

George Orwell and His Relevance to the Twenty-first Century

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George Orwell (1903-1950) occupies a significant place in the English literary imagination. A political and cultural commentator, as well as an accomplished novelist, Orwell is one of the most widely-admired English- language essayists of the 20th century. He is best remembered for two novels written towards the end of his life: *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty- Four* (1949). In my paper I intend to suggest that Orwell was very much alive to the vital issues of his time and he showed an extensive range of interests stretching from politics, war, sports to such issues of language , literature, popular culture, even to suggest the eleven golden rules of how to prepare a nice cup of tea, and he is also very much relevant to our time, very much like our contemporary, very much alive to the vital issues of twenty-first century.

Life was not particularly kind to George Orwell, nor was his contemporary critics. But history has treated him well, proving him right about the key issues of the twentieth century. In the bipolar political climate of the 1930s and 1940s, when intellectuals on the left and right were cozying up to the world's greatest evildoers, Orwell saw that the choice between Stalinism and fascism was in fact no choice at all, that the real struggle was between freedom and tyranny. A conservative by upbringing, and a socialist and a dissident by nature, he did not believe in politics as a matter of allegiance to a party or camp. What he did believe in was his own sensibility or what he described as his "power of facing unpleasant facts." As Christopher Hitchens observes in his biographical essay "Why Orwell Matters", this "power of facing" proved important to Orwell, whose life was filled with more than its share of unpleasantness and danger. While working as a policeman in Burma he experienced the complexities of Empire and its insidious effects on colonizer and colonized alike; while fighting in the Spanish Civil War alongside the anarchists of Catalonia he witnessed the wickedness of Stalinism; and in Paris, London, and the various mining towns of Northern England, where he immersed himself in life at the lowest rungs of society, he saw the pitfalls of attempts by both Church and State to elevate the poor. Throughout these experiences, he expressed his nonconformist views—and faced considerable social and professional adversity as a result. Daphne Patai, attacked Orwell in 1984, in a book entitled *The Orwell Mystique: a Study in Male Ideology*, for what she called "his fears of socialism and the machine, his attraction to the experience of war, and the conservatism apparent in his carefully circumscribed challenge to hierarchy and authority" (14). What she was doing something which was currently seen as a progressive attitude. For her, it was clearly still a defining characteristic of the left to want to bring the means of ownership, production and exchange under public control; to be as enthusiastic about machines as H. G. Wells had been in the early years of the century , and as the ecologists who were soon to see themselves as the true heirs of the left-wing concern for the quality of life were not . He was to distrust military force in a

way which would have surprised admirers of the Red Army in the 1940's, to be hostile to authority under all its forms, even if these did happen to incarnate the dictatorship of the proletariat and to be a good deal keener on female emancipation.

He has been an object of much adulation and adverse criticism even since the publication of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The variety of the critical books on him published within forty years following his death in 1950, demonstrates the real value of his literary achievement. More than twenty volumes and scores of Critical essays and reviews have already been written and the Orwellian has assumed the shape of a small-scale industry. Orwellian scholars have investigated and elaborated the numerous standpoints which Orwell and his works present. There are certain aspects of his creation which most critics have admired, notwithstanding their ideological differences. This is a proof of his sincerity and honesty of purpose, his keen observation of society and human existence, clarity of vision and different aspects of human affairs. The criticism on Orwell, in general is moving within these premises. There is also a group of hostile critics, who find out aberrations, inconsistencies, contradictions, confusions and failings in his works. For this co-existence of diverse opinions, the author of 1984 has already become an institution.

In dealing with Orwell's work, most critics have chosen to point out the bio-ethical perspective, politics of imperialism, Orwellian Ethics and Aesthetics, his approach to totalitarianism and the prophecy on human existence. It is because his life is a fairly open chapter; especially his biography has become a constant source of inspiration to the critics to raise their critical trend in their respective responses. Other critical approaches such as archetypal, mythopoeic and formal, etc. have not been much in evidence, though the rhetorical aspects of the writings - his lexicon, imagery, symbols, style, etc., have received attention.

To start with the critics who were close to him in time and spirit, Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* (1938) comes first. Connolly describes Orwell as a true rebel and —intellectual at school and it portrays an interesting contrast to Orwell's own unpleasant memories of school days recorded in his essay "Such were the Joys". It is no doubt an interesting biographical criticism Q. D. Leavis, George Woodcock and V.S. Pritchett contributed their critical essays on Orwell in 1940, before the publication of *Nineteen Eighty Four*. They are the first Orwellian scholars who threw new lights on his creative mind and brought him to light. Q. D. Leavis refers to him as a writer having —a special kind of honesty, and describes his writings as "responsible, adult, and decent" (193). George Woodcock found in his varied writings the presence of a "crystal spirit", and later on wrote a book on him with the same title. T.S. Eliot and Bertrand Russell referred to Orwell's spirit of bitterness, grim pessimism, and negativism; Pritchett called him, "a kind of saint" (96), and Arthur Koestler saw in him "the only writer of genius among the litterateurs of social revolt between the two wars" (103). Lionel Trilling's essay "George Orwell and Politics of Truth" (1952) written as an introduction to Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and later published in *The Opposing Self* (1955) described Orwell as a virtuous member of human family. He believed that Orwell teaches us to understand our present state of politics as he —restores the old sense of the democracy of mind "and makes us believe that we may become full members of the society of thinking men (158). In his book *Essays of Literature*

and Ideals (1963) John Wain denies Orwell the epithet “revolutionary” as he had no hatred of the past and had not believed that political action could affect the millennium. In between 1966 and 1969, Benson Weintraub and Hopkins evaluate Orwell’s contribution to the literature of the Spanish civil war. He elevates Orwell’s deep insight into political situation highlighting his moral standard. Tom Hopkinson in his British Council Pamphlet that appeared in 1953 threw light on the moral aspect of Orwell, both as a man and a writer and saluted —the courage and lonely man who is not afraid of being lonely (5). John Atkins and Laurence Brander published two full-fledged books on him in 1954. Both knew Orwell personally and tried their best to publish Orwell’s real attitude in their respective books. Atkins points out that the common element in Orwell’s writings is a sense of decency and uniqueness in having the mind of an intellectual and feeling of an ordinary man. He criticizes Orwell for suggesting a dangerous doctrine that “A writer should bifurcate himself, devoting one part (the citizen) to an ideology and other part (the writer) to external values (365)”. Brander regarded him for an individualist who refused to accept the compromises demanded by the so-called normality of life. He said that Orwell spoke with authority and in his books, he dealt with “contemporary, social and political problems with the detachment of a fine intelligence” (12). In 1961, Sri Richard Rees, Orwell’s close friend, published his book *George Orwell: Fugitive from the Camp of Victory* where he described Orwell as a fighter for justice who instinctively and spontaneously responded to the call of the suffering. According to him, Orwell was a friend of the poor. His moral antennae could suddenly pick up the televised cry of the downtrodden. Rees portrayed an integral relationship between Orwell’s life and work in this book in an artistic way. According to him it is difficult to think about his works without thinking of his life and vice versa” (9). Richard J. Voorhees published his book *The Paradox of George Orwell* in the same year examining Orwell’s paradoxical attitudes towards rebellion and responsibility. He describes Orwell as “a rebel with a remarkably strong sense of responsibility” (11). Frederick R. Karl in his book *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary English Novel* (1963) includes a chapter on Orwell entitled “George Orwell: The White Man’s Burden”. He has surveyed Orwell’s works and called him “a literary Marxist”(161). According to him, Orwell is to be thoroughly understood for an understanding of our contemporary society and of the society of the future. Robert Lee in his book *Orwell’s Fiction* saw “a sense of sanity welcome in an age that often seems insane” (xi). In his major political work, Orwell persuasively puts forward a view of democratic socialism as the natural alternative to the bloody ideologies of the time. Many of his views were indisputably radical: he felt that free market capitalism was a failed system, pernicious in its effects on English society. He was remarkably consistent in his opinions and opposed atrocities and imperialist actions all over the world, even when they were committed in the name of freedom. But before getting into the details of his writings, I would like to present a brief biographical account of his life to put his writings in proper perspectives.

George Orwell was born Eric Blair on June 25, 1903 to an Anglo-Indian family in Motihari, Bihar, in India, during the period when India was part of the British Empire under the British Raj. The date and place are important, because they meant that Orwell came of age during the Great War and experienced the British Empire at the height of its power. George Orwell is a British Christian name, and Orwell is the name of a small river in East Anglia in England. Although he understood the

flaws of the Edwardian Age, Orwell would always look back on that era with nostalgia, as an Eden destroyed by war, technology, and mass unemployment. Orwell's writing draws upon this vision of a happier time, maintaining that no matter how bad things become, some hope remains for humanity.

There Blair's father, Richard Walmesley Blair, worked for the opium department of the Civil Service. His mother, Ida Mabel Blair, brought him to Britain at the age of one. He did not see his father again until 1907, when Richard visited England for three months before leaving again. Eric had an older sister named Marjorie, and a younger sister named Avril. He would later describe his family's background as "lower-upper-middle class." Blair attended St Cyprian's on a scholarship that allowed his parents to pay only half of the usual fees. Many years later, he would recall his time at St Cyprian's with biting resentment in the essay "Such, Such Were the Joys", describing the stifling limits placed on his development by the Warden. "They [the officials] were my benefactors", writes Orwell, "sacrificing financial gain in order that the cleverest might bring academic accolades to the school". "Our brains were a gold-mine in which he [the Warden] had sunk money, and the dividends must be squeezed out of us". However, in his time at St Cyprians, the young Blair successfully earned scholarships to both Wellington College and Eton College. After some time at Wellington, Blair moved to Eton, where he was a King's Scholar from 1917 to 1921. Later in life he wrote that he had been "relatively happy" at Eton, which allowed its students considerable independence, but also that he ceased doing serious work after arriving there. Reports of his academic performance at Eton vary; some assert that he was a poor student, while others claim the contrary. He was clearly disliked by some of his teachers, who resented what they perceived as disrespect for their authority. During his time at the school, Blair made lifetime friendships with a number of future British intellectuals such as Cyril Connolly, the future editor of the *Horizon* magazine, in which many of Orwell's most famous essays were originally published. Though remembered often for his *1984* and *Animal Farm*, his essays like "Shooting An Elephant", "A Hanging", "Politics and the English Language" are illuminating, fantastic essays and they encapsulate all of the themes that Orwell concerned himself with. Orwell's ruminations on manners, the perfect tea, English parliamentary procedures highlight the fact that there is at least one moment of insight in every single piece that makes one read and remember him. George Orwell was first and foremost an essayist. From his earliest published article in 1928 to his untimely death in 1950, he produced an extraordinary array of short nonfiction that reflected and illuminated the fraught times in which he lived and wrote. "As soon as he began to write something," comments George Packer in his foreword to a two-volume collection, "it was as natural for Orwell to propose, generalize, qualify, argue, judge, in short, to think, as it was for Yeats to versify or Dickens to invent." So, in 1922 he joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He came to hate imperialism, returned to England in 1927 and resigned, determined to become a writer. He later used his Burmese experiences for the novel *Burmese Days* (1934) and in such essays as "A Hanging" (1931), and "Shooting an Elephant" (1936). In 1928, he moved to Paris, where his aunt lived, hoping to make a living as a freelance writer. But his lack of success forced him into menial jobs – which he later described in his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), although there is no indication that he had the book in mind at the time. And broke, he moved back to England in 1929, using his parents' house in Southold, Suffolk, as a base. Writing what became *Burmese Days*, he made frequent forays into tramping as part of what had by now become a book

project on the life of the underclass. Meanwhile, he became a regular contributor to John Middleton Murray's *New Adelphi* magazine. Blair completed *Down and Out in Paris and London* in 1932, and it was published early the next year while he was working briefly as a schoolteacher at a private school in Hayes, Middlesex. Blair became George Orwell just before *Down and Out* was published, adopting the pen-name of George Orwell. It is unknown exactly why he chose this name. He knew and liked the River Orwell in Suffolk and apparently found the plainness of the first name George attractive. It is believed by some that he chose George by way of Saint George, among other things the patron saint of England. Orwell drew on his teaching experiences for the novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), which he wrote at his parents' place in 1934 after ill-health forced him to give up teaching. From late 1934 to early 1936 he worked part-time as an assistant in a second-hand bookshop in Hampstead, an experience later partially recounted in the novel *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936). In early 1936, Orwell was commissioned by Victor Gollancz of the Left Book Club to write an account of life in the depressed areas of northern England, which appeared in 1937 as *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

In December 1936, Orwell went to Spain to fight for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War against Francisco Franco's Nationalist uprising. He went as part of the Independent Labour Party contingent, a group of some 25 Britons who joined the militia of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), a revolutionary socialist party with which the ILP was allied. The POUM, along with the radical wing of the anarcho-syndicalism CNT (the dominant force on the left in Catalonia), believed that Franco could be defeated only if the working class in the Republic overthrew capitalism- a position fundamentally at odds with that of the Spanish Communist Party and its allies, which (backed by Soviet arms and aid) argued for a coalition with bourgeois parties to defeat the Nationalists. By his own admission, Orwell joined the POUM rather than the communist-run International Brigades by chance- but his experiences, in particular his witnessing the communist suppression of the POUM in May 1937, made him sympathetic towards the POUM line and turned him into a lifelong anti-Stalinist. During his military service, Orwell was shot through the neck and was lucky to survive. His book *Homage to Catalonia* describes his experiences in Spain. To recuperate from his injuries, he spent six months in Morocco, described in his essay 'Marrakech'. Back in Britain, Orwell supported himself by writing freelance reviews, mainly for the *New English Weekly* (until he broke with it over its pacifism in 1940) and then mostly for *Time and Tide*. He joined the Home Guard soon after the war began (and was later awarded the Defense medal). In 1941 Orwell took a job at the BBC Eastern Service, mostly working on programmes to gain Indian and East Asian support for Britain's war efforts. He was well aware that he was shaping propaganda, and wrote that he felt like "an orange that's been trodden on by a very dirty boot." Despite the good pay, he resigned in 1943 to become literary editor of *Tribune*, the left-wing weekly then edited by Aneurin Bevan and Jon Kimche. Orwell was on the staff until early 1945, contributing a regular column titled "As I Please." In 1944, Orwell finished his anti-Stalinist allegory *Animal Farm*, which was published the following year with great critical and popular success. The royalties from *Animal Farm* were to provide Orwell with a comfortable income for the first time in his adult life. While *Animal Farm* was at the printer, Orwell left *Tribune* to become (briefly) a war correspondent for *Observer*. He was a close friend of the *Observer's* editor/owner, David Astor, and his ideas had a

strong influence on Astor's editorial policies. Orwell returned from Europe in spring 1945, shortly after his wife died during an operation (they had recently adopted a baby boy, Richard Horatio Blair, who was born in May 1944). For the next three years Orwell mixed journalistic work, mainly for *Tribune*, *the Observer* and the *Manchester Evening News*, though he also contributed to many small-circulation political and literary magazines, with writing his best-known work, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was published in 1949. He wrote much of the novel while living in a remote farmhouse on the island of Jura, off the coast of Scotland, to which he moved in 1946 despite increasingly bad health. In 1949, Orwell was approached by a friend, Celia Kirwan, who had just started working for a Foreign Office unit, the Information Research Department, which had been set up by the Labour government to publish pro-democratic and anti-communist propaganda. He gave her a list of 37 writers and artists he considered to be unsuitable as IRD authors because of their pro-communist leanings. The list, not published until 2003, consists mainly of journalists (among them the editor of the *New Statesman*, Kingsley Martin) but also includes the actors Michael Redgrave and Charlie Chaplin. Orwell's motives for handing over the list are unclear, but the most likely explanation is the simplest: that he was helping out a friend in a cause, anti-Stalinism — that they both supported.

There is no indication that Orwell ever abandoned the democratic socialism that he consistently promoted in his later writings, or that he believed the writers he named should be suppressed. Orwell's list was also accurate: the people on it had all, at one time or another, made pro-Soviet or pro-communist public pronouncements. In October 1949, shortly before his death, he married Sonia Brownell. Orwell died in London at the age of 46 of tuberculosis, which he had probably contracted during the period described in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. He was in and out of hospitals for the last three years of his life. Having requested burial in accordance with the Anglican rite, he was interred in All Saints' Churchyard, Sutton Courtenay, and Oxfordshire with the simple epitaph: Here lies Eric Arthur Blair, born June 25th, 1903, died January 21st, 1950. Orwell's adopted son, Richard Horatio Blair, was raised by an aunt after his father's death. He maintains a low public profile, though he has occasionally given interviews about the few memories he has of his father.

Blair worked for many years as an agricultural agent for the British government and had no interest in writing. Orwell's political views changed over time, but there can be no doubt that he was a man of the left throughout his life as a writer. His time in Burma made him a staunch opponent of imperialism and his experience of poverty while researching *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* turned him into a socialist. "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it," he wrote in 1946. It was Spain, however, that played the most important part in defining his socialism. Having witnessed at first hand the suppression of the revolutionary left by the Communists, Orwell returned from Catalonia a staunch anti-Stalinist and joined the Independent Labour Party. At the time, like most other left-wingers in Britain, he was still opposed to rearmament against Hitler's Germany but after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the outbreak of the Second World War, he changed his mind. He left the ILP over its pacifism and adopted a political position of "revolutionary patriotism". He supported the war effort but detected

(wrongly as it turned out) a mood that would lead to a revolutionary socialist movement among the British people. "We are in a strange period of history in which a revolutionary has to be a patriot and a patriot has to be a revolutionary," he wrote in *Tribune*, the Labour left's weekly, in December 1940. By 1943, his thinking had moved on. He joined the staff of *Tribune* as literary editor, and from then until his death was a left-wing (though hardly orthodox) democratic socialist. He canvassed for the Labour Party in the 1945 general election and was broadly supportive of its actions in office, though he was sharply critical of its timidity on certain key questions and was also harshly critical of the pro-Soviet stance of many Labour left-wingers. Although he was never either a Trotskyist or an anarchist, he was strongly influenced by the Trotskyist and anarchist critiques of the Soviet regime and by the anarchists' emphasis on individual freedom. Many of his closest friends in the mid 1940s were part of the small anarchist scene in London. During most of his career, Orwell was best known for his journalism, his essays, reviews, columns in newspapers and magazines and for his books of reportage: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (describing a period of poverty in these cities), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (describing the living conditions of poor miners in northern England) and *Homage to Catalonia* (describing his experiences during the Spanish Civil War). On the face of it, the novels that George Orwell wrote in the 1930s look surprisingly remote from one another. *Burmese Days* (1934) is about a colonial administrator who kills himself over a failed love affair. The heroine of *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) is an amnesiac spinster who embarks on a low-life picaresque with a gang of down-and-outs. *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936) stars moth-eaten Gordon Comstock, a disaffected poet trying to preserve his integrity in the presence of capitalism's rattling swill bucket.

Coming Up for Air (1939) finds a middle-aged insurance salesman grimly revisiting the locales of his Oxfordshire boyhood. All four, however, share the same emotional perspective; each, in the end, declares itself as a step on the path that leads to Nineteen Eighty-Four. Orwell's most ingrained habit as a novelist is a trick of grounding his fiction in the circumstances of his own life. A few extra-curricular flourishes aside, his novels consist almost exclusively of projections of himself, deviously imagined structures erected on the foundation of his own psychology. Each of Orwell's novels turns out to be a study in regression, a matter of life not sustaining its early promise, dreams cast down into dust. Flory in *Burmese Days* is a lonely fantasist whose best years have been squandered in drink and whoring. Dorothy Hare in *A Clergyman's Daughter* is an old maid at 28. Even George Bowling in *Coming Up for Air*, perhaps the most resourceful and worldly of this desperate crew, is irrevocably caught up in the ooze and stagnation of a life lived out with his mirthless wife, Hilda, in the shadow of approaching war, the bombs and the machine guns that are going to smash civilization into bits. And behind them – behind Comstock, with his rants against the editors who won't print his poems, or Dorothy bicycling to Holy Communion through the inhospitable back lanes of Knype Hill, Suffolk – lurks the figure of Orwell himself, a man who, despite much evidence to the contrary, considered himself a failure and believed that, wherever he was set down on the planet, whether in early 1920s Burma or on late 1940s Jura, he was being watched. Each of his four novels from the 1930s has what is in effect the same structure: the setting up of a solitary, persecuted anti-hero in opposition to a hostile world. That world is at bottom Orwell's own – the Burmese village where he had served as an Imperial policeman, the Suffolk town

where he had lived with his parents – in each case twisted out of kilter, decorated with all the subliminal horrors that oppressed the author as much as the people he created. What makes these landscapes, so suffocating is the presence of —themll, the malign exterior forces that Orwell assumed to be at work interfering in his characters’ lives. If the people in his novels share a single characteristic, it is their creator’s tendency to victimize them, to place them at the centre of a hostile world in which their every movement is subject to constant surveillance. The provincial backwater of Knype Hill is represented as a cauldron of spite and backbiting. Gordon’s life is a series of furtive concealments: he brews illicit cups of tea in his room while listening for the sound of the landlady’s feet on the stair. Bowling has a terror of being found out. His journey in search of the Thames Valley haunts of his boyhood is paranoiacally undermined by the thought that his wife’s spies are on his tail. In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the spies are real and unavoidable, symbolized by the telescreen that hangs on every wall. Written more than a decade before Oceania, Airstrip One and two-minute hates, the 1930s novels are full of sharp, prefigurative intent. The alarm clock that jerks Dorothy out of bed in the opening paragraph of *A Clergyman’s Daughter* is —like a horrid little bomb of bell metall. The aeroplanes are coming, Gordon reflects in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*; the whole world will shortly be going up in a roar of high explosives. — “My poems are dead . . . We’re all dead people in a dead world,” he tells his girlfriend, sounding uncannily like Winston Smith. Even the campaign that Gordon works on after his shamefaced return to advertising (canvassed by the slogan —PP [ie. ‘pedic perspiration’]. What about YOU? which is reckoned to have a —sinister simplicity) seems only a yard or two distant from the looming horizons of Big Brother and the Thought Police. Yet these connections ought not to surprise us. Each of Orwell’s novels is, ultimately, the story of a rebellion that fails, of an individual – in *Animal Farm*, a mini-society – who, however feebly or obliquely, attempts to throw over the traces. Everything ends in more or less the same way, with the protagonist humbled, defeated, sent back to square one. Flory shoots himself. Dorothy returns to the sedative thralldom of her father’s rectory. Gordon marries the pregnant Rosemary and succumbs to the insidious embrace of the Money God. George Bowling creeps home to the west London suburbs in shame. In much the same way, ten years later, Winston Smith brainwashed and re- educated, knows that he loves Big Brother. The best one can hope for is a kind of coming to terms with the weight of this environmental quicksand “he is dead but won’t lie down” peddled by the epigraph of *Coming Up for Air*. Contemporary readers are more often introduced to Orwell as a novelist, particularly through his enormously successful titles *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The former is an allegory of the corruption of the socialist ideals of the Russian Revolution by Stalinism, and the latter is Orwell’s prophetic vision of the results of totalitarianism. *Nineteen Eighty- Four* has given the English language the phrase ‘Big Brother’, or ‘Big Brother is watching you’. This is used to refer to any oppressive regime, but particularly in the context of invasion of privacy. The TV series ‘Big Brother’ is named after this phrase. The adjective Orwellian is mainly derived from the system depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It can refer to any form of government oppression, but it is particularly used to refer to euphemistic and misleading language originating from government bodies with a political purpose, for example ‘friendly fire’, ‘collateral damage’ and ‘pacification’. Variations of the slogan “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others”, from *Animal Farm*, are sometimes used to satirize situations where equality exists in theory and rhetoric but not in practice. For example, an allegation that rich people are treated more leniently by the courts despite

legal equality before the law might be summarized as "all criminals are equal, but some are more equal than others". The term "cold war" goes back centuries. Orwell used it in an essay titled "You and the Atomic Bomb" on October 19, 1945 in *Tribune*, he wrote: "We may be heading not for general breakdown but for an epoch as horribly stable as the slave empires of antiquity. James Burnham's theory has been much discussed, but few people have yet considered its ideological implications, this is, the kind of world-view, the kind of beliefs, and the social structure that would probably prevail in a State which was once unconquerable and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbours." (gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0300011h.html)

Orwell claimed that his writing style was most similar to that of Somerset Maugham. In his literary essays, he also strongly praised the works of Jack London, especially his book "The Road." Orwell's descent into the lives of the poor, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, strongly resembles that of Jack London's "The People of the Abyss," in which London disguises himself as a poverty-stricken American sailor in order to investigate the lives of the poor in London. In his literary essays, George Orwell also praised Charles Dickens, Henry Miller and Herman Melville, the author of *Moby Dick*. Another of his favourite authors was Jonathan Swift, and, in particular, his book *Gulliver's Travels*, which he rated as one of the six greatest books ever written. George Gissing's *New Grub Street* with its description of the growing commercialization of late 19th Century society was another influence. Perhaps a few words on the essay would help us in putting Orwell's own essays in proper context and show how Orwell handled a whole host of subjects through this genre. The word essay comes from the French word meaning, to try. In all instances, the genre is an attempt to write about any subject matter – relevant or mundane though maybe at the outset – in the hope to capture an interesting thought, experience and insight from it. Compared to other genres in literature, essay is the least explored and may be considered to be the least popular, but the scope of this genre is huge, ranging from the formal, clear-cut essays popularized by Montaigne, Addison and Steele and Emerson to the informal loosely-constructed ones popularized by Scott Russell Sanders, George Orwell, EB White, and other contemporary writers these days. The history of the essay goes back to the works of Michel de Montaigne who is touted by many as the genre's pioneer writer. The genre became popular in 19th century through the works of Addison and Steele, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. By the 20th century, essay was redefined in the works of Virginia Woolf, George Orwell, EB White, James Baldwin and Joan Didion. As of the present, the genre remains stronger than ever. The prestige of the essay seems to be continually rising in many literary circles today because of the growing number of its practitioners lately. Much of the essay's rising popularity is due to the fact that the genre has undergone a huge transformation for so many years. There are two types of essays – the formal essay and the informal essay. Formal essays are objective, rational and well organized when it comes to form. The approach to the subject matter is very straightforward and the ideas presented are arranged in a very organized manner. Conventional essay forms follow the thesis-topic-sentence-conclusion arrangement and in most cases the beginning, middle and end can be distinguished effortlessly. The outline of the essay can be easily derived as well. On the other hand, the informal essay type is what gives the genre its –malleable form. In the informal essay, there's much experimentation as far as form is concerned. While it is true that formal essays deal with the realms of fixed subject topics and relevant matters,

informal essays are defined more by the personality of the writer – the presentation of the Self in his essay. In the informal essay type, the definition of the essay is starting to get ambiguous because of so many close relations that are attributed to it – new journalism, literary nonfiction / creative nonfiction, feature articles, profiles, etc. In *Imaginative Writing*, author Janet Burroway says that the most familiar forms of essay are as follows: expository (imparts information), narrative (recounts events in order), descriptive (adds sense impressions) and persuasive (wants to influence us). But what's interesting in the realm of essay, as what Burroway has emphasized, is the development of literary nonfiction / creative nonfiction where the essay can now incorporate various elements in fiction in recreating a sense of lived experience .

In literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction, there is greater attention to the personal voice of the writer, stylistics and dramatic devices. Works that are classified as creative nonfiction often have writers as characters in the essays. In creative nonfiction, the writer has more freedom when it comes to form. At some point the genre borrows style and writing techniques both from fiction and poetry – refined language, dialogues, brevity, shifting voices – to bring out a purpose and meaning that will resonate all throughout the piece. Under the creative nonfiction genre, we have memoir, a story retrieved from the writer's memory with the writer as the protagonist and personal essay, an idea or an interest deliberately explored and is likely to give rise to meditation on some subject that the experience suggests. Very wide-ranging though the genre maybe, it all boils down to the idea that an essay is a genre that begins with a personal experience until it reaches out to a larger idea, insight or thought about the human condition, to which it should end. In essays, anything is potential for writing. The essay is a forgiving form, and the writer has the liberty on how to present the subject matter or experience in the most realistic and the most palpable manner possible. From the early 1930's until his death in 1950, Orwell churned out hundreds of essays, reviews and columns. For a man who is so often identified with common sense, Orwell was a decidedly odd individual. He preferred squalor, was a devotee of the worst excesses of English cuisine and suffered from paranoia about his body odour. He later accelerated his own death by moving to a poorly ventilated shack in the Scottish isles while severely ill with tuberculosis. This pattern of self-denial led many friends and associates to call him saintly, and less sympathetic critics to call him mad. Many of his personal opinions were politically incorrect. At English boys' schools, he adopted a misogynistic and homophobic outlook as well as a distrust of what today would be called cultural liberalism. He disdained —the high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit juice drinkers who come flocking to the smell of progress like bluebottles to a dead cat. His contempt for pansies would lead to a vitriolic attack on W.H. Auden and other homosexual writers. These complaints have gained more attention in recent years, as Orwell scholarship has been undergoing a renaissance since the death in 1980 of Orwell's wife, Sonia. Sonia, whom Orwell married on his deathbed, discouraged all attempts at a biography of her late husband, and published an incomplete and bowdlerized anthology of Orwell's journalism. In 1949 Orwell provided the British government with a list of writers with pro-communist views who should not be employed to write anti-Soviet propaganda. Though this has been known since 1980, in recent years Orwell has been savaged in the British press for cooperating with the —thought police. This incident is the centrepiece of Scott Lucas's forthcoming book *Orwell and the Betrayal of Dissent*. Hitchens makes the point that this was a minor incident, and that Orwell

intended harm to nobody. In a line of argument that seems less reasonable, he goes on to attack several of those Orwell listed, implying the truth of the allegations justified the making of the list. In an age dominated by the novel, the periodical essay has become a poor relation. on the literary scene. Yet some of our finest writers have traditionally used the form to consider key issues of cultural, social and political import. This major new study of the whole of Orwell's literary and political journalism through the three decades of his writing situates it comprehensively within the biographical, historical and publishing contexts of its production. The writings of George Orwell are marked by a profound consciousness of social injustice, and rebellion against a modern world run by a privileged and often brutal few people, by the oligarchs who are in it only for the money, and of course corrupting power, and an intense dislike of tyrants, and a passion for clarity in language. Orwell's essays form five major groups: autobiographical, literary, political, sociological and cultural. Such. Such Were the Joys', 'Shooting an Elephant', 'A Hanging', 'How the Poor Die', 'Bookshop Memories', 'Marrakech', 'Confessions of a Book Reviewer' and 'Why I Write' comprise the cluster of autobiographical essays. There are the literary essays on novelists who influenced him: Dickens, Gissing and Koestler; and on those whom he admired but criticized for their reactionary political views, for Orwell believed that enjoyment can overwhelm disapproval, even though one clearly recognizes that one is enjoying something inimical' (rv.22I). These essays are on Swift, Tolstoy, Kipling, Yeats, Wells, Wodehouse and Henry Miller. The political essays concern literature and totalitarianism and are closely connected to 1984: 'The Prevention of Literature', 'Writers and Leviathan', 'Politics and the English language', 'James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution' and 'Looking Back on the Spanish Civil War'. Orwell's essays on the sociology of England are 'England Your England', 'The English People', 'Poetry and the Microphone', 'Notes on Nationalism' and 'Anti-Semitism in Britain'. His criticism of popular culture is closely related to Coming Up For Air and includes Raffles and Miss Blandish, 'Decline of the English Murder', 'Boys' Weeklies', 'The Art of Donald McGill', 'Riding Down From Bangor' and 'Good Bad Books'. A discussion of some representative essays in which Orwell writes about himself as well as his, subject, expresses his characteristic ideas, and reveals his values and beliefs.

'Charles Dickens', the longest of Orwell's essays, was one of the earliest critical studies of the novelist and is still valuable for its freshness, vigour and suggestiveness. The essay considers many of the approaches to Dickens that were later explored by critics in full-length books: Dickens's attitudes to society, class, money, sex and politics; his literary techniques, comedy, imagery, use of detail and creation of character through caricature. But the essay is also important for what it tells us about Orwell, for he says as much about what he is trying to do in his own work as about Dickens. Orwell begins with a negative definition of Dickens, who was neither a 'proletarian' nor a 'revolutionary' writer. Though bourgeois, he was 'a subversive writer, a radical, one might truthfully say a rebel'. Though Dickens was not revolutionary "in the accepted sense"; Orwell feels that, like Blake, he understood what living in a capitalist society means. Orwell explores the paradoxical fact that the major, radical theme of Dickens's novels is at variance with Dickens's bourgeois solutions. One force behind Orwell's analysis is the need to reconcile his sense of Dickens's grimness as a novelist with his feeble political thought. One of his purposes in writing the essay is to use his study of Dickens to establish his opposition to, propagandistic literature. Throughout the essay Orwell

implicitly measures his own talents as a writer against the genius and achievement of Dickens. The essay demonstrates how completely Orwell integrated his imaginative, with his practical and political life, for he wrote his most successful novels when he discovered a medium that used literary art to convey political ideas. Orwell's characterization of Dickens as a writer who combines a radical criticism of society with a persistent longing for a traditional way of life is very close to his, own nostalgic feelings in *Coming Up For Air*. Orwell's observation that, the very people he attacked swallowed him so completely that he has become a national institution himself, reminds us that the same is now true of Orwell. His remark that before I was ten years old I was having Dickens ladled down my throat by schoolmasters in whom even at that age I could see a strong resemblance to Mr. Crinkle' is ironic in several senses. For *Animal Farm* is also taught in schools today, and not always in the spirit that Orwell intended. It is in the nature of English culture, Orwell suggests, to absorb and domesticate radical literature. Orwell is attracted to Dickens because the novelist tried to understand how human suffering comes about and how it can be overcome. This central problem of the abuse of power became the theme of *Animal Farm*. It is obvious to Orwell that people are oppressed by leaders and by institutions. The crux is what the solution to this problem should be:

There is always a new tyrant waiting to take over from the old - generally not quite so bad, but still a tyrant.' Orwell thinks that two positions are tenable: the moralistic and the revolutionary. The revolutionary supposes that you can improve human nature by changing the system, while Dickens, the moralist, believes that the world will change only when men have a change of heart. Orwell's technique is to demonstrate fully the weakness of Dickens's moralistic attitude so that, paradoxically, he can emphasize the value of Dickens's idea of decency, a moral concept that Orwell adopted in his own work. Orwell's discussion of the novels themselves, therefore, combines an exercise in debunking and a warm appreciation of the enjoyment to be gained from Dickens. Orwell balances and opposes Dickens's strengths and weaknesses. He is intellectually shallow but emotionally profound; he savagely attacks social evils but accepts the social inequalities of his age and makes no constructive criticism of Victorian society - an accusation that was later made against Orwell. Dickens did not really know the working class and portrayed them either as the rough and alien boys of his time in the blacking factory, or as feudal servants. Orwell contrasts the loving personable servants in Dickens's novels with the reality of the slavey drudging fourteen hours a day in the basement kitchen'. Orwell shows that though his invention is brilliant and his characters memorable, Dickens is ignorant of all social classes but his own 'the London commercial bourgeoisie and their hangers-on' - and that he lacks detailed knowledge of the major occupations and institutions of his day. Dickens's novels raise all kinds of questions about education, industrial exploitation and the legal system, and yet his answers seem to reveal an enormous deficiency': the lack of intellectual curiosity and the absence of an ideal of work. In fact, Dickens does not write at all about work, and though his novels show men and women struggling towards self-knowledge and the fulfilment of ambition, the goal to which they aspire is a kind of cosy and blissful family life. Orwell devotes several pages to demonstrating the feebleness of Dickens's featherbed respectability' and concludes that these intellectually unacceptable solutions to social injustices and human cruelty are the substance of Dickens's 'message. It is interesting to note that Orwell illustrates this aspect of Dickens so fully, for the idea of the secure, old-fashioned family also occurs in his own work, not as

a solution to injustice and cruelty, but as an idealized alternative in an earlier and happier age. After dealing with the negative side of Dickens, Orwell briefly but accurately defines the genius of the novelist and reverses the traditional positions of mortised revolutionary. Dickens's fertility of invention', his use of derails to create characters of monstrous proportions, the play him imagination unregulated by any intellectual framework or higher creative purpose, are qualities that make his creations endure: they are monsters, out they exist. ..Dickens is obviously a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes. He is all fragments, all details - rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles. 'We can believe that the driving force behind the comedy is the consciousness of having something to say. He is always preaching a sermon, and that is the final secret of his inventiveness. For you can only create if you can care ...A joke worth laughing at always has an idea behind it, and usually a subversive idea.' The moralist is ought to be the true radical, and most revolutionaries are potential moralists by changing its form: there are some kinds of evil that will never disappear. Orwell's observation that the vagueness of Dickens's discontent is the mark of its permanence, 'applied equally to *Animal Farm* and *1984*'. In Dickens, however, there is a force that mitigates this pessimistic vision: his native generosity of mind probably the central secret of his popularity and which enables him to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable - form the native decency of the common man'. Orwell, who inherited Dickens's belief in decency, was particularly impressed by *Hard Times* (1854). Stephen Blackpool was probably Orwell's first introduction to the industrial working class; and the utilitarians are the precursors of the totalitarian inquisitors in *1984*, this novel Orwell employs Dickens's technique of using a character to represent .pipit of ordinary humanity, for just as Mr. Scary maintains that people must be another', so Winston Smith is revived when he hears the singing of the red-armed parole washerwoman. A consideration of how far a good novel should be committed to conveying a political idea is at the root of Orwell's discussion of Dickens. Orwell begins his essay with a question that leads to the choice between moralist and revolutionary: to whom Dickens belong, to the bourgeois conservative or Marxist? Orwell resolves .The question is of asserting that Dickens's endures precisely because it is based not on ideology, out on a belief in the fundamental decency and the brotherhood of all. The conclusion of the essay is rather that the humanist position is weak. Tough his affinity with Dickens is considerable, his analysis reveals the wide divergence of their ideas. Modern political events weakened Orwell's belief in man until, in his later works, decency and goodness become the attributes not of heroes, but of victims. Orwell analyses the distinctive cultural characteristics and class structure of England, and contrasts the English belief in justice and, objective truth to the power-worship and terrorism of the Fascist enemies. As in 'Inside the Whale', he implicitly suggests his own character and ideals through his deification of the positive and negative qualities of English life. Orwell begins with a concrete description of the sounds, the smells and the surfaces of things one feels when returning to England from abroad: The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant. The crowds in-die big towns, with their mild knobby faces, their bad teeth and gentle manners, are different from a European crowd: He then expresses these differences through some generalizations about the English. They are not gifted in music or the visual arts; they dislike abstract thought; they are snobbish, xenophobic and hypocritical (particularly in the Empire, which often brings out the worst aspects of the English); they value privacy and individual liberty; and, though their religious belief is weak, they have a deep respect for morality

and legality. The most stirring in English Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' is about a brigade of cavalry which charged in the wrong direction and all were massacred. The tone of the essay always balances Orwell's two ostensibly opposite purposes: to encourage his – stand in time by celebrating their distinctness and nation; and at the same time to attack the political system from Socialist point of view. Orwell skilfully uses commonly accepted generalizations, convincing conclusions and is deliberately provocative, for he sceptically calls British democracy less of a fraud than it sometimes appears'. Orwell suggests that England is currently engaged in a war not because of historical inevitability or the aggressive policies of the European dictators, but because of the decay of ability in the English ruling class and the disastrous foreign policy of the thirties, which Auden called a low, dishonest decade'. Just as the English writers of the thirties refused to see the Russian reality and supported Communism because it opposed Fascism, so the English statesmen of that time refused to notice the changes that were occurring all around them and accepted Fascism because it was hostile to Communism. England (and France) remained strictly neutral during the Spanish Civil War and allowed Germany and Italy to fight in Spain and win Franco's war against the Left-wing Republicans; and they never realized that this victory would have a disastrous effect on their own policies and interests. Though the ruling class were morally sound, they were tossed to and fro between their incomes and their principles' (any rich man has less to fear from Fascism than from Communism) and they could not do anything but make the worst of both worlds'. Unlike the writers and the statesmen, Orwell recognized that both Communism and Fascism had lost touch with the essentials of democracy; and he spent the thirties, like a weary Jeremiah, warning of the future apocalypse. While the imperialists declined with the stagnation of the Empire, the intelligentsia took their ideas from Europe and were ashamed of their own nationality. Orwell belonged to both of these classes and remained isolated within each of them. He understood that the Empire was doomed and welcomed the independence of the out his contact with imperial and then economic and military reality protected him from 'the emotional shallowness of people who live in a world of ideas'. Unlike the philistine Blimp intelligentsia, Orwell was proud of the common culture of his country and tried to unite patriotism and intelligence in his struggle against totalitarianism. In his essay on *Gulliver's Travels* (1946), in which he rejects Swift's reactionary ideology but is nevertheless able to admire the terrible intensity of Ills art, Orwell compares Swift to Tolstoy, another disbeliever in the possibility of happiness. In both men you have the same anarchistic outlook covering an authoritarian cast of mind in both a similar hostility to science, the same impatience with opponents, the same inability to see the importance of any question not in treating themselves; and in both cases a sort of horror of the actual facts of life' (IV.217). In 'Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool', Orwell analyses Tolstoy's condemnation of *King Lear* in his pamphlet *Shakespeare and Drama*, which was written at the end of his life, in 1903. He suggests that Tolstoy was unable to be critically objective about Shakespeare's art, and that his identification with Lear led to his attack on the play. According Leo Tolstoy, Shakespeare, far from being a genius, was a less than mediocre author who plagiarized an earlier play and ruined - it when he -wrote *King Lear*, which was full of moral and aesthetic faults and could be read only with aversion and weariness. Tolstoy's explanation of how Shakespeare is universally admired despite his immoral ideas and ridiculous language interested Orwell. The Russian believed that the civilized world was deluded about Shakespeare by a kind of mass hypnosis' which only he was able to recognize; Goethe pronounced Shakespeare a great poet,

whereupon all other critics flocked after him like a troop of parrots, and the general infatuation has lasted ever since.' After consenting on Tolstoy's extreme bias, insensitivity to the metaphorical (as opposed to the literal) quality of Shakespeare's, language blindness to Shakespeare's veiled social activism, Orwell suggests some important similarities between Lear and the aged Tolstoy. Both were majestic old men with flowing white hair and beard, a figure out of Blake's drawings'. This archetype originated with Leonardo's self-portrait and was characteristic of nineteenth-century prophets like Whitman and Darwin. Orwell's idea draws parallels between Lear's and Tolstoy's spiritual bullying, their gratuitous and misguided renunciation (the basic subject of the play), their exaggerated revulsion from sexuality. Even Tolstoy's final flight from his family accompanied by his only faithful daughter, and his death in a village railway station, seems to have a phantom reminiscence of Lear'. Given these biographical similarities, it was perhaps inevitable that Tolstoy would be angered by Shakespeare's assumptions about Lear's behavior. For Shakespeare points out the results of practicing self-denial for selfish reasons', and Tolstoy, who toiled very hard to make himself into a saint ... had done no more than exchange one form of egoism for another'. Shakespeare (like Orwell) loved the surface of the earth and the process of life, but Tolstoy renounced the pleasures of earthly life and looked instead to the Kingdom of Heaven. _ Orwell is rather cynical about the possibility of secular sainthood and refuses to take Tolstoy at his disciples' valuation. He dislikes the attempt to narrow the human limits. Orwell's wariness of the drive for power and mention over others gave him unique insight into Tolstoy's deeper motives for writing about Lear. Orwell writes in his essay on King Lear that a sort of doubt always hung round character of Tolstoy, as round the character of Gandhi'; and he begins his essay on the Indian nationalist, who shook empires by sheer spiritual power. with the aphorism: Saints should always be judged guilty within they are proved innocent.' Like Tolstoy with Lear, Orwell made a partially conscious identification with Gandhi. For, like Orwell, Gandhi came of a poor middle-class family, started life rather unfavourably, was probably of unimpressive physical appearance, [but] was not afflicted by envy or by feeling; of inferiority'. Orwell first read Gandhi's autobiography (the occasion of the essay) in an Indian newspaper during his Burmese days; and though he associated Gandhi, like the pansy-Left whom he attacked in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, with homespun cloth, mysticism and vegetarianism, he was impressed by Gandhi's ethics, honesty and courage. Orwell criticizes Gandhi for his inhuman tendencies (those who aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings') and for his willingness' to let his wife or child die rather than give them animal food. The limit of what we will do to remain alive, Orwell believes, is well on this side of chicken broth'. Despite his other-worldly doctrines, Gandhi's real importance was in his political implementation of Thoreau's doctrine of passive resistance - though this technique could only work under democratic regime like the British Empire. A totalitarian government would have run trains over the first protesters tracks. And he would have marked the end of the movement. Though Gandhi was a pacifist he understood what it was to take sides. Though Orwell rejects Tolstoy's and Gandhi 'sainthood and feels that their basic aims were anti reactionary and that they wanted to escape from love and iron (lie pain of living. Gandhi represents the ideal of patient political struggle, untainted by hatred or by greed for power. Dali is actually writing within a well-established tradition of romantic rebels - from Byron and Baudelaire through the decadents (like Huysmans's hero) to Jean Genet and Norman Mailer - who believe that strange sexual habits, bizarre behaviour and a taste for violence

stimulate artistic creativity through a kind of individualistic opposition to traditional virtues. Orwell is unable to identify imaginatively with anything so totally alien, and he is so hostile to Dali's kind of art that he is incapable of judging it. His attempt to interpret Dali and to relate him to Edwardian painters does not succeed. If, as Orwell says, there is something wrong with a society in which Dali's 'diseased intelligence' can flourish (while decent drudges like Orwell plod on with little recognition), then the fault must surely lie as much with the society that praises Dali as with Dali himself, who gives society what it wants. Since Dali's appeal is limited and he is not really popular in the way that James Hardly Chase is, Orwell is actually attacking the nameless defenders of Dali, presumably the aristocratic patrons of the arts and avant-garde critics who admire his art and do not care about his morals.

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