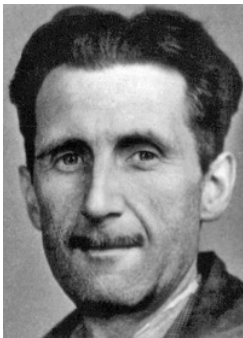


George Orwell

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Eric Arthur Blair



Pseudonym: George Orwell

Born: June 25, 1903
Motihari, Bihar, India

Died: January 21, 1950
London, England

Occupation: Writer, author, journalist

Influences: W. Somerset Maugham, Trotsky, Dickens, H.G. Wells, Jack London, Huxley, Henry Fielding, Charles Reade, Samuel Butler, Zola, Flaubert

Eric Arthur Blair (25 June 1903^[1]^[2] – 21 January 1950), better known by the pen name **George Orwell**, was an English author and journalist. Noted as a novelist, critic, political and cultural commentator, Orwell is among the most widely admired English-language essayists of the 20th century. He is best known for two novels critical of totalitarianism in general, and Stalinism in particular: *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Both were written and published towards the end of his life.

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Early life

He was born on 25 June 1903 to Anglo-Indian parents^[3] in Motihari, Bengal (modern Bihar), India when it was part of the British Empire under the British Raj. There, Blair's father, Richard Walmesley Blair, worked for the opium department of the Civil Service. His mother, Ida

Mabel Blair (née Limouzin), brought him to England 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".

Education

At the age of six, Blair was sent to a small Anglican parish school in Henley-on-Thames, which his sister had attended before him. He never wrote of his recollections of it, but he must have impressed the teachers very favorably, for two years later, he was recommended to the headmaster of one of the most successful preparatory schools in England at the time: St. Cyprian's School, in Eastbourne, Sussex. 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". However, in his time at St. Cyprian's, the young Blair successfully earned scholarships to both Wellington and Eton.

After one term at Wellington, Blair moved to Eton, where he was a King's Scholar from 1917 to 1921. Aldous Huxley was his French teacher for one term early in his time at Eton. 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 formed lifelong 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.

Burma and the early novels

After Blair finished his studies at Eton, his family could not pay for university and he had no prospect of winning a scholarship, so in 1922 he joined the Indian Imperial Police, serving at Katha and Moulmein in Burma. He came to hate imperialism,

and when he returned to England on leave in 1927 he decided to resign and 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). Back in England he wrote to Ruth Pitter, a family acquaintance, and she and a friend found him a bedroom on the Portobello Road (a blue plaque is now on the outside of this house) where he started to write. It was from here that he sallied out one evening to Limehouse Causeway—following in the footsteps of Jack London—and spent his first night in a common lodging house, probably George Levy's 'kip'. For a while he went native in his own country, dressing like other tramps and making no concessions, and recording his experiences of low life in his first published essay, 'The Spike', and the latter half of *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933).

In the Spring of 1928, he moved to Paris, where his Aunt Nellie lived and died, hoping to make a living as a freelance writer. In the autumn of 1929, his lack of success reduced Blair to taking menial jobs as a dishwasher for a few weeks, principally in a fashionable hotel (the Hotel X) on the rue de Rivoli, 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.

Ill and broke, he moved back to England in 1929, using his parents' house in Southwold, 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 poorest people in society. Meanwhile, he became a regular contributor to John Middleton Murry's *New Adelphi* magazine.

Blair completed *Down and Out* in 1932, and it was published early the next year while he was working briefly as a schoolteacher at a private school called Frays College near Hayes, Middlesex. He took the job as an escape from dire poverty and it was during this period that he managed to obtain a literary agent called Leonard Moore. Blair also adopted the pen name George Orwell just before *Down and Out* was published. 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. He rejected three other possible pen names: Kenneth Miles, H Lewis Allways, and PS Burton.

Orwell drew on his work as a teacher and on his life in Southwold for the novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), which he wrote at his parents' house in 1934 after ill-health - and the urgings of his parents - forced him to give up teaching. From late 1934 to early 1936 he worked part-time as an assistant in a second-hand bookshop, Booklover's Corner, in Hampstead. Having led a lonely and very solitary existence, he wanted to enjoy the company of other young writers and Hampstead was a place for intellectuals as well as having many houses with cheap bedsitters. He worked his experiences into the novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936).

The Road to Wigan Pier

In early 1936, Orwell was commissioned by Victor Gollancz of the Left Book Club to write an account of poverty among the working class in the depressed areas of northern England, which appeared in 1937 as *The Road to Wigan Pier*. He was taken into many houses, simply saying that he wanted to see how people lived. He made systematic notes on housing conditions and wages and spent several days in the local Public Library

consulting reports on public health and conditions in the mines. He did his homework as a social investigator. The first half of the book is a social documentary of his investigative touring in Lancashire and Yorkshire, beginning with an evocative description of work in the coal mines. The second half of the book, a long essay in which Orwell recounts his personal upbringing and development of political conscience, includes a very strong denunciation of what he saw as irresponsible elements of the left. Gollancz feared that the second half would offend Left Book Club readers, and inserted a mollifying preface to the book while Orwell was in Spain.

Soon after completing his research for the book, Orwell married Eileen O'Shaughnessy.

Spanish Civil War and *Homage to Catalonia*

In December 1936, Orwell travelled to Spain primarily to fight, not to write, for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War against Francisco Franco's Fascist uprising. In a conversation with Philip Mairet, the editor of the *New English Weekly*, Orwell said: 'This fascism ... somebody's

got to stop it.' [Letter of Philip Mairet to Ian Angus, 9 Jan. 1964]. To Orwell, liberty and democracy went together and, among other things, guaranteed the freedom of the artist; the present capitalist civilization was corrupt, but Fascism would be morally calamitous. John McNair (1887-1968) is also quoted as saying in a conversation with Orwell: 'He then said that this (writing a book) was quite secondary and his main reason for coming was to fight against Fascism.' He went alone, and his wife joined him later. He joined the Independent Labour Party contingent, a group of some twenty-five Britons who joined the militia of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM - Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista), a revolutionary Spanish communist political party with which the ILP was allied. The POUM, along with the radical wing of the anarcho-syndicalist 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. In the months after July 1936 there was a profound social revolution in Catalonia,

Aragon and other areas where the CNT was particularly strong. Orwell sympathetically describes the egalitarian spirit of revolutionary Barcelona when he arrived in *Homage to Catalonia*.

By his own admission, Orwell joined the POUM rather than the Communist-run International Brigades by chance — but his experiences, in particular his and his wife's narrow escape from the Communist purges in Barcelona in June 1937, greatly increased his sympathy for POUM and made him a life-long anti-Stalinist.

During his military service, Orwell was shot through the neck and nearly killed. He wrote in *Homage to Catalonia* that people frequently told him he was lucky to survive, but that he personally thought "it would be even luckier not to be hit at all."

The Orwells then spent six months in Morocco in order to recover from his wound, and during this period, he wrote his last pre-war novel, 'Coming Up For Air'. As the most English of all his novels, the alarms of war mingle with idyllic images of a Thames-side Edwardian childhood enjoyed by its protagonist, George Bowling. Much of the novel is

pessimistic; industrialism and capitalism have killed the best of old England. There were also massive and new external threats and George Bowling puts the totalitarian hypothesis of Borkenau, Orwell, Silone and Koestler in homely terms: *Old Hitler's something different. So's Joe Stalin. They aren't like these chaps in the old days who crucified people and chopped their heads off and so forth, just for the fun of it ... They're something quite new – something that's never been heard of before.*

The Second World War and *Animal Farm*

After the ordeals of Spain and writing the book about it, most of Orwell's formative experiences were over. His finest writing, his best essays and his great fame lay ahead. In 1940, Orwell closed up his house in Wallington and he and Eileen moved into 18 Dorset Chambers, Chagford Street, NW1. He supported himself by writing freelance reviews, mainly for the *New English Weekly* but also for *Time and Tide* and the *New Statesman*. He joined the British Home Guard soon after the war began (and was later awarded the "British Campaign Medals/Defence medal").

In 1941 Orwell took a job at the BBC Eastern Service, supervising broadcasts to India aimed at stimulating Indian interest in the war effort, at a time when the Japanese army was at India's doorstep. He was well aware that he was engaged in propaganda, and wrote that he felt like "an orange that's been trodden on by a very dirty boot".

The wartime "Ministry of Information", which was based at Senate House University of London, was the inspiration for the "Ministry of Truth" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Nonetheless, Orwell devoted a good deal of effort to his BBC work, which gave him an opportunity to work closely with people like T. S. Eliot, E. M. Forster, Mulk Raj Anand and William Empson.

Orwell's decision to resign from the BBC followed a report confirming his fears about the broadcasts: very few Indians were listening. He wanted to become a war correspondent and also seems to have been impatient to begin work on *Animal Farm*.

Despite the good salary, he resigned in September 1943 and in November became the literary editor of *Tribune*, the left-wing weekly then edited by

Aneurin Bevan and Jon Kimche (it was Kimche who had been Box to Orwell's Cox when they both worked as half-time assistants in the Hampstead bookshop in 1934-35). Orwell was on the staff until early 1945, contributing a regular column titled "As I Please." Anthony Powell and Malcolm Muggeridge had returned from overseas to finish the war in London. All three took to lunching regularly, usually at the Bodega just off the Strand or the Bourgogne in Soho, sometimes joined by Julian Symons (who seemed at the time to be Orwell's true disciple), and David Astor, editor/owner of The Observer.

In 1944, Orwell finished his anti-Stalinist allegory *Animal Farm*, which was first published in Britain on the 17th of August in 1945 and in the U.S.A on the 26th of August in 1946 with great critical and popular success. Frank Morley, an editor at Harcourt Brace, had come to Britain as soon as he could at the end of the War to see what readers were currently interested in. He asked to serve a week or so in Bowes and Bowes, the Cambridge bookshop. On his first day there customers kept asking for a book that had sold out – the second impression of *Animal Farm*. He left the counter, read the single copy left in the postal orders' department, went to London and bought the

American rights. 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, and with the end of the War in sight, Orwell felt his old desire growing to be somehow in the thick of the action. David Astor asked him to act as a war correspondent for the Observer to cover the liberation of France and the early occupation of Germany, so Orwell left *Tribune* to become a war correspondent. Orwell was a close friend of Astor (some say the model for the wealthy publisher in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*), and his ideas had a strong influence on Astor's editorial policies. Astor, who died in 2001, is buried in the grave next to Orwell.

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* and final years**

Orwell was taken ill again in Cologne in Spring 1945. While he was sick there, his wife died during an operation in Newcastle to remove a tumour (they had recently adopted a baby boy, Richard Horatio Blair, who was born in May 1944). She had not told him about this operation due to

concerns on the cost and the fact that she thought she would make a speedy recovery.

For the next four 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. Originally, Orwell was undecided between titling the book *The Last Man in Europe* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but his publisher, Fredric Warburg, helped him choose. The title was not the year Orwell had initially intended. He first set his story in 1980, but, as the time taken to write the book dragged on (partly because of his illness), that was changed to 1982 and, later, to 1984. See *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for more information.^[4]

He wrote much of the novel while living at Barnhill,^[5] a remote farmhouse on the island of Jura, which lies in the Gulf stream off the west coast of Scotland. It was an abandoned farmhouse with outbuildings near to the northern end of the island, lying at the end of a five-mile heavily rutted track from Ardlussa, where the laird of landowner, Margaret Fletcher, lived and where the paved road, the only road on the island, came to an end.

In 1948, he co-edited a collection entitled 'British Pamphleteers' with Reginald Reynolds.

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 the Labour government had set up to publish 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 a friend in a cause — anti-Stalinism — that they both supported. There is no indication that Orwell 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 made pro-Soviet or pro-communist public pronouncements. In fact, one of the people on the list, Peter Smollett, the head of the Soviet section in the British Ministry of

Information, has later on (after the opening of KGB archives) been proved to be a Soviet agent, recruited by Kim Philby, and "almost certainly the person on whose advice the publisher Jonathan Cape turned down *Animal Farm* as an unhealthily anti-Soviet text", although Orwell was unaware of this.^[6]

In October 1949, shortly before his death, he married Sonia Brownell.

Death

Orwell died in London at the age of 46 from tuberculosis, which he had probably contracted during the period described in *Down and Out in Paris and*



George Orwell's Grave

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, Oxfordshire with the simple epitaph: "Here lies Eric Arthur Blair, born June 25, 1903, died January 21, 1950"; no mention is made on the gravestone of his more famous pen-name. He had wanted to be buried in the graveyard of the closest church to wherever he happened to die, but the graveyards in central London had no space. Fearing that he may have to be cremated, against his wishes, his widow appealed to his friends to see if any of them knew of a church with space in its graveyard. Orwell's friend David Astor lived in Sutton Courtenay and negotiated with the vicar for Orwell to be buried there, although he had no connection with the village.

Orwell's son, Richard 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.

Literary criticism

Throughout his life Orwell continually supported

himself as a book reviewer, writing works so long and sophisticated they have had an influence on literary criticism. In the celebrated conclusion to his 1940 essay on Charles Dickens one seems to see Orwell himself:

"When one reads any strongly individual piece of writing, one has the impression of seeing a face somewhere behind the page. It is not necessarily the actual face of the writer. I feel this very strongly with Swift, with Defoe, with Fielding, Stendhal, Thackeray, Flaubert, though in several cases I do not know what these people looked like and do not want to know. What one sees is the face that the writer ought to have. Well, in the case of Dickens I see a face that is not quite the face of Dickens's photographs, though it resembles it. It is the face of a man of about forty, with a small beard and a high colour. He is laughing, with a touch of anger in his laughter, but no triumph, no malignity. It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, but who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is generously angry — in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are

now contending for our souls."

Controversies

A number of Polish and continental European critics think that *Animal Farm* is very similar to *Bunt* (Revolt. A novel) by winner of Nobel Prize - Wladyslaw Stanislaw Reymont, which had been published much earlier, in 1924.

Rules for writers

In "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell provides six rules for writers:^[7]

- Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- Never use the passive voice where you can use the active.
- Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- Break any of these rules sooner than say

anything outright barbarous.

Political views

Orwell's political views shifted over time, but he was a man of the political left throughout his life as a writer. In his earlier days he occasionally described himself as a "Tory anarchist". 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 the Spanish Civil War that played the most important part in defining his socialism. Having witnessed the success of the anarcho-syndicalist communities, and the subsequent brutal suppression of the anarcho-syndicalists and other revolutionaries by the Soviet-backed Communists, Orwell returned from Catalonia a staunch anti-Stalinist and joined the Independent Labour Party.

At the time, like most other left-wingers in the United Kingdom, he was still opposed to rearmament against Nazi 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) Labour-supporting 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 despised 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.

In his writings, MIT linguist and political analyst Noam Chomsky refers to a suppressed introduction [8] Orwell wrote for *Animal Farm*, an introduction discovered thirty years after *Animal Farm*'s first publication. In it Orwell says that *Animal Farm* was a satire directed against Stalin and totalitarianism in general, and that it also applied to free England. The concentration of the press and the educational system in England produce something similar to what the Soviet Union's KGB did: suppression of dissent.

Orwell had little sympathy with Zionism and opposed the creation of the state of Israel. In 1945, Orwell wrote that "few English people realise that the Palestine issue is partly a colour issue and that an Indian nationalist, for example, would probably side with the Arabs".

While Orwell was concerned that the Palestinian Arabs be treated fairly, he was equally concerned

with fairness to Jews in general: writing in the spring of 1945 a long essay titled "Antisemitism in Britain," for the "Contemporary Jewish Record," no less. Antisemitism, Orwell warned, was "on the increase," and was "quite irrational and will not yield to arguments." He thought "the only useful approach" would be a psychological one, to discover "why" antisemites could "swallow such absurdities on one particular subject while remaining sane on others." (pp 332-341, *As I Please: 1943-1945*.) In his magnum opus, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he showed the Party enlisting antisemitic passions in the Two Minute Hates for Goldstein, their archetypal traitor.

Orwell was also a proponent of a federal socialist Europe, a position outlined in his 1947 essay 'Toward European Unity', which first appeared in *Partisan Review*.

Legacy

Work

During most of his career, Orwell was best known for his journalism, in essays, reviews, columns in newspapers and magazines and in 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 the poor in northern England, and the class divide generally) and *Homage to Catalonia*. According to *Newsweek*, Orwell "was the finest journalist of his day and the foremost architect of the English essay since Hazlitt."

Contemporary readers are more often introduced to Orwell as a novelist, particularly through his enormously successful titles *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Both of them are primarily allegories of the Soviet Union, the former of developments in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution, and the latter of life under Stalinist totalitarianism- although there are elements in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which satirize "opium for the masses" that can be found outside the Soviet Union (witness the newspapers filled with "sex, sport, and astrology" which the Ministry of Truth peddles to the proles). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often compared to *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (which is often considered the inferior of the two); both are powerful dystopian novels of an "imaginary" future of state control, the former bleak and the latter superficially happy.

Influence on the English language

Some of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s lexicon has entered into the English language.

- Orwell expounded on the importance of honest and clear language (and, conversely, on how misleading and vague language can be a tool of political manipulation) in his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*. The language of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is Newspeak: a thoroughly politicised and obfuscatory language designed to make coherent thought impossible by limiting acceptable word choices.
- Another phrase is 'Big Brother', or 'Big Brother is watching you'. Today, security cameras are often thought to be modern society's *big brother*. The current television reality show *Big Brother* carries that title because of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
- The same novel spawned the title of another television series, *Room 101*.
- The phrase 'thought police' is also derived from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and might be used to refer to any alleged violation of the right to the free expression of opinion. It is

particularly used in contexts where free expression is proclaimed and expected to exist.

- Doublethink is a Newspeak term from Nineteen Eighty-Four, and is the act of holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously, fervently believing both.

Variations of the slogan "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others", from *Animal Farm*, are sometimes used to satirise situations where equality exists in theory and rhetoric but not in practice with various snowclones. For example, an allegation that rich people are treated more leniently by the courts despite legal equality before the law might be summarised as "all criminals are equal, but some are more equal than others". This appears to echo the phrase *Primus inter pares* - the Latin for "First amongst equals", which is usually applied to the head of a democratic state.

Although the origins of the term are debatable, Orwell may have been the first to use the term *cold war*. He 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 at once unconquerable and in a permanent state of 'cold war' with its neighbours."

Literary influences

In an autobiographical sketch Orwell sent to the editors of *Twentieth Century Authors* in 1940, he wrote:

The writers I care about most and never grow tired of are: Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, Dickens, Charles Reade, Flaubert and, among modern writers, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence. But I believe the modern writer who has influenced me most is Somerset Maugham, whom I admire immensely for his power of telling a story straightforwardly and without frills.

Elsewhere, Orwell strongly praised the works of

Jack London, especially his book *The Road*. Orwell's investigation of poverty in *The Road to Wigan Pier* strongly resembles that of Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*, in which the American journalist disguises himself as an out-of-work sailor in order to investigate the lives of the poor in London.

In the essay "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels" (1946) he wrote: "If I had to make a list of six books which were to be preserved when all others were destroyed, I would certainly put *Gulliver's Travels* among them."

Other writers admired by Orwell included Ralph Waldo Emerson, G. K. Chesterton, George Gissing, Graham Greene, Herman Melville, Henry Miller, Tobias Smollett, Mark Twain, Joseph Conrad and Yevgeny Zamyatin.

He also publicly defended P.G. Wodehouse against charges of being a Nazi sympathiser; a defence based on Wodehouse's uninterest in and ignorance of politics.

Personal life

Orwell and Cyril Connolly were school mates at both St Cyprian's and Eton. The two were later to become good friends, with Connolly giving his old schoolmate a helping hand by introducing him into London literary circles.

Orwell was made to study like a dog at St Cyprian's by the Headmaster to get a scholarship, solely to enhance the school's prestige with parents. He said this accounted for his lackadaisical approach to his studies at Eton.

Whilst living in terrible lodgings on the Portobello Road after his return from Burma, his family friend recalls:

“ That winter was very cold. Orwell had very little money indeed. I think he must have suffered in that unheated room, after the climate of Burma ... Oh yes, he was already writing. Trying to write that is – it didn't come easily... To us, at that time, he was a wrong-headed young man who had thrown away a good career, and was vain enough to think he could be an author. But

the formidable look was not there for nothing. He had the gift, he had the courage, he had the persistence to go on in spite of failure, sickness, poverty, and opposition, until he became an acknowledged master of English prose. [Ruth Pitter in BBC Overseas Service broadcast on 3 Jan. 1956]

”

Speaking about his tramping days and extreme poverty, Orwell writes in *A Road to Wigan Pier*:

“ When I thought of poverty, I thought of it in terms of brute starvation. Therefore my mind turned immediately towards the extreme cases, the social outcasts: tramps, beggars, criminals, prostitutes. These were the ‘lowest of the low’, and these were the people with whom I wanted to get into contact. What I profoundly wanted at that time was to find some way of getting out of the respectable world altogether.

”

Orwell and his first publisher, Victor Gollancz, had a rather stiff relationship - for example, Orwell

always addresses him as Gollancz in his letters. Two items in the relation between them is of particular interest. The first one is that that Orwell apparently never voiced any objection to Gollancz's apologetic preface to *A Road to Wigan Pier* and the second is that Gollancz released Orwell from his contract (at Orwell's request) so that Secker & Warburg could publish his fictional works - *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Gollancz's refusal to publish the books meant that their publication was considerably delayed. A Soviet sympathizer, Gollancz was more interested in Orwell's non-fiction writing, finding *Animal Farm* too hot to handle politically.

Eileen O'Shaughnessy was warned off Orwell by friends saying she didn't know what she was taking on, but she accepted him regardless. After her death during a hysterectomy operation, Orwell refers to her (in a letter to a friend) as 'a faithful old stick'. How much Orwell was in love with Eileen remains ambiguous. Eileen's symptoms may account in some part for Orwell's infidelities in the last few years of the war, but as Orwell wrote in a letter to a woman to whom he had proposed, 'I was sometimes unfaithful to Eileen, and I also treated her badly, and I think she treated me badly too at times, but it was a real marriage in the sense that

we had been through awful struggles together and she understood all about my work, etc.'^[9] Bernard Crick makes an apt comparison with Thomas Hardy and Emma Gifford: 'Certainly with a great writer the writing comes first. One thinks of Thomas Hardy, subtle in his characters but obtuse to the actual suffering of his first wife.' Nevertheless, it seems Orwell was very lonely after his wife's death and desperate to find a wife, both as a personal companion for himself and as a mother for Richard.

Bob Edwards, who fought alongside him in the Spanish trenches, said: 'He had a phobia against rats. We got used to them. They used to gnaw at our boots during the night, but George just couldn't get used to the presence of rats and one day late in the evening he caused us great embarrassment ... he got out his gun and shot it ... the whole front and both sides went into action.'

Also:

He liked what he liked, roast beef cooked very rare and Yorkshire pudding dripping with gravy on Sundays, and good Yarmouth kippers frequently for high tea. (p.501)... He liked his tea as well as his tobacco strong, sometimes putting twelve

spoonfuls into a huge brown teapot that needed both hands to lift and steady it.^[10]

His clothes were famously casual. His wardrobe consisted of ‘an awful pair of thick corduroy trousers’, a pair of thick grey flannel trousers, a ‘rather nice’ black corduroy jacket, a shaggy and battered old greeny-grey Harris tweed jacket, and a ‘best suit’ of dark grey to black herringbone tweed of old-fashioned cut.^[11]

Orwell's younger sister, Avril, joined him at Barnhill in Jura in the role of housekeeper. She had a tough character like her brother and eventually drove out Richard Orwell's nanny, saying that the house was too small for both women to live in. Orwell also nearly died during an unfortunate boating expedition at this time.

Bernard Crick's own perceptive insights about Orwell are that,

“ ... he was both a brave man and one who drove himself hard, for the sake, first, of ‘writing’ and then more and more for an integrated sense of what he had to write. Orwell was unusually reticent to

his friends about his background and his life, his openness was all in print for literary or moral effect; he tried to keep his small circle of good friends well apart – people are still surprised to learn who else at the time he knew; he did not confide in people easily, not talk about his emotions – even to women with whom he was close; he was not fully integrate as a person, not quite comfortable within his own skin, until late in his life – and he was many-faceted, not a simple man at all. ”

A suitable comment to end with on Orwell the writer comes from T.R. Fyvel:

“ His crucial experience ... was his struggle to turn himself into a writer, one which led through long periods of poverty, failure and humiliation, and about which he has written almost nothing directly. The sweat and agony was less in the slum-life than in the effort to turn the experience into literature.

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- A Little Poem
- Awake! Young Men of England
- Kitchener
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- The Pagan
- The Lesser Evil
- Poem From Burma

George Orwell's Poems

Trivia

- His first wife, Eileen, was once a student of J. R. R. Tolkien.
- Despite being remembered for his radio broadcasts for the BBC during the war, there is no known recording of Orwell speaking. The only known film footage of Orwell is from him at Eton playing the Eton Wall Game.
- Orwell had an NKVD file due to his involvement with the POUM militia during the Spanish Civil War.
- While working on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, although suffering from tuberculosis as a result of service in the Spanish Civil War, he regularly used a Royal Enfield 350 motorcycle.
- There has been speculation about Orwell's links to the secret services in the UK and some have even gone so far to claim that he was in the employ of MI5.^[13] The evidence for this claim is contested.
- The George Orwell School was located in the London Borough of Islington
- A Song by the American Punk Rock band Bad Religion, *Boot Stamping on a Human Face Forever*, is titled after the quote "if you want a vision of the future imagine a boot stamping on a human face ... FOREVER" (See: The Empire Strikes First)

- A song by the American political punk band Anti-Flag is named after *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, called Welcome to 1984.
- A song by the American band Oingo Boingo is named after *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, called 1984.
- Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*, which Orwell reviewed, provided a model for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
- Babot, a California poet, coined the phrase, "Orwell was an optimist," in 1984, after reading Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
- *Animal in Man* by the Hip-Hop group Dead Prez is a musical translation of *Animal Farm*.
- George Orwell lived part of his life in the Herfordshire village of Wallington, about three miles from Baldock. A plaque attached to his old house commemorates this fact. A barn described in *Animal Farm* still exists, 'Manor Farm' is set in the real village of Willington on England's south coast very close to St Cyprian's private school which so affected his early years. The Red Lion public house where the pigs colluded with the humans is also located in Willington East Sussex.
- Orwell's apartment in London, number 27B, is evidently surrounded by CCTV

surveillance cameras^[14].

- In Barcelona a town square has been named Plaza de George Orwell, in his honour. It is fittingly monitored by security cameras^[15].

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7. ^ George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," 1946
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9. ^ *George Orwell: A Life*, Bernard Crick, p.480

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