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A Qualitative Analysis of the Example of George Orwell:

From His Lived Experience to Ours

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the manner in which students enrolled in the Honors program at Indiana State University responded to intensive, seminar-based exploration into the life and writing of George Orwell. A common trend among those who teach Orwell, especially at the high school level, is to teach the man's literature while focusing little attention upon his life. How much more valuable can Orwell scholarship be for students when they study his work in relation to the author's unique lived experience? Can a more thorough study of this life and literature inspire students to draw more from their own experiences, or become more aware and more critical of the world around them?

This research was conducted on the campus of Indiana State University, in Terre Haute, Indiana, and used participants who were enrolled in the Honors program at that university. Specifically, participants who had enrolled in a 300-level Orwell course taught by Dr. Michael Shelden were recruited for the study, which then ran concurrently with that course. Qualitative methods used to gather data from those participants included a questionnaire, seminar sessions, and individual interviews.

This study indicated that George Orwell's biography, i.e., his "lived experience," is a very important part of Orwellian scholarship, one that allows students to appreciate and understand his writing on a much more meaningful level. The study also provided valuable insights as to Orwell's continued relevance for students of today, as well as the manner in which studying Orwell—with the proper context—can influence and empower students.

PREFACE

This research was inspired by the life and work of George Orwell and everything that it has meant to my writing, study of literature, and understanding of the world around me. It is my hope that his example will continue to influence and inspire future generations, that tyranny and injustice will be more readily recognized and acted upon, and that the Orwellian example will not falter in the coming years. I have learned how important it is to study the George Orwell within the proper context. And I hope this study will illustrate that importance to as many students and educators as possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

George Orwell (1903-1950) may have been the most relevant political writer of the twentieth century. At a time in modern history when perception, conviction, and a clear voice mattered most, Orwell made sense of the chaotic, seemingly-apocalyptic state of European and world affairs. Because he was able to do this through compelling allegories, candid essays, and memorable novels, Orwell's writing has earned a lasting place in the Western literary canon, particularly in England and the United States.

There is a sense of sincerity and credibility within Orwell's writing that, when coupled with the artistry of his perspectives, results in writing that has appeal for readers of all ages and backgrounds. This appeal, along with the historical significance of his writing, has added to Orwell's longevity, especially in the high school classroom. As Rodden (1991) pointed out, "it is likely that Orwell has exerted a deeper influence on young Anglo-American writers than any other English writer of the last half-century" (p. 504).

However, Rodden also observed that in spite of Orwell's lasting popularity at the high school level, and even in the early, introductory levels of post-secondary curricula, his works—with the obvious, although limited exception of *1984*—are seldom studied at higher levels. Specifically, he mentioned that Orwell seldom receives in-depth examination at the advanced undergraduate level or in graduate courses.

After conducting his examination of Orwell's place in the Anglo-American literary classroom, Rodden (2009) conducted a survey of preeminent Orwell scholars as to "Orwell's relevance both to their personal lives and to the twenty-first century" (p. 216). Rodden's work illustrated valuable insights about Orwellian study at the beginning levels, as well as at the level of highest expertise, i.e., among the recognized and established Orwellian scholars of the world. However, there is a noticeable gap in the spectrum.

As a doctoral student and devoted Orwell scholar, I have found intensive Orwellian study at the graduate level both rewarding and life-changing. It is because of that experience that I wanted to have a better understanding of Orwell's value to students at the undergraduate level.

Statement of the Problem

The popularity of George Orwell's writing is undeniable. This is true of a few of his best essays, such as "Shooting an Elephant" (Orwell, 1936/2002) and "Politics and the English Language" (Orwell, 1945/2002), but it is especially true of Orwell's last two novels, *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1946) and *1984* (Orwell, 1949), which are commonly taught at the secondary and postsecondary levels. Unfortunately, one of the greatest attributes shared by these two amazing novels—that they can be enjoyed and appreciated on multiple levels—may contribute to those books seldom being taught with sufficient emphasis upon the lived experience of Orwell's that contributed to their creation.

This can be a difficult paradox to comprehend. In essence, it is the apparent (albeit in many ways, deceptive) simplicity of Orwell's literary model that often prevents it from being explored with the appropriate depth. As Davison (2011) wrote, "what Orwell expressed was so readily understood, so clear, so unproblematic as to retain its capacity to make an immediate appeal to the understanding" (para. 2). Because of this common perception of Orwell's work as

“unproblematic,” with all of its apparent logic and verisimilitude, many teachers and professors tend to take the books and essays at face value. The need for deeper exploration is not readily apparent.

This trend is perhaps best illustrated through a closer examination of *1984*. Standing on its own, in a context that is not specific to George Orwell, *1984* is an amazing piece of fiction that tells a compelling story. The narrative is gripping, the images frightfully vivid, and the themes timeless. Given a global and historical context, the book has become a lasting statement on the horrors likely to exist within extreme forms of totalitarianism. As Hitchens (2002) pointed out, there are very few differences between the world depicted in *1984* and life in modern-day North Korea (pp. 73-75). For these reasons and countless others, *1984* is a brilliant and chilling novel.

However, when one contemplates the incomparable wealth of lived experience from which Orwell drew for the creation of that novel, the power of the book and true magnitude of what one, lone author actually accomplished gain a much richer context. When these fundamental aspects of the creation of *1984* are either ignored or forgotten, some of the essence of the novel is lost. And in that instance, much hope is lost for genuine awakenings and inspiration within future Orwell students.

Need for the Study

A great deal has been written about George Orwell. Six major biographies have been published¹, as well as a comprehensive collection of Orwell’s personal notes and letters (Orwell, 1998). There have also been thousands of scholarly essays and articles published about Orwell’s

¹ In chronological order, these biographies were written by Crick (1980), Sheldon (1992), Stansky/Abrahams (1994), Meyers (2000), Bowker (2003), Taylor (2003)

life and work. As this body of work has grown over the last few decades, so too has the level of insights into Orwell's work, especially regarding his late novels and political essays. When it comes to George Orwell, there is a wealth of information from which to choose.

Although Orwell biographers have used some markedly different approaches in examining the man's life and era, they have done a great deal to illustrate many of the links between his lived experiences and the texts he was writing. Although there is an obvious relationship between experience and writing in Orwell's non-fiction—dozens of essays and three books²—some of those connections become less obvious as one contemplates his two grand works of political fiction, *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

There is no shortage of literature and scholarly insight into the unique events of Orwell's life, nor of how those events were transformed into essential literary works. There has also been much written about Orwell's relevance and rightful place in the literary world. Scholars have discussed why the Orwellian example endures, what his work has meant to them as individuals, and what that work can or should mean for all of us who read or study it on a more intimate level. In Chapter 2 I will be discussing some of the biographies and other scholarly work that Orwell has inspired.

There is still a great deal that can be learned about what the Orwellian model actually inspires within students. It has been widely acknowledged that his writing remains every bit as relevant today as it was in the 1940s. Thanks to all that has been examined and written about his life and career it is commonly understood that Orwell's lived experience made a profound

² It is widely accepted that *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) are non-fiction and that his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), is most likely non-fiction with a little fiction mixed in.

contribution to the impact of his written work. But that linkage—the deceptively simple relationship between substantial lived experience and worthy artistic creation—deserves deeper examination. This is perhaps even more relevant when those creations come to have lasting political relevance, as Orwell’s undoubtedly have.

It is important to have a better understanding of what that link within the Orwellian model kindles inside the hearts and minds of future students. Of perhaps even more significance would be comprehension of how that link may help those students draw from their own experiences.

Significance of the Study

Every year the number of options available to teachers of literature becomes greater. As this inevitable increase continues, authors of past prominence in the American syllabus become less known and more obscure. To an extent, it truly does not matter how universally relevant or “immortal” a writer may be considered. William Shakespeare, for example, appears to have a permanent place in the Western literary canon. But even his plays, once quoted and performed by students of all ages, are no longer as widely taught as they once were.

In George Orwell’s case, his historical relevance and place in the classroom has faded very little in the 60-plus years since his passing. As for new scholarship, there has even been something of a “resurgence” (Davison, 2011, para. 6) of interest at the university level. However, in comparison to literary greats such as Jonathan Swift or the aforementioned Shakespeare, those six decades are but a short time. There is no way to know what Orwell’s status will be in a century or two. Nor can we know with any certainty whether his place in our classrooms will remain.

This study attempted to identify the specific value of the Orwellian model for students.

Most Orwell scholars are aware of the author's distinct qualities as a social essayist and political caricaturist. By further identifying George Orwell as a writer whose work can awaken students to the importance of their own experiences, as well as increasing the notion that every individual can be both powerful and relevant, this study sought to shed additional light on the value of the Orwellian model. Perhaps it can further strengthen his place in the classroom. Beyond that, I hope that this study may change the manner in which Orwell, by some teachers, is taught.

Research Questions

This study explored the influence that an Orwell curriculum—both literary and biographical—had on students enrolled in an undergraduate honors program in relation to their perceptions and the context of their own lived experiences. Questions 2-4 were treated as sub-questions.

1. What does the literary and biographical model of George Orwell inspire within students in an undergraduate honors program?
2. How essential is the biographical model, George Orwell's unique lived experience, to the literature he created?
3. What can the recognition of this relationship between lived experience and literary output mean for students in terms of their own personal experiences?
4. Can this recognition further empower each student as an individual?

Qualitative Orwell

George Orwell died when he was 46 years old. Millions of copies of his books have been sold, copied, or distributed. He was directly involved in two major wars, used two different names, and had two wives and one adopted son. He also shot and killed one elephant. It has become widely accepted that the title for *1984* came from reversing two numbers of the year in

which Orwell finished writing the book, 1948. These are just a few of the ways in which the life and writing of George Orwell are quantifiable.

What is also known about the title for Orwell's most lasting novel is that it was changed shortly before its publication in 1949. The original title that Orwell had selected for the book was *The Last Man in Europe* (Shelden, 1992, p. 494). This title, as well as the novel itself, is driven by the intensely personal experiences of a single man, Winston Smith. Much attention and writing has been dedicated to government tyrannies and political theories. From mob mentality to manipulated masses, there have been plenty of insights about imperialism and totalitarianism—the two institutions that Orwell most abhorred—on a grand scale and from without. Few writers, if any, have managed to capture the hopelessness and demoralization of a single human being as convincingly as Orwell did through Winston Smith.

From my perspective, there is almost nothing of value in the Orwellian model that is inherently quantifiable. I have come to view the man as one of the most capable and in-depth qualitative researchers of his generation. Prior to calling the world's attention to the true evils of imperialism, Blair spent five years in Burma, serving as the arm of British colonial exploitation in the police force. Before writing about the poor, Blair spent months on end living in squalor, moving about from one place to the next with the transients of England. In order to create a book about working conditions in England, Blair lived among miners, taking his giant frame down into tiny mineshafts amid the coal dust and blackness. Prior to writing essays that were critical of the wealthy ruling class of England, Blair lived, studied, and played as a “poor boy among the rich” (Bowker, 2003, p. 58) at Eton College. To experience the war in Spain, Blair carried a rifle and lived in the trenches. The bullet he took through the throat nearly ended his life. Instead it captured his lifelong attention. And finally, before he was able to invent the famous

“Newsspeak,” Blair worked for the BBC during World War II, holding a position with the Ministry of Information.

As a result of this incomparable lived experience, acquired through a sadly-shortened lifetime of genuinely qualitative research, the writer, George Orwell, was able to produce books and essays of lasting significance. Because this is the case, I find it absolutely superfluous to study the significance of the Orwellian model with anything other than qualitative methods.

Theoretical Framework

Sumara (1998) wrote that “identity exists in the remembered, the lived, and the projected relations of our daily experience” (p. 205). For the purposes of this study, I found this definition to be of great value. For Orwell, as he moved through the various events and relationships of significance in his life, his identity shifted and changed as he went. Thus, as the fluid evolution of his personal narrative progressed and an incalculable wealth of lived experience was gathered, he was armed as few others in his generation to expose certain world events for what they were. This is the very essence of the Orwellian model.

Sumara’s (1998) notion of personal identity is also relevant to students as they read and react to Orwell’s work. A more popular description of this phenomenon comes from Van Manen (1990), who described successful writing as kindling a spark of recognition or familiarity within readers, helping them to understand lived experience on a higher level (p. 70). While examining student response to the Orwellian model, I wanted to learn more about what that experience can awaken within seasoned students of literature.

As for the theoretical construct of the research, I used a phenomenological, hermeneutic approach, capturing as much depth and detail of participant experiences and responses as possible. By utilizing a survey, conducting interviews with each participant, and observing

seminar sessions as the study was carried out, I contributed to the “big picture” by constructing individual case studies for each participant. Although I was very interested in any individual response to Orwell and his writing, I was also looking for some commonality—shared threads through which I could better illustrate the value of Orwell scholarship for students at this level.

Background of the Researcher

Given how deeply I was involved in the design, implementation, and analysis of this research study, qualitative methods dictate that I present some of my own personal history, as well as a few of my experiences with the Orwellian model. I am a 42 year-old man who has spent most of his life in Indiana. I am a husband and a father of four. Professionally, I have spent more than 18 years as an officer in a middle-sized, Midwestern police department. I earned bachelor and master of arts degrees in English before enrolling in a Ph.D. program in 2005.

My perspective on George Orwell has undergone immense transformation in the three decades that I have been reading his work. In the fourth grade I read a nifty little novel about a barnyard ruckus. That book was called *Animal Farm*. The English class I took during my junior year of high school was taught by a wonderful old gentleman named Lawrence Nanny, who fed his students a steady diet of George Orwell and George Bernard Shaw, with just a dash of Aldous Huxley. During my four years as an undergraduate I was not required to read a single page of Orwell’s work. And I did not. But then there he was, waiting for me like an old friend as I began my master’s coursework. As a graduate student I was not just studying the work of George Orwell but writing about the man, utilizing essays, articles, and biographies. It was then that I began to experience the true Orwellian model to which I shall refer throughout the following pages. During the 15 years that have passed since that reunion, I have been traveling a path that led me to this study.

Orwell and his work have become a substantial influence on both my personal and professional interactions. More than a few have pointed out that my own experiences as a police officer fit well with Orwell scholarship, given the author's five years on the beat in Burma. Much like Orwell did in those years, I serve as an enforcer for legislators and figureheads with whom I seldom agree. In essence, there are certainly moments in my professional endeavors when I experience the burdensome notion that I am upholding the will and wishes of Big Brother. Despite those misgivings, however, there is an advantage to such a moralistic plight. Serving as I do, I have the benefit of a special vantage point, being close enough to serve the existing power structure but also near enough to see and describe many of the cracks and flaws in that seemingly impenetrable wall.

In many ways it has been Orwell's influence that has led me develop my own voice and to go beyond my current professional responsibilities in the promotion of social justice and community awareness. Specifically, I have spearheaded grassroots political campaigns against powerful entities such as drug manufacturers and corporate retailers. Those efforts were undertaken in the hopes of stemming our national methamphetamine lab epidemic, which kills thousands of people a year but continues, in large part, because there are corporate entities profiting through it, making billions of dollars each year. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, those efforts on my part are often limited by necessity.

I have also learned to recognize and point out recurring social and political trends, especially the very Orwellian notion that newly-elected leaders invariably morph into replicas of the leaders who were replaced. The world I see today is polarized—seemingly by design—and most people are too distracted by the trivial or unchangeable to recognize the forces that are

actually shaping the world.³ From my perspective, Orwell provided a path towards a more thorough understanding of complex social and political structures. It is this clarity that I want for myself, my loved ones, my students, and anyone else out there who is willing to grasp it. In a world where transparency is often mentioned but seldom achieved, people need to become more informed and empowered as individuals, lest they become submerged in the ever-spreading sea of indifference that grows ever more prominent.

Method of Study

There was a small group of advanced undergraduate students who played a significant role in this qualitative study. Six of them were there in the beginning, but only five completed a significant amount of the research activities. Research participants met for four different seminar sessions in which the Orwellian model was examined. These discussions were led by renowned Orwell scholar, Dr. Michael Shelden. I attended the sessions and participated occasionally, when it seemed appropriate or necessary. The seminar sessions addressed, but were by no means limited to, some of Orwell's most relevant novels and essays, which the students were asked to have read before they were discussed. In later sessions Orwell's background and biography were introduced and explored as deeply as time allowed. During the final session, special emphasis was placed upon the manner in which Orwell's lived experiences eventually manifested themselves upon the page. All sessions were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of data collection. Those recordings were audio only, as far too many things can change with the simple act of pointing a camera, a trend that I find contrary to genuine qualitative analysis.

³ The most successful distraction of all may well be the myth surrounding the two-party system in the United States. Ideologically, the Republican Party and Democratic Party are as different as night and day. In practice, however, they are practically identical.

In addition to the seminar sessions, I conducted two separate interviews with each of the participants. The first of those interviews was conducted after the first two seminar sessions had taken place, and the second occurred after all sessions had been completed. Five foundational questions were written and approved to provide a basic and consistent structure for the interviews (Appendix A and B). Those interviews were also recorded and transcribed, which allowed me to become engaged with each student with more depth than was possible during seminar meetings.

There was one survey filled out by each participant at the beginning of the study, before the seminar sessions took place (Appendix C). At the conclusion of the study, once all of the other data had been collected, a focus group was conducted by Dr. William Barratt during which the specific research questions were addressed with the participants. Neither I nor the seminar leader, Dr. Shelden, was present during the focus group.

Participants

Participants in this research study were undergraduate students enrolled in the honors program at Indiana State University. Honors students were chosen in the hopes of drawing upon a richer and more established literary awareness. I also wanted to use older, more mature students in this study because they have more lived experience from which to draw. Students participating in this study signed informed consent forms (Appendix D), acknowledging awareness of and consent for recorded seminar sessions and interviews. Confidentiality of all data collected in this study was carefully maintained, with only the first names of participants being used. Single-name aliases for each participant were then chosen for the writing of this dissertation.

Definition of Terms

The Orwellian Model: This is a term that describes, for the purposes of this study, the all-encompassing example set in motion by George Orwell through using his unique lived experiences to create an enduring body of writing that has influenced social and political views for more than three generations.

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object. An experience is directed toward an object by virtue of its content or meaning (which represents the object) together with appropriate enabling conditions. Phenomenology as a discipline is distinct from, but related to, other key disciplines in philosophy, such as ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics (Smith, 2011, para. 4). “Phenomenology has been practiced in various guises for centuries, but it came into its own in the early 20th century in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and others. Phenomenological issues of intentionality, consciousness, qualia, and first-person perspective have been prominent in recent philosophy of mind” (Smith, 2011, para. 2).

Lived Experience: This term has become a pivotal element of phenomenological research. It defines all past experiences—familial, historical, social, interpersonal, medical, etc.—that are unique to an individual. Recognized as a culmination of all past experience, lived experience also plays a dominant role in perceptions, beliefs and future experiences. In this way lived experience plays a part in shaping future endeavors and interactions.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There have been several excellent books written about George Orwell in the last 30 years, including both critical studies and biographies. Many of those works pinpoint the key moments in Orwell's life that shaped his perspective and eventually manifested themselves within his writing. This literature review opens with an exploration of the six most formative periods in George Orwell's life through the lenses offered by some of the most prominent writers and biographers. As was stated in Chapter 1, the experiences themselves are both important and fascinating. But it is what those moments helped create that matters most. That is the crux of the Orwellian model as I have chosen to define it.

Next, this literature review examines scholarship that has focused upon the study, importance, and sufficient recording of lived experience. This section begins with an examination of lived experience from both an author's and a reader's perspective. What does that pool of experience mean for a writer, and what does that writer's work subsequently trigger within readers?

The literature review then moves from the discussion of literature into a much broader examination of the work that has been done by social theorists explore how and why perspectives can be altered through artistic and philosophical contemplation. The review concludes by coming full-circle back to Orwell. This section examines studies by exemplary

Orwell scholar, John Rodden, on the significance of Orwell's example to both students and experts. It also provides a detailed history of Orwell's place within the Anglo-American literary canon.

From Eric Blair to George Orwell and from Eton to the BBC

Prior to undertaking a study of the Orwellian model and its potential influence upon honors students, it is necessary to make a thorough examination of George Orwell's most significant lived experience as it has been chronicled and analyzed by experts in the field. One should always be wary of any rigid effort to compartmentalize particular aspects of or periods in any person's existence. However, there are times when at least some degree of categorizing becomes necessary. Almost all biographies have chapters, after all. For the purposes of this literature review, I have chosen to discuss Orwell's experience in terms of a) his years at Eton College, b) the period of service in India with the British Imperial Police, c) his years of vagrancy and poverty in England and in Paris, d) time amongst the coal miners during his research for *The Road to Wigan Pier*, e) experiences fighting as a soldier against totalitarianism in the trenches of the Spanish Civil War, and f) Orwell's service with the BBC during World War II.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, it seems reasonable to speculate that there have been few other writers fortunate enough to have gained as much invaluable firsthand experience as Orwell or to have lived and written during a period in which so many different critical and world-changing events were taking place. By 1948, as he sat in the smoky isolation of Jura, Scotland, writing the first draft of his final novel, Orwell had all of the pieces that were needed for the creation of a masterpiece. There is certainly credence to the notion that the writing of *1984*—the pace, work-rate and stress from taking the novel from first draft to publication in such a short

period—most likely hastened Orwell’s death the following year (Delaney, 2011; McCrum, 2009). Even if that is the case, however, *1984* was the novel that Orwell had lived most of his life in order to write. These are six of the major periods and experiences that led him there.

Orwell the Etonian (1917-1921)

Perhaps no English writer of the 20th century was more capable of debunking the mystique of the British ruling classes than George Orwell. That ability was greatly strengthened by his years on the inside, among the elite King’s Scholars at the oldest and most prestigious school in England, Eton College.

Shelden (1992) described Orwell’s years at Eton as a period of reflection and realization, not merely because of his unique and elite surroundings but because he spent most free moments devouring books and plays by visionaries and skeptics of the day, such as H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw—both writers of whom Orwell would become critical in later years. It was at Eton that Orwell began to see that “the world was full of people and events that could not be taken at face value. He was learning that everything was open to question, even the views of fellow skeptics who were asking some of the best questions about society’s values” (Shelden, 1992, p. 71-72).

Taylor (2002) believed that “Eton left a profound impression on Orwell which, if anything, became more marked the further he moved away from it” (p. 41). Most biographers have mentioned that Orwell, who was a King’s Scholar by virtue of his academic accomplishments and abilities—and whose family did not have to pay, nor could they have paid the same monumental tuition fees as others at Eton—became distinctly aware of class and wealth while attending the school. But Taylor suggested that Orwell recognized the “futility of a classical education” (p. 55) and likely developed contempt for well-moneyed, “pansy aesthetes

and left-leaning” (p.55) literati that would stay with him for years to come. However, Taylor also believed that Orwell was grateful for his Eton experiences, especially later in life, when he was as likely to defend his alma mater as not.

In the discussion of Orwell and class, it would be an injustice to focus merely upon his socialism, his advocacy for the working classes, and his desire to wrest at least some power away from the British aristocracy. The degree, and even to some extent the sincerity of Orwell’s socialism, has come under attack over the years for two main reasons. The first of those reasons is that Orwell was among the earliest and most relentless critics of Joseph Stalin, who was the iconic figurehead of socialism for many Europeans. Secondly, when England came under the daunting attack of Hitler and the Nazis, Orwell largely abandoned class warfare amid the realization that England—the England of his childhood, which he loved dearly, aristocracy and all—must be preserved and protected at all costs (Hitchens, 2002).

To this end he seems to have realized how inappropriate it was to demonize an entire class, continuing the illusion that those people were entirely without merit or virtue. In his 1941 essay, “The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius” (1945/2002), Orwell set himself apart from many of the socialist and Labour Party spokesmen of England by giving some degree of credit to that nation’s elite:

One thing that has always shown that the English ruling class are morally fairly sound, is that in time of war they are ready enough to get themselves killed. Several dukes, earls and what-not were killed in the recent campaign in Flanders. That could not happen if these people were the cynical scoundrels that they are sometimes declared to be. . . . They are not wicked, or not altogether wicked; they are merely unteachable. Only when their money and power are gone will the younger among them begin to grasp what century

they are living in. (Orwell, 1945/2002, pp. 308-309)

As this passage demonstrates, even when acknowledging the virtue of valor, Orwell made no bones about the overall ineptitude of those in higher social spheres. Cynicism tempered by fondness and nostalgia, that was Orwell's Etonian legacy.

Beat Cop in Burma (1922-1927)

Most Orwell scholars agree that the two biggest global trends that Orwell sought to discredit were those of imperialism and totalitarianism. This notion is so commonly accepted in Orwellian scholarship that more of those who write about him mention it than not. The irony of his having served within the mechanism of imperialism is seldom, if ever, lost. Esteemed Orwell scholar and political essayist Hitchens (2002) pointed out that "Orwell's decision to repudiate the unthinking imperialism [of his and so many previous English generations] coloured everything he subsequently wrote" (p. 6).

Orwell's outrage towards British imperialism was not born overnight. Rather, it evolved gradually during his five years of service in Burma with the Indian Imperial Police. The decision to apply to and test for the British Civil Service, although perhaps odd for an Eton man, was a step in his father's footsteps. Orwell's father, Richard Blair, had long served as a civil servant in India (Shelden, 1992, pp. 93-94). Bowker (2003) painted a picture of a young Orwell who made a slow, meticulous, and at times even anthropological study of Burmese culture in and around Mandalay and in other districts. Conscious of the service of his father in India before him, as well as that of other relatives, Orwell had eschewed his Etonian background in favor of a more plebeian but traditional family service. But rather than pay tribute to those who had come before him, Orwell felt a degree of contempt for those British subjects who had lived for decades amongst Indian people without learning any command of the language (Bowker, 2003, p. 83).

While among the Burmese, Orwell drank in language, customs, and culture, learning to communicate in various Indian dialects.

In one of his most astute passages about the moral evolution of a young George Orwell, Bowker (2003) evoked images of a Jekyll-and-Hyde metamorphosis, personified through a sadistic character named Ellis in *Burmese Days* (1934), the novel with which Orwell chronicled much of his Indian experience. Bowker suggested that the Ellis character

represents the dark side of himself [Orwell], the Mr. Hyde evoked in him by his role in Burma. The intense remorse he felt about his actions as a policeman—his abuse and beating of Burmese servants and prisoners to which he later confessed—was what finally worked the transformation. At some moment he stood back and asked, “What am I doing here?” The role and the uniform had taken him over and he hated what he had become. Once he had taken that step he was quite lost to British imperialism. (p. 87)

This passage is especially important in that it lends even more validity to Orwell’s perspective. One begins to question the credibility of any voice that becomes too sanctimonious or condescending. In denouncing imperialism, Orwell presented it as something that most of the people in England chose to ignore and something into which it was easy to get caught up, as he occasionally did, without contemplating the moral dilemma. He also made a thorough and colorful study of those countless, nameless Indians who were routine victims of imperialist exploitation. In this way he avoided the negative labels of anarchist or armchair liberal. Instead he is a firsthand witness who forces readers to smell the stench and see the body swinging at the end of a rope, often leaving them to draw their own conclusions. One cannot change people’s minds, after all, by talking down to them.

Vagrancy and Poverty by Choice (1927-1929)

This same sense of credibility—that which manifests itself when a writer endeavors to illustrate rather than tell—carried over when Orwell ended his tenure of service to the Crown and returned home to England from Burma. The choice to live life as a tramp for several weeks at a time, crowding into one shelter after the other with many of the same people, would seem odd to most people. In Orwell’s mind, however, it was merely research. It was in-depth, anthropological research into which he plunged with more fervor and dedication than perhaps any other Etonian would or could have done.

Although his motives for living in squalor are of interest, perhaps his message is nothing extraordinary. “Orwell does not wish merely to enumerate evils and injustices, but to break through what he regards as middleclass oblivion, a state of false consciousness that in his representation of it amounts to a kind of lying” (Sabin, 2007, p. 45). As Sabin (2007) also pointed out, there is some degree of levity within the pages of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell’s first novel, which details many of his findings while living among the poor. There are images of a man inking his own ankles in order to better hide the holes in his socks or sneezing through the night in a bed that has been filled with pepper in order to keep the bugs away.

The first Orwell biographer, Crick (1980), alluded to some of the same guilt and self-loathing at having had a hand in brutal, imperialistic endeavors that appears in the work of Bowker and others. As Orwell himself would later write of this period of impoverished research, immersing himself among society’s victims was a form of solace after serving the oppressors. Crick paraphrased the author’s notion that it is horrible to “oppress other men” (p. 108), noting that “arbitrary power and privileges do corrupt; and to write about the condition of the poor and

oppressed it is sensible to share it, even if only for a time, not simply to observe it” (p. 108). In this light, going from one perceived extreme to the other made sense, in Orwell’s mind.

It also paid great dividends, from an artistic standpoint. As Crick (1980) pointed out, there is an air of dank and impenetrable hopelessness within the pages of *1984* that owes a lot to Orwell’s months of living among society’s poorest (p. 136).

4: The Road to Wigan Pier (1936)

When examining Orwell’s literature and his lived experience it becomes increasingly important to examine the path that his socialism took as his career of research and writing progressed. *The Road to Wigan Pier* was a significant pinnacle in Orwell’s affiliation with mainstream English socialism and the Labour party, and there is perhaps some irony that the book also brought the first significant payday of his writing career (Shelden, 1992, p. 297). The first half of the book offers a startling look at the living conditions among the workers and unemployed in Northern England.

From the qualitative perspective that is described in Chapter 1, Orwell went to great lengths to understand what those lives were like. He lived with them, ate with their families, and took his over-large frame down into the mines, filling his tubercular lungs with coal dust in order to see what those miners did. It is worth noting, however, that he also did a great deal of traditional research in preparation for writing the book. As Davison (1996) explained, Orwell “visited libraries in the north, collected a mass of newspaper cuttings, wrote to local government officials, read books, and visited the British Museum Library” (p. 71). For a man who traveled and immersed himself as deeply as he did, Orwell managed an amazing amount of reading.

The end result, although not often considered to be on the same level as Orwell’s next effort, *Homage to Catalonia*, was that the book opened some eyes in England about the stark

realities faced by many of their laborers and unemployed citizens. Some of the highest praise for *The Road to Wigan Pier* from modern critics is that the book was “a passionate polemic that helped fuel the debate on poverty and responsibility, and ultimately helped lead to the development of the welfare state” (Armstrong, 2012, para. 5).

Many Orwell scholars have written about the somewhat strained relationship that he had with the socialist movement in England, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* is often used as a striking illustration of this ideological conflict. As Shelden (1992) pointed out, although Part 1 of the book was roundly acknowledged as “a powerful piece of work that graphically exposed the plight of the industrial poor” (p. 275), many on the left in England thought “that he was at fault for putting too much of himself in the narrative” (p. 275) of Part 2, which is somewhat critical of the socialist movement.

Where Orwell belongs on the political spectrum, and why he has been so strongly vilified by some on the left has become a point of contention for some. Hitchens (2002) responded to some who have portrayed Orwell as a man commenting on poverty or the working classes from a “comfortable” distance:

Having taken a bullet through the throat, and while suffering from a demoralizing and ultimately lethal case of TB, he lived on an astonishingly low budget and tried whenever possible to grow his own food and even to make his own furniture. Indeed, if there was anything affected about him it might be his indifference to bourgeois life, his almost ostentatious austerity. (p. 42)

As Hitchens (2002) also pointed out, the most persistent, albeit equally inaccurate, criticism of Orwell’s socialism has come as a result of his rigid denunciation of Joseph Stalin and the evolution of socialist causes on a global scale. For George Orwell, most of that struggle

began in a Spanish trench.

Orwell in Spain (1936-1937)

Shortly after finishing *The Road to Wigan Pier* and submitting it to his publisher, Orwell left England for Barcelona, where he enlisted in a socialist militia, the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) and took up arms against the fascist rule of Spanish dictator, Francisco Franco. For some writers, this might have been perceived as a romantic or heroic gesture. Writers such as Ernest Hemingway, for example, seemed to go off to wars in search of glory and attention. For Orwell, however, the act of enlisting was a sincere desire to fight against the totalitarian extremes that had become an increasing threat to the world. It also served the initial purpose of validating Orwell's socialist ideals and allowing him even more of the invaluable firsthand experience that he so often sought, for insights and writing material.

The lived experience for Orwell was there to be had. But his ideas about socialism—in practice, if not in theory—would be challenged. For Orwell, the transformation of those perspectives would have a lasting impact upon the remainder of his writing. Taylor (2003) described the time in Spain as “the defining experience of Orwell's life . . . it gave him a sense of what he wanted from life and the goals that he wished to achieve” (p. 201).

For Orwell, arriving in Spain was not as simple as merely showing up and fighting against fascists. What Orwell found instead was a resistance to Franco's forces, the “Popular Front alliance,” that was factionalized and disorganized to extremes that no newly-arrived foreigner could possibly have understood (Taylor, 2003, p. 205). Orwell spent more than a hundred days on the front lines and in the trenches. During those months of fighting he also took a bullet in the throat that nearly killed him.

But the lasting impression that the war in Spain had upon Orwell was left by the

influence of Russian leader Joseph Stalin, whose agents and military figures had infiltrated and begun to dominate “the non-Stalinist left, spreading rumors and trying to disparage groups opposed to the Communists. Anarchists and Trotskyists were his special targets, and the men he controlled were ready to use imprisonment, torture and even murder to achieve their ends” (Bowker, 2003, pp. 212-213). In spite of his earnest efforts and everything he had done with a rifle in his hands, Orwell and the other members of POUM were labeled as Trotskyists. Subsequently, several POUM members and leaders (including the group’s founder, Andres Nin) were either imprisoned or killed. In the end, Orwell was fortunate to escape from Barcelona with his freedom and life intact.

Orwell’s experiences in Spain became the basis for what many consider his finest book of non-fiction, *Homage to Catalonia*. Iconic Columbia literature professor and critic Lionel Trilling thought so highly of this book that he referred to it, in an introduction to the first American edition, as “one of the most important documents of our time” (Trilling, 1980, p. iii). Referring to these experiences in his 1946 essay, “Why I Write,” Orwell acknowledged being criticized for going to such great lengths to defend himself and his friends from false, propagandist accusations:

A critic whom I respect read me a lecture about it. “Why did you put in all that stuff?” he said. “You’ve turned what might have been a good book into journalism.” What he said was true, but I could not have done otherwise. I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book. (Orwell, 1946/2002 p. 1085)

Regarding the assertion, in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, that Orwell was one of the

preeminent qualitative researchers of the 20th century, Sabin (2007) emphasized that notion, pointing to the additional credibility created by Orwell through his own disclaimers in works such as *Homage to Catalonia*:

These disclaimers, however, have the effect of increasing more than they detract from Orwell's air of truthfulness; since partiality is inevitable, candor about it exemplifies a necessary skepticism towards all claims of absolute and objective truth. "Beware of my partisanship", he warns the reader on the final page of *Homage to Catalonia*, "my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware of exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the Spanish War." (p. 45)

The end result of Orwell's time in Spain was that of yet another powerful inspiration. Seeing so many friends and comrades—most of whom, like Orwell, had come to Spain with the noblest of intentions—lose their freedom or their lives as the result of propagandist campaigns that were being orchestrated from hundreds of miles away left a lifelong impression. In trying to discredit and destroy the POUM as they did, Stalin's agents "played a crucial role in transforming the mildly-socialist Orwell into an equally fanatical anti-Communist, whose books would play a not inconsiderable part in the final destruction of the god they served" (Bowker, 2003, p. 220).

A Voice at the BBC (1941-1943)

As he was no longer fit for military service, much of Orwell's contribution to England's war effort in the Second World War came through his work with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Some of the most thorough research into Orwell's time at the BBC was conducted by Sheldon (1992), who described this effort as something of an extension of Orwell's

service in Burma, which had ended nearly 15 years earlier. Tasked with countering a ceaseless flow of Nazi propaganda in India, the BBC's radio telecasts sought to maintain the loyalty of that country, and in particular the enormous army that stood in wait, to England. As ironic as this turn of events must certainly have been for Orwell (Hitchens, 2002), given his persistent and outspoken denouncement of England's presence in India, it was the censorship of his broadcasts by England's Ministry of Information—which certainly did not allow negative thoughts about British imperialism during a war of propaganda and global conquest—that made the most lasting impression upon the writer:

The effect of working in such a place was that eventually it became impossible to think of putting any words on paper without considering the response from the censors.

Censorship does not have to be strict to induce this thought; it needs only to be present in some form and to be applied with regularity. At the BBC the one method of censorship that was most unnerving involved the use of a “switch censor” during a broadcast. With this technique, some trusted bureaucrat was put in front of a switch so he or she could cut off the broadcast of any speaker who might be tempted to say something unsanctioned by official policy. (Shelden, 1992, p. 416)

Davison (2011) pointed out that Orwell's notion of propaganda, as he would use the concept in its most extreme form within the pages of *1984*, was much more intense than that utilized by the BBC. Davison also summed up that time of service by suggesting that although their efforts to sway opinion in India may not have been entirely successful—or, for that matter, even necessary, as Orwell likely realized—the amount and quality of his work was impressive.

Although Orwell himself ultimately concluded, when it had finally come to a close, that his two-plus years of service with the BBC had been a waste of time (Taylor, 2003, p. 325), there

is no doubt that some of that experience would prove valuable in the future. Most notably, Orwell's years in broadcasting were an ideal source of "inspiration in the creation of the nightmare bureaucracy of the Ministry of Truth" in *1984* (Shelden, 1992, p. 415).

Almost every step in Orwell's personal and professional career provided valuable insight and writing material for him in later years. As his well of lived experience grew, so too did Orwell's vision of the world and ability to bring those concepts forth in clear, approachable, and artistically worthwhile prose. His experiences were an invaluable part of his writing process.

The Writing Process

Before undertaking a qualitative, phenomenological study of literature, and the potential influence of a single writer upon experienced students, it is necessary to explore the writing process as it has been defined, or at least identified, by some of the acknowledged experts in phenomenological research. One of the most commonly cited of those experts, Van Manen (1990), described writing as a process that "creates a distance between ourselves and the world whereby the subjectivities of daily experience become the object of our reflective awareness" (p. 127). This observation makes an ideal opening for a discussion of the writing process, as most writers have experienced how much more easily and accurately one can describe a moment after a period of reflection, as opposed to doing so when caught up in that moment.

Van Manen (1990) also described the intensely personal nature of the writing (and re-writing) task. "To write means to write myself, not in a narcissistic sense but in a deep collective sense" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 132). Although this description obviously applies to anyone who undertakes the writing process—although perhaps on different levels—it is through a sense of style that more distinctive, individualized reflections can manifest themselves on the page. "In writing, the author stylizes in textual form the truth that is given signification in his or her

contact with the world” (Merleau-Ponty, as cited by Van Manen, p., 1990, p. 132).

The discussion of style is especially relevant with regards to George Orwell, who is credited by many as having one of the most direct and effective prose styles of any English or American writer. In the conclusion of his 1946 essay, “Why I Write,” Orwell wrote a simple, well-known sentence about prose and style. “Good prose is like a window pane” (Orwell, 1946/2002, p. 1085). Although Orwell was certainly aware that the window pane created by a writer’s words will invariably be tinted with that writer’s beliefs and perceptions, he was a staunch advocate for writing that was clear, precise, free of jargon, and as true to the writer’s exact feelings as possible.

The insistence upon clarity is by no means unique to Orwell. Clarity has been set aside as an essential rule by more than one great author. It is fascinating that several of the rules of good writing outlined in Orwell’s 1945 essay “Politics and the English Language” are also found in *The Elements of Style*, the tiny, best-selling prose guide by Strunk and White (1959) that has been used by millions of American writing students.

Although I would not go so far as to suggest that some American writers had a strong influence upon Orwell, or the manner in which he wrote, it is interesting to note a few of the trans-Atlantic connections and parallels that exist. Orwell made no secret of his admiration for writers such as Herman Melville and Mark Twain. He even expressed, to one publisher, a desire to undertake a biography of Mark Twain (Shelden, 1992, p. 220). It is also worth noting, as I have observed, that Orwell’s love of nature and preference for isolation—and the success of his writing when he managed to combine those two ideals, as he did in Jura while writing *1984*—is highly reminiscent of American writers such as Henry David Thoreau and E. B. White. The final comparison I wish to highlight is found within the pages of *1984*. Orwell used sex and passion

between Party members, Winston and Julia, as an act of defiance to, and even an attack against the Party. It was Winston's hope that "simple undifferentiated desire: that was the force that would tear the Party to pieces" (Orwell, 1949/1961, p. 105). This is very similar to the manner in which Nathaniel Hawthorne used forbidden desires and other such devices to "lay bare the rigid barbarity of the Puritan mind" (McCall, 1966, p. 38).

But Orwell's knowledge and understanding of language was much more complex than his rules for simplicity in writing seem to suggest. One of the reasons that Orwell cautioned so strongly against trite phrases and jargon was because he understood the manner in which the internalization and externalization of language has a potential to shape the thoughts, themselves. In "Politics and the English Language," Orwell suggested that it is possible to lessen the effort towards thought by "simply throwing your mind open and letting all the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you, even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent—and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself" (Orwell, 1945/2002, p. 962).

One cannot help but wonder, when reading this passage from Orwell, whether he had ever read or acquired any Vygotskian theory. The notions of internalizing the surrounding world and then developing inner speech before learning to utilize shared language were prominent in the work of Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who had a strong background in the study of literature. Prolific Vygotsky scholar, Smagorinsky (2007), discussed the role of language in a manner which suggests that Orwell and Vygotsky held a similar understanding of this process:

For Vygotsky, speech is the primary "tool" in the construction of culture. Through speech, people express what is on their minds. They in turn help to structure a society through the ways in which their speech both constructs a reality and brings it to order so

that others may move easily within it. Further, speech serves not only as this means of representing a world; the process of speaking itself often serves as a vehicle through which new thoughts emerge. (p. 64)

Carrying on these theories of language as defined by Vygotsky and Orwell were philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, who had a great deal of influence in the discipline of phenomenology. As Merleau-Ponty described the communicative process, “thought does not itself suffice for recognizing things; nor does speech presuppose thinking. In fact, there would be no clear thought without speech. Lacking all supports, such thought would vanish instantly and we could never be aware of it” (Langer, 1989, p. 58). Insights such as this make it easier to understand the relationship between language and thought. They also further explain—and to an extent help to justify—the need for the qualitative, phenomenological study that was conducted for this dissertation.

Russian philosopher and literary critic Bakhtin seems to have built further upon Vygotskian theory and identified social factors that allow individuals to understand the spoken and written word. Paramount among these social factors is the notion that “because no two individuals ever entirely coincide in their experience or belong to precisely the same set of social groups, every act of understanding involves an act of translation and a negotiation of values” (Emerson, 1983, p. 248). The lived experience of each separate individual, therefore, affects language, perception, and reality. “For Bakhtin, words come not out of dictionaries but out of concrete dialogic situations. He saw the distinction between dialogic words—that is, utterances—and dictionary words as one between theme and meaning” (Emerson, 1983, p. 248).

There is a certain degree of overlap between theories and research studies pertaining to the process of writing and those pertaining to the act of reading. However, that overlap is not so

substantial that the two areas should be discussed simultaneously.

The Lived and Shared Experience of Reading

As with the collective body of research and theories pertaining to the writing process, much of what is currently used in reading instruction has roots in the work of Vygotsky and some of the other social theorists that built upon his work. One of the theories in reading education that has direct roots in social learning is that of schema theory. Derry (1996) explained that “schema is a general term connoting virtually any memory structure” (p. 167), and then described a cognitive schema theory which holds that “thinking and learning take place within working memory, where prior-knowledge schemas are activated in response to environmental input” (p. 167). McVee, Dunsmore and Gavelek provided valuable insights into the extent to which schema theory and the work of social theorists are still both relevant and foundational:

The extent to which the literacy field still relies on and values schema theory can be seen from the results of an analysis of current reading and language arts texts for pre-service and in-service teachers. In a review of 25 reading/language arts texts published between 1989 and 2004, we found that all of the texts introduced schema theory to help explain the reading process, especially comprehension. The wide-spread reliance on schema theory indicates that educators still believe schema theory is a valuable tool in helping pre-service and in-service teachers understand cognitive and individual aspects of reading. At the same time, most of these same reading and language arts texts introduce their readers to sociocultural theories, particularly the work of Vygotsky. (McVee et al., 2005, p. 534)

One of the most effective scholars at clarifying and defining the reading experience has been curriculum expert, Sumara. Sumara’s (2002) analysis of the reading process moved well

beyond the traditional pedagogical practice of identifying and interpreting specific authorial intentions. Rather, Sumara delved into the interpretation of literary works as they relate to the unique well of experience and personal history of each individual reader. One of the things Sumara (2002) explored, from both the author and reader perspective, is the notion of truth:

Truth does not exist in platitudes and clichés or moral imperatives. Truth cannot be found, directly, by asking others for advice, or from reading pop-psychology books that give directions for improved living conditions. What is experienced as truthful emerges from the complex relations of history, memory, language, and geography. (p. 4)

When surveying Sumara's (1998) work, there are several moments when the life and work of George Orwell come to mind. One example of this is Sumara's notion that personal identity often "includes our relationship with literary texts" (Sumara, 1998, p. 205). He further explained that "not only do these books and their characters become personally significant to the development of identity, they sometimes become culturally significant" (Sumara, 1998, p. 205). In terms of cultural significance, there is arguably no more commonly referenced or dubiously iconic figure than that of George Orwell's Big Brother.

As for the use of literary fiction in the classroom, Sumara (2002) acknowledged the link between some fiction and historical contexts. "The importance for relating historical narratives to contemporary situations is not unknown to educators. . . . It is acknowledged that one reason for studying literary fictions is to gain a deeper understanding of historical events, whether of one's own culture or of others" (Sumara, 2002, p. 27). One could easily speculate that Sumara's words here were inspired by, or in reference to the late fiction of George Orwell and the awareness of a specific historical context that those works raise.

Some of the responses that can be triggered during the reading process are not

specifically limited to literary experiences but can be applied across the aesthetic spectrum. One of the foremost advocates of this notion is Iser, “who makes an anthropological case for the importance of aesthetic experience” (Thomas, 2008, p. 623) with regards to cultural understanding. As such, he has been identified with the literary anthropology movement. Perry (1996) separated Iser’s theories from other anthropological disciplines and provided a valuable description of literary anthropology:

In Iser’s definition and use of the term, the point of literary anthropology is that it is not reducible to other types of anthropological discourse but that it charts both human and textual evolution by examining the different ways in which we attach meaning to changing images of humanity in the literary text. It does not borrow models from structural or generative anthropology but creates its own through the boundary crossing and interplay of the fictive . . . and the imaginary. (p. 440)

According to Thomas (2008), Iser described the process of reading as constantly moving back and forth between the fictional and reality, allowing readers to “stage” themselves repeatedly. As each reader undertakes this experience, it allows the “possibility of staging new versions of the self. Aesthetic experience helps to activate this potential to fashion new identities and to imagine new worlds” (Thomas, 2008, p. 626).

With Iser’s notion of literary anthropology in mind, examining the success of Orwell’s writing—particularly that of his essays and political fiction—necessitates an understanding of how writing is able to change a reader’s perspective. As Sumara (2002) pointed out, “accomplished novelists understand the importance of attending to and representing the usually unnoticed experiences that combine to make a life” (pp. 153-154). This becomes a very important distinction when studying the work of George Orwell, who managed, time and again,

to find seemingly commonplace experiences and examples that gave his readers a different perspective on a topic or issue that was worthy of reexamination.

According to Comprone (1978) Burke went even further than Sumara, describing the writing and reading process as an attempt to communicate in a world of infinite and ever-changing perspectives. “As writers, we follow out our own symbolic actions, always to establish a complex mosaic of shared insights that are dramatically attained” (Comprone, 1978, p. 340). In his 2005 dissertation detailing the influence of German philosopher Nietzsche on Burke’s “perspective by incongruity,” Groce detailed one of the few definitions of PbyI (the abbreviation Groce used for Perspective by Incongruity) offered within Burke’s writing:

The nearest attempt at defining PbyI appears in his third critical work, *Attitudes Toward History* (ATH). In the “Dictionary of Pivotal Terms,” Burke resorts immediately to metaphor: “A method for gauging situations by verbal ‘atom cracking’” (308). This involves bashing two things together: words, phrases, ideas, concepts or conventions, and the list of abstractions could go on. But, Burke emphasizes the consciousness of the act by referring to it as “planned incongruity,” even a “rational planning.” The semantic values of the sign are affected, including the connotations. “A word belongs to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category.” (Groce, 2005, p. 10)

The notions of rational planning and planned incongruity apply quite readily to the political fiction of George Orwell, and they are also used effectively in some of his essays. Some excellent examples can be found in one of Orwell’s earliest essays, “A Hanging”, which was published in 1931. This essay’s “emotional power comes from a slow but steady accumulation of details,” which emphasize Orwell’s “horrific reality of an act that is so much easier to sanction in

the abstract if one never has to witness it in the flesh” (Shelden, 1992, pp. 121-122).

There are two key details in this essay that bring out seemingly simple but inherently different perspectives for Orwell’s readers. The first of these is the moment in which the condemned man, who is being escorted to the gallows, pauses a moment to step around a puddle. This is “one detail that illuminates all the others” (Shelden, 1992, p. 122). The second detail, brilliantly chosen and orchestrated by Orwell, occurs through the perspective of a dog, whose sudden presence at the hanging seems to stun the executioners back into the moment and, at least temporarily, away from their collective stoicism and gallows humor. The dog, wisely cast by Orwell as an Airedale, at first wants to love and play with the condemned man and then later comes back and recoils in shock at what has been done to him.

Through Orwell’s use of perspective in this essay, it has taken an animal to remind both executioners and readers of their humanity. Helping readers to see and experience his viewpoints and ideas from different perspectives is one of the most successful and enduring aspects of Orwell’s writing.

Hermeneutics and Phenomenology

The methodology of this research study will be discussed in thorough detail in Chapter 3. However, for the purposes and completeness of this literature review, a brief discussion of qualitative research methods, and especially of the foundational phenomenological theorists, is necessary.

In an impressive review of qualitative research methods, Horn (1998) chose to separate those methods into four different categories: a) symbolic interactionism, b) phenomenological description, c) constructivist hermeneutics, and d) critical studies (p. 602). Although the middle two categories were of specific importance to this study, it is worth noting that the first and last

categories are relevant in any qualitative study and are especially relevant to the writing of George Orwell. Symbolic interactionism applies to the discussion of language earlier in this chapter, as outlined through the linguistic theories of Vygotsky, Bakhtin, and others. Critical studies are also helpful for understanding the Orwellian model, as Orwell wrote hundreds of pages of quality criticism. Before getting too far into the aforementioned survey, Horn readily acknowledged that qualitative methods have yielded a “body of literature that regularly crosses disciplinary boundaries and often resists classification” (p. 604).

Although this study—and any other study that has a specific focus upon literature and language—was linked inextricably to theories of symbolic interactionism, the methods that were used to gather information in this study were hermeneutic and phenomenological in nature. This is an important distinction to clarify, because the notion of symbolic interactionism is ever-present. However, as Horn (1998) explained, although “symbolic interactionism emerged from within a sociological tradition to focus upon the psychology of social behavior, phenomenological description continues to develop as an applied sociology of knowledge that rests upon the principals and aims of Husserlian phenomenology” (p. 606).

German philosophers Husserl and Heidegger are most commonly associated with the beginning of phenomenology as a philosophy and movement. It is difficult, however, to come up with any single, concrete definition for phenomenology (Budd, 2005, p. 49). When searching for information on this concept, one finds that it is most commonly used in medical studies. Specifically, it is often used in studies of nursing, where lived experience and interpersonal communications are perhaps most essential. Phenomenological philosophers and researchers tend to contradict one another. To some extent, it is important to acknowledge that phenomenology, in its early stages, was a departure from 20th century movements such as

positivism and empiricism. “Across all conceptions of phenomenology there is a clear and explicit recognition that experience is richer than what our physical senses can apprehend” (Budd, 2005, p.45).

Husserlian phenomenology is founded upon the notion (later prevalent in postmodernism) that “bias and prejudice are so pervasive that anything resembling truth is unachievable” (Budd, 2005, p. 46). In Husserl’s model,

the complexity of the human condition involves perceiving reality at a point in time, in a place, within a social context, in a psychological state. In other words, there is so much that is part of our Being that the genuine apprehension of reality is not an easy task.

Ultimately, though, Husserl’s goal is to present a means of examination that can help us bridge the gap between initial (especially uncritical) perception and reality. (Budd, 2005, p. 46)

As has been mentioned, there seem to be a great many disagreements over matters of semantics among the scholars and philosophers associated with phenomenological inquiry. The relationship between Husserl and Heidegger is an excellent example of such trends within the discipline. There is a prevalent notion that Heidegger was critical of Husserl, or at least that he sought to contradict, or even betray his philosophical predecessor. However, a more accurate, and less sensational, summary of the relationship acknowledges that Heidegger built upon Husserl’s work, and did not deviate nearly as far from Husserl’s phenomenology as some believe (Moran, 1999, p. 54).

What Heidegger added to Husserl’s work was perhaps a stronger focus upon human subjectivity and the emotional realities of the moment. According to Heidegger, “reflection is a theoretical stance, and every theoretical endeavor, every observation and demonstration involves

a certain objectifying modification, involves a certain element of ‘de-living,’ introduces a certain fracture between the experience and the experienced” (Heidegger as cited by Zahavi, 2003, p. 159). That is not to say that Husserl had not acknowledged such things, however. “It is undoubtedly true that Husserl focused more on elucidating acts of cognition rather than the emotions or human actions, but in no sense did he downgrade the practical and the emotive in relation to our specifically cognitive achievements” (Moran, 1999, p. 50).

To some extent these minor discrepancies seem both inevitable and, potentially, infinite. As the man who began the phenomenology movement, Husserl was destined to have scholars following in his footsteps and challenging his foundational work. And during the 20th century there were several prominent philosophers, such as Heidegger, Rorty, and Merleau-Ponty, who wrote litanyes of chapters and articles detailing their contentions—both great and small—with Husserl’s original theories.

However, one important distinction to arise from the different focal points of Husserl and Heidegger has resulted in the two methods of inquiry that were prevalent within this proposed study. Although Husserlian phenomenology has commonly come to be known as reflective, Heidegger’s approach has come to acquire the label of hermeneutical phenomenology. As mentioned above, the difference between the two is not so great as some might suggest (Zahavi, 2003, pp. 168-169).

The methodology for this study that will be discussed in Chapter 3 utilizes a great deal of the hermeneutical phenomenology that is most commonly associated with Heidegger. But it also owes a great deal to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Rorty, Burke, van Manen, and many of the other philosophers and researchers who have shaped the manner in which qualitative research is being conducted today.

John Rodden's Orwell Scholarship

This literature review would be incomplete without an examination of some of the seminal Orwell scholarship that has been conducted by Rodden, author and professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Texas. In his 1991 article, "Reputation, Canon-Formation, Pedagogy: George Orwell in the Classroom," Rodden made a detailed study of Orwell's place in the British and American literary canons, the history of that ascension, and invaluable insights into the manner in which authors and their works fall into and out of favor in middle school, high school, and college classrooms. Rodden identified six distinct phases in Orwell's canonical journey⁴ and summed up the process, at one point, as "a puzzling mix of elevations and exclusions, a matter of selective enshrinement" (p. 504).

Rodden (1991) suggested that *Animal Farm* was highly suited for American middle school and high school students for several reasons. Although the novel's "brevity, readability, perceived literary merit, and sufficiency to the assigned task and grade level" (p. 505) were obvious factors, Rodden also cited a move away from large anthologies and towards small, cheap paperbacks in American schools. However, perhaps the greatest merit for *Animal Farm* was how well it fit into the political climate of the United States in the 1950s. "Orwell's little fable filled, as probably no other contemporary work could, a public need during the Cold War era to wipe out the Communist menace, especially in the schools, and thereby safeguard impressionable youth (Rodden, 1991, p. 507).

Rodden (1991) also described the manner in which Orwell's diversity, and specifically his championing of Democratic Socialism, was commonly ignored in an effort to further his

⁴ For the purposes of this literature review, I will not go into a detailed summary of these points. But I would highly recommend this article for anyone interested in the trends surrounding canon formation.

value in the anti-communist agenda. For the purposes of my research, this is a very important point. It illustrates the manner in which the life and experiences of George Orwell were commonly ignored when his work first became a fixture in American classrooms. Rodden then went on to discuss a tendency regarding Orwell which would later be addressed by Hitchens in even greater detail. Over the years, activists from the right and left have tried to claim, co-opt and champion Orwell for the promotion of specific political agendas. With Orwell, perhaps more than any other writer, this is impossible to do—whether one is of the traditional right or left—without ignoring key moments in his life and significant portions of his literary output.

As many others have pointed out before me, there may be no greater attribute for a political writer than the innate tendency to neither align nor become permanently affiliated with either end of the political spectrum.

In his discussion of *1984* and its place in the classroom, Rodden (1991) suggested that although the novel may be more meaningful to those students who read it, it “occupies a different, and less secure, place than *Animal Farm* in school canons” (p. 510). One of the main reasons for this placement is that *1984*, which contains an explicit sexual encounter between Winston and Julia, has been banned in several places over the years. Another likely explanation, as Rodden mentioned, is that unlike *Animal Farm*, *1984* is not limiting its implication of totalitarianism to that which occurs on the communist left.

In terms of understanding how authors rise and fall from the canon, it would seem that inclusion in literature anthologies and the publication of collected works play an invaluable role. Rodden (1991) offered a fascinating statistic to emphasize this point:

Before 1950, according to the MLA Bibliography, not a single academic book or article had been written on Orwell. After publication of the omnibus collection *The Orwell*

Reader, more than twice as many articles (eighteen) were published in 1956-57 alone as in 1951-55 (eight). (p. 512)

Orwell's writing seems to have become firmly entrenched within the low canon, which Rodden (1991) described as a place in middle school and high school classrooms, as well as in elementary survey courses and writing seminars at the university level. However, Rodden believed that through the somewhat elitist "dynamics of reputation-formation in the academy" (p. 523), Orwell's writing has been largely eschewed by the "high canon taught in upper division university literature courses (The Great Tradition)" (p. 503). Among the reasons for this exclusion, Rodden listed the apparent simplicity of Orwell's work, making it of lesser perceived value to in-depth, and at times ostentatious, literary criticism. Rodden also pointed to the perception of Orwell as a plebian writer (more of a journalist than a novelist) and a lasting disdain among many in the Academy towards one of the most vocal critics of the Left.

I believe this exclusion to be a persistent form of academic snobbery and an extreme injustice to both college students and an author whose example and literary merit are likely to stand the test of time as well as those of any other writer. To further emphasize this point, it is worth examining some of the lasting impressions of George Orwell that have been formed by those who have studied the man and his work most closely.

In his 2009 article, "Orwell's Significance for Intellectuals Today: A Presence in Our Lives," Rodden gathered insights on Orwell from those who have made a name for themselves as Orwell scholars. Discussing those interviews in the introduction to the article, Rodden indicated a few important reasons why Orwell's influence remains vital:

One of the distinctive features of their remarks is that, despite the enormous sea change in world affairs and Anglo-American culture in the last half-century, Orwell continues to be

a presence in their lives as well as in political debate. . . . The fact that they read Orwell and readily admit that their thinking is filtered through his work is significant and worthy of attention. For it occurs with virtually no other writer of the twentieth century—and certainly with no other writer to this extent. Orwell's personal and moral significance for intellectuals across the political spectrum, from conservatives and neoconservatives to the liberal-far left, progressives, and independent radicals—is an extraordinary and unique development that knows no contemporary parallel. (pp. 216-218)

Among the experts quoted by Rodden (2009) in this article was Richard Rorty, a professor of Humanities at Stanford University. Rorty noted that Orwell “reminds us how easy it is for intellectuals to become, with the best motives in the world, apologists for tyrannies” (p. 220). In a quote of Rorty’s that became especially meaningful for me as I conducted and reported on my research, he expressed hope that future generations would read both George Bernard Shaw and Orwell, “but not because either he or Orwell had original ideas. They just made certain ideas exceptionally vivid. Like Dickens, both men were exceptionally useful writers” (p. 225). As I will discuss in Chapter 4, and to a lesser extent in Chapter 5, there is a notion—and it had a pervasive presence as this study was carried out—that originality is seldom possible. Fortunately, vividness and vitality are.

Rodden (2009) also quoted Bernard Crick, who wrote the first biography of George Orwell (cited earlier in this chapter), pointed out what I consider one of Orwell’s most endearing and identifiable qualities. “He was an intellectual who tried to reach the common reader. . . . He understood modernist writers such as Joyce and Henry Miller but deliberately chose not to write in that intellectual way that is only understood by other intellectuals” (Rodden, 2009, p. 225).

Michael Shelden, who wrote the authorized biography of George Orwell and played a

crucial role in this study, was also interviewed for Rodden's (2009) article and quoted as follows:

As a human being, with lots of faults, he still had a side to him that one of his friends called a "crystal spirit." It is a beauty and integrity that has inspired a lot of people. I think many people inspired by Orwell are inspired by his deep sense of integrity. . . . Anything you pick up and read you want to feel as though you haven't been cheated. Orwell gives you that sense that you haven't wasted your time but that you've grown a bit, that you've expanded a bit in your own mind as a result of reading him. And that's something that keeps people coming back to him. (Rodden, 2009, pp. 223-225)

I was pleased to notice, as this research was conducted, that Sheldon's faith in the vitality of Orwell's crystal spirit had not faltered at all in the decade since he had shared those thoughts with Rodden.

Rodden (2009) also quoted from his interview of Todd Gitlin, an author and a professor of journalism and sociology at Columbia University who had this to offer about the sincerity of Orwell's perspectives:

He doesn't take cheap shots. Some of the best stuff in *Homage to Catalonia* is explorations of the mindset and the experience of his enemies. Read him on the fascist soldier for example. He's very moving. He is not a demonizer. He is interested in why it is that people do things which are immoral. He's interested. He's curious. And the people on his side are not necessarily exemplars of supreme excellence (p. 222).

The final quote that Rodden (2009) takes from these interviews that is worthy of mention came from his interview with author Richard Kostelanetz. "I can never forget a young woman in Warsaw in 1982, whom I heard spontaneously testifying that the truest novel about life in Poland at that time was *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" (p. 226). This simple recollection does more to illustrate

the success of Orwell's political fiction than perhaps anything else I have read. The thought that Orwell's final novel could speak for those citizens living under such oppression—those who, for so many years, were not able to speak for themselves—is absolutely stunning.

In his 2005 article, "Lessons from Brother Orwell," Rodden took a more personal approach at summarizing the writer's influence. Using a model similar to that utilized in "Politics and the English Language," Rodden first identified six things that Orwell's example has taught us to unlearn in the name of clear thinking and good writing:

1. Unlearn Groupthink. Don't ride along with the intellectual herd. Refuse to accede to coterie politics.
2. Unlearn treating the glitterati as more than equal than others. Resist the bewitching attractions of court patronage and courtly politicians. Keep instead a wary distance from power.
3. Unlearn simplistic skepticism. Renounce the alluring, merely oppositional role of critic and skeptic.
4. Unlearn politicizing the personal and personalizing the political. Break the intelligentsia's lazy, kneejerk habit of lining up people in categories.
5. Unlearn Elitespeak and its Newspeak idioms. Avoid addressing primarily the cultural elite—and avoid the self-referential allusions and jargon that usually accompany such practices.
6. Break any of these rules, rather than do something that violates intellectual integrity.

(pp. 72-73)

Rodden concluded the article, throughout which he addressed George Orwell directly, by listing the personal lessons that he had taken from the author over many years of scholarship.

There are six of these, as well, but Rodden chose not to number them:

- You tempered my will to systematize and gave me a respect and love for the concrete particular.
- You emboldened me to speak out, to make a commitment, to abide by it.
- Your example fortified me to sustain a process of rigorous self-questioning, to hold my own side to the highest possible standard.
- You showed me how important it is to live what one writes. In practical terms this has meant a concentration on friendship and on lived experience.
- You vouchsafed me a vision of my best self, one that is truly realistic, not just calculating or pragmatic or willful.
- You taught me to write in an accessible manner and not to embrace elitism or specialness, not to insist on being superior by taking the moral high ground and remaining self-righteous, as if only I myself know the Right Way. (p. 73)

In what later amounted to a happy accident, I set this article aside—having scanned it but not read it thoroughly—while writing this literature review for the purposes of proposing this dissertation. Owing to a busy schedule, and a strong desire to finally get my research underway, I did not revisit this piece until after that research had concluded. As a result of that fortunate delay, I have enjoyed comparing my research findings with Rodden’s personal reflections without feeling as though they may have had too strong an influence upon the study itself.

In Chapter 3, I will be discussing the methodology around which that research study was designed and implemented.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As was discussed in specific detail in Chapter 1, there are very few English or American writers that have been as widely taught and read as George Orwell. This is true of his satiric novel, *Animal Farm*, and a few of his more popular essays. But it is especially true of Orwell's final novel, *1984*, whose Big Brother remains one of the most widely referenced literary figures of the 20th century. However, although Orwell's work is still known and taught in many schools and universities, it is often being taught on a somewhat superficial level. Unless the books and essays of George Orwell are taught in sufficient depth and with adequate biographical focus, much of what those literary works have to offer students—specifically those students who are older and have more life experience—is lost.

That Orwell's writing is so often taught without enough depth is partially the result of a common misconception. There is an apparent and genuinely deceptive simplicity about much of George Orwell's work. This does present a certain level of appeal for most readers and perhaps even for many of those who teach literature. But this simplicity also prevents Orwell's books from being studied in depth and with sufficient emphasis on the writer's unique biographical experiences. A detailed understanding of the lived experience of George Orwell that culminated in his vivid illustrations and artistic creations is necessary in order for those studying his writing to get the full benefit from it.

George Orwell was one man who accomplished great things. As one man, he challenged the longstanding tradition of British imperialism and had a major influence on the manner in which it began to be perceived by others in England. As one man, he illustrated the fatal flaws in the Stalinist/Soviet totalitarian regime to the whole world with a clarity that managed to transcend multiple language barriers. And finally, as one man, Orwell authored social and political insights and criticisms that remain relevant to this day. Without understanding the events in his life that contributed to those accomplishments, the essence of the Orwellian model is greatly diminished.

Theoretical Framework

A phenomenological, hermeneutic research approach was used for this study. The Orwellian model was presented, defined, and discussed by participants during four seminar sessions. Those seminar sessions were led by noted Orwell scholar and English professor, Dr. Michael Shelden. As this research study was designed for students in an honors program, the sessions were conducted with undergraduate student volunteers who were already enrolled in a 300-level Orwell course offered through the honors program at Indiana State University. In this manner, informed and semi-structured social discourse was recorded (audio only) for the purposes of data collection and analysis.

In addition to gauging response and reaction to the Orwellian model in a social setting, a case study approach was utilized to gather insights from participants on a more personal level. There was a small number of participants, five, which allowed participant responses to be collected through one survey, two interviews, and a focus group.

Methodology Defense

As was discussed in Chapter 1, there is very little of interest or genuine relevance about the life and writing of George Orwell that is quantifiable. Although it would certainly be possible to undertake some kind of study about Orwell using more traditional, quantitative methods, it seems doubtful that such a study could capture much about the Orwellian model that would illustrate those elements that make him such an effective and enduring political writer. More than anything, that power comes from the reaction that Orwell's books and essays inspire within individual readers. It is that essential focus, upon each individual reader, that necessitates a qualitative, phenomenological research method.

During a phenomenological study, the researcher becomes much more immersed among subjects than in traditional research methods, striving for a more comprehensive illumination of social phenomena, or the lived experience of individuals. As van Manen (1990) explained, "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995) provided an apt explanation for the phenomenological process, and why it is, in many ways, more appealing and valuable than traditional models:

The phenomenologist rejects both rationalism [in which the bottom line of reality is logic] and empiricism [as elaborated in 20th century mainstream social science, the bottom line of reality is its mathematical representation in statistics] because they fail to account for the world as experienced by the human being. (p. 405)

In many ways, it seems unfair to compare phenomenological methods to those used in more traditional research. As some define it, "phenomenology is not a methodology—it does not provide a formal construction for investigation; it is an attitude, a way of preparing oneself for

inquiry, for seeing” (Scheler as cited by Budd, 2005, p. 45). If phenomenology seems to defy classification, that is perhaps appropriate for a method of inquiry that strives to recognize phenomena that evade traditional classification and quantification. One popular observation about the nature and process of this kind of research is that it has to be undertaken and experienced in order to be sincerely understood:

There is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it “from the inside.” We tend to get a certain satisfaction out of grasping at a conceptual or “theoretical” level the basic ideas of phenomenology, even though a real understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by “actively doing it.” (van Manen, 1990, p. 8)

This passage from van Manen (1990), which provides a solid endorsement for the value of lived experience, also leads nicely into an explanation of and justification for a hermeneutic approach. In many qualitative studies, the researcher will attempt to bracket his or her personal biases for the purpose of conducting objective research. However, from a purely hermeneutic, heuristic perspective, this cannot be done. In actual research settings, “the observer can never bracket her status as an observer, for it is that ontological status that directs any resulting epistemology” (Horn, 1998, p. 608).

Research Questions

This study investigated the influence that an Orwell curriculum—both literary and biographical—had upon undergraduate honors students in relation to their perceptions and the context of their own lived experience. Questions 2-4 were treated as sub-questions.

1. What does the literary and biographical model of George Orwell inspire within students in an undergraduate honors program?

2. How essential is the biographical model, George Orwell's unique lived experience, to the literature he created?
3. What can the recognition of this relationship between lived experience and literary output mean for students in terms of their own personal experiences?
4. Can this recognition further empower each student as an individual?

Participant Selection

The participants used in this study were undergraduate students enrolled in the honors program at Indiana State University. Because of the need for such a specific kind of participant in this study, purposeful sampling was necessary. In other words, by specifically designing and implementing honors-level seminar discussions, and openly encouraging students from an honors program to participate, this study moved nearly as far away from the traditional model for random sampling as possible. Purposeful sampling is necessary when “the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam as cited by Guyton, 2011, p. 61).

The specific purpose of this study, as discussed in Chapter 1, was to identify the value and influence of the Orwellian model upon advanced and specialized undergraduate students. These students were chosen because they have more lived experience than high school students or younger college students. The outline of requirements for the Honors Program in the 2013 Indiana State University course Catalogue illustrates what differentiates those students from many of the others on campus:

The University Honors Program is open to first-year students who, by reason of high grade point average (3.7 or higher on 4.0 scale), test scores (1100 or higher SAT verbal and quantitative, 24 ACT), or high school graduation rank (top ten percent of graduating

class), have demonstrated outstanding academic aptitude and achievement. Students transferring to or already enrolled at Indiana State who have demonstrated superior scholastic ability are also eligible. All students who believe their academic work merits consideration for entrance into the University Honors Program should contact the executive director of Honors. The University Honors curriculum features a core of classes that immerses students in the great ideas and works of human civilization and equips them with the tools to think critically, analytically, and with the ability to integrate and synthesize across disciplines and concepts. (Indiana State University, 2013-14, para. 8)

On average, students who are eligible for honors courses have a stronger background in writing and literature than other undergraduates. From my vantage point, this made them better suited to take part in the seminar sessions for this research. With more literary backgrounds and richer lived experience, this specific student population was more likely to yield valuable insights into the Orwellian model as the study was conducted. This last point is worthy of significant emphasis because it justifies the effort that was put forth to recruit participants from within such a specific demographic of the university population. It also explains the need for adequate compensation for subject time and participation.

In addition to lived experience and a stronger literary background, I also sought research subjects who had a higher level of maturity. From the beginning I believed that the seminar sessions, which were so essential to the success of this research, would require a level of collaboration that younger, less mature students would be unlikely to maintain. However, as Gallagher (1943) wrote, age and class standing will not always guarantee maturity. "It should be emphasized that maturity is relative and that it varies not only among individuals, but also that

different maturity levels exist within the same individual,” she explained, concluding that “maturity is qualitative” (Gallagher, 1943, p. 7).

During the spring semester of 2013 there was a course, GH 301, offered through the honors program at Indiana State University. That course, titled “George Orwell,” was taught by Dr. Michael Shelden. During the first week of that course I was allowed to address the students who were willing to stay a few minutes after class and hear a brief recruitment speech, which took me only a few minutes to deliver. During that speech I was able to give a brief description of the study, its timeframe, and the level of financial compensation available for participants (Appendix E). I was also able to clarify that research activities would be completely separate from graded course activities. The students who agreed to participate in the research then read and signed an IRB-approved consent form (Appendix D).

Confidentiality for participants was maintained to the highest level of reasonable expectation. I maintained full care and custody of all data collected during the research study. With the exception of two faculty reviewers, I was the only person to view data materials. On all data collected, including the survey, only the first names of participants were used. The informed consent form, which detailed the manner and extent to which the data in this study would be recorded, was maintained along with all other confidential materials.

Apart from their status as students in an honors program, specific participant demographics were neither anticipated nor expected. Because a case study approach was used in this research, questions about age, gender, educational background, and professional experience were incorporated into the survey (Appendix C).

The ideal number of participants for which this study was designed was in the range of four to six. In that regard, my efforts at recruitment were highly successful. Using fewer

participants than this would probably have limited the potential of the study. On the other hand, using more than eight to ten participants would have been likely to dilute individual responses and may have placed substantial limitations on the intimacy and intensity that was intended. As has been mentioned, George Orwell was one man whose writing challenged governments and global institutions. Potentially, his life and writing can empower the individual. For the purposes of this study, much of that potential would have been lost in a crowded lecture hall.

Data Collection

The data that were collected and analyzed in this study were gathered through some of the methods most commonly associated with qualitative and phenomenological research. This study utilized observation, surveying, and interviewing. There was also a focus group conducted with the participants. By utilizing all of these methods with a small and specialized sample of participants, a rich and complex tapestry of lived experience and human response to the Orwellian model was illustrated and analyzed.

Observation

There were four separate seminar sessions carried out during this study. These sessions were approximately an hour in length and took place during the spring semester of 2013. They were conducted in University Hall, on the campus of Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. The sessions were led by English professor and Orwell biographer, Dr. Shelden.

These seminar sessions focused as much as possible upon selected Orwell works that the participants had been assigned to read for Dr. Shelden's Orwell course. Most notably, these works by Orwell included essays "Marrakech," "A Hanging," "Such, Such Were the Joys" (1946) and "Shooting and Elephant." Those readings also included *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Although these six, specific works were assigned reading for all of the participants, it should be

noted that some of the participants had read additional Orwell essays, such as “Politics and the English Language,” “The Lion and the Unicorn” (1941), and “Reflections of Gandhi” (1949).

Audio of the seminar sessions was recorded, with participants’ full knowledge and consent. Transcripts of those recordings, which I typed myself in the hopes of becoming more fully immersed in the data once all of it had been gathered, were later processed and studied for the purposes of data analysis. There was an initial temptation to use video recordings, especially for the purposes of analysis and data collection. However, the simple act of pointing a camera seemed likely to change seminar settings and outcomes. Because of that concern, only audio recording was utilized.

As the researcher conducting this study, I was in attendance during each seminar. My participation was limited to occasional comments and questions. I also assisted Dr. Shelden in keeping seminar discussions from straying too far away from the specified and intended topics, as seminar discussions often tend to do. In all but one of the sessions, those efforts were successful.

Survey

There was one survey used in this study (Appendix C). The primary purpose of that survey was to find out, in specific detail, what level of exposure to and knowledge of George Orwell that each participant had. Because a case study approach was used with each separate participant, survey questions also covered age, gender, and educational background. There are advantages that a simple survey has over the interview process. During interviews, participants do not have the benefit of time and reflection prior to each answer. For undergraduate students in an honors program, it was reasonable to speculate that both time and reflection were necessary for the recollection of past Orwell study. For that reason, the survey was given to each

participant at least a week before the date of the first seminar, at which time participants were asked to have them completed and turned in.

Interviews

Two separate interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The first interviews were carried out after the first two seminar sessions had taken place. Five central questions (Appendix A) were asked to all participants. However, as individual responses varied, so too did follow-up questions and points of clarification. In other words, although the pre-designed questions provided a foundational basis around which each of the interviews was constructed, additional questions and follow-up questions were different for each participant. At least a week ahead of the interviews, participants were asked to reflect upon those central questions so that they had plenty of time to consider possible responses ahead of time.

The second interviews were conducted after the last of the four seminar sessions had taken place. This allowed for specific focus upon the seminar sessions as a whole, with specific concentration on individual participant response and reaction to the Orwellian model. These interviews were somewhat longer than those conducted in the first round and often went into more specific detail. As with the first interviews, participants were given five central questions (Appendix B) at least a week before the interview and were asked to reflect upon them ahead of time.

Focus Group

Participants were asked to participate in a focus group after all four seminar sessions had taken place. Neither Dr. Sheldon nor I was present during this exercise, which was conducted by one of the faculty reviewers being utilized in this study, Dr. William Barratt. The goal during this focus group was to garner more insights, in a group setting, into the research questions at the

center of this study. Focus groups are an effective means of channeling the social and collaborative nature of academic inquiry. It is also important to give participants a chance to speak on these topics with impunity, away from the potential influence of the professor who will be determining course grades or from the researcher who has orchestrated the entire study. The focus group also provided a secondary means of data collection from participants in a group setting. This is an important point, because much of the data that were collected were more individualistic in nature.

The focus group, just like all of the interviews, was recorded and transcribed for the purposes of data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study began the moment I started reading the survey completed by each participant prior to the first seminar sessions. Using that survey as a foundation point for each participant, I began building around it with my own observational notes, transcribed interviews, and transcribed seminar sessions to construct miniature individual case studies. These smaller case studies made an integral contribution to the final results of this research, creating a methodological approach that has been identified in similar research settings as “nestled and layered case studies” (Patton, 2002, p. 297).

As the study was carried out and these various forms of data were collected, I began transcribing and reading through the material several times in order to become as immersed within and familiar with the data as possible. Transcribing the seminar sessions was especially significant for me, as I relived some of the most worthwhile moments of group interaction, remaining quite focused on the research during the weeks of down time between sessions. During that immersion process I began identifying common themes and possible “content codes”

(Wilson, 2007, p. 47) that were later used to tie some of the individual case studies together in a more meaningful way. There are some qualitative researchers who make use of computer software for the coding process. However, it is worth reiterating that the importance of the Orwellian model is not something that can be overtly quantified. Although common themes among members of this small participant sample were sought, identified, and made the subject of scrupulous analysis, a consensus among participants was neither the goal nor the expectation of this study. Rather, it was expected and later found that there were unique, isolated responses from participants—especially regarding the application of the Orwellian model to individual lived experience—that proved to be of great value.

This last insight alludes to the notion of multiple realities that are commonly accepted by most, if not all qualitative researchers. It was also quite clearly recognized and discussed by George Orwell himself. Because of the widely acknowledged notion of multiple realities, it would have been unrealistic to expect a “single or universal truth to be discovered based on the information provided by participants” (Wilson, 2007, p. 48).

As I am a strong advocate for the hermeneutic concept of phenomenological research in which the descriptive, historical, and personal influence of the researcher is readily and openly identified, some of the analytical process used for this research was consistent with heuristic inquiry as described by Moustakas (as cited by Patton, 2002). Because this study used several different forms of data collection, and because I was directly involved and invested in the entire process, the final product came about through a process of creative synthesis:

Creative synthesis is the bringing together of the pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships. This phase points the way for new perspectives and meanings, a new vision of the experience. The fundamental richness of

the experience and the experiencing participants is captured and communicated in a personal and creative way. (Patton, 2002, p. 487)

The evolution of this research study, from its inception to its completion, has led me to the overwhelming conclusion that multiple forms of data collection and analysis are a must, given the potential limitations of any single method of inquiry. The notion of more accurately and comprehensively describing research results through the use of multiple data sources has been identified by some scholars as triangulation. “Triangulation within a qualitative inquiry strategy can be attained by combining both interviewing and observations, mixing different types of purposeful samples . . . or examining how competing theoretical perspectives inform a particular analysis” (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

Although it was important to identify my personal biases and historical background as the researcher conducting this study, which was done in Chapter 1, there were also safeguards implemented to ensure that those biases did not ultimately transform the study into something that I wanted it to become. I constructed a journal of personal reflections while the study was being conducted. Through that reflective journal and review process I hoped to identify anything of significance that may have been missed or any area in which my personal biases may have influenced participant reactions. That journal, along with all transcripts of seminar sessions and participant interviews, was reviewed by two approved faculty members, Dr. William Barratt and Dr. Larry Tinnerman. After reviewing that material, as well as a nearly final draft of this dissertation, each of them concluded that there were no overt signs of researcher bias in the research findings.

Summary

This research study utilized predominantly phenomenological methods in order to gather different forms of data from a small, specialized sample of participants. These data were collected and analyzed in an effort to identify and describe the potential influence of George Orwell's literary and biographical example upon undergraduate students enrolled in an honors program. The role of the researcher in this study was openly acknowledged and defined, and steps were taken to ensure that researcher bias did not become a dominant factor in the final results of the study. In Chapter 4, I will discuss those results in detail.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Although there was plenty of room for my gratitude for those who helped me with this research in the acknowledgements in the opening pages of this dissertation, it must be expressed in this introduction how unique the opportunity for this research was. Working with Dr. Shelden was an amazing experience, but it was very difficult to arrange. Without the collective efforts of my committee and support from the Bayh College of Education, the English Department and the University's Honors Program, this study would never have taken place.

As I sat and observed Dr. Shelden's GH 301 course during the spring semester of 2013, occasionally taking part in some of the discussions, I truly felt as though I was participating in something special. For the most part, the students were engaged, the discussions were lively, and the students had a strong influence upon the directions in which those discussions travelled. Really getting into the Orwellian spirit, some of the students in the class began referring to Dr. Shelden as "Dear Leader," whether in class or somewhere else on campus. And as one might imagine, the professor rather took to the role of the benevolent, all-knowing Midwestern version of the timeless Big Brother. And he led those students on an invaluable journey through the Orwellian model.

For the purposes of absolute clarity—which is a quality upon which Orwell himself always insisted—there are certain things that must be understood and remembered while reading

this chapter. Throughout this chapter I will refer to the course or class that was taught by Dr. Sheldon and from the ranks of which I recruited my participants for specific research activities. Unfortunately, my family and work schedule did not permit me to attend all of the classes that semester, but I was there for most of them. This chapter contains a handful of references to that class and general trends of which I made note, such as students referring to Dr. Sheldon as “Dear Leader.” I feel that this is both necessary and justifiable. For, even though I designed eight separate and specific research activities in which these subjects were to take part, there was undeniable overlap and crossover between class time and those research activities. It was, after all, no accident that this study was designed to be carried out concurrently with an Orwell course that was taking place. And frankly, I’m not sure where else I might have found subjects willing and well-prepared enough to delve as deeply into the Orwellian model as I wanted to get. It would not be reasonable to expect most research participants to be willing to read hundreds of pages of literature for the purpose of a research study. However, if they are reading those pages because they also happen to be assigned course material, that is an ideal scenario, as it proved to be in this instance. As I mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, although the research benefitted profoundly from assigned course readings, research participation had absolutely no bearing upon graded course activities.

All direct quotations in this chapter are taken from interviews and seminar sessions that were recorded during the course of this research. I make reference to those activities throughout the following research discussion and will often specify whether quoted material was taken from an interview, a seminar session, or a questionnaire.

Case Studies of the Research Participants

Before examining the miniature case studies that I constructed for each of the research participants who took part in this project, it would be beneficial to take a closer look at the group as a whole. All five participants were recruited from the ranks of an honors Orwell course at Indiana State University. Originally there were six students who signed on to take part in the study, but one of them dropped out very early in the study, not contributing anything worthy of mention beyond this lone sentence of attribution.

It seems only fitting to qualify and quantify these subjects from a superficial distance before getting to know each of them on a more personal level. All five of the participants in this study were White, and all five of them were born in the United States. The youngest participant was 19 years old, while the oldest was 29. The other three participants were in their early 20s. There were no freshmen in the group. Two of them were sophomores, two were juniors, and one a senior. All five research participants entered the semester in good academic standing at the university. Three of the participants were men, and two of them women.

I grew very fond of each of these participants during the course of the study. Rather than explain why I think that happened, I present the following miniature case studies that were constructed for each of them.

James: A Philosopher and Democratic Socialist

If one is fortunate enough when conducting qualitative research in a small group setting, there will be a participant or two who are genuinely excited to take part in the study and always seem happy to be there. In my study James was that participant, often staying after we had finished for the afternoon and continuing our discussion on a different and more personal level.

He was also the only participant who thanked me for giving him the opportunity to take part in the study. Not that I expected any thanks whatsoever. But James was just that happy to be there.

At nearly 30 years old, James most likely began his undergraduate career with more lived experience than the other participants. That is not merely a quantitative assumption based upon a few extra years of life but rather a qualitative measure of a person who has seen and done a lot of things. James grew up in a military family, living in places throughout the United States and also in Guam. Before beginning college, James worked in restaurants, for a moving company, and as a debt collector. He was also enlisted for a time in the army. While enrolled at Indiana State, James was working at one of the student writing centers, faced with the arduous task of helping students write better.

Like every other participant in the study, James was disenchanted by his experiences in school. He shared a summary of those experiences very early in the semester:

I did not pay attention a lot in elementary school, middle school or high school; I only liked art, sociology, psychology, and English. I was a shy, silent kid, but I got into a fair amount of trouble. I did not do well. I was more concerned with what I wanted to learn. I would not participate in gym class, and I would read my own books in classes. In the fifth grade, I failed everything save art and English; I was held back in seventh grade because I skipped a lot, argued, and told my biology teacher, "I don't care."

With recollections such as these in mind, it is not surprising that James responded the most passionately to Orwell's essay, "Such, Such Were the Joys." More than once during the semester James praised that essay, and he especially liked the scene in which young Eric Blair punched one of his bullying persecutors in the face.

As might be expected, James only had a short tenure in the army, lasting about a year and a half. He learned a great deal from his experiences in the service, however. And although it was perhaps inevitable that he would find trouble for “questioning things, criticizing the chain of command, insubordination, [and] refusal to accept and obey orders,” James observed many trends and human tendencies that had a lasting influence on his personal philosophy and worldly outlook. On an interpersonal level, he watched people he knew get changed and reformed by military life. On a more global level, James described a perception of regimes and propped up “sock puppets” being put in place and removed as wars and political administrations shaped the field of a giant chess board. As James spoke in class or during seminars or when I spent time with him during and after interviews, it became apparent that his time in the military had taught him much of what Orwell learned from his time with the Imperial Police in Burma.

Soft-spoken, reflective, and very well read, there was more than just his experience in the military that made James an ideal student in an honors course focused upon George Orwell. On the political spectrum, James considered himself to be a “democratic socialist,” and was wary of government motives and political doublespeak. He was also very knowledgeable about the life and work of Eugene V. Debs, the Terre Haute native who helped create labor unions in the United States and who ran for President as a socialist candidate four times. Although Debs, whose house has become a museum on the Indiana State University campus, remains an important historical figure to some, not many undergraduates whom I have met here seem to know much about him. During one of my interviews with James, he suggested that Debs and Orwell were similar in that they both brought a lot of lived experience into their endeavors and were each much more effective because of it. He also talked about how Debs, much like Orwell, was quite wary of things that were happening under Joseph Stalin’s regime at a time when many

other socialists around the world were choosing to turn a blind eye on mass murder in the name of political ideology.

James was one of three participants in the study who took the time to fill out my questionnaire. He did a lot more than just write in a few brief comments for each of the nine questions. When I received questionnaires back from the students, I was pleased to find that James had typed out three single-spaced pages in response to my nine questions. More impressive than the length and depth of those responses was the list of authors that James had read, his summaries of their work, and why he felt they were important. It was in this painstaking and meticulous display that I found yet another key similarity between James and George Orwell. More than once during the semester, Dr. Sheldon referred to Orwell's critical essay about the life and work of Charles Dickens. It is one of Orwell's most famous essays and one of the most thorough and comprehensive literary critiques ever written. As I read through the three pages that James typed out in response to my questionnaire, I thought more than once of the Dickens essay.

James had a passion for the work of writers such as Noam Chomsky, Stuart Ewen, and James Hilton. He had also made a thorough study of the great philosophers such as Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Camus. He came into the semester having more familiarity with the work of George Orwell than most of the other students, having read *1984* multiple times. "In high school I understood Orwell's writing on a very fundamental level," James explained, adding that as he got older and gained more experience, he "started to understand Orwell on both a concrete and more profound level." Although he had been reading Orwell for more than a decade before taking part in this study, James admitted to knowing very little about the author's life and personal experiences.

As a result of this illumination, James said that he came to understand both the author and his work with more clarity. By the end of the study he had come to see Orwell as “this man who just had this sort of inner drive and tenacity, he wouldn’t give up and he just felt compelled to write because he wanted to expose big lies . . .”

Of the five students who participated in this study, James seemed by far the most likely to follow in Orwell’s footsteps in that regard.

Victoria: A Southern Transplant with Cuban Roots

It is probably not uncommon for a researcher, especially one who is highly invested in a study such as this one, to formulate a series of images and notions of what ideal research subjects would be like. In the case of this study, I knew that I wanted self-motivated and outgoing honors students who would be happy to join Dr. Shelden and me for a lengthy and scrupulous Orwellian exploration. As for individual traits or personal backgrounds, I never bothered to hope for much beyond the diversity and varying perspectives that one is apt to find in a small group of undergraduates.

When I met and got to know Victoria, I was nothing short of amazed at what she brought to the study. Victoria was the granddaughter of a successful Cuban businessman who was forced to flee his native country as Fidel Castro and Che Guevara were in the very early stages of establishing a longstanding totalitarian regime. She also remembered her grandfather well enough to be able to relate a great deal of his firsthand insights into the changes in his native country and his decision to emigrate to Miami rather than staying behind to fight and die to protect a way of life in Havana that had been very dear to him. A few of those insights, as relayed through Victoria during seminar sessions and interviews, provided some of the most

insightful and valuable moments of the entire study. How much more ideally-suited could someone be for a study of George Orwell?

However, Victoria was far from defined by her Cuban heritage. In fact, she had estranged herself from her father's side of the family by refusing to get married—in a somewhat arranged manner—at a very young age and to a man whom she did not know very well. Instead of taking that path and making her father happy, Victoria became the first woman in her family to go to college. Fluent in Spanish and very much aware of her cultural obligations, Victoria knew that her decision would be one with lasting consequences:

I decided on that day, I knew I had to make a decision. I either kowtow to what my family expects of me, and just do it, and be silent and be unhappy. Or I can do what I want. And I knew that it would be a struggle, and also I wouldn't speak to any of them. And I don't. I can't.

Although Victoria openly discussed and lamented the lack of a voice for herself and the other women in her family, she was not one to shy away from putting her feminine qualities on display. Openly acknowledging her Southern background, Victoria proudly wore a dress to class every day, as is still done on the campuses of some Southern universities. However, in contrast to the meek and humble nature that some are all too ready to associate with any such traditional, genteel displays, Victoria was somewhat of an extrovert, never shy to give her opinion on any number of topics. Her course of study at Indiana State was also highly ambitious. At the time of this study Victoria was pursuing a major in criminology, with minors in history and civic leadership. And although she didn't have any acutely defined goals for what she hoped to accomplish after graduating with those credentials, she certainly did not want to be limited:

I want to go to grad school but I also want to get my bartender's license because I think that would be so much fun and I want to own like, a bar one day. I want to own a coffee shop one day, I want to own a little used bookstore, I want to travel the world, I want to get married, I want to have babies, you know. I just have so many things that I want to do, so I don't want to narrow it down for myself because I don't want to get stuck in one particular thing and hate it.

Like everyone else who took part in the study, Victoria had a lot of negative reflections about her early educational experiences. After spending much of her childhood in Georgia, Victoria moved with her family several times during her high school years. She attended five different high schools, in Georgia, Florida, and Indiana before finally graduating. Every one of those schools was a disappointment—even a performing arts school in Florida that she had hoped would be different from the others. Victoria summed up most of her school experiences as repressive and valueless, feeling that her efforts to go against the grain rather than conform like most of the others around her only caused her to feel more ostracized and lonely.

Like some of the others who took part in this research, Victoria described her frustration at being more advanced than her classmates and eventually, because of that, disinterested. In her case this was especially true when teachers would assign books to the class that she had read on her own several years earlier. With both fondness and sadness, Victoria recalled one teacher who recognized her boredom and broke the rules in order to assign her a separate curriculum, giving her books such as *A Picture of Dorian Gray* to read. That teacher was fired at the end of the school year, and Victoria still believed that his special interest in her was one of the reasons for his firing. One cannot help but wonder just how much her feelings about school must have suffered if one of the few educators to make a connection with her was later fired for doing so.

As for her Orwellian scholarship, Victoria had a lot to bring to the table, and she put a great deal of effort into her study of that iconic Englishman. Towards the end of the semester, she even acquired, and listened to, many of Dr. Sheldon's published lectures about Orwell. This added an extra dimension to our final seminar session, as she was able to pick the professor's brain after reflecting upon some of his most polished and noteworthy insights. That is not to say, however, that Victoria needed to have Orwellian concepts spoon-fed to her by others. Before it had ever come up in class or been mentioned during any research activity, Victoria identified a sense of evolution in Orwell's writing, as the author moved from essay to novel and then to his masterpieces. Although this may not be a stunning revelation for those of us who have been studying George Orwell for years, it is a highly significant observation for an undergraduate who is fairly new to Orwell. It also ties directly to the biographical relevance that was at the very heart of this study. So when Victoria identified the progression of Orwell's writing as his career unfolded and the events of his life took shape, it was a good indicator of just how insightful this small group of honors students would be.

In no way did this revelation of Victoria's prevent her from turning a critical eye upon the featured writer. Her main criticism of Orwell focused on his female characters. It is no surprise that she turned to the portrayal of Julia in *1984* to emphasize this point. However, Victoria went much deeper than that, deconstructing Orwell's life as a possible explanation for this perceived shortcoming. As Victoria explained during one interview, a man whose youth was spent mostly in all-male boarding schools, and who then spent several years in India and then tramping, was not exposed to very many strong, independent women. And when Orwell finally did have a woman like that in his life for a few years, his first wife, Eileen, she was taken from him all too quickly.

That Victoria was so thorough and well-researched in both her praise and criticism of the venerated Englishman was one of her most Orwellian qualities.

Trenton: Questioner and Seeker of Truth

As much as anyone else involved in this study, and in Dr. Sheldon's entire Orwell course, for that matter, Trenton loved a good discussion, a good debate, and any kind of discourse involving sound reasoning and logic. Trenton was the valedictorian of his high school class and a self-described overachiever. That trend continued from high school right into college, where Trenton was an arts and science major who was active in performing arts (especially singing) and who hoped to one day become a math teacher.

Trenton was one who longed for genuine discourse, lamented how rare and infrequent it has become, and was determined to continue searching for it in many venues. Trenton believed that before one can truly claim a stance or opinion on any topic, he should be able to argue the opposing stances fluently. Otherwise, he believed, one's stance or opinion doesn't hold much value. This is not an original concept, by any means. But it has an obvious presence in Orwell's essays, which often examined his subjects from multiple angles and perspectives. It is worth noting, however, that even though this approach may have been common sense for George Orwell, it is not something that one is likely to hear from very many of today's undergraduates.

One of the main reasons Trenton cited for the outright indifference in some of his fellow students, and a perceived lack of depth or comprehension in many of the others, is a desire to avoid the kind of analysis that may prove challenging:

They just don't want it, that's the thing. They just don't care, they just want to get through things. They want to do what they want, and a lot of them just don't want to, it seems, that they don't want to learn or to challenge themselves. They want the easy route.

So they're not going to question authority, they're not going to question those thoughts that have been accepted for years.

Trenton had another colorful summary for many of his modern contemporaries that was similar to these sentiments but was catchy, more succinct, and much easier to call upon when needed. "People are just intellectually lazy," he explained during our final seminar session, "and they refuse to take the time to get to know people and to get to know ideas." I have quoted Trenton on more than one occasion since conducting this study, because every one of us takes the intellectually lazy shortcut from time to time. And every now and again, it is appropriate to call someone out for it.

It is possible that Trenton, at the tender age of 19, has observed more of this tendency among his college peers than most students at Indiana State. This is because of two identifying labels which, once they are affixed to a person, become somewhat difficult for many to overlook. Trenton was a Republican. And this simple fact would likely see him vilified in some circles but applauded in others. Trenton was also gay, which might also see him applauded in some circles and vilified in others. He and I had an amusing conversation one afternoon about just how difficult this particular duality can be for some of his contemporaries to grasp. One of Trenton's biggest pet peeves was meeting someone who just couldn't see beyond a set of one-dimensional, pre-conceived notions. And it became especially difficult for Trenton to tolerate people who were so bound to their preconceptions that they could no longer see the individual before them:

It's like people can't get past the idea of like stereotypes. Like oh, so you say that you're a conservative. So you automatically believe these five staple things, and you can never go against those things, otherwise I'm going to disown you. . . . One of the residents in my building was complaining because he was like, oh, I hate being a conservative on this

campus ‘cause everybody expects all this crap from me. . . . And he was like, you’re a gay Republican, how do you do that?

As an aspiring educator, Trenton was passionate about the evils of standardized testing, and what No Child Left Behind has done to American education. He was determined to try and change things and to make a difference once he had his own classroom, although he readily admitted that standardized testing has more of a place in his chosen subject, mathematics, than others. Trenton hoped to someday see the heavy emphasis upon standardized testing removed from American education but felt as though many teachers actually prefer its current status because it makes their jobs less challenging. “It’s an easy way to assign a grade,” he explained in one seminar session, “and they’re not interested in reading essays that could be poorly composed, or poorly written.”

Perhaps it is no coincidence, given his strong feelings about the need for change in education, that Trenton also responded the most passionately to the essay, “Such, Such Were the Joys.” Trenton was by no means a stranger to Orwell, having read *Animal Farm* in the eighth grade and then several times since. But it was Orwell’s essay about life at St. Cyprian that really struck a chord with Trenton, who summed up much of his previous education as “rather lack-luster and boring.” He was especially animated and forthcoming in discussions about the apathy he sees in others around him and how most seem to choose the easiest path before them without any consideration of process or consequences.

Time and again, Trenton seemed very pleased with the opportunity to have spent a semester studying Orwell with Dr. Sheldon in a small, intimate setting. On more than one occasion Trenton explained that his experiences in that class and in this study had changed the way he looked at everything. As a result, he found himself questioning everything around him.

Deconstructing and analyzing, Trenton noted, just as Orwell had done. Although he realized that this is not the easier path to take, Trenton never gave the impression that he wanted the easier path. He had no desire, after all, to be intellectually lazy.

Donna: Sensitive but Straightforward

Donna contributed to both the group and the study in several ways. An openly emotional and empathetic person, Donna would often bring a human context back to our discussions after they had drifted into lofty, theoretical realms. In that sense she brought a very central Orwellian trait into our circle, reminding us of our humanity once it had temporarily drifted away.

Donna had begun her undergraduate career as an optimistic elementary education major but had quickly become disillusioned by the state of today's public education. Although she had not been very pleased or satisfied with her own experiences as a student, Donna's hopes for changing things as an educator faded almost immediately when she began learning about the realities of the American classroom in the age of No Child Left Behind. This was a very difficult and emotional topic for her to discuss, and at one point during our first interview, Donna was close to tears as she recalled some of the connections she had made with certain children as a student teacher. As Donna understood things, connections such as those are becoming all too rare in today's public schools, as class sizes swell and curricula fall under the eminent domain of standardized testing:

Teaching to a class of 30 or more will never be effective. . . . Standardized testing, it's so, it's so depressing because it destroys the idea that individuality exists, but that it, it gets rid of caring. . . . I was an elementary education major and part of me really wants to go back. . . . I'm going to start crying. I haven't been a teacher, I haven't been in a classroom in so long.

Although Donna's reflections became somewhat jumbled as they poured forth, the one thing that was never in doubt was her level of compassion for the students.

In spite of this emotional reaction to the world of *No Child Left Behind*, Donna's favorite Orwell essay of the ones we studied was not "Such, Such Were the Joys," as was the case for the others in the study. Of those essays, Donna felt the strongest about "Shooting an Elephant." In part, this choice was based upon some of the essay's obvious merits, those of a timeless narrative that illustrates the evils of imperialism. Beyond that, however, Donna felt great empathy for a young Eric Blair, who felt forced into doing something terrible that he did not want to do and for reasons that were not very good. In each of her interviews, Donna likened the experience of progressing down a bad road for the wrong reasons to three years that she had remained in an abusive relationship. Donna mentioned this significant part of her life but did not seem to dwell upon it. Instead she expressed a determination that she would never again tolerate such circumstances.

Although Donna had been raised Catholic and gone to Catholic schools, she was no longer religious. She gave up on religion at the age of eight, after her religious education teacher told her that her new puppy—the first dog that Donna ever had—could not go to heaven. Although she seemed neither bitter nor condescending towards those still inclined towards religion, Donna had perhaps the best one-liner of the semester during a lengthy discussion of religion and hypocrisy that took place during our second seminar. Victoria was describing the attempts of a student at one of her schools to protest the addition of a prayer to their graduation ceremony. For his efforts, Victoria told us, that student had been bullied and ridiculed by other students (and even one teacher), who went so far as mocking some of his physical traits. Hearing

this last detail, Donna immediately quipped, “*That’s* the Christ-like thing to do.” It was several moments before the laughter died down and we managed to resume the discussion.

Donna took a keen interest in some of the more modern societal trends and had actually done a good deal of research about social media before taking part in this study. In one of the most fascinating moments of our first interview, she noted one key difference between the world that Orwell created in *1984* and the world of today. I will be discussing those insights in the final section of this chapter.

Donna did not speak very highly of her experiences studying literature in high school. Donna echoed a sentiment that would come up several times during the study, citing a lack of context in the typical high school approach towards the study of literature. To further illustrate this point, she spoke at length about her favorite novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Noting that most of the characters in the novel are not very likeable, Donna said that her high school English teacher told the class next to nothing about F. Scott Fitzgerald or of the period in American history that inspired the great masterpiece. So Donna took it upon herself to learn more about Fitzgerald and the Roaring Twenties on her own and has loved both novel and author ever since.

Donna’s Orwellian scholarship was a new experience for her, as she was the only student in Dr. Shelden’s course who had never read any Orwell before. And even though it was difficult for me to accept that such a thing could be true of a college honors student, I was pleased at the perspective and insights that she added to the study. During our final seminar session there was a discussion of Orwell’s early novels, which were not very successful from a commercial standpoint and with which Orwell never seemed overly pleased. Speaking of that failure, and how it helped Orwell find his true voice, Donna noted that “nothing else has the power to . . . make you self-reflect and self-analyze more than failing.” This was a key point to touch upon,

while those in the seminar were trying to sum up the contribution of Orwell's lived experience to his creative output.

In retrospect, perhaps it was helpful to have the perspective of at least one participant in the study who was without any preconceived notions about George Orwell. In that regard, Donna certainly helped the effort put forth by the participants to better understand the face behind the page.

Oscar: Journalist, Biologist, and Man of Action

Among all of the discussions of unfulfilling school days that came about during this study—and there were many, as those themes practically dominated an entire seminar session—the material provided by Oscar was perhaps the most colorful. It was also the most closely reminiscent of the world described in Orwell's essay, "Such, Such Were the Joys." Oscar described his school as having been authoritarian. Perhaps, he suggested, in response to the carefree and unstructured atmosphere of the 1970s. Much like a young Eric Blair, Oscar was forced to swim in very cold water. And the teachers Oscar described sounded somewhat cold and ruthless, ready to stomp out any overt signs of individuality.

We were made to swim. It was compulsory. If you didn't bring swimwear you had to wear these awful speedo outfits that everyone wore. We jumped in freezing water. . . .

We weren't allowed to wear certain things. My friends got in trouble for wearing Mario shirts with mushrooms on them as being suggestive. It was a very look-over-your-shoulder kind of experience, the more I look back on it. As you grow up you look back on the people who taught you. I know more now about any subject than those people taught. It's just sort of a combination of stupidity and absurd authority, I think.

One of the things that impressed me the most about Oscar was that, in spite of his unpleasant descriptions of those years, he seemed neither to have harvested a grudge nor to have taken those experiences personally. Instead he spoke with an almost scientific detachment about teachers who seemed to hold onto order in their classrooms through a sense of obligation. He even suggested the likely possibility that those teachers held no great love for the system itself but were often acting through fear of getting in trouble. With that notion he took Orwell's narrator in "Shooting an Elephant," who had no love for his job but did not wish to look foolish, and connected those insights with the sense of institutional conformity that is portrayed in "Such, Such Were the Joys" to suggest an interesting possibility. Oscar proposed that often, neither the oppressed nor the oppressors have much respect for the system in which they function. And perhaps there is a notion of punishment for all involved if that system is not maintained:

The person in the authority doesn't necessarily believe in the system, you know. And the teachers who are forced to do that, you know, it's almost more of a pain for them, 'cause they get in trouble if they can't hold onto a class, and they have to impose their will on them. So it's almost out of a fear of a non-existent punishment of some kind. . . . But it just keeps going up until you realize that nobody is really making these decisions. It's just something that we're stuck with.

Oscar, who was majoring in biology, would occasionally add an extra element of futuristic speculation in a class that was already abuzz with Orwellian images. During one class he took the discussion on an interesting turn by suggesting that, as we continue to scientifically reduce the effects of ageing, our life-expectancies will inevitably double and populations will swell even further than they already have. Oscar also worked for the college newspaper, the *Indiana Statesman*, but saw nothing especially noble in that employment. Instead he would

caustically refer to it as simply a means for getting beer money. However dismissive of his journalistic experiences he tended to be, Oscar could not hide his obvious interest in the use of language and the Orwellian concepts of Newspeak and Doublespeak. He was also every bit as fascinated by the dystopian model presented by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* as that created by Orwell in *1984*. Perhaps even more so, as Oscar firmly believed that Huxley's version is more relevant in modern American society, where we are more commonly subdued and distracted by our own pleasures and amusements than any kind of repressive, totalitarian force.

All five of the participants in this study made valuable contributions, and it would be both pointless and disingenuous to rank them or to say that any particular student was more insightful than the other. In Oscar's case, I was most pleased with the manner in which he often described or paraphrased the essence of Orwell's contribution. More than anyone else in the study, Oscar seemed to contemplate Orwell in an historical context, ever-mindful of the author's contemporaries and of those who have managed to emulate Orwellian perspective and success. The most obvious and most commonly referenced example of such a person is the late Christopher Hitchens, whose book, *Why Orwell Matters*, has earned a lasting place at the heart of the Orwellian canon. During his second interview, Oscar described this connection from his own perspective:

I think Orwell certainly had a big influence, especially on me, through Christopher Hitchens' commentary on it. Because it's sort of like a, sort of channeling modern, a modern version of an Orwellian vision. And I just think, I think Orwell's, you know, at the time it's easy to look back on things and say, well, that was obvious. Well it was only obvious because somebody saw it and said something.

At a relatively early point in the study—this interview with Oscar was only the second of the 10 interviews that were conducted—this was a rather encouraging observation. Like many others who travelled the doctoral research path well before I had, I experienced periods of doubt about the importance and originality of my study. Some of what I learned in this study could be said to be obvious, or at least similar to what other Orwell scholars before me have discovered and discussed. But that is not nearly as true with some of the other insights and discoveries.

Ultimately, as Oscar pointed out in his descriptions of Orwell's work, there are tremendous benefits to Orwellian scholarship that may seem obvious to some in the field and perhaps even to those with a solid understanding of Orwell's work. Nevertheless, those are things that still need to be identified and reiterated to the rest of the world: those who may not know, or those who have simply forgotten why, as Christopher Hitchens reminded us, Orwell matters.

During that same interview Oscar went on to speculate that Orwell's amazing success with novels like *Animal Farm* and *1984* likely played an important role in the buildup leading to some of the successful antiestablishment movements of the 1960s. "I'm not sure what would have happened if that kind of stuff didn't germinate in Orwell's time," he explained. At the time of that interview it occurred to me that this is not a connection that many undergraduates are likely to make.

I felt that way towards each of the five wonderful students who agreed to participate in this research study. As I look back upon those two intensive months of interviews, seminars, and questionnaires, I feel quite fortunate to have had such a diverse and brilliant group of research participants from whom to learn. That the project was executed so smoothly and yielded such an abundance of material is, essentially, the result of what they brought to the table.

Self-Shaping Research

Given the overall design of this study, and the admittedly wide net that I was casting for insight, I was in for somewhat of a firestorm when the research finally got underway. Once the seminars and interviews had begun, there were so many things to take in and process that there was scarcely time to notice that many of our discussions were not going in directions that I had expected. In other words, many of the discussions and points of interest among the research participants seemed to take on lives of their own. They were not as interested in some of the aspects of Orwellian scholarship as I had thought they would be and were highly passionate about subjects upon which I had never expected to place much emphasis.

I experienced a great deal of panic when this first began to happen. Feelings of frustration and anxiety took hold of me as I watched the study that I had been planning for more than two years begin to take on a life of its own. It was a helpless feeling, and there were certainly moments when my anguish was justified. Perhaps the worst and most worthless moment in the study was the third seminar session. At the beginning of that seminar, subjects began talking about things that they didn't like about Indiana State University, and they warmed to the topic with such vigor that there was no stopping it. Nothing that Dr. Sheldon or I said could lead the discussion back in Orwell's direction, and just that quickly the session was over. I was more than a little upset that afternoon and for a few days afterwards. It was one of only four seminar sessions that would take place, and it was a wasted opportunity. And, as no meaningful Orwellian insights transpired during that session, I never even bothered to transcribe it.

However, the other three seminars proved very successful, and I was also very pleased with the questionnaires that were completed and all 10 of the interviews. It was amid these other research activities that it gradually dawned upon me that I didn't want a study that would turn

out exactly as expected or anticipated. There would be nothing new or exciting in that. Instead, these students were responding to the study of Orwell not the way that I had, or the way that I do, but in the manner that honors students at Indiana State University did. And although there were, of course, some of the same reactions and responses that have resulted from Orwellian scholarship in the past, some of these insights were different. That was exciting. It was only then, once I had successfully jettisoned the overbearing yoke of my expectations, that the true essence of the study became apparent. That was also when this research ceased to feel like a chore and became something enjoyable. All of a sudden I was having just as much fun as the students were.

Such, Such Were the Joys

One of the things that I truly underestimated when designing this study was how powerfully the students would respond to “Such, Such Were the Joys,” the essay about Orwell’s school days at St. Cyprian, which was not published until after his death. This passionate response by students can be attributed, in part, to the quality of the essay, which was written late in Orwell’s life, when his writing was at its best and he had already exposed the most overtly threatening global institutions. However, the most appealing aspect of this essay for the participants in this study was how readily each of them could relate to it. Without exception, every one of these students had felt both repressed and victimized by their school experiences. Our first seminar session was dominated by terrible accounts of school experiences and the feelings of helplessness and frustration that came about as a result.

Although he was the most soft-spoken and reflective participant in the group, James made no bones about which essay he preferred during our opening seminar:

“Such, Such Were the Joys.” I mean, it’s so great just to get a glimpse of his childhood and realize what experiences sort of shaped him. I mean, once you realize who the artist is and why they did the things they did, it’s – and not only that, but it’s just kind of inspiring if you weren’t like a football player or . . .

This impression, for James, was not short-lived. He actually concluded our fourth and final seminar with these reflections:

Well, I’m just so fascinated with “Such, Such Were the Joys.” And I really like the part where that kid who bullied him, he just went up and punched him in the face. And he said look, hey I only became a rebel because of what you put me through. You put me in a wicked, corrupt system I’m gonna behave this way, ‘cause I have the right. And that’s just how I feel. That’s my philosophy.

Although perhaps not as free with his praise, it was obvious that Oscar also felt strongly about Orwell’s school essay, acknowledging the likelihood that it was not just his generation that felt repressed in school but those that had come before. He also made some light of the tendency for some to discredit negative school reflections as mere exaggerations. But if Oscar’s school reflections were exaggerated, it couldn’t have been by much. He readily acknowledged that the trauma of his school days was not as severe as that faced by a young Eric Blair:

I didn’t have it nearly as bad. Nobody was seeing if I wet the bed, or you know, whatever. But yeah, I do relate to that spirit of school. . . . Because, you know, people will say to me—and when you’re a kid your parents tend to say to you, because they’ve forgotten—you know, like well, you’re just a kid, or it wasn’t that bad. It was that bad, and I will sit by that forever. So just like how we said people try to say well, you’re just overdoing how it was bad for you.

Although Victoria's favorite essay seems to have been "A Hanging," because she really liked the manner in which the narrative seems to sneak up on the reader's perspective, she felt a powerful connection with Orwell's school essay:

I think how I feel about Orwell stems from my childhood and stems from the sort of isolation and the sort of questions that I was always thinking in my head, but I never thought that I had a voice similar to him. He never thought that he had a voice to voice what he was feeling which was, this is wrong, I don't like this, I don't feel like we should be treated that way. And I felt like that in my childhood. . . . I think all of his works that I've read so far have a common theme of what your truth is versus what other people's truths are. And are you willing to accept and go along with other people's truths, or do you accept your own truths and go against the grain. And you have to make that decision and that stems from childhood. That's why I think "Such, Such Were the Joys" was so, so important.

It makes perfect sense to me now, as I reflect upon a completed study, that many gifted kids are unsatisfied with, and in some cases even somewhat hostile towards, the memories of their school experiences. It stands to reason that many such students will go on to college and that some of those will become honors students. But I did not anticipate such a strong response to this essay. I did expect long and lively discussions on "Marrakech," an essay that, in my opinion, touches upon many timeless themes in a rather brilliant fashion. It may be my favorite of Orwell's essays, and I could talk about it for hours. The students in Dr. Sheldon's class, however, and especially those taking part in this research, did not share my enthusiasm for "Marrakech," and we scarcely discussed it at all.

I have come to recognize “Such, Such Were the Joys” as an essential ingredient to a successful course on George Orwell. It also seems important that this essay should be one of the first that students in any such course will read, because it establishes an immediate credibility for the author. This credibility stems, in large part, from a sense of empathy that dissatisfied students are likely to feel based upon their own school experiences. Although this connection certainly seems obvious, there is potential for a valuable connection between student and author that extends well beyond empathy. There is a timelessness about the description of Orwell’s years at St. Cyprian that is not necessarily present with some of his other main themes. Students of the Millennial generation do not remember the Cold War. For most of those students, institutions such as totalitarianism and imperialism are trends they are likely to understand on a conceptual level, but the understanding isn’t likely to go much beyond that. Certainly, they can study world history and get a sense of just how terrible things must have been in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin. But there is a disconnect there that will only grow stronger with each generation. Such is not the case, however, for “Such, Such Were the Joys,” which speaks just as fluently to students today as it would have to those in the 1940s.

Other Essays

It does not seem necessary to go into nearly as much detail about student reaction to some of the other essays as I have with “Such, Such Were the Joys.” However, this chapter would not be complete if it did not highlight some of the impassioned responses that were inspired by the other Orwell essays that we explored.

As with most who read or study Orwell, these participants were drawn to “Shooting an Elephant.” For the most part, this appeal had more to do with a sense of empathy for the narrator

of the essay than anything else. Donna, who seemed the most empathetic person in the study, and who admitted to struggling with the expectations of others, felt strongly about this essay:

I liked “Shooting an Elephant,” and that may be . . . super relevant to today and forever. Because even if just not the idea of peer pressure and acting, every action is based on, in public at least, is based on social cues and pressure, in a way. Going on actions because you feel as if it’s your duty or your, your pressure to, I mean, anybody could relate to that in personal life. . . . But just acting every day on ways that you feel you should. And like every day I feel like I, I have to slaughter some type of elephant that I don’t want to. Or just maybe not even that but I may not, not want to but that I, that I have to just because it’s what is expected of me.

Victoria had similar feelings about Orwell’s famous essay but seemed to respond on an even more personal and specific level:

In “Shooting an Elephant,” when he’s talking about sort of the inner struggle that he has . . . I remember that like, my father forced me to do something that I wasn’t comfortable with, and I was crying during it, and I was crying after it. And I completely relate to what he’s saying. I mean, that story is so memorable to me because of how he felt, doing it. Like, he was so disgusted, and he felt such guilt doing it. I think we can all—maybe not to the degree—but have cases where we did something because someone told us to, even though we weren’t comfortable doing it.

“A Hanging” inspired some of the standard reflections that surround the debate about capital punishment, but there was nothing especially original there. I had hoped that the discussion of this essay might yield some good insights into Orwell’s use of perspective, luring his readers into a glance through a different lens. But in terms of perspective, our seminar

discussions never went much beyond the notion that it is much more difficult to be in favor of capital punishment if you have either witnessed or had to take part in an actual execution.

I would have been terribly disappointed had “Politics and the English Language” not received some attention during this research, and it was Oscar who brought the famous essay into our focus during this study. Armed with his experiences in journalism, working for the *Indiana Statesman*, and also a natural love of language and clarity, Oscar was drawn to Orwell’s notion of obscuring basic truths through the use of generic, shapeless language. And, although this is obviously used in political and journalistic machinations, Oscar identified a trend whereby individuals think and analyze less critically when falling back upon common jargon and clichés:

I think that in our society language is becoming stupefied. . . . A corruption of language corrupts your ability to think because there’s a correlation between language and, and a higher thinking processes. . . . Our society doesn’t read anymore, and that coupled with our social media has something to say about how people don’t use language in a way that is constructive anymore, but that is rather a reconstruction of words and phrases that you know, you’re already given by culture.

These observations from Oscar were very reminiscent of my discussion of the similarities between Orwell and Vygotsky in Chapter 2, which I had written well before this research was undertaken. It was inspiring to hear such linguistic insights from an undergraduate. Knowing that they had come to fruition through study of the Orwellian model was even more inspirational.

Our discussion of Orwell’s essay about Charles Dickens was brief and did not yield the interest for which one might have hoped. Both Dr. Sheldon and I tried to hold the essay aloft, as one of the most comprehensive pieces of literary criticism ever undertaken. Some of the participants acknowledged how impressive it was that Orwell—who had read not only

everything written by Dickens but also countless works by so many of Dickens' contemporaries—knew his subject so thoroughly. However, as Victoria pointed out, the essay may be “a little over people's heads because people don't read Dickens anymore.”

If this is true, and it probably is, it is sadly so.

Animal Farm

Animal Farm played a crucial role in George Orwell's career, providing him with long-overdue recognition and commercial success after so many years toiling away in the shadows. The short novel also played a central role in this research, as it was the most recognized and lauded exposure to Orwell that most of the participants in this study had encountered prior to becoming college students. Before discussing their response to *Animal Farm*, it is worth acknowledging why the novel still plays such a central role, more than 65 years after its publication.

Fortunately, *Animal Farm* is a novel that is still widely read in American high schools and junior high schools. And even though much of the literature taught at that level—as I will discuss in much greater detail in the discussion of my research questions—is taught in a fairly shallow and decontextualized manner, the appeal of *Animal Farm* is universal. It does not need to be spoon-fed to students or explained in great detail. The historical and political implications of the novel, and even familiarity of figures such as Joseph Stalin who are caricatured in the story, are essential to understanding just how brilliant the novel is. *Animal Farm* is, arguably, the most successful political novel of the 20th century. Exposing the great myth of Stalin's socialist regime—and doing so in a manner that transcended the barriers of language and cultural difference—was a remarkable accomplishment on Orwell's part. I do not believe that this level of success has been duplicated since *Animal Farm* was published.

However, understanding the magnitude of the novel's success is not necessary for one to enjoy reading *Animal Farm*. With or without a thorough understanding of the political implications within the characters and events that surround Manor Farm, people of all ages are drawn to the story itself. It is a compelling story, presented by Orwell very much like a fairytale. For those who first read *Animal Farm* at a young age, there is the opportunity to come back to the novel later in life, appreciate it on a more complex level, and enjoy that same wonderful tale all the more.

That was the case for two of the people involved in this study. Each of them read the novel before entering high school and had been drawn to it on a rather elementary level. In Trenton's case, there was no guided explanation of Orwell's work from any teacher until he enrolled in Dr. Shelden's honors course:

We actually didn't read it in school . . . We had to pick a book off one of those lists in middle school, actually in eighth grade I read *Animal Farm* for the first time. . . . And then I just picked it up every now and again to refresh. It was one of my favorite books, especially [at] that time, so I would pick it up on my own. But we never actually discussed it in class.

Although Victoria also read *Animal Farm* at a young age, she readily acknowledged that neither it nor *1984* can be fully appreciated at a young age. "I think most people have read *1984* or *Animal Farm* when they were in high school and they have no idea of the world around them," she explained. "I don't think you really even begin to look outside of yourself until you hit college." With the benefit of a more worldly outlook, and a more thorough understanding of George Orwell, however, Victoria identified *Animal Farm* as a crucial turning point in the author's career:

Orwell wasn't able to write these [later works] until after *Animal Farm* was published, until after he sort of got this sense that he couldn't be overlooked. . . . If Orwell hadn't published *Animal Farm*, I don't even know if he would have even written *1984*, or had the courage to write *1984*, or even "Such, Such Were the Joys."

As I will discuss in much greater detail later in this chapter, in the discussion of my research questions, knowledge of Orwell's lived experience is essential to realizing the true brilliance of his two successful political novels. Both *Animal Farm* and *1984* can stand up as individual, independent works, and each novel certainly has enough purpose and artistic merit to do so. But *Animal Farm* evolves into an entirely richer experience once one has gained the necessary historical and political context. With *Animal Farm* this trend is readily apparent, but it is even more striking within the pages of the masterpiece that followed.

1984

For a dedicated Orwell scholar, one of the most compelling aspects of *1984* is that one can go back into Orwell's collected works and find several instances in which the younger author was sowing the seeds that would one day grow into a remarkable novel. One obvious example of this can be found in a brief book review that Orwell published in January 1939, nearly a decade before he would begin writing *1984*. In "Review of Power: A New Social Analysis by Bertrand Russell," Orwell wrote one very simple sentence, perhaps with an eye on future projects: "It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two and two will make five when the Leader says so" (Orwell, 1939/2002, p. 108). There are several other points—most of them much more subtle than this one—in the two decades of writing prior to *1984* that foreshadow the direction in which Orwell was heading. This is a fascinating process to contemplate, with the

benefit of retrospect, because one can almost see the outline of Orwell's masterpiece taking shape.

In a similar manner, but on a much less ambitious scale, I designed this research with the hope that students could make similar connections between Orwell's biography and his culminating novels. For either the beginning student or the seasoned Orwell scholar, most paths lead to *1984*. On nearly every page of that novel one can find an image or passage that seems attributable to one of those unusual moments into which Orwell continually seemed to place himself during his amazing life. In our seminar sessions we touched upon this concept in a rather broad and general manner. A few of the participants made more specific allusions to it during their interviews. Oscar, for one, directly identified an intensely personal aspect of the novel that stems from Orwell's lived experience:

There's a sense of an experience with that kind of, there's a deep psychology in some ways. When he describes the drudgery and the, you know, what it feels like to live in that system and also the deep. . . . There's a lot of sort of deep psychological stuff when he talks about *1984*. The main character, he has these dreams and he has these visions you know, well he has these dreams. And is sort of a very real type of person experiencing these things.

These were subtle distinctions, coming from an undergraduate student, although I was not surprised by this level of depth from Oscar. However, it would not be accurate to imply that our discussions of *1984* were dominated by talk of George Orwell's lived experience. Readers at every level are continually drawn to how relevant *1984* remains in the world of today, and this group of students was no exception to that trend. We spent a good deal of our seminar and

interview time discussing the novel's continued relevance. Victoria, for one, made no bones about casting the Patriot Act in an Orwellian light:

I was drawn to the fact that it is a very bleak look [at] a future that could be entirely possible. We are living in an age with so much surveillance. With these Patriot Acts which allow the government—basically no evidence against you—to invade your privacy. We're living in a world where we're censored in so many ways, even though we have these freedoms. And I say that in quotations, 'cause they're not really freedoms, they're really privileges. If they're freedoms, they can't be taken away. They're privileges. They can be taken away. That's what I take from Orwell, specifically *1984*.

If the Orwellian components of the Patriot Act may be hard to miss, there are other federal mandates that are more subtly reminiscent of Big Brother's far-reaching tentacles. True to his pedagogical pursuits, Trenton noted the Orwellian implications of No Child Left Behind.

“Looking at *1984* and seeing how everybody, you know, is regimented and everything has to be cookie cutter, that's kind of how standardized testing, that's what standardized testing does. . . . I definitely think there are Orwellian, you know, themes in there,” he explained.

One of the recurring themes that one finds in curriculum studies is the notion that learning is much more likely to take place when the subject matter in question is relevant to the student's everyday life. This was a central theme in the experiential learning that was undertaken in John Dewey's laboratory school more than a century ago, and has remained a cornerstone of educational theory ever since. It is a theory that applies to every discipline and is especially relevant in the study of literature. As Victoria pointed out during this study, very few of today's undergraduates read Charles Dickens, and if they do, that is most likely because one of his novels is assigned. Many of the students in Dr. Shelden's Orwell course had read the *Twilight*

novels by Stephanie Meyer and the Harry Potter novels by J.K. Rowling. In that regard they were likely no different from many other students of their generation. That they were just as readily drawn into the experience of *1984*, just as several other generations had been before them, is a testament to the novel's timelessness. Many of the novel's central themes seem every bit as relevant today as they were in 1948. Not only was this feeling echoed, at one point or another, by each of the participants in this study, it came up several times during our discussions.

In chronicling undergraduate response to the Orwellian model, and especially when discussing the importance of Orwell's place in the modern literary canon, the sustained relevance of *1984* is a point that would be nearly impossible to overstate.

Accepting the Boot Heel

Some of the most fascinating and insightful material gathered during this study came about when we were discussing the machinations of totalitarianism and just why it is that citizens with an opportunity to resist even minor forms of tyranny or oppression often do no such thing. Those discussions were not limited to our seminar sessions but also occurred during class time, in the hallways before and after meetings, and during some of the interviews that I conducted. A variety of different governments and nations were considered, from Stalinist Russia to modern-day North Korea, from Cuba to the United States. One of Dr. Shelden's class periods disappeared entirely, once the class began discussing the lack of due process for American citizens on foreign soil under the current drone policy of the Obama administration.

Although it was not a concept to which I had given much thought when designing this study, these discussions accounted for a significant presence in the research. Why do people accept oppressive governments without offering resistance? What causes citizens to ignore governmental trends and acts that should be creating a sense of outrage? How do those born of

free will simply accept the yoke of tyranny and choose to carry on with neither struggle nor fight?

During our seminar sessions, the first attempt at answering these questions came from Victoria, as she recounted her grandfather's recollections of his decision to leave Cuba rather than stay there, fighting to protect a life and culture in Havana that he had loved:

Well, my relatives, most of them left when Che [Guevara] took over. But I remember my grandfather talking about it, like before he passed away, and he said why should I stand up and fight when I'm going to die? And he's like, and I'm selfish enough—well, paraphrasing—but he said I'm selfish enough to know that if I die I've killed my family more than I've raised an idea. . . . They gave [him] a choice. They said you can stay in Cuba and you can die, or you can leave and go to the United States. Because my grandfather liked Cuba, the way that it was before.

Victoria went on to explain the difficulty that her grandfather would have living with that decision and some of the problems that he had adjusting from a life of prominence in Havana to one of endless toil in Miami. In her first interview, Victoria described an attitude of self-preservation—sometimes done for the sake of loved ones more than for the individual—that permeates the pages of *1984*:

And I feel like that's how it is with people in these kind of countries, in Cuba, in Afghanistan. You know, they, they have these thoughts. How can you not have these thoughts, how can you not walk around and see sort of the devastation and not feel innately in your gut that this is wrong, why are we doing this? But it's because you feel like it doesn't matter if you're hurt or not, nothing is going to change. Or you don't feel that you should speak because who are you in the grand scheme of things? I mean, what

could you possibly do about it? I think that's what my grandfather thought, too. I mean, he said that before, and I think I mentioned it, that he left and he regretted it his entire life because he had, you know, money and power and things like that. And if he had thought that he was important enough or that his voice was important enough to say something he could have made some kind of difference.

Reactions such as these by individual citizens have a very Orwellian feel about them, making an excellent starting point early in the study. Invariably, the discussion moved from foreign countries under the shadow of totalitarian leadership to much closer and more familiar shores. And even though fear and terror are not nearly as common for citizens of the United States, mistrust and indifference are flourishing. As Oscar pointed out, this is especially true when many Americans contemplate the political arena:

I'm speaking for myself, but I think the way that politics in the west certainly makes me feel is just a great sense of apathy and a sense of disinterest. I think that that comes from a distrust, nobody can believe what anybody, what is said, and I think . . . There's no room for the individual in politics anymore.

Ever mindful of the current plight of education in the United States, Trenton attributed some of the apathy in our citizens to the atmosphere in which they are being taught. Identifying Orwell as a man who always asked the difficult questions and who always seemed to question authority, Trenton felt as though this type of personality, already rarely encountered, as it is, will become ever more so in the coming years:

People just don't have the initiative anymore. They just don't want it, that's the thing. They just don't care, they just want to get through things. They want to do what they want and a lot of them just don't want to – it seems that they don't want to learn or to

challenge themselves. They want the easy route. So they're not going to question authority, they're not going to question those thoughts that have been accepted for years I feel like that's one of the major flaws in the public education systems today is, sure they might act like they're going to embrace all the differences and the creative aspects of people. But really one of the primary things we're told is accept this, I'm not going to give you a reason why and you're just going to go with it.

Oscar, whose dedication to the veracity of Aldous Huxley's dystopian model seldom wavered, often reminded us that it is not by tyranny and oppression that people stay ignorant of government affairs but rather because they are distracted by their chosen pleasures. Others in the study offered a slightly different take. Explaining one reason for the apparent blind eye of the American public, James expressed the belief that it is not merely the information and pastimes that people seek, but rather the massive overload of information with which each of us is inundated, on a daily and hourly basis. And much of that information, as James and others have surely noticed, is scarcely of any significance whatsoever. James made this clear during our first interview, when I asked him why there was seldom much outrage about war anymore:

I think part of it is just man's faulty memory. We're inundated with tons of information, most of it useless. You don't really hear about the war being discussed every day. . . . You hear a lot of what's that football player from Notre Dame, who faked having a girlfriend? . . . It's stuff like that. So I think those three elements, faulty memory, being inundated with useless information and things just not being discussed. I think that leads to people sort of forgetting some of the fine details.

This was a chillingly accurate summary from a former military man. And all of a sudden, 24-hour access to constant "news" sources doesn't sound so wonderful anymore.

Before discussing the results of my research questions and summarizing just how exactly these students did respond to the Orwellian model, it seems important to clarify one point about the details that I have just described. I remember some of the aforementioned discussions quite vividly, as they became, for me, every bit as important as the Orwell questions around which this study was designed. Perhaps this is because I have been trying so hard to understand why so many people in our community seem to stay so willingly ignorant of or indifferent to the major events of the world. As my participants pointed out, this trend can be at least somewhat explained by a combination of self-preservation, inundation (or informational overload), distrust, insufficient memory, and the overwhelming distractions created through the pursuit of personal amusement.

It is worth examining the role that Orwellian scholarship played in these discussions. Each one of these conversations occurred in the midst of seminar sessions and interviews that were focused upon the life and work of George Orwell. Each of the topics came about in an inherently Orwellian manner and seemed quite vivid and poignant in that context. Of course, it would be unjust to presume that many of the aforementioned quotes had not already been in the minds of the speakers well before they ever signed on to spend a semester with Dr. Shelden. Indeed, some of the insights seem to have been incubated and shaped for many years. Overall, in fact, one must acknowledge that not one of the insights that I have quoted in this section is entirely original.

However, once the critical lens is removed there are many things about these discussions that are noteworthy. Primarily, they encompassed some of the most worthwhile collaboration that I have experienced among any students, graduate or undergraduate, in all of my years at Indiana State University. There was a definite synergy among the research participants, Dr.

Shelden, and, to a lesser extent, me. They were not simply intelligent students who were talking just to hear themselves. Instead they seemed to feed off of each of the others' knowledge and enthusiasm, forming a genuine community of practice. It was the kind of atmosphere that most literature professors aspire to create during a class but surely do not experience as often as they might like.

As we travelled seamlessly from Orwell's experiences to ours, from his literature to the realities of the modern world, it was a natural flow. I have very little patience for things that are contrived—as evidenced by the loathing that I developed for my original interview questions, before we journeyed well beyond them—but most of the work that we did and the topics that we covered during this study felt anything but contrived. I felt that this sincerity was due, to some extent, to the amazing quality of students that were recruited for this research. It also had quite a bit to do with the quality of our professor and seminar leader, Dr. Shelden. I was quite grateful for each of those factors and have set myself to the final writing of this dissertation with the winds of good fortune at my back. And I experience those feelings not the least because the excellent quality of these discussions and the interviews that were conducted had everything to do with the Orwellian model and its being examined and discussed in a biographical context, in a setting where students are encouraged to share their own interpretations.

This was not merely my interpretation of our group work and why it was so worthwhile. During one interview, Victoria provided some excellent insights into the manner in which Orwell's example can inspire students to explore the realms well beyond what is commonly accepted:

I started going over Cuban history a little bit because I sort of realized how I've kind of indoctrinated myself into my American culture more than I have in my Cuban culture.

And when you read things like, just Orwell in general, you think about how sort of lazy and ambivalent we've become as a society. I mean it's, you see more and more people are sort of suppressing what they feel and not even having the courage to say anything, and more focused on the joys of now, and not thinking ahead. And I think one of the things that Orwell asks, sort of begs the reader to do, is critically think about your life and the world around you and not accept what is the norm.

Victoria's sentiments, in one form or another, have been echoed by many an Orwell student and scholar, and that attribution is a testament to the quality and endurance of his work. Orwell wrote in a manner that was both simple and truthful. He created a voice that had credibility and authority but did not talk down to his readers. His pages practically dripped with firsthand knowledge and worldliness—Orwell's lived experience—but were as approachable and comprehensible as a simple fairytale. Therefore, in studying and discussing his work, if such is done in the proper context, it is only natural for students to respond by drawing from their own experiences. "From His Lived Experience to Ours" was not a title for which I had to search and struggle. It occurred to me during the course of this research, and it was simply the most obvious choice for a title.

During the course of this research I arrived at something of an epiphany regarding our collective acceptance of the boot heel. Many of the people of importance in my life share an awareness of these matters, knowledge that corruption and/or ineptitude have etched a permanent place in American legislature, corporate structures, media sources, and schools. Invariably, one feels as though the major sources of power and influence within these structures are more strongly motivated by the forces of personal gain than any conceivable, outdated notion of the greater good. These are unpleasant concepts to accept and can become especially detrimental to

one's happiness, and even health, if they become the subject of intense focus and obsession. Over the years I have watched friends, loved ones, and mentors develop something of a toxic personality after becoming overwhelmed by governmental or institutional trends for which there is no apparent remedy. Human kind, or at least a noticeable segment of the world's population, is inherently greedy, and that greed equates to what may be the one fatal flaw in a capitalist system.

There is a helplessness that accompanies this realization. And the toxicity that can accompany it is a dangerous condition, one that can become a substantial threat to friendships, professional success, family structure, and happiness. I have witnessed this transformation in others and was once fortunate enough to diagnose its early stages within my own consciousness. I cannot afford to become that person, nor do I want to. So, from my perspective, my willingness to accept the boot heel comes from a sense of self-preservation and a substantiated belief that going too far down that road could lead to my very own undoing from within.

The Research Questions

In an effort to explore Orwellian relevance in both a broad and specific manner, I designed one broad research question and three sub-questions that were more specific. These questions were presented in Chapter 1 of this dissertation:

1. What does the literary and biographical model of George Orwell inspire within students in an undergraduate honors program?
2. How essential is the biographical model, George Orwell's unique lived experience, to the literature he created?
3. What can the recognition of this relationship between lived experience and literary output mean for students in terms of their own personal experiences?
4. Can this recognition further empower each student as an individual?

For the purposes of presenting my answers to these questions, I will discuss Questions 2-4 before concluding with Question 1.

How Essential is the Biographical Model, George Orwell's Unique Lived Experience, to the Literature He Created?

As I discussed in detail in Chapter 1, one of the foundations for this research was my belief that, although Orwell is still widely taught, his works are seldom studied with the depth and context necessary for them to be fully understood and appreciated by students. This trend occurs frequently at the university level but seems the most prevalent in high school classrooms, where Orwell's writing still makes an impact on young readers but perhaps does not leave nearly the impression that it could.

Among the participants in this research, James was one of the most cognizant and appreciative of the importance of learning about Orwell's life while reading his work. During his second interview, James discussed this importance, and he also explained the one-dimensional manner in which Orwell was taught in high school:

Learning about Orwell's life helps you learn about why he created the art he did, and his true intentions with his art. Unfortunately—I believe I've talked about this—in high school Orwell is decontextualized, so you don't learn about his experiences. You don't learn about how it's a satire and he was kind of creating a parody of these authorities. But learning about him, you start to realize these things, that he's not making predictive science fiction. He's not saying this is going to happen. He's saying this could happen, but this is power to its extreme of ridiculousness, and he kind of believes that won't ever happen because of the spirit of man. So that's how learning about him has changed my view on it. I used to think of *1984* as depressing, but now I realize he is

criticizing these power hungry people and saying the spirit of man will always kind of defeat you.

Like James, Victoria felt very strongly about the importance of incorporating Orwell's biography into the study of his work. She was, in fact, so drawn to this concept that she went well beyond what Dr. Sheldon had assigned her for the course and beyond the research that was being conducted in the seminar sessions. Victoria sought further background on Orwell's life by listening to a series of lectures that Dr. Sheldon had recorded years earlier. As Victoria explained, understanding Orwell's lived experience is crucial:

I think it's essential for Orwell. I don't think it's necessarily essential for every writer that you read. But I think it's especially for Orwell, because there's such a—I mean, I've said this so many times—but there's such an important, in reading almost chronologically, his works, and seeing where he comes from. And it does, it just, it changes your views about Orwell and his writings. Definitely.

After making this point more than once, Victoria went on to explain some of the concepts that one uncovers upon further exploration of Orwell's life and work. The most striking of these concepts, from my perspective, was the notion that one can see an evolution in both Orwell's writing and his perspective as he builds towards some of the culminating work at the end of his life. And, drawing heavily upon "Such, Such, Were the Joys," as many in Dr. Sheldon's class did, Victoria traced that evolution all the way back to Orwell's school days:

You kind of see the progression through his writing of how he grows into the person that he becomes and the author that he becomes. . . . You can definitely see his thought process throughout his writings. And sort of, because you go through a socialization during childhood, and you can see how his socialization affected him completely. . . . I

think as a child he basically knew that that system was wrong but didn't have the courage to say anything about it. So he just continued on with sort of this isolation feeling, and this feeling of people watching him, and this feeling of dictators who didn't care about their people. And then when he was in the police, obviously feeling uncomfortable carrying out things that he thought were ethically or morally wrong and so that, you can see why he would write *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

Orwell's lived experience contributed profoundly to the evolution of both his voice and his message. It also created a kind of credibility that goes well beyond where he had been and what he had seen. This is a rather complex point, one that is worthy of closer examination. In a somewhat obvious sense, Orwell's credibility as a writer does indeed stem from his having had a front row seat to significant historical events, as well as being directly involved in and affected by the machinations of global institutions such as imperialism and totalitarianism. But Orwell's ability to place readers within those conceptual realms so effectively also stems from his understanding of the individual human response to those very world-shaping trends and institutions. I mentioned this ability earlier, in my discussion of why *1984* succeeds so powerfully as a novel. To illustrate with such crisp, Orwellian clarity how an individual capable of love, passion, and free will can function, rebel, and be broken in the brutal face of totalitarian extremism is a literary feat well worthy of the longevity it has enjoyed in the American classroom.

During our first interview, Oscar explained that learning about Orwell's life had helped him understand the author beyond a merely conceptual level. He also described an image of Orwell's humanness, which is quite in line with the quality that I have just described:

Well, I didn't really know much about Orwell before coming in here. I respected him a lot and, like I said, I've been affected by the residual, you know, the trickledown effect of Orwell in society, and those ideas which almost seem too out of the background of, you know, our societal conversation. . . . I've come to respect . . . how Orwell came to these ideas, what life-changing events led to his way of thinking. . . . The main thing I've learned is his true humanness, his ability to think of the individual in the situation. It's very easy to think up post-apocalyptic worlds, dystopian futures of government corruptions. But how does the individual feel?

Although we explored many different possible benefits to linking Orwell's lived experience with the writing that it inspired, this final point echoed by Oscar seemed one of the most relevant. It would perhaps be possible to read *1984* in a vacuum—or at least in the decontextualized manner described by some of the participants in this study—and still acknowledge the powerful isolation and helplessness experienced by the novel's main character, Winston Smith. However, without knowing about the life of George Orwell, it would be impossible to fully appreciate or comprehend the depth, clarity and very human reality faced by the most significant fictional character he ever created.

What Can the Recognition of this Relationship Between Lived Experience and Literary Output Mean for Students in Terms of their Own Personal Experiences? Can this Recognition Further Empower Each Student as an Individual?

Recognizing the importance of the relationship between experience and writing was not difficult. And once we began discussing that link in an Orwellian context, during both our seminar sessions and our individual interviews, it was something to which my participants began to allude with increasing frequency. This point, in and of itself, felt like a significant

breakthrough, as I suddenly found myself surrounded by undergraduate students who were constructing observations and conclusions about our subject that were on par with those that had been made by established Orwell scholars. To be clear, one of the participants, Oscar, had in fact read some Christopher Hitchens and held the late journalist in the highest regard. But the other four participants had not read anything even close to Orwellian scholarship prior to taking part in this study. This is an important distinction to acknowledge, because it clarifies that for at least four of the participants—and quite possibly all five—the ground that we covered during the study constituted new and original territory.

What I learned about my research design as the study progressed was that two of my questions were difficult to address in a manner that seemed entirely genuine. Although I did ask one direct question concerning those areas—the fifth and final foundational question, asked in the second interview—I did not feel comfortable pressing the matter:

5. Has the material we have studied in this seminar—the “Orwellian model”—done anything to increase your sense of empowerment as an individual? Would it be likely to do so in others? Why?

I kept this question in the study, and it did yield some valuable insights from participants. However, to have asked a lengthy series of specific questions would have felt somewhat contrived. That much became obvious to me as we progressed through the interviews. Instead of asking further direct questions in these areas, I tried to encourage participants to discuss their personal experiences, hoping that the Orwellian context would become apparent. It did, in many instances, and there were several answers that were both sincere and relevant.

For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I decided to write about these two questions together, as if they were just one question. This was not an immediate decision but one

that was reached during the drafting process. When I attempted to write about each question separately there was a lot of repetition, and I was continually guilty of creating the kind of redundant, jargon-ridden filler of which Mr. Orwell so strongly disapproved.

Among the participants immersed in this study, most of them experienced personal connections with Orwell, both man and writer, and felt as though those models were relevant to their lives. All but one participant, Donna, experienced at least some sense of empowerment by linking Orwell's lived experience with their own. James acknowledged a definite link between the Orwellian model and a realization that anyone can succeed, observing that Orwell, the man, was not any more extraordinary than James, himself:

Taking this class and learning about Orwell, his persistence and his wanting to become his, the standard in his head. George Orwell going from Eric Blair to George Orwell, becoming that, that's very inspiring. . . . The thing about Orwell that you like is that when you actually think about it, he's not very exceptionally brilliant. He's just like me, as intelligent as I am, and that's comforting. So it makes you think, man, this guy who was just an average man who just worked hard and tried, he did these great things. So I take it that I can. Other people, I don't know, I think a lot of people today are apathetic, they don't believe in themselves, I'm not sure why but there's got to be something at home or within the culture that just doesn't encourage people.

It is no accident that as cultural apathy becomes an even bigger part of our national character those experiencing either hope or outrage continue to bring Orwell back into the conversation. As I have been writing this draft, sales of *1984* have been surging as a result of the public learning that the NSA has been collecting millions of American cell phone records in the name

of national security (Jinman, 2013). As has been happening for decades now, when things begin to seem murky, Orwell's example is there for us, a constant beacon of reason.

The need to question authority is another theme that appeared several times during this study. Although each participant echoed different variations on the difficulties faced by gifted students in the public schools, all of them agreed that there was a sense of hopelessness when facing those dilemmas. During our first seminar sessions, I learned a lot about each of these fascinating individuals, as they described acts of rebellion, as well as the pleasure that each of them took at the decision not to conform. However, there is a difference between rebelling simply for the sake of doing so and questioning established practices because those questions need to be asked.

Although Trenton alluded to the same apathetic atmosphere around us that James mentioned, his sense of optimism resulting from our Orwellian endeavors was nothing short of vibrant. As Trenton explained it, he was no longer willing to accept much of anything without question, and studying Orwell had played a key role in that attitude:

I look at Orwell's life, and having Dr. Sheldon here to, you know, to guide us and give us his experiences. I mean, I don't accept anything anymore without a critical, analysis of it. Even my own thoughts. Why am I thinking that? Does that really make sense? Do I really believe that? I think it's made me a better person, especially a better academic because I am actually, you know, I'm not just accepting things. . . . I actually question things now and I expect an answer of some sort. I mean, that's really the biggest impact this class has had on me . . . Orwell wasn't just somebody that accepted things. He always challenged authority in everything. And I feel like I'm trying to take that on. I feel like it, I mean, it's obvious it did him well, so I figure it can't hurt to try.

Even though the discussion of the apathy all around us was common, as I have mentioned, it took many different forms. Oscar, while acknowledging that Orwell's work does a lot to illuminate the need for change and action, questioned what people would be likely to do with that knowledge once it had been presented. Although Oscar felt a definite sense of empowerment through the study of Orwell, he wondered if such a model would be enough to put others in motion. He clarified many of these points during one interview, when speaking of the Orwellian model:

It certainly is an empowering thing, but only if it affects the way you live. . . . I think people need to be more serious, and I think in that way, yeah, Orwell certainly is in the back of my mind. It makes me feel, in a strange way, more confident about things I believe in, or things I will stand for because—it's ironic because Orwell was fledgling and dying when he wrote these things, you know, and probably didn't even have much of a voice by the end; but making one feel that it's okay to have strong opinions. As long as you think through them constantly, and as long as you put them in action, I think [that is] something that will definitely empower me. And then on top of that, seeing how he developed his ideas, humanizing him, like we were saying earlier, makes one feel like you can do similar things . . .

It would be wonderful, if not perhaps somewhat suspect, if I could report that all of the research participants came away from the study with a strong sense of Orwellian empowerment. But that was not entirely the case. Although she was one of the most confident and ambitious students taking part in this research, Victoria did not feel strongly motivated to stir the winds of change the moment that she walked out of an Orwellian classroom. Instead she expressed a sense

of regret because she was not, at this pivotal stage in her scholastic career, more willing to cast herself into the fray:

I think it's hard to not read Orwell and sort of be inspired to go against the grain. . . .

When you read Orwell you think to yourself, there's so much more that I could be doing or saying. . . . But I don't know if Orwell necessarily inspires courage, and that's something that I've sort of noticed about myself. When I read Orwell, he inspires me to think about all of these different themes that he has going on. Themes that are definitely a part of my life, even at such a young age. But I don't know if I'm necessarily inspired to really put myself out there and do anything about it, which is sad.

It seems likely that one of the immediate setbacks for Victoria, when studying Orwell, was a perceived lack of depth in the female characters that he created. This was an issue that she discussed in great detail during our interviews, as I mentioned in Victoria's case study. It did not seem to dampen her enthusiasm for the subject, as she did more outside research on Orwell than anyone else in the class. But it seems reasonable to speculate that this paucity of feminine depth may have prevented Victoria from experiencing as strong a connection as some of the others in the class.

Victoria's positive responses to Orwell were similar to some of the comments made by other participants. Donna, on the other hand, did not indicate any direct of empowerment as a result of our work together. As she explained, the awareness that most in the class appeared to generate as we studied and discussed Orwell together was a sense of consciousness that, for the most part, she had already achieved. She also expressed some surprise at how little some of her contemporaries seemed to have thought about things. "It's kind of depressing, in a way," Donna

explained. “I’m glad that people are getting this taste of question authority, and things like that. But I think I always had that.”

Perhaps it is no accident that the two women who took part in this research did not describe nearly the sense of empowerment for the Orwellian model as the three male participants. Although Victoria immersed herself wholeheartedly into the life and work of George Orwell, Donna did not seem to do so. Rather, I got the strong impression that she did not read as much of the material assigned by Dr. Sheldon as most of the others in the class. However, her contributions to the seminar sessions were intelligent and well-reasoned, and I would in no way want to discredit the validity of her response to Orwell. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter, it is possible that women do not respond quite as strongly to the Orwellian model as men.

What does the Literary and Biographical Model of George Orwell Inspire Within Students in an Undergraduate Honors Program?

While discussing the first and most central question of this study, I will be summarizing many of the themes that this chapter has presented. I will also attempt to come full circle, expressing some of the individual responses that the research elicited from the participants whose miniature case studies formed the beginning of this chapter. In this way I hope to remain true to the vision that was in place when the research was proposed and undertaken, exploring trends and points of interest that were shared by many in the group while also recognizing the power and importance of some individual responses.

An analysis of the current state of American education was one of the most dominant themes, especially during the first seminar sessions. And even though we never returned to the intensity that resulted when discussions of “Such, Such Were the Joys” combined with student

recollections of their own school experiences, the pedagogical theme remained a part of the study throughout, coming up time and again during interviews. For the most part, these discussions were of the quality that one hopes for in a seminar setting, going seamlessly back and forth between individual experiences and national policies. That was ideal, as anyone can point out the flaws in an established national policy from a safe and anonymous distance. Such critiques become ever more meaningful, however, when discussed on an interpersonal level.

That distinction is precisely why Orwell was so successful at speaking to his readers. He was able to expose globalized institutions through the intimate personal experiences of those caught up in those systems. The most impassioned about educational reform in this study was Trenton, who loathed standardized testing, large class sizes, and the impersonal nature of the modern American classroom. Talking about “Such, Such Were the Joys” during an interview, Trenton expressed a feeling that his outlook towards education had been altered and solidified as a result of studying Orwell:

It totally re-tweaked my view of George Orwell and just my—really, I mean, wanting to go into educational reform and stuff, that was really just a focal piece, for me. It’s just really helped me to re-examine some things that I’ve thought about education and how it was done, and how far we’ve come, and how far we have yet to go. And just having that experience, having his experience on paper has really just helped me to look at it from a different angle.

“Such, Such Were the Joys” has its own section in this dissertation, which was certainly not a part of my original vision for this study. But I must mention yet again how readily these gifted undergraduate students related to Orwell’s school experiences. The essay was an invaluable springboard into a detailed and intimate examination of the Orwellian model. And

with a personal connection thus established between author and students, the rest of what Orwell has to offer was all the more readily contemplated by each of them. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, these discussions had a natural and genuine quality about them. Neither Dr. Sheldon nor I made many efforts to steer the discussions in a specific direction. Instead, we allowed seminar topics to flow as they would. At no point did it feel as though our participants were anything less than enthusiastic about what they were contributing to the discussions.

Linked quite naturally to our discussion of education in America, there were also many insights into the systemic atrophy of language in modern culture. For the sake of expediency, and as a symptom of the growing worship of technology—most notably, these days, of modern media devices—many people now text just as readily as they might have an interpersonal conversation. As the intricacy and subtlety of America’s daily language diminishes, people become ever more inundated with a ceaseless stream of useless information. Twenty-four hour news stations are blasting from every angle with “news” that never has an ending. Honed by his own journalistic endeavors, as well as a highly acute linguistic awareness, Oscar alluded to these trends:

I believe our language is falling apart. If you look at the way people communicate through social networking, through text messages, if you watch television ever, which I recommend against. The way the news . . . People talking about sports using unquantifiable terms like “excruciating pressure” or they, this team just wanted it more. Those are unquantifiable terms. People calling Obama a communist and a socialist, or a Muslim. You know those words are used dishonestly, and they’re used in a way that is destructive, but with a degradation of language used. And that affects a lot of, I think it affects everything.

Oscar's feelings about modern media were quite relatable for the others in the group, who then contributed their own theories and experiences into a highly worthwhile discussion about modern media trends and the obfuscation of language among both broadcasters and politicians. Perhaps, for most people, journalists and politicians do not fit so readily into any particular classification. For those engrossed in Orwellian scholarship, however, there is an obvious link between the two, and the use of language is a central theme. This was also where the presence of Dr. Sheldon was particularly valuable. Seldom have I worked with a professor who has such a gift for leading Socratic discussions without becoming a dominant presence in them. Especially after he had established something of a connection with these five students, Dr. Sheldon drew forth several of their own lived experiences into the conversation. Linking Orwell's experiences with those of his readers was one of the central purposes of this research, as evidenced by the title I have chosen for this dissertation.

Conversations about language, politics, and journalism inevitably led to discussions of social media, a form of communication that has gained popularity with such momentum in the last few years that it played a crucial role in the last presidential election. Not only has social media changed how many people communicate, spend leisure time, and interact with others, for some it has become one of the most central windows through which they view the outside world. I have no intention of derailing this dissertation with a detailed analysis of why this deluge of incessant media and social media has become a detriment to meaningful discourse and the straightforward expression of thoughts and opinions. But it is a phenomenon that certainly facilitates many of the things discussed earlier in this chapter, in my discussion of "Accepting the Boot Heel." As James was quoted as saying, today we are "inundated with useless information" in settings where important issues are "just not being discussed." Perhaps some of those who

have spent a few hours on Facebook would agree that James is offering a pretty accurate assessment of what goes on there. But even the most devoted advocates of social media would have to admit that, overall, it is a far cry from the window pane that George Orwell sought to create through the simple clarity of good prose.

Among those who took part in this research, Donna displayed the most interest in current modern societal trends and had actually done some research in that area before taking part in this study. In one of the most fascinating moments of our two interviews, she noted one key difference between the world that Orwell created in *1984* and the world of today. Donna highlighted the irony of how people willingly put themselves onto a screen for Big Brother to see, rather than his screen being a forced, intrusive presence in their lives:

Yeah, and then the fact that, not only that Big Brother is watching is now relevant but it's that he's watching the TV screen [of] you out in front of him. Like, it's not that you have to peek over your shoulder and you're being watched, it's that you're on stage now and you're putting yourself there. It's like you're putting yourself in your own reality TV show to where this is my life, this is everything and it turns everyone into Big Brother. I was so fascinated by this observation that I have come back to it several times since. It has also influenced the manner in which I use social media. It is hard to understand just how readily many people—and at times even the more cynical among us—are willing to put their lives out there into cyberspace, for the entire world to see. It is possible that most individuals simply can't bear to be constantly vigilant, perhaps a little paranoid, and ever mindful of all the bad possibilities with which they should concern themselves.

Just what is it that most individuals go so far out of their way not to think about? Why do many tend to shy away from unpleasant realities, even though they are quite aware that those

realities exist? How has it become so common that there are often negative responses to those few people in our society with a tendency to, as Orwell put it in his original preface to *Animal Farm*, “tell people what they do not want to hear” (Orwell, 1972, p. ix). As I discussed earlier in this chapter, there is absolutely nothing new or original in the inherent, collective distrust of law enforcement, government, and major corporate entities. However, just because that distrust is inherent does not mean that it is commonly discussed. Perhaps adopting the seemingly Zen wisdom of the “Serenity Prayer” and accepting those things that we cannot change, many of us gradually marginalize that distrust until it becomes accepted and ignored. As defined through my personal epiphany mentioned earlier in this chapter, dwelling upon these matters, or thinking about them too often can become a threat to one’s happiness.

However, the potential for that unhappiness—although it may teach some not to dwell upon those systemic atrocities around that are ever present—should in no way be an excuse for being ignorant of those matters. As I have progressed further in my Orwell scholarship, one of the things that I have come to admire most about the author is his ability to channel that anger and outrage into a counterattack that has all of the precision of a surgeon’s scalpel. It is worth recalling a part of the passage from “Why I Write” that I quoted in Chapter 2. “I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book” (Orwell, 1946/2002, p. 1085). This passage describes Orwell’s motivation for writing *Homage to Catalonia*, which was not the major blow to Stalinist practices that he wanted it to be. The novel was, however, a necessary step in the evolutionary process that finally led to that major blow.

I do not believe that there are very many people who possess the tenacity, perseverance, and tireless work ethic that George Orwell utilized to finally expose the evils of Stalinism to the

world. But as this research ran its course, I saw several indications of students beginning to feel somewhat empowered and also becoming more determined to talk about some of those unpleasant realities that many would just as soon ignore. Time and again, this seemed to happen when those students were able to link the Orwellian model with their own personal narratives. Speaking about the value of Orwell's military experiences in Spain, James transitioned into his own experiences in basic training, watching the systematic breakdown of the people around him:

I think that experience, what it does is it makes you question how these things can come. Because like if you go through boot camp you literally, before that you know these people, you know their first names, their last names, their personalities, the individual. But then you see after a while that process, that all the individuality is killed almost, and there's like a machine. And I think you want to learn what, how people are controlled and then you also look at the system and you notice it's very corrupt, and that it does a lot of things in the name of democracy, capitalism, freedom and you want to understand that as well. And I think that experience, that's very important, why I'm so interested in this class.

I found this response from James to be especially relevant because his examples went from a group mentality to that of the individual and then from global mentalities back to the individual again. This kind of thinking is very Orwellian in nature. And it certainly seems, now that I have successfully navigated my way through this intensive research project, that with the help of five charismatic and intelligent undergraduates, Dr. Sheldon and I managed to illuminate one of the most significant benefits of studying Orwell's example. Even in the face of countless numbers, insurmountable odds and global trends, the individual still has a choice and can absolutely make a difference.

The final glimpse at the significance of the Orwellian model comes from Victoria, who still carries in her daily consciousness the narrative of her grandfather's Cuban exodus:

You take the path that either you are comfortable with or you take the path that you're not comfortable with. And you see that with Orwell, like he, he could have done what he was supposed to do, which was get a scholarship, go to Eaton, become a professor, write, whatever. Or he could examine his life and pursue what he thought was good which was for him the absolute truth. You see that like in everything that he writes he always writes about truth. I think all of his works that I've read so far have a common theme of what your truth is versus what other people's truths are. And are you willing to accept and go along with other people's truths, or do you accept your own truths and go against the grain?

If those are the questions that a well-guided examination of Orwell's example causes students to ask, I can only hope that his work will maintain a significant place in the literary canon for centuries to come.

Regarding the Literature

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the insights into language and clichés by Oscar that were reminiscent of the linguistic theories of both Orwell (1945/2002, p. 962) and Vygotsky (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 64). Many of the concepts discussed within the literature review in Chapter 2 became readily apparent as this research was carried out. Although it would be somewhat redundant to identify all of those concepts within the context of this study, I believe that a brief review of those that were most prominent is worthwhile.

The concept of literary anthropology, most commonly associated with theorist Iser (Perry, 1996, p. 440), was present throughout this study, as participants were able to stage

multiple versions of themselves while relating to each text and then moved back and forth between those texts and historical events. This trend was most noticeable when Victoria was discussing her Cuban grandfather and how his experiences reflected the sincerity of Orwell's narratives. It was also quite vivid when James described his time of service in the military and the personal transformations that he witnessed. I was especially fascinated by the notion of literary anthropology as it related to *Animal Farm*, a novel that Trenton and a few others had read several times, going all the way back to their middle school years. That novel, more than any of the other work we studied, offered the opportunity to gauge "both human and textual evolution by examining the different ways in which we attach meaning to changing images of humanity in the literary text" (Perry, 1996, p. 440).

The aforementioned moments provided an excellent illustration of Iser's (Perry, 1996) theory of literary anthropology. They also did a great deal to reinforce the insights of Sumara (2002). On several occasions, as participants reconstructed personal narratives during our seminar sessions and interviews, there was a sense that they were in the process of building upon their own personal identities. In some instances, that identification process linked directly to the literature we were discussing and the lived experience of George Orwell. At other times that was not the case. However, as has been mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, it was in the midst of these Orwellian discussions that such personal reflections seemed to flow most abundantly. Especially during the seminars, there was an atmosphere that was conducive to both interpersonal and intrapersonal connections.

The theories of Sumara (2002) and van Manen (1990) were most evident during discussions of the essay "Such, Such Were the Joys." Time and again, sparks of recognition seemed to flare up within students, as they related to Orwell's school experiences. Without

question, these moments led several of the participants to a much richer understanding of lived experience—both Orwell’s and their own. As I described earlier in this chapter, there was an undeniable feeling of validation as the participants compared their school experiences with those of Orwell and with those of other students. As this occurred during seminar sessions, it became much easier to grasp Sumara’s (2002) belief that we experience truth “through the complex relations of history, memory [and] language” (p. 4).

As for Rodden’s insights into the legacy of George Orwell, and the personal influence that the writer has had for him, I observed many similar responses from the students involved in this study. During our seminar sessions, much time was spent identifying and overcoming “Groupthink,” tearing down the pedestals of the “glitterati,” navigating a path around the reflex skepticism of the constant critic, avoiding the lazy convenience of categorization, and identifying “Elitespeak and its Newspeak idioms” that are often used to shelter us, as a people, from the truth (Rodden, 2005, pp. 72-73).

Summary

Since undertaking this research project more than two years ago, I have spent much time and effort deconstructing the potential for value and validation. During the lowest points of that process, I worried that there would be perhaps very little within these pages that has not already been the subject of Orwellian scholarship for many years. Much of that trepidation began to fade, however, once I heard these undergraduate participants addressing Orwellian scholarship with the clarity and insights that one would commonly associate with some of the experts in that field. And it would occur to me, time and again, that it was never the intention of this study to influence the genesis of bold new insights and epiphanies about the life and literature of my favorite author. Instead, my purpose was to illustrate the obvious value in teaching George

Orwell in the manner that will most effectively illustrate the profound influence that his work has and will to continue to command.

I believe that has been accomplished here, and I hope that in some way, this research may contribute to the continuation of both Orwell's relevance and his place in the American classroom.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the implications and limitations of this study. I will also explore the possibilities that this study may have illuminated in terms of the potential for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This was a very intensive and ambitious project to conduct, and there have only been a few occasions since its completion in which I have managed to distance myself from this work and look at it with something of an outsider's perspective. It is clear to me why some academicians tend to eschew qualitative methods. However, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, there do not seem to be any other methods of inquiry sufficient for exploring literary models with any meaningful depth.

One of the most important factors in the completion of this project was a degree of spontaneity. There were times when the research did not go as planned, and seminar discussions veered off course. Dr. Sheldon and I also covered several topics, at length, that had been neither anticipated nor planned. Anyone who has conducted doctoral research understands that there is a certain degree of obsessiveness that we experience during the execution stage. After months and even years of planning, little setbacks can seem like major catastrophes. However, some of those digressions were of significant value and became an important part of this study.

Implications

It has never felt like a very bold statement to say that knowledge of George Orwell's lived experience is necessary in order to fully understand and appreciate his writing. As Victoria pointed out during one of her interviews, this would be a beneficial approach for studying the

work of any writer but becomes especially important for Orwell because lived experience was so essential to his literary output. Although this can be said to be true for all writers, it is a theory that applies more for George Orwell than most. In my opinion, one writer who falls somewhere on the other end of that experiential spectrum is Henry James.⁵ James, perhaps one of the most astute observers of human nature and psychology of his generation or any other, wrote more than 20 novels, a few of which are still commonly read and taught today. When reading James one gets the impression that he traveled, conversed extensively, and observed. Although it is important to know that his brother, William, was an eminent psychologist, there doesn't seem to be much else about his life that is crucial to the understanding of his work.

With Orwell, the emphasis upon lived experience becomes necessary and even worthy of repetition, simply because it has become so common to study his writing without a biographical context. Time and again during this study I heard reminders that Orwell is often taught in a “decontextualized” manner at the high school level. And the same participants who emphasized this point—which was a central theme in the need for this study that was outlined in Chapter 1—also illustrated, in great detail, how much more worthwhile Orwellian scholarship is when it is carried out with sufficient context. To that end this research has felt like a success, because the findings did not merely emphasize that Orwell's lived experience is critical, but illustrated *why* it is critical.

⁵ It was only after careful consideration that I chose Henry James for this comparison, and I am only comfortable doing so after having read so much of each author's work over the years. Although there is a far cry from the interlocation of a Henry James novel to the bullets, boot heels, and third world smells one associates with Orwell's writing, that is not why this comparison works. For me it works because learning about the life of Henry James did not change the manner in which I experienced his novels.

In one of my favorite interview quotes from Oscar, he mentioned the significance of Orwell's themes in spite of the possible perception, years later, that his observations were nothing original. "You know, at the time it's easy to look back on things and say, well, that was obvious," he explained. "Well, it was only obvious because somebody saw it and said something." With that perception in mind, I readily acknowledge that the importance of Orwell's lived experience should be obvious to those who study or teach him. But perhaps it is not as obvious to some as it is to those of us with a close personal connection to George Orwell and his writing. It is therefore my hope that by examining, explaining, and emphasizing this significance, this research may influence some educators to take a different approach at the manner in which these novels and essays are taught. As was mentioned earlier, this notion should be applied to all writers, to one degree or another.

Although it was certainly rewarding to have such a key research question answered as thoroughly as it was, there were a few trends within this research that came as somewhat of a surprise. One of the things that really impressed me during those two months of study was how genuinely enthusiastic these undergraduates were to discuss weighty topics and discuss them on a very personal level. From the drudgery of high school to life at Indiana State University, from the distrust of governments to concern about global trends, these students offered their experiences and opinions on a daily basis. These discussions were of tremendous quality, eclipsing all but perhaps a handful of graduate seminar experiences in terms of the worthwhile discourse that I have experienced at this university over the last several years. They listened to each other, fed off of one another's ideas, and maintained a degree of synergy that is seldom

achieved in a college classroom. Although it is true that these students were well compensated⁶ for their time, I do not believe that one can actually purchase this kind of sustained enthusiasm.⁷

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, these impassioned conversations were inspired by the Orwellian model because every one of them had sprung from a discussion of the writer, his life, and his work. In the early stages this seemed to be a rather nice turn of fortune, from a researcher's perspective. This participant enthusiasm was fun to experience, and I was quite pleased with the apparent early success. However, as both the study and intensity continued, I began to believe that certain degrees of intimacy and engagement are inherent in Orwellian scholarship. And perhaps this should have come as no surprise. Those same timeless and cherished qualities that have drawn generations of Orwell's readers in and held them close, almost mesmerized, are there to be had in the classroom. And that learning environment need in no way be limited to discussions about George Orwell. Rather, students and teachers are inspired to draw from their own experiences, utilizing both the close, personal connection that Orwell creates and the universality of so many of his themes.

This point is worthy of tremendous emphasis. It has been more than a decade now since Hitchens (2002) published a book to illustrate *Why Orwell Matters*. What Mr. Hitchens

⁶ Of the five participants who took part in this research study, three of them took part in all eight research activities and received the maximum amount of compensation, \$200.00. Of the remaining two participants, one of them received \$150.00 and the other received \$125.00.

⁷ And sustained it most certainly was. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, some of these discussions inspired so much passion and excitement that they often continued long after class periods and/or seminar sessions had finished for the day. And they were by no means limited to designated research activities. Often these discussions dominated Dr. Shelden's class periods and involved several other students who were not taking part in this research.

illustrated, and what this study reiterated, is that Orwell remains profoundly important because his main tenets are every bit as relevant today as they were when he was alive.

Finally, although this has been mentioned more than once in the preceding chapters, it is necessary to reiterate just how successful the essay “Such, Such Were the Joys” was as an entry point into Orwellian scholarship. Dr. Sheldon’s students were drawn to this essay immediately, and that connection to Orwell, for most of them, remained in place and evolved throughout the rest of the semester. The inclusion of this essay was by no means obvious to me when this study was still in the planning stages, and I am grateful that Dr. Sheldon convinced me of the essay’s importance.

Limitations

There are a few obvious limitations that exist with a study that is designed the way that this one was. The first and most obvious of them is that with such a small number of participants, this research was limited by what those five particular students brought into the study. As was mentioned in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I was extremely fortunate to have recruited the five research participants who were used in this study. Even if I had the time, motivation, and resources to attempt a study of this kind again, it seems unlikely that I would be able to recruit five participants who would be as well-suited for demonstrating the value of Orwellian scholarship as these participants were.

With the obvious benefit of retrospect, I also feel as though this study was somewhat limited by the nature of two of my original questions:

3. What can the recognition of this relationship between lived experience and literary output mean for students in terms of their own personal experiences?
4. Can this recognition further empower each student as an individual?

I felt that these questions, although they seemed to make a great deal of sense as I was designing the study, did not entirely reach fruition as the research was carried out. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, asking these questions directly—which was only done with Question 5, at the end of the second round of interviews—felt somewhat contrived. Although some of the answers to that question were reported in the discussion of my results, I did not place quite the same value on those answers as I did some of the more natural and spontaneous responses.

I would perhaps have done better to combine these two questions, as I did when writing Chapter 4, and create a different question. While writing Chapter 4, and since completing it, I have felt that a question about the mistrust of government or about the collective societal ignorance or indifference that seems to have become pervasive would have been very appropriate. The section in Chapter 4 entitled “Accepting the Boot Heel” was, after all, one of the most significant parts of the research results. However, one of the most interesting things about that part of this study is that it was not the result of a specific, pre-designed, and pre-approved research question. Instead, it was the spontaneous result of what can and most certainly did happen when a group of promising undergraduate students become immersed in the Orwellian model.

So, rather than derail this chapter with a lengthy discussion of the merits of rigid, pre-designed research questions and spontaneous, natural responses, I would suggest that for a qualitative study of this nature, it is perhaps ideal to have a healthy measure of each and not rely too heavily upon one or the other.

In a manner similar to the way that I felt about two of my research questions, once this study moved from the planning stages into practice, I was not entirely pleased with the rigid formality of some of my approved interview questions. I am not fond of anything that seems

contrived, in a research setting or in any other setting, for that matter. Those who participated in this study seemed to share that feeling, to one extent or another, and responded much more readily once I began paraphrasing those questions and asking spontaneous follow-up questions that were more attuned to what each student seemed ready to discuss. Ultimately, I do not believe that the quality of the study suffered because of this. But it certainly would have, had a large degree of flexibility not been included in this research design.

One of the most obvious limitations of this study lies in the personnel that it required. I have been more than a little incredulous that, in his more than 30 years as a professor at Indiana State University, the honors course around which this project was structured was the first class on Orwell that Dr. Michael Shelden has ever taught. However, rather than wringing my hands about how unfortunate I find that to be, I will merely suggest that anyone wishing to replicate this study or to create a research setting as high in quality as I believe that this one was may find it difficult to do so. And even though there certainly are other professors who could do a commendable job of teaching an Orwell seminar⁸, it is unlikely that there are many who could do so as well as Dr. Shelden has. And I suspect that is especially true when searching the ranks of academia on this side of the Atlantic.

⁸ For the sake of clarity, I must mention that as writers go, Orwell does seem more readily approachable, more interesting, and perhaps even more “user friendly” than many others. Although this research project found a lot of inspiration from the notion that Orwell is commonly taught without sufficient context, it has never been my opinion that Orwell is difficult to teach. Students have been responding to his writing with enthusiasm for several decades now, regardless of how it may have been taught. And the experiences detailed in this dissertation certainly indicate that this trend is unlikely to cease anytime soon.

Future Research

There were a few trends I noticed during this study that came as somewhat of a surprise. As I have already indicated at a few points in this dissertation, those unexpected moments were something that I came to embrace. Ultimately, had this research somehow been carried out and concluded exactly as I might have expected or predicted, then this entire study—and especially the results—would have been entirely too much of my own creation, heavily saturated with researcher bias and of little value as anything more than an opinion piece. As I have come to think of them, these unexpected trends give this study both credence and validation. They also indicate a few areas in which I would like to have made further exploration, had time and resources not been a factor. As such, I will discuss them in terms of their potential for future research.

This study was originally designed to be conducted with graduate students. As my specific focus was to be upon Orwell, in terms of both his lived experience and the lived experience of his readers, I wanted research subjects with as much of that experience as possible. Specifically, I wanted students similar to the majority of those I have encountered during my own graduate education, people who had some degree of experience and success in the professional world. As it turned out, in terms of my research, I managed to recruit honors students with a pretty impressive array of lived experience. However, given my original vision, I cannot help but wonder how an older, and even more experienced group of students may have responded to Orwell.

Specifically, I wonder how more mature participants may have responded to each of the essays that were used for this study. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, there was very little interest from the honors students in the essay “Marrakech,” which I have come to consider one of

Orwell's most masterful attempts at challenging the perspectives of his readers. Does one have to be older or more experienced in order to appreciate those new perspectives? Is it possible that a few years do not make the difference for readers of "Marrakech" but that there is some kind of generational difference?

It would also be interesting to explore different potential reactions to "Such, Such Were the Joys," the essay that played such a crucial role as a springboard into this study. I believe that the connection between Orwell and his readers, for this particular essay, may well be stronger for younger readers than for those of us who are further removed from our school days. I was certainly aware of some of the absurd and, at times, repressive tendencies at some of the schools that I attended, but it was seldom something that I dwelled upon. Some in-depth, qualitative responses to this essay from others in my generation, and even from preceding generations, might prove highly worthwhile. Such is also true of the other end of the age spectrum. Responses from high school students, and perhaps even those in middle school, might also be of value.

However, my interest in "Such, Such Were the Joys" is not merely limited to generational responses. It would also be worthwhile to explore the reactions of students who are not honors students or students who come from different regions, countries, or socio-economic backgrounds. This essay was so effective at establishing a connection between my participants and the Orwellian model that I would love to see what it would do for different readers. Perhaps it is every bit as universal as *Animal Farm* and some of the other works that we studied.

The final point from this study that seems worthy of future exploration lies within the potential role that gender may play in Orwellian scholarship. It would be somewhat simplistic to conclude that the two female participants in this study did not respond as strongly to the material as the three male subjects did. Victoria, for one, chose to make a much more thorough study of

Orwell than the others. And she did respond to this material in a very positive and personal manner. Like others before her, Victoria raised many valid questions about the seemingly limited roles that female characters seem to play in Orwell's fiction. Understandably, she placed particular emphasis upon Julia, the main female character in *1984*.

Although these concerns, for the most part, did not seem to dampen Victoria's enthusiasm for Orwellian scholarship, they may well serve to explain some of the discrepancies in participant responses. All three of the men in this study indicated a strong sense of empowerment through experiencing Orwell's example. The two women did not share that feeling. Although the implications of this discrepancy are certainly limited by the small number of participants used in this study, this point may be worthy of further exploration.

Final Thought

One of my favorite quotes from this research came about during the focus group, which I was not there to experience but later listened to and transcribed. During that session, Trenton began summarizing the change in outlook he had experienced as a result of studying Orwell:

Being in this class and discussing stuff all the time has changed the way I look at everything. Because Orwell was definitely not one to just take something at face value. He was going to question it, and if he found a flaw he was going to point it out, and so I found myself questioning literally everything in my life. . . . I don't accept anything anyone says anymore. Someone says, oh, this is true. . . . Well why is this true? . . . Orwell has changed my life.

Without going back into everything that Orwell and his writing mean to me, personally, I will conclude by emphasizing just how important it is for young people such as Trenton to be asking those questions. It is my steadfast belief that the study of George Orwell, carried out in

the proper context, can provide an invaluable influence upon students of all ages, encouraging them to keep asking those potentially unpleasant societal questions that are so often ignored.

Much like George Orwell, I would not want to live in a world where those kinds of questions are no longer asked.

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APPENDIX A: CENTRAL QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW #1

- 1) Which of the works that we have read at this point has made the biggest impression upon you? Why do you feel that way?

- 2) Which of the works that we have read at this point has meant the least to you? Why?

- 3) Is there anything within the Orwell we have read that feels relevant to something that is happening/has happened in your life? If so, can you expand upon that?*

- 4) In your opinion, is there anything either universal or timeless about Orwell's work that has lasting social or political relevance? If so, what are the most notable, from your perspective?

- 5) Have these first two seminar sessions, or the (re)reading of any of this material changed the opinion of Orwell that you had already established? How has it changed?

* This question will also be asked in Interview #2

APPENDIX B: CENTRAL QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW #2

- 1) How essential do you believe George Orwell's biography, i.e., his "lived experience" was to the quality and impact of his writing?
- 2) In your opinion, do Orwell's experiences give more credibility to his work? Could they have created an unwieldy bias within his outlook?
- 3) Is there anything within the Orwell we have read that feels relevant to something that is happening/has happened in your life? If so, can you expand upon that?*
- 4) Did the intensive focus in these seminar sessions upon Orwell's lived experience cause any change in your perception of the works we have read? If so, which specific works, and how did your perception change?
- 5) Has the material we have studied in this seminar—the "Orwellian model"—done anything to increase your sense of empowerment as an individual? Would it be likely to do so in others? Why?

* This question will also be asked in Interview #1

APPENDIX C: ORWELL QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) What is your first name? Your age?
- 2) Where are you from? How would you describe your previous education? (Be as specific or general as you please.)
- 3) What professional experience do you have (not limited to experience in education)?
- 4) What books or essay by George Orwell, if any, have you read?
- 5) Did any of those make a strong impression upon you? If so, why?
- 6) Who are your favorite authors? What sets them apart from other writers?
- 7) In your opinion, what are the characteristics of good writing?
- 8) Is the study of literature still important? Why?
- 9) What lasting impressions/opinions, if any, have you formulated about Orwell and/or his work?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

By enrolling in this doctoral research study you have agreed to participate in a research study that hopes to explore and identify the example of George Orwell upon students enrolled in an English Honors program. Data for that study, which will be carried out through the spring semester of 2013, will be collected through the use of seminar sessions, a survey, observation, interviews a focus group . The four seminar sessions and the focus group will be approximately an hour in length, and will be conducted on Tuesdays, after GH 301 has been dismissed, and at two-week intervals. Scheduling for the two interviews – each of which will take no more than 15-20 minutes – will be done in person with the principal researcher listed below, who will be available to speak with participants each Tuesday during the semester, after GH 301 has been dismissed. Participants in this study are not required to take part in all research activities.

Participation in this study is entirely separate from GH 301, and will have no bearing or influence upon grades for that course, the instructor for which will not have access to the data collected in this study until after final course grades have been assigned. Data gathered in this study will be kept confidential. A case study will be constructed by the researcher for each participant. For the purposes of data collection, only your first name will be used. A pseudonym for each participant will be used upon publication of all data and findings.

Students taking part in this research study will receive compensation for participation. There will be eight different research activities used to gather data. Five of those activities will take place at a set time (four seminar sessions and one focus group), while the other three will take place at the participant's convenience (one survey and two interviews). All research activities, with the obvious exception of the written survey, will be recorded for data gathering purposes. Compensation will be \$25.00 per participant for each research activity.

If you decide during this study that you no longer want to participate, you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Financial compensation will be made to participants for each of the research activities that are undertaken. Completion of the entire study is not required in order to receive compensation for the research in which you have taken part.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please feel free to contact:

Mr. Christian W. Gallagher

Terre Haute, Indiana

Phone: (812) 208-0822

Email: cgallagher@sycamores.indstate.edu

or: Dr. Scott Davis

Terre Haute, Indiana

Phone: (812) 237-2954

Email: Henry.Davis@indstate.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, Indiana, 47809, or by phone at (812) 237-8217, or email IRB at irb@indstate.edu.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT SPEECH

Orwell Research Invitation

To those of you who have chosen to enroll in GH 301, “George Orwell,” I am extending an invitation to take part in a doctoral research study that I am conducting.

The study will be exploring the potential influence of the “Orwellian Model” upon students enrolled in an honors course. This study offers a unique opportunity to experience Orwell in much more depth with Dr. Sheldon, who has earned a place as one of the elite Orwell scholars in the world. Apart from being one of the most important political writers of the 20th century, George Orwell has much to teach us about perceptions and experience. These insights are seldom brought to fruition through the manner in which Orwell is commonly taught at the high school and undergraduate level. Hence the need for this study.

Because I was once a Graduate Assistant in the English Department here at ISU, I know firsthand how difficult it can be for students to finance their time here. For that reason, and because I am targeting a highly specific and elite demographic for this study, participants will be well compensated for their time.

There are eight different research activities within this study – one survey, four seminar sessions, two interviews and one focus group. Each participant will be compensated \$25.00 per research activity. While some of the activities will take approximately an hour (the seminar sessions and the focus group), others should take significantly less (the survey and the two interviews). In short, participants completing the entire study will be able to make \$200.00 for approximately eight hours of their time.

These research activities are in no way connected with graded course activities, and your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no bearing on your course work or grade.

This is a significant opportunity to participate in meaningful Orwellian scholarship and contribute to the existing knowledge base within literary education. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time, and I have implied consent forms that you will need to read and sign if you decide to take part in this research. Thank you for your time.

Christian Gallagher
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana State University