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Essay by Algis Valiunas

## ORWELL IN THE ORWELLIAN CENTURY



**T**HE SUREST SIGN THAT A WRITER HAS made his mark is the adoption of his surname in common parlance as an adjective immediately significant even to those who barely know his work, or merely know of it. Dickensian, Tolstoyan, Proustian, Joycean: this shorthand suffices. These names are integral parts of the culture.

And then of course there is, more prominent than the rest, the word *Orwellian*, which pertains not only to the author's imagined world but to a political reality that matches his fictional description. It is really for one book, or just the title of one book, that George Orwell is world-renowned: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a work of terrifying genius, which depicts the worst of all possible worlds, its evil strictly of human devising, the consummation of the surpassingly inhuman political passions that marked Orwell's time and place.

In 2007 the readership of the *Guardian*, the flagship daily paper of the English Left, voted Orwell's masterpiece "the defining novel of the 20th century." Anyone familiar with the type knows that here 1984 tends to mean Abu Ghraib rather than Kolyma, NSA com-

puters rather than psychiatric prisons. And the invaluable Anthony Burgess, in the preamble to his novel *1985*, observes, "American college students have said, 'Like 1984, man,' when asked not to smoke pot in the classroom or advised gently to do a little reading."

Thus the Orwellian century has been defined largely by persons who know precious little of Orwell. But to many of those who know rather more of him—the other novels, the travels through the working class badlands, his memoir of the Spanish Civil War, literary criticism with a sociological edge, and running commentary on the events of the day, momentous and otherwise—he is "the crystal spirit," as George Woodcock called him; or a being comparably rare and fine.

Orwell stands as the supremely penetrating political mind of the 20th century, ever honorable, serious, judicious, yet vehement in his animadversions and scalding in his eloquence. Self-overcoming was essential to Orwell's life's work; one might even say it was his life's work. Born in India in 1903, the child of an imperial bureaucrat, he would serve as a colonial policeman in Burma from 1922 to

1927, and subsequently become the scourge of the Empire, never missing a chance to rip into its racist presumption, economic exploitation, and casual brutality. An Eton scholarship boy, he scorned the appointed path by way of Oxford or Cambridge to a respectable perch in the upper-middle class at the very least, and refashioned himself as a virtual proletarian, a voice for the best in the working class, and a fellow sufferer from the manifold ills of poverty. A born intellectual and writer, he resisted his natural vocation until his late twenties, and thereafter became a student and critic of the intellectual follies that endorsed and established the worst political regimes ever. He died at the age of 46, of tuberculosis, the fatal illness of the exhausted laborer and the neglected artist in his garret.

From Left and Right admirers have scrambled to honor him. His 1980 biographer, Bernard Crick, declared,

If one takes the term "political writer" in its broadest sense to include philosophers, statesmen, publicists, and pamphleteers who might claim to be secure

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in the canon of English literature, three names seem indisputably pre-eminent: Thomas Hobbes, Jonathan Swift, and George Orwell.

The masterly historian of Soviet terror Robert Conquest credited Orwell with “moral genius,” and leaves one inclined to think that this might be the rarest gift of all. Christopher Hitchens in *Why Orwell Matters* (2002) notes that Orwell coined the very term “cold war” in a 1945 essay, and even earlier “was fighting [that war] when most Tories were still hailing Britain’s gallant Soviet ally.” Long-time Trotskyist after his own fashion and a post-9/11 neoconservative according to his own lights if not by his own admission, Hitchens in his 2012 introduction to Orwell’s *Diaries* reverts to his early form, unable to resist the chance to join “some of Orwell’s best and most mordant egalitarianism” to “the ‘99 percent’ campaign of response to the mixture of crime and capitalism on Wall Street.” And the English cultural historian Robert Colls, in the new intellectual biography *George Orwell: English Rebel*, focuses on his hero’s Englishness, in his native aversion to high-flown speculation when plain sense is called for, his guiding belief that (in Colls’s words) “all four systems—capitalist, imperialist, Fascist, and Communist—encouraged the strong to plunder the weak and the few to deceive the many,” and his perennial hope that “democratic socialism” would salvage the remnants of human decency from the 20th century’s unprecedented political wreckage.

### The Best and the Worst

THE 20TH CENTURY DID NOT MERELY try men’s souls; it tore them every which way. What then was the intellectual’s responsibility amid the tumult and horror of incendiary politics, and how far did Orwell fulfill it? Did Orwell in fact understand the Orwellian century more deeply than anyone else? Did he best serve the best in humanity, and advance the highest political purpose?

It may be that in elevating Orwell to supreme eminence, his advocates overlook contemporaries of his who at the very least rivaled him in the most crucial respects. There is the French novelist and critic Julien Benda, who understood how modern political passions had consumed intellectual life, and who honored above all the disinterested purity of vocation that marked the best thinkers and artists of earlier times. There is also Winston Churchill, who was himself consumed by political passion, as statesman and as historian,

but who embodied that dual vocation with the rarest excellence.

But to understand Orwell’s place in his time and his status in ours, first one must consider the worst men, which the epoch of totalitarianism produced in unexampled superabundance. It was an age in which mass murderers killed according to abstract precept. The principal abominations were conceived and realized by intellectuals: theoreticians rapt by the idea of salutary violence that would cleanse the earth of creatures not fit to be called men; journalists peddling their mental offal to ignorant multitudes who had never before tasted anything so much to their liking; party hacks instructing all within shouting distance of the true meaning of equality, freedom, justice, while in their hearts they swore by the eternal truth of the palpable lie and the innocent murder; and several varieties of intellectual berserker elevated to the political leadership of once great nations.

The totalitarian masters got their start in politics as writers inspired by other writers. As a young man, Mussolini adulated Machiavelli and Marx, and he parlayed his editorship of a four-page socialist weekly in a backwater town into a prominent career in Italian leftist journalism, only to leave utopian Marxism behind and transform a leading socialist paper into the voice of Fascism, the movement he claimed to have begotten and baptized. Mussolini’s peers and superiors among Fascist and Communist leaders were similarly passionate and impressionable readers and writers. Vladimir Lenin translated *The Communist Manifesto* into Russian before he was 20. He would of course become Marx’s most infamous reader, a contentious rival unwilling to wait for the historically inevitable unrolling of the glorious future. Joseph Stalin composed romantic poetry in his native Georgian, before reading Lenin steered him away from lyric effusion and toward the beguiling solidity of newsprint. He broke into big-time Bolshevik politics in March 1917, when he arrived in St. Petersburg from Siberian exile and seized editorship of *Pravda* from Vyacheslav Molotov. Stalin preened himself on his well-upholstered and commanding mind. As General Secretary he boasted a personal library of 20,000 volumes, and claimed to read 500 pages a day; and no one dared to say that he saw Stalin’s lips moving as he read. And then there is Hitler, who burned books and then people, both in accordance with the moral guidelines enunciated in his own book, *Mein Kampf*, or *My Struggle* (1925), which demonstrates that raving madmen can also be intellectuals, and of a terribly potent sort.

### Épater le Bourgeois

HOW THEN DID ORWELL RESPOND to the ambient evil of his time and place? Orwell’s earliest recorded political hatred was not for the continental tyrants emerging and established, but for the British ruling class, for the Empire it oversaw, and by extension for all capitalist banditry. In Orwell’s first novel, *Burmese Days* (1934), the obsequious Dr. Veraswami wants to credit the ruling British with all the sterling qualities that justify their conquest of and domination over inferior races such as his own. The self-loathing English timber merchant James Flory sets the doctor straight:

Pox Britannica, doctor, Pox Britannica is its proper name. And in any case, whom is it pax for? The moneylender and the lawyer. Of course we keep the peace in India, in our own interest, but what does all this law and order business boil down to? More banks and more prisons—that’s all it means.

In the famous 1936 essay “Shooting an Elephant,” Orwell recalls his days as a colonial policeman, and how the Burmese hated him and he came to hate himself and his chosen work, serving “the unbreakable tyranny” of the British raj. When a tame elephant goes suddenly rogue and kills a Burmese man, a crowd of two thousand people follows Orwell as he goes looking for the offending animal with rifle in hand. He knows that the great beast had turned violent in an overwhelming hormonal storm, and he sees it is peaceable now and knows he ought not to kill it. But “the sea of yellow faces” plainly expects him to demonstrate his superior manhood, and it is then he realizes his own inferiority: “in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of these yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.” The tyrant tyrannized must do the alien crowd’s pleasure in spite of himself. The elephant goes down, as the Empire sinks ever lower in Orwell’s estimation.

To free himself from subjection to the tyrant he had been raised to be, Orwell would apply himself to an education in capitalist-imperialist-racist wrongdoing, which would teach him compassion for the suffering of the working class, and admiration for the virtues of the poor that were all too rare among their betters.

*Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) relates his “first contact with poverty,” or European poverty at any rate, in a Parisian slum.



Orwell cannot quite conceal his eagerness for even the most dismal experience, and he keeps an eye out for the sordidly picturesque: "It was a very narrow street—a ravine of tall, leprous houses, lurching towards one another in queer attitudes, as though they had all been frozen in the act of collapse." In the lower depths he cannot resist thinking of high art: Cellini, Fielding, Zola, Villon, Shakespeare, Melville, Tolstoy, Scott, and London all get their mention, and they are his true native companions in this alien land of the immiserated. He relishes the honored artistic calling *épater le bourgeois*, as he describes, say, the filthy habits of the filthy cook in the filthy kitchen of a quite elegant hotel. All the same, he does make you understand that his spell of penury is not a bohemian idyll and that down and out is something that you pray you'll never be. But when he solemnly discloses the deepest truth of modern society, the revelation is not exactly newsworthy: "Money has become the grand test of virtue." Orwell hates the prosperous who despise the poor, and he hates his own middle-class nature, which he is attempting to exorcise by seeking out proletarian ordeal.

His rightful place will never be among the comfortably respectable who prefer not to know what life at the bottom means. In the novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), he takes apart the social pretensions of a High Anglican country vicar whose congregation is dwindling and who cannot afford the upper-middle-class amenities he considers appropriate to his station. The pinched drabness of his soul, and the hectic fervor of his daughter, who sticks her arm with a pin whenever an impious thought crosses her mind, illustrate a pathology that normal secularized men like Orwell are glad to have eradicated from themselves. Then one day the daughter, Dorothy Hare, awakens from a blackout explicable only by the magic of fiction, and finds herself on a London street with no idea who she is. She falls in with migrant workers off to the countryside to pick hops, punishing labor but incomparably more gratifying than the longeurs of the rectory. "As the afternoon wore on you grew almost too tired to stand, and the small green hop lice got into your hair and into your ears and worried you, and your hands, from the sulphurous juice, were as black as a Negro's except where they were bleeding. Yet you were happy, with an unreasonable happiness." Dorothy will have it much worse as a despised teacher in the despicable Ringwood House, whose operation is dedicated to lining the petit bourgeois headmistress's pockets. Evelyn Waugh or Kingsley Amis would have called it Ringworm School and run wild

with the absurdity, but Orwell feels obliged to preach grimly, about the usual class-mad snootiness and hypocritical religiosity. His is the dismal art of a baritone with a small congested brownish voice, or of a painter whose palette is several shades of dreary. Dorothy's finding strength and solace in the forms of the religion whose doctrine she no longer believes is the only legitimate surprise in the book, which reduces fiction to a political-theological tract laying out Orwell's several ideological dissatisfactions with the English middle class.

#### To Touch the Evil

**K**EEP THE ASPIDISTRA FLYING (1936) manages to be duller still, relating the misadventures of a bookstore clerk and floundering poet given to Wastelandism in the extreme, garnished with the mid-'30s class hatred made obligatory by Oxford-educated poets W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and C. Day Lewis. Gordon Comstock's poor head clatters with the re-

### Churchill knew better than Orwell what needed to be done in order to secure a decent and democratic world.

frain enervating to him and endlessly wearisome to the reader.

Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club.... Money for the right kind of education, money for influential friends, money for leisure and peace of mind, money for trips to Italy. Money writes books, money sells them. Give me not righteousness, O Lord, give me money, only money.

Orwell even recycles the nasty parody of sublime Pauline wisdom that he used in *A Clergyman's Daughter*, in which the cardinal virtue of love is supplanted by the be-all and end-all of money. Comstock vows to defy to the death the reigning cash-nexus perversion, but in his determination to sink to the squalor of mere subsistence he proves more perverse than the ant-like multitudes he scorns. In the end, salvation arrives like the cavalry when his long-suffering girlfriend gets pregnant and he knows he must man up.

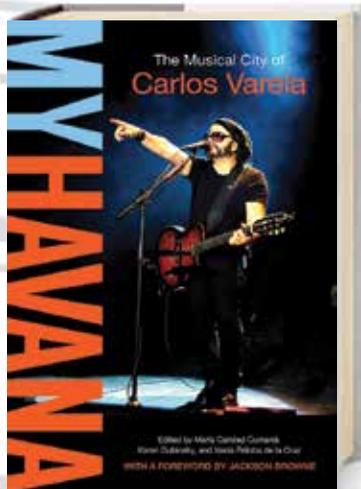
Orwell in his bleak earnestness revisits the plight of the poor in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), his lament for the north-country coal miners' lot, a tribute to hard servitude heroically endured, capped by the now customary fillip of self-loathing for his own cushioned position among the privileged who spend their days above ground, doing nothing more strenuous than moving words here and there. Orwell has seen and felt something of the misery by going down himself into the pit, not to say The Pit, the place of darkness visible.

In a way it is even humiliating to watch coal-miners working. It raises in you a momentary doubt about your own status as an "intellectual" and a superior person generally. For it is brought home to you, at least while you are watching, that it is only because miners sweat their guts out that superior persons can remain superior. You and I and the editor of the *Times Lit. Supp.*, and the Nancy poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of *Marxism for Infants*—all of us *really* owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.

At his best, Orwell takes pains to see and feel before he thinks. He seeks out those resigned to weariness, hunger, disease, humiliation, and an early death. He wants actually to touch and to be touched by some of the worst things going in his society. The heedless leap into abstraction repulses him, and in the second half of *Wigan Pier* he denounces at length the half-wit socialist zealots who come from the middle class and never quite see their way to real understanding. "The fact is that Socialism, in the form in which it is now presented, appeals chiefly to unsatisfactory or even inhuman types." The writer out to render the sorrowful facts and charge his readers with the spirit of revolution requires genuine artistry. Now as the rise of fascism threatens to create a "totalitarian world," the only serious alternative to perpetual night is a socialism that recovers its original shining inspiration. Long buried under "a mountain of dung" that the incapable and incurable leftist sages have raised high—he fingers such dubious heroes as George Bernard Shaw, Upton Sinclair, William Morris—"justice and liberty" must be restored to the leading place in the movement.

In the cause of a civilization founded on love more sublime than Saint Paul's—on the brotherhood of all men, in justice and liberty—

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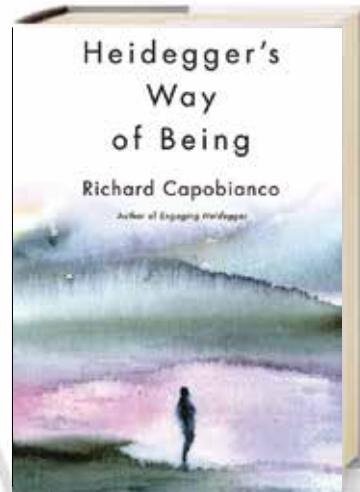


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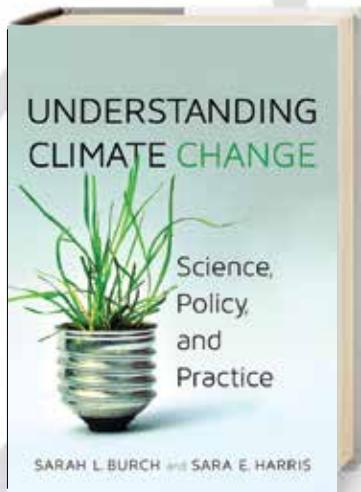
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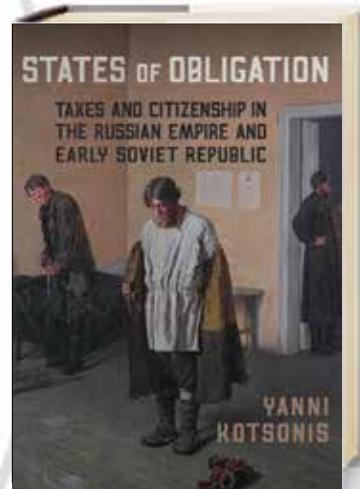


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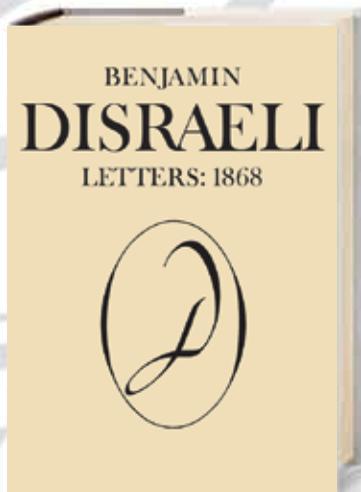


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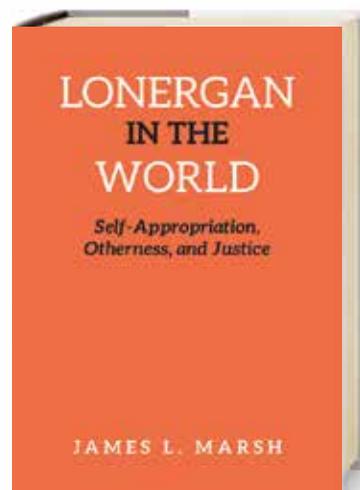


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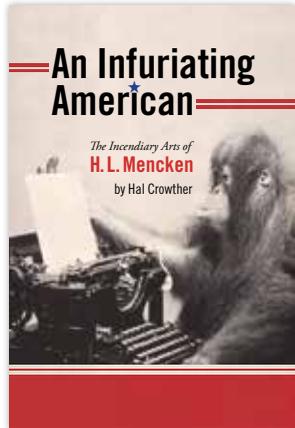




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Orwell went to war, in Spain, in 1936, to preserve the new republic from fascism. Here he found the best society he had ever been part of, and he recalls his exultation in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938):

In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilized life—snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc.—had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England.... The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before.

But he goes on to say that such perfection could not last. Orwell wound up taking a fascist sniper's bullet in the throat that nearly finished him off, yet he spent his last days and nights in Spain eluding not the fascists but the Communist executioners bent on liquidating their former allies in the POUM, the Party of Marxist Unification, to which Orwell belonged, and which had just been branded a renegade Trotskyist aberration by the notoriously volatile Kremlin orthodoxy. Orwell's sad money-tainted England started looking more attractive than ever before.

It is not easy to convey the nightmare atmosphere of that time [in Spain]—the peculiar uneasiness produced by rumours that were always changing, by censored newspapers and the constant presence of armed men. It is not easy to convey it because, at the moment, the thing essential to such an atmosphere does not exist in England. In England political intolerance is not yet taken for granted.... It seemed only too natural in Barcelona.

Orwell concluded that the Communist treachery guaranteed the defeat of the Republic and thereby served Stalin's dark ends.

### Full-Bore Political Horror

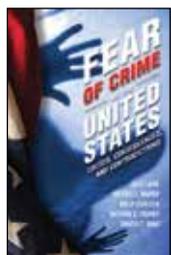
**O**RWELL HATED STALIN MORE THAN he did Hitler, because Stalin had fouled the purest human ideal ever in Orwell's eyes, while Hitler had merely resurrected the mad barbarism of the Dark

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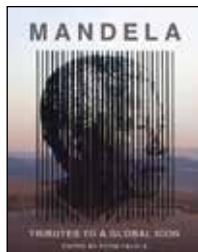
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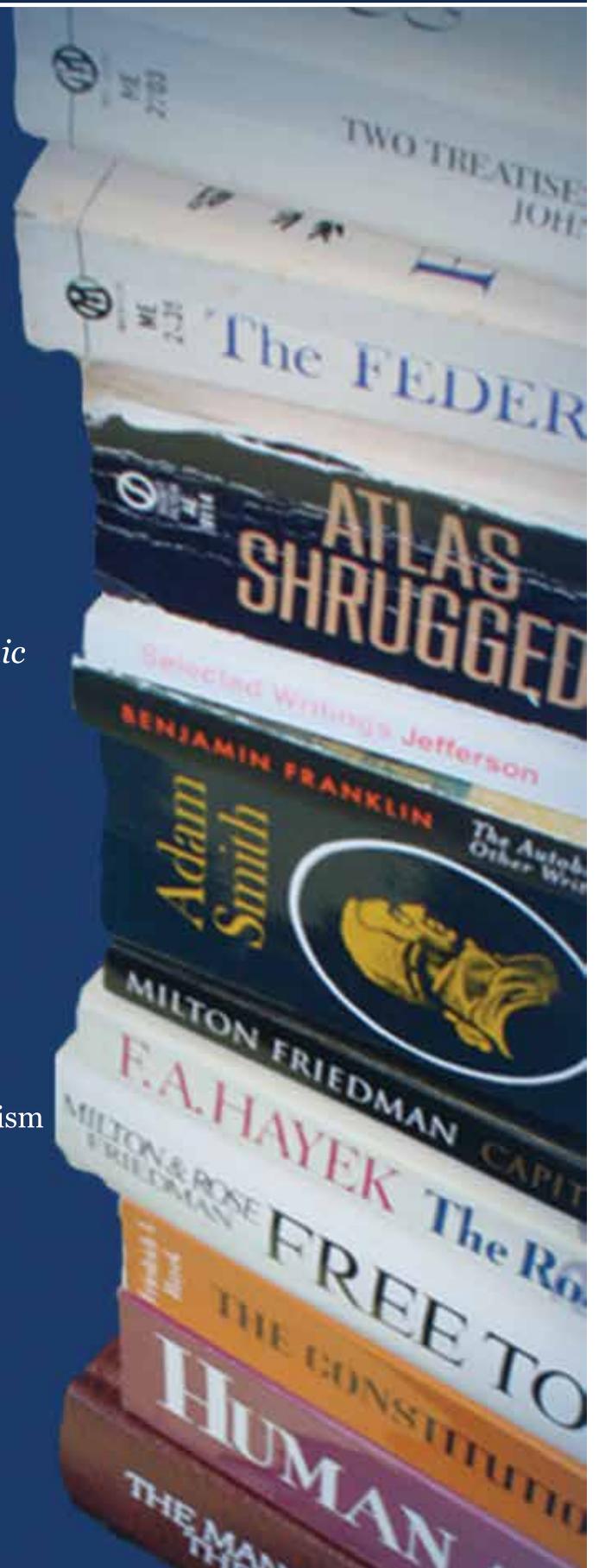
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Ages. In a very peculiar piece on *Mein Kampf* in March 1940, Orwell declared, "I should like to put it on record that I have never been able to dislike Hitler.... I have reflected that I would certainly kill him if I could get within reach of him, but that I could feel no personal animosity." In photographs Orwell sees Hitler reproducing "[i]n a rather more manly way...the expression of innumerable pictures of Christ crucified, and there is no doubt that that is how Hitler sees himself." What can one politely say? Hitler was nothing like even the Nietzschean ideal of Caesar with the heart of Christ. When there was crucifying to be done, Hitler would be the one hammering in the nails, many million times over, and with the unhinged ecstasy of perfected evil.

Orwell looked elsewhere for his passionate hatreds, reserving a particular loathing for the uncomprehending Left, the "parlour Bolshies" and "fashionable pansies," the reigning intellectual sub-normals with their fantastic triviality and megaphone hectoring.

The unforgivable intellectual sin was to accept the Soviet masters' own proclamation that the Socialist Motherland was a light unto the nations, while in fact it had become one of the darkest places on the earth. Orwell wrote *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* in three months from late 1943 to early 1944, and in this allegorical fable he lampooned the Soviet misprision of the noble socialist project, as the Manor Farm animals' revolution overthrows the unconscionable oppressor Mr. Jones, establishes the new dispensation of perfect barnyard equality, but is gradually subverted by the most intelligent and greediest of the animals, the pigs, led by the boss hog, Napoleon. The allegory travesties Soviet history from 1917 to 1944, and the most famous line in the book became the unofficial motto of anti-Soviet contempt everywhere: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others." Quite contrary to Orwell's aim, that signature line commonly came to deride socialism in whatever form, while he had tried to convince his readers that "the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement," as he put it in the preface to a Ukrainian-language edition of the novel, bound for denizens of Displaced Persons camps in postwar Germany.

Orwell's usual publishers, the usual sort of parlour Bolshies, rejected the novel as political heresy. Even the royalist-traditionalist-Anglo-Catholic T.S. Eliot, a Faber and Faber editor, advised against publication, because the novel was a blatant affront to a valued ally. *Animal Farm* would not appear in print until August 1945, days after the atomic attacks on Japan that ended the war.

But in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) war is never-ending among the three totalitarian entities that control the world, or what is left of it after widespread nuclear devastation in the 1950s. INGSOC is one of the ruling powers, English socialism bastardized almost beyond recognition, hideous and virulent to a degree that makes Stalinism seem sunshine itself. The Party has of course liberated the proles from their enslavement by the capitalists, but everyone except those rulers more equal than others now lives in the desolate ugliness that Orwell had seen in the slums of Wigan and Sheffield. The Party rules by lies and terror. The Ministry of Truth rewrites history continually, dumping down the memory hole sometime facts that now contradict the authorized version of reality. The Ministry of Love houses the thought police, in which one sees the realized fantasy of the most malignant 20th-century thinkers: at last they exercise absolute control over their subjects' very thoughts. "Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death." And the renegade Winston Smith learns upon his own body the core truth of the regime, as his moral tutor, and torturer, so plainly states it:

Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.... Progress in our world will be progress towards more pain. The old civilisations claimed that they were founded on love or justice. Ours is founded upon hatred.... If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever.

Orwell can imagine that future so clearly because he has schooled himself in some of the worst things that men have actually done. No one else has gone so far in predicting how inhuman ideas will ultimately be translated into action. And it is possible that Orwell was right in divining the end result of totalitarian practice: absolute power will so deform the masters that they will forget any humanitarian pretense and will live for power alone—not only the god-like power over life and death that every sound Machiavellian wishes to exercise, but the even more monstrous power to control what the regime's subjects think and feel.

#### Orwell or Churchill?

**O**RWELL IS RENOWNED THEN AS A figure apart from the crowd of political intellectuals who conducted the world toward the verge of apocalypse. Surely

he thought of himself that way. But how far apart was he really?

French philosopher and novelist Julien Benda's *La trahison des clercs*, translated as *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1927), contrasts the superbly disinterested minds of the past with the politically servile ones of his time. His heroes were either "entirely indifferent to these [political] passions," as Leonardo da Vinci and Goethe were, or they honored "an abstract principle superior to and directly opposed to these passions," as did Erasmus and Kant. Such purity is no longer acceptable. "Our age is indeed the age of the *intellectual organization of political hatreds*.... Antisemitism, Pan-Germanism, French Monarchism, Socialism are not only political manifestations; they defend a particular form of morality, of intelligence, of sensibility, of literature, of philosophy and of artistic conceptions." Stout-hearted men, especially on the Left, reviled Benda as a relic of intellectual snobbery indifferent to the suffering of ordinary men and women; he was reported to have said that his idea of a perfect evening was to read Plato in the finest room at the Ritz. Yet in 1935, when Mussolini invaded Abyssinia, and those stout-hearted men responded with ineffectual words, Benda issued a call to arms against Fascism.

Benda and Orwell lived out two very different types of intellectual vocation. Benda knew there was a higher calling than that of the political actor or that of the political intellectual; indeed, political partisanship generally violated that nobler calling. This did not mean, however, that a decent-thinking man could let tyranny destroy the best of civilization, or for that matter assault an innocent people considered barbarous. Orwell for his part never stopped being political, nor thought there might be a higher intellectual life than the one he was leading, or following; yet he swore by his devotion to the truth. But for all his probity and his clear-sightedness about some matters, he never quite left the Platonic cave of 20th-century politics; really he exchanged one cave for another, fleeing the redoubt of the respectable capitalist and imperialist English middle class, which he staggered his way out of by his mid-twenties, and finding sanctuary in the sweetest fantasy of socialism, which he defended even as he condemned the worst socialist realities and the lies that sustained them, but which left him in semi-darkness.

Orwell shared certain presuppositions of the typical man of the Left that also blinded him to political virtues superior to his own. Perhaps his most egregious failure of appreciation was his condescension to Winston



Churchill. He paid Churchill the scantest attention until the Second World War, and then regarded him with swaggering contempt. In his diary for August 7, 1942, Orwell wrote, "Everyone agrees with my suggestion that it would be a good job if Churchill were sunk on his way home [from Moscow], like Kitchener." And in a long poem that appeared in the socialist weekly *Tribune* for June 18, 1943, he declared of Churchill, "I've no wish to praise him, / I'd gladly shoot him when the war is won, / Or now, if there was someone to replace him." When the war was won, as Orwell was noting that Churchill was a better man with a better mind than the unspeakable common run of ruling-class Conservatives, he still ranked him well below quite mediocre socialists, and was only too glad to see him unseated as prime minister by Clement Attlee in the Labour Party victory of 1945. And Orwell was only too confident that he was Churchill's superior as a political writer. In his review of *Their Finest Hour* in 1949, the last piece Orwell wrote for publication, he is willing to admit that Churchill's "political reminiscences... have always been a great deal above the average, in frankness as well as in literary quality." When Orwell is finished with him, however,

Churchill qualifies as no more than a respectable journalist.

Yet, in Churchill's accounts of the wars of his youth, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, *The River War*, and *From London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, he rightly recognizes the honorable civilizing mission of the British Empire in spite of its various injustices, where Orwell sees only unspeakable racism and buccaneering plunder. In Orwell's various observations on the literature of the First World War he never mentions Churchill's six-volume history, *The World Crisis*, which cannot justly be called a better-than-average political reminiscence. It was the greatest book to come out of that war: Churchill's magniloquent sorrow for the suffering of the men in the trenches is as powerful as that of the finest war poets; his anger scathing at the politicians who called down the cataclysm and the generals who dragged the slaughter out to no decent end; yet his conviction is adamant that the political and military vocations remain indispensable to civilized life at its best. And there is no indication that Orwell even read *Marlborough: His Life and Times*, in which Churchill rehearses those everlasting themes in the biography of his greatest ancestor, the most successful general England ever

produced. Leo Strauss called this "the greatest historical work written in our century." But then philosophers see things that elude the shrewdest political intellectuals.

These two histories of Churchill's were the most important works of political art to appear between the two wars, and if Churchill's vision of honorable and prudent political life had been more widely recognized and seen into action the Soviet terror state might have been stopped before it started, Hitler denied his opportunity to sow devastation, and the Second World War averted. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* deserves its esteemed place in the post-World War II literature, but its searing horror reflects an experience of political evil that mankind could have avoided. Winston Churchill knew better than George Orwell what needed to be done in order to secure a decent and democratic world in which no one would even imagine such a definitive political catastrophe as the one that made Orwell famous. It needn't have been Orwell who defined the 20th century. The world should never have been allowed to become Orwellian.

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