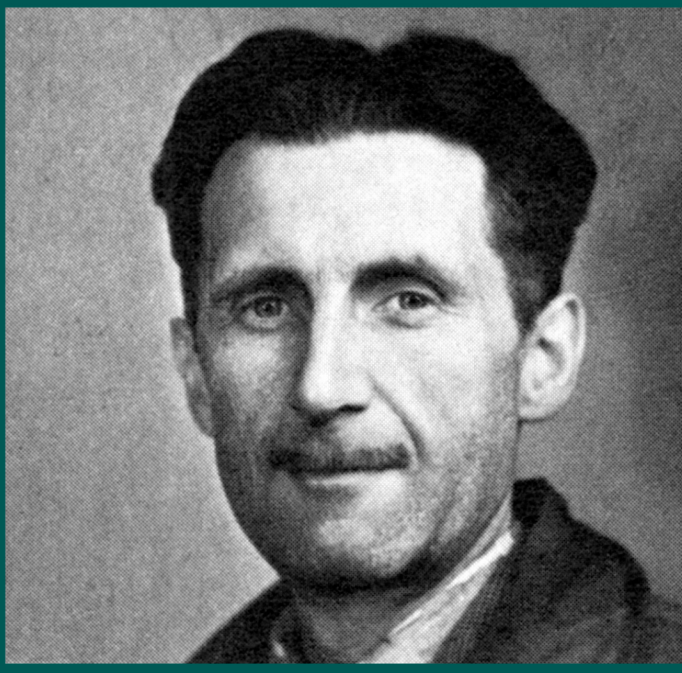
with a new introduction and glossary by the author

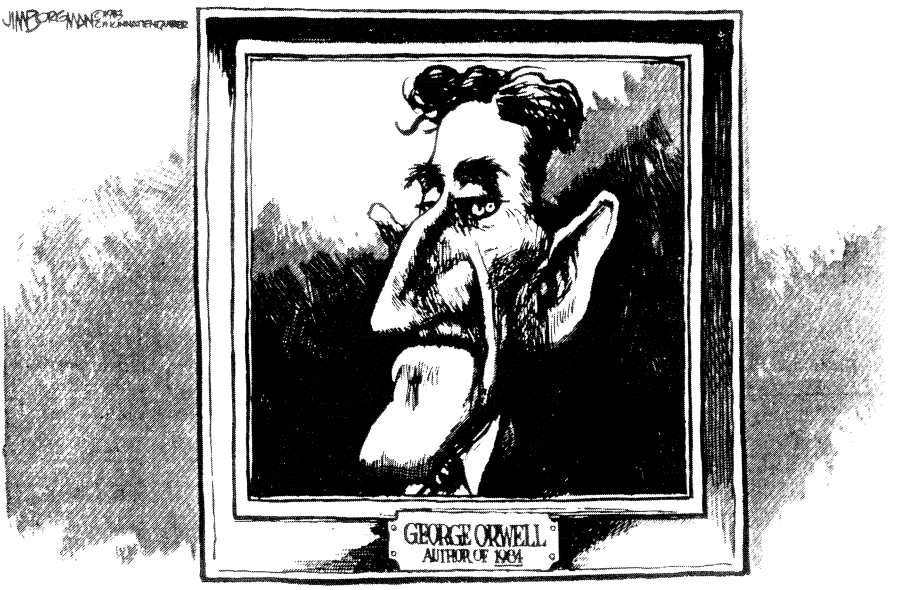
John Rodden

The Politics of Literary Reputation



George Orwell

George Orwell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THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER
GEORGE ORWELL
AUTHOR OF 1984

with a new introduction and glossary by the author

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The Politics of Literary Reputation

George Orwell

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Catherine McGinley
1896-1988,
Who vouchsafed me her love of language

In Memoriam

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Introduction to the Transaction Edition

I

Almost two decades ago, I began work on a book about both a man and a monument. My first concern was with the intellectual legacy and cultural impact of George Orwell, the foremost political writer of the century and the contemporary master of plain English prose. I was especially interested in Orwell's deep and ongoing influence on the generations of Anglo-American intellectuals that followed him, many of whom had also influenced me. Like them, I had grown up reading Orwell's work, drawing political lessons and social values from it, modeling my own writing style on it, and even teaching it to younger generations of college and high school students. I counted myself as one of Orwell's spiritual heirs. He was my benificent intellectual big brother.

In the early and mid-1980s, I interviewed and corresponded with several of Orwell's old friends and colleagues (among them Julian Symons, John Atkins, George Woodcock, and Mary Fyvel) and with prominent American and British intellectuals active in the early postwar years who had responded strongly to his work (such as Irving Howe, Steven Marcus, Norman Podhoretz, William Phillips, Mary McCarthy, Alfred Kazin, Russell Kirk, Kingsley Amis, and John Wain). These encounters brought Orwell and his era to life before me. My conversations also persuaded me—because they sometimes touched on private matters that my interviewees declined to share for the public record—that personal contact with the principals themselves, with the historical actors who participated in and shaped that record, is indispensable for writing contemporary intellectual history.

But these interactions taught me far more than a lesson in historiography. They reminded the young historian—who had always been so committed (at least in principle) to the value of the empirical—of a truth best learned by experience: The past is a foreign country. During my interviews, I realized anew how very hard it is for someone from a much younger generation, because he possesses no experience of the era that his elders describe, to comprehend it solely from the written page. If he is to

gain even partial access to that era as a living reality, historical events must be placed in context and brought to life by the actors themselves.

Beyond the useful information that my interviewees provided me, therefore, was the equally valuable texture of lived experience that they communicated. No transcript or tape recording or phenomenological exegesis can recapture the indefinable quality of shared presence in those encounters. Beyond their factual content, these interviews resuscitated fragments of a vanished past that served as my visa to the country of Orwell's generation, the world of my intellectual grandfathers and -mothers, whereby I could better understand Orwell and his times.[1]

II

My chief intention in writing this book was not, however, to reconstruct history from the viewpoint of Orwell and his generation. Nor was it to sit in judgment of Orwell's achievement. Rather, it was to describe the emergence and development of his self- and public images, with particular focus on his posthumous reputation.

So it was both the life and the legacy—particularly the controversial, ambiguous afterlife—of George Orwell that engaged my attention. I was interested not just in Orwell but in the central role that he still played, more than three decades after his death, in the imaginative lives of so many other readers, among them the leading intellectuals of the English-speaking world.

Moreover, the timing for some kind of larger study that would address Orwell's place in the modern mindscape seemed inviting. As 1984 approached, profiles and documentaries about Orwell dominated intellectual magazines, press headlines, and cultural airwaves. Orwell seemed ubiquitous. And even more so did the swelling figure of "Orwell"—less now a writer or even historical personage than an international celebrity, a media prophet, a universal symbol fused (and confused) with his nightmarish date. After 1984, as the tumult died down, it became clear that no writer had ever occupied such a position in the cultural consciousness and garnered such widespread notice—and that the convergence of circumstances which had facilitated this extraordinary reception might never recur. Indeed *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had managed the spectacular and unprecedented feat of topping the fiction bestseller lists for several weeks in late 1983 and early 1984—an amazing thirty-five years after its original publication in June 1949.[2] In the wake of 1984, it was clear that Orwell had indisputably become the most influential political writer of the century.

So not just who Orwell was, but who he *became* in the eyes and ears of his readers—and even listeners and viewers—intrigued me. Biographers had already chronicled the life of Orwell. But the story of the unique afterlife of "Orwell"—not just the man or writer or even the persona or literary personality, but the totem with which History had conjured—remained unwritten. As the "Year of Orwell" receded, I concluded that a book about both the writer's achievement and the historical and cultural phenomenon of his towering reputation could be a worthwhile contribution to cultural history.

My greatest challenge was to make sense of the vast corpus of Orwell's reception—comprising press clippings and broadcast media items numbering in the tens

of thousands (during 1983–84 alone!), and radiating well beyond English-language audiences.

As I gained an overview of Orwell's reception, I struggled to move beyond a mere description or historical chronicle of Orwell's monumental reputation to an understanding of literary reputation itself. Gradually, I realized that in order to appreciate the key forces and factors at work, I would need to develop a loose, supple framework of concepts pertinent to audiences' responses to books and authors, an organically related set of terms that I called "the rhetoric of reception." Empirically grounded in the historical materials of Orwell's reception, such a rhetoric would posit concepts that could illuminate the development and transformations of his own reputation. (For this new edition, I have added a glossary that makes more explicit the significance of these concepts for the larger argument of the book.) From this concrete basis, I felt equipped to move beyond Orwell's case history to address the larger question of reputation as an artistic and social phenomenon.

My focus centered on the dynamics of image-making, a process that I have termed "reputation-formation." What ultimately emerged was a rudimentary vocabulary that outlined a "cosmology of repute." Drawn from diverse fields of knowledge, this constellation of terms—such as "star reputation," "figure," "radiance," "institutional reader," "reception scene," "face," "portrait gallery," "watchword," and "defacement"—aimed to suggest the variabilities and vicissitudes of reputation-formation.[3]

Such usages represented an attempt to navigate between two forms of historicism, the old and the new. The great value of the traditional version of Historicism was to emphasize the need for context. Unfortunately, in its totalizing zeal to reconstruct history—"as it really was," in Ranke's phrase—it often reduced history to an extra-literary matter of documentary retrieval or scavenger source-hunting.[4] The value of the New Historicism was to look toward marginalized and often forgotten or ignored information, to investigate why it had been so neglected, and to re-evaluate history from that fresh standpoint. It was a salutary corrective, similar in spirit to the social history of the 1960s, whose emphasis also unfortunately led too frequently to excessive claims for peripheral evidence, a sweeping dismissal of all mainstream and conventional views, and a preoccupation with victimology. My attempted synthesis sought to reemphasize the value of context, but not to reduce events to their contexts. Conversely, without devaluing intellectual history or the cultural significance of educated reading publics, my approach also entailed close textual study of little-noticed and often dismissed reception materials among non-elite audiences, i.e., historical evidence that indicated the contours of reputation beyond intellectual networks and circles.[5] Although my framework of concepts does not amount to a formal "methodology," let alone a comprehensive theory of reputation or a systematic typology, I hope nonetheless that this approach toward Orwell's reception is suggestive for studying reputation in other cases and circumstances.

III

When this book first appeared in 1989, the study of reputation as an historical and sociological issue was still in its infancy. Little attention had ever been devoted

to the subject, except to dismiss it as unserious or to engage in superficial and impressionistic speculation about its workings.[6]

To combat these tendencies and highlight reputation as an issue meriting scholarly attention, I originally called this study *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of 'Saint George' Orwell.* However prolix, that title aimed to signal that reputation emerges through a social process contingent on innumerable factors, both personal and institutional: There is no immaculate reception. And the subtitle suggested that, given these contingencies of reputation, any outsized reputation will be subjected to unforeseen uses and abuses—and that Orwell's hallowed status sheds revealing light on both the dynamics and polemics of reputation-formation.

My approach was both contextual and textual. I collected the available reception materials on Orwell, examined those audiences and publications decisive for shaping his reputation, established the context of their reception, and then engaged in a detailed historical and biographical interpretation of that reception scene. Among my questions were the following:

- How and why did these individuals and audiences treat Orwell as they did?
- How and why did readers, especially intellectuals, cast Orwell in their own images?
- How did their projected images of him serve their own vocational needs and aspirations?

Given such questions, these chapters not infrequently turned into a study in group psychology. They also became an inquiry not just into the "making" of "St. George" Orwell, but also into the "making" of the postwar intellectual—and of the intellectual hero as well.

Indeed the idea and ideal of intellectual heroism looms large in this study. And it bears noting how often readers have projected their own exalted aspirations onto a heroic image of Orwell (or "Orwell"), usually in an attempt to resolve their own problems of identity. These readers, especially those intellectuals featured in this book—even including readers in formerly Communist nations who had no easy access to his writings—have openly acknowledged their enormous debt to him as a radiant presence in their lives.

Admittedly, the world scene that made Orwell's language and vision resonate so powerfully for his readers has changed dramatically since the early Cold War era—and even since 1984. The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991 have radically altered geopolitical and ideological realities, rendering many of the old bipolar East-West generalizations anachronistic. Within the Western nations, anti-communism is virtually dead as a major political or cultural issue; and Marxists outside the academy are a rarity. European Social Democrats who appeal to the center still command a strong following, but few present-day political leaders in the West assume that they can win office by campaigning on a radical left-wing platform, even if their allegiance is to an independent, democratic socialism in Orwell's tradition.

None of this means that Orwell and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are irrelevant in the new millennium.[7] Indeed, the very fact that these changes have transpired owes something to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The novel fails today as a political prophecy because it succeeded as a cautionary warning.

Furthermore, not all the issues of the Cold War and the 1980s are obsolete. True, international nuclear strategies and the conditions of diplomacy have changed, but American foreign policy initiatives do not win automatic assent; contrary to the optimistic predictions of the pundits of globalization, the New World Order of a "Pax Americana" and the triumphalist End of History forecasts have not been realized.

And Orwell himself is still "alive today," as I argued in the Conclusion, for his example still possesses for us, as it did for early postwar readers, "contemporary consequence, rather than mere historical significance." They too worked to craft their own writing styles, they too labored to forge their own literary visions, they too struggled to define their own political commitments. And throughout it all, they—or rather, we—looked and listened to Orwell as a guiding conscience and a courageous voice, both as an advocate of fundamental "decency" in human relations and a model of clear, direct, plain English prose. For us all, Orwell's example has represented the possibility of writing with literary integrity and of living with passionate engagement.

For us all, Orwell is our intellectual big brother.

Notes

I am grateful to Jonathan Rose and Paul Rodden for their helpful suggestions and to Beth Macom for her keen editor's eye and deft proofreader's touch.

1. Nothing served as a more bracing reminder to me about how I was starting to see Orwell as not just a man but a legendary figure than my amusing exchange in 1985 with Julian Symons, a distinguished mystery writer and one of Orwell's closest friends during the 1940s. On a rainy March day, we were sitting in a warm pub near Victoria Station. Then in his mid-70s, Symons lived outside London and was in town for a weekly visit with friends and colleagues.

   "You and everybody else always wants to know what George Orwell was like," Symons began with a broad wave of his hand. He went on:

   > You must try to understand—George Orwell was a chap whom I used to stroll down the street with and sip a beer with—in a pub not far from here—and above all to argue with. If Orwell had announced to me during the war that, forty years later, some young bloke from America like yourself was going to cross the Atlantic and interview me about him, I would probably have replied, "Well, George, why isn't he coming to interview *you* about *me*?!"

2. This unique achievement marked the high point of Orwell's cascading popular reputation; it is unlikely ever again to approach that height. I wrote in the Conclusion that I did "not expect the Orwell centennial in 2003 to be more than an academic affair." No developments in recent years induce me to revise that judgment. Nor has anything significant emerged to alter our views about Orwell himself since that time.
3. Or as I expressed it in the opening paragraphs of Chapter Six:

   > What I have tried to do throughout this book is to make some sense of the reputation process via an eclectic figural vocabulary derived, as needed, from portraiture, cos-

> mography, and geography: to capture, however partially, the elusive figure-making process in figures of my own. . . . [A] special metaphorical vocabulary is not merely justified but necessitated, since the concept of reputation is fundamentally metaphorical and metonymic...
>
> My own metaphors, then, have framed this study of Orwell's reputation. And the metaphors in which images of him have been cast, like "saint," have helped structure his reputation-history insofar as they have highlighted certain of his features and veiled others, leading observers to form their responses in accord with the metaphor. (322-24)

4. To be fair to Leopold von Ranke, it deserves mention that his epigones arguably exaggerated and thereby distorted his admonition to write history "wie es eigentlich war." The phrase may also be translated "as it essentially was," a less totalizing conception of historiography and one more in keeping with the spirit of Ranke's scholarly corrective to historical presentism and negligence of sources.
5. In the past, assessments of popular reputation had merely been asserted by critics. Even determinations of a writer's literary reputation were typically based on arbitrary or impressionistic evidence, usually gathered from a few books or reviews, with little effort made to gauge their precise influence or representative value.

   I concluded that careful evaluation and copious presentation of the reception evidence were essential in order to demonstrate that appraisals of reputation, however uncertain or indefinite, are more than speculative: they are the critic's judgments, not merely the critic's invention. Reputation, whether literary or popular, necessarily has a materialist basis; insofar as possible, therefore, estimates of reputation require validation and documentation through the materials of a reception history.
6. In the last dozen years, however, the study of reputation has garnered attention among cultural historians and sociologists, and also among literary critics, communication scholars, philosophers, economists, and legal and political theorists. There are even scholarly organizations, such as the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP), which have established reputation as a special topic of their research focus, thereby inspiring more coordinated and systematic study of reputation among scholars.

   Among the most significant studies, listed in chronological order of publication, have been the following:

   Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang, *Etched in Memory : The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation* (Chapel Hill, 1990). Jim Fowles, *Starstruck : Celebrity Performers and the American Public* (Washington, 1992). Charles Camic, "Reputation and Predecessor Selection: Parsons and the Institutionalists," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 57 (August 1992), 421-46. Gary Gorton, *Reputation Formation in Early Bank Debt Markets* (Cambridge, MA 1993). Joshua Gamson, *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, 1994). Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, eds. *American Heroes in a Media Age* (Cresskill, N.J., 1994). Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1996). Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford, 1996). David P. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power : Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, 1997). Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA 1998). Thomas F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science : Credibility on the Line* (Chicago 1999). Anthony Elliott, *The Mourning of John Lennon* (Berkeley, 1999). Peter McNamara, *The Noblest Minds: Fame, Honor, and the American Founding* (Lanham, MD, 1999.) Roger G. Kennedy, *Burr, Hamilton, and Jefferson : a Study in Character* (Oxford 2000). Cintra Wilson, *A Massive Swelling : Celebrity Re-examined as a Grotesque, Crippling Disease, and Other Cultural Revolutions* (New York, 2000). Tyler Cowen, *What Price Fame*? (Cambridge MA, 2000). David Giles, *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity* (New York, 2000).

Among the most pertinent concepts to my own historical-sociological approach to reputation are Thomas Gieryn's work on reputational "mapping," Randall Collins' general sociology of intellectual linkages and his attention to the "cult of the intellectual hero," and Charles Camic's formulation of reputational claiming (and disclaiming) in terms of "predecessor selection."

7. Nor has Orwell ceased at all to engage the attention of scholars and critics. More than twenty books and scores of articles have appeared on him and his work in the last dozen years. Most of them can be found in Gillian Fenwick's *George Orwell: A Bibliography* (Winchester, UK, 1998). Certainly the most significant publication is Peter Davison's definitive, twenty-volume *Complete Works of George Orwell* (1986-97), the last ten volumes of which appeared after my own book. Also noteworthy have been the two new biographies of Orwell, including Michael Shelden's *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (1991) and Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of A Generation* (2000).

Preface

I

Literary reputations are made, not born. But to the outsider or latecomer, the canon of great names often looms like a canopy of fixed and shining stars, so that socially constructed reality appears a law of nature. Or like inherited titles, reputations seem not so much "established" as "acquired," a matter of birthright vaguely ascribed to some dateless anointing. Literary histories have traditionally nourished these illusions by treating the rise and fall of reputations as a matter of "taste," a subject best left to the curious sociologist and the omniscient "verdict of posterity," outside the bounds of literary scholarship proper. One of the most difficult problems for literary and cultural historians is to cast light on the making of reputation as a social process while not ignoring that intrinsic, sometimes indefinable, aesthetic attributes of works contribute to authors' reputations. For we should neither reduce reputation merely to an interaction among institutional forces nor presume cynically that all established judgments are largely groundless, the products of ruling class "mystifications" which demand "unmasking" and "demythologizing." The problem is further complicated by the common supposition, repeatedly contradicted by experience, that literary reputation and value rest almost exclusively upon literary productions: the works of the writer, not the image of the man.

The subject of George Orwell's reputation raises all these issues with the man and writer's characteristic directness. Within little more than four years in the late 1940s, Orwell rose from a position of relatively modest standing

as a London journalist and minor English novelist to a writer of international stature during the last months of his life and a symbolic figure from virtually the moment of his death. If he had never written his last two books, quite probably he would be largely unknown today, even within the literary academy, his brilliant essays and trenchant journalism notwithstanding. But in the aftermath of what the press came to call "the countdown to 1984" and "The Year of Orwell," Orwell's name is once again, as it was in the mid-1950s, recognizable to millions. Unlike so many acclaimed modern writers, his critical reputation has suffered no periods of sharp decline since his death; and although his popular standing is again in descent from its high-water mark of the early 1980s, he has remained a permanent fixture in the media's pantheon of literary figures.

Still, it is questionable, almost painfully so for some admirers, whether Orwell's literary achievement—except perhaps in the essay form, where his compelling ethos so strongly appeals—can bear the weight of esteem and significance which successive generations have bestowed upon him. Indeed the virtues cited as characteristic of the writer's style have all been claimed as the man's personal qualities: clarity, simplicity, honesty, plainness, vigor, passion. Even some of the most prominent champions of Orwell's work have maintained, often with regret, that he was much more important for how he lived than for what he wrote. Whether true or not, as a critic remarked of Camus shortly after his death, many readers *want* Orwell to be a great writer, not just a very good one. The disarming candor, the fervent commitment, the innate decency, and always the living voice conspire so pardonably to rationalize such a critical judgment, even to demand it.

Orwell himself frequently bemoaned book reviewers' inflated, cultish praise of other writers, once caustically reminding a star-struck critic to "remember the difference between hagiography and criticism."[1] The advice is worth recalling when we come to 'St. George' Orwell, lionized as the "quintessentially English" patriot, the fearless slayer of the Red dragon, the socialist paragon, the pure stylist, the model of intellectual integrity—and vilified with a sling of his own adjective "Orwellian" back upon him. Certainly Orwell's ubiquity during the early 1980s in classrooms and academic journals, in the press, and on airwaves was incontestable; but no extended discussion has dealt with the making of his extraordinary public reputation and its attempted "claiming" by numerous political and commercial interests, with how Orwell has come to represent so much in a personal way to intellectuals both of the Left and Right, and with how his rhetoric and vision have so deeply penetrated our consciousness that they have been assimilated, often without attribution, into the Western political lexicon and imagination.

The following chapters are the story of that process. "Making" and "claiming" are broad and colloquial terms for the process, yet their scope and informality at least respect the theoretical complexities and heated polemics involved. Reputations come into being in different ways at different times under different conditions. They are radically contingent—partly make-believe and always makeshift and made over—being variously cre-

ated, fashioned, built, manufactured, suppressed, and distorted—in a constant interaction of images and information in and through social relations. Ordinary usage, which characterizes reputations as "monuments," disguises this sociohistorical process as an inherited product, thereby veiling the fact that reputations emerge over time and leading us to project a single aspect for the diverse whole.

The situation is all the more complicated in Orwell's case, for the remarkable fact about his posthumous history is that he has been cast not in one but in several vivid, distinct images since his death. And not only have changing historical conditions spotlighted various of these images, but the tendency has persisted to read all the images backwards from the Cold War, the widely quoted obituaries, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and *Animal Farm,* thus obscuring or confusing Orwell's earlier work and life. Some of these images are mere caricatures, bearing little direct relation to George Orwell, as man or writer. Most people familiar with his life and work know, for instance, that he was no "difficult saint" or "doomsday prophet."[2] But the matter begins, not ends there. All the important issues still remain; and even such a knowing dismissal of these characterizations may be ill-founded or premature. The original contexts of such characterizations, how they became established as images of the author, what such images indicate about author-reader relationships, and how they bear on the uses and abuses to which a writer's name and work are put: however laborious, investigation of the dense, intricate web of relations which constitutes these processes is our historical and sociological task. It is to identify both the immediately and less obviously recognizable faces in the Orwell family album and to trace their lines of descent and divergence. As such, it lies beyond both the erection and razing of literary monuments.

Thus my project is cultural criticism directed at recovery and clarification. For as a negotiated process of selection and exclusion, history is indeed not only a repository of events but a giant dustbin, and contemporary interests have a way, even without writers like Winston Smith at work, of "rectifying" reputations in line with present-day preoccupations. Part of the task with Orwell is therefore to retrieve the scraps of his early reputation from the memory holes of history.

II

This book aims chiefly to describe the making and claiming of a reputation, rather than to argue a specific case for its upward or downward revaluation. Inasmuch as I am implicated in the very processes I am describing, of course, these chapters do reflect and will inevitably contribute to Orwell's changing value and repute. So while my goal is certainly not to refurbish Orwell with a new image or set of images, let alone to coopt him for one political camp or another, I am fully aware that the act of tracing and appraising his historical images will influence their development and figure in the emergence of new images of him. To chronicle the "making" of a reputation inescapably influ-

ences its "remaking." Moreover, the incremental, near-invisible historical process and the tissue of interacting influences which bear on it are hardly intelligible without some arrangement into stages and lines of development. And this arrangement is invariably related to one's own critical location and consciousness. One of this project's contentions is that the historical-institutional locations of certain of Orwell's observers have decisively influenced the course of his reputation. Likewise, my own politico-historical and cultural-professional location—as a left-of-center white male of working-class origins, a post- Vatican II Catholic liberal, an academic in English and Communication Studies, and an American who came to Orwell's work in the 1970s—has obviously borne on my reconstruction of his reputation, as the succeeding chapters make clear.

In the widest and most explicit senses of the word, then, the case of Orwell raises the "politics" of literary reputation. For no reputation germinates in a value-free environment; all reputations flourish or perish in light of relations and access to power and influence. Reputations are invariably "political," enmeshed in ideological beliefs and emergent from within concrete forms of social and institutional life. Even beyond such conditioning structures, however, so political is Orwell's reputation that its history is inextricably bound up in postwar cultural politics and his politicized legacy is a minor political issue in its own right.

III

Much discussion about Orwell has involved the transformation of Eric Blair into "George Orwell." Our concern is chiefly with the metamorphosis of "Orwell" into 'St. George'—and the so-called grave-robbing which has attended it. Although this study treats selected aspects of Orwell's reputation from several perspectives through the year 1988, much of my attention is focused upon two periods: the postwar decade and the months before and during 1984. These two periods are particularly important as the key years of the emergence and expansion, and then re-emergence and re-expansion, of Orwell's reputation. The former period spans the term of his critical ascension and sudden growth in popular reputation, a decade stretching roughly from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. In 1945–46 the U.K. and U.S. editions of *Animal Farm* appeared. The years 1953–56 saw the production of three film/TV adaptations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and an animated cartoon of *Animal Farm*. By the late 1950s almost all of Orwell's early out-of-print books (some of them never published in America) had come back into print, four essay collections had appeared, and his books had been translated into more than thirty languages. In the single year 1949–50, during which occurred the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Orwell's death, his reputation penetrated beyond intellectual circles into the wider public domain and his predominant public images of "prophet" and "saint" began to take firm shape. By 1956 one old friend could observe that "as his reputation soared after the publication of *Nine-*

teen Eighty-Four," an "almost" "unknown" writer seemed suddenly transformed into "the Orwell legend."[3]

The countdown to 1984 similarly witnessed Orwell's popular reputation re-emerge far beyond even its dimensions in the mid-1950s. Press articles, television and radio programs, plays and movies, academic conferences and commercial spinoffs devoted or pegged to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* testified that Orwell and his work were subjects of global interest. "1984" was Orwell's year all right: he was even drafted as a favorite-son candidate for the White House by "The Orwell for President Committee."[4] One headline in a small U.S. daily newspaper fairly summed up Orwell's Anglo-American status for at least a few weeks in early 1984: "Orwell Becomes A Household Word."[5]

IV

Although these chapters are first a study of one writer's history of repute, the protean shape and broad scope of Orwell's reputation makes him an especially worthwhile case for insight into the general processes involved in making literary reputations. For Orwell poses unusual, and valuable, difficulties by virtue of the complex, highly personal response to him by readers; and he offers unusual, if complicated, opportunities by his politicized reception and the diversity of his audiences. The rare and auspicious fact is that Orwell has been both an extraordinarily popular serious writer and a critically acclaimed one. A study of his reputation thus promises to illumine not only the cultural significance of the most widely read serious writer and the most celebrated English political writer of our century. It also lends itself to careful speculation about the social processes governing the personal response to and the public impact of the writer in the modern age. Perhaps through Orwell we can begin to understand, in Malcolm Muggeridge's phrase about his friend, "how the legend of a human being is created"[6]—how history makes figures and how biography and society interrelate.

George Orwell

Not what the Saint is but what he represents in the eyes of the non-sanctified gives him his world-historical importance.

Nietzsche
Human, All Too Human

. . . no decent person cares tuppence for the opinion of posterity.

Orwell, "As I Please"

Introduction

Appraising Famous Men: Mediating Biography and Society

I

Literary reputations get made, but how? How does a writer become, in Lionel Trilling's famous characterization of Orwell, "a figure in our lives"?[1]

Much has been written about Orwell as a man and as a writer, and much also about the general relation of the contemporary writer to his culture. Most commentaries on Orwell, however, are biographical discussions or literary criticism not directed to his cultural significance; and most discussions of "the writer in society" are not so much the outgrowth of specialized individual studies as an attempted substitute for them. The need is to see how the complex relations between writers and cultures work themselves out in an individual life and legacy. The nature and development of Orwell's public reputation are first his own special case, for Orwell's career constitutes one man's response to a particular historical situation. Yet because of his polarized reputation among intellectuals and extensive media exposure, Orwell also furnishes perhaps the best opportunity among modern authors for exploring how patterns of interpersonal and institutional relations transform a writer into a literary figure.

What do we mean when we call a writer a "literary figure"? How in fact does a "literary" reputation differ from other sorts of reputation? How does a writer achieve not just a standing in literary circles but a public reputation? How does response to a writer's work and personality interact with cultural and political history to shape his reputation? What bearing do the social-institutional affiliations of audiences have upon the forma-

tion of literary reputation? And how in turn do their responses to a writer re-form them as readers and reshape history itself? The arrival and enactment of Orwell's fated year made such questions about him not only timely but collectively self-revealing. One index to a culture is the figures it exalts.

Literary critics and sociologists have scarcely touched upon these questions. No study has directly addressed the processes by which writers' images and identities are formed and literary reputations are gained, lost, consolidated, revised, and deformed—important issues located in what Orwell called, during the early years of the Cold War in postwar Britain, "that painful and . . . almost insoluble problem, the relation of literature to society."[2] Although Marxist literary criticism, literary sociology, and German reception aesthetics have all explored this relation from various vantage points,[3] literary critics have frequently regarded the institutional processes of "reputation-formation" and "canon-formation" as extraneous to artistic production and critical acclaim. Indeed literary criticism and literary sociology have traditionally behaved like estranged bedfellows. Invariably segregated as "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" approaches to literature, each has kept its back to the other. Empirical sociology and Marxist theory have too often tended to dissolve the experience of art into statistics or social structures, and to defer to criticism for literary interpretation; criticism has tended to regard interpretation as its private turf and to acquiesce to sociology on "external" matters of literary production and reception.

"[R]eal criticism," pronounced Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), had nothing to do with "all the literary chit-chat which makes the reputations of poets boom and crash in an imaginary stock-exchange." Criticism was as yet still "a primitive science," said Frye, whose "materials, the masterpieces of literature," could only yield their natural fruits and ground a "systematic" field of study ("criticism") if reputation and the history of taste ("where there are no facts, and where all truths have been split . . . into half-truths") were "snip[ped] off and throw[n] . . . away."[4] How the nascent science's "materials," its "masterpieces," gained their status, whether there might not be "half-truths" in the history of reputations of relevance to critics, and how one could even speak about the comparative maturities of disciplines without some understanding of their institutional histories: these questions did not detain Frye.

"A book never *is* a masterpiece," wrote the elder Goncourt. "It *becomes* one."[5] It is a widely believed, though still little-examined, generalization that "producers," "distributors," and "consumers" in the "literary industry"—publishers, censors, agents, book clubs, libraries, reviewers, academic critics, the mass media—partly determine a book and writer's success with the public.[6] Not only the quality or "genius" of a writer's work earns him and it a literary reputation, but also an institutional network of production, distribution, and reception which circulates and values his achievement. What needs systematic study is how books and authors emerge through this web of relations and through institutional history, what roles specific audiences play in

the formation of popular images, and how critical and popular influences interact to transform critical acclaim into public reputation.

This study addresses some elementary patterns of interaction in this intricate process as it concentrates upon literary reception. The aim is to make sense of the reputation of a single controversial and significant literary figure, and in turn to shed some light on the reputation process generally. Reputations are perceived and disseminated in and through images, as Chapter Two will argue, and since the project reconstructs not the story of a man's life but the vicissitudes of his reputation, it pursues not the fates of historical individuals but of historical images. It is a tour of a portrait gallery. Our focus widens and narrows—we step up and step back—as we scrutinize each picture, and move on from one to the next.

Rather than a straightforward chronology of Orwell's history of repute, therefore, I have approached his reputation by the more painstaking route of the dominant historical images in which various readers and groups have cast him, insofar as the available record of his historical reception has permitted. Critics and the media have indeed treated Orwell via a number of sharply defined images as "essences" characterizing him and his work. Based on these repeated characterizations, I have reconstructed the commentary (or "imagery") on Orwell into four metaphors as public "faces," limiting the number as the reception evidence suggested and for heuristic purposes and reasons of economy. Each of these faces must be examined, insofar as possible, against Orwell's own view of what he was doing, or trying to do. Like all of us, Orwell presented in his personal life and in his work different yet not incommensurable views of himself to different people at different times. Yet criticism, unlike hagiography, must not avoid the most insistent questions: To what degree is a writer responsible for the uses to which his name and work have been put? And which portraits of him are "forgeries"?

Friends have waylaid me repeatedly with these questions, and in the course of these pages I have tried to respond to the pertinent issues, but the questions themselves are too baldly put. Orwell is arguably partly "responsible" for or complicitous in some of the abuses of his work, but the life and writings of every writer condition the course of his reputation. No political writer can avoid ideological distortion, let alone posthumous confiscation of his name, for no one can prevent observers from seizing on perceived affinities between his work and that of groups whom he opposed, from linking his position on one issue with a range of other allegedly related issues, or from ignoring or disregarding his stated intentions and/or the original context in which he wrote. Likewise, metaphors or images or "portraits" are neither "true" nor "false"; only the factual claims made via them possess or lack validity. Portraits are good or poor likenesses; no image of Orwell in this study captures all of him. We should speak of "partial" portraits, rather than "authentic" ones and "forgeries": the man was the original, not some prose description. This is not to say that we cannot reject illegitimate claims to a legacy. Or that we cannot distinguish between "por-

traits" and "caricatures." Every portrait selects and emphasizes, but caricatures are at wide variance with the available biographical and critical evidence, clearly less inclusive, coherent, fair-minded, and convincing. Finally, however, though these distinctions are important for conceptual clarification, the most that one can do in drawing them in the particular case is to make one's own interpretations clear, to stay close to the author's writings, to weigh the (often conflicting) testimony about his life, to appreciate the context in which he wrote and was received—and thereby expose the grosser attempts to claim his mantle, for whatever camp. Many of the unfortunate misconceptions about Orwell have arisen because his declared political positions altered somewhat during World War II and after, and because his acquaintances have differed in their reports of his political sympathies.

Orwell is one of the few literary men who stands with modern thinkers of the stature of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Bergson, and Sorel as writers whose work has undergone distortion by disciples and colleagues. Notably, he is the only imaginative writer—and the only English-language writer—in this group. Since most of Orwell's work was fiction and journalism, he has been in certain respects even more susceptible to misinterpretation and misuse than these other figures. His last two works are variously taken for direct political statements or prophecies or satires, his fictional characters are read as autobiographical mouthpieces, his nonfiction is invoked where expedient to buttress both practices, and his "failure" to provide any comprehensive *summa* of his politics is exploited as a rationale for "extending" his ideas in various partisan directions. Whereas these other thinkers are read only by an intellectual minority, with their work often perceived as not easily accessible, argument about Orwell's writings has frequently entered the conversation of the wider public, as the letter columns of Anglo-American newspapers from the mid-1950s and early 1980s attest. In a September 1983 Harris Poll an astounding 27 percent of Americans claimed (perhaps doubtfully) to have read *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—well before the novel began to sell more than 50,000 copies per day in early 1984 and became a subject of New Year television specials and advertising promotions.[7]

One recalls the comment of a Whitehall official in a wartime dossier on Orwell: "As to use, we already know by personal acquaintance, making use of him is difficult."[8] Political and commercial interests have found it less difficult since the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Orwell's death. Indeed the "Orwell phenomenon" and the contested legacy of 'St. George' are so intertwined with the complexities of postwar Anglo-American ideological and cultural politics that an intellectuals' holy war has periodically flared as to which groups possess the right to claim his rich bequest. Numerous American and European academic conferences on Orwell during 1984 featured old friends, biographers, and academic "experts," many of whom were deferred to as vicars of Orwell and treated as his voices from beyond the grave—which of course only served to increase the cacophony and the number of competing claims. On a much larger scale, the bitter volleying of Orwell's name and catchwords between the West and the Communist bloc constitutes an extra-

ordinary instance of what political scientists have recently come to call "word politics."[9]

Thus the politics of Orwell's reputation represents far more than a battle for the ghost of 'St. George' himself. An extended study of his heritage offers several revealing perspectives on the main political and cultural developments of the postwar West. *George Orwell: An Afterlife* would in many ways be an even more complicated and rewarding book than Bernard Crick's *George Orwell: A Life*. The present study consists of a variety of sharply focused scenes from that afterlife, rendering a world-historical, primarily posthumous Orwell.

II

A study in the historiography of reputation, or what we might call "reputation-history," proposes to act as a bridge connecting cultural history, literary biography, and literary and historical sociology. It is an effort to relocate literary history within intellectual and social history. I am less concerned here with what the literary critics usually examine, those subtleties of the writer's art so often lost on the non-specialist and the non-reader, and more concerned with what critics pay little heed to but wider audiences mainly experience, the public images of writers transmitted through their work and through re-presentations of their work and personalities by critics and the mass media. In many respects the project is similar to Orwell's own "semi-sociological literary criticism,"[10] and it is the sort of undertaking which I believe that Orwell himself would have endorsed and which his essay "Charles Dickens" exemplified in its attention to Dickens' social origins and politicized reception. Orwell often wondered how and why reputations changed, and he answered in "Inside the Whale," as I have done in this study, that first and foremost "one has to take account of the *external* conditions that make certain writers popular at certain times." Indeed his essays bear out the judgment of John Atkins, Orwell's friend and *Tribune* colleague, that he was "not really a literary critic" at all but a "literary sociologist": "All his best criticism was sociological."[11]

Insofar as an historiography of literary reputation seeks to bridge biography and society, it poses what Sartre saw as "the problem of mediations," or phrased more challengingly, what C. Wright Mills called "the task and promise" of "the sociological imagination": "to understand the intersections of biography and history within society," "to shift from one perspective to another [and] thereby to know the social and historical meaning of the individual in society and in the period in which he has his quality and his being."[12]

The critical point with Orwell, as with so many other historical figures, however, is that his "period" is at least as much his posthumous history as it was his living one. Orwell continues to exert influence because what he said to his age still somehow speaks to our own, and because the force of his example and the symbolic power of his work upon his contemporaries

somehow grip us too. Thus the posthumous history needs close examination not only for itself but to better understand how general history gets concretely realized in personal histories and how living and posthumous reputations interrelate. Bernard Crick drew back from subtitling his biography of Orwell a "Life and Times" on the sound theoretical principle that "such a formula, unless a man has a great effect on events, is mainly padding." Nor could Crick comfortably write a "Life and Works," he said, because he saw his task not as "literary criticism" but as a chronicle of Orwell the man and writer. Crick settled finally, and simply, for "A Life."[13]

Yet the fact is that since his death at mid-century, Orwell has indeed had a major impact on events, attributable not just to the books he wrote but to the sort of life he led, or which people think he led. Today only the books remain. But for all the capacity of the writer's clear voice to evoke a sense of the man within the work, the books alone cannot fully account for his cultural influence or inspirational power. To understand Orwell's impact one must instead look back and forth between the life and books and times. How the life and works were influenced by the times, and in turn have influenced the times—both Orwell's and ours—is the dynamic, reciprocal process which repeatedly requires examination in his case. It is the process of a man making and remaking himself and thereby remaking his world and ours; of a writer's reception by, impact upon, and re-formation of and through his culture.

These processes return us by a different route to intrinsic and extrinsic considerations, and to the problem of mediations. With every person, and Orwell was no exception, there is an "inside" and "outside" view: how he saw himself and how the world has seen him. This distinction between inside and outside views, and the practice of shuttling between them, is fundamental to social psychology and the sociology of symbolic interaction, resonant with Mills's description of the personal "troubles" of milieu and the public "issues" of social structure. "Troubles" have to do with the individual's self, arising with him "as a biographical entity"—within his character and within the range of his immediate relations with others. "Issues" have to do with institutions and their interpenetration, transcending the individual's local environments and pertaining to a society's organization and history. Mediating this rich field of relations between the self and social structure is the social group, that pivotal region in which the formation of self-images and public images is endlessly renegotiated and transformed. Mills himself believed strongly that "the problems of history-making" necessitated an understanding of group relations, of both the institutional dimensions of personal troubles and the human meaning of public issues.[14] Orwell the literary sociologist certainly would have agreed. In choosing to study a writer's history of reputation, we have the advantage (not without its interpretive difficulties) of having his self-estimations at different times preserved in his own words, rather than needing to judge him exclusively by the reports or memories of others. As we examine the Orwell portraiture, we will pay particularly close attention in certain sections to Orwell's self-images and to the reference group as a unit of

study, seeing how the group relations and social-institutional affiliations of Orwell and his audiences have conditioned their images of him.

Literary transfiguration is, then, a process with a large institutional component. Occasionally the process bears some marks of a consciously coordinated effort among several of the industry's spheres to "manufacture a reputation"—i.e., among interested parties in publishing, book reviewing, academic criticism, literary and critical movements, and the mass media. But such orchestrations are probably far less frequent than the conspiracy-minded would have us believe.[15] All of these agents of influence have interacted (though in my judgment not colluded) to build Orwell's critical reputation into a wide public one. The estimates and characterizations of early book reviewers and literary critics have substantially determined the distinctive shape of his reputation; the mass media's assimilation of his works has been mainly responsible for its size. Because of their historical importance and general availability, materials connected with these three agents of influence (reviewers, critics, mass media) receive special attention in this study. I have found autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs invaluable for interpreting the larger social-institutional contexts of observers' responses to Orwell. Indeed my reconstruction of the formation of Orwell's reputation could not have proceeded without these materials. Newspaper columns, general circulation periodical articles, letters to the editor, and transcripts of radio and television broadcasts have enabled a few forays into Orwell's reputation at the widest spheres of public response. Such "marginal" reception materials puncture the fiction of the homogeneity of the reading "public," that easily held academic illusion of a single, intellectual audience.[16] They also give empirical support to the common-sense view—whose implications have gone largely unaddressed in reception aesthetics and literary sociology—that intellectual audiences are themselves multiple and in any case are by no means the exclusive receivers of "public" writers like Orwell.

III

In his essay on Henry Miller, Orwell remarks on "one of those revealing passages in which a writer tells you a great deal about himself while talking about somebody else."[17] Just as some of Orwell's critical statements on Dickens, Swift, Tolstoy, and Kipling tell us more about him than about them, observers' comments on Orwell not infrequently amount less to literary criticism than to self- and group-analysis. Such "revealing passages" written by Orwell are obviously of special interest; but so too are such passages in the commentary of Orwell's observers. For when many observers tell us, however knowingly or unawares, as much about themselves as about their ostensible subject, it suggests a great deal about how readers identify with authors as intellectual models and rivals.

The sense of passionate identification expressed toward Orwell by some observers and the variety of inspirational images in which they have cast him sometimes make him appear almost like Joseph Campbell's "hero with

a thousand faces." "Kidnaping Our Hero" is in fact a subtitle of one of Irving Howe's discussions of Orwell's controversial postwar legacy. Indeed the typically unscholarly question of heroes and hero worship hovers at the border of any study of the making of a literary figure. "The need for heroism is not easy to admit," wrote Ernest Becker in *The Denial of Death.* "To be conscious of what one is doing to earn his feeling of heroism is the main self-analytic problem of life." Each of the historical faces which I have reconstructed from the Orwell commentary is a characteristic image of the Hero—as Rebel, Common Man, Prophet, and Saint. Despite the diverse judgments of observers on Orwell, there is seldom far removed from their remarks about him the search for, appeal of, or anxiety toward the heroic—manifested with their preoccupation with Orwell the man, or with the man in the writings.[18]

Such a focus upon a writer as a heroic character in his society was frequent, though often wholly uncritical, in nineteenth-century biography, and it is central to the philosophizing of Carlyle, Emerson, Nietzsche, and others on "great men." Contemporary biographers, on the other hand, influenced by the psychohistorian's practice of locating extraordinary adult achievement in childhood conflicts and by the social historian's emphasis on ordinary lives and on socioeconomic forces as historical determinants, often shrink great men and women. The crucial task in writing biography and history is to address the institutional conditions which bear on the making of reputations while retaining the generosity of spirit to recognize the heroic in its many guises. For Becker, societies are not merely systems of symbolic interaction and role-typing but "cultural hero systems." They are theatres for the heroic which give people feelings of specialness and usefulness by carving out "roles for performance of various degrees of heroism." People play their roles on different stage levels, from the "high" heroism of an Orwell to the "low" heroism of a Wigan coal miner.[19]

Perhaps the frequent characterizations of Orwell as an intellectual "conscience" and "voice" by so many of his admirers constitute a baring of one dimension of our modern culture's hero system: the making and recognition of the intellectual hero. Sometimes the acknowledgments by other writers of Orwell's "presence" in their lives are startlingly open and unrestrained. Characterizations of Orwell by Anglo-American intellectuals of the Left and Right—to Lionel Trilling the figure of "the man who tells the truth," to Irving Howe an "intellectual hero," to T.R. Fyvel a "literary hero," to Angus Wilson "one of my great heroes," to John Atkins a "social saint," to Stephen Spender "an example of 'the lived truth', " to George Woodcock a "conscience," to Alfred Kazin "a hero whom I shall always love," to Joseph Epstein and Malcolm Muggeridge a "hero of our time," to Richard Rees a "spiritual hero," to John Wain a "moral hero"—indicate that for many intellectuals, regardless of their politics or even generation, Orwell has stood as nothing less than an heroic model and ethical guide.[20] Such a relationship between a writer and his culture demands explanation of what various group and cultural needs have so powerfully and frequently drawn

observers to him. It is not enough to say that a person is an heroic figure because other people have named him as such: the task is to see both *why* they so named him and what specific *elements* in his life and work apparently fulfilled their needs and aspirations. Of course, like all figures, "George Orwell" has been a mutable, pulsating "figure in our lives"—or in some people's lives. He is nothing like the unchanging wax figure now installed at Madame Tussaud's in London, but rather a fluid, if more or less continuous, presence in recent Anglo-American cultural life and a periodically prominent habitation and name in our culture.

IV

The value of the insights derived from studying Orwell's reputation will possess general relevance insofar as Orwell's widely recognized importance as a modern literary figure suggests questions much larger than his own case. "[G]et to really know something about yourself—and thru yourself the world," Henry Miller told Orwell in 1938. "Everyone is micro- and macrocosm both, don't forget that. . . ."[21] Miller's posture of political detachment aside, the substance of this advice is worth our consideration in approaching a figure of Orwell's dimensions and significance. For it is paradoxically true that the general is sometimes best approached by way of the particular. A writer can be peculiarly representative of his age or craft by the very fact of his distinctiveness; Orwell's single history remarkably touches, often in the capacity of the writer as participant-witness, practically all the pressing issues facing his generation—and ours: poverty, imperialism, war, revolution, socialism, mass culture, totalitarianism. "His history," declared the narrator of one Orwell TV special in 1984, "is the history of the twentieth century." Indeed, from the standpoint of the 1980s, Orwell appears very much like a Sartrean "singular universal," an individual through whom the "universal" spirit of an age finds expression and from whose "singular" experiences the character of the age is forged. Or as one critic dubbed him in 1984: "The Political Secretary of the Zeitgeist."[22]

In confronting the problem of mediations—in framing the task of getting to know something about a self and a reputation, and through it something about a society and an age—one could boil down the questions on Orwell already posed in this introduction to four key ones worthy of extended exploration:

- What sort of "reputation-history" does Orwell possess?
- How should a writer with this particular history of reputation be approached?
- Why has this writer, George Orwell, been the occasion for such wide-ranging symbolic transformation?
- In what images have observers cast him?

Part One furnishes a preliminary answer to these questions and a critical perspective useful for investigating them further. Chapter One offers

the long view to the first question, including a capsule history of Orwell's reputation. Chapter Two addresses questions two through four, examining reputation as a literary issue, offering a framework for discussing it, and introducing the Orwell gallery. Part Two tours each room portrait by portrait, slowly encircling each face and inspecting each from shifting angles of vision. We will be assaying the efficacy and limitations of the critical concepts broached in Chapter Two as we probe the features and blemishes of the Orwell physiognomy.

Thus we are exploring the reputation process in a single instance, looking for ways of conceptualizing some of its general implications and identifying its distinctive features, and seeking to return to the instance with some helpful theoretical instruments. The first tasks are to clarify the dimensions of and the issues bearing on Orwell's reputation, and thereby provide a background from which larger questions about the making of reputation will emerge. Our consequent starting point is a brief and concrete discussion of Orwell's history of reputation and ambiguous legacy.

Part One

Anatomy of Reputation

. . . later on [he may] *attain a brilliant reputation. And if it should come only after he is no more, well! . . .*
He may console himself by thinking of the saints, who are canonized only after they are dead.

Schopenhauer,
"On Reputation," The Art of Literature

No doubt alcohol, tobacco and so forth are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid.

Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"

Swaddling 'St. George' ushers in the New Year: the countdown to 1984 was finally over.

ONE

Orwell into the Nineties

1. Reputation, Legacy, Historiography

I

"Saints should be judged guilty until they are proved innocent," Orwell said of Gandhi,[1] and probably no one would have been more surprised (and disquieted) than Orwell himself at critics' posthumous discovery and spontaneous proclamation of his heroic sanctity. He was eulogized majestically by V.S. Pritchett as a "saint" and "the conscience of his generation";[2] his beatification as a writer followed in upward revaluations of his work a few months later by leading British and American intellectuals;[3] and his canonization in school curricula and in the popular press during the 1950s was conducted by acclamation rather than audit. Periodic impieties from the far Left about a "reactionary petit-bourgeois" Orwell and from psychoanalytic critics about a "sadomasochistic" Orwell merely reinforced the image established among many liberal and conservative intellectuals of a lonely, embattled hero persecuted for having spoken the truth.[4] Even occasional revelations about Orwell's shortcomings in private life have only served to reaffirm for his admirers his genuine and fallible humanity.[5] Many reviewers have depicted him simply as a man among saints. Certainly more than one Orwell-watcher has assumed 'St. George' innocent until proven guilty—and skipped trial proceedings altogether.* Such uncritical hagiography, as will soon be-

*As one worshipful reviewer of *Such, Such Were the Joys* put it in 1953: "In this case at least I do not even have to read the book, I like it in advance. One should not prejudge—with the exception of George Orwell!"[6]

come apparent, is only one manifestation of a recurring contrast between images of the man and images of his work.

Still, it would be no exaggeration to say that Orwell merits his own fond benediction to Kipling as "the most popular English writer of our time."[7] *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have sold almost 40 million copies in sixty-odd languages, more than any other pair of books by a serious *or popular* postwar author. One sign and secret of Orwell's appeal for new generations of readers may lie in the widespread, pleasurable association of his name with our earliest reading experiences, and in the feeling that he speaks directly to every stage of our reading lives. Schoolchildren find *Animal Farm* a beguiling fantasy, and then learn to delight in the neatness of its allegory. Many of the fable's mature readers vividly recall having burst through it in a single sitting as youngsters, and sometimes also remember seeing the animated cartoon version, with its happy ending. High school students read *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* often identifying with rebellious Winston and Julia, and afterwards spotting adult Newspeak and doublethink everywhere. College students in introductory composition classes are reminded by their instructors that "Good prose is like a windowpane" and "What is above all needed is to let the meaning choose the word," and then given assignments to model their themes on "Shooting an Elephant," "Politics and the English Language," or other of Orwell's frequently anthologized autobiographical and expository essays. More advanced students of history, politics, and literature not only read these works but also the social documentaries, the literary criticism, and the fiction in order to understand better the nature of poverty, imperialism, war, and totalitarianism; the intellectual and cultural climate of the British 1930s and '40s; and the interrelations among politics, art, and language. And sometimes just for the pure pleasure of the bracing prose.

Probably no other modern English-language writer's work has been so woven into the texture of the popular imagination. Teenagers have tuned out and floated off on the waves of rock star David Bowie's apocalyptic hits, "Nineteen Eighty-Four" and "Big Brother." Concerned citizens, alarmed about reports of massive CIA-FBI-KGB computer files and worldwide undercover spying operations, have warned that the spectre of Oceania is not just far-fetched science fiction.[8] The words *vaporized, thoughtcrime,* and *Hate Week* suddenly come to life for many of us when televised nightmares like *Holocaust* enter our living rooms. Indeed, as he once said of Kipling's rhetorical impact upon the pre- World War I era, Orwell today may also stand as "the only English writer of our time who has added phrases to the language."[9] Bureaucrats traffic in Newspeak, politicians orate in doublespeak, government agents eavesdrop like Thought Police—even "Some are more equal than others" has become a knowing put-down for hypocrisy and a discrimination story headline, making the phrase sometimes sound more native than the Jefferson original. Perhaps not a few youngsters have even wondered, when watching commercials for the nationwide Big Brothers organization for fatherless boys, what "Big Brother Is Watching You" really meant.

So thoroughly have the catchwords and mood of Orwell's dystopia permeated our collective consciousness that "1984" immediately evokes—or did until the long-awaited arrival of the year—numerous fearful associations. The date is part of Western folklore. Many people don't know it is a book title; still more have no idea of the name of the book's author. No matter: the numeral became, as it were, a man-made Friday the 13th. The title of a 1983 Smithsonian Institute panel made the point: "1984 as a Universal Metaphor."[10] Even people who have never read the book will admit to having paused momentarily in vague anxiety at the mere mention of that numerical swastika of the totalitarian age. Now that we have lived through the year (and recorded it countless times on our letters, checks, and computer terminals), the figure haunts us no longer; instead it may seem to most of us no more than four ordinary numbers, a historical relic, or a hackneyed joke. And yet even our new nonchalance or jadedness toward "1984" testifies in a way to the numeral's wide currency: surely it is the only number that has ever become a cliché.

In addition to the general impact of Orwell's last two books, there are the documentaries and essays, with their appeal of Orwell's accessible, gripping prose style and his apparent rootedness in the culture of ordinary people's lives. Even Orwell's casual journalism often gives the impression of freshness, although some of it is now almost a half-century old. Orwell subtitled his first American essay collection "Studies in Popular Culture,"[11] and his anthropological pieces on boys' weekly newspapers, detective stories, and penny postcards in some ways mark him as the grandfather of the field. One is hard-pressed to think of another English writer who has managed to survive and bridge the ever growing chasm between high and mass culture, his work being not only assigned in the universities but widely read by the general public.

Others have paved the trails Orwell blazed. The present-day orientation of academic fields studying issues in communication, sociology, and journalism is partly connected with the history of Orwell's example and influence. Much of his fiction and journalism carefully explores the subtle interconnections between linguistic and political manipulation, and has spawned English followers like Henry Fairlie and Kenneth Hudson. One critic has maintained that even Orwell's realistic fiction and documentaries constitute a searching investigation of the failures of language to promote interpersonal intimacy and social harmony.[12] Best-selling anti-jargon vigilantes like Edwin Newman (*Strictly Speaking, A Civil Tongue*) and William Safire (*New Language of Politics, What's the Good Word?*) are directly descended from (though far less serious than) Orwell. Studies in political rhetoric on the government jargon used during the Vietnam War and Watergate Affair have unearthed a mountain of euphemism and doublespeak that makes them seem like research projects documenting our regress toward Newspeak. Sociology textbooks have excerpted chapters of Orwell's novels and documentaries, and Dwight Macdonald called Orwell's documentary writing "the best sociological reporting I know."[13] Orwell's practices of "living

his research," presenting sociological types like the "tramp-monster" and miner, and offering detailed subjective descriptions of his situations and subjects bear clear affinities with the best-written early fieldwork of the Chicago School of interpretive sociology.[14] More recognizably, Orwell's energetic prose, his unusual openness about how he may be influencing his own reporting, and his characteristic preference for describing society "from below" by way of lower-class and deviant life mark him as a forerunner of the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe and Jack Newfield.[15] It is doubtful that any other recent English literary man has served as the subject or springboard for academic studies in such wide-ranging fields as political thought, journalism and media studies, rhetoric and semantics, futurology, popular culture, and even religious studies.[16]

II

Not all of these legacies, however, have been as widely acknowledged as they might, nor are those which *are* claimed necessarily the ones which Orwell actually left. Orwell's predicament four decades after his death is not unlike what he called Kipling's "peculiar position of having been a byword for fifty years." "Before one can speak about Kipling," wrote Orwell in a prophetically self-reflexive moment, "one has to clear away a legend that has been created by . . . sets of people who have not read his works." Moreover, as he said of Stendhal, the great majority of those who *have* read his books know him for only two famous ones, a circumstance that has added half-truth to ignorance and turned Orwell legend into chimera.[17]

All writers are selectively read and esteemed, of course, according to a plethora of sociohistorical variables. But the point with Orwell is that the popularity of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has both made his name familiar across a broad spectrum of the international reading public and has helped generate widely variable popular and critical attitudes toward him. "Orwell" and his coinages are recognizable on a worldwide scale. But most people know nothing about Orwell's life: the man has been eclipsed by the power and notoriety of his masterworks. Among intellectual readers, similar discrepancies prevail. Intellectuals of the Left (Bernard Crick, Irving Howe) and Right (Norman Podhoretz) have judged him the best political writer of the century. Yet some radicals (John Casey) and more literary-minded intellectuals (T.A. Birrell) have regarded him as a ("mere") journalist.[18]

The variations in Orwell's reputation in the educational community are perhaps most striking. Orwell's canonization in English curricula was immediate, but it has also been eclectic. *Animal Farm* is a high school staple. (A former college chairman of the Advanced Placement Program could write in the 1970s, with noticeable chagrin, that Orwell's beast fable was the only book previously read by every student of the eighty-five in his freshman literature class.[19]) Orwell's essays are likewise standard requirements in introductory university composition classes. Yet these writings are rarely encountered in more advanced courses. Nor, apart from the

special attention to Orwell's *oeuvre* in 1984, are any of his other works usually taught in the academy. Nor are there any Orwell journals or literary societies.[20] (Admittedly, one can hardly imagine anything he would have more disliked.) And yet, except possibly for Lawrence, it is likely that Orwell has exerted deeper influence on young Anglo-American writers than any other English writer of the last half-century. Several postwar British writers more widely taught in university literature courses, such as the so-called Angry Young Men and Movement writers (Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Osborne, Robert Conquest), acknowledge their indebtedness for style and subject matter to Orwell's early fiction and essays. But he made a first appearance in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* only after some of them (fourth edition, 1980).

Statements from those inside and outside the academy on Orwell's standing as a "canonized" author highlight these oddities in reputation. One coordinator of an American academic conference on Orwell's work in 1984 told me that, of more than a dozen academic symposia she had organized in the previous three years, no figure or issue had attracted so many international participants as the Orwell symposium. Such testimony stands in apparent opposition to the verdict of several U.S. English professors in a 1983 interview. They agreed that Orwell was a "journalist" and "didactic writer" who "failed to live up to top literary standards," with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular "lacking in literary sophistication."[21] Readily conceding Orwell's exclusion from the modern British novel's "great tradition," even so ardent an Orwell admirer as Richard Rovere reflected these same assumptions and the prevailing consensus on Orwell's fiction ("of the second rank") in his introduction to *The Orwell Reader* (1956).[22] Others have dismissed Orwell's fiction as being not even third-rate, with his documentaries qualifying him as a lesser Mayhew.[23] I have heard *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* patronized as "high school reading." (Even though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been one of the books most frequently banned from U.S. secondary schools.[24]) And since a fable and a dystopia do not fit easily into standard fiction categories, the result is that Orwell the fiction writer is reduced to a "Thirties writer"—his work falling, most inconveniently for reading lists in college literature courses, between the end of the modernist movement and the return to more traditional, realistic fiction in the 1950s.

Some readers, having encountered *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and an Orwell essay or two as teenagers, vaguely think of "Orwell" and his "old-fashioned plain style" as adolescent fare. Others faintly remember him and his work as something from the dim past. (As one journalist wrote, mockingly, of this feeling in early 1983: "Oh yeah, there's that book I read in high school. It's that 'Big Brother thing'—George . . . what's his name . . . wrote it."[25]) To many Britons and most Americans he is a sort of icon. Even after (or because of) the publicizing of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* during the title year, they know relatively little about the real life of George Orwell, the ephemera of the year and the hype behind the popular biographical treatments ("Do *you* know who George Orwell is?" asked a *People* magazine

cover) having effectively obscured the few substantive press discussions and radio-TV documentaries on Orwell.[26] But, given the newspaper headlines, many people know the sinister meaning of "Orwellian" and feel a twinge of discomfort at the mention of the adjective's reference, assuming *l'adjectif c'est l'homme.* Readers of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* who are slightly acquainted with the myth of Orwell's "saintly" life often perceive the breach between the man's character and the writer's vision as near-absolute. As we will soon see in detail, their Orwell is a schizoid figure, the "honest, decent man who wrote the abject, ruthless books."

All this raises the issue of Orwell's relation to mass culture and his place in the English literary canon. These subjects can, however, wait; thus far we have merely indicated the boundaries and terrain of a writer's reputation. Topography now equips us for geology. The incongruities in Orwell's reputation from one region to the next should refocus our attention on two partially submerged issues: the heterogeneity of Orwell's audiences and the problematic relation between the man and the works. The implications for canon-formation and of the discrepancies in Orwell's reputation among different spheres of reception are discussed in Chapter Two, an instance of what I term "the problem of reputation." Here we need note only that differences from one sphere of reception to another are characteristic of all authors' reputations; my present aim is to mark, not to decry or contest, the peculiar "tri-furcation" in Orwell's reputation among popular, intellectual, and academic spheres of reception, including many notable variations in all three. Orwell's reputation turns out to be of special interest precisely because its sharp discontinuities illustrate so graphically the heterogeneous receptions of all writers.

The multiformity in Orwell's reputation has arisen at least partly because his readership, unlike most, spans the continuing, probably widening, split among "highbrow," "middlebrow," and "lowbrow" audiences. Various of Orwell's works are read primarily in the critical community, still living in the shadow of the modernist revolution and its formalist assumptions; *Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and (to a lesser extent) the documentaries and essays are read by the literary-minded public, usually favoring non-experimental, more accessible writings; and Orwell's coinages, often along with information about his last two books and his life, have reached the general public either in the press or through the broadcast media.

The impression of a "schism" between "the man" and "the works"—usually portrayed as corresponding to the supposed rift between "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell"—has further contributed to his highly ramified reputation. Information about "Orwell" often fails to travel far beyond intellectual circles; as a result, the public is left to judge Orwell primarily by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and infer the man from it. This is not to say, however, that there is anything like a consensus among intellectuals and academics as to the relation of the man to the works. Just the reverse. The sense of a disjunction between the man and his writings is reflected in the long-standing argument among critics as to which of the two is the more signifi-

cant accomplishment. Literary and biographical critics have been at pains for years to show that Orwell was more important for what he wrote than for how he lived. "The achievement is more important than the man," biographer Bernard Crick has insisted. The compulsion to argue the point testifies in itself, however, to the power of Orwell's personal example. Old Orwell acquaintances have usually argued exactly the reverse of Crick, supporting their views with some "revealing" personal anecdote or conversation "with Eric," implying that only they are really qualified to decide the man-versus-writer issue. "The greatest thing about Orwell was Orwell," concluded poet-friend Paul Potts. "He was ultimately better than anything he wrote. . . . In this man's presence there have been kings who would have looked parvenus." Adding still further to the confusion is testimony from other Orwell friends like Jacintha Buddicom that *Animal Farm* and the nonfiction "exactly" capture the man, indeed that, in George Woodcock's judgment, Orwell's "crystalline prose" exemplifies that "the style is the man."[27]

The mass media have redoubled and recast the confusion by trumpeting all these judgments and simultaneously taking the Orwell of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for the whole literary personality, thus transmitting to the public a grotesque twin profile: the 'St. George' caricature of the nonfiction and acquaintances' testimonies crouches in the shadow of The Prophet of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the 1950s and early '60s, magazine reviewers paid tribute in the literary pages to Orwell as Lionel Trilling's "virtuous man" even as reporters writing for the political pages bandied "1984" in Cold War arguments and casually linked "Big Brother" to Orwell's character. These opposing practices further contributed to the sense of a "split" between Orwell's life and work. Meanwhile, just as friends of Orwell like Woodcock sometimes implied that the man and works were a seamless, transparent unity, hostile Left critics like Isaac Deutscher and James Walsh asserted the same identity to merge the man and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* into a bogeyman figure. Woodcock's pure, clean stylist was Walsh's "hysterical, shrieking" slogan-monger and anti-socialist duckspeaker.[28] ("The style is the unperson"?) 'St. George' as Defender of the King's English was thus coming to be viewed by admirers as a paladin of good prose and by enemies as a pillar of Establishment reaction.

III

With the exception of the Marxist Left, however, the coveted (and presumed) patronage of the patron saint was to know no bounds. "George died on Lenin's birthday, and is being buried by the Astors," wrote Malcolm Muggeridge in his diary in January 1950, "which seems to me to cover the full range of his life." Or perhaps better, his afterlife. Prominent Labour Party supporters and democratic socialists, liberals and neoliberals, conservatives and neoconservatives, anarchists, the "younger" generation of writers, composition teachers, journalists, literary intellectuals and leading

opinion-makers, Catholics and Protestants, Humanists and Personalists all soon beat a path to Orwell's grave, exalting him not only as a literary model but also as a human one. "The most heterogeneous following a writer can ever have accumulated," Woodcock called Orwell's "faithful." Many newcomers to the flock elaborated tortuous, and heretofore overlooked, parallels between Orwell and themselves. Even *The Bookseller* took to reminding readers on one occasion that Orwell too was "a bookseller."[29]

The historical emergence of the "claiming" of Orwell is worth pursuing here, for its study illumines the problem of intellectual grave-robbing and the hidden concatenations between Orwell's afterlife and his life. Equally important, it takes us a step further toward understanding the first critical issue which we have discussed, the heterogeneity of Orwell's reception, and opens out onto the second issue, the "paradoxical" relation of the man to the works, suggesting an avenue for approaching its tensions.

What Orwell wrote of Dickens soon applied to himself: "the very people he attacked have swallowed him so completely that he has become a national institution himself."[30] Each new publication by or about Orwell in the early 1950s further enlarged his reputation and also further complicated it by serving as the occasion for political and commercial interest groups to claim him as a partisan. To *Time,* flagship publication of the conservative Luce press, Orwell demonstrated in his 1950 and 1953 essay collections that he was "The Honest Witness," "one of the few genuinely important writers of these times," the fearless patriot who "car[ried] out a guerrilla campaign against the woolheaded fellow travelers who were poisoning English life." The *New Republic,* organ of the American liberal intelligentsia, treated the 1950 republication of *Burmese Days* and *Coming Up for Air* as occasions for "Homage to George Orwell," for "less vain, less subjective a writer never lived." But *Newsweek* and the popular press were not to be outdone: *Homage to Catalonia,* appearing in its first American edition in 1952, was "a great, even saintly, sort of recollection. . . . Orwell in no place in his account of his war experiences in Spain betrays the least malice. Of such, perhaps, is the Kingdom of Heaven." The battle for the mantle of 'St. George' Orwell had begun.[31]

The making of Orwell into a patron saint of the Left and Right, however, was not a matter of ideological factions simply claiming a champion. It was the outcome of a complicated conjunction of the Cold War, two powerful satires, and an ailing writer's (perhaps understandable) carelessness with regard to the possibilities for ideological and commercial exploitation of his work. Orwell's conflicting posthumous images before the public in the early '50s were matters of timing as much as critics' or the media's design. Contributing mightily to the anomalies was Orwell's meteoric climb to fame during his last years, arising from the sudden successes of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* which were his darkest works and were written in large part as broadsides against Russian state socialism and therefore highly susceptible by their negative thrust to misinterpretation. Orwell's untimely death from tuberculosis in January 1950, just seven months after the publication of

Nineteen Eighty-Four, made the book seem to many people (even some friends)[32] the parting testament of a dying man in despair, and it further confused Orwell's legacy. These varied developments made it easier for anti-socialist and conservative critics, especially those unfamiliar with the London literary scene, to misconstrue Orwell, willfully or not, as an ally. His determination to complete *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and then retype it himself when no secretary could be found to do the job, was also interpreted by many observers as evidence of his "death wish." Isaac Rosenfeld could "not conceive of a greater despair" than Orwell's, and he speculated in 1950 about Orwell's "suicide," his masochistic drive as "a dying man" to finish the masterpiece in which he had "cast his own sickness [as] the world's."[33] Jeffrey Meyers later expressed the prevalent view that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the killing blow in Orwell's "mad and suicidal sojourn" to his "bleak" Hebrides isle.[34] Orwell had finished *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* went some verdicts, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had finished him. (The view has persisted. "Consumed by His Book, George Orwell Died for It," ran one press headline in 1984.[35])

These widely circulated speculations generated a romantic myth about Orwell as a man who literally lived and died for his work, just as his dystopia was becoming embroiled in Cold War argument. Furthermore, Orwell's request in his will that no biography of him be written was respected by his acquaintances and energetically enforced by his widow Sonia. Yet Orwell's work had also given the impression that there was hardly need for a biography; much of his writing seemed straightforwardly autobiographical to most readers. So acquaintances reminisced about Orwell and wrote about his work, constructing along the way what amounted to a haphazard composite biography. They used his work to talk about his life, often casually treating his essays and fiction as if they were unreconstructed reports about the poverty and Burmese police work of his younger days, i.e., as if his fictional heroes Gordon Comstock and John Flory *were* George Orwell.[36] And they similarly used his life to talk about his work, but of course relying upon exaggerated stories of his boyhood poverty and down-and-out days. Usually these stories were quoted not from actual conversations with Orwell, who was extraordinarily reticent even with close friends about his personal life, but based upon ostensibly autobiographical passages in his books or on hearsay.[37] Literary critics and reviewers who had not known Orwell followed these leads and operated similarly.[38] New editions of Orwell's work, new collections of his essays, and new books of literary/biographical criticism on him kept his name continually in book review pages during the 1950s. But his early work frequently received belated and flattering attention at least partly on account of the growing reputations of his last two books. The complex and partial truths making for Orwell's posthumous fame often overwhelmed responses to Orwell's prewar work, obscuring or distorting his early career and reputation.

Even before Orwell's death, the political claims and counter-claims were being lodged to both the man and the work. Almost immediately the notoriety of *Animal Farm* turned "Orwell" into an issue in international cultural

politics. Published in Britain in the same month (August 1945) as the dropping of the atom bombs, *Animal Farm* exploded on the cultural front. Orwell's little fable seemed to signal the end of one era of East-West relations and the beginning of another: the Cold War. One historian has judged that *Animal Farm,* along with Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon,* "probably did more to make Western public opinion *feel* the unique Stalinist combination of equalitarian myth and new privileges than any historical or sociological explanation." *Animal Farm*'s plot and characterizations closely corresponded to the Russian Revolution, its aftermath, and its principals; understandably, it was taken—as Orwell intended—as first and foremost an assault on the Soviet Union. Anglo-American Communist reviewers denounced Orwell's "pig's eye view." Equally predictably, anti-Stalinist radicals in London and New York greeted *Animal Farm* enthusiastically.[39]

Quite disturbing to Orwell, however, was his fable's celebrated reception in conservative circles. Some conservative reviewers read it as a criticism of the Soviet Union from the Right; noting that it was set in England (with the lyrics of the animal hymn "Beasts of England" modeled on the *Internationale*), they welcomed it as not only anti-Stalinist but anti-socialist, as not only pro-libertarian but pro-American. Or they coupled Orwell with his friend Koestler as a disillusioned former Communist Party member. Orwell reportedly told Stephen Spender that he "had not written a book against Stalin in order to provide propaganda for capitalists." Nevertheless, he fell victim to a process whose dangers he often discussed in conversation: how difficult it is, in an ideologically polarized climate, to take up any position without being presumed to hold (or being deliberately tagged with) the current string of "party line" views conventionally associated with the position. It was not well understood outside the literary Left in London and New York that Orwell was an internal critic of the Left and yet not a bitter ex-socialist.[40]

Part of Orwell's problem was that he was now addressing a much wider audience, politically and culturally, than earlier in his career. His clear style implied a clear message. No reader needed to make a special effort to read Orwell's prose. But the plain style can mask a submerged complexity, and this was the case with the relation of Orwell's political fable to the emergent Cold War. For an allegory like *Animal Farm* which seemed so straightforward—the best example of Orwell as "The Crystal Spirit," in Woodcock's estimation—made one assume that one *did* understand the man and the book, and need not acquaint oneself with its historical-political context. The point here is not that Orwell was disingenuous or his persona false, as some radical Left critics have argued. It is simply that the man, his work, and political events so converged as to make Orwell both famous and widely misunderstood at the same time.

Nineteen Eighty-Four suffered similar ideological misreadings. Indeed the book became known almost immediately not by its original and proper title, but simply as "1984," a distillation which ironically outdid even the bareness of Newspeak by dispensing with words altogether. This abridgement both

reflected and facilitated the encapsulation, oversimplification, and distortion of his work in the following decade. Whatever Orwell's anger at the use of *Animal Farm* as "propaganda for capitalists," however, he appears to have taken no special steps to avoid the same consequences with *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* In 1947, responding to his literary agent's news that a "reactionary" Dutch paper was serializing *Animal Farm,* Orwell answered, "I don't know if we can help that. Obviously a book of that type is liable to be made use of by Conservatives, Catholics, etc."[41] This casual (though perhaps also cynically pragmatic) attitude toward the abuse of his work suggests that Orwell may indeed have inadvertently contributed to the misreadings of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which arose even during his life. Clearly, Orwell as polemicist was willing to sacrifice precision of aim for rhetorical power, as his incautious name for the Party, "Ingsoc" (= English socialism) suggests.* Not surprisingly, as with *Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four* was warmly welcomed on the Right as not only anti-Communist but also anti-socialist.[43] Even Orwell's publisher, Fredric Warburg, interpreted *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in his in-house report as "a deliberate and sadistic attack on socialism and socialist parties generally." Warburg attributed Orwell's vitriol entirely to his ill health and feared that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was "worth a cool million votes to the Conservative party."[44]

However erroneous Warburg's judgments, his reading merits notice: if Orwell's publisher could so grossly misinterpret his intentions, how likely was it that others would not? Although many intellectuals on the anti-Stalinist Left (Pritchett, Trilling, Philip Rahv) immediately saw what Orwell was up to and shared his political stance, confusions like Warburg's—far more serious and widespread than with *Animal Farm* because the Cold War was now nearing its peak (June 1949) and because the slogans of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were so inviting as press headlines—soon developed. What has gone unnoticed is the extent to which Warburg's actions contributed to their development. Orwell issued a press release, through Warburg, and later a *dementi,* often quoted by scholars though not widely heeded at the time, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was "NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party, of which I am a supporter. . . . "[45] No statement, seemingly, could have been clearer. But Warburg apparently continued to advertise *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with promotions from conserva-

*The lack of caution, however, is partly why *Nineteen Eighty-Four* penetrated so deeply into the Western imagination. The book facilitated the immediate and only half-conscious transferal and superimposition of the West's wartime horror of Nazi Germany onto Stalinist Russia. Orwell's dystopia could be taken as the nightmare of Nazism and Bolshevism rolled into one: "Red Fascism." The "enigma" of Russia and of Stalin's postwar actions were then comprehensible as the aggressive acts of a Hitler. By fusing some tendencies common to Nazism *and* Bolshevism into a model of "totalitarianism," *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thus inadvertently lent coherence and force to the simplistic Nazi-Stalinist analogy, whereby Russia in the 1950s was a carbon copy of Germany in the 1930s, with "Yalta" and "Greece" feared as a replay of "Munich" and "appeasement." Needless to say, Orwell's swipes at Britain and the U.S.—e.g., the fact that "Airstrip One" was England, that its currency was "dollars," and its national anthem was "Oceania, 'tis of thee"—were largely ignored in the Western media.[42]

tive papers like Lord Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard,* which had named *Nineteen Eighty-Four* its Book of the Month that June. The literary editor of the *Evening Standard* wrote that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "shows how 'the abolition' of private property means the concentration of property in fewer hands than before," and he sarcastically prescribed it as "required reading" for Labour Party M.P.s. The *Evening Standard* subheadline that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was "the most important book published since the war" also appeared on the dust jacket of the Uniform Edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* printed in late 1949.[46]

Whether all or some or none of this was done with Orwell's knowledge is impossible to say. The Irish writer Frank O'Connor, however, has expressed doubt whether Orwell's *dementi* was "altogether candid." A self-described "non-political man," O'Connor claims that Warburg also sent out—at least to the conservative paper for which O'Connor reviewed *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* if not others, though it is unclear whether this promotion too continued after Orwell's *dementi*—"a cover letter in which Secker & Warburg implied that *1984* was an anti-Labour polemic" and which estimated "the number of votes it was believed [the book] would cost the Labour Party in the next General Election."[47] In addition, before the misinterpretations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* began to appear (though admittedly, after the confusions with *Animal Farm,* his decision shows, at minimum, poor judgment) Orwell did arrange with the conservative *Reader's Digest* to print a 25-page condensation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* and with Henry Luce's *Life* to run an illustrated summary in its July 4 issue.[48] These organs, and some American and Canadian newspapers, told the public that Orwell's book was a vision of a future police state "under socialism."[49] As the subheadline of *Life*'s story put it, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrayed "The Cruel Fate of Man In A Regimented Left-Wing Police State Which Controls His Mind and Soul." Soon thereafter pro-McCarthyite organs like *The Freeman* began suggesting that Adlai Stevenson's advisers were "sicklied over" with the vision of a nation "wet-nursed by a Big Brother that may, in 1984, turn out to be Big Brother: Orwell style."[50]

The elevation of the man by various intellectual groups followed apace with Orwell's death. Only the Marxist Left dissented from the chorus of acclaim. After the lavish praise bestowed on Orwell in obituaries and reviews by his London acquaintances (Pritchett, Spender, Koestler, Herbert Read, Bertrand Russell), Orwell stood before readers on both sides of the Atlantic as an heroic figure, or in the phrase of *Tribune* editor John Atkins, "a social saint."[51]

The encomia soon spread outward—and took flight. Anglo-American liberals honored Orwell wistfully as a fellow thinker whose calling as a writer had not compromised his "manhood" and as a man of action who had fought in the Spanish Civil War against fascism, lived among the poor and the working classes, and never hesitated to tell his fellow leftists—many of them now guilt-ridden over the Soviet "betrayal of the Left"—when and where they were wrong. "If there were a competition for saints in which

liberals could bid," Philip Rieff mused in 1954, "Orwell would be their man; he satisfies at once the liberal nostalgia for action and their resignation to despair."[52] If so, he also satisfied the conservative hunger for order and their aversion to change. More interested in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an anti-Communist statement and less so in the man's character, conservatives nevertheless held up Orwell as an "honest" radical, who became "disillusioned" with socialism, and some conservatives implied or argued that he was tending toward Conservatism or religious belief during his last years. Conservative intellectuals (Christopher Hollis, Russell Kirk) argued that Orwell's outlook "coincided" with many conservative principles; the Luce press and anti-Communist periodicals like *The Freeman* went much further, explicitly appropriating Orwell as a bulwark against the threat of socialism and communism alike. The John Birch Society offered *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for sale; its Washington branch adopted "1984" as the last four digits of its telephone number.[53] Thus, whereas to liberals Orwell appeared an exemplary role model, to many conservatives and right-wing anti-Communists he stood as a defender of democracy and an implacable, clear-sighted foe of socialist experiments. Before the Left and Right, he was 'St. George,' Heroic Truth-teller and Fearless Patriot.

And to the literate public too these tableaux of Orwell became recognizable, though largely overshadowed by the darkness of his final vision in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Cast against the luminous white of Orwell's "exemplary life," the blackness of his nightmare vision in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* projected a kind of silhouette. The press was chiefly (if not intentionally) responsible for distributing the image of the "fatalistic" Orwell (though some of Orwell's closest acquaintances had subscribed to it too) by employing the coinages of Oceania as shorthand for the perceived Red menace. TV and film adaptations of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the mid-'50s made Orwell's slogans familiar to millions of nonreaders. Soon after the unprecedented controversy over the BBC's 1954 adaptation of Orwell's dystopia, in which outraged viewers claimed that the program upset them physically and warped youngsters' minds with its pessimism, "1984" became in Britain what Isaac Deutscher called "The Black Millennium," lodged in the imagination as the horrific Year of Judgment, when our technology and our leaders and our very spouses and children betray us.*[54] As associations multiplied and quickened between the world of Orwell's novel and the world of the 1950s—the budding American "computer state," the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, the McCarthy "witchhunts," Khrushchev's revelations of Stalin's crimes, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, the erection of the Berlin Wall—clock-watchers began to wonder whether their anxious present could really become Orwell's terrifying future. As they did so, Orwell himself started to take on the image not just of the secular saint but of the gloomy clairvoyant, Prophet of the Future Imperfect.

*See Chapter Five, Section 16, "Media Prophet": Orwell on the Telescreen (pp. 273–87).

This twin profile of the haloed Saint and the dark Prophet gradually became the public image by which Orwell was chiefly known. The two faces gained prominence not only because of the charged characterizations—"saint," "virtuous man," "prophet," "fatalist"—which the critics and the media applied to Orwell, but also because these images correlated with the developing rift between the life and works, i.e., between the man and the author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Likewise the two faces corresponded to the central division in Orwell's reception between intellectual and popular audiences. For intellectuals of the Left and Right, Orwell was a moral hero. For the public at-large, he was either "the author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*" or, more likely, a vague and shadowy figure.

Thus, by the mid-'50s, the nomenclature which a few major commentators had applied to Orwell shortly after his death had set the main outlines of his reputation. It remained for other critics, and especially the mass media, to fill out, modify, retouch, and popularize these sketches. The images of Orwell and the disputes and confusions about his legacy which emerged in the early 1950s have followed along these lines into the 1980s. The only real change has been the increased number of claimants and the heightened determination of would-be political beneficiaries to gain exclusive possession of the Orwell halo.

The tug-of-war between the Right and Left climaxed during late 1983 and early 1984. Norman Podhoretz, neoconservative editor of *Commentary*, argued that "If Orwell Were Alive Today," he "would be taking his stand with the neoconservatives and against the Left" on everything from the nuclear freeze to the (alleged) failure of democratic socialism. The conservative *National Review* offered similar "Homage to Orwell," claiming that Orwell in the 1980s would be denouncing left-wing "liberation movements and the whores' allegiance" of "the forces of darkness. . . . The [right-wing] forces of light have Orwell on their side and draw strength from it." On the liberal-Left, Irving Howe insisted that Orwell's "conservative sentiments" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "not only aren't in conflict with his socialist opinions, they can be seen as sustaining them." To the radical-liberal *Village Voice*, Orwell's travels to and from Wigan Pier were the "Chronicles of a Decent Man."[55]

The press meanwhile invoked Orwell to denounce Newspeak of the East and West, from the mysterious deaths of dissidents in Soviet mental hospitals ("negative patient care outcomes") to the Reagan administration's MX "Peacekeeper" missile and "revenue enhancements." ("Nothing is certain but negative patient care outcome and revenue enhancements.") Almost every major issue or topic of joint interest to the East and West between the late 1970s and 1984—the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Iranian hostage crisis, the politicized 1980 and 1984 Olympics, the imposition of martial law in Poland and the Philippines, the Soviet shooting of Korean air liner 007, the U.S. military involvement in Lebanon and El Salvador and Nicaragua,[56] the re-election of Reagan—became an occasion in the American or another national press to rail at doublethink and the "Orwellian"

spectre of Big Brother. "Happy 1984," proclaimed a *New York Times* editorial which criticized Ronald Reagan's "Orwellian arguments" for the U.S. "invasion" (or "rescue mission") of Grenada in 1983.[57] Proponents and opponents of the nuclear freeze, abortion, the ERA, and the Reagan administration's proposed "squeal rule" (intended to inform parents whether their teenagers received contraceptives from federal clinics) all adopted Orwell's name and catchwords to adorn their arguments. Freezing our arms stockpile in the face of the steady buildup by totalitarian Russia, murdering innocent human life, eliminating gender distinctions, and letting government secretly usurp parents' duties in their children's sexual education meant capitulating to the "Big Brother" without and creating the conditions for Oceania within. Right? Or did practicing "continuous warfare" while millions starved, invading a woman's body, relegating half the population to second-class status, and violating the confidence and rights of young people signify the apotheosis of blackwhite, the loss of ownlife, the existence of female proles, and the coming of "1984"? It depended on whom you listened to.[58]

On the question of Orwell's excellence as a political writer, however, most political intellectuals and most journalists managed to agree—and it is, as Podhoretz has admitted, partly Orwell's "enormous reputation" that has made him "well worth stealing" by intellectuals intent upon adding authority to their positions.* In Howe's estimation, Orwell is "the best English essayist since Hazlitt, perhaps since Dr. Johnson." Crick has ranked Orwell with Hobbes and Swift as one of the greatest "political writers" in English. Podhoretz himself has placed Orwell almost this high, and the neoconservative Committee of the Free World has published under the imprint "Orwell Press."[59]

IV

Not only *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but also Orwell himself, therefore, have been pressed into the service of rival factions and diametrically opposed causes. "Emasculation through Canonisation," Leopold Labedz, the neoconservative editor of *Survey* magazine, has called the process of Orwell's appropriation. Labedz bemoans that Orwell, once a "democrat and libertarian," was "reassessed" and "expropriated" in the late 1960s and '70s by the very sort

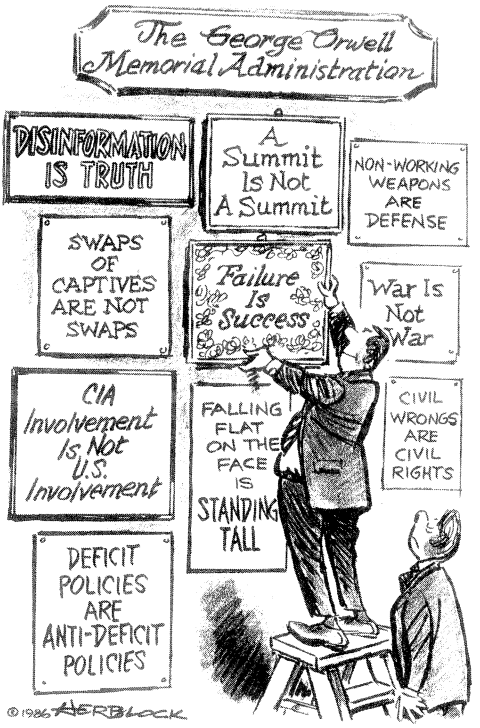
*Podhoretz's remark about Orwell's "enormous reputation" among intellectuals calls attention to the chief irony in Orwell's "high culture" reception, the gap between his "academic" and "intellectual" reputation. Orwell's absence from the literary "high canon" testifies to the academy's relative *disesteem* for his achievement—as a "political" writer and realistic novelist; and the battles for his mantle among non-academic intellectuals testify equally to their *presumption* of his stature. Quite possibly, the professors have undervalued Orwell and the political intellectuals have overvalued him; but both groups have tended more to *assume* his reputation than to re-evaluate it. Such a "freezing" of reputation within particular domains of reception is, as we will see in Part Two, a typical development. For a discussion of Orwell's reputation in the literary academy, see Chapter Six, Section 22, Canonization and the Curriculum: Orwell in the Classroom (pp. 382–98).

of radical "progressive" intellectuals whom he (and Labedz) despised. Pretending that Orwell was a latter-day pacifist and that there had never been any differences between them, socialists have castrated Orwell, once an uncompromising anti-pacifist and anti-Communist, and have hoisted him to their fashionable Left pedestals, argues Labedz. Neoconservative Irving Kristol has taken a similar line, commenting that Orwell would be "slowly spinning in his grave" if he knew into whose hands he had fallen.[60]

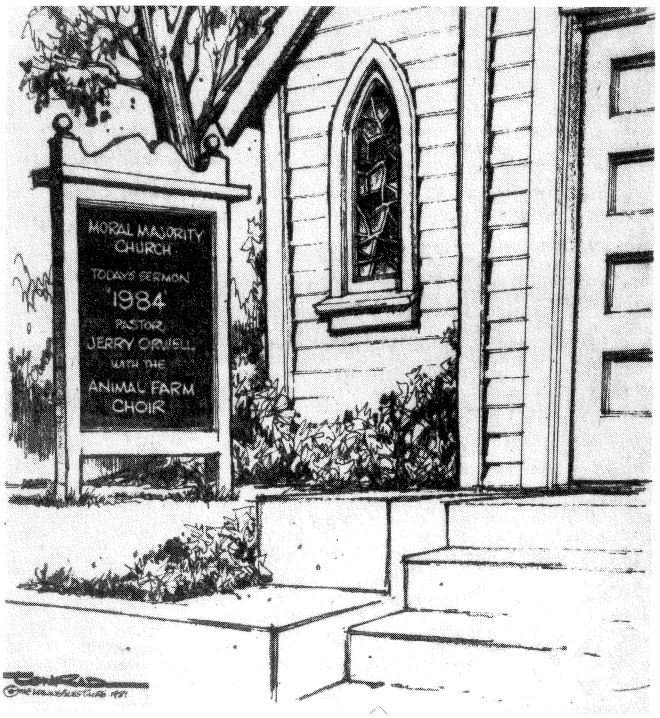
If, that is, the grave-robbers of the Left *and* Right hadn't run off with him already. For conservatives and neoconservatives have also "emasculated" Orwell, downplaying his pamphleteering for an "English socialist revolution" during World War II and his expression of support for the Labour Party even after the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* among their other omissions or distortions. Nor is what Labedz calls the "Orwellization" of Orwell—a neologism which would itself leave Orwell spinning in his grave—limited to ideological groups, to the media fanfare attending the "countdown" to 1984, or even to the last two decades. Moreover, "emasculation" suggests a process much too explicit and calculated for characterizing much of the subtle incorporation of "Orwell" and his coinages into the rhetoric of many political and commercial interest groups. Except within contentious intellectual circles, the refurbishing and sanctifying of Orwell have not entailed the kind of castration-by-the-pen—through detailed rewriting of his positions—that Labedz charges. For the most part, Orwell's coopting has simply proceeded by ritual invocation. His canonization has not so much left him an ideological eunuch as a prefab cultural commodity.

"Assimilation Through Canonization" might therefore better describe Orwell's posthumous fate, at least at the wider levels of reception (letters to the editor, lobbying by political interest groups, commercial promotions), where no deliberate "Orwellizing" has occurred. Particularly in the 1980s and in non-intellectual groups, "Orwell" is merely mouthed, like a Party chant in *Nineteen Eighty-Four.* He has become part of the repertoire of the duckspeaker, similar to the political quacking of the names "Edmund Burke," "Thomas Jefferson," "Abraham Lincoln." (Or, more recently, the bleating of "Franklin Roosevelt," "John F. Kennedy," and "Scoop Jackson" by Republicans as well as Democrats in the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns.) It is true, of course, that the *precondition* for this sort of reflex supplication is a filing down of a figure's edges. To accommodate him to (nearly) all groups and interests, the figure must transcend ideology—and transcend history too, so that he comes to represent a timeless virtue (Truth, Freedom, Democracy, Unity) rather than a party or partisan cause. He must be, as Orwell would put it, "lifted clean out of the stream of history" and remade into an all-purpose Comrade Ogilvy, the valiant Party hero whom Winston "creates" at the Ministry of Truth.

The most remarkable thing with the use of "Orwell" is not just that all this has happened—and happened so fast and happened not to a political leader but to a literary man—but that the process has served the ends of *both* acclaim *and* detraction. The edges of "Orwell" have been "filed down" in *two*



Orwell is victimized as a quacker of Reaganite duckspeak and classic Newspeak.



During the 1984 countdown, George Orwell, the dissident atheistic socialist, became—*voila!*—Moral Majority preacher Jerry Orwell.