flory continually refuses to stand up for his friend Dr. Veraswami in an attempt to avoid a "row" with his fellow Club members.[20]

Orwell also criticizes the native Burmese as being a part of the problem. Many of Orwell's most specific and direct critiques of imperialism are found in Flory's discussions with Veraswami.[21] Veraswami argues that the British are the "salt of

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19 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 69.

20 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 63

21 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 131.

the earth" who have "modernized" the backwards Burmese, and protected Burma's economy. Flory responds by pointing out that the British are stripping the natives of their culture and hobbling Burma's development as an economic competitor. To Flory the British are only interested in exploiting Burma, not modernizing it, stating "I suppose it's a natural lie enough. But it corrupts us, it corrupts us in ways you can't imagine. There's an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day."[22] While Orwell succinctly depicts the mentality of British imperialism through the discussion, it is Veraswami's steadfast defense of imperialism that is key. To Orwell, the natives are equally to blame as they willingly accept both imperialism and its rhetoric. Throughout the story he shows how natives accept and work within the established imperialist system, even when they want to better themselves. As Stansky and Abrahams write, the competition between Dr. Veraswami and the corrupt U Po Kyin is "...not to reclaim Burma from the English, but to be elected to membership in the English Club."[23] This is seen when Flory promises to support Veraswami becoming a member and Veraswami responds by assuring Flory he has no interest or intent of ever *going* to the Club, he simply wants the recognition of being a Club member.[24]

Much of *Burmese Days* was based directly on Orwell's experiences in Burma. Orwell knew an Indian doctor named Krishnasawmy, who, like Veraswami,

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22 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 36-42.

23 Stansky and Abrahams, *The Unkown Orwell.* 174.

24 Orwell, *Burmese Days.* 151.

supported imperialism while working in colonial institutions such as hospitals.[25] Orwell felt the native population was too willing to accept imperialist thought, writing in *Le Progrès civique*, a French magazine, that while Britain was effectively stealing from the Burmese, the Burmese did not care. He argued they were too focused on daily life in their villages and were not at the "intellectual level" to consider nationalism.[26] The reason Orwell held this less than flattering view of the Burmese was because of his personal experiences. As a police officer, Orwell dealt with irritated Burmese citizens who repeatedly antagonized him. This harassment led Orwell to despise both imperialism as well as the native Burmese.[27] For Orwell, the hypocritical justification for imperialism was intolerable, yet he did not see the Burmese people as being inherently "good" in opposition to an "evil" British empire. By not portraying the Burmese as helpless innocents or superior to the British, Orwell provides a stronger case against imperialism, avoiding making the novel a polemic and showing how the Burmese, while victims of colonization, actively helped to maintain it.[28] If the Burmese are at fault for supporting, or at least accepting imperialism, they are no worse than Westerners, who accepted conditions in colonies that were completely abhorrent to Orwell.

Orwell's view of imperialism was very close to the realities in Burma.

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25 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 128-130.

26 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life.* Penguin Books: Middlesex, 1982. 172-3.

27 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 123-5.

28 Crick, 167.

Burmese support of colonialism was a result of British policy in Burma and other colonies. In developing their empire the British created schools which helped reinforce the benefits of imperialism and, as Michael and Matrii Aung-Thwin state, the Burmese "began to believe that Burmese culture was indeed inferior to Western civilization and as a result embraced ideas associated with the colonial ideology of the Burmese being 'rescued' from the burden of their own traditions."[29] In Burma, the idea of embracing empire, as negatively as Orwell saw it, was not uncommon. Elements of the plot of *Burmese Days*, while exaggerated, were based on existing issues and feelings in Burma at the time Orwell worked there. The controversy of having a native Burmese as a club member (one of the main plot points in the story) was real but a past issue. By the time Orwell was posted in Burma the colonial government allowed high level Burmese officials to become club members.[30] Though the overt and outrageous racism of a club member like Ellis might seem an isolated case, Orwell had witnessed blatant racism towards the Burmese in his dealings with British soldiers.[31]

The reaction to the release of *Burmese Days* revealed serious concerns with its content. In particular, Orwell was wary that his former employers and peers in

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29 Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin. *A History of Myanmar Since Ancient Times: Traditions And Transformations*. London: Reaktion Books, 2012. 209-10.

30 Crick, 164.

31 Crick, 149.

Burma would see themselves in the characters of the book, and sue him for libel.[32] Although never actually sued over the book, Orwell and his publishers' concern does show Orwell was very close to the bone. *Burmese Days* touches on issues that were sensitive and, in some cases, potentially damaging to particular individuals. When the book was released in the United States in 1934 the reviews were mixed. Some, like F. W. March of the *New York Times,* praised Orwell for creating "vividly real" settings and characters, while also noting that the book had not yet been published in Great Britain. March pointed out that "The problem of India is one about which Mr. Orwell's countrymen are often sensitive."[33] Margaret Carson Hubbard of the *New York Herald Tribune* criticized Orwell for having an "ax to grind." She felt that by making the British characters so one dimensional Orwell had left the story without any really complex characters except for the Burmese.[34] The reviews from America, as well as the struggles to even release the book in Britain, showed that Orwell had indeed touched a nerve in Britain. The book's reception revealed not only the developing distaste for imperialism among British thinkers, but also the fears of many in the general public. With a weakening economy and the rise of European instability, many Britons looked to the Empire not only for support in a time of need but for

32 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 216.

33 Marsh, Fred T. "Sahibs in Burma: *Burmese Days.* By George Orwell. 371 Pp. New York: Harper & Brothers. $2.50." *New York Times*. October 28, 1934, sec. Book Review. http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu [Accessed September 28, 2015]

34 Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation.* Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1979. 53.

positive identification. The biting satire of his novel forced readers to examine how imperialism actually operated, and showed how evil was inherent in the system. For many the weakening of the British empire by examining its flaws was repugnant.

Keep the Aspidistra Flying and the Hypocrisy of Middle-Class Socialists

By the time Orwell wrote *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1935) he was in a period of transition in his thinking. The novel may seem less focused on social conditions than a satire of Gordon Comstock, but it reveals how Orwell saw himself (and others) as products of the conditions in which they lived. The title itself alludes to the novel's emphasis on how middle class mores and pretensions are ultimately the highest value of a person in that class, whether they acknowledge or not. By 1935, Orwell was barely getting by as a writer. The three books he had published by that point had not sold particularly well. He was living in near poverty, barely making 200£ a year through the combination of his writing and job at a bookshop in London.[35] His experience with poverty inspired his decision to work on *Aspidistra.* The story explores the fledgling poet, Gordon Comstock, and his attempt (and failure) to fight against the lure of wealth and status as he tries to protect his artistic integrity. Orwell focuses heavily on showing how Gordon's stance against earning money is based less on moral or artistic integrity than his sense of bitterness towards a world centered on wealth

35 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 242.

and privilege. Gordon, having missed a party he was invited to by his friends the Dorings, immediately suspects they deliberately misled him because he is poor. He angrily writes them a note telling them off, even when he admits to himself he simply might have been wrong about the date.[36] The beginning of the novel shows how Gordon's living conditions and the real effects of destitution warp Gordon's perspective. Gordon's flat is ugly, unpleasant, and uncomfortable—the gas heating provides little warmth, he must wait for more oil to use a lantern, and he is forced to wash his tea cups in his wash basin as his land lady forbids tenants from making tea.[37] Gordon's entire behavior is affected by how poor he is; the restrictions and limitations poverty forces upon him in turn affect his ability to write. As Gordon contemplates, "Lack of money means discomfort, means squalid worries, means shortage of tobacco, means ever present consciousness of failure—above all, it means loneliness."[38] Gordon's paranoia about people treating him differently because he is poor is a result of his own frustrations with class snobbery and class distinctions. At the same time Gordon rails against the pursuit of wealth and status his daily survival is being affected by his shabby living conditions, which have evaporated his belief in his own writing ability.[39] Orwell is examining how an artist deals with the problems that arise from having

36 George Orwell. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* Middlesex: England, 1970 (1935). 107-9.

37 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 32-5.

38 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 37.

39 Gordon B. Beadle. "George Orwell's Literary Studies of Poverty in England." *Twentieth Century Literature* 24, no. 2 (July 1, 1978): 188–201. doi:10.2307/441127. 195-6. [Accessed October 1[s], 2015]

so little, as he himself had experienced. How could any writer be able to work creatively, effectively, and productively in circumstances where they had no heat, little food, or even the freedom to make their own tea?

Yet Orwell is simultaneously lampooning Comstock's frustrations as an author as the direct result of his middle class upbringing. Readers eventually discover that Gordon had given up a good job as a copy writer in an advertising company in order to avoid becoming "infected" by ease and economic security. By intentionally forcing himself into hardship Gordon is voluntarily putting himself in the conditions he detests, while other Englishmen are "eating their hearts out for lack of jobs."[40] Through Gordon, Orwell is possibly exploring his own feelings of guilt over the fact that he, as a writer, let himself suffer voluntarily and temporarily conditions that others had no chance of escaping.

Orwell also reveals the flaws in British Socialist thought in relation to class bias through Gordon's relationship with his friend and editor, Phillip Ravelston. Ravelston, a socialist with a "good job," sees the poor conditions around him as simply the last days of decaying capitalism, which will make way for the new socialist culture. This is a view which Gordon mocks for ignoring the interests of the British people.[41] As much as Gordon may appear both boorish and whiny as he argues with Ravelston, Ravelston is portrayed as wholly unaware of how his concept of the world is completely divorced from his own personal feelings towards poverty. This is seen in his discomfort going to a pub with Gordon.

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40 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 56-62.

41 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. 90-100.

Even though the pub is a locus for the “proletariat” that Ravelston constantly claims he supports, he is uncomfortable being there as he finds the pub, and the people in it, dirty and ugly. Surrounded by his “people” Ravelston is barely able to drink a glass of beer as he's aware that it “had been sucked from some beetle-ridden cellar through yards of slimy tube, and that the glasses had never been washed in their lives, only rinsed in berry water.”[42] Ravelston's hypocrisy is also evident when he later visits Gordon at his apartment. Appalled by the ugly surroundings he urges Gordon to find a better flat as the concept of a “gentleman” being in these conditions “worried him more than the thought of ten thousand unemployed in Middlesbrough.”[43] For Orwell, Ravelston exemplifies the problem with many real middle class British socialists in the thirties—no matter how much they claimed to support the working class, it is almost impossible really to connect with them as they find the workers' condition to be utterly vile. Ravelston is only able to interact with a man of his own social class, such as Gordon, who is poor solely by his own volition.

While the rest of *Aspidistra* focuses on how Gordon's personal failings result in his giving up his artistic pursuits in order to have a “good job,” Orwell's commentary on Gordon's plight (in contrast to the many real Britons unemployed) as well as his gibes at British socialism reveal Orwell's developing ideas on class divisions, poverty in Britain, and the failure of British socialism. That failure is at the forefront of one of Orwell's most famous books, *The Road to Wigan Pier.*

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42 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 93-94.

43 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 223-7.

Aspidistra acts as a middle step in the development of Orwell's thinking between *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Road to Wigan Pier.* The novel shows how Orwell evolved from sympathy with the poor, to an awareness of his own discomfort with other classes, an awareness that allows him to explore the middle class biases which he railed against in *Wigan Pier.*

Orwell's nonfiction work was key in developing his social awareness and their influence can be clearly seen in novels like *Aspidistra. Down and Out* is the beginning of Orwell's preoccupation with the subject of poverty in Britain. Through his experiences described in *Down and Out* Orwell discovers that most vagrants were not poor due to their character, but because of unemployment and businesses' failure, which forced them to constantly relocate in order to survive.[44] This insight into the situation of the poor must have been on Orwell's mind as he desperately attempted to avoid another lucrative yet soul crushing occupation like the one he had in Burma.[45] Gordon's struggles in *Aspidistra* are a dark mirror of Orwell's own attempts to be a writer. Where some would see his decision to live in poverty as the noble embodiment of his beliefs, Orwell twists this by portraying Gordon's decision to live as an artist as driven mainly by his own pride and narcissism. It is possible that Orwell realized that his behavior was truly odd in a number of ways. For a man who was making 660£ a year, he was *choosing* to live in near poverty while all around him others did not have that luxury. It is quite likely that Orwell realized that his behavior was both absurd and perhaps

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44 George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London.* Harcourt: New York 1972 (1933), 200-1.

45 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 134-6.

insulting to people who were trapped in these conditions. The greatest difference between Orwell and Gordon is that Orwell, to a degree, recognized, accepted, and tried to overcome his biases against the working class. Gordon, on the other hand, is so affected by destitution that he eventually gives up writing in order to marry his pregnant girlfriend, Rosemary, going back to his former job.[46] It is Gordon's middle class upbringing, the same one which created his distaste for the snobbery and elitism of the wealthy, that makes living below his class unbearable to him. As Phillip Bonds writes Gordon's "...self-imposed exile is primarily responsible for *enflaming* his bourgeois prejudices."[47]

Orwell uses both Gordon and Ravelston to critique the British middle class and their ignorance of how class bias affects their attitudes. For Orwell, members of the Left Book Club, the group who published some of his early books, embodied these issues. The Club consisted mostly of middle class Labour and Liberal party members and people new to politics who, as Stuart Samuels writes, "joined the Club because it enabled them to support popular radical causes without committing themselves to a party. For them the Club symbolized a new level of political consciousness, rather than an awakening of class consciousness."[48] Like Ravelston, members of the Left Book Club were willing to express Socialist

46 Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying.* 251-5.

47 Philip Bounds. *Orwell and Marxism: The Political and Cultural Thinking of George Orwell*. International Library of Cultural Studies 4. London ; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009. 185

48 Stuart Samuels, "The Left Book Club." *The Left Wing Intellectuals between the Wars, 1919-1939*. Eds. Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse, Journal of Contemporary History, 2. New York: Harper & Row, 1966. 76

political ideals, but were less enthusiastic about true social change, particularly if it led to losing certain upper or middle class privileges and becoming equals to the poor.

In *Road to Wigan Pier* (1936), Orwell specifically comments on the failure of Socialism and connects it to the class biases inherent in the middle class. He describes how as a child he was taught to dislike the working class for their speech, behavior, and hygiene, while at the same time he loathed the upper class for their flaunting of wealth and assumed superiority. For Orwell, this created a sense of abhorrence for both the wealthy and the poor, writing, "The correct and elegant thing, I felt, was to be of gentle birth but to have no money."[49] Orwell directly addresses how British middle class Socialists may have believed in Socialist theory and respect for the proletariat in the abstract, but had a hard time applying those theories in reality. He writes, a Socialist "Perhaps, once, out of sheer bravado... smoked a cigar with the brand on, but it would be almost physically impossible for him to put pieces of cheese into his mouth at the point of a knife, or to sit indoors with his cap on, or even drink tea out a saucer."[50] Orwell goes even further noting that Socialists tended to accept the working class' poor hygiene as an inherent character flaw, not as a symptom of living in near poverty.[51] He hypothesizes that the middle class supports Socialism as an idealized way of bringing class equality to England, but most have no interest in

49 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 137-8.

50 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 135-6

51 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 130.

creating social change which could affect their own lifestyles.[52]

The first part of *Wigan Pier* examines conditions of poverty that Orwell referenced in *Aspidistra*, such as his descriptions of his lodgings with the Brookers in northern England. There he slept with three men in the same room, was served old and moldy food, and found garbage around and throughout the house.[53] Orwell's subtle characterizations in *Aspidistra* become direct commentary in *Wigan Pier,* with the novel serving as Orwell's introduction to the issue of middle class hypocrisy. Both books reflect the problems and challenges the British faced in a declining economy—an economy which in the 1930s included high unemployment, poor housing, and social inequality. As A.N. Wilson writes, in an examination of the conditions of the working class in a depression era England, Orwell “has no rival.”[54]

In the midst of his explorations of social class and Socialism, Orwell was drawn into a new set of concerns by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. The conflict not only led to Orwell writing a nonfiction recollection of his time in Spain, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)*,* which would later be recognized as one of the most accurate accounts of the war, but would solidify his fears of authoritarianism, particularly as embodied by the Soviet Union. The civil war started in 1936 when General Francisco Franco led a Fascist coalition of right-wing groups, including the Catholic Church and the Spanish military, to oppose

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52 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 157-61

53 Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 5-17.

54 A. N. Wilson, *After the Victorians*. London: Hutchinson, 2005. 236.

the newly established Spanish Republic. When the Republic was unable to mobilize forces itself, splinter Socialist groups rose up to its defense.[55] Believing that the Spanish Republic had to be defended, Orwell, with the help of the Independent Labour Party who sent him as a reporter for their newspaper, the *New Leader,* went to Spain to fight.[56]

Once in Spain, Orwell was assigned to the Marxist group POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification). This decision pit him against the Soviet efforts to dominate Republican forces in the Civil War. The Soviets, intent on being the only Socialist faction in the war, were taking steps to eliminate all other Socialist/Marxist forces, even those splinter groups that were supposed to be their allies in the effort against Franco. The Soviets went so far as to accuse POUM of secretly supporting Franco's forces. They created a smear campaign against POUM, claiming the group had started infighting in Barcelona and were paid by the Fascists to create chaos on the Republican side. Orwell refuted these accusations, arguing that POUM was one of the first groups to fight the Fascists.[57] He soon found himself in the crosshairs of the Communists intent on crushing any independent Republican groups. In the spring of 1937 Orwell was hit by sniper fire. While recovering he discharged himself from the POUM, tired of the Leftist infighting. Almost simultaneously Orwell learned the republican

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55 Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War.* Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 16-8.

56 Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation.* 235-7.

57 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia.* Beacon Press: Boston 1967 (1938). 160-72

government had begun purging POUM of many of his closest associates, such as Georges Kopp who was detained by the Republicans. Orwell himself barely escaped this purge with the help of John McNair, who had helped him enter the war.[58]

These events had a lasting impact on Orwell and how he viewed totalitarianism. He realized that in Spain Socialism had been corrupted by the Communists as a way for them to gain power and influence. He had witnessed the Soviets willing to crush anyone, even those who agreed with some of their politics, who could impede them. As Stansky and Abrahams point out, "Spain educated him in the complexities, ambiguities, compromises, and betrayals of politics."[59] This education would be combined with Orwell's understanding of British social thought in his next novel, *Coming Up For Air*.

Remembering England in *Coming Up For Air*

Coming Up For Air (1940) is a fitting book to conclude Orwell's work in the thirties as it once again examines the social mentality of middle-class Britain—this time through memories of Britain before the turn of the twentieth century, contrasted with the looming threat of World War II. *Coming Up For Air*'s protagonist, George Bowling, is one of Orwell's more fascinating characters as he is quite distinct from Orwell himself. An insurance salesman who leaves his family to visit his childhood home, Bowling represents a British people who have

58 Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation.* 278-84.

59 Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation.* 285.

lost their faith. Caught between a depressed present and an apocalyptic future, Bowling looks back to a perceived "better" time. Orwell uses his story to show the harsh ugliness of "modern" England. Bowling contemplates the stress of paying the lease on his house and the fear of workers who desperately need to appease their customers to keep their jobs.[60] Bowling is overwhelmed by the sterility of modern England. When he visits a milk bar, he notices how cold and "modern" it is—full of mirrors, chromium flooring, while food is boxed, refrigerated, kept antiseptically preserved in cans and cartons. For Bowling in modern Britain "food doesn't matter, comfort doesn't matter, nothing matters except slickness and shininess and streamlineness."[61] To Bowling, the utilitarian nature of existence in England has led to a feeling of detachment in people towards their homes, food, and one another. People no longer create things for pleasure or comfort. The modern world is based solely on providing goods for consumption. The new ideal is appearance and sleekness.

Orwell takes a shot at British Communism when describing Bowling joining his wife at a Left Book Club meeting. At the meeting Bowling listens to a Communist speaker who focuses heavily on demonizing Hitler and the Nazis, while extolling the virtues of Communism. To Bowling, the Communist, terrified of the looming Nazi threat, is satisfied to try and to rile himself and others up in order to "smash people's face in with a spanner."[62] This scene raises Bowling's

60 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* Avon: New York 1950 (1939). 12-4.

61 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 20.

62 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 116-120.

greatest concern with the present—the open brutality and rank fear people are feeling. Ideology itself has no meaning other than as a way of rallying people to hate others in order to cope with their fears. As Bowling points out, the Communist speaker has little awareness of who is the greatest danger—Hitler or Stalin. He simply is reacting out of fear.

Constant anxiety about an impending Second World War haunts Bowling throughout the story—as it did many in thirties Britain—an apprehension expressed by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's observation that "the bomber will always get through."[63] In the beginning of the novel Bowling, while thinking about neighborhoods in London, considers how dense housing is in the city and how easy it will be for German bombers to destroy them.[64] While Bowling has little concern for the physical damage the war might inflict on Britain, he is greatly concerned with the possibility of post-war Britain becoming a totalitarian state, fearing "The Barbed Wire! The Slogans! The enormous faces! The cork-lined cellars where the executioner plugs you from behind!"[65] This dread of a dangerous and horrific future is the final reason for Bowling's distaste for modern England. The intense rhetoric, the constant threat of losing job or home, the growing mechanization of British life, the looming danger of Nazi domination, as well as the daily frustrations of his family and personal life completely

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63 "International Affairs" British House of Commons. (Hansard, 10 November 1932)." http://hansard. millbanksystems.com (Accessed March 6, 2016).

64 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 19.

65 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 134.

overwhelm Bowling. This leads him to seek escape through Lower Binfield, his childhood home. Bowling admits to himself that this reprieve will not last forever. At the same time he desperately craves respite from all the darkness before the world becomes even worse. As Bowling explains, even if people "lived like turnips" in Lower Binfield in his youth, "turnips don't live in terror of the boss, they don't lie awake at night thinking about the next slump or the next war."[66] Bowling seeks to escape to safer, more innocent time as a way of avoiding the oppressive present and future.

Bowling's decision to go back to Lower Binfield is heavily influenced by his recollections of his childhood and the simplicity of life then. He remembers Binfield as a small market town full of natural beauty, with valleys and a forest and hedges that provided a variety of berries.[67] He recollects the bustling town center, how beer had "guts in it,"[68] and the fishing pond near Binfield House.[69] What Bowling remembers is a relatively peaceful time and place where there were no fears, where the world was beautiful and natural, where the remoteness and frigidity of modern progress did not exist. This idealized version of Binfield which Bowling has crafted becomes effectively crushed once he actually returns to the town.

Driving into town, Bowling notices the roads are now covered in tarmac, while

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66 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 136.

67 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 29-30.

68 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 33-4.

69 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 60-2.

the beautiful landscape and simple design of the town is now clotted with modern houses and shops similar to those in London.[70] He goes to the old town pub, The George, and finds that it has become more of a hotel than a tavern and has been redecorated in order to appear "medieval."[71] Even his beloved pond near Binfield House has become a refuse dump.[72] Instead of the haven from the modern world which he imagined, Bowling finds a town that has embraced all the elements of progress that he loathes. The natural beauty of the valleys are now crammed with buildings. The small and personal shops are replaced with stores packed with new technology, prepared foods, appliances, and radios. Bowling cannot even escape from worrying about the war as the city is hit by German bombers during his visit.[73] Ultimately Bowling gives up on the belief that there is any escape from the horrors of the modern world, and that "The dustbin we're in reaches to the stratosphere."[74]

Though his visit ends with Bowling giving up any hope for the modern world, the story itself is not entirely cynical. Orwell is, despite the humor, honestly examining how people could effectively deal with the challenges Britain faced in the 1940s. As Bernard Crick points out, even with the growth of totalitarianism, there were "other values: a crisis might remind us what they were and what they

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70 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 142-3.

71 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 148-9.

72 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 172-4.

73 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 178-9.

74 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air*. 176.

could do."[75] In the novel Bowling gives up on the world entirely. But Orwell makes clear that Bowling is wrong. Bowling is a man who wants to escape the struggles in his life, not confront them. Though he mentions repeatedly that he recognizes the Binfield of his memory is not perfect, he is still stubbornly determined to hang onto it as an escape from reality, even going so far as head there without telling his ill wife beforehand.[76] Bowling's recollections of Binfield show a selective blindness as he alters his past.

Early in the novel Bowling reminisces that during his childhood the people of Binfield, who were generally Liberal, once threw the conservative candidate into a pond, an act which Bowling describes as "People took politics seriously those days." He also calmly recounts his memory of a local man who fell off a second story building and was not cared for for hours.[77] While Bowling brushes off any suggestion that the Binfield townspeople were bullying or thoughtless, the residents of Binfield's past come off just as boorishly as the Communist speaker Bowling mocks in the present day. This further emphasizes how the past, for Bowling, is simply a respite from his frustrations with the present. Bowling's desperate need to idolize the past has "held him back from being an effective man and what prevented his class from fulfilling an active and distinct political role."[78] Binfield fails as an escape from the present, but in the past there may be some

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75 Crick, 372.

76 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 136-7.

77 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 36.

78 Crick, 376.

answers.

In Bowling, Orwell reproaches the British middle class who, though fearful and defeated, are also self satisfied and unwilling to work to address the changing conditions around them. Orwell argues that looking to the past *is* necessary. People can find values in the past which they can apply to the problems of the present. In "England Your England," the first section of his 1941 essay, "The Lion and the Unicorn," Orwell argues that Britain's culture and character are based on a respect for an individual's rights and a desire for peace which has existed since the nineteenth century. Orwell believes these characteristics are particularly innate to the lower-middle and working classes of Britain and they prevent the country from the blind acceptance of militant rhetoric or the reverence for power found in other European states.[79] Orwell, whose Socialism tended to emphasize limited government oversight, saw the British past, in which people had more control over their lives, as an example of what Britain had lost in the present.

Orwell's depiction of Bowling was certainly relevant to many Britons in the thirties who saw their present society as so utterly broken and corrupt that another large scale war was inevitable.[80] Bowling's own memories acknowledge that life at the turn of the century was at times no better than the present in terms of living

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79 George Orwell. "England Your England" (1941) in *Such, Such Were the Joys*. 1st American ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953. 203-6.

80 Richard Overy, *The Twilight Years: The Paradox of Britain Between the Wars.* New York: Viking 2009. 316-7.

and class conditions. In recounting his childhood he describes the houses in Lower Binfeld as teeming with insects, shabby and unsanitary, while his father, a seed salesman, spent his life standing behind a counter tending his store.[81] Even in Bowling's romanticized recollections his Great Britain could be dirty, run down, and ill maintained with neighbors willing to brutalize those who differed from them politically. Yet Orwell maintains that in some ways Britain's past was preferable as it provided a sense of stability. As Jeffrey Meyers writes, for Orwell, turn of the century "was more class ridden and more impoverished than the modern world, but did not have an oppressive sense of helplessness."[82] *Coming Up For Air,* mocking Bowling's and many Britons' nostalgia for the past, also reveals Orwell's own attachment to what he saw as a threatened way of life.

To some Britons, including Orwell, a key concept of "Englishness" was their ability to appreciate and interact with nature.[83] In the novel Bowling wanders along a country road and notices a field filled with flowers, noting he felt "alive that moment when I stood looking at the primroses and the red embers under the hedge. It's a feeling inside you, a kind of peaceful feeling..."[84] As Orwell describes in his essays during the second World War the English loved nature and had an affinity for peace. For Orwell this connection was in danger of being

81 Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 37-44.

82 Jeffrey Meyers, "Orwell's Apocalypse:: Coming Up for Air." In *Orwell*, *Life and Art.* University of Illinois Press, 2010. 86.

83 Benjamin James Clarke. *Orwell in Context: Communities, Myths, Values*. Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 139-40.

84 George Orwell, *Coming Up For Air.* 132-3.

severed through the "progress" accompanying new technologies. While Orwell was aware it was impossible to avoid using new technologies and appreciated they lessened the burden of manual labor, for Orwell those technologies also "softened" people by removing many useful challenges which tested and affirmed a person's humanity. He saw the new labor saving technologies as often effectively turning a person into a "brain in a bottle."[85] As Bernard Crick points out, Orwell was worried over "...progress which could destroy traditional decencies of an England still close to the countryside—the machine versus nature."[86] *Coming Up For Air* distills Orwell's own appreciation for what he saw as unique to the British character—at the same time voicing what he saw as the greatest threat to that identity.

Many contemporary reviews of *Coming Up For Air*, however, focused almost solely on how Orwell had successfully created a convincing portrait of a middle class salesman with depth and humor. *The London Times* stated that Orwell had given British readers some insight into the character of the "small man" which had been seen negatively before then.[87] The novel, while selling relatively well in comparison to Orwell's other books, once sold out was not reprinted for years, a decision that Orwell suspected was due to the Second World War starting at the same time as it was released. In a letter to editor Julian Symons, Orwell claimed

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85 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier.* 190-200.

86 Crick, 242.

87 J. S. "New Novels." *The Times*. June 23, 1939. The Times Digital Archive. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu [Accessed October 14, 2015]

the book was "blitzed out of existence. So thoroughly that in order to get a copy from which to reset it we had to steal it from a public library."[88] In the end *Coming Up For Air* was too close to reality for readers to fully appreciate the satire, most saw the novel simply as a story of a middle class British individual, George Bowling.

The novels written by Orwell in the nineteen thirties show a growing consciousness. It begins with his critique of imperialism, goes on to examine the biases of the British middle class, and finally, by the end of the decade, details his own fears of totalitarianism as well as the dehumanizing effects of progress and technology. Orwell's novels, along with his nonfiction, reveal a man who is able to recognize the ironies of his world. Whether pointing out that imperialism is often largely supported by the colonized themselves, showing how the middle class have no ability to recognize the biases they inherit, or arguing why Britain should not give in to the pressures of the modern world, Orwell developed his insights both through his writing and his own experiences.

Graham Greene: An Independent Voice

Viewing Graham Greene's work in the context of Interwar Britain is more challenging. The only way fully to appreciate Greene's point of view is to understand his interest in individual psychology as well as his conversion to Catholicism. While Orwell understood psychology in terms of class, Greene

88 George Orwell, *A Life in Letters*. Peter Hobley Davison ed. First American edition. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013. 405.

viewed it on an individual and moral level. Born in 1904, the son of a schoolmaster at the Berkhamsted School, Greene, like Orwell, had difficulty handling the stresses of the British school system. At school Greene was subjected to continual bullying because of his shy nature, which resulted in his repeatedly attempting suicide and running away from home.[89] The bullying partly stemmed from Greene being the headmaster's son, as his peers saw him as a possible spy for his father.[90] Greene's father would prove to be of little help in dealing with his struggles. Greene was intellectual, quiet, poor at sports—the antithesis of the successful British public school boy. Charles Greene, while trying to support his son, was unable to see the problem as simply bullying and began to believe it must somehow involve something more—in his son's case, homosexuality. Graham blamed his father's reaction on the rigidity and enforced expectations of the British school system.[91]

In order to help Greene with his ongoing problems, at sixteen his family sent him to London to receive psychoanalytic treatment from Kenneth Richmond. During his time with Richmond, Greene had the chance to experience life outside of Berkhamsted, meeting many of Britain's most notable writers who were friends of Richmond, including the poet Walter de la Mare.[92] This proved to be a pivotal

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89 Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*. Vol. 1. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. 71-88.

90 Michael Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 1st Edition. New York: Random House: New York. 1994. 53-4.

91 Sherry, 88.

92 Sherry, 92-105.

experience for Greene. While living with Richmond and his wife in London Greene found support for his artistic interests. He was introduced to British literary circles and was able to have a short story published in a London newspaper, *The Sun* (not then a tabloid), thanks to Richmond.[93] His treatment under Richmond allowed Greene's creativity to flourish, an event that likely would not have occurred back in Berkhamsted within the confines of the school and his well-meaning, but very traditional father. Richmond also gave Greene new perspectives on how to respond to the challenges that he faced. As Norman Sherry writes, Richmond allowed Greene to gain "the courage to question the notion of 'loyalty—to the school first, but to other accepted 'loyalties' later, thereby opening the way for Graham to embrace 'disloyalty' as a principle."[94] Living with Richmond provided Greene with a psychological explanation of his situation. He became aware that his insecurities had developed in response to the forces around him and he would explore the psychological pressures exerted on people throughout his career.

In his late teens Greene was drawn to finding an external moral framework to live by. He briefly joined the Communist Party in 1922—but the great turning point in Greene's life would be his conversion to Catholicism in the late 1920s. The conversion began as a result of Greene's infatuation with Vivien Dayrell-Browning, a devout Catholic. As Greene was determined to marry her, he believed that he "...ought at least to learn the nature and limits of the beliefs she

93 Sherry, 104-5.

94 Sherry, 107.

held."[95] To do this, Greene met with the priest of the Nottingham Church, Father Trollope. It was through his discussions with Trollope that Greene decided to convert in February 1926.[96] For Greene, Catholicism particularly fascinated him as it could, as Michael Shelden points out, "create a heightened sense of evil."[97] It is understandable that someone who had been subjected to continual harsh treatment at the hands of innocent seeming school boys would find in Catholicism a way of understanding how "good" people could be so brutal. This, alongside the confidence he gained from his time with the Richmonds, would define Greene's future focus—a morally centered view of the world that encompassed a strong opposition to establishment and traditions which, in Greene's views, often oppressed others for their own interest and gain.

One of the obvious differences between Greene and Orwell is that Greene, unlike Orwell, was not specifically involved in political and social issues in his twenties and thirties. By the 1930s, Greene had left Balliol College, Oxford, married Vivien, and worked as an editor at both *The Nottingham Journal* and *The Times*. For Greene, especially at the beginning of his career, the focus was more on becoming an established writer and less on the details of what he was writing about. Over the decade, the topics of Greene's writing varied as he examined the moral issues surrounding Catholicism, politics, and society. While he remained focused on novelistic style and structure, Greene's work in the Interwar Period

95 Graham Greene, *A Sort of Life.* London: Vintage, 2002 (1971). 118.

96 Greene, *A Sort of Life.* 120-1.

97 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 105.

illustrate unique interpretations of the political and social challenges Britain faced at the time.

It's a Battlefield and the Psychology of Social Injustice

By the early 1930s, Greene had written two thrillers, *The Man Inside* and *Stamboul Train.* Both books were what Greene considered “entertainments.” Both sold moderately well and Hollywood optioned *Stamboul Train,* but Greene was still struggling to make a living writing. With *It's a Battlefield* (1932), Greene crafted a more openly political novel, one of his most ambitious works in the thirties. The novel reveals Greene's middle class understanding of (and naivete about) contemporary British class structure. Set in London, the novel depicts the arrest and impending execution of Jim Drover, a Communist bus driver convicted of killing a police officer while defending his wife during a political rally. Using the fictional case of Drover, Greene tackles issues he would revisit again and again—love, jealousy, lust—but also larger moral and social concerns, in this case the concept of injustice in Britain. Describing the personal struggles of Drover's family, a Communist party eager to exploit Drover's arrest for their own political gain, an ambivalent police force hoping to shove the matter under the rug, a reporter bent on riding the story to personal fame, and a left leaning blueblood dedicated to rescuing Drover, Greene critiques British society across the classes and political spectrum. *It's a Battlefield* describes a Britain which had developed a political, civil, and social system which ignores justice and morality.

Four of Greene's central characters, Mr. Surrogate, Conrad Drover, Caroline Bury, and the Associate Commissioner, each reflect how the injustice systematically inherent in Interwar Britain corrupts the individual. For Mr. Surrogate, head of the British Communist Party, Drover's execution is just a tool for his own ends. Surrogate ponders how best to present Drover's imminent death to effectively paint him as a martyr for Communism, an innocent killed by an unjust system.[98] At the Communist meeting, Surrogate repeatedly pushes to create a fund for Drover's soon-to-be widow, insisting to his fellow member, Bennett, that attempting to save Drover is useless.[99] His Communist affiliation allows him to view himself as a righteous intellectual working for the good of "the people" yet his affair with Drover's sister-in-law reveals he is only a weak old man who easily gives in to his vices. As Malika Maamri states "Communism is only an escape from lust, shame, betrayal and cowardice. Thus, Surrogate is but a parody of the revolutionary, a substitute."[100] In the end, Communism for Surrogate is attractive only in the abstract. He is happy to believe in the ideals espoused by the party—class equality, providing workers the means of production, striving to improve the lives of workers. Yet in practice Surrogate finds these goals only create frustration, conflict, and untenable personal demands

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98 Graham Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* Penguin: New York. 1977 (1934). 34-5.

99 Greene, *Its a Battlefield.* 41-2.

100 Malika Rebai Maamri. "Cosmic Chaos in The Secret Agent and Graham Greene's It's a Battlefield." *Conradiana* 40, no. 2 (2008): 179-92. http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu (Accessed December 3rd, 2015).

on his time and energy. He is particularly irritated that Bennett, a Communist from a lower class, challenges his authority, and he longs to avoid all genuine social interaction. As the narration states, Surrogate "...could live in a world of religions, of political parties and economic creeds; he would go mad rubbing at every turn with saviours, politicians, poor people begging for bread."[101] Greene's examination of Mr. Surrogate's attitude towards Communism is surprisingly similar to what Orwell criticized about middle class Socialists. Both decry Socialists and Communists who are dedicated to the purely theoretical concepts of their party, but are unable to accept functional equality due to class bias, personal distaste, or their desire to maintain their privilege.

Through Jim Drover's younger brother, Conrad, Greene explores envy and desire, reoccurring themes in his work. Yet Conrad's self perceived failings in the novel are all the direct result of his experience with upper class values. Unlike the rest of his family Conrad has moved up from the working class to a good upper middle class job as a chief clerk, thanks to his hard work in school. He should be a success story—a man who pulls himself out of poor, working class conditions by dint of his own efforts. Conrad's position, however, just creates anxiety for him. He feels isolated from his class, hated by coworkers who envy him, and constantly fearful his job will be taken from him by someone from the upper class who is a better "fit." These concerns are exacerbated by his brother's conviction, which Conrad believes will be used against him by the other clerks, who wish to

101Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 43-44.

usurp his position as chief clerk.[102] Conrad's paranoia makes him overly aware of his class. As Roger Sharrock points out, “He is the one most cruelly aware of the gulf fixed between 'them' and 'us' because his intelligence and his sensitiveness separate him from those on his side of the barrier who should be his fellows.”[103] Conrad is a study of the psychological impact of the class divisions inherent in Britain. While his fears are heightened by his sense of masculine inferiority to his brother, Conrad's situation reflects how Britain's suffocating class stratification was so extreme that one could not psychologically escape it.

The Associate Commissioner is at the center of Drover's case and possible execution as his job is to investigate the crime and make a recommendation on Drover's sentence. In the Associate Commissioner Greene indicts bureaucratic irresponsibility. The Commissioner is very familiar with the divisions between wealthy and poor that exist in his world. The secretary for the Prime Minister tells him that he is the best man for the job as he knows London, “the poorer parts in particular.”[104] The Commissioner is all too aware that the laws he enforces are often biased towards the rich. He notes “...the laws were made by the property owners in defence of property; that was why a Fascist could talk treason without prosecution; why a man who defrauded the State in defence of his private wealth

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102 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 106-8.

103 Roger Sharrock, *Saints, Sinners and Comedians: The Novels of Graham Greene.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. 64.

104 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 13.

did not even lose the money he had gained..."[105] Yet even knowing this the Commissioner continually tells himself he is not responsible for enforcing justice—he is simply in charge of keeping the peace, he is a civil servant who cannot change the system. The Commissioner justifies his role in the system because he is old, tired, and unwilling to make the effort to change.[106] His refusal to act on his conscience ultimately prevails when he decides to ignore the case and move on to other work.[107] As Brian Diermert states, "Ultimately, by providing protection against the terror of 'the demands which might be made on him' and by defending the social order from revolution, his blinkered social vision allows the Associate Commissioner to continue doing his job."[108] The Commissioner, like Surrogate, hides behind an idealized image of himself—a man whose greatest fealty is to duty. Though he sees himself as responsible for maintaining order and stability in reality he only looks out for himself, pointing out to Caroline Bury "The truth is, nobody cares about anything but his own troubles. Everybody's too busy fighting his own little battle to think of the next man."[109]

Lady Caroline Bury is the closest thing to a moral center for the novel, as well as Greene's way of verbalizing his criticism of present conditions in Great Britain. A wealthy patron of the arts, Caroline is appalled that Drover is to be executed.

105 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 168-9.

106 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 166.

107 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 201-2.

108 Brian Diemert, *Graham Greene's Thrillers and the 1930s*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. 111.

109 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 188.

Arguing with the Associate Commissioner as she tries to save Drover's life, Caroline points out how the entire British system is inherently biased towards the wealthy. She argues that laborers who do the same amount of work as middle class workers are given significantly lower pay, while condemning the Commissioner for maintaining the status quo, stating "Without the police force such a state of affairs couldn't last a year."[110] Caroline effectively highlights one of the main themes of the novel, that British law benefits the rich while the police, instead of establishing and supporting justice, are tools in the interest of the rich and the ruling class.

Yet Caroline is also a product of the system. Her plan to bribe the Home Secretary (which she acknowledges is just another example of corruption in Britain) reveals how anyone opposed to the system of wealth and privilege is forced to use wealth and privilege to achieve anything. This point is emphasized again when the Associate Commissioner ponders his own death. He considers how he did nothing to address institutionalized injustice, while "Caroline who had wanted to bribe the Home Secretary with an inheritance deserved to live."[111] Caroline's willingness to exhaust her own wealth to influence change and remove inequality speaks to the desperation of people in this system.

In order to better appreciate the historical elements of *It's a Battlefield*, it is important to understand how Greene developed the left leaning politics he espouses in the novel. After his first novel was released, and sold relatively well,

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110 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 185-90.

111 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 191.

the next three sold poorly, leading him to work as a literary critic in order provide for himself, Vivien, and their newborn child. This, as Norman Sherry explains, became a major reason for his sympathy with the poor and disenfranchised.[112] Greene understood the struggle of working hard, yet barely scraping by.

Greene also leaned towards the Left due to his part in the 1926 General Strike. The strike was called by coal miners wanting a national minimum wage and angry over mine owners' refusal to respect agreements for minimum additional wages. The Trades Union Congress, which had agreed to oversee any large scale labor disputes in Britain, promised to organize and gather support for the miners if they went on strike. Railroad and shipping workers refused to move coal in solidarity with the striking miners and soon more trade unions joined the strike.[113] During the strike, Greene became a special constable, a decision he claims he made out of curiosity, the need for the extra pay, and the assumption "special constables" mostly hung around together in pubs. He ended up taking an active part in breaking up the workers on strike.[114] Greene, like Orwell in Burma, came to regret his participation—guilty for being paid for actions he had little to no belief in. This, as well as the growing unemployment in Britain, turned Greene to the Leftist politics he had always leaned towards. As James Hopkins states, British intellectuals were impacted by "the unemployed who brought the sufferings of the

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112 Sherry, 468-9.

113 C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940.* Boston: Beacon Hill. 1971. 290-2.

114 Greene, *A Sort of Life.* 127-8.

country's distressed areas into the enclaves of Oxbridge class and privilege."[115] Greene soon joined the Independent Labour Party, a more leftist affiliate of the British Labour Party.[116]

Greene's insights into Britain's institutional support of the wealthy in *It's a Battlefield* had merit. In reaction to the 1926 General Strike, the British government called a state of emergency, allowing police to arrest people without warrants if they appeared to "endanger public safety."[117] These broad "emergency" powers angered British citizens as they were enforced with severe checks on individual civil liberties while having little effect on the coal industry. Magistrates who were union members were forbidden to take part in any trial concerning the strikes, while magistrates involved in the coal industry were allowed to serve under the logic that there were too many magistrates with interest in the coal business to disqualify them.[118] There was also blatant inequality in punishing offenses after the strike. Citizens who committed petty crimes, such as tearing down government notices or encouraging workers not to become special constables, were often sentenced to several months' hard labor and a fifty pound fine. For minor offenses like these, there was no possibility for amnesty. The coal industry, on the other hand, faced far more lenient treatment—

115James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire: The British in the Spanish Civil War*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998. 28.

116 W. J. West, *The Quest for Graham Greene.* St. Martin's:New York (1997) 59.

117 K. D. Ewing and C. A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 161-7.

118 Ewing and Gerty, 194-7.

with one company having to pay a mere fourteen shillings for selling coal without a permit.[119] The General Strike, and the laws which resulted from it, created the sense that the British Government was dedicated to maintaining the power of upper class and industrial interests.

This is not to say that Greene's novel is entirely accurate in its portrayal of Britain at the time. His description of the Communist meeting, in particular, lacks realism. Grahame Smith makes the point that the working class party members are portrayed in ways common to middle class writers in the thirties.[120] This can be seen in the party members' hackneyed phonetics such as “If they want to 'ang 'im, they'll 'ang 'im.”[121] Greene admits in his memoir, *Ways of Escape,* that the meeting scene was based on a single party meeting he attended in Paris, and doubtfully reflected what a meeting in Britain would have been like.[122] While lacking some authentic detail, Greene's novel effectively created a reflection of 1930s London. Greene claimed to have used several real individuals as inspirations for his characters including Lady Ottoline Morell for Caroline, the Socialist writer John Middleton Murray for Surrogate, and his own uncle Graham for the Associate Commissioner.[123] As Samuel Hynes points out, Greene created events in the story that mirrored real life, including the rally that leads to Drover's

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119 Ewing and Gerty, 197-8.

120 Grahame Smith, *The Achievement of Graham Greene*. Totowa, N.J: Harvester Press, 1986. 121.

121 Greene, *It's a Battlefield.* 45.

122 Graham Greene, *Ways of Escape.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980. 36.

123 Greene, *Ways of Escape.* 36.

arrest and the other murder cases the Associate Commissioner is involved in. For Hynes this creates a heightened sense of realism, writing that “A reader coming into the novel in 1934 must have felt very strongly that these characters occupied the same world that he did, and were moved by the same forces he felt and found recorded in his evening newspaper.”[124] *It's a Battlefield* captures the growing anxiety of a British people worried over economic and social inequality and the sense of growing violence and chaos.

Nationality and Identity in *England Made Me*

Greene's next novel, *England Made Me* (1935), examines the British character and identity in the 1930s. The story, set in Stockholm, focuses on the Farrant siblings, Anthony and Kate, and Anthony's developing conscience as he learns more and more about the actions of Kate's corrupt employer and lover, Erik Krogh. Like Orwell in *Coming Up For Air*, Greene here examines how assumptions from the past continue to define and influence contemporary “Englishness.” For Greene being British largely was defined by attitudes that limited people, primarily emphasizing the need to keep up appearances. Greene contrasts this perfunctory Englishness with the cold and detached modernity embodied by Krogh. In *England Made Me* Greene shows the damage entrenched upper-class English attitudes could create, yet the compass that these traditional values could still provide.

124 Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* London: Pimlico, 1992. 136-7.

The primary victims of Britishness in the novel are Anthony Farrant and Ferdinand Minty. Due to the teaching of both his father and school, Anthony strictly follows English mores and beliefs. Anthony keeps "a stiff upper lip...learning (the beating in the study when he brought home the smutty book with the pretty pictures) that you must honour other men's sisters. Anthony learning to love in moderation."[125] This harsh inculcation of manners has a profound effect on Anthony. He has the perfect traditional British manners but becomes a good-for-nothing con man going from to job to job. He has no interest establishing a real occupation, believing that he can get away with anything with his charm and refined demeanor, even going so far as to attempt to sell tea bags thrown away by his company at a full price.[126] As Norman Sherry states Anthony "has retained the veneer that was produced by his public school—useful in keeping one's head above water."[127] For Anthony, true effort does not matter; image does. This belief, Michael Shelden argues, hinders Anthony's ability to thrive in a post-war world.[128] At the time the novel opens Anthony is unemployed, unattached, and sliding through life. Greene makes clear that, to Anthony, this is preferable to grinding lower- middle or lower class life.

Anthony has certainly taken away the wrong lessons from the instructions of his youth. His sense of "right" (read proper British) behavior comes to the

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125 Graham Greene, *England Made Me.* New York: Penguin Books, 1970 (1935), 64.

126 Greene, *England Made Me.* 19.

127 Sherry, 491-2.

128 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 170.

forefront when he accepts his sister's offer of a job in Sweden. He looks down on all foreigners, dismisses his fellow expats, and generally assumes he is brighter, savvier, and better than Krogh or, for that matter, anyone he meets. Yet he is appalled when he discovers that Kate knows her boss and fiancee, Krogh, is manipulating sales at his company in Amsterdam. For Anthony, who made his way as a con man and a grifter in London, this is unacceptable to his concept of what is right. Although he is willing to use this information to blackmail Krogh, his decision impacts Kate, who realizes that "somewhere on that straight steel track down which his brain now so quickly drove there burned a permanent red light; somewhere he would stop, waver, make a hash of things. He wasn't unscrupulous enough to be successful."[129] Anthony through the novel moves from facilely skating through life to discovering a real sense of morality and decency. Ultimately, Anthony, due to the morals instilled and buried in him, is unwilling to ignore the obvious evil that Krogh is committing.

Minty, the journalist investigating Krogh, is another example of the direct damage that Englishness could have on its citizens. A dirty and creepy introvert, Minty, like Anthony, is greatly affected by his time in public school. At Harrow Minty faced bullying for his Catholicism and punishment by school teachers for an affair which forced him to leave the school. Yet Minty, whose trials at Harrow have effectively destroyed his life, is enraged when he discovers that Anthony wears a Harrow tie while never having attended the school. As Greene describes, "No captain of the Games, no member of the Philathletic Club with a bow tie and

129 Greene, *England Made Me.* 142-4.

a braided waistcoat, would have been capable of a more honest indignation."[130] Even though he had to leave Harrow, Minty is dedicated to the school and that connection is key to his self definition. Even in Stockholm, Minty seeks out Harrovians. He attempts to set up a dinner with a fellow alumn, the foreign Minister of Sweden, who quickly rejects the idea. Despite their dubious public school connection, which means everything to Minty, the Minister can see in a moment that Minty is shabby and dissolute. Minty is painfully aware the Minister wants nothing to do with him noticing "He has not asked me to sit down, he is afraid for his tapestry chairs because my coat's a little wet."[131] Anthony and Minty are cut from the same cloth. Both suffered the trauma of a traditional English upbringing, yet both retain an attachment to empty image and manners that provide little help in dealing with the real world. Unlike Anthony, Minty has become isolated and completely embittered by his experience, while he still clings to the illusion of school camaraderie. As Michael Shelden writes, "At least Anthony has Kate and assorted girlfriends; Minty relies on himself."[132] The only thing keeping Anthony from becoming completely bitter and another Minty is his own innate charm and his sister.

Kate is a slightly different example of Englishness in action. *England Made Me*'s theme of trying to escape a national past by embracing a capitalist and international present was an inherent issue for Interwar Britain. Seeing British

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130 Greene, *England Made Me.* 83.

131 Greene, *England Made Me.* 86-88.

132 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 171.

traditions and the demands imposed by them as pointless and futile, Kate elects to leave England to work for Krogh. As skeptical as she is about what stifling English expectations may have done to her, she is completely embittered about what they have done to her brother. For Kate, her father and the school system are responsible for turning Anthony into a slacker and scammer— and separating him from her. She feels that her father "loved Anthony and he ruined Anthony..."[133] Convinced of the damage done to Anthony by her father and school, Kate moves further and further away from English nationalism. She views Krogh's international capitalism, which breaks down bonds of country and nation, as the best way to survive in the world. Through most of the novel Kate believes that her and Anthony's upbringing has only resulted in them being "broke, we belong to the past, we haven't the character or the energy to do more than hang onto something new for what we can make out of it."[134] This reasoning allows Kate to have a loveless relationship with Krogh simply for financial security, well aware that Krogh uses shady methods to gain power and influence.

Yet even in her determination to protect Anthony and bring him to Sweden, Kate becomes aware that, perhaps, there are some positive elements in the old English nationalism, and that there "had been a straightness about the poor national past which the international did without. It hadn't been very grand but in their class at any rate there had been gentleness and kindness once."[135] Kate's

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133 Greene, *England Made Me.* 64.

134 Greene, *England Made Me.* 135.

135 Greene, *England Made Me.* 136.

morality is fully awakened after her brother is killed and while she does not fully accept English nationality, she refuses to continue to be an accomplice to Krogh and ends the relationship.[136]

For both Greene and Orwell much of the vacuity of present day English character could be directly traced to English public school education. The experiences of both Greene and Orwell are examples of how the British school system placed far more emphasis on promoting “character” and appearance than on teaching children useful knowledge and skills. The English public school was a single-sex, supposedly self-disciplining, residential institution that was meant to inculcate “modesty,” and “general decency.” Yet school norms also enforced “prejudice against all things artistic, eccentric, abstract, poetic, studious, foreign, or feminine.”[137] This hostility towards anything “different” was certainly found in the school experiences of Orwell, and Greene, as well as Minty, whose school mates bully him for his Catholicism.[138]

Greene and Orwell's public school experience is an important point of comparison between the two and places them both in the center of the social mindset of 1930s Britain. The psychological effects of living within the public school system gave Greene, Orwell, and many other British intellectuals the crushing experience of oppressive subservience to the status quo, and is a possible reason why many of them ultimately moved towards the Left when they got older.

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136 Greene, *England Made Me.* 205-7.

137 Graves and Hodge, 212-3.

138 Greene, *England Made Me.* 86.

The fact that many of these thinkers and writers went to school in the midst of the First World War also had a pronounced effect on their school experience. As many of their older peers were sent out to fight and die in war, honed and inspired by the rigid instruction of their public schools, the younger generation often felt they pointlessly suffered outworn disciplines and empty indoctrinations. This made the harsh way these lessons were instilled seem even more arbitrary. As Peter Parker states, “For these men the values of the public schools seemed irrelevant to a post-War world. Had they taken part in the War they might have found some use for their moral education, but denied this chance they felt both cheated and obscurely guilty.”[139] The War only intensified the frustration many British writers of the thirties felt toward British schooling. Like Greene and Orwell, many writers of their generation saw their school experience as simultaneously traumatizing and useless.

Orwell and Greene were not alone in sharing a distaste, especially prevalent on the Left, for this oppressive form of schooling. In the 1920s and 1930s there were several attempts to improve British education. Parents and educators, many victims themselves of rigid pre-war schooling, longed to see education focus on improving a child's mind, not instilling a rigid sense of decorum. Bertrand and Dora Russell created a “free school” focused on children developing their individual personalities rather than simply learning from rote texts. The school

139 Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos.* London: Constable. 1987. 274.

also had mixed gender classrooms with boys and girls.[140] While many parents still promoted “English” character in their children, the attempts by these educators show how strongly people felt about pre-war British schooling. *England Made Me* provides, in narrative form, an insight into what being “British” really meant, for both good and bad, in the thirties.

The Confidential Agent: The Case of British Isolationism

For many, *The Confidential Agent* (1939), Greene's last novel of the decade, is a perfect example of a Greene “entertainment”— a well-written thriller which diverted readers. Yet the novel also reflects political and social attitudes common in 1930s Great Britain, especially in regards to how other nations and states were viewed as a foreign war waged on. The novel recounts the adventures of D., an agent for a republic in a state of civil war (a thinly veiled Spain), who is sent to England to convince coal owners to sell his republic resources. The novel tackles xenophobia, the differences in a republic in a state of chaos and England in the throes of depression, treachery, deceit, and the desperation of the British working class.

The Spanish Civil War placed Greene in an awkward position. His left-leaning tendencies automatically made him oppose Fascism and Franco. On the other hand, Franco's ties with Catholicism forced Greene to choose between his politics and his religion, a decision that became even harder when he learned of atrocities committed by Socialists in Spain. These included the destruction of churches and

140 Graves and Hodge, 210-1.

the killing of nuns. With misgivings about both the Nationalists and the Socialists, Greene gave his support to the Basques.[141] For Greene this decision made perfect sense. The Basques, led by Basque National Catholic Party leader Jose Antonio Aguirre, declared themselves autonomous from the Spanish Republic and fought Franco's forces on their own.[142] Openly Catholic, Basque priests participated by attending to the dying during battle.[143] Support for the Basques allowed Greene openly to oppose Fascism, while not having to support Republican forces committing anti-Catholic atrocities. His sympathies towards the Basques increased once Nationalist forces bombed the city of Guernica and executed priests who had supported Basque nationalism.[144] Greene considered going to the besieged city of Bilbao in 1937 as a reporter, but ultimately decided not to go as it was too difficult to get into the city and report on the conditions in the time frame he wanted.[145] For some, like Michael Shelden, this showed Greene was making an empty show of support, backing out at the last minute as he had no political interest in the war.[146]

Greene was not alone in his reservations about the Republic based on his religious ties. British Catholics, like Greene, were appalled at the British Left's

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141 Sherry, 611-3.

142 Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977. 185.

143 Sherry, 612.

144 Carr, 236-7.

145 Sherry, 612-3.

146 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 188.

acceptance of the destruction of churches in Spain. The Left accepted the destruction as simply an example of a people removing elements of their hated past.[147] This attitude, as well as suspicions of the Communists' real intents, led some notable Catholics—such as Wyndham Lewis, Roy Campbell, and particularly Evelyn Waugh—to side with Franco.[148] Despite his concern with the Socialist atrocities committed against Catholics, Greene's leftist beliefs put him under great pressure. For many Leftist thinkers in Britain, the Spanish Civil War proved to be a definitive event. Here was a republic, one of the few political body to represent Socialist ideals, under assault by Fascist forces. John Lehmann argued that the growing sense that democracy was crumbling in the thirties—in Germany, Italy, Hungary, and now Spain—led to the Left's feeling it had to act.[149] This sense, that in Spain the decisive battle between democracy and Fascism was underway, was the reason both why Orwell felt compelled to join the conflict and Greene felt trapped between his sympathies to both Catholicism and his Leftist ideals.

Greene's complicated attitude towards the war explains why he chose to use the war more for setting than theme in *The Confidential Agent.* The novel still provides a subtle examination of Britain's attitude towards Spain and the Civil War. Throughout the novel, Greene, through D., examines a Britain containing

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147 Buchanan, 155.

148 Buchanan, 160-1.

149 Peter Stanksy, and Abrahams. *Journey to the Frontier: Julian Bell & John Cornford: Their Lives and the 1930s*. London: Constable, 1966. 288.

even harsher and more ruthless conditions than in a civil war itself. Depicting a depressed Britain in the late thirties, Greene examines how the state's struggles, as well as its not so hidden xenophobia, led to a public that cared little for affairs outside of its own.

Even with his wariness of the Socialists' actions in the Spanish Civil War, there are many hints in *The Confidential Agent* that Greene supported the Left in the conflict. An obvious example is when D. encounters his arch-nemesis, L. The meeting reveals the differences between D., a professor of Classics who lost his wife and was tortured in prison back in his home country, and L., an aristocrat working for the nationalists. L. laments what the war has cost both men, casually comparing the loss of his rare art work to D. losing his wife.[150] For Greene, the battle between Fascism and Socialism is in the end economic. He saw the conflict as a contest between lower classes seeking stability and equality and elite upper-classes intent on maintaining the status quo with the help of the Fascists.

Yet despite the sympathetic presentation of his protagonist, D., D.'s government is more suspect. As Grahame Smith points out "Although D.'s left-wing materialism is conveyed with great sympathy, the government he represents is vitiated by a lack of trust at every level."[151] When D. meets with his fellow collaborator, K., K. has no idea of D.'s mission. He only knows that D has a large sum of money. To D., his superiors have kept K. in the dark because they have little faith in him, stating "it would be just like the people at home to send him on

150 Graham Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* New York: Penguin Books, 1984 (1939). 28-30.

151 Smith, 34-5.

a confidential mission and let other people who they didn't trust with a knowledge of his object to watch him."[152] By emphasizing D's growing suspicions of those on his own side, Greene reveals the inherent lack of trust created by the civil war, as ideology is superseded in the effort to survive.

An issue Greene tackles in the the novel is the heightened sense of superiority and animosity towards foreigners in Britain between the wars. In *The Confidential Agent*, the British people are portrayed as holding the moral high ground simply for not being a country in a state of civil war, unlike D.'s homeland. The best example of the prejudice that D. faces is the character of Captain Currie, the manager of a roadside restaurant where D. stops. When D. departs with Rose's car, Currie and his chauffeur chase him down and assault him, repeatedly accusing D. of trying to worm his way into Rose's confidence. This beating continues even after a couple stops by to question what is going on. They move on when Currie explains that it is "One of these foreigners..."[153] This is accepted as sufficient reason for the attack.

This sense of superiority to foreigners is seen again when Currie catches D. attempting to leave England after he is falsely accused of killing K. Currie observes that D.'s people kill each other without regard, but suddenly demand full legal protection when in England.[154] Curri, like many of the club members in Orwell's *Burmese Days,* is a prototype of the judgmental, often prejudiced

152 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 44-6.

153 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 33-7.

154 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 198-201.

parochial Briton who openly disdains foreigners. Currie self-righteously looks down on D. and his countrymen, involved in an ugly and brutish civil war, unlike his "peaceful" Britain. This same complacent sense that Britain is entirely detached from the chaos of foreign civil wars is evident when D. considers Dr. Bellows and Ms. Carpenter, the heads of the Entrenationo Language Centre. To D., the two, though well-intentioned as they work to create a new international language, are both utterly clueless. Naive and uninformed regarding the real issues in the world, D. describes them as "robbed of reality by their complacent safety."[155] England's geographical isolation becomes a moral and intellectual one as well. Through the Entrenationo Centre, Greene satirizes how many Britons, wrapped in their self-perceived safety and security, remained stupidly detached from the serious conflicts occurring throughout the rest of the world. This is the same Britain where Neville Chamberlain could rue that Britons would ever have to worry about "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing."[156]

Greene offers another reason why Britons were willing to overlook issues outside their country—financial stability. When D. tries to convince the coal miners not to send coal to the Nationalists, Rose, a member of the British upper class as the daughter of a wealthy coal magnate, feels this is pointless. She tells

155 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 128.

156 "Prime Minister on the Issues: 'If We Have to Fight.'" *The Times*. September 28, 1938. The Times Digital Archive. 10. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu (Accessed March 6th, 2016)

D. that the miners, who had to deal with mine shutdowns during the depression, “...haven't got any spirit left. They just live, that's all.”[157] This comment proves all too true as D. discovers when he tries to talk to the coal union. Arguing that the coal is going to support Fascists the miners say they were told it is being shipped to Holland. When D. points out this is just a cover story to allow the coal to be sent to the Nationalists, one woman in the crowd argues that “Charity begins at 'ome.”[158] The coal miners and their families, living with unemployment for so long, could care less what interest the coal will eventually serve. They simply want their jobs and some economic stability back. In the end, the miners are unaffected by D.'s plea.[159] Across class, social, and economic lines Britons in *The Confidential Agent* have little interest in or awareness of situations outside their own immediate problems and biases. Greene's novel makes clear that this attitude ultimately cannot prevent international events from affecting Britons' lives.

The attitudes Greene portrays in *The Confidential Agent* accurately reflect the views of many Britons in the thirties. To some degree the British people viewed the Spanish as responsible for their own situation. It was easy for Britons to dismiss Spain as a failed empire. Marked by its decline in international influence, starting in the nineteenth century, its internal chaos seemed almost inevitable. Britons had no sympathy with the state's strict form of Catholicism and many believed the newly created Spanish Republic had opened itself to Communist

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157 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 143-5.

158 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 167-70.

159 Greene, *The Confidential Agent.* 194.

influence.[160] At the start of the Civil War, British media focused on reporting the horrors of warfare, downplaying the political context. As Tom Buchanan states, “The newsreels spent little time on explaining the political complexities of the conflict, but rather used film of the war to illustrate the evils of civil strife and to reinforce a conservative view of British life.”[161] For many British people, the war was simply the chaos resulting from a poorly run, unsophisticated state. Spain was just not as secure or stable as Great Britain.

Throughout the war, in order to protect its own interests, Britain did not take sides in the conflict. In 1937, Britain went so far as to form a “gentlemen's agreement” with Italy where the two powers promised not to affect conditions in the Mediterranean. This was effectively a promise to abandon Spain to its own affairs.[162] Great Britain only became concerned with their policy of non-intervention once Italy seized control of the territory of Majorca, which was a potential threat to British control of the Mediterranean. As Anthony Beevor writes, “The only circumstance likely to influence British foreign policy was a direct threat to traditional interests, the most sensitive of which was still the route to India.”[163] British public opinion approved of the policy of nonintervention at the start of the conflict under the assumption that it would encourage other states

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160 Buchanan, 12-17.

161 Buchanan, 25.

162 C. L. Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940.* Boston: Beacon Hill. 1971. 575.

163 Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006. 135.

to also stay out of the conflict.[164] When this proved untrue many on the Left argued that a Republican Spain was an asset worth fighting for. As James Hopkins states "whether one's political disposition was that of a high Tory or socialist, there was ample reason for Great Britain to support the Spanish Republic in the hour of its peril."[165] For Greene, the British stance of non-intervention was based solely on short term, self-serving interests. Great Britain, smugly thinking itself a secure, stable empire, had little interest taking the lead supporting other countries in crisis.

Greene's point that Britain's domestic concerns were far more pressing to its citizens than any international ones is his sharpest point in *The Confidential Agent.* By the time the Spanish Civil War broke out in the mid 1930s, Britain had only just begun to crawl out of its Great Depression. While some parts of the British economy were beginning to recover, notably electronics and automobiles, traditional British export industries such as steel, coal, and ship building still had few jobs to offer. Almost thirty to fifty percent of unemployed in Britain came from these industries.[166] The ship building town of Jarrow is a good example of the dire conditions some British towns faced. A thriving community before the depression, Jarrow collapsed in the early thirties. As shipbuilding failed nearly

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164 Buchanan, 49.

165 Hopkins 124.

166 A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945*. Oxford History of England 15. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.

342-6.

seventy percent of the population became unemployed and local businesses soon followed.[167] The mining village in *The Confidential Agent* was Greene's way to explore a community's fear and anxiety after losing their way of life, and their desperation to get it back.

Greene's point that Britons were dangerously unaware of issues outside their country was in fact a serious concern. Tom Buchanan points out there was a feeling that the public needed to be better educated in world affairs and avoid "...the growing sense of alienation of ordinary people from world affairs, and the tendency of the newspapers to speak on behalf of the public without seeking to establish their views by scientific means."[168] Greene's portrayal of these issues in *The Confidential Agent* adds realism to his thriller. As Peter Widdowson writes "The precise and detailed reference to the material world of Europe in the thirties, however synthetic Greene's use of it, is the constituent which gives substance to his metaphors of neurosis and their social causes."[169] In *The Confidential Agent* the novel's setting is used to comment on the personal and psychological damage many suffered in Interwar Britain.

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167 David Clay Large, *Between Two Fires: Europe's Path in the 1930s.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1991 196-9.

168 Buchanan, 23.

169 Peter Widdowson "Between the Acts?: English Fiction in the Thirties." *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties*. Eds. Jon Clark, Margot Heinemann, David Margolies, and Carol Snee London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979. 54.

Critical Reception and Orwell and Greenes' Place in Historical Research

In these early novels both Graham Greene and George Orwell use relevant and pressing concerns of Britain in the thirties to inform their themes, settings, and characters. Both authors present psychological profiles of Interwar Britain, lampoon commonly held British attitudes and beliefs, explore the definition of "the British character," and express concern for Britain's present and future. The question of the historical importance of each author then becomes how their work has been used and viewed by historians. What are the specific differences between Orwell and Greene that makes one key to understanding the past, while the other is regarded as apolitical and divorced from the events that surrounded him? In many ways, Orwell and Greene are quite similar. Born to middle class families, both were sensitive young men greatly affected by their school experiences. Both expressed disdain for class inequality and colonialism. Both were disaffected by what they saw as a sense of moral hypocrisy in 1930s Britain, leading them to search for commitment in Leftist politics and, in Greene's case, religion.

One of the main differences between Orwell and Greene, and the one that set the two apart for decades, is how they identified themselves. Orwell saw himself as an independent Socialist, while Greene identified himself as "Catholic and Communist."[170] Greene was always a man of many contradictions and diffuse

170 Meyer, *Orwell: Witty Conscience of a Generation.* 223.

beliefs, while Orwell was consistently clear and overt in his political views. Greene's support of both Catholicism and Communism was just one example of his ability to hold seemingly contradictory values. Some critics see this as hypocrisy, allowing him to avoid ever aligning with a side. The reality is that Greene's reluctance to choose sides does affect his standing as a "historically relevant" writer. He cannot be quoted easily for overt statements on historical events. He does not represent one clear ideological or historical position. His refusal to define himself through a single political lens is often used in both literary and political circles to support closed readings of his work, detaching Greene from his context. A figure like Orwell, on the other hand, is far easier to reference. One can clearly track Orwell's historical narrative. Orwell often directly confronts contemporary political issues, making it almost impossible to remove his politics from his writing.

Historians examine the works of artists to understand the writers' class views and biases. Orwell, in his examination of British class psychology, directly confronts his own. He recognizes and examines the biases he felt resulted from his middle to upper class upbringing, and that examination is a major part of his writing. Greene often wrote on subjects he had little direct experience with in the thirties, and so created novels which provide fewer insights on his own class beliefs. Greene's novels often involve elaborate, dramatic plots which do not tackle his specific social views and experiences—he tends to focus more on an examination of individual psychology.

Orwell, as a writer, may be remembered for *Animal Farm* and *1984* but is often historically cited for his nonfiction. Orwell's perceptive analysis is often used as an illustration of Britain in the first part of the twentieth century. A narrative detailing Britain in the Interwar Period or the Spanish Civil War likely includes Orwell's accounts from *Road to Wigan Pier* or *Homage to Catalonia*. Charles Mowat argues that Orwell was able to "profoundly" examine the attitudes of the British unemployed living on the dole.[171] Richard Overy uses Orwell's experience in Spain as a prime example of the British left's attempt to involve itself in the Civil War.[172] Of even greater interest to historians is how Orwell explores the wider issues impacting the world outside of Great Britain, as in his critiques of totalitarianism in *Animal Farm* and *1984*. As Emma Larkin argues, for Burma "Orwell wrote not just one novel about the country, but three: a trilogy comprised of *Burmese Days*, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*."[173]

The historical respect for Orwell is understandable. He effectively captures and reflects key issues of his time in his writing. He specifically looks at social problems, such as colonialism, unemployment, and totalitarianism, elaborating a sociological and psychological analysis of these conditions which forces his audience to see them anew. Orwell's journalistic style of writing, particularly in his nonfiction books, adds legitimacy to his pronouncements on the conditions of

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171 Mowat, 486.

172 Overy, 323.

173 Emma Larkin, *Finding George Orwell in Burma*. American ed. New York: Penguin Press, 2005. 3.

Britain's poor or the conflict in Spain. Orwell, in fact, supported the idea that he was a chronicler and a journalist, admitting to Julian Symons he was “not a real novelist anyway...”[174] To Orwell, it was his reporting on political, social, and economic conditions, not his novels, that were his forte.

Orwell's effectiveness in historical research is in large part due to his clear evolution through the first half of the twentieth century. Any reader can trace the growth of Orwell's views—from describing the evils of colonialism to his examination of the struggling working class, from his acknowledgment of the weaknesses of ideologies he supported to his attack on totalitarianism as a corrupted form of Socialism. Orwell thought and cared about issues. Orwell not only examined relevant problems of his day but could clearly express complicated and profound political ideas.

Greene, on the other hand, has generally been neglected by historians. Over his lifetime Greene used many of the locales he visited and lived in, including Liberia, Mexico, Austria, Cuba, Vietnam, and Haiti, as settings for his novels. For the most part, however, Greene's writings on these areas are cited for the biased viewpoint of a white European looking down on the native populations of third world states. Ibrahim Sundiata describes Greene's travelogue on Liberia, *Journey Without Maps* (1935), as Greene being a “war tourist”—willing to ignore the brutality and corruption in Liberia based on his western acceptance of the conditions there. Sundiata also criticizes Greene for being charmed by the

174 Orwell and Davison, 405.

enigmatic head of the Liberian Militia, Colonel Elwood Davis.[175] Millery Polyné argues that Greene's *The Comedians* (1966)*,* set in Papa Doc Duvalier's Haiti, "...reduces Haiti to a land of obscurity, barbarity and vodou drumming."[176] It is only Greene's open disdain for US international policy that attracts any real attention from historians. But even this bias is typically cited for superficial details. *The Quiet American,* Greene's 1956 novel openly criticizing American intervention in the French-Indochina War, is mostly referenced as a historical footnote. Jacques Dalloz's *The War in Indo-China 1945-54* cites the novel only in his discussion of the ruthless Catholic theocrat Colonel Leroy, who Greene mentions in his preface.[177] It is only very recently that the novel has been more fully examined, such as in Frederik Logevall's 2012 *Embers of War*. Logevall devotes an entire chapter to *The Quiet American,* treating it as an important source for understanding the French-Indochina War. He references Greene's depictions of the American, Vietnamese, and European roles in Vietnam in a way few historians have done before.[178]

With the enormous amount of territory Greene has explored it is curious why

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175 I.K. Sundiata,*Brothers and Strangers: Black Zion, Black Slavery, 1914-1940*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. 241-5.

176 Millery Polyné, "The Moody Republic and the Men in Her Life: François Duvalier, African-Americans, and Hatien Exiles." *Politics and Power in Haiti*. Eds. Kate Quinn and Paul K. Sutton, Studies of the Americas. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 106.

177 Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indo-China, 1945-54*. Dublin : Gill and Macmillan: 1990. 112.

178 Frederik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam*. Random House, 2012. 293-310.

he is not more often cited by historians. Historians and others tend to view Greene's politics and beliefs as based on expediency, lacking any clear ideology. Michael Shelden goes so far as to argue that Greene used his Catholicism to change his writing "persona" whenever it best suited him.[179] While Shelden's accusation is extreme, there is some truth to the idea that Greene was apolitical, or, at the very least, valued politics far less than morality and psychology. His own rejection of real political meaning in his novels, such as *England Made Me*, supported this idea.[180] For Greene the morality involved in world events, as well as their psychological impact on the individual, were more pressing than politics. His perceived coolness and detachment, and his often paradoxical attitude towards world events, could make Greene appear uncaring at best, or hypocritical at worst.

There were, however, some who understood the complexities of the Greene world view—one being Orwell himself. In a letter to Tosco Fyvel, Orwell argued against Fyvel's claim that Greene was a reactionary Catholic, writing "Of course he is a Catholic and in some issues has to take sides politically with the church, but in outlook he is just a mild Left with some CP leanings. I have even thought that he might become our first Catholic fellow traveler, a thing which doesn't exist in England..."[181] What Orwell realized, which many overlooked, was though Greene leaned toward the Left he was never interested in declaring any formal

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179 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 107-8.

180 Greene, *Ways of Escape,* 40.

181 Orwell, and Davidson, 460.

political alliance. His own left leaning politics were based on the belief that the inequality existing in the world was morally unfair, and that it hurt human beings. While he may have sympathized with both Catholics and the Left, Greene's prime focus was examining the human condition.

This acceptance of multiple, even conflicting, ideologies has affected Greene's historical reputation. Michael Shelden condemns Greene's hesitancy in choosing a side in the Spanish Civil War as due to self interest, arguing that "Greene saw no compelling reason to become involved. He had nothing to gain from it."[182] Shelden believes Greene cravenly avoided the war out of a lack of personal commitment. While Greene believed in the Socialist ideals of supporting the disenfranchised, he would not support a political party for its own sake, especially when it was as guilty as the Fascists of committing crimes. A good way to gain a sense of how Greene saw the conflict is through D. in *The Confidential Agent.* D, while not a member of the Socialist party, joins the Socialists against the Fascists out of his own sense of morality. Greene's views of right and wrong led him to apply aspects of both Socialism and Catholicism in both his life and work. He applies doctrines from multiple beliefs, while never fully committing to any. As Anthony Burgess writes in defense of Greene "...one cannot hold opposed beliefs and maintain orthodoxy in both."[183] In his own thinking Greene was not confined

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182 Shelden, *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within.* 188.

183 Anthony Burgess, "Politics in the Novels of Graham Greene." *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 2 (1967): 93–99. 94. http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu (Accessed December 03th, 2015)

by definition.

The contrast between Orwell and Greene's historical reputations is evident from contemporary receptions of their novels, as well as their publishing histories. Greene's work was released in traditionally popular British publications. This led to most of his books being categorized by specific genres. Robert James notes that working class readers of the thirties tended to like books that had distinct styles, such as the detective, western, romance, or thriller novel, using the example of twopenny library owner Ronald Batty's suggestion to categorize books into these genres.[184] Thirties readers were interested in accessible, diverting stories—and they wanted to know what they were getting. This classification for popular novels likely affected Greene's downplaying politics in his work. An example is the publication of *It's a Battlefield,* a novel which expresses obvious political content and concerns. Greene, apprehensive the novel would be read as a polemic on the British government, claimed he added scenes detailing a separate murder in order to avoid the book becoming purely political.[185]

Though Greene was happy to identify his books by genre in order to make them more salable, he could not help inverting those traditional genres as he wrote. Brian Diemert examines how *It's a Battlefield* is actually a detective story where the criminal, Drover, has already been caught. Diemert argues that this

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184 Robert James, *Popular Culture and Working-Class Taste in Britain, 1930-39: A Round of Cheap Diversions?* Studies in Popular Culture. New York: Manchester University Press, 2010. 106.

185Greene, *Ways of Escape.* 35-6.

deconstructs traditional concepts of the detective story, as the detective (the Assistant Commissioner), and the readers, actually share the criminal's experience of prosecution and conviction. The usual detective story of the time focused on finding and catching the criminal, ignoring the social, civil, legal, and psychological ramifications of arrest.[186] As Diemert argues, Greene intentionally challenges genre conventions in order to "move towards a popular literature that could suggest moral values."[187] Greene used popular literature to express his unique moral and psychological critique of the world.

Orwell is a slightly different case. Focused on examining social ills in Britain, Orwell followed a different path to publication. As much of Orwell's early work, including *Burmese Days,* was largely autobiographical he faced challenges being published due to the potential threat of libel. It was only with the assistance of Victor Gollancz that Orwell found a publisher willing to release his books. Gollancz saw *Down and Out* as a perfect form of nonfiction journalism. It piqued his interest after earning solid reviews from one of his readers. The only changes Gollancz had Orwell make before publication were to alter some names and censor language in order to avoid lawsuits.[188] Gollancz later republished *Burmese Days* even with the continued threats of libel.[189] Gollancz was willing to take a chance with Orwell because of his own political leanings. Gollancz, one of the

186 Diemert, 107.

187 Diemert, 115.

188 Crick, 223-4.

189Stansky and Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation.* 55-6.

founders of the Left Book Club, was looking for writers who confronted current social issues. He formed a publishing partnership with Orwell which lasted up to the 1940s.

It would only be when Orwell wrote his bold polemic against middle-class socialists in *Road to Wigan Pier* in 1936 that this relationship began to falter. It must have been staggering to Gollancz to discover that Orwell, who was being paid to write *for* the Left Book Club, would spend half of the book condemning Socialists for being part of the problem in Great Britain. Gollancz responded by quickly crafting a foreword which praised Orwell's depiction of miners' lives in northern England, while explaining away the second part of the book as Orwell simply offering an alternate form of Socialism which opposed intellectual thought.[190] The split between author and publisher would only grow. Orwell's experiences in Spain reinforced his belief that Communism could only lead to totalitarianism. Gollancz, a supporter of Stalin, refused to print *Animal Farm* (1945) because of its obvious allusions to the brutality of Stalin's regime, just at the time when Britain saw the Soviets as their allies in World War II. Gollancz's support for Stalin was a position that Orwell predicted Gollancz would take.[191]

Orwell's works, now seen as prescient accounts of the social challenges Great Britain faced in the first half of the twentieth century, were often dismissed in the thirties. Many readers and reviewers found his politics too extreme, his positions too isolated, and his insights too often just complaints. At best his books, such as

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190 Meyers, *Orwell: Witty Conscience of a Generation.* 136-7.

191 Meyers, *Orwell: Witty Conscience of a Generation.* 245-6.

Down and Out or *Road to Wigan Pier*, were appreciated for providing interesting insights into how the lower classes lived, or for revealing the lives of the "little man," such as Bowling in *Coming Up For Air*.

Orwell's wartime essays during the 1940s were key in establishing his reputation as a unique social and political thinker. In essays such as "Shooting an Elephant" (1936, broadcast 1948), "Such, Such Were the Joys," (1948), Politics and the English Language" (1946), "The Lion and the Unicorn," (1941) and "Inside the Whale," (1940) Orwell did not simply document—he distinguished himself as a leading British commentator and intellectual. In these essays, Orwell explored topics ranging from English national character to his own concept of what a writer is and should be, from the impact of British public schooling to living under the pressures of British colonial society. "The Lion and the Unicorn," in particular, allowed Orwell to express his own hopes for Britain after the war. Orwell argued that the war could allow England to begin its own unique social revolution. Orwell believed the new British society could focus on nationalizing industries such as banks, mines, and railways, decrease the power of the aristocracy and still maintain Britain's national character, including the monarchy.[192]

This bold argument for a "British" social reformation elevated Orwell from being simply a writer documenting the world around him to a truly unique British

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192 George Orwell. "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius." in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*. Vol. 2 1st ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. 95-102.

thinker; so much so that he was invited to speak at a meeting for both the Oxford English Club and Democratic Socialist Club in 1941.[193] Yet for all the acclaim he was receiving as an essayist some of his comments only further alienated him from segments of the political Left. In arguing for a social revolution based on British traits and character, Orwell had condemned middle-class intellectuals who supported a Marxist Socialism he felt unattractive to many in Britain. He also argued that intellectual pacifists were doing little to oppose Hitler and the Fascists, even going so far as to suspect some intellectuals would eventually support Hitler due to his economic and political successes.[194] Many British middle-class intellectuals felt Orwell was vilifying them for being so superficial that they had no real investment in their own country. As a member of this intellectual community, Greene would claim that Orwell's writing at the time was no better than "rumor mongering."[195] Yet Orwell's wartime essays not only established his reputation as a prominent writer and thinker, but made him historically relevant for his effective expression of unique ideas about what the British government and society should be in a time of monumental social and political change. The very violence of reaction from the Left and other middle-class intellectuals, as well as the positive acclaim he received, speaks to how

193 Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography.* 405.

194 Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn:Socialism and The English Genius." 101-6.

195Graham Greene, *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters.* Richard Greene ed. First American Edition. New York: W.W. Norton. 2008. 321.

influential these essays were.

Throughout the forties, Leftist critics increasingly condemned his writing on totalitarianism. *The New Republic*'s review of *Animal Farm* felt Orwell had little to no actual experience with internal Soviet policy and was not qualified to comment.[196] Some of these views would change with the publication of Orwell's last and most recognized work, *1984.* Mark Schorer praised the novel for being more visceral and direct in decrying totalitarianism than *Animal Farm*, and also declared the book was "the most contemporary novel of this year and who knows how many past and to come..."[197] Even with positive reviews like these, Orwell still faced criticism from the Left, with Robert Hatch arguing that *1984* suffered from Orwell's misanthropy and lack of faith in humanity.[198]

The reviews of Orwell's early work reveal how the English public tended to see Orwell's Interwar novels. They were interesting diversions, offering insight into living conditions and people most of Orwell's readers had little familiarity or interaction with. Orwell's forty's essays established him as a keen, if polarizing, social/political observer. The reviews of his later work become divided between

196"Animal Farm." *New Republic* 115, no. 9 (September 2, 1946): 266–67. 267. zotero://attachment/1214/ (Accessed December 7th, 2015)

197Mark Schorer, "When Newspeak was New" 1984 by George Orwell. June 12, 1949. *New York Times.* October 6, 1996. Late Edition-Final."The New York Times: Book Review Search Article." https://partners.nytimes.com/library/books/072098orwell-1984.html. (Accessed January 3rd. 2016)

198Robert Hatch, "George Orwell's Paradise Lost." *New Republic* 121, no. 5 (8/1/49 1949): 23–24. 24. zotero://attachment/1208/ (Accessed January 3rd, 2016).

those shocked and persuaded by his critique of totalitarianism, and Leftist critics condemning Orwell as a cynic who had no right to comment on issues he knew little about. By the end of his life Orwell came to be seen more as an ideological figure than a writer. Orwell the novelist was supplanted by Orwell the political prophet.

The same could not be said for Greene. Like Orwell, Greene, from the outset, was criticized for his cynicism. The *London Times* complained that *It's a Battlefield* condemned British society, yet provided no alternative.[199] When Greene's work was praised, it was reviewed solely for literary content. Social or political commentary was ignored and emphasis focused on thematic analysis, as seen in Katherine Woods' review of *The Confidential Agent* in which she focused on the novel's literary allusions.[200] It was American criticism of *The Quiet American* (1956) that had the greatest impact on Greene's legacy. Angered by Greene's depiction of US participation in the Vietnamese conflict in the mid 1950s, American critics were quick to denounce Greene. They described the novel as a polemic with clear bias. Robert Davis accused Greene of making the titular "quiet American," Aiden Pyle, a one dimensional bundle of stereotypes who is never allowed to effectively defend American intervention in Vietnam.[201]

199"New Novels." *The Times*. February 6, 1934. The Times Digital Archive. http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu (Accessed November 30th, 2015)

200Katherine Woods, "'The Confidential Agent.'" *The New York Times*, October 1, 1939, sec. Books. http://www.nytimes.com/1939/10/01/books/greene39-confidential.html. (Accessed January 3rd, 2016)

201Robert Gorham Davis, "In Our Time No Man Is a Neutral." March 11, 1956. *New York Times.*

These critics propagated an image of Greene as a crank who ridiculed the United States by creating caricatures who spouted Greene's own interpretation of American interventionist rhetoric. Alongside the purely literary reviews of his earlier work, this functionally disconnected Greene from the prevalent social and political concerns of his time, which were always a key part of his novels. While Orwell came to be pigeonholed as a social commentator, Greene was all too often seen as a cranky British racist writing novels about wholly abstract situations.

The Literary Politics of Orwell and Greene

Orwell and Greene's politics inform our appreciation of their work in historical terms. For decades their politics have been simplified in order to satisfy the interests of political, religious, and literary groups. In Orwell's case, both the political Left and Right worked to create a portrait of Orwell which suited their own purposes. Due to the strength of his arguments revealing the failings of many Leftist ideals and concepts Orwell, over time, became a tool for conservatives who saw his work as a denunciation of the Left. Viewing himself as an independent and an anarchist no one would be more surprised, and perhaps appalled, than Orwell at his transformation into a conservative idol. As Christopher Hitchens points out, Orwell was a staunch patriot who supported the individual and was wary of government power. He could certainly appear

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sec. Books. https://www.nytimes.com/books/00/02/20/specials/greene-quiet.html. (Accessed January 3rd, 2016)

conservative to some.[202] Orwell represented one of the first Cold War heroes for conservatives because of his continual warnings against the totalitarian Left, both in his writing and in his actions. During the 1940s Orwell was one of the first to coin the term “Cold War” and pushed for the British government to investigate the Soviet killings of Polish officers in the forests of Katyn—deaths the Soviet army blamed on the Germans.[203] These actions solidified Orwell's reputation as a defender of liberty for conservatives, while they also led to a division in how the Left viewed him.

Orwell, who had already angered many Leftists in the thirties for his indictment of Socialism in *Wigan Pier,* would further agitate them with many of his 1940s essays, particularly his criticisms of Ghandi and the Soviet Union. Orwell willingly acted against the Left when he gave a list of possible Communists to the Information Research Department, a British foreign office focused on propaganda who used the information to prevent those listed from working in the department.[204] To the Left, Orwell's constant repudiation of Leftist ideals and concepts and his naming names turned him into an enemy. This is why Orwell, for decades, has been criticized by Leftist thinkers such as Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, and Raymond Williams for preaching simplified politics.[205]

202Christopher Hitchens, *Orwell's Victory.* London: Penguin, 2002. 71-2.

203Hitchens, 77-9.

204John Rodden, *The Unexamined Orwell*. 1st ed. Literary Modernism Series. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. 323.

205Hitchens, 34-6.

Orwell's work in the 1940s set the stage for continual revisions of his reputation. For decades following his death in 1950 George Orwell, the writer, was redefined, revised, and reimagined. With the Cold War in full swing both the British and American public saw Orwell as a prophet of the dangers of Soviet totalitarianism. Orwell was lionized as "St. George" for his ideological bravery and perception, an image which the Right embraced in their stand against the Left. By the 1960s, Orwell's reputation began to change as Cold War tensions eased and people no longer viewed, or wished to view, his work as accurately portraying Leftist states. Suddenly interest in Orwell was primarily literary as critics focused on his use of language, allegory, and symbolism. In the 1970s Orwell was looked to as an expository model for his clear and unpretentious prose. More recently Orwell has been used by both Left and Right thinkers to discuss issues such as Vietnam or American involvement in the Middle East—with writers postulating what Orwell would have thought of such events.[206]

Greene's literary reputation has been affected by the politics involved in his religion, his use of genre, and his commentary on American foreign policy. Many of the limitations put on Greene's legacy begin with his own remarks. Early in his career Greene claimed that his novels were "entertainments" and acknowledged the fact that he was Catholic. These two statements effectively defined interpretation of Greene over the next seventy years. In the case of his

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206John Rodden, *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of "St. George" Orwell*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 45-9.

Catholicism, Greene's work has been studied relentlessly for its religious context.[207] Searching for the religious subtext in his work, critics ignored the social and political one. Critics became obsessed with discovering links with Catholicism in Greene's writing and how that related to his personal issues.

Greene's tendency to write in specific genres also led critics to ignore the historical context in his writing. For decades, critics created interpretations of Greene's work based almost solely on his choice of genre and the time the critics themselves were writing. Using the example of *It's a Battlefield*, Brian Lindsey Thompson explains the range of analyses that were produced by individual reviewers' own interests. V.S. Pritchett argued that *It's a Battlefield* was an example of Greene's cinematic writing style, inspired by the then growing art of film. Norman Sherry maintained that Greene was creating an in-depth recreation of real life—a review largely based on his 1990s audience who could easily key into television, real world recreations, and the fascination with "reality."[208] Greene wrote novels that could be explored for how they subverted genre, analyzed as experiments in literary form, viewed as blueprints for screenplays, or discussed as representations of the "Catholic novel." The breadth and diversity of critical approaches available in discussing Greene's work ironically limited his impact historically. Labeling him by genre or religious affiliation effectively removed Greene from the social, political, and historical context which regularly

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207Brian Lindsay. *Graham Greene and the Politics of Popular Fiction and Film*. Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 155-6

208Taylor 68-71.

inspired his work.[209]

While Orwell is often valued more for his politics than his art, Greene, focused on the novel, ended up being considered too highbrow for the masses and too lowbrow to be "Literature." This is a long standing bias against Greene, based on his label as a genre writer. For some intellectuals, the popularity and accessibility of Greene's work by the "common man" make it impossible for them to see him as a "serious writer" as it blurs the lines between their self-proclaimed ability to evaluate what is literature and what is popular writing. Taylor argues that critics "vigorously resisted the idea that the bookish activity that non-intellectuals engaged in could be considered reading in any legitimate sense of the term."[210] If Greene did not espouse a distinct political view (though he did), personally take part in historical events (though he did), or belong to the accepted literary pantheon (he was not), he was deemed to have little historical credibility.

Conclusion: Literature and Historiography

Historians seek sources that impact a society and affect their thinking, and Orwell fits that description perfectly. Because of his strong political beliefs and his constant struggle to make others aware of what he perceived, Orwell is a seminal figure. By the time of his death in 1950, Orwell's body of work had made the post-World War II world more aware of the challenges it faced. Orwell's ideas and concerns spurred serious debate on crucial questions of the twentieth century.

209Taylor, 80.

210Taylor, 81-3.

Greene, on the other hand, is a novelist concerned with morality and psychology. As it is often difficult to find explicit social or political commentary in Greene's writing (except for *The Quiet American*) historians have felt little need to address his work. Greene's writing, however, has value as a historical source. As Norman Sherry writes, Greene "...marched with the times," feeling Greene's "...nature forced him to seek stimulation and diversion through events reflecting the dangerous extremes of the day."[211] Greene's social and political concerns center on the strain specific ideas, institutions, environments, and assumptions can create. The settings, political conflicts, and ideological paradoxes Greene describes in his novels are historically on point. Whether it is corruption in government, the pressure to follow particular mores, or a sense of moral laxity in response to foreign affairs, Greene's work describes psychological realities in 1930s Great Britain. His novels reveal how an intelligent, perceptive individual saw the twentieth century struggling morally, socially, and politically with constant change and pressure.

The referencing of Orwell and Greene's work, however, is just one facet of how the two can be used historically. In their publishing histories one can see the period's interest in genre and the Left's dedication to writing about current social concerns in Britain. As an examination of an author's social views Orwell directly confronts his own biases towards other social classes—overtly commenting on his own classes' views, beliefs, and prejudices. Greene equally provides a way of viewing British middle class bias in the Interwar years. In portraying upper and

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211Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene*. Vol. 3. New York, NY: Penguin, 2004. xxv.

lower-class characters in his thirties novels, Greene often uses middle class Leftist stereotypes of Britian's rich and poor. Greene's depiction of an emotionally stunted, self-centered elite and a beleaguered helpless working class is the same middle class intellectual view of class structure which Orwell examines and discusses. Both Orwell and Greene's work from the thirties reflects the decade's trend of writers wanting to mirror the world they lived in. Even Greene, who built his early career around "entertainments," wanted his work to be based on "real" events that were occurring around him.

The greatest takeaway from comparing Orwell and Greene, however, is how eerily similar they are as products of early 20th century Britain. Both men were middle class intellectuals disaffected by their upbringing and seriously concerned with the social conditions around them. While Orwell and Greene's political methodologies differed, they were both impacted by a British culture and society which empowered the rich, seemed to care little for morality, and proclaimed itself superior to the world due to its rigid sense of correctness and manners. The frustration Greene and Orwell both felt towards this system led them not only to seek a political answer to the challenges in Great Britain, but a moral one as well. For Orwell, this was found in an English Socialism and his romanticized moral ideals of the agricultural British working class, while Greene sought political answers in a more Marxist form of Socialism, and moral compass through the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The desire in both men to find some defining moral principle speaks to the

time they lived in. As Britain struggled to recover from the First World War, and the depression that accompanied it, intellectuals such as Orwell and Greene were vividly aware of the inequality, hypocrisy, and presumptuousness that existed in their country and their empire. This partly explains why the writers in 1930s Britain commented directly on the conditions around them. For men like Orwell and Greene, the challenges their country faced stemmed not just from an economic depression—they were the result of long-standing psychological attitudes which, to them, had led to moral decay in Britain. With a genuine sense of urgency, writers of Interwar Britain examined and documented the critical issues of their time. Orwell and Greene, intellectual and sometimes cynical, shared a heartfelt moral concern for their country and the world. Intelligent, piercingly insightful, with a strong sense of what they felt to be right, both Orwell and Greene sought to provoke their readers' thinking and spur them to recover values lost over the years. Historians, by reading and analyzing their work, can not only gain significant insight into the cultural, social, and political challenges 1930s Britain faced but appreciate how many young intellectual Britons tried to address them.

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