[3] Malcolm Cowley, "Sister Carrie: Her Fall and Rise," in *The Stature of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. Alfred Kazin and Charles Shapiro (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1955) 175.

[4] Canyon Creek lies about 15 miles northeast of Helena, Montana.

[5] In 1888, Montana was still a territory. It formally joined the Union in 1889.

[6] White Sulphur Springs is situated about 45 miles due east of Helena, Montana.

[7] In fact, in Dreiser's novel, the character is named Clyde Griffiths, not Guy Griffith. Undoubtedly, Ballou is writing from memory and does not have the text in front of him.

[8] The Gillette murder trail made the national news in 1906.

[9] Apparently, Ballou does not approve of the repeal of prohibition. He is, however, correct in noting that the anti-prohibition forces enlisted the aid of the women's vote in their efforts to repeal the constitutional amendment.

*Permission was granted by Nancy Bidwell Barcus, owner of the Ballou Family Archives, to *English Language Notes* for the one-time publication of this letter written by Louis Ballou.

"JUST JUNK": GEORGE ORWELL'S REAL-LIFE SCAVENGING AND *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR*

In compiling *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (1968), Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus omitted six of the nine "Saturday Essays" on English life that Orwell wrote for the *Evening Standard* between December 1945 and January-February 1946.[1] The omission of one of these, the January 5, 1945 installment "Just Junk," is especially unfortunate, for the essay is a revealing draft towards a central episode in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. An account of Orwell's visits to the junk shops of London, it outlines the basis for Winston Smith's experiences at Mr. Charrington's "frowzy little junk shop" in the "slummy quarter" of town.[2] Its details corroborate efforts to classify the novel as allegorical autobiography, rather than futuristic fantasy.[3] Most significantly, it enhances our understanding of the episode in Orwell's intellectual career that Winston's visit to the junk shop is meant to represent.

Several details in Orwell's descriptions of actual shops anticipate his account of Charrington's. First, the geographical location. The shops Orwell frequented were located in his

Islington neighborhood and other rough parts of London: such establishments, he observes, are never to be found in "good neighbourhoods."[4] The shop in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is situated in the "prole quarter" of London, "somewhere in the vague, brown-coloured slums to the north and east of what had once been Saint Pancras Station" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 85-86): the district corresponding to Orwell's Islington. There is a close correspondence, too, between the items Orwell singles out in the essay and those that capture Winston's attention at Charrington's: agate broaches, picture frames, and, above all, those "fantastically expensive" glass paperweights "that have a piece of coral enclosed in the glass" ("Just Junk" 6). Finally, the essay establishes a distinction between junk shops and antique shops that is of some thematic importance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. "An antique shop is clean, its goods are attractively set out and priced at about double their value and once inside the shop you are usually bullied into buying something"; in a junk shop, on the other hand, one invariably finds "a fine film of dust over the window, its stock may include literally anything that is not perishable, and its proprietor, who is usually asleep at a small room at the back, displays no eagerness to make a sale" ("Just Junk" 6). Charrington's shop is clearly an outlet of the latter kind: it contains "nothing . . . of the slightest value," just "miscellaneous rubbish" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 98). More importantly for the aesthetic argument developed in the novel, its proprietor has the reticence typical of his real-life counterparts, "never asking that Winston should buy . . . merely that he should admire . . ." (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 158).

As I have argued at length elsewhere,[5] Winston's passion for Charrington's "scraps of beautiful rubbish" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 104) refers allegorically to Orwell's own resistance to official Communist aesthetics in the late 1930s and 1940s. Just as Winston cherishes the paperweight for its "apparent uselessness" — precisely what makes it "vaguely suspect to the Party" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 99) — so Orwell defended modernist aestheticism against its official condemnation by the Soviet Government, the Third International, and the majority of Communist writers in England, Trotskyists excepted.[6] (In one such defense, published not long after the "Junk Shop" essay, in 1946, Orwell avows his

passion for "solid objects and scraps of useless information").[7] On the same allegorical level, Charrington, who resembles a "literary man" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 97), could well represent T. S. Eliot, the modernist writer Orwell defended most energetically from detractors on the Left. The fragments in Charrington's shop and conversation resemble the textual fragments of *The Waste Land.* Orwell's emphasis on Charrington's lack of a sales pitch may be a reference to Eliot's modernist eschewal of rhetoric, which Orwell welcomed as a respite from propaganda and aggressive commercial advertising.[8]

The "Just Junk" essay furthers this reading of Winston's visits to Charrington's shop by hinting at the limitations of the kind of historical knowledge gained there. Winston's interest in Charrington originates, of course, in his quest to retrieve some sense of the past, and with it the capacity for critical comparisons between past and present — for discovering whether things were "better than they are now, or . . . worse" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 90). His junk-shop scavengings represent his effort to reverse the work he conducts every day at the Ministry of Truth, burning incriminating photographs and scraps of obsolete text. The paperweight and other bits of junk, in other words, offer him a means of ideological resistance: they are "chunk[s] of history" that the Party has "forgotten to alter" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 152). During the period of his own scavengings, Orwell praised Eliot for bringing back the "sense of history" effaced by the propaganda of Soviet and European governments[9]; the "Just Junk" essay indicates that Orwell himself found similar gratification in his patronage of junk shops.

The essay also points to the possibility, however, that the satisfaction to be found in junk shops is illusory. This suggestion, a clue to the major plot reversal in the novel, comes in a passage describing another item Orwell purchased at the shop, a Victorian curiosity called a "scrap screen":

> Scrap screens — all too rare nowadays — are simply ordinary wooden or canvas screens with coloured scraps cut out and pasted all over them in such a way as to make more or less coherent pictures. The best were made round about 1880, but if you bought one at a junk shop it is sure to be defective and the great charm of owning such a screen lies in patching it up yourself.
>
> You can use coloured reproductions from art magazines, Christmas cards,

postcards, advertisements, book jackets, even cigarette cards. There is always room for one more scrap, and with careful placing anything can be made to look congruous.

Thus, merely in one corner of my own scrap screen, Cézanne's card-players with a black bottle between them are impinging on a street scene in medieval Florence, while on the other side of the street one of Gauguin's South Sea islanders is sitting beside an English lake where a lady in leg-of-mutton sleeves is paddling a canoe. They all look perfectly at home together. ("Just Junk" 6)

Orwell's emphasis on the appealing *incompleteness* of the scrap screen, on the challenge it presents its owner to "patch it up" himself, makes it a perfect analogue for the project of collecting and reassembling historical fragments Winston pursues under Charrington's supervision. Though Winston finds no scrap screen *per se* at Charrington's, the other item he purchases there corresponds to it in function: formerly a "young lady's keep-sake album" (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* 98), for Winston a diary for arranging such fragments of past experience, personal and social, as he is able to find.[10] But the tone of Orwell's description of the scrap-screen is not perfectly neutral: it seems subtly to censure the "careful placing" by which even the most diverse lot of materials "can be made to look congruous." It suggests that the end of such patchworking projects is inevitably to *diminish* historical difference. On the literal level of the allegory in *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* the counterpart to this discovery may be the trap into which Winston's historicist faith leads him: his delivery into the hands of the Thought Police, and thence to Room 101, where he is indoctrinated to accept a view of history as unchanging and eternally present in the mind of Big Brother. The aesthetic argument implicit in both essay and novel may be that poems like Eliot's, despite their promising archival appearance, dehistoricize their contents, erasing difference and organizing all into a timeless coherence.

Orwell's description of the scrap screen in "Just Junk," then, may make it possible to make better sense of Charrington's betrayal of Winston. It suggests that the bogus nature of the research Charrington facilitates may be Orwell's admission that he came to see *The Waste Land* as a seductive but ultimately futile effort to reclaim historicity. He may mean us to see, in other words, that Eliot's poetic fragments, like the contents of the shop,

are in the end "just junk" — insufficient evidence to make significant historical criticism possible. If the junk-shop keeper's lack of a sales pitch reads allegorically as his modernist disavowal of rhetoric, the essay may also suggest that Orwell came to be suspicious of Eliot's studied indifference to what his readers will "buy," that he saw the potential even of a seemingly random display of fragments, accompanied by no discursive commentary, to direct its reader towards a particular conclusion: a conclusion, in this case, about an omniscient godhead.[11] As Orwell had confessed in 1939, he had come to conclude that "All art" — including modernist, aestheticist art — is finally "propaganda."[12]

The fact that Winston's research is merely a patch in a wider plan lends retroactive significance to one final small, but eerie detail in the *Evening Standard* essay. Explaining how a scrap *screen* differs from a scrap *book*, Orwell characterizes the screen as "the scrap book's *big brother*" (my emphasis). Was Orwell's real-life scrap collection the inspiration, not just for Winston's earnest project, but for the limitations that in the end proved to contain and neutralize it? Either way, the metaphor is fortuitous: with the many other correlations between article and novel, it leaves little doubt of the autobiographical nature of Winston's scavengings and of the essay's importance as a draft toward *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

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NOTES

[1] The omitted essays are "Christmas for the Children" (December 1, 1945); "Banish this Uniform" (December 22, 1945); "Just Junk" (January 5, 1945); "Songs we used to Sing" (January 19, 1946); "But are we Really Ruder? No" (January 26, 1946); and "Bad Climates are Best" (February 2, 1946). The essays included in The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters are "In Defence of English Cooking" (December 15, 1945), "A Nice Cup of Tea" (January 12, 1946), and "The Moon under Water" (February 9, 1946). See *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 38-40, 40-43, and 44-47. Subsequent references to *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters* will appear in parentheses with the abbreviation CEJL.

[2] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1989), 8. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses in the text.

[3] See, for example, Keith Alldritt, *The Making of George Orwell: An Essay in Literary History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969) 176; Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1991) 471; and Jeffrey Meyers, "Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel of the 1930s," in Courtney T. Wemyss and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds., *George Orwell* (N.Y.: Greenwood, 1987) 135-43. As Meyers represents the position: "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a projection of the future that is based on a concrete and naturalistic portrayal of the present and the past. Its originality is rooted in a realistic synthesis and arrangement of familiar materials rather than in prophetic and imaginary speculations" (135).

[4] George Orwell, "Just Junk," *Evening Standard* (January 5, 1945): 6. Subsequent references will appear in parentheses in the text.

[5] See Patricia Rae, "Mr. Charrington's Junk Shop: T.S. Eliot and Modernist Poetics in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 43, 2 (Summer 1997): 196-220.

[6] For some relevant arguments against high modernist aesthetics on the English Left in the thirties, see Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1937; New Edn. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1946), Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937; rpt. with a Preface and Select Bibliography by Jeremy Hawthorn, Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), and Louis Macneice's 1938 book *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968). For an influential speech against literary modernism delivered at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, see Karl Radek, "Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art," in *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress* (London: Martin Lawrence Ltd., 1970).

An opportunity for dissension from the anti-modernist stance presented itself with the appearance of a manifesto, authored by Trotsky but officially circulated by Andre Breton and Diego Rivera, in 1938 and 1939. The polemical document, titled *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art*, called for the rejection of the Third International, both politically and culturally. Herbert Read forwarded to manifesto to Orwell, who agreed to sign it in a letter to Read dated January 4, 1939. See Orwell, *CEJL* 1: 377-78.

[7] Orwell, "Why I Write" (*CEJL* 1: 6).

[8] For Orwell's preference for works that present without argument, as opposed to those written "by cocksure partisans telling you what to think," see his defense of Henry Miller in "Inside the Whale," *CEJL* 1, 493-527; note especially 501. In his 1936 novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Orwell represents the battle to defend anti-rhetorical modernist poetry "in 1935" as a battle to resist a job offer at an advertising agency (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989) 265. Until material circumstances no longer make it possible for him to continue, his anti-hero Gordon Comstock eschews the opportunity to write "Bovex Ballads" (257-58) in favor of laboring on a modernist poem, composed of a series of fragments, called "London Pleasures" (33). Orwell also discusses the non-rhetorical nature of modernist writing in his 1941 essay "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda," *CEJL* 2, 123-27.

While the loci classici for the eschewal of rhetoric in modernist poetics may be the arguments for art-for-art's sake in Pater, Wilde, and Archibald

MacLeish, or perhaps Ezra Pound's distinction between the poet and the advertising agent in "A Retrospect" and revision of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* in "The Serious Artist" (see *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 6; 41-57), Eliot's early essays also appear to affirm the position that poetry's function is to communicate feeling and knowledge without persuading its audience to accept a particular point of view. For one clear statement of this position, note Eliot's distinction between the aesthetically acceptable demand that one "suspend one's beliefs" in order to come to know the poet's beliefs and the aesthetically unacceptable demand that the reader himself come to believe the poet's beliefs in "Dante," *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934) 257. An eschewal of rhetoric would also seem implicit in Eliot's account of the passive, organic, process by which the poetic "image" appears in the poet's mind, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (*Selected Essays* 18) and in his description of the essentially expressive nature of the "objective correlative," in "Hamlet" (*Selected Essays* 145). For a argument about the persuasive potential of such images, however, see Edward Lobb, *T. S. Eliot and the Romantic Critical Tradition* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 41-42, 94-96.

[9] For Eliot's role and that of his literary predecessors, see the March 19, 1942 *Listener* essay, "The Rediscovery of Europe" (*CEJL* 2, 197-207); for that of Soviet and European propagandists, see the February 4, 1944 Tribune column, "As I Please," *CEJL* 3, 87-89.

[10] These include adolescent memories recorded in a Joycean "stream of consciousness" style and selections from a children's history textbook. See *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 66-72 and 75-76.

[11] Orwell wrote frequently about the parallel between the authoritarian hierarchy of the Communist Party and that of the (Anglo)-Catholic Church in which Eliot resolved his earlier sense of a chaotic world. See especially his 1942 review of *Burnt Norton, East Coker, The Dry Salvages*, *CEJL* 2: 236-42. For an argument that *The Waste Land*, despite its heteroglossic appearance, is constructed to elicit a monological and theistic reading, see Calvin Bedient, *He Do the Police in Different Voices: The Waste Land and its Protagonist* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986).

[12] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," *CEJL* 1, 413-460; see especially 448. Emphasis mine.