



George Orwell
A Clergyman's Daughter

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A CLERGYMAN'S DAUGHTER

GEORGE ORWELL was born Eric Arthur Blair in 1903 in Motihari, in modern Bihar, where his father worked in the Indian Civil Service. He grew up in Oxfordshire and was a King's Scholar at Eton from 1917 to 1921. Between 1922 and 1927, he worked for the Indian Imperial Police; after returning to England, he spent some years living as a tramp and casual manual worker, episodes that informed *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933 under his newly chosen pseudonym 'George Orwell'. His first novel, *Burmese Days*, which drew on his imperial experience, appeared in 1934. Between 1935 and 1940 he published three more novels and three non-fiction works, including *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), an account of his time fighting in the Spanish Civil War as a Republican volunteer. In 1936 he married Eileen O'Shaughnessy, who died in 1945. At the beginning of the Second World War Orwell, turned down for military service due to ill health, joined the Home Guard. From 1941 to 1943 he worked as a talks producer for the BBC Eastern Service, after which he became literary editor of the left-wing weekly *Tribune* for two years, to which he also contributed a column 'As I Please'. Throughout the war he wrote a large number of occasional articles and periodical essays. Orwell's political satire *Animal Farm*, was completed by the end of February 1944 but not published until August 1945, when it enjoyed enormous success. From 1946 he spent long periods on the isle of Jura in the Inner Hebrides working on the novel that became *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and struggling with worsening tuberculosis; the novel was published in 1949, again to great acclaim. Confined to a sanatorium, he married his second wife, Sonia Brownell, late in 1949; he died of a tubercular haemorrhage in January the following year.

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Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

NATHAN WADDELL

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INTRODUCTION

Readers who are unfamiliar with the plot may prefer to treat the Introduction as an Afterword.

CORRESPONDING with his friend Brenda Salkeld in December 1933, George Orwell noted that his novel *Burmese Days* (1934) was with his agent, Leonard Moore, and expressed his hope that the ‘next one’ would be ‘better’.¹ The ‘next one’ in question was *A Clergyman’s Daughter* (1935). Written between January and October 1934, it was the second of the four novels Orwell published in the 1930s, the others being *Burmese Days*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *Coming Up for Air* (1939). It has never enjoyed the comparative esteem of these novels, however, and tends to be viewed as the runt of the litter. Yet we should be wary here. *A Clergyman’s Daughter* gains much in re-reading, and remains valuable as a record of Orwell trying his hand at episodic storytelling. That this same point tends to be used against the novel may tell us less about its supposed failures and more about the priorities of those committed to the seeming ascendancy of so-called ‘organic’ forms, such as the literary romance or the novel of sentimentality. Orwell dismissed *A Clergyman’s Daughter* in a letter of 1936 to the novelist Henry Miller as ‘bollox’, before including the qualifying point that in it he ‘made some experiments’ that were ‘useful’ to him.² Peter Davison, the most influential Orwell scholar of the last half-century, adds the important detail that Orwell’s dissatisfaction with *A Clergyman’s Daughter* and with *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* may have had a lot to do with their muddled publication histories, not least because both novels were censored owing to concerns about accusations of obscenity and anxieties over libel to do with the naming of advertising companies and real-life individuals and businesses.³ That said, the truth is likely to have been more complex than Orwell’s self-directed criticism implies.

¹ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, x: *A Kind of Compulsion, 1903–1936*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 329.

² *Ibid.*, 496.

³ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, xvii: *I Belong to the Left, 1945*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 115, n. 2.

In a letter of 1946 to the anarchist literary critic George Woodcock, Orwell stated: 'There are two or three books which I am ashamed of and have not allowed to be reprinted or translated, and [*Keep the Aspidistra Flying*] is one of them. There is an even worse one called "A Clergyman's Daughter." This was written simply as an exercise and I oughtn't to have published it, but I was desperate for money, ditto when I wrote "Keep the A."' ⁴ Orwell reiterated this position in notes (signed 31 March 1945) for his literary executor, in which, faced with the prospect of a uniform edition of his books appearing after the Second World War, he described both *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* as 'silly potboilers' which he 'ought not to have published in the first place'. ⁵ L. P. Hartley, author of *The Go-Between* (1953), described *A Clergyman's Daughter* as 'neither new nor convincing', whereas the critic Geoffrey Stone was of the view that the novel's characters 'have not the self-sustaining quality of characters in memorable novels, being conceived as illustrations of the gloomy thesis' that 'life is no fun at all'. ⁶ Many readers today no doubt would agree with these estimations, but there are multiple senses in which this intriguingly experimental, sometimes tedious, yet always characteristic novel has yet to find the audience it deserves.

Influences and Narrative Structure

The story of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is extracted in large part from Orwell's early 1930s experiences, in particular the time he spent picking hops in the Kentish countryside from August to October 1931; his employment in 1932 and 1933 as a teacher at The Hawthorns, a private school for boys in Middlesex; and then his teaching work at Frays College, Uxbridge, in 1933. Much of the local colour of the book, especially its gently disparaging depictions of the fictional town of Knype Hill in its first and final chapters, is drawn from Orwell's knowledge of Southwold, the Suffolk seaside resort his parents

⁴ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, xviii: *Smothered under Journalism, 1946*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 411.

⁵ Orwell, *I Belong to the Left*, 114.

⁶ Jeffrey Meyers (ed.), *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage* (1975) (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 59, 64.

retired to in 1921.⁷ Certain passages in the novel also owe their details to the time Orwell spent researching urban destitution in London, the focal point for the second half of his non-fictional work *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). Searching for a way to combine these and other experiences into a narrative whole, Orwell was inspired by literature as much as by life. Famously, Orwell tried in the third chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter* to imitate the structure of the 'Circe' episode in James Joyce's modernist magnum opus *Ulysses* (1922). The title *A Clergyman's Daughter* echoes the title of James Stephens's *The Charmwoman's Daughter* (1912), just as its protagonist, Dorothy Hare, who is partly based on Salkeld, evokes the similarly named and similarly intelligent Dorothea Brooke, the protagonist of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872).⁸

Another possible influence is Samuel Butler, whose novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) aligns with *A Clergyman's Daughter* in positing that 'significant emotional and intellectual growth must inevitably lead to a loss of religious faith'.⁹ Charles Dickens is in the orbit of the novel, too, not only in the 'Micawberish' (p. 30) Mr Warburton, who could be a character straight out of *David Copperfield* (1850), but also in the miserly schoolteacher Mrs Creevy, who shares a deplorable educational philosophy with Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times* (1854). Yet another stimulus was George Gissing, whose novel *The Odd Women* (1893) Dorothy reads, leaning 'against a great gnarled beech tree' (p. 193). The image is apposite. Envisaging *A Clergyman's Daughter* as a kind of exploratory branch growing out from the trunk of literary tradition, Orwell aimed in this novel to investigate what he later called, in his 1948 essay on Gissing, 'the pressure of social conventions which are obviously absurd but which cannot be questioned'.¹⁰ Dorothy faces the pressure to extricate herself from social and religious habits that she knows, or comes to believe, are false. Yet the 'force of habit' (p. 222) is too strong to be denied, the internal admonitory conscience too obtrusive to be ignored. Dorothy's story ends

⁷ An extensive, anecdote-laden, and highly enjoyable account of Orwell's time in Southwold can be found in Ronald Binns, *Orwell in Southwold: His Life and Writings in a Suffolk Town* (York: Zoilus Press, 2018).

⁸ Gordon Bowker, *George Orwell* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), 159.

⁹ Gordon B. Beadle, 'George Orwell's Literary Studies of Poverty in England', *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 24 (1978), 188–201, at 195.

¹⁰ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, xix: *It Is What I Think, 1947–1948*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 348.

more or less where it begins, with her making costumes for school-children. This closing vignette invites readers to think less about Dorothy's supposed inability to leave Knype Hill and do better for herself elsewhere, and more about the power of provincial routine to structure the terms of a life.

We are introduced to Dorothy, who is in her late twenties, in the novel's very first sentence. This tells of an alarm clock exploding 'like a horrid little bomb of bell metal' (p. 3). The simile is characteristically Orwellian, anticipating how the ticking of Mrs Wisbeach's alarm clock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* marks 'the sinister passage of time', and affecting Dorothy in a way that foreshadows her experience of mental and physical violence at the hands of Mr Warburton.¹¹ Badgered and manipulated by her 'irritable' (p. 6), standoffish father, the Rector, Charles Hare, Dorothy manages the household finances and does good work for the Knype Hill parish by delivering cornplasters to old ladies, gossiping with housewives, and keeping 'sour-smelling' (p. 39) children entertained. Mr Warburton, a middle-aged philanderer and mediocre artist, pursues her. The novel's first chapter ends with Dorothy struggling in his arms, 'violently and for a moment helplessly' (p. 62), before, in Chapter II, she awakes in London, confused about her identity. Time has passed: 'an interregnum in her life of not quite eight days' (p. 73). Dorothy has suffered a traumatic episode—a consequence of 'the exhausting and intolerable pressures' she has undergone.¹² Orwell's descriptions of Dorothy coming into consciousness (pp. 67–9) evoke the strange impressions of a wounded mind—an emphasis reiterated later on in the novel when Dorothy imagines that the 'clotted dark red blossoms' of an ash tree look like 'festerings from a wound' (p. 216). She falls in with Nobby, Flo, and Charlie, three vagrants with whom she finds work in the hopfields south-east of London. A while later, Dorothy remembers who she is, and where she has come from, before spending a freezing night in the company of the destitute in Trafalgar Square, an experience Orwell himself underwent in August 1931.¹³ Thereafter, she works for the tyrannical and 'nasty' (p. 165) Mrs Creevy, before returning to Knype Hill and to her old life. A circular story, then, with stickiness as one of

¹¹ George Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) (London: Penguin, 1989), 37.

¹² Loraine Saunders, *The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell: The Novels from 'Burmese Days' to 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 61.

¹³ Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, 212–14.

its guiding motifs (this being another link to *Middlemarch*)—from the glue pot Dorothy uses to make costumes, to the gloopy adhesions of domestic habit, from which she does not escape.

Dorothy's return to 'respectable society' (p. 146) is a return from the unexpected to the predictable, from the unsympathetic worlds beyond Knype Hill to the Rectory. Upon returning to this world, she sees it for what it is: empty and unfulfilling. But Dorothy internalizes that knowledge without doing much about it—the only changes she undergoes are 'secret ones' (p. 216), interior reorientations in thought that leave the outward structures of her life intact. Here, circularity can be taken to mean entrapment, as the literary theorist Terry Eagleton has pointed out: 'the movement to freedom and renewal, here as in all of Orwell's novels, ends in failure. Life is hopeless and sterile, but the worst false consciousness is to think you can change it.'¹⁴ This circular journey also reflects the novel's search for a form with which to do justice to Dorothy's traumatic dislocations. *A Clergyman's Daughter* can never quite make up its mind about what sort of novel it wants to be. Domestic comedy, experimental prose-drama, a novel of faith tested and lost, educational satire—the book manages to be all of these things without settling on a unifying emphasis. And this would seem like a flaw in the novel's design were it not for the possibility that this very same 'lack' of integration might, in fact, be precisely the book's point: its attempt to embody, at the level of generic shifts and episodic transitions, Dorothy's struggle to find rest in a changing world. *A Clergyman's Daughter* stages these transitions at the level of rhetoric, moving 'from the comforts of cliché and jargon' in Knype Hill towards 'the difficulty and intensity of expression that occurs' in those places (London, the countryside, Mrs Creevy's school) where 'these conventions are stripped away'.¹⁵ Dorothy finds an ounce of peace in convention—in the 'unutterably familiar' (p. 222) smell of glue. Having pulled herself away from different kinds of social and psychological constraint, she chooses to glue herself back into the 'pious concentration' (p. 224) upon which duty to her community relies.

¹⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 89.

¹⁵ Lynette Hunter, *George Orwell: The Search for a Voice* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1984), 42.

Evidently, then, *A Clergyman's Daughter* is a novel filled with imaginative interest. But, as we have seen, Orwell was not happy with it in retrospect, and thought, soon after he finished writing it, that he had 'made a muck of it', whatever his best intentions had been.¹⁶ The scholar Claire Hopley puts this down to bad structure. The 'problem with *A Clergyman's Daughter* as a whole', she writes, 'is not that it is badly written—it contains some of Orwell's most evocative prose—but that it is poorly composed, the incipient novel never really developing from the pieces from which it is derived'.¹⁷ It may well be that the story of the novel is, to use its own words, 'too thin a story altogether' (p. 143); that it is the kind of 'badly written novel where everyone talks a little too much in character' (p. 152). The subject of the novel is a succession of 'strange, anomalous position[s]' (p. 170) that Dorothy finds herself in, which is itself embodied in a strange amalgam of anomalous styles. Yet for all that, there is a charm about *A Clergyman's Daughter* which is not easily argued away. Some of the book—especially aspects of the hop-picking sequence and some of the school material in its second half—could perhaps have been trimmed a little, but the section that is often seen as the unanswerable failure of the text, the Joycean stretch at its centre, is not as disastrous as many have claimed, and there is much else in the novel that deserves our attention.

Southwold, Hops, and Schools

Consider, first of all, Knype Hill, the fictional settlement with which Orwell re-imagined Southwold as a place of small-town, godless blather and abominable architecture. The 'rosy-gilled faces' of those who peer out from the windows of the Conservative Club, 'like chubby goldfish from an aquarium pane' (p. 11), anticipate the nighttime Londoners satirized in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, who slide 'to and fro, avoiding contact, barely aware of one another's existence, like fish in an aquarium tank'.¹⁸ The 'low, barely undulating East Anglian landscape' (p. 11) is not much better, and neither is the Blifil-Gordon sugar-beet refinery, which looms unsettlingly over the town's jumbled

¹⁶ Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, 351.

¹⁷ Claire Hopley, 'Orwell's Language of Waste Land and Trench', *College Literature*, 11, no. 1 (1984), 59–70, at 60.

¹⁸ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 77.

rows of 'vile' cottages and 'sham-picturesque villas inhabited by the coffee brigade', and an 'imitation castle of dark red brick' (pp. 11–12), the last a folly that reflects the corresponding ridiculousness of the settlement it adjoins. Gordon Bowker, one of Orwell's biographers, has stressed that although interwar Southwold was old-fashioned, it was nevertheless a little more interesting than Orwell lets on—Bowker writes of its attractiveness to artists and of its established Anglo-Indian ex-colonial community, for example.¹⁹ Still, in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Orwell made Southwold's passéism his priority. Knype Hill is dreary, dull, and dilapidated, its antiquatedness conveyed as much by its stiffened locals as by the 'elderly bicycle' (p. 24) Dorothy uses to travel round the town.

Orwell channelled a lot of his ill feeling about Southwold into his depiction of characters like the ironmonger, Mr Twiss, 'a weazened, leather-coloured old man', who peers out of his doorway 'with veiled malevolence' (p. 31), and especially Mrs Semprill, the most eminent of Knype Hill's many blabbermouths. After all, it is Mrs Semprill who circulates the rumour that Dorothy has eloped from Knype Hill following an encounter with Mr Warburton, during which she was 'dressed in scanty attire, and appeared to be under the influence of alcohol' (p. 100)—neither accusation is true. In this respect, Mrs Semprill is in many ways simply representative of the 'generalised suspicion' (p. 204) that characterizes Knype Hill at large, what with its culture of 'prying eyes' (p. 102) and a high street that looks 'so ideally peaceful on a casual visit', yet in fact has 'an enemy or a creditor behind every window' (p. 28). More straightforward criticisms of Southwold come through in Orwell's characteristic fascination with stench. The skewedness of the Pithers residence, for example, is indicated not only by its 'badly fitting door' (p. 40), but also by its hellish kitchen, which is 'oppressively hot, evil-smelling and saturated with ancient dust' (p. 41). A 'melancholy smell of boiled cabbage and dish-water' (p. 40) oozes out from it, anticipating the 'perennially damp' (p. 43) bedding in the malodorous bedroom. Orwell's scorn is targeted most forcefully at Knype Hill's inward-looking paranoia, and with particular force at Mrs Semprill's mendacious callousness, which is a form of proto-doublethink: 'the one thing you could never be certain of with Mrs Semprill [was] whether she told

¹⁹ Bowker, *George Orwell*, 72. See also Binns, *Orwell in Southwold*, 15–16.

her lies consciously and deliberately *as* lies, or whether, in her strange and disgusting mind, she somehow succeeded in believing them' (p. 102).

With Knype Hill at its core, Dorothy's story is on so many levels a chronicle of finding herself in, and then trying to break free from, the limitations of differently trapping environments. Reiterated images and settings of constriction emphasize Dorothy's struggle to situate herself in time and space—from the dilapidated, worm-eaten Rectory where she lives with her father, with its front garden 'choked with ragged fir-trees' (p. 12); to the residence of Sir Thomas, who keeps her like a lady in the attic in 'a dusty, forlorn room at the top of the house' (p. 146); to the deadening environment of Ringwood House Academy (with its funereal clock), where her position as a teacher is 'virtually that of a slave' (p. 165). Dorothy finds that Mr Warburton is 'a difficult man to shake off' (p. 32) and that she has to work hard 'to hold her own' in the face of the 'meandering arguments' in which he delights 'to entangle her' (p. 55). A reference to 'the shop-debts' she has to manage on her father's behalf, for example, is accompanied by the image of 'bindweed in the peas' (p. 106; see also p. 49). When Dorothy finds herself in Trafalgar Square, she encounters 'a knot of people who take it in turns to sit down' (p. 129) on its benches. Southbridge, the 'repellent suburb' in which Ringwood House is located, contains 'labyrinths of meanly decent streets, all so indistinguishably alike, with their ranks of semi-detached houses, their privet and laurel hedges and plots of ailing shrubs at the crossroads', all of which imply a space in which 'you could lose yourself [...] almost as easily as in a Brazilian forest' (p. 149). The fact that Dorothy makes breakfast for Nobby (p. 85) just as she does for her father proves how difficult it is to escape the male-dominated domesticity of Knype Hill Rectory, an idea expressed more obviously in the almost exactly identical rendering of her 'to do' list at the novel's start and at its end.

It is not quite the case that Dorothy *seeks* to leave the thorny entanglements of the knotty-sounding Knype Hill. Moreover, she is not convinced by Mr Warburton's view that, if she returns to Knype Hill after her escapades in London, her life 'will be a little bleaker, a little fuller of those deadly little jobs that are shoved off on to lonely women' (p. 212), not least because she's disgusted by the prospect of the alternative he offers her: a life lived amid the reek of his 'harsh

odour of maleness' (p. 214), in the company of a man whose sense of shame has been 'killed by overwork in a lifetime of squalid affairs with women' (p. 214). But in going to the Kentish countryside, to central London, and to Southbridge, Dorothy nevertheless finds herself removed from Knype Hill's smelly, rheumatic, non-metropolitan, and suspicious idiosyncrasies. Whether she is or is not a caged bird (pp. 115–16) who doesn't know how to fly, or even that she can or should fly, is for individual readers to decide. Dorothy's changing circumstances give her a series of illuminating contrasts between the world she has known and the worlds she comes to know, even if, at times, the rejuvenating effects of these comparisons—for example, what she perceives as the sun's redeeming of 'the labyrinths of little dingy-coloured houses, the great chaotic factories, the miry canals and derelict building lots littered with rusty boilers and overgrown by smoke-blackened weeds' (p. 205) visible on her train journey from Liverpool Street Station—vanish as quickly as they arrive. Having travelled back to Knype Hill, Dorothy settles into her old routine 'with astonishing swiftness' (p. 217). All the same, it is not unequivocally obvious that this is a bad thing, not least because, in losing her faith, she finds a renewed pleasure in the satisfying labour of craftwork.

It is clear that, already at this early stage in his fiction-writing career, Orwell knew how to recycle the 'multitudinous, urgent details' (p. 106) of his own experience. Orwell's most famous biographer, D. J. Taylor, describes this side of *A Clergyman's Daughter* as a split between efficiency and investigation, between 'Orwell making use—sometimes clumsily, sometimes with considerable subtlety—of material drawn from his own life', on the one hand, and 'personal experience, peculiar to the author, grafted on to an imagined psychology that is much less able to deal with it', on the other.²⁰ The most direct link in this respect between Orwell's life and the plot of *A Clergyman's Daughter* lies in how the novel makes use of his time in Kent, an episode he chronicled in a sequence of diary entries written between August and October 1931, in the essay 'Hop-Picking' (1931), and—lightly re-imagined—in the second chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter* itself. The chapter begins with Dorothy waking up in the street after her encounter with Mr Warburton, moves through

²⁰ D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003), 138, 139.

Orwell's astonishing effort to capture the process of her mind restructuring itself from the 'paradox' of 'a wordless perspective', and then settles on Dorothy's experiences with Nobby, Flo, and Charlie as they walk the long distance along the Old Kent Road to Cairns's farm.²¹ Here, Dorothy works hard at picking hops, and Orwell puts in a great deal of effort to draw narrative interest out of the fact that, to quote from his diary, one day 'at hop-picking' is 'very much like another'.²²

Much of the enjoyment to be had from the countryside sequence comes from Orwell's detailing of the technicalities of hop-picking and from his evocative descriptions of the smell and feel of getting in among leaves and branches. He also focuses, as he does in his diary, on the harsh realities of the hop-picker's employment, accentuating its painful physicality, long hours, dirtiness, and low remuneration in ways that look ahead to the exhaustions and soilings of physical labour chronicled in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Likewise, much of the pleasure in Orwell's view of the Dickensian-sounding Ringwood House, the school at which Dorothy works after she survives her night in Trafalgar Square, comes from the fact that he barely veils his disgust at its educational standards. Like the 'stupid' and 'mechanical' (p. 88) processes of hop-picking, teaching at Ringwood House, when Dorothy first arrives there, is a matter of 'mechanical' (p. 158) tutelage co-ordinated by a woman, Mrs Creevy, who grasps at what she wants 'as ruthlessly as any machine' (p. 150). Dorothy's story as a whole is in many ways an education, but what she finds at Ringwood House is education done by numbers: its pupils are 'anaemic' and shabbily dressed (p. 161); 'dazed by a dull, mechanical rigmarole' (p. 166); and experts in learning by rote. The fact that the pupils are good at 'the parroting of ready-made French phrases' (p. 159) indicates their quasi-animal status, just as it signals the 'beastliness of living in Mrs Creevy's house' (pp. 158–9)—a trial that Dorothy, as her lodger, is forced dejectedly to endure.

Orwell finds it hard to keep himself out of this part of the novel. The narrative voice slips in and out of Dorothy's perspective, conveying Orwell's concerns about the 'essential taint' (p. 182)—the profit imperatives—of high-cost education, a view derived from his

²¹ Keith Williams, "'The Unpaid Agitator': Joyce's Influence on George Orwell and James Agee", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 36 (1999), 729–63, at 733.

²² Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, 225.

experiences teaching in a succession of private schools.²³ But like all of the other sequences in the novel, the Ringwood House episode is carefully patterned in accordance with the thematic emphases of *A Clergyman's Daughter* as a whole. Dorothy's time at the school can be understood as a sequence of encounters between restrictive educational and interpersonal philosophies, just as the 'suet stupor of boredom' (p. 185) its pupils have to endure in their classes with Mr Booth provides yet another instance of an entrenchment that may very well not be escapable. It is also difficult not to see in this part of the novel a foretaste of Orwell's angry denunciations in 'Such, Such Were the Joys' (1952) of St Cyprian's School in Eastbourne, which he attended from 1911 to 1916. Mrs Creevy's exploitative philosophy of education is of a piece with the 'confidence trick' played, as Orwell saw it, by St Cyprian's, just as Dorothy's interest in Shakespeare in the face of Mrs Creevy's anti-Shakespearean prejudice (p. 180), which she shares with the parents of her pupils (p. 174), anticipates Winston Smith's inexplicable voicing of the word 'Shakespeare' as a kind of saving remnant amid a very different brand of exploitative intolerance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).²⁴ Not for nothing, after all, did Orwell give Winston's strict and controlling torturer, O'Brien, the 'air of a schoolmaster'.²⁵

Kinds of Faith: Religion and Politics

Unsurprisingly for a book with the word 'clergyman' in its title, *A Clergyman's Daughter* is centrally concerned with the question of religion: with the idiosyncrasies of pious and not-so-pious communities, with the differences between religious traditions, with what it means to have one's faith tested by challenging circumstances. If, in one sense, it is a novel about constriction, in another it is concerned with how the binding threads of religion can be loosened and not so easily stitched back together. It offers 'a potent exposure, in Dickensian satiric mode, of a grotesquely flawed Church of England clergyman,

²³ Tim Crook, 'Orwell the Teacher: Such, Such Were the Joys', *George Orwell Studies*, 2, no. 1 (2017), 38–51.

²⁴ Orwell, *It Is What I Think*, 361.

²⁵ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), with an introduction by Julian Symons (London: Everyman's Library, 1992), 279.

his repressed daughter and dispirited congregation'.²⁶ The novel bears comparison in this respect with F. M. Mayor's *The Rector's Daughter* (1924), another book with a senescent clergyman, a decaying rectory, and crestfallen churchgoers, and a title that appears—possibly as an allusion—on the posters noticed by Flo and Charlie en route to the hopfields (p. 69). Dorothy's parish work is 'profoundly discouraging': she has wearying conversations with wearied people, and few of the women she visits seem 'to have even a conception of the Christian life'—she knows that half of them are 'at heart atheistical in a vague unreasoning way' (p. 39). The St Athelstan's congregation is beset by the influence of 'Science and Free Thought' (p. 51), which has helped the spread of atheism in the community. Yet the parishioners are not helped by the 'dullness' (p. 52) of the church services either, nor by the sense that the church building looms in their consciousness 'like a leaden sphinx, its single bell tolling funereally boom! boom! boom!' (p. 6).

A "difficult" kind of man' (p. 15), the petulant Rector, Charles Hare, similarly has the quasi-mythical bearing of 'a rather exceptionally aloof and unhelpful sphinx' (p. 20). He performs his clerical duties scrupulously but has little interest in doing more than that, leaving the day-to-day care of his home and parish largely in his daughter's perennially occupied hands. And while Dorothy is 'fond of her father' (p. 192) in spite of his faults, and while Charles does try to get in touch with his daughter during her absence, albeit 'in a round-about and not very helpful way' (p. 142), the faults themselves are hard to ignore. Nitpicking with Dorothy and extremely bad with domestic finances, Charles is prone to live 'in the world of his imagination', in 'an imaginary golden past in which such vulgar things as butchers' bills simply did not exist' (p. 24). He dismisses what he calls 'lower-class' (p. 23) people and habits, and he is at a loss during Dorothy's absence, when he is 'obliged to prepare his own breakfast—yes, actually to mess about with a vulgar black kettle and rashers of Danish bacon—with his own sacerdotal hands' (p. 142). Such passages indicate that although there is much to despise in Charles Hare, there is also much to admire in the Dickensian horse-play of his characterization.

²⁶ Michael G. Brennan, *George Orwell and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 41.

Charles's false teeth broadly align him with another denture-sporting Orwellian character: George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air* (1939). They also suggest that his ageing body is of a piece with the crumbling Rectory he calls home. Like Mrs Creevy's 'dismally cold' residence, with its 'damp, chilly feeling, as though fires were rarely lighted in it' (p. 153), the Rectory smells of dust and damp plaster (p. 3), its 'dilapidated conservatory, whose roof-panes, from the action of time and dirt, [are] dim, green, and iridescent like old Roman glass' (p. 46), further contributing to its air of disintegrating antiquity. The under-sized towels with which Dorothy has to dry herself (p. 5) reflect the 'poverty-stricken' (p. 24) condition of the Rectory's affairs, just as the 'worm-eaten' chairs and 'old, dark, defaced steel engravings' (p. 13) on the walls of its dining-room indicate something rotten at its core. Orwell's fondness for animal resemblances is conspicuous here, with the revelation that the new church organ replaces an old one that reminded Charles 'of a cow with the asthma' (p. 27), an expense that plunges the parish coffers still further into barely manageable debt. Charles maintains standards by insisting on the purchase of expensive fish for dinner (p. 25), while presumably refusing to spend money on the upkeep of the Rectory, which is as run-down as the church building it serves (p. 26). In all these ways, Rector and Rectory alike confirm Orwell's sense, urged in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, that most clergymen (and most schoolmasters, too) live a 'shabby-genteel' life, tensely marked by financial angst and 'unwarrantable extravagance'.²⁷

Of course, there is a lot of entertainment in all of this, and Orwell's 'unremitting mockery of established religion' is blackly comic.²⁸ But running alongside the comedy is a more serious attention to the viability of faith in a modern world said to be marked by 'hateful ennui' (p. 193). A far more consequential weariness than the boredom the girls in Mrs Creevy's school have to endure under the tutelage of the chemistry teacher with no chemistry, Mr Booth, this deeper ennui sounds more than an echo of Arthur Schopenhauer's suspicion that existence is inherently valueless.²⁹ Dorothy's experiences away from

²⁷ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), with an introduction by Richard Hoggart (London: Penguin, 1989), 115–16.

²⁸ Brennan, *George Orwell and Religion*, 42.

²⁹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, ed. and trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2004), 53.

Knype Hill lead her briefly to entertain the inevitability of a 'deadly emptiness [...] at the heart of things' (p. 220). Her faith is not restored by her return to her beginnings, but she does recover 'the outward habits of piety' (p. 222) which have structured her life for so long. Yet the satisfactions of these rituals are short-lived. Dorothy finds 'uselessness' (p. 222) in prayer, preferring instead to embrace the more down-to-earth consolations of getting on with a day's work. As a result, the narrative tone at the end of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is hard to judge. The sight of Dorothy working away into the night, 'pasting strip after strip of paper into place' (p. 224) for the local schoolchildren's amateur dramatics, can be interpreted as a genial, maybe even stoical return to normality, as a loop back from the quasi-exotic climes of London and its surroundings to the possibly stifling, perhaps comforting routines of Knype Hill. However, with its emphasis on the darkling sky, this closing scene just as plausibly evokes the idea that 'life on earth [...] is meaningless, dark and dreadful' (p. 221)—in short, that what lies at the heart of things is not some anodyne blank but a conceptual and existential void.

Dorothy's wrestling with the meaning of faith convinces her that she needs 'to stiffen her courage and remake the whole structure of her mind' (p. 220). How far she gets with this endeavour is not for readers to know—the novel ends only a few pages later. But we do know that this 'restructuring' convinces her that there is nothing that can take religion's place in her life. Anticipating Orwell's descriptions of the 'huge, terrible, and glittering' ideals of the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, those visions of 'a world of steel and concrete, of monstrous machines and terrifying weapons', Dorothy is convinced that there is 'no possible substitute for faith; no pagan acceptance of life as sufficient to itself, no pantheistic cheer-up stuff, no pseudo-religion of "progress" with visions of glittering Utopias and ant-heaps of steel and concrete' (p. 221).³⁰ In adopting this perspective she is following in the footsteps of her father's testy rejection of a certain understanding of progressive politics (pp. 21–2). She is also demonstrating that her experiences away from Knype Hill have given her a deep-rooted scepticism towards the rhetorical excesses of those who promise cure-all solutions to complex socio-political problems. At the start of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, Dorothy barely grasps 'the difference

³⁰ Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 77.

between Liberal and Conservative or Socialist and Communist' (p. 28) principles. There are few signs that much has changed, in this respect, by the novel's end, but at the very least Dorothy has shown that she can see through the pledges of those claiming to have straightforward answers to the problems raised by the 'menacing future' (p. 213).

As *A Clergyman's Daughter* winds down, its protagonist is on the verge of some kind of modest political awakening. This is not to say, however, that the novel more generally is apolitical, or that it offers no responses to the socio-political and economic circumstances of its day. *A Clergyman's Daughter* is less obviously 'engaged' with socio-political questions than the novels Orwell wrote on either side of it—*Burmese Days* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*—and it certainly has very little of the political sensitivity of texts like *Coming Up for Air*, *Animal Farm* (1945), and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but it does refer to several issues with which these works are preoccupied, the problem of class and the injustices of wealth being prominent among them. For instance, through the character of Victor Stone, the Church schoolmaster, *A Clergyman's Daughter* registers, in passing, the anti-Bolshevik sentiments (p. 49) that motivate Mr Lackersteen in *Burmese Days*.³¹ And although the 'horrible communism' (p. 140) of those down-and-outs in Trafalgar Square is not of the Bolshevik variety, their plight indicates what Dorothy understands as 'the mysterious power of money' (p. 148)—the power that can put people, as it does Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, in dire straits at one moment and leave them flush with cash at another. At the literal and symbolic midpoint of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is an extended depiction of the 'horrible futility' (p. 170) of destitution, one that draws an implicit contrast between the bony frames and 'wind-nipped faces' (p. 134) of those living on the streets and the 'class-instinct' (p. 147) of those who, like Sir Thomas, seemingly care so little about 'visions of poverty and of escape from poverty' (p. 214). The novel's gentle mockery of 'electioneering' (p. 31), an attitude established principally through its sardonic representations of Mr Blifil-Gordon's by-election campaign, anticipates similar material in *Coming Up for Air*, but it also arguably reveals how difficult it can be to incorporate political themes into domestic stories in a convincing way.

³¹ George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (1934), with an introduction by Emma Larkin (London: Penguin, 2009), 245.

More persuasive is the novel's attentiveness to the ways individuals reproduce large-scale political dynamics in the smaller spaces of home and work. Blifil-Gordon's 'unceasing' requests for votes from his prospective constituents, a strategy deployed with a 'largesse of smiles' (p. 29), are reiterated in the 'ceaseless canvassing and impudent bluff' (p. 164) with which Mrs Creevy operates Ringwood House. These 'disgusting antics' (p. 31) in turn evoke Charles Hare's tyrannical relationship with Dorothy, who lives a 'slavish, worrying life' (p. 212) not only in his household but also in the comparably 'tyrannous' (p. 195) company of Mrs Creevy, who oozes the same 'malignant' respectability as Mrs Wisbeach in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.³² John Sutherland's claim that *A Clergyman's Daughter* might well have been 'called "The Clergyman's Slave"' extends to the novel's account of Dorothy's time at Ringwood House, which turns her simultaneously into a 'slave' (p. 165) and a slave-driver (pp. 186, 195).³³ Dorothy rejects Mr Warburton's confident prophesying of what her future will look and feel like (pp. 212–13) at least in part because his smelliness presumably reminds her, at some level, of her father's 'stuffy', 'masculine' odour (p. 6), and therefore of the stifling patriarchy it denotes. And—as a kind of authorial stand-in for Orwell, who had a strong antipathy to prophecy—she also counters Warburton's predictions, owing to their kinship with the 'visionary' mindset she comes to disparage.³⁴

All of which is to say that *A Clergyman's Daughter* does, in fact, engage with politics, but that the nature of its engagement is oblique—a matter of peeking round corners and of subtle evocations. Orwell's customary warmth towards the poor and destitute comes through in the precision with which he attends to the effects of open-air exposure and to the 'bitter cold' (p. 129) of Trafalgar Square, whose denizens stamp and clap in a 'frenzy' as they 'feel the deadly cold penetrate to their bones' (p. 131). Dorothy's 'bone-deep memory of the cold' (p. 180) evokes other kinds of skeletal imagery, too, ranging from the 'creaking sound' of Mrs Mayfill rising from her chair, which suggests

³² Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 24.

³³ John Sutherland, *Orwell's Nose: A Pathological Biography* (2016) (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 139.

³⁴ As Orwell asserted in 'Spilling the Spanish Beans' (1937): 'All prophecies are wrong' (*The Complete Works of George Orwell*, xi: *Facing Unpleasant Facts, 1937–1939*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 46).

the noise of ‘bones grating against one another’ (p. 9), to the idea that Dorothy’s faith ‘had once, like the bones in a living frame, held all her life together’ (p. 188). It also suggests that the painful physical experience of deprivation is a ghastly secret of society at large, something the well-heeled put out of their thoughts, much as Charles Hare hopes to keep his daughter out of mind during her absence from Knype Hill, like ‘a skeleton in a distant and well-locked cupboard’ (p. 192). And although Dorothy’s turn, at the novel’s end, to the pleasures of craftwork derives from her recognition that ‘faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable’ (p. 223), it is also on one level a turning away from the distantly political implications of the kind of craftwork she pursues. The jackboots for the schoolchildren’s plays, which hover just ‘offstage’, as it were, because Dorothy spends most of the novel thinking about how hard they are to make, might in their own small way signify the stamping tread and ‘accusing image[s]’ (p. 65) of a decade increasingly given over to the sound of goose-stepping boots threatening to stamp on human faces, forever.

Modernism and James Joyce

If *A Clergyman’s Daughter* was written in the shadow of politics, it was also written in the wake of established literary experiment. Orwell wrote his 1930s novels ‘with an intense consciousness that he was writing after the heady days of modernism’.³⁵ At times this ‘consciousness’ is expressed through explicit references, in the novels themselves, to the work of Orwell’s modern and modernist contemporaries. An example is Gordon Comstock’s supposedly ‘fine’ scorn of the writers George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis, and Ernest Hemingway in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*.³⁶ At other points, however, the intensity of Orwell’s response to modernism’s experiments in form and theme comes across in the very fabric of his prose. There is a sense in which the broadly realist style of Orwell’s 1930s writing can itself be deemed a response to the perceptual mystifications of certain kinds of modernist technique.

³⁵ Michael Levenson, ‘The Fictional Realist: Novels of the 1930s’, in John Rodden (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59–75, at 59.

³⁶ Orwell, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, 179.

'Realist truth-telling' can be seen as 'a rejoinder to the culture of fantasy and escape' that many critics in the period discerned in modernism's thematic and stylistic elaborations—in its so-called drift towards obscurity, allusiveness, elitism, solipsism, and difficulty-for-difficulty's-sake.³⁷ Yet if modernist writing had fallen out of favour to an extent by the end of the 1930s, as Orwell himself acknowledged, it still exerted a powerful grip on interwar writers well into that decade. And nowhere is this clearer in Orwell's work than in the third chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, which imitates the form of that door-stopper of a modernist novel, Joyce's *Ulysses*. The key response to modernism in Orwell's 1930s writing is not rejection, but homage.

This is not necessarily to say that *A Clergyman's Daughter* is Joycean through and through. There is a 'lark' (p. 77) followed by a symbolic plunge in the novel, although these are not quite the lark and the plunge experienced by the titular character of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). And while one of Orwell's biographers, Michael Shelden, rightly points out that 'everything about *Ulysses* fascinated [Orwell]', that he was 'amazed by Joyce's ambitious experiments with style and structure', and that he 'enjoyed the sexual frankness of the novel, and admired Joyce's way of combining earthy realism with high intellectual concerns', certain passages in *A Clergyman's Daughter* point to other kinds of modernist affiliation.³⁸ One such instance is the early scene in which Miss Mayfill struggles to her feet 'like some disjointed wooden creature picking itself up by sections' (p. 9), which carries more than a whiff of Lady Fredigonde's similarly marionettish rising from a chair in the opening paragraphs of *The Apes of God* (1930), the epic riposte to *Ulysses* written by Joyce's friendly enemy Wyndham Lewis. The figure of Ralph Blifil-Gordon, the 'epicene youth of twenty' who is 'given to the writing of sub-Eliot *vers libre* poems' (p. 27), pokes fun at those driven to imitate the poetry of T. S. Eliot, the modernist poet whom Orwell held in high regard. But the most essential point of connection is undoubtedly with Joyce. The narrator's claim that '[t]he best brothel-scenes in literature have been written, without exception, by pious believers or pious unbelievers' (p. 34)—which anticipates Dorothy's time at 'Mary's', the 'well-known refuge of prostitutes' (p. 114)—is probably

³⁷ Levenson, 'The Fictional Realist', 61.

³⁸ Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (1991) (London: Politico's, 2006), 198.

a reference to Joyce, just as it is possible that the five-part structure of *A Clergyman's Daughter* is meant to echo the quintipartite form of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).³⁹

Along with works as varied as Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), and W. Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden* (1927), *Ulysses* was, as Salkeld later recalled, one of Orwell's 'best books'.⁴⁰ Orwell admitted to Salkeld that he was initially confused by the novel's mythic shape and purpose. He stated to her in a letter of March 1933 that he was sure neither why Joyce chose to structure *Ulysses* as a sequence of 'tricks' involving 'successive changes of style' nor why he so carefully retained throughout the 'parallelism' with Homer's *Odyssey*, a link announced in Joyce's title and then elaborated point for point throughout its eighteen episodic chapters.⁴¹ By December of that same year Orwell was moving towards a firmer grip on things, yet he remained uncertain about Joyce's ventures in Homeric likeness. Foregrounding correspondences between characters, Orwell remarked:

As to the design [of *Ulysses*] itself, so far as I understand it, it doesn't seem to me to be altogether successful. The incidents are clearly based on the 'Odyssey'. You can identify a lot of them. Bloom is Odysseus, Dedalus is Telemachus, Mrs B is Penelope (complete with suitors), Gertie Macdowell is Nausicaa, Bella what's her name who keeps the brothel is Circe etc. I fancy Joyce's idea in basing it on the 'Odyssey' is that he means to say 'There is the Bronze Age—here is us'. Nevertheless the book does seem to be to split up into a lot of unrelated or thinly related incidents.⁴²

Nine months or so later, in another letter to Salkeld, the emphasis fell on Orwell's sense of his own apparent inadequacies as a novelist:

I rather wish I had never read [*Ulysses*]. It gives me an inferiority complex. When I read a book like that and then come back to my own work, I feel like a eunuch who has taken a course in voice production and can pass himself off fairly well as a bass or a baritone, but if you listen closely you can hear the good old squeak just the same as ever.⁴³

Awed, impressed, disconcerted: these were Orwell's responses to a work by which he would always be enthralled. Returning to Joyce's novel in his essay 'Inside the Whale' (1940), he wrote: 'When you

³⁹ That said, Orwell described *Portrait* as 'a commonplace book compared with "Ulysses"' (*A Kind of Compulsion*, 329).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 327.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 348.

read certain passages in *Ulysses* you feel that Joyce's mind and your mind are one, that he knows all about you though he has never heard your name, that there exists some world outside time and space in which you and he are together.⁴⁴

Orwell worked on *A Clergyman's Daughter* throughout his correspondence with Salkeld. The novel took shape, that is, alongside his attempts to understand why and how *Ulysses* mattered as an example of specifically modern writing. It could even be said that *A Clergyman's Daughter* was a product of these efforts, or at least that some of it was. One interpretation of Orwell's novel would situate it as an exploratory consequence of his fascination with a modernist writer whose work he deeply admired, yet whose significance he could not fully articulate. The fruits of this investigative labour emerge in the third chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, most of which represents Orwell's attempt to capture the style of the 'Circe' or 'nighttown' episode of *Ulysses*. In this section of Joyce's novel, what Orwell called the Irish writer's efforts 'to present life more or less as it is lived' take generically dramatic form.⁴⁵ Orwell followed suit. In this part of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, performance directions introduce the attitudes and motivations of characters as they would be established in a stage play, and speakers' names followed by colons mark the beginnings of an extraordinary assortment of speeches, outbursts, and lyrical vocalizations (an approach that has been called 'radio-phonetic').⁴⁶ Dorothy's night-time experiences in Trafalgar Square are dramatically rendered: personalities talk, bicker, and sing songs around her as she participates in the 'game of musical chairs' (p. 129) that structures the nocturnal interactions of central London's rootless inhabitants, who speak in a variety of socially and geographically particular registers.⁴⁷

The typography and layout of the third chapter of *A Clergyman's Daughter* mark its most obvious debt to *Ulysses*, just as they extend the form and function of the dramatic exchanges in which Dorothy

⁴⁴ *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, xii: *A Patriot After All, 1940–1941*, ed. Peter Davison, with Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (London: Secker & Warburg, 1998), 87–8.

⁴⁵ Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, 326.

⁴⁶ Tim Crook, 'George Orwell and the Radio Imagination', in Richard Lance Keeble (ed.), *George Orwell Now!* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 193–208, at 195.

⁴⁷ A full analysis of these registers is given in Roger Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1995), 109–18.

participates at a much earlier point in the novel (pp. 47–8).⁴⁸ Orwell teases with Joycean precedent, too, when he characterizes the monologue of one of the Trafalgar Square denizens, Mr Tallboys, as ‘a stream of nonsense’ (p. 134), thereby poking fun at Molly Bloom’s stream-of-consciousness soliloquy in the culminating episode of *Ulysses* (‘Penelope’), and harking back to the ‘current’ of Dorothy’s thoughts (p. 10) during prayer. And this is not the only way in which Orwell’s novel indicates its designs on the structuring potential of ancient myth and legend. When he takes Dorothy in from the streets, Sir Thomas expects to see ‘some rouged and powdered *siren* who would plague him with temptations’ in place of the ‘countrified, spinsterish girl’ he actually encounters (p. 147; emphasis added). Siren or not, Dorothy is without question a Molly Bloom-esque, Penelope-like figure, one who is complete not only with suitors (Francis Moon and Mr Warburton among them), but also with the skill at sewing that echoes the classical Penelope’s use of weaving to keep unwanted suitors at bay while she awaits the homecoming of Odysseus, a precursor whose decade-long return from the Trojan War finds a belated parallel in Dorothy’s slow ‘return home’ (p. 222) to Knype Hill. Her alignment with more than one mythological antecedent—she is also compared to Andromeda at one point (p. 202)—could be a product of Orwell’s increasingly creative enthusiasm for Joyce’s use of classical patterns, including Dorothy’s descent into a ‘sub-world’ (p. 180), which evokes the mythic idea of *katabasis*: a journey downwards to the kingdom of the dead. Yet this same multiplicity of sources also hints at a lack of cohesion with the Homeric archetypes, to which *A Clergyman’s Daughter* only imperfectly relates. The symbolic implications of Orwell’s characters lack the mythic finesse of Joyce’s, and the episodic chapters of the novel never achieve (were perhaps not meant to achieve) the satisfying structural unity acquired through the consistently reiterated mythic allusion for which *Ulysses* is celebrated.

Dreams: Fantasy, Ghosts, and Adventure

A Clergyman’s Daughter may lack a sense of mythic cohesiveness, and it may also be open to Orwell’s early objection about *Ulysses*—namely,

⁴⁸ Brennan adds the point that the novel’s ‘lengthy first chapter’ imitates *Ulysses* ‘by tracing the events of a single day’ (*George Orwell and Religion*, 42).

that it seems to be split up into a lot of unrelated or thinly related incidents—but it is, nevertheless, designed. Indeed, there are signs that it is not all that far from what Orwell referred to as the ‘dream-form’ of certain aspects of Joyce’s novel.⁴⁹ *A Clergyman’s Daughter* is, at one level, a kind of *Bildungsroman* or novel of education, an account of the journey that defines the unfolding of Dorothy’s ‘life-pattern’ (p. 207). At another, it charts an ambiguous journey into the mind by means of literal and symbolic dreaming. Orwell himself knew that *A Clergyman’s Daughter* suffers from a sense of internal disconnection.⁵⁰ He also thought it was marred by a sense of unreality. Yet that very same unreality announces itself as one of the connecting threads running throughout the novel, from the first page, where Dorothy is ‘wrenched from the depths of some complex, troubling dream’ (p. 3), to the concluding scene, in which she works long into the night, as laborious day crosses the wondrous threshold into evening. The things that happen to Dorothy are, in her view, ‘of no *real* importance’ (p. 205; emphasis added). Even so, they have an *unreal* significance in the sense that they are bound up with the de-realizing ingredients of legend, ghostliness, and adventure.

The structuring potential of the European fairy-tale tradition is established on several occasions in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, which follows Dorothy as she finds herself in increasingly extraordinary landscapes—for instance, during her trek with Nobby & Co. ‘across commons and through buried villages with incredible names’ and down lanes that lead nowhere (p. 75)—and charts how her departure from and return to Knype Hill resemble a series of dream-like transitions between quasi-imaginary places. Just before Dorothy disappears for the eight days preceding her awakening out of a ‘black, dreamless sleep, with the sense of being drawn upwards through enormous and gradually lightening abysses’ (p. 67), the clock in her father’s study strikes the hour of midnight—although what happens after this point in the story is anything but a Cinderella-like tale of victory over the wicked. Dorothy does, nevertheless, find herself in places that have conspicuously fanciful dimensions. The ‘huge, tapering strands of foliage’ she gathers in the hopfields are likened to ‘the plaits of Rapunzel’s hair’ (p. 85), whereas the heads of the assembled sleepers in Trafalgar Square nod ‘like those of jointed porcelain Chinamen’

⁴⁹ Orwell, *A Kind of Compulsion*, 307.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 351.

(p. 135). Fairy-tale similitude is further embedded in the novel when Dorothy buys her pupils at Ringwood House a volume of stories by Hans Christian Andersen (p. 165), the author of, among other tales, 'The Little Mermaid'. This link echoes the earlier reference to a woman popping up 'like a mermaid from the strawy sea' (p. 84) of a tin hut's bedding in the hop-picking sequence. It also makes for a stark contrast with the narrator's view that Dorothy, settling down for a night's rest in this same straw, is unable to imagine a more 'voluptuous' sleeping place: 'not Cleopatra's couch of swan's-down nor the floating bed of Haroun al Raschid' (p. 84).

A Clergyman's Daughter develops this reference to Harun al-Rashid, who looms large in the stories collected in the *Arabian Nights*, by focusing on Mrs Semprill's unnerving habit of appearing out of nowhere 'like an Arabian jinnee' (p. 35). In this respect, the other-worldly Mrs Semprill resembles the ethereal, almost demonic Mrs Creevy, whose first appearance in the novel is described in a mode with all the hallmarks of a ghost story. In her habit of noisily banging breakfast crockery she is 'as full of thumps and raps as a poltergeist' (p. 154), a description that picks up on her wraithlike physicality. When Dorothy first encounters Mrs Creevy, she mistakes her not only for a servant, but also for a kind of 'tall and gaunt-looking' spectre who leads her wordlessly 'up some dark stairs to a twilit, fireless drawing-room', where she turns up 'a pinpoint of gas, revealing a black piano, stuffed horse-hair chairs, and a few yellowed, ghostly photos on the walls' (p. 150). Dorothy has already experienced 'a deadly chill, like a hand of ice, fasten[ing] about her heart' (p. 99) on her travels, and the time she spends at Ringwood House similarly fills her with 'horror' and 'secret shrinking and dread' (p. 161). Even the thought of her 'unmarried', penurious future haunts her like an 'inexorable ghost' (p. 219). All of which is rounded off when Dorothy, called upon to explain to her pupils the dénouement of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, itself a tale of ghostly revivals, is filled with 'a sudden horrid misgiving' (p. 173). Here, horror and drama combine in a way that signals both Dorothy's angst-filled pedagogy and the novel's parallel fixation on the theatre and the dreamy implications of its workings.

The stage-play-esque exchanges of the novel's Joycean third chapter represent the most developed instance of this latter point; its depiction of the hubbub of Trafalgar Square, with its 'chorus of varying

sounds—groans, curses, bursts of laughter, and singing, and through them all the uncontrollable chattering of teeth’ (p. 129), echoes the ‘confused din of voices’ (p. 47) that characterizes the rehearsals for the play *Charles I*, organized by the Church schoolmaster, Victor Stone. When Dorothy reads with dismay about her disappearance from Knype Hill in *Pippin’s Weekly*, she learns that ‘the elopement took place in *dramatic* circumstances’ (p. 100; emphasis added), just as when she begins her employment at Ringwood House she has to overcome the ‘stage-fright’ (p. 157) of teaching history, a subject that she, allegedly ‘like most “educated” people’ (p. 156), knows very little about. Such details underline the extent to which *A Clergyman’s Daughter* is concerned with ‘dramatic’ happenings. They also suggest that Dorothy’s adventures are a kind of fantastical foray into the theatrical spaces of hallucination: she is looked at ‘dreamily’ (p. 44) by a cow; finds herself engaged in ‘ceaseless nightmarish activity’ (p. 74) after she is discovered by Nobby and the gang; picks hops in ‘a dreamlike state’ (p. 83); and experiences her arrest as an incident with ‘dreamlike’ (p. 141) characteristics—the entire Trafalgar Square episode, in fact, is said to have ‘the vagueness of a dream’ (p. 140).

Perhaps the most dreamy thing that happens in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*, however, is the way Dorothy treads along at least some of the path walked by her more fantastical namesake, Dorothy Gale, the protagonist of L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). There is no evidence that Orwell read this book, and *A Clergyman’s Daughter* was written well before the release of the film version starring Judy Garland in 1939. Yet the similarities between *A Clergyman’s Daughter* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* are tantalizing, even so. Knype Hill, with its cypresses and greyish lime-trees and even more anaemic inhabitants—an emphasis introduced through references to Dorothy Hare’s ‘grey jersey’ (p. 6); the sexton’s ‘curly grey hair’ (p. 8); and Mrs Pither’s grey hair (p. 40), ‘dull grey eye’ (p. 41), and ‘large, grey-veined, flaccid legs’ (p. 43)—bears more than a passing resemblance to Baum’s ‘great grey’ Kansas prairie, whose ‘grey mass’ fits in with ‘the same grey colour’ that is ‘to be seen everywhere’, and in particular in the ‘dull and grey’ house in which Dorothy Gale lives.⁵¹ Where Baum’s Dorothy is whisked away from

⁵¹ L. Frank Baum, *The Wizard of Oz* (London: Puffin, 2019), 2; originally published in 1900 as *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.