



George Orwell Orwell in Spain



P E N G U I N  
C L A S S I C S

Orwell in Spain

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*The Full Text of Homage to Catalonia with Associated Articles,  
Reviews and Letters from The Complete Works of George Orwell*

*Edited by Peter Davison*

*Introduction by Christopher Hitchens*



PENGUIN BOOKS

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‘One of the most influential English writers of the twentieth century’ Robert McCrum, *Observer*

‘A prophet who thought the unthinkable and spoke the unspeakable, even when it offended conventional thought’ Peter Grosvenor, *Daily Express*

‘He saw through everything because he could also see through himself. Many writers and journalists have tried to imitate his particular kind of clarity without possessing anything like his moral authority’ Peter Ackroyd, *The Times*

‘Orwell’s innocent eye was often devastatingly perceptive... a man who looked at his world with wonder and wrote down exactly what he saw, in admirable prose’ John Mortimer, *Evening Standard*

‘Matchlessly sharp and fresh... The clearest and most compelling English prose style this century’ John Carey, *Sunday Times*

‘It is impossible not to be elated by his literary and political writing – and enraged by what he was up against... the most lovable of writers, someone whose books can make the reader long for his company’ Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *Spectator*

‘His intellectual honesty was a virtue... it wasn’t just the amount of truth he told but the way he told it, in prose transmuted to poetry by the pressure of his dedication’ Clive James, *New Yorker*

‘The finest English essayist of his century... He made it his business to tell the truth at a time when many contemporaries believed that history had ordained the lie... His work endures, as lucid and vigorous as the day it was written’ Paul Gray, *Time*

ERIC ARTHUR BLAIR (George Orwell) was born in 1903 in India, where his father worked for the Civil Service. The family moved to England in 1907 and in 1917 Orwell entered Eton, where he contributed regularly to the various college magazines. From 1922 to 1927 he served with the Indian Imperial Police Force in Burma, an experience that inspired his first novel, *Burmese Days* (1934). Several years of poverty followed. He lived in Paris for two years before returning to England, where he worked successively as a private tutor, schoolteacher and bookshop assistant, and contributed reviews and articles to a number of periodicals. *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published in 1933. In 1936 he was commissioned by Victor Gollancz to visit areas of mass unemployment in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is a powerful description of the poverty he saw there. At the end of 1936 Orwell went to Spain to fight for the Republicans and was wounded. *Homage to Catalonia* is his account of the civil war. He was admitted to a sanatorium in 1938 and from then on was never fully fit. He spent six months in Morocco and there wrote *Coming Up for Air*. During the Second World War he served in the Home Guard and worked for the BBC Eastern Service from 1941 to 1943. As literary editor of *Tribune* he contributed a regular page of political and literary

commentary, and he also wrote for the *Observer* and later for the *Manchester Evening News*. His unique political allegory, *Animal Farm*, was published in 1945, and it was this novel, together with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which brought him world-wide fame.

George Orwell died in London in January 1950. A few days before, Desmond MacCarthy had sent him a message of greeting in which he wrote: 'You have made an indelible mark on English literature... you are among the few memorable writers of your generation.'

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CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS is a regular columnist for *Vanity Fair* and the *Nation*. His books include *Blood Class and Nostalgia: Anglo-American Ironies* (1990) and *No One Left to Lie To: The Triangulations of William Jefferson Clinton* (1998). He is currently Professor of Liberal Studies at the New School for Social Research in New York, and lives in Washington, DC.



# Introduction

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The grandeur of George Orwell, in our store of moral and intellectual memory, is to be found partly in his very lack of grandeur. He is remembered, with different and varying degrees of distinctness, as the man who confronted three of the great crises of the twentieth century and got all three of them, so to speak, 'right'. He was right, earlier than most, about imperialism, viewing it as an unjust and unjustifiable form of rule, and also as a cause of war. He was right, early and often, about the menace presented by Fascism and National Socialism, not just to the peace of the world but to the very idea of civilization. And he was right about Stalinism, about the great and the small temptations that it offered to certain kinds of intellectual, and about the monstrous consequences that would ensue from that nightmarish sleep of reason.

He brought off this triple achievement, furthermore, in his lowly capacity as an impoverished freelance journalist and amateur novelist. He had no resources beyond his own, he enjoyed the backing of no party or organization or big newspaper, let alone any department of state. Much of his energy was dissipated in the simple struggle to get published, or in the banal effort to meet a quotidian schedule of bills and deadlines. He had no university education, no credential nor area of expertise. He had no capital. Yet his unexciting pen-name, drawn from a rather placid English river, is known to millions as a synonym for prescience and integrity, and the adjective 'Orwellian' is understood widely and – this has its significance – ambivalently. To describe a situation as 'Orwellian' is to announce dystopia: the triumph of force and sadism and demagoguery over humanism. To call a person 'Orwellian' is to summon the latent ability of an individual to resist such triumphs, or at least to see through them and call them by their right names.

Though he is best remembered for his satires upon, and polemics against, the big lie and grand illusion – he properly understood that it was both – of the 'Great Soviet Experiment', Orwell acquired the necessary knowledge and insight for that task as a front-line fighter against the European Right and its 'crusade' (the term actually employed by Franco and his Vatican supporters) to immolate the Spanish Republic. It was while serving in Catalonia that he survived a fascist bullet through his throat while in the trenches, but very nearly did not survive a Communist stab in the back while recuperating in Barcelona. From this near-accidental opportunity to bear witness came the body of work we now understand as 'Orwellian'. This work had been slowly begun in the sullen villages of colonial Burma and refined in slums and coal-mines and doss-houses and on the picket-lines of the Depression, but the crucible – or the point where the hammer met the anvil – was in Spain.

Introducing the American edition of *Homage to Catalonia* in 1952 (the first such edition, incidentally, since the book did not find a publisher in the United States until fourteen years after it was written and two years after its author had died a virtual pauper), Lionel Trilling made the uncondescending observation that Orwell was not a genius. By this he meant, and stated very finely:

If we ask what it is that he stands for, what he is the figure of, the answer is: the virtue of not being a genius, of fronting the world with nothing more than one's simple, direct, undeceived intelligence, and a respect for the powers one does have, and the work one undertakes to do... He is not a genius – what a relief! What an encouragement. For he communicates to us the sense that what he has done, any one of us could do.

This judgement strikes me as being simultaneously true and beautiful. Orwell was physically brave in Spain, but not heroically so. He did no more than countless other volunteer soldiers, and suffered very much less than many of them. But when he was put to the test, and stumbled across an important chunk of evidence, he had to confront the strong pressure either to lie or to keep silent. Here again, he was exceptional rather than exemplary. He simply resolved that he would tell the truth as he saw it, and would stipulate that he had only the vantage point of a bewildered and occasionally frightened but none the less determined individual. He repeatedly enjoins the reader, in effect, not to take him upon trust:

It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda. I myself have little data beyond what I saw with my own eyes and what I have learned from other eye-witnesses whom I believe to be reliable.

In this properly provisional verdict, however, he unknowingly erred on the side of pessimism. The history of the May events in Barcelona in 1937 was certainly buried for years under a slag-heap of slander and falsification. Orwell, indeed, derived his terrifying notion of the memory-hole and the rewritten past, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, from exactly this single instance of the abolished memory. ‘This kind of thing is frightening to me,’ he wrote about Catalonia, ‘because it often gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world’:

After all, the chances are that those lies, or at any rate similar lies, will pass into history... The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future *but the past*. If the Leader says of such and such an event, ‘It never happened’ – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five.

But in our very immediate past, documents have surfaced to show that his vulgar, empirical, personal commonsensical deposition was verifiable after all. The recent opening of Communist records in Moscow, and also of closely held Franco-era documentation in Madrid and Salamanca, has provided posthumous vindication.

The narrative core of *Homage to Catalonia*, it might be argued, is a series of events that occurred in and around the Barcelona telephone exchange in early May 1937. Orwell was a witness to these events, by the relative accident of his having signed up with the militia of the anti-Stalinist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) upon arriving in Spain. Allowing as he did for the bias that this lent to his first-hand observations, he none the less became convinced that he had been the spectator of a full-blown Stalinist *putsch*, complete with rigged evidence, false allegations and an ulterior hand directed by Moscow. The outright and evidently concerted fabrications that immediately followed in the press, which convinced or neutralized so many ‘progressive intellectuals’, only persuaded him the more that he had watched a lie being gestated and then born.

Well, now we have the papers of the Soviet Military Archive in Moscow, formally known as the State Military Archive. ‘Document Forty-Two’, in the series dealing with Spain, provides us with the text of a lengthy unsigned report, delivered on 15 April 1937, and forwarded by Georgi Dimitrov to Marshal Voroshilov. The importance of the traffic is emphasized by this very routing: unimportant messages did not go from the head of the Comintern to the chief of the Red Army and thus almost certainly to Stalin himself. (The actual author may well have been André Marty, the French-born Comintern agent for Spain, memorably etched in at least some of his cold hatefulness by Ernest

Hemingway in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.)

In robotic prose, the author characterizes the non-Communist left in the Spanish Republic and specifically Catalonia as ‘fascists or semi-fascists’. He goes on to describe the position of Moscow as ‘absolutely correct on every question’. This slavish stuff might be called routine, but just after a paeon to the ‘natural and indisputable’ inevitability of a Communist Party victory, the writer of the report comes to the point. A crisis may be objectively brewing, given the staunchly anti-Russian positions taken by Largo Caballero and his Republican cabinet, but it may still need some subjective assistance. In fact, the duty of the Party involves ‘not waiting passively for a “natural” unleashing of the hidden government crisis, but to hasten it and, if necessary, to provoke it’. The date of this proposal, which also announces that ‘the Party is waiting for your advice on this question’, anticipates the Communist police attack on the Barcelona telephone exchange by a matter of just over two weeks.

The succeeding paper, ‘Document Forty-Three’, was written on 11 May and is the first report back to the Comintern on the mixed results of the action. Regretting the extent to which the POUM and other forces had been able to resist the Stalinist onslaught, the author (whose identity in this instance is uncertain) relays the demand for ‘energetic and merciless repression’ by means of a ‘military tribunal for the Trotskyists’.\* There is no need for guesswork about the meaning of this; Professor Peter Davison’s work on Orwell has already established that a Catalan version of the Moscow show-trials was in preparation, and that George Orwell and his wife Eileen would have been in the dock – a NKVD file unearthed in Moscow and dated 13 July 1937 describes them as ‘pronounced Trotskyists’ had they not managed to slip across the border into France. As it was, many of their English comrades were imprisoned and vilely ill-used, and Andrés Nin, the leader of the POUM, was kidnapped by Stalin’s agents and tortured to death. With each succeeding disclosure from the records of the period it becomes clearer that Orwell’s free-hand sketch of events was a journalistic understatement.

‘Part of his malaise’, wrote Jennie Lee, who saw Orwell in those terrible days, ‘was that he was not only a socialist but profoundly liberal. He hated regimentation wherever he found it, even in the socialist ranks.’ Ms Lee went on to become the wife of Aneurin Bevan, who was also Orwell’s editor and patron at *Tribune*. Her choice of the word ‘malaise’, and her stress upon regimentation, are both oddly paradoxical. To many supporters of the Spanish Republic, especially to foreigners who did not wish to impose themselves (as well as to those who did), it seemed axiomatic that one should first win the war against a fascist mutiny supported by Hitler and Mussolini, and only then discuss the shape of the future. Orwell, the old Etonian and former colonial policeman, and lifetime foe of affectations and posturings, might have been expected to be highly susceptible to this no-nonsense approach. In fact, in his ‘Notes on the Spanish Militia’, discussing a POUM attack on Huesca, he writes: ‘I was not in this show, but heard from others who were that the POUM troops behaved well.’ It sounds amazingly like a stiff-upper-lip staff officer (‘this show’) of the generation before.

Yet when it came to it, this rather insular and reserved Englishman – renowned in his own detachment as a bit of a stickler for discipline, whose wife when at the Aragon front wrote yearningly of Crosse & Blackwell pickles and Lea & Perrins sauce and good old English marmalade – brought himself to see that a conventional military victory was an illusion, and that what the place really needed was a thoroughgoing social and political revolution. Moreover, he came to understand that much of the talk about ‘discipline’ and ‘unity’ was a rhetorical shield for the covert Stalinization of

the Spanish Republic. Undoubtedly, he was assisted to this conclusion by the calibre of the revolutionaries he met, both Catalan and international (he often finds occasion in these pages to speak well of the German comrades). And of course, he could tell in his bones and from experience that the Stalinists were lying. As a consequence, the honour of many decent and brave people was upheld, through his fragmentary but consistent writings, against a positive downpour of calumny and malice. This can sometimes make one feel better about the supposedly hopeless pragmatism, the sheer want of theoretical capacity, of the island race.

Integrity, though, is not just a matter of dogged adherence. It is most striking to see, in these pages how Orwell continues to fight with the weapons of patience and politeness. Whether it is in combat with an anonymous reviewer in *The Listener* (a stolid adherent of the commonsense school, this one, see page 295) or debating with other leftists like Raymond Postgate, he maintains the rules of rational argument and never – except in taking the odd pot-shot at an occasional fascist – descends into mere invective. He monitors reports of the trial of the POUM (page 311), keeps up the search for news of his missing or imprisoned friends and steadily answers all his correspondence. Every now and then, we glimpse another ‘flash-forward’ to the raw material of *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as when we read, on page 325, of his old comrade Georges Kopp being tortured by confinement with rats or when Orwell drily notes that Antonov-Ovseenko, the Soviet commissar in Barcelona charged with the extirpation of Trotskyism, has himself been indicted in Moscow for Trotskyist deviations, or when in Orwell’s papers we find Bertram Wolfe’s eulogy to Andrés Nin, with its evident influence on the world of Goldstein and Big Brother. The only lacuna – and it is an odd one, given Orwell’s sensitivity to colonial questions – concerns the subject of Morocco. It was from this base, and with a heavily Moorish army, that Franco’s aggression had been launched. The demand of the Trotskyist Left was that Spanish Morocco should be immediately given its independence, first as a matter of principle and second because it might undermine Franco’s imperial rearguard. The Communist line was to oppose this, because such a policy would alienate Britain and France, the other two colonial powers in North Africa. Meanwhile, they used chauvinist propaganda against the employment of dark-skinned infidels by a Catholic crusade. The argument was a very intense one at the time; it is disappointing to find Orwell having so little to say about it.

The intellectuals and writers of enlightened Europe generated shelf upon shelf of prose and poetry during the Spanish Civil War, but it is absolutely safe to say that most of this stuff would not bear reprinting except as a textbook in credulity and/or bad faith. There is barely a sentence, however, in this collection which causes a wince or a shudder. Orwell, who did not share the febrile enthusiasm of the clenched-fist cheerleaders and propagandists (see page 248), none the less had a deeper belief than they did in the capacities of the Spanish people. His work also acts as a prophylactic against the efforts of a certain revisionist school, which now likes to argue that the victory of Franco was preferable after all, because the alternative would have been a prototype ‘Peoples’ Democracy’ of the order of Czechoslovakia in 1948. Orwell, who had grasped the nature of ‘Peoples’ Democracy’ more acutely than most, argued to the contrary. An awful tyranny was possible in either case, he granted, but:

Given a Government victory, it seems much likelier that Spain will develop into a capitalist Republic of the type of France than into a socialist state. What seems certain, however, is that no regression to a semi-feudal, priest-ridden régime of the kind that existed up to 1931 or, indeed, up to 1936 is now possible. Such régimes, by their nature, depend upon a general

apathy and ignorance which no longer exist in Spain. The people have seen and learned too much. At the lowest estimate, there are several million people who have become impregnated with ideas which make them bad material for an authoritarian state.

In the event of a Franco victory, as Orwell also noted, ‘the desire for liberty, for knowledge and for a decent standard of living has spread far too widely to be killed by obscurantism or persecution’. Those who assert that Spain would have become Stalinized in the event of a Franco defeat are also fond of arguing that Franco’s regime was relatively benign, as against Hitler’s, say, and that it gave way in the end to democratic evolution from below. Why could not this be true in the opposing case, and for much the same reasons? The missing element in the calculation is the ability of people to make their own history, an ability which Orwell did not doubt since he had seen it demonstrated. Dystopia might win, but it did not have to, and it might not last. In this sense, the courage and bearing of the Catalans taught Orwell to argue against his own direst premonitions.

He was prescient even in the smaller things, writing in 1943 that it was mistaken to believe, as many did, ‘that Franco will fight for the Axis if the Allies invade Europe. Fidelity is not the strong point of the minor dictators.’ To combat Franco in 1937 was to hope for a reverse of European fascism *tout court*: once that struggle had been betrayed by Stalin and Chamberlain and Daladier, matters resumed the banal shape of *realpolitik* and local compromise. Excess of zeal is a poor guide, especially for the ideologically inclined.

Just such an excess of wartime enthusiasm, and of the Puritanism that may accompany it, led Orwell to commit his only lapse into demagoguery. In May 1937 – that cruellest of months for the cause as it was to turn out – W. H. Auden published his extraordinary poem ‘Spain’, which first appeared as a shilling pamphlet with proceeds donated to Medical Aid for the Spanish Republic. In a long and extremely moving evolution of verses, the poet attempted to express his emotion for the martyred country itself (‘that arid square, nipped off from hot Africa and soldered so crudely to inventive Europe’), to hymn its centrality in the hearts of thinking and feeling people (‘Our thoughts have bodies/ The menacing shapes of our fever/ Are precise and alive’) and to register the moral agony that was experienced by intellectuals who abandoned neutrality and decided to support the use of force by their chosen side:

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death;

The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;

To-day the expending of powers

On the flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

In successive articles, one of them written for *The Adelphi* in 1938 and another more celebrated under the title *Inside the Whale*, Orwell emptied the vials of contempt over this stanza in particular. He denounced it as

a sort of thumb-nail sketch of a day in the life of a ‘good party man’. In the morning a couple of political murders, a ten-minutes’ interlude to stifle ‘bourgeois’ remorse, and then a hurried luncheon and a busy afternoon and evening chalking walls and distributing leaflets. All very edifying. But notice the phrase ‘necessary murder’. It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder... The Hitlers and the Stalins find murder necessary, but they don’t advertise their callousness, and they don’t speak of it as murder; it is ‘liquidation’, ‘elimination’, or some other soothing phrase. Mr Auden’s brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled.

The laden sarcasm here is more than slightly thuggish; it also reflects one of Orwell's less agreeable habits of mind, which was an instinctive prejudice against homosexuals. (Allusions to 'pansy' or 'nancy' poets elsewhere in his writing are common enough – there's one on page 249. They are usually directed at Auden or his supposed clique, and are the only expletives uttered by Orwell that could also have been authored by Zhdanov or some other Stalinist cultural enforcer.)

Auden of course exemplified nothing of the kind; in order to believe that he was, you would have to find the words (not the phrases) 'liquidation' or 'elimination' to be 'soothing'. His 'brand of amoralism' consisted in trying to be direct and honest about the consequences of going to Spain and overcoming what were essentially pacifist scruples. For example, though he broadcast propaganda for the Republican government from Valencia, he was revolted by the burning of churches – revolutionary actions which Orwell always reports and refers to with the utmost breeziness, as to be expected in time of class warfare and civil strife.

It isn't clear how much immediate effect Orwell's polemic had on Auden, but in 1939 he revised 'Spain' to delete all allusion to such choices, and after the 1950s he would not permit the poem to be anthologized at all. This is in more than one way a pity, because it robs us of a magnificent minor epigram in verse, and leaves stranded and isolated a haunting phrase which many people have heard but which fewer and fewer people can 'place'. That phrase – 'History to the Defeated' – forms part of the climax of the poem, and suggests in an elegiac way that the losers will never be granted their meed of honour. To them, history 'May say Alas but cannot help or pardon.' In later life, Auden came, wrongly in my humble opinion, to think of this as an expression of the repulsive idea that impersonal or Hegelian capital-H 'History' was necessarily on the side of the triumphant big battalions.

Yet 'History to the Defeated' is the underlying subject and text of this collection of pages and fragments. Like several others in the 'midnight of the century', the glacial period that reached its nadir in the Hitler–Stalin Pact, Orwell wrote gloomily but defiantly for the bottom drawer. He belonged in the lonely 1930s tradition of Victor Serge and Boris Souvarine and David Rousset – speaking truth to power but without a real audience or a living jury. It is almost tragic that, picking through the rubble of that epoch, one cannot admire him and Auden simultaneously. 'All I have is a voice', wrote Auden in 'September 1, 1939', 'To undo the folded lie, / The romantic lie in the brain... And the lie of Authority.' All Orwell had was a voice, and to him, too, the blatant lies of authority were one thing, while the 'folded' lies that clever people tell themselves were another. The tacit or overt collusion between the two was the ultimate foe.

In Catalonia three years ago, the history of the defeated was finally celebrated as a victory. A square near the Barcelona waterfront was named Plaça George Orwell, while a street in the town of Can Rulldor was named Calle Andrés Nin. Present at the dedications were many veterans of the Barcelona 'May Days' of 1937, who had survived to bear witness because Nin never betrayed any names to his interrogators and murderers. The translations of Dostoyevsky and Tolstoi that are read by Catalan schoolchildren are Nin's translations; he was a figure in Catalonia's literary and linguistic revival, and a lover of Russia for the same reason that he was a hater of Stalin. The history of the Civil War that is taught to Catalan schoolchildren now includes Orwell, and has been wiped clean of any totalitarian or revisionist taint. Truth, it turns out, is great after all, and can prevail. The book you hold in your hand is a modest, individual illustration of that mighty proposition, which will always stand in need of

volunteers to vindicate it.

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Christopher Hitchens

Palo Alto, California

May Day, 2001

\* These documents, and many others of extraordinary interest, were disclosed as a consequence of an exclusive agreement between the State Military Archive and Yale University Press. They will appear in full in *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union and the Spanish Civil War* by Ronald Radosh and Mary R. Habeck (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2001). In view of the fact that I have disagreed strongly in print and in public with Professor Radosh, for his published views on the Spanish conflict, I should like to emphasize the unusual courtesy he showed in sharing his findings with me.



## Editorial Note

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In the main, the items reproduced here are given in the chronological order in which they were written or published. However, the order of events is sometimes better represented by not following this practice. It will be obvious, from dates and item numbers, where the chronological order has not been followed. Letters are typewritten unless stated otherwise. The titles used for Orwell's essays and articles are not always his own but this distinction is not noted unless there is a special reason to do so.

Almost all the items are drawn from *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, edited by Peter Davison, assisted by Ian Angus and Sheila Davison (Secker & Warburg, 1998). Some explanatory headnotes and many footnotes have been added, amplified and modified. The *Complete Works* did not provide biographical notes of authors of books reviewed but, for this selection, these have been added if the author had a link with Orwell or if they might illuminate the context of Orwell's review. Item numbers from the original edition are given in italics within square parentheses, and a list of volumes in which these items can be found is given in the Further Reading.

Where the text was in some way obscure, the original edition does not modify but marks the word or passage with a superior degree sign (°); in most instances such passages have been silently corrected in this edition but in a few instances the degree sign has been retained, for example, where one of Orwell's idiosyncratic spellings occurs: e.g., 'agressive' or 'adress'.

References to items in the *Complete Works* are generally given by volume, forward slash and item number in italic: e.g.: XV/953; page references to *CW* are given similarly except that the page number is in roman: XII/387; page references to this present volume are given as 'p. 57'; references are also made to the companion three volumes: *Orwell and Politics*, *Orwell and the Dispossessed* and *Orwell in England*. References to *Homage to Catalonia* are given to this edition by page and, within square brackets, by the *CW* volume number (VI) and page (the page numbers in *CW* and Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics are identical for the text): e.g.: p. 36 [VI/57].)

The following works are designated by abbreviated forms:

*Complete Works* and *CW*: *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, edited by Peter Davison assisted by Ian Angus and Sheila Davison, 20 vols. (1998); volume numbers are given in roman numerals, I to XX. Vols. X–XX of a second, enlarged and amended, edition are being published in paperback from September 2000.

*CEJL*: *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, 4 vols. (1968; paperback, 1970)

Crick: Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (1980; 3rd edn, 1992)

*A Literary Life*: P. Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (1996)

*Orwell Remembered*: Audrey Coppard and Bernard Crick, eds., *Orwell Remembered* (1984)

*Remembering Orwell*: Stephen Wadhams, ed., *Remembering Orwell* (1984)

S&A, *Unknown Orwell*: Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *The Unknown Orwell* (1972)

S&A, *Transformation*: Peter Stansky and William Abrahams, *Orwell: The Transformation* (1979)

Shelden: Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorised Biography* (1991)

*The Thirties*: Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties* (1940; 1971); reviewed by Orwell, XII/615

Thomas: Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (rev. edn, 1977; Penguin, 1979)

A fuller reading list is given in Further Reading.

Peter Davison,



# Acknowledgements

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George Orwell's (Eric Blair's) work is the copyright of the Estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell. Most of the documents in this edition are held by the Orwell Archive (founded by Sonia Orwell in 1960) at University College London. Gratitude is expressed to the Archive, and particularly its Archivist, Gill Furlong, for the help given the editor. A number of documents are in the possession of others and thanks to the following are gratefully extended: Archivo Histórico Nacional de España, Madrid, for the Spanish originals of the documents referring to Orwell (Blair) and Doran (374A); the BBC for the paragraph from the Weekly News Broadcast to India, 22 (1173); the British Library for Mss Add. 49384 (Kopp's report on Orwell's wound, 369); Mrs Bertha Doran and Waverley Secondary School, Drumchapel, Glasgow, for 386; the Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, for 358 and 365; Harry Ransom Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, Texas, for 381 and 434; and Judith Williams for 386A.

Headnotes, footnotes and the Note on the Text of *Homage to Catalonia* are copyright of Peter Davison.

I wish to add a last acknowledgement to this, my favourite of Orwell's books. Sheila, my wife for over fifty years, has been of inestimable help in the production of this and the other three volumes in this series, *Orwell and the Dispossessed*, *Orwell and Politics* and *Orwell's England*. Her eyes, much sharper than mine, have spotted many errors in the course of proof-reading, and she has endeavoured to ensure I have written simply and straightforwardly. For this and so much else I am abidingly grateful.

## Orwell's Journey to Spain, December 1936

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*The Spanish Civil War was fought from 1936 to 1939 between the Spanish Republican Government and Nationalist rebels. The Republicans included socialists, communists, anarchists and Catalan and Basque nationalists, but also many moderates; the Nationalists comprised the conservative elements of Spain, including monarchists, Carlists, Falangists (fascists) and the Roman Catholic Church. The Soviet Union gave the Republicans (especially the communists) active support; the Nationalists were given heavier support by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Many foreigners fought on both sides, especially on behalf of the Republicans, notably in the International Brigade. Britain and France were among countries that pursued a non-interventionist policy. General Francisco Franco (1892–1975) played a vital role in ensuring the Nationalist victory. From September 1936 he served as Generalissimo of the Nationalist forces and after the war became dictator of Spain. The ferocity of the war led to heavy loss of life, directly in the fighting, 'behind the lines', and, after the war, in retributive killings and deaths in prison (perhaps some 100,000), a total of some half-million people in all.*<sup>1</sup>

*On 10 December 1936, George Orwell wrote the first of a series of short letters to his literary agent, Leonard Moore, making arrangements for his journey to Spain, where he intended to fight on behalf of the Republicans. He confirmed that his bank had allowed him to overdraw to the tune of £50 (which Moore had guaranteed). He asked Moore to try to persuade the Daily Herald (a newspaper that supported the Left) to commission him to write 'a few articles or something like that' (327). No agreement was reached with the Herald. The next day he wrote an authorization for his agent giving his wife, Eileen, complete rights over his literary affairs and directed that all payments due to him should be paid to her (328). On 15 December he sent Moore the manuscript of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. This was processed very rapidly and on Saturday, 19 December, his publisher, Victor Gollancz, sent him a telegram asking him to call at Gollancz's offices on the following Monday, 21 December, to discuss the book's publication. Orwell telegraphed back to say he would be there at noon and they then discussed terms for the publication of the book and the inclusion of illustrations (341). Orwell endeavoured to win the support of Harry Pollitt, Secretary-General of the Communist Party, for his journey to Spain, but Pollitt, suspicious of Orwell's political reliability (as he saw it), declined to help him. He did, however, advise him to obtain a safe-conduct from the Spanish Embassy in Paris. Orwell also obtained a letter of introduction from the Independent Labour Party (the ILP) to John McNair, its representative in Barcelona.<sup>2</sup> Orwell arrived in Barcelona about 26 December. He described the journey (and an incident in Paris on the way) in his Tribune column, 'As I Please', in 1944. Jennie Lee (1904–88, Baroness Lee of Asheridge, 1970), first Minister of Arts and wife of Aneurin Bevan (1897–1960), under whose forceful leadership the National Health Service had been set up in 1948, described Orwell's arrival in Barcelona in a letter to Margaret M. Goalby, written shortly after Orwell's death.*

Extract from 'As I Please', 42 [The Journey to Spain]  
*Tribune, 15 September 1944*

About the end of 1936, as I was passing through Paris on the way to Spain, I had to visit somebody at an address I did not know, and I thought that the quickest way of getting there would probably be to take a taxi. The taxi-driver did not know the address either. However, we drove up the street and asked the nearest policeman, whereupon it turned out that the address I was looking for was only about a hundred yards away. So I had taken the taxi-driver off the rank for a fare which in English money was about threepence.

The taxi-driver was furiously angry. He began accusing me, in a roaring voice and with the maximum of offensiveness, of having 'done it on purpose'. I protested that I had not known where the place was, and that I obviously would not have taken a taxi if I had known. 'You knew very well!' he yelled back at me. He was an old, grey, thick-set man, with ragged grey moustaches and a face of quite unusual malignity. In the end I lost my temper, and, my command of French coming back to me in my rage, I shouted at him, 'You think you're too old for me to smash your face in. Don't be too sure!' He backed up against the taxi, snarling and full of fight, in spite of his sixty years.

Then the moment came to pay. I had taken out a ten-franc note. 'I've no change!' he yelled as soon as he saw the money. 'Go and change it for yourself!'

'Where can I get change?'

'How should I know? That's your business.'

So I had to cross the street, find a tobacconist's shop and get change. When I came back I gave the taxi-driver the exact fare, telling him that after his behaviour I saw no reason for giving him anything extra; and after exchanging a few more insults we parted.

This sordid squabble left me at the moment violently angry, and a little later saddened and disgusted. 'Why do people have to behave like that?' I thought.

But that night I left for Spain. The train, a slow one, was packed with Czechs, Germans, Frenchmen all bound on the same mission. Up and down the train you could hear one phrase repeated over and over again, in the accents of all the languages of Europe – *là-bas* (down there). My third-class carriage was full of very young, fair-haired, underfed Germans in suits of incredible shoddiness – the first *ersatz* cloth I had seen – who rushed out at every stopping-place to buy bottles of cheap wine and later fell asleep in a sort of pyramid on the floor of the carriage. About halfway down France the ordinary passengers dropped off. There might still be a few nondescript journalists like myself, but the train was practically a troop train, and the countryside knew it. In the morning, as we crawled across southern France, every peasant working in the fields turned round, stood solemnly upright and gave the anti-Fascist salute. They were like a guard of honour, greeting the train mile after mile.

As I watched this, the behaviour of the old taxi-driver gradually fell into perspective. I saw now what had made him so unnecessarily offensive. This was 1936, the year of the great strikes, and the Blum<sup>1</sup> government was still in office. The wave of revolutionary feeling which had swept across France had affected people like taxi-drivers as well as factory workers. With my English accent I had

appeared to him as a symbol of the idle, patronising foreign tourists who had done their best to turn France into something midway between a museum and a brothel. In his eyes an English tourist meant a bourgeois. He was getting a bit of his own back on the parasites who were normally his employers. And it struck me that the motives of the polyglot army that filled the train, and of the peasants with raised fists out there in the fields, and my own motive in going to Spain, and the motive of the old taxi-driver in insulting me, were at bottom all the same.

1. Léon Blum (1872–1950) was the first Socialist Prime Minister of France, 1936–7 and 1938; he presided over a Popular Front government which enacted a series of reforms benefiting working men and women. He was imprisoned during the occupation of France by the Germans. He was again Prime Minister, 1946–7.

## Jennie Lee to Margaret M. Goalby, 23 June 1950: Orwell's Arrival in Barcelona

In the first year of the Spanish Civil War I was sitting with friends in a hotel in Barcelona when a tall thin man with a ravished [*sic*] complexion came over to the table. He asked me if I was Jennie Lee, and if so, could I tell him where to join up. He said he was an author: had got an advance on a book from Gollancz,<sup>1</sup> and had arrived ready to drive a car or do anything else, preferably to fight in the front line. I was suspicious and asked what credentials he had brought from England. Apparently he had none. He had seen no-one, simply paid his own way out. He won me over by pointing to the boots over his shoulder. He knew he could not get boots big enough for he was over six feet. This was George Orwell and his boots arriving to fight in Spain.

I came to know him as a deeply kind man and a creative writer... He was a satirist who did not conform to any orthodox political or social pattern... The only thing I can be quite certain of is, that up to his last day George was a man of utter integrity; deeply kind, and ready to sacrifice his last worldly possessions – he never had much – in the cause of democratic socialism. Part of his malaise was that he was not only a socialist but profoundly liberal. He hated regimentation wherever he found it, even in the socialist ranks.

1. This advance was of £100 against royalties for *The Road to Wigan Pier* (see 341).



## Orwell in Spain, December 1936

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In *George Orwell: A Life (317–18)*, Bernard Crick quotes from John McNair's typescript, 'George Orwell: The Man I Knew', dated March 1965, in Newcastle upon Tyne University Library. McNair records that Orwell brought him one letter from Fenner Brockway (1888–1988, Lord Brockway, 1964), General Secretary of the ILP, and one from H. N. Brailsford (1873–1958), a socialist intellectual and journalist and leader-writer for several newspapers, including the *Manchester Guardian*; Orwell later corresponded with him (see below). McNair, a Tynesider, was at first put off by Orwell's 'distinctly bourgeois accent', but, when he realized that this was George Orwell, two of whose books he 'had read and greatly admired', he asked what he could do to help him. 'I have come to Spain to join the militia to fight against Fascism,' Orwell told him. He also told McNair that 'he would like to write about the situation and endeavour to stir working-class opinion in Britain and France'. McNair proposed that Orwell base himself in McNair's offices and suggested he visit Madrid, Valencia and the Aragón front, where the POUM<sup>1</sup> was stationed, 'and then get down to writing his book'. Orwell told McNair that writing a book 'was quite secondary and his main reason for coming was to fight against Fascism'. McNair took him to the POUM barracks, where Orwell immediately enlisted, and introduced him to Victor Alba, then a journalist who would later write a history of the POUM (see, p. 2, n. 1, above); Alba showed Orwell round Barcelona. Orwell did not know, and never knew, that two months before he arrived in Spain, the NKVD's resident in Spain, Aleksandr Orlov, had confidently assured NKVD Headquarters, 'The Trotskyist organization POUM can easily be liquidated'<sup>2</sup> – by those, the Communists, whom Orwell took to be their allies in the fight against Franco.

1. POUM, Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), was described by Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia* as 'one of those dissident Communist parties which have appeared in many countries in the last few years as a result of the opposition to "Stalinism"; i.e. to the change, real or apparent, in Communist policy. It was made up partly of ex-Communists and partly of an earlier party, the Workers' and Peasants' Bloc. Numerically it was a small party, with not much influence outside Catalonia, and chiefly important because it contained an unusually high proportion of politically conscious members.... It did not represent any block of trade unions.' He gives the membership as 10,000 in July 1936; 70,000 in December 1936; and 40,000 in June 1937, but warns that the figures are from POUM sources, and 'a hostile estimate would probably divide them by four'; see p. 180–81 [VI/202–3].
2. Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (1999), 95, quoting John Costello and Oleg Tsarev, *Deadly Illusions* (1993), 281.

Eileen Blair to Leonard Moore

31 January 1937 *Handwritten*

The Stores, Wallington, Near Baldock, Her

Dear Mr Moore,

I enclose the signed agreement.<sup>1</sup> I am afraid there was a little delay before your letter was forwarded to me – I got it yesterday – but when I read the agreement I was delighted, as I know my husband will be when he hears the details. I had not fully realised before how satisfactory it was; in your office the other day I was being rather single-minded.

There is quite good news in Spain, though it comes very erratically. Eric has been created a ‘cabo’ which is I think a kind of corporal<sup>2</sup> & which distresses him because he has to get up early to turn out the guard, but he also has a dug-out in which he can make tea. There is apparently no ‘proper’ fighting as neither side has efficient artillery or even rifles.<sup>3</sup> He says he thinks the government forces ought to attack but are not going to. I hope no crisis will arise needing his decision as letters take from 7 to 10 days to get here.

With many thank

Yours sincerel

Eileen Bla

1. The agreement was for the next three novels Orwell was to write after *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (see 357).

2. Orwell refers to his promotion in *Homage to Catalonia*, see p. 48 [VI/25].

3. Orwell records that rifles were issued on their third morning in Alcubierre, *Homage to Catalonia*, see p. 42 [VI/16].

4. ‘10’ is possibly ‘16.’ Eileen seems to be more concerned that a battle could affect the publication of her husband’s work than that it might endanger his life. Her objectivity, surely deceptive, might be considered in the light of that attributed to Orwell at the end of her life.

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