PAPER

A Textbook Case: Aligning Orwell and NCTJ Teaching

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This paper reflects on the appearance of two extracts from Orwell's essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946), which are framed as excellent advice on developing a writing style in the latest National Council for the Training of Journalists' (NCTJ) guide for trainee journalists. Noting that attention to these extracts arises briefly towards the back of the expanded new guide, this paper nevertheless highlights three positives for both Orwell scholarship and journalism education. Firstly, Orwell's inclusion is a noteworthy difference from the previous, longstanding guide which did not mention him at all. Secondly, Orwell's inclusion provides licence for his incorporation into NCTJ teaching practice, opening up creative possibilities for tutors to enhance learning for their UK and international students. Lastly, Orwell's inclusion is, in fact, a significant development in the context of NCTJ publications historically. Through archival research, this paper finds a general absence of reference to Orwell (who died in 1950) in NCTJ literature since the organisation's inception in 1951.

Keywords: Orwell, National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ), journalism, education

Jonathan Baker's *Essential Journalism* (2021), the updated and official 'NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists', was released a couple of months before the start of the 2021-2022 academic year with a brief but encouraging foreword from Alex Crawford, Sky News special correspondent and NCTJ patron. 'Strap yourself in,' she advises. 'You are about to have the ride of your life' in 'one of the toughest and most gratifying professions there is' (Baker 2021a: ix).

Excluding a series of 'further reading' lists at the end and the index, the book consists of 437 pages – quite hefty but certainly value for money as 'a core resource' for its target market, according to the back-cover blurb, of 'journalism trainees and undergraduates' as well as 'seasoned practitioners and lecturers'. In particular, the book is pitched as 'a practical guide to all aspects of modern journalism' for those who wish to undertake the NCTJ Diploma 'and become a qualified journalist in the UK'. As Baker explains in the preface, the NCTJ is 'the UK's principal training body' and 'the book is aligned to the Programmes of Study, or syllabus, laid

out in the Diploma' (2021a: x). Although the Diploma is not the only NCTJ qualification available, it is the primary route for many students to employment. The NCTJ website states there are more than 80 NCTJ-accredited courses 'at some 40 universities, further education colleges and independent training centres across the UK', with the NCTJ's stamp of approval 'the hallmark of excellence in journalism training, providing a world-class industry standard that is recognised throughout the media' (NCTJ 2022a).

This paper concerns, primarily, a brief but significant passage among the wide-ranging contents of Baker's new NCTJ manual on the fundamentals of journalism. It singles out for scrutiny what might readily seem, from an Orwell studies perspective, the pertinent and to-be-expected invoking by Baker, for the purpose of instruction on the development of a writing style, of what he calls Orwell's 'celebrated essay' (2021a: 401) entitled 'Politics and the English Language' (1946) – albeit on page 401 and thus notably close to the end. After all, the essay showcases magnificently Orwell's obsession with English language usage and writing style, bound up with his acute awareness of verbal gymnastics in politics. The essay has been a revered text for generations of journalists – not least subeditors tasked with checking and improving copy – in the UK and internationally.

Industry veneration of the essay was inaugurated by proprietor-editor David Astor who, as Jonathan Heawood writes in his introduction to *Orwell*: The Observer *Years* (2003), had a copy 'distributed to every new *Observer* writer' following its publication in the April 1946 issue of *Horizon*. 'Even now,' Heawood adds, 'it is quoted in the house style guide' (ibid: xii); and this tradition continues online (for instance, see *Guardian* 2020). Yet, as this paper will show by way of archival research, Baker's reference to Orwell and inclusion of two extracts from his much-admired essay is, in fact, a new development in NCTJ publications. With Baker's book coinciding with the NCTJ's 70th anniversary celebrations, the paucity of evidence of the impact of Orwell's legacy on NCTJ literature historically, given that he died in 1950 shortly before the NCTJ was founded in its initial form in 1951, is intriguing.

ORWELL'S WRITING ADVICE ACKNOWLEDGED – AT LAST

Baker briefly turns the spotlight on Orwell and the essay in the final part of the book which focuses on specialist journalism practice and where he encourages developing a writing style as a feature writer. Although this attention to Orwell occurs at a late stage and requires readers' stamina and interest in becoming a feature writer to arrive at, it fits well in the context of feature writing given not only the applicability of the two extracts to practice but also considering, from

an Orwell studies perspective, that Orwell's journalism encompasses a number of the 'sorts of features' (2021a: 384) outlined by Baker, including reportage, profiles, analysis or 'think pieces' and reviews. Describing Orwell as 'both a novelist and a journalist', and among 'the most famous proponents of the plain and simple approach', Baker explains that Orwell 'summarised his thoughts' in a celebrated essay entitled 'Politics and the English Language' (ibid: 401). Baker then reproduces what Orwell described as writing 'rules' to support decision-making 'when instinct fails' (Orwell 2000: 359). In doing so, Baker turns the Roman numerals into numbers:

> 1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech that you are used to seeing in print.
>
> 2. Never use a long word when a short one will do.
>
> 3. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
>
> 4. Never use the passive when you can use the active.
>
> 5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
>
> 6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous (ibid: 401).

Baker immediately reproduces another portion of Orwell's essay, adding numbers for each question:

> A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: 1. Could I put it more shortly? 2. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? (ibid).

These two short extracts lead to Baker's encouragement to experiment and discover one's own writing style:

> This excellent advice holds good for everything that you write, of whatever sort and for whatever medium. It is a very good place to start, as you begin to experiment with your writing. As with all your other journalistic output, keep it clear, keep it simple. But as you grow in confidence, feel emboldened to add a little colour to the plainness. Try your hand at various techniques: a short sentence, or several short sentences, followed by a longer one; or vice versa. A paragraph that builds tension, which is then resolved with a smart conclusion. Extended metaphors (Orwell only advised us not to use hackneyed and overused metaphors and similes; there is nothing wrong with coming

> up [sic] something fresh of your own) or a bit of word play perhaps. Try things out and see whether or not they come off. But, to repeat: in the end you are looking for a style that suits you and with which you feel at ease, not one you have copied from somewhere else and which feels laboured and not natural to you (ibid).

Baker's harnessing of Orwell's essay as a quick 'writing by numbers' tutorial to spur trainee journalists' development of a writing style is an astute educational strategy and to be applauded. However, an obvious downside is that, by dealing with Orwell's essay at a basic level for beginner journalists, Baker confines his approach to only one aspect of Orwell's overall argument – the English language – and completely neglects the other, ultimately inseparable component – politics. It is easy to appreciate why Baker sidesteps the complication of the link to politics, within a chapter on feature writing in general and in keeping with the apolitical ethos of NCTJ practical training, but context matters – especially in journalism teaching and practice, at any level – and the political dimension could helpfully have been signposted beyond the essay title. As Baker wrote in a blog on the NCTJ website, in advance of the book's release:

> … in some respects at least – the more things have changed, the more they have stayed the same. Even in a much-changed world, reporting at its most fundamental level is still about finding things out and telling people about them; journalism is still about building on that by adding context, explanation, background and anything else the audience might need in order to understand what is going on in the world, and to have the means to become informed and engaged citizens (Baker 2021b).

ORWELL'S CRUCIAL LINKING OF POLITICS AND LANGUAGE

So too in journalism teaching. Within Orwell's essay, the second extract precedes, of course, the first and leads to the key sentence: 'It is at this point that the special connexion between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear' (2000: 355). Perceiving that language stems from and, in turn, shapes thought and there is, thus, a potential for mutual corruption, Orwell is championing here the value of mental effort: a firm pushback against the intellectual laziness of using 'ready-made phrases' that 'will construct your sentences for you – even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent' and readily 'perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself' (ibid: 355).

The first extract, in context, is squarely in line with the second. Leading to it, Orwell upholds again the value of 'conscious effort' (2000: 358) and advocates a process by which 'one can choose – not simply accept – the phrases that will best cover the meaning, and then switch round and decide what impression one's words are likely to make on another person' (ibid: 358-359). Before listing his six rules, he writes that this 'last effort of the mind cuts out all stale or mixed images, all prefabricated phrases, needless repetitions, and humbug and vagueness generally'; and following his list of rules, he expressly clarifies that he has 'not here been considering the literary use of language, but merely language as an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought' (ibid: 359). Proceeding to close his essay, the political component of Orwell's overall argument remains crystal-clear: 'One ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end' (ibid). Significantly, Orwell is not concerned solely with improvement of language usage by writers, to achieve clarity and directness. He is also warning that political obfuscation and deception can occur *through* language usage which, by its contortions, typically signals their occurrence. He writes: 'Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind' (ibid). Orwell, therefore, elevates improved language usage to a form of duty and resistance, in the interests of better standards of public discourse: 'One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one jeers loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase – some *jackboot*, *Achilles' heel*, *hotbed*, *melting pot*, *acid test*, *veritable inferno* or other lump of verbal refuse – into the dustbin where it belongs' (ibid: 359-360, italics in the original).

This denouement chimes with what are perhaps the essay's most well-known sentences (which appear in the online '*Guardian* and *Observer* style guide: O'), featuring one of Orwell's most striking images, in which he perceives that 'inflated style is itself a kind of euphemism' and argues powerfully: 'The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish squirting out ink' (ibid: 357). It also chimes with his claim that silly words and expressions 'have often disappeared … owing to the conscious action of a minority': 'Two recent examples were *explore every avenue* and *leave no stone*

unturned, which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists' (ibid: 358, italics in the original). Detecting and calling out agendas, insincerity and falsehoods in politics is, of course, central to the traditional functions of journalists (or the Fourth Estate) in democratic societies. As Baker writes in Chapter 2, 'The nature of journalism: the nature of news': 'One of the jobs of a free media is to make sure that politicians and people in public office, or people who manage public money, behave as they promised they would or as they are supposed to. This idea is often referred to as "holding power to account"' (2021a: 26).

Moreover, the importance of questioning and, if need be, challenging those in authority, for the public's benefit, extends to many areas of society involving power dynamics: journalists are routinely required to examine and interpret language usage and motives in the form of press releases, speeches, interviewees' responses, reports, documentation, etc, in researching and constructing what should be accurate, fair and balanced stories. This is allied to another traditional function of journalism: to foster and inform discussion and debate among a diversity of voices in the public sphere (or as Baker described it in his NCTJ blog, to provide the 'means to become informed and engaged citizens'). Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, Orwell's essay could be drawn upon to a much greater degree in training journalists to fulfil their roles in society than the confines of the brief tutorial provided by Baker – and this paper urges an enlarged and integrated approach. Journalists' intellectual effort and competence in writing and editing should be united with the ability to recognise and appropriately deal with, to be blunt, 'BS' dressed up in language that is, for instance, convoluted, opaque, evasive and/or dishonest – wherever a journalist may encounter it.

That said, Baker's reference to Orwell and inclusion of extracts from 'Politics and the English Language' is a welcome development as a visible NCTJ Diploma-aligned teaching approach, introducing these engaging elements into students' learning experience within the scope of exploring and discovering their own feature writing style. Yet, at a basic level, Orwell's advice can be applied to journalistic writing and editing more generally, without necessarily abandoning the pro-democratic rationale of a free press which traditionally underpins the roles of journalists in society. By utilising Orwell to spur students to become adept feature writers, Baker provides not only a licence for NCTJ tutors to follow suit but effectively opens up creative possibilities for tutors to incorporate Orwell into wider teaching of the NCTJ Diploma syllabus.

ORWELL'S ADVICE APPLICABLE TO STORYTELLING

As we have seen, Baker suggests that Orwell's plain and simple approach 'holds good', as a starting point, for all journalistic writing. As Baker also wrote in his NCTJ blog: 'The central elements of my new guide for young journalists … are all about story-finding and storytelling. All storytelling requires good, clear, simple and unambiguous writing' (Baker 2021b). Orwell could just as easily have been invoked, then, much earlier in the book in relation to writing, not least Chapter 11 on 'Storytelling: language and style' (2021a: 192) where, for instance, it is stated that the aim is 'for an easy and accessible style, uncomplicated, unambiguous and capable of immediate comprehension' (ibid: 193) while 'Acid test' (ibid: 212) is top of a list of common clichés. Orwell's essay could also have been included among the subsequent recommended 'further reading' where it does not even appear correspondingly on the 'Feature writing' (2021a: 440) list.

This is not to suggest, absurdly, that Orwell has never formed part of journalism teaching in a broad sense – far from it. As one of the foremost Orwell experts, Richard Lance Keeble, writes in *Journalism Beyond Orwell* (2020): 'I have certainly used Orwell extensively in my teaching: on media ethics, literary journalism, investigative reporting, war correspondence, on the links between Fleet Street and the secret state and so on' (2020: 2). Teachers of journalism, including NCTJ tutors, have been free to draw upon Orwell (and myriad other journalists in UK and international contexts) as they please. The author of this paper has taken the liberty of doing so, too, in both industry and academia. However, as we shall see in more detail, attention to Orwell and, therefore, visible sanction for tutors to utilise Orwell for the purposes of teaching aligned to the NCTJ Diploma (and for that matter, other NCTJ qualifications), has tended not to arise explicitly in the NCTJ literature until Baker's book. This development may encourage NCTJ tutors who have never included Orwell in their teaching to consider the benefits of doing so. However, a note of caution is warranted if referring to Orwell via Baker's book.

Unfortunately, the only other explicit reference to Orwell in the book is dubious. In Chapter 2, crediting Lord Northcliffe with the assertion that 'News is what people do not want you to print. All the rest is advertising', Baker adds: 'This thought is also attributed to George Orwell, substituting "public relations" for "advertising"' (2021a: 29). However, an entry on the Quote Investigator website, with input from researcher Barry Popik and updated in 2015, concludes that attributions to 'Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) and several other individuals' appeared later than

1953 and the 'popular variant using "public relations" instead of "advertising" was in circulation by 1979'. It adds: 'The linkage to George Orwell is very weak. Based on current data QI would label the adage anonymous' (Quote Investigator 2015). Mentioning attribution to Orwell here without reservation is not, then, the best example for trainee journalists who must quickly appreciate the importance of fact-checking and accuracy as part and parcel of writing and editing.

Nevertheless, the point made by Baker is an important one, that 'news will often mean publishing things that the people involved would like to keep out of the public domain' (2021a: 29); and, all in all, Baker's references to Orwell and extracts from 'Politics and the English Language' in the new NCTJ guide constitute a positive and noteworthy change from Orwell's absence in the immediately preceding NCTJ guide entitled *Essential Reporting* which was written by Jon Smith and released in September 2007. Interestingly, although Orwell was a print and broadcast journalist who died in 1950, his appearance in the new NCTJ guide forms part of the revised and expanded content in response to the evolving demands on journalists of working in the digital age. In the preface, duly acknowledging Smith's book as 'the forerunner', Baker explains that when it was published in 2007 the 'digital revolution, then only in its infancy, was soon to make its presence felt'. In 2021, 'the scope of this book, its successor, has had to be much wider and multi faceted [sic]'.

Nevertheless, Baker reflects that 'so much of Smith's wisdom, common sense and explanations of the basics of good, accurate, ethical journalism remain highly relevant and applicable today' and he expresses his gratitude to both Smith and the NCTJ for permitting transferral of 'so much of that wisdom' (2021a: xiii) to the new book. In this vein, Baker wrote in his NCTJ blog that journalism 'needs to cling to the principles and values of good journalistic practice that long predate the digital age, but whose relevance and worth remain undiminished' (2021b). Notably, in the expansion of content to 451 pages, compared to Smith's 264 pages (both including the index and 'further reading' recommendations), Baker reworks and adds substantially to Smith's 'Features' chapter (17). Baker's Chapter 21, 'The feature writer', encompasses the print, broadcast and online environments with an emphasis on developing initial 'core skills that are regarded as essential to good journalism in whatever form' (2021a: 383) – hence its abiding concern with good writing practice.

The inclusion of, and numbering within, the two extracts from Orwell's essay certainly brings a sharper focus on language usage and writing style than before; and the extracts also complement

Baker's prior examples of aspects of feature writing and his account of narrative structure. Orwell also informs the summaries which close the chapter. For instance, Baker asserts that the completed feature will have 'an accurate, grammatically sound and authentic narrative, using simple and direct language, and avoiding over-complexity in its sentence structure' (ibid: 402). Among his 'Top tips for feature writing', Orwell's relevance is recognisable in the advice, for instance, to strive 'to pinpoint the exact word(s) to convey your meaning'; to use 'simple, familiar words'; to ensure that for any long sentences 'the writing is clear, the meaning is quickly absorbed and the reader will not be held up trying to work out what you are trying to say'; to avoid 'clichés and over-worn phrases, especially in descriptive passages'; and to use 'active language not passive' (ibid).

ORWELL'S ADVICE APPLICABLE TO NEWS REPORTING

Here again, NCTJ tutors could gain impetus from Baker to incorporate Orwell into their teaching – not just in relation to feature writing but also other areas of the Diploma syllabus. As Baker points out, many of his tips 'would apply equally to news reporting'; and he argues that features 'are not a separate and discrete branch of journalism' but 'simply offer a different, and richly rewarding, medium for storytelling' (2021a: 402). Although Orwell's journalism outputs included much that could be categorised as feature writing, such as his 'hundreds of reviews', and he produced only 'a clutch of news reports, most of them for the *Observer*' (Anderson 2008: 38), his example as a journalist and aspects of his writing advice are eminently suited, this paper expressly foregrounds, to the teaching and learning of basic news reporting and editing skills, too, in delivering the Diploma syllabus for UK and international students.

By bridging these forms of journalism, Baker makes more explicit and detailed what had been touched upon in Smith's book. Comparing and contrasting the nature and functions of features with those of basic news reports, Baker draws attention to how there is more that 'unites than divides them' (2021a: 386). Shaping Baker's approach, Smith had highlighted that features 'like news, require keen observation, careful research, a focus on people, meticulous accuracy, and disciplined construction' (2007: 229) although for features one could 'use metaphors, similes and other literary devices inappropriate in news stories' (ibid: 232). More's the pity, then, that Orwell was not explicitly utilised by Smith whose book served as the NCTJ guide on journalism fundamentals for around 14 years. By the light of Baker's book, students could retrospectively recognise Orwell's relevance in the 'forerunner' by Smith. For instance, among the advice on writing features dispensed

by Smith is that they 'are not an excuse for long rambling essays in flamboyant language'; 'there is no place for waffle' (ibid: 229); they are not an opportunity 'to over-indulge in extravagant language or intricate sentences' (ibid: 232); and 'time-battered clichés' (ibid: 238) should be avoided.

Notably, while Smith's features section is near the end of the book and this shapes its similar placement in Baker's book, it is in relation to news reporting rather than feature writing that Smith's book is most reminiscent of Orwell's writing advice. For instance, in Chapter 10, 'Writing the Words', his immediate advice is to 'keep it short, keep it simple, tell it straight': 'The secret of news-writing is as short, simple and straightforward as that' (ibid: 119). Smith proceeds to elaborate: 'Use short words'; 'Cut out unnecessary words' (ibid: 120); 'Be active, not passive'; 'Be wary of clichés' (2007: 121). This is augmented in the next chapter, 'English Matters', with advice on good grammar and punctuation, lists of sloppy 'language errors' (ibid: 139) and redundant as well as problematic words, and encouragement to master house style.

HOW ORWELL GOES MISSING IN NCTJ PUBLICATIONS

Given that Orwell was not referred to in Smith's book, it might be asked: what about in NCTJ publications between 1951 and 2007? Library searches and, in particular, kind permission to access Bournemouth University's Segrue Collection were helpful in identifying and consulting clearly NCTJ-issued or NCTJ-aligned texts historically. The earliest publication located, in the Segrue Collection, was the second edition (revised) of the *Handbook of Training* (1953) of what was then the National Advisory Council for the Training and Education of Junior Journalists. It states: 'As the central advisory body, the Council will administer the Training and Education Scheme, and will be responsible for the examinations for the General Proficiency Test and the National Diploma' (NACTEJJ 1954: 1). The book provides detailed context on the origins and nature of the journalism training scheme at that time and can be squared with the NCTJ's account on its website of its emergence in the 1950s (see NCTJ 2022b for 'Our History'). Both sources quote the same passage from the report of the Royal Commission on the Press in 1949 concerning the 'problem of recruiting the right people into journalism, whether from school or from university, and of ensuring that they achieve and maintain the necessary level of education and technical efficiency…' (NACTEJJ 1953: v; NCTJ 2022b).

Although the writing approach that Orwell espoused is in evidence, there is no mention of Orwell in the book – and it is not difficult to appreciate why, for the same reason that Smith can

hardly be criticised for leaving Orwell out of his book decades later. The plain and simple approach to writing was not the sole preserve of Orwell, of course, but widely accepted 'best practice' ratified by style guides in the journalism industry long before he put his own stamp on it in 'Politics and the English Language'. In covering the 'Three-Year Basic Course: Vocational Training', for instance, the *Handbook of Training* states: 'Writing of simple, direct, grammatical English is essential. … An office "style book" should always be at hand in a junior's training' (1954: 17). This is mirrored, as might be expected, in a National Advisory Council pamphlet, also in the Segrue Collection and entitled *Summary of Training and Education Scheme* (1954). It stipulates that juniors must become 'able to write reports in clear, concise and grammatical English' (NACTEJJ 1954: 4); and it is recommended that vocational training should include, among other experiences, 'the preparation of practice reports which will be corrected by a senior' and 'instruction in the mechanics of sub-editing' (ibid: 5). Also notable is the stipulation that juniors should 'pursue systematic courses of study' throughout, with 'English Language and Literature' (ibid) a constant each year.

Orwell is absent, too, from the 1960s texts consulted. Unsurprisingly, in the *Training in Journalism: Handbook of the National Council for the Training of Journalists* (1964), also in the Segrue Collection, the line is repeated verbatim: 'Writing of simple, direct, grammatical English is essential'; and it is advised again that a style book 'should be available to every junior, who should refer to it regularly' (NCTJ 1964: 25). However, this time it is highlighted that juniors 'sometimes become confused' about style and, with there being 'various styles which journalism is likely to demand', the NCTJ's new book *Daily English* 'and the English syllabus to be launched at the Colleges in September 1964, should help considerably in clearing up this confusion' (ibid).

The need for English proficiency is repeatedly accentuated. For instance, it is also reported that the NCTJ's intention is to raise, in 1965, 'its recommended educational qualifications for new entrants … to *at least five* Ordinary level subjects (including English Language and Literature)… ' (ibid: 13, italics in the original). Later, it is argued (with the male bias of that time which would be called out, as we shall see, in an NCTJ manual in 1997): 'In subjects such as English language, government and current affairs, the journalist must be better informed than the average reader of the newspaper for which he writes, if he is to write to any real purpose at all' (ibid: 31); and it is revealed that among the 'educational targets which a junior must achieve to be eligible to sit for the Proficiency Test' is 'English Language and/or Literature: from September 1964, the National Council's own course…' (ibid: 33). In *Daily English: A*

Course in Practical English for Young Journalists (1964), also in the Segrue Collection, the stated purpose is to help young journalists present news 'clearly, accurately and cogently' (Liddle and Pardoe 1964: 5). Orwell is not among its 'representative selection of modern newspaper writing' (ibid: 7) nor on its list of Recommended Books which includes by then already decades-old texts like *Modern English Usage* (1926) and *The King's English* (1930) by H. W. and F. G. Fowler and *An A. B. C. of English Usage* (1936) by H. A. Treble and G. H. Vallins. These texts are repeated, as might be expected, in the English Language section of a 16-page NCTJ pamphlet entitled *Reading List* (1967), also in the Segrue Collection. Again, Orwell is missing but, notably, the 1943 Penguin edition of *Scoop*, by Evelyn Waugh, first published by Chapman & Hall in 1938, appears in the Fiction section (NCTJ 1967: 7).

In *The Practice of Journalism* (1963), by John Dodge and George Viner, produced under the auspices of the NCTJ and National Union of Journalists (NUJ), similar 'best practice' advice compatible with Orwell's approach to writing is offered. For instance, in the chapter 'Good English' by the pseudonymous contributor 'Dr Syntax', it is argued that the 'shorter and simpler the words and phrases we use, the better, as a general rule; but a good writing style grows only out of careful thought, constant vigilance, good sense, knowledge, and experience' (Dodge and Viner 1963: 121). Dr Syntax adds: 'The prime necessity for every writer is to have something to say; but it is also necessary to take care about *how* we say it. Plain, short words in crisp, short sentences are always better than long, pretentious words which mean the same thing as the short words, and long sentences which use many words to say little' (ibid). Dr Syntax is alluding in the first portion of the sentence to the Victorian poet-critic Matthew Arnold. As Baker highlights shortly before turning his attention to Orwell: 'One of the best-known comments about style was made by the Victorian poet Matthew Arnold: Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style' (2021a: 401).

Baker does not provide a text source but this dictum is attributed to Arnold in G. W. E. Russell's *Collections and Recollections* (1898). Amusingly, in a full-page article by Preston Benson in the *Journalist* in November 1963 promoting *The Practice of Journalism*, with the headlines 'TRAINING MAKES NEWS: THE TEXTBOOK'S OUT – COURSES GROW' and 'First comprehensive guide to the skills of British journalism', Orwell's close friend Malcolm Muggeridge and the television personality, Nancy Spain, are criticised for their response on TV to a question from 'a youth' aspiring to become a journalist on 'what the functions of journalism were: "To sell newspapers, I suppose," murmured Malcolm uneasily. Nancy lamely concurred'. Benson adds scathingly: 'When journalists of

distinction are as witless as this about their craft surely they need a refresher course and luckily for them it is to hand' (Benson 1963: 7).

Orwell is also neglected in *The Practice of Journalism*'s companion volumes published under the auspices of the NCTJ: *Practical Newspaper Reporting* (1966) by Geoffrey Harris and David Spark; and John F. Goulden's *Newspaper Management* (1967), also in the Segrue Collection. With four editions, *Practical Newspaper Reporting* has enjoyed remarkable longevity: the first edition appeared in 1966, the second in 1993, the third in 1997, and the substantially updated fourth version in 2011. The latter can, therefore, be considered contemporary with Smith's NCTJ *Essential Reporting* guide and another NCTJ resource (also sans Orwell), Andy Bull's *The NCTJ Essential Guide to Careers in Journalism* (2007). Predictably, the *Practical Newspaper Reporting* first edition contains the familiar industry 'best practice' advice which Orwell had, in his own way, advocated: 'Newspaper English needs to be simple and straightforward. Use active verbs, not passives… ' (Harris and Spark 1966: 107). The reader is urged: 'Do not be content with abstract phrases. … Obviously your sentences must be simple and clear…'; 'Use simple and direct words. … Try to use the exact word for the meaning you want to convey' (ibid: 108); opt for readily understandable words 'in common use' (ibid: 113); beware difficulties presented by 'Technical and foreign words' and ambiguities even in 'simple English' (ibid: 116); avoid 'lazy thinking' (ibid: 119).

In a section under the subheading 'Worn phrases', advice to attempt 'to devise and use new similes and images of your own which exactly convey the meaning you want' is followed by a list including 'acid test' with the comment: '"Acid" has gone with test so often that it has ceased to add any meaning to it' (ibid: 122). With slight revisions and some new subheadings, the wording of the advice is largely the same (including 'acid test') in the second edition as well as the third edition, although the latter incorporates several new elements.

For instance, there is a list of pointers drawn from Keith Waterhouse's celebrated text *On Newspaper Style* (1989), such as using 'specific', 'concrete' and 'plain' (Harris, Spark and Hodgson 1997: 77) words; a section on 'codes' (distinguished from the attention again to 'Technical language') which reiterates that journalism is about 'communicating with readers in clear, simple and vivid language' (ibid: 79); a section on 'Political correctness' which warns 'it produces clumsy phrases, seeks to hide realities behind euphemisms … and it sometimes seems more interested in evading criticism than in expressing meaning' (ibid: 88) but also,

positively, highlights that a 'marked success of the feminists has been to persuade writers that they can no longer use "his" or "him" to include "her" when making a generalization' (ibid: 89); and a section on 'Loaded words' which points out the '*Times Style Guide* bans all euphemisms for murder' (ibid).

In the 'completely rewritten' (Spark and Harris 2011: xii) fourth edition, which is responsive to the demands of contemporary online journalism as well as key issues within the journalism industry such as diversity and ethics, there is still close attention to English language usage, writing style, and forms of journalism like news reports and features: ample topics, then, for which Orwell could have been explicitly drawn upon but, once again, is not. However, here too, it remains possible to recognise Orwell's approach to writing in the 'best practice' advice. For instance, in Chapter 5, 'Newswriting: choose the words', it is stated that readers 'like journalists to use clear, fresh words' (2011: 63). A range of problems like repetition, jargon, clichés, mixed metaphors and 'tired words' are highlighted. Although the 'acid test' example is gone, a sincerity-clarity link reminiscent of Orwell's essay underpins an argument that reference to '*loved ones*' rather than specific family members like father, mother, etc, 'radiates insincere compassion' (ibid). Imaginative originality is encouraged: 'Why copy the overused imagery and vocabulary of other journalists, when you could use fresh images of your own?' (ibid: 68). The wide-ranging advice is augmented by Chapter 6, 'Newswriting: getting the words in order', which urges, for instance, writing succinctly and avoiding 'muddled thinking' (ibid: 79) as well as long sentences.

Overall, the only explicit reference to Orwell in the NCTJ literature historically, besides Baker's book, occurs fleetingly in the distinctly male-orientated *Newsman's English* (1972), the first of a five-volume series by Harold Evans under the auspices of the NCTJ but also geared towards journalists internationally (and covering, in order, *Handling Newspaper Text*, *News Headlines*, *Picture Editing*, and *Newspaper Design*). According to Hugh Cudlipp, Evans believed 'we cannot have healthy democracy without efficient and honest newspapers' (1972: vii) – a position firmly in the tradition of journalists as the Fourth Estate, shared by Orwell. Commencing Chapter 2, 'Good English', Evans reproduces a longer quotation attributed to Matthew Arnold containing the same portion alluded to by Dr Syntax and later quoted by Baker: 'People think I can teach them style. What stuff it is [!]' leads into: 'Have something to say and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.' Evans proceeds to argue that the 'penny-a-liner, who is disappearing anyway, is a petty corrupter of the language by comparison with Her Majesty's Government and the Pentagon'. In lines in accord

with Orwell's approach, Evans holds that 'English has no greater enemy than officialese' and observes: 'Daily the stream of language is polluted by viscous verbiage. Meaning is clouded by vague abstraction, euphemism conceals identity, and words, words, words weigh the mind down.' Meaning, he insists, 'must be unmistakable, and it must also be succinct' (Evans 1986 [1972]: 16).

Elaborating on the role of 'the deskman' 'in 'protecting the reader from incomprehension and boredom', Evans explains the necessity of language usage 'which is specific, emphatic and concise'. Each sentence 'must be clear at one glance' and there 'must be no abstractions'. This, he declares, 'places newspaper English firmly in the prose camp of Dryden, Bunyan, Butler, Shaw, Somerset Maugham, Orwell, Thurber. The style to reject is the mandarin style … which is characterised by long sentences with many dependent clauses, by the use of the subjunctive and conditional, by exclamations and interjections, quotations, allusions, metaphors, long images, Latin terminology, subtlety and conceits' (ibid: 17). In this vein, Evans subsequently advises to 'Be Active': 'Vigorous, economical writing requires a preference for sentences in the active voice' (ibid: 23); to 'Avoid Needless Repetition' (ibid: 45); to 'Care for Meanings' (ibid: 53); and to 'Avoid Clichés' (ibid: 58). Topping the list of 'Stale Expressions' is the familiar 'acid test' (ibid: 80).

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO THE NCTJ TO UTILISE ORWELL STILL MORE IN THE FUTURE

As Evans's book indicates, Orwell can be counted within a rich tradition of critics and writers of prose in English which deeply informs journalism 'best practice'. That Orwell has been subsumed into a vast corpus of acclaimed prose works by renowned writers, and thus a cultural swirl of anecdotes and writings about writing which are pertinent to journalism, helps to explain the paucity of references to him in NCTJ publications historically even as these publications appear to be awash with writing principles he espoused. Besides obvious irrelevance to some topics (for instance, Orwell was for a time Literary Editor at the *Tribune* but never worked in newspaper management), another factor could be Orwell's complex relation to the standard 'objective' journalism of the mainstream or corporate press which, in Orwell's view, often served the interests of its wealthy proprietors. Although he supported 'a readiness to present news objectively', Orwell also believed prominence should be given 'to the things that really matter' (Orwell 2008 [1946]: 330). In similar vein, Orwell also took issue with schools of journalism and formulaic writing courses which prioritised money-making at the expense of 'telling unpleasant truths about present-day society' (ibid: 191).

As Keeble conveys, Orwell was 'a progressive journalist committed to the alternative media' on the left of the political spectrum, with his journalism reflecting 'an overall political activist approach' (Keeble 2020: 2). Such an approach differs markedly from the injunction to be impartial or unbiased which is usually enshrined in style guides in the newspaper industry and, accordingly, drummed into trainee journalists as essential to accurate, fair and balanced coverage deriving from apolitical professional practice.

Even Orwell's 19 articles as a war correspondent for the *Observer* and *Manchester Evening News* in 1945, 'the only time Orwell worked to strict deadlines as a reporter for mainstream newspapers' (Keeble 2007: 101), are highly subjective. Moreover, Orwell has been better known as the author of *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) than as a journalist and essayist. Historically, Orwell does not seem to have readily stood out, then, as a go-to exemplar or suitable case study for NCTJ textbooks for beginner journalists. Yet, as Baker's updated NCTJ guide shows, Orwell could not be more relevant to the need for beginners to understand industry expectations and develop best practice in terms of English language usage and writing style. This paper not only endorses Baker's harnessing of Orwell for educational purposes aligned to the Diploma but calls for further visible and wide-ranging utilisation of Orwell in future NCTJ textbooks and teaching. Orwell could potentially be applied in a range of areas: for example, the mandatory Essential Journalism, e-portfolios and ethics modules; and the optional magazine, editing skills and sports journalism modules.

Although Orwell's radio work as a talks producer for the BBC Eastern Service has not been examined here, reference to it could enrich teaching of the broadcast/radio journalism modules. Baker's professional background in BBC radio, television and multimedia newsgathering, as well as his leadership of training of BBC journalists globally as head of the College of Journalism (2010-2013), would have made him acutely cognisant of the value of Orwell's writing advice – which helps to explain its inclusion in Baker's new NCTJ guide. 'Politics and the English Language' appears, for instance, on the further reading list on page 85 of the *The BBC News Styleguide* (2003) written by John Allen, when Baker was World News Editor at the BBC Television Centre in London. A quotation from the essay opens the section on 'Clichés and Journalese': 'By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself' (Allen 2003: 23; Orwell 2000 [1946]: 354-345).

As Tim Crook argues in 'Orwell and the radio imagination' (2015), Orwell's six rules can be extrapolated at various points in

Allen's guide. Crook speculates that it 'is perhaps no coincidence that Orwell's two years of toil, industry and creativity at the BBC were followed by the writing of two seminal essays' – 'Politics and the English Language' and 'Poetry and the Microphone' (1945) – 'that have had such a powerful influence on radio journalistic writing and the presentation and communication of poetry on the radio'. 'Politics and the English Language,' he argues, 'underpins the professional ethic of impartial, clear, and unpretentious writing in radio news.' He adds: 'I believe the stripped down, cautious and spoken word style of broadcasting English reverberated with Orwell's desire to resist the propagandizing and politicization of English communication. His enduring struggle against academic gobbledygook and determination to fight staleness of imagery and lack of precision is the stalwart aim of anybody writing scripts in spoken English style for the radio' (Crook 2015: 11).

Moreover, there is wider evidence of inclusion of Orwell in textbooks for the purposes of journalism training which predate Baker's NCTJ guide: for example, both editions of *Writing for Broadcast Journalists* (2005, 2010) by Rick Thompson. Although not explicitly branded as such, these editions appear to be compatible with teaching aligned to the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC) which, like the NCTJ and Professional Publishers Association (PPA), accredits journalism courses in the UK. In Chapter 3, 'The language of broadcast news', the identical quotation from 'Politics and the English Language' which appears in Allen's 2003 BBC guide opens the section 'Clichés' on page 29 of the first edition and on page 31 of the second edition. 'Orwell's summary' can be found near the end of both editions: 'Every journalist should develop his or her own style, avoiding clichés and stale formulae. In broadcasting, never forget that the words will be heard, not read.' Before quoting Orwell's six rules which, as we have seen, are later reproduced by Baker, Thompson argues there 'is no better summary of the way the spoken word should be written than the advice given by George Orwell in his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*' (2005: 151, 2010: 163). The essay appears on the further reading list for 'The Development and Use of the English Language' in both editions (2005: 176, 2010: 188).

Notably, in the revised section on 'Officialese from politicians' in Chapter 3 of the second edition, Thompson's argument is in accord with this paper's foregrounding of the value, in the 'apolitical' training of journalists, of expressly recognising Orwell's political awareness; and therefore in accord with this paper's call for change from Baker's exclusive attention to the English language aspects at the expense of the ultimately inseparable political dimension of Orwell's writing approach. Thompson highlights that, in 2008, the

Centre for Policy Studies published a 'Lexicon of Contemporary Newspeak' pointing out that 'what George Orwell described as *euphemism*, *question-begging* and *sheer cloudy vagueness* now dominates political discourse' (2010: 25, italics in the original). He adds that the director of the think-tank, Jill Kirby, was scathing about this 'often impenetrable vocabulary' and believed 'the corruption of language has infected all political parties, is endemic in public service, and is rapidly spreading in the media' (ibid: 25-26). Thompson stresses this 'serious point' and rightly argues: 'All good broadcast journalists not only must avoid this kind of political jargon and stick to everyday spoken English, they should also point out to their audiences, through direct quotes or attribution, that their elected leaders are deploying this kind of obfuscation' (ibid: 26).

Yet this should apply, of course, to *all* journalists fulfilling their function to hold power to account; and it illustrates, again, how relevant Orwell remains and how useful he could be if incorporated into teaching aligned to the NCTJ Diploma in a wide-ranging but integrated manner. Students could benefit not just from improved language skills across media platforms but enhanced appreciation of why they, as journalists, matter to society. Given recent calls in the US for the media to improve its approach to 'democratic backsliding' (Maruf 2021) and 'to start championing an unapologetic pro-democracy bias, before it's too late' (Klaas 2021), Orwell could serve to stimulate discussion that helps UK and international students to develop, fundamentally, a strong sense of professional identity and purpose that will shape – and sharpen – their practice as journalists.

Above all, Orwell's insistence on plain truth-telling stands as a perennial beacon for trainee and working journalists. The Ipsos Veracity Index 2021 showed that British adults' level of trust in journalists to tell the truth was only 28 per cent – a slight improvement on 2020 and 'back to their previous highest scores' since 1983. The only professions less trusted were government ministers and politicians generally at 19 per cent each, and advertising executives at 16 per cent (Clemence 2021). To borrow from the quotation alongside Orwell's statue at BBC headquarters in London, these are facts that journalists would not necessarily 'want to hear' but must if the profession is to rise to new heights.

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