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*THE CRITICAL HERITAGE*

**GEORGE ORWELL**

Edited by  
**JEFFREY MEYERS**



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# GEORGE ORWELL

THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

Edited by

JEFFREY MEYERS



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For  
Alfredo and Barbara



## General Editor's Preface

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The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer's historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in the *Critical Heritage Series* present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly productive and lengthily reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality—perhaps even registering incomprehension!

For earlier writers, notably pre-eighteenth century, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer's lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author's reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.



# Contents

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	page xiii
INTRODUCTION	1
NOTE ON THE TEXT	37
<i>Down and Out in Paris and London (1933)</i>	
1 GEORGE ORWELL, Introduction to the French edition (1935)	39
2 Unsigned notice, <i>TLS</i> , 12 January 1933	41
3 C.DAY LEWIS, <i>Adelphi</i> , February 1933	42
4 W.H.DAVIES, <i>New Statesman and Nation</i> , 18 March 1933	43
5 Unsigned notice, <i>Nation</i> , 6 September 1933	45
6 JAMES FARRELL, <i>New Republic</i> , 11 October 1933	46
7 DANIEL GEORGE, <i>Tribune</i> , 24 January 1941	47
<i>Burmese Days (1934)</i>	
8 SEAN O'FAOLAIN, <i>Spectator</i> , 28 June 1935	50
9 Unsigned notice, <i>TLS</i> , 18 July 1935	51
10 G.W.STONIER, <i>Fortnightly</i> , August 1935	53
11 MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, <i>World Review</i> , June 1950	54
<i>A Clergyman's Daughter (1935)</i>	
12 L.P.HARTLEY, <i>Observer</i> , 10 March 1935	58
13 V.S.PRITCHETT, <i>Spectator</i> , 22 March 1935	59
14 PETER QUENNELL, <i>New Statesman and Nation</i> , 23 March 1935	61
15 MICHAEL SAYERS, <i>Adelphi</i> , August 1935	62
16 GEOFFREY STONE, <i>Commonweal</i> , 18 June 1937	64
<i>Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936)</i>	
17 WILLIAM PLOMER, <i>Spectator</i> , 24 April 1936	65
18 CYRIL CONNOLLY, <i>New Statesman and Nation</i> , 25 April 1936	67
19 Unsigned notice, <i>TLS</i> , 2 May 1936	68
20 RICHARD REES, <i>Adelphi</i> , June 1936	69
21 KENNETH MACPHERSON, <i>Life and Letters Today</i> , Autumn 1936	70
22 ANTHONY WEST, <i>New Yorker</i> , 28 January 1956	71
23 HENRY POPKIN, <i>Commonweal</i> , 23 March 1956	80
24 DOROTHY VAN GHENT, <i>Yale Review</i> , Spring 1956	82

CONTENTS

- 25 ISAAC ROSENFELD, *Commentary*, June 1956 84  
 26 LOUIS SIMPSON, *Hudson Review*, Summer 1956 88

*The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

- 27 VICTOR GOLLANCZ, Foreword to the Left Book Club edition  
 (1937) 91  
 28 WALTER GREENWOOD, *Tribune*, 12 March 1937 99  
 29 ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL, *Time and Tide*, 20 March 1937 101  
 30 H.J.LASKI, *Left News*, March 1937 104  
 31 DOUGLAS GOLDRING, *Fortnightly*, April 1937 108  
 32 HAMISH MILES, *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 May 1937 110  
 33 ROBERT HATCH, *Nation*, 30 August 1958 113  
 34 PHILIP TOYNBEE, *Encounter*, August 1959 115

*Homage to Catalonia* (1938)

- 35 Unsigned notice, *TLS*, 30 April 1938 119  
 36 GEOFFREY GORER, *Time and Tide*, 30 April 1938 121  
 37 JOHN MCNAIR, *New Leader* (London), 6 May 1938 124  
 38 PHILIP MAIRET, *New English Weekly*, 26 May 1938 127  
 39 A.W.J., *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1938 130  
 40 DOUGLAS WOODRUFF, *Tablet*, 9 July 1938 131  
 41 STEPHEN SPENDER, *World Review*, June 1950 134  
 42 T.R.FYVEL, *New Leader* (New York), 16 June 1952 137  
 43 GEORGE MAYBERRY, *New Republic*, 23 June 1952 141  
 44 HERBERT MATTHEWS, *Nation*, 27 December 1952 143  
 45 HUGH THOMAS, *New Statesman*, 20 April 1962 150

*Coming Up For Air* (1939)

- 46 Unsigned notice, *TLS*, 17 June 1939 152  
 47 MARGERY ALLINGHAM, *Time and Tide*, 24 June 1939 154  
 48 WINIFRED HORRABIN, *Tribune*, 21 July 1939 155  
 49 JOHN COGLEY, *Commonweal*, 3 February 1950 156  
 50 IRVING HOWE, *Nation*, 4 February 1950 158  
 51 EDMUND FULLER, *Saturday Review of Literature*, 18 February  
 1950 161  
 52 JAMES STERN, *New Republic*, 20 February 1950 164  
 53 CHARLES ROLO, *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1950 167  
 54 ISAAC ROSENFELD, *Partisan Review*, May 1950 169

*Inside the Whale* (1940)

- 55 ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL, *Time and Tide*, 9 March 1940 175  
 56 PHILIP MAIRET, *New English Weekly*, 14 March 1940 177

CONTENTS

57	Unsigned notice, <i>TLS</i> , 20 April 1940	180
58	MAX PLOWMAN, <i>Adelphi</i> , April 1940	182
59	ROBERT HERRING, <i>Life and Letters Today</i> , June 1940	184
60	Q.D.LEAVIS, <i>Scrutiny</i> , September 1940	187
<i>The Lion and the Unicorn</i> (1941)		
61	DWIGHT MACDONALD, <i>Partisan Review</i> , March 1942	191
<i>Animal Farm</i> (1945)		
62	GRAHAM GREENE, <i>Evening Standard</i> , 10 August 1945	195
63	KINGSLEY MARTIN, <i>New Statesman and Nation</i> , 8 September 1945	197
64	CYRIL CONNOLLY, <i>Horizon</i> , September 1945	199
65	ISAAC ROSENFELD, <i>Nation</i> , 7 September 1946	201
66	EDMUND WILSON, <i>New Yorker</i> , 7 September 1946	204
67	NORTHROP FRYE, <i>Canadian Forum</i> , December 1946	206
<i>Critical Essays</i> (1946)		
68	STUART HAMPSHIRE, <i>Spectator</i> , 8 March 1946	209
69	EVELYN WAUGH, <i>Tablet</i> , 6 April 1946	211
70	HARRY LEVIN, <i>New Republic</i> , 6 May 1946	215
71	ERIC BENTLEY, <i>Saturday Review of Literature</i> , 11 May 1946	219
72	WYLIE SYPHER, <i>Nation</i> , 25 May 1946	221
73	EDMUND WILSON, <i>New Yorker</i> , 25 May 1946	224
74	JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY, <i>Adelphi</i> , July 1946	227
75	NEWTON ARVIN, <i>Partisan Review</i> , September 1946	232
George Woodcock on George Orwell (1946)		
76	GEORGE WOODCOCK, 'George Orwell, 19th century Liberal,' <i>Politics</i> , December 1946	235
1984 (1949)		
77	FREDRIC WARBURG, Publisher's Report, 1948	247
78	JULIAN SYMONS, <i>TLS</i> , 10 June 1949	251
79	HAROLD NICOLSON, <i>Observer</i> , 12 June 1949	257
80	DIANA TRILLING, <i>Nation</i> , 25 June 1949	259
81	DANIEL BELL, <i>New Leader</i> (New York), 25 June 1949	262
82	PHILIP RAHV, <i>Partisan Review</i> , July 1949	267
83	SAMUEL SILLEN, <i>Masses and Mainstream</i> , August 1949	274
84	GOLO MANN, <i>Frankfurter Rundschau</i> , 5 November 1949	277
85	I.ANISIMOV, <i>Pravda</i> , 12 May 1950	282
86	HERBERT READ, <i>World Review</i> , June 1950	283

CONTENTS

87	CZESLAW MILOSZ, <i>The Captive Mind</i> (1953)	286
88	JAMES WALSH, <i>Marxist Quarterly</i> , January 1956	287
Obituaries		
89	V.S.PRITCHETT, <i>New Statesman and Nation</i> , 28 January 1950	294
90	ARTHUR KOESTLER, <i>Observer</i> , 29 January 1950	296
91	BERTRAND RUSSELL, <i>World Review</i> , June 1950	299
<i>Shooting an Elephant</i> (1950)		
92	E.M.FORSTER, <i>Listener</i> , 2 November 1950	302
93	T.R.FYVEL, <i>Tribune</i> , 3 November 1950	305
94	CHRISTOPHER SYKES, <i>New Republic</i> , 4 December 1950	308
95	EDMUND WILSON, <i>New Yorker</i> , 13 January 1951	309
96	C.V.WEDGWOOD, <i>Time and Tide</i> , 10 February 1951	311
<i>England Your England</i> (1953)		
97	STEPHEN SPENDER, <i>New Republic</i> , 16 March 1953	313
98	Unsigned notice, <i>TLS</i> , 4 December 1953	316
99	ANGUS WILSON, <i>Observer</i> , 24 January 1954	318
100	HENRY POPKIN, <i>Kenyon Review</i> , Winter 1954	320
101	JOHN WAIN, <i>Twentieth Century</i> , January 1954	326
102	GEORGE ELLIOTT, <i>Hudson Review</i> , Spring 1957	334
<i>Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters</i> (1968)		
103	ANTHONY POWELL, <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , 3 October 1968	341
104	CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN, <i>Listener</i> , 12 December 1968	344
105	IRVING HOWE, <i>Harper's</i> , January 1969	349
106	MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE, <i>Esquire</i> , March 1969	359
107	GEORGE STEINER, <i>New Yorker</i> , March 1969	363
108	JEFFREY MEYERS, <i>Philological Quarterly</i> , October 1969	373
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	382
	INDEX	383

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# Introduction

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## CONTROVERSY, REVIEWS AND REPUTATION

Before he published his first book at the age of thirty, Orwell's experience ranged from Eton to service in the colonial police, and from short periods as a tramp, dishwasher, hop-picker, tutor and teacher to book reviewer and pseudo-Georgian poet. And during the next twelve years he worked as a book dealer, farmer, shopkeeper, film critic, broadcaster, editor, columnist and war correspondent to supplement his meager income as an author. Orwell deliberately sought out experience to provide material for his writing, and everything he produced is related to the events of his life. His acute eye for detail and passionate desire to inform others of the human and political reality he had discovered made him pre-eminent as a reporter, essayist and satirist rather than as a novelist.

Because his books were critical of society and of governments, of received opinion on the Right and on the Left, they often inspired controversy and were difficult to publish. *Down and Out in Paris and London* was rejected by Cape and Faber. The English edition of *Burmese Days* was refused by Cape and Heinemann, and then delayed for a year when the India Office objected to its anti-imperialism. *The Road to Wigan Pier* carried a Foreword by Victor Gollancz, addressed to the members of the Left Book Club, which attacked Orwell's attacks on Socialism. And Gollancz rejected *Homage to Catalonia* for political reasons before a word of it was written, though he insisted on retaining his rights to Orwell's future books and did not relinquish his contract until 1944. *Animal Farm* was again refused by Gollancz, Cape, Faber and twenty American publishers because of its criticism of Stalinist Russia. *1984* got an icy reception in Left-wing circles and was violently attacked in the Communist press. Though Harper published Orwell's first three works, none of his books appeared in America between 1936 and 1946; and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Homage to Catalonia*, *Coming Up For Air* and 'Such, Such Were the Joys' did not appear in that country until Harcourt Brace, who became Orwell's publisher in 1946, brought them out after his death.

Orwell's books were closely related to the historical events and political issues of his time. *Burmese Days* reflected the decline of British imperialism; *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* and *The Road to Wigan Pier* were published during the Depression and dealt with poverty; *Homage to Catalonia* came out during the Spanish Civil War; and *Coming Up For Air* appeared three months before the outbreak of the war that it prophesied. *Inside the Whale* and *The Lion and the Unicorn* were published during the Second World War, *Animal Farm* a few days after Hiroshima, 1984 at the height of the Cold War, and the *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* during the bitter protests against the war in Vietnam.

Though Orwell regularly published a book every year from 1933 to 1941, and edited and contributed to three books of essays in 1941–3, his works were usually published in small editions of 1,500 to 3,000 copies and did not sell well until 1945. Before then he was generally unknown and frequently hard-up, and was forced to undertake the 'quite exceptionally thankless, irritating and exhausting job'<sup>1</sup> of industrious and indiscriminate book reviewing, which brought in a vital three or four pounds a week. His journalistic output was enormous and in less than twenty years he produced more than seven hundred articles in addition to his books. Malcolm Muggeridge relates that Orwell hated the journalistic grind and 'cherished the dream that he would retire to the country and write great literary masterpieces; nevermore sit in anguish over a typewriter with a deadline to meet' (No. 106).

Orwell did far too much reviewing himself to take it very seriously. He had gone from Eton to Burma and, like his hero Gordon Comstock, despised and resented 'those moneyed young beasts who glide so gracefully from Eton to Cambridge and from Cambridge to the literary reviews.'<sup>2</sup> In his witty 'Confessions of a Book Reviewer' he recommended that reviews have a minimum of a thousand words and said, 'The great majority of reviews give an inadequate or misleading account of the book that is dealt with.... The usual middle-length review of about 600 words is bound to be worthless, even if the reviewer genuinely wants to write about it' (IV, pp. 183–4). And in his 'As I Please' column of 1944 Orwell condemned the reviewers of the 1930s in a somewhat exaggerated tirade:

The truly shameful feature of literary life before the war was the blurring of the distinction between advertisement and criticism. A number of so-called

reviewers, especially the best-known ones, were simply blurb writers.... The literary pages of several well-known papers were practically owned by a handful of publishers who had their quislings planted in all the important jobs.... A book coming from the right publishers could be absolutely certain not only of favourable reviews, but of being placed on the ‘recommended’ list....

In America even the pretence that hack reviewers read the books they are paid to criticise has been partially abandoned. Publishers, or some publishers, send out with review copies a short synopsis telling the reviewer what to say. (III, pp. 168–9)

Orwell knew that the facile reviewers did not need a publisher’s synopsis to enable them to judge a book without actually reading it and that critics often had to praise trash in order to get their reviews printed.

Yet Orwell, who had to live on his earnings as a writer, was well aware of the connection between criticism and sales, and he took a pragmatic and cynical attitude about reviews. As he wrote in 1938 to Cyril Connolly, who was about to publish *Enemies of Promise* (an autobiography that described the young Orwell at prep. school and Eton): ‘I see from the *NS & N* that you have a book coming out sometime this spring. If you can manage to get a copy sent me I’ll review it for the *New English [Weekly]*, possibly also *Time & Tide*. I arranged for Warburg to send you a copy of my Spanish book (next month) hoping you may be able to review it. You scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours’ (I, p. 309).

Many of Orwell’s books were reviewed by friends like Connolly, Richard Rees, Malcolm Muggeridge, Anthony Powell, Julian Symons, George Woodcock, Max Plowman and T.R.Fyvel in periodicals to which he frequently contributed: the *Adelphi* (founded by Middleton Murry and co-edited by Rees in the 1930s), the *New English Weekly* (founded by A.R.Orage of the *New Age*), *Time and Tide*, the *New Statesman* (founded by Sidney and Beatrice Webb), the *Tribune* (the Socialist weekly, edited by Aneurin Bevan, which published Orwell’s ‘As I Please’ column from 1943 to 1947), *Horizon* (edited by Connolly), *Partisan Review* (which published Orwell’s ‘London Letters’ during the war), the *Observer* (which published Orwell’s war dispatches) and the *Manchester Evening News* (which published his weekly book review in the mid-1940s).

Though Orwell’s books were widely reviewed and well-received, his reputation—which can be divided into four phases—developed slowly and he did not achieve fame until the end of his life. In the

early phase, from *Down and Out* (1933) to *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), his books were often discussed with some other mediocre works, and he received those brief and sometimes superficial 600-word reviews that contained more plot summary than serious criticism. But the reviewers showed more indulgence than discrimination about his early novels, which got surprisingly good notices. In the middle phase, from *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) to *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), Orwell published his idiosyncratic and unpopular attacks on Socialism and Stalinism, became a controversial but respected and sympathetic figure, and received longer and more perceptive reviews.

Orwell's reputation changed dramatically in the late phase, from *Animal Farm* (1945) to *1984* (1949), when unlike Conrad, Joyce and Lawrence, he became both popular and wealthy in his own lifetime. After the publication of his beast fable Orwell attracted the best critics of the time, received brilliant as well as appreciative reviews on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, in the lead review of the *New Yorker*, and in all the prominent periodicals, and was recognized as one of the major writers of the twentieth century. Most of the reviews after 1945 are valuable for their intrinsic interest as well as for what they say about Orwell, and many were substantial enough to be reprinted in books. These reviews, however, did not significantly affect Orwell's attitude to his work. But they contributed to the success that freed him from continuous journalism, and allowed him to buy a house on Jura, in the Hebrides, and concentrate on *1984*. It is ironic that *Animal Farm* coincided with the terminal phase of his tuberculosis and the last years of his life.

In the fourth phase of his reputation, from *Shooting an Elephant* (1950) to the *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (1968), the reviews of his posthumously published books provided a reevaluation in the light of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, refined the earlier critical judgments, and distinguished between Orwell's strengths and weaknesses. This posthumous phase was strongly influenced by the splendid obituaries of Victor Pritchett (No. 89) and Arthur Koestler (No. 90), which helped to establish the legend of the tall, lined and shaggy man who shot the elephant in Burma and was shot in Spain, witnessed a hanging and saw the poor die, went in the spike and down the mine, and was perhaps prematurely canonized as a secular saint. It is worth noting, as Orwell would say, that though critics invariably admire the subtle art of his autobiographical writings, they sometimes forget that Orwell's legend is based mainly on his *own* carefully projected self-image.

A number of dominant themes emerge from the criticism on Orwell. Critics like Irving Howe (Nos 50 and 105), Q.D.Leavis (No. 60) and Conor Cruise O'Brien (No. 104) mention his lack of imaginative power, discuss the difference between the successful *persona* in his documentary works and the self-pity of his unconvincing fictional heroes, and agree that he is much better as a reporter than as a novelist. Other writers, most notably Isaac Rosenfeld (No. 54) and Henry Popkin (No. 100), analyze Orwell's profound conservatism (he wanted his son to go to Eton), his desire to establish a continuity between the England of the past and the present, and the paradox that he was both a Socialist and a man in love with the pre-war world.

Orwell's personal characteristics: his courage, compassion, honesty, decency, generosity, integrity and responsibility as well as his masochism (West, No. 22), and his stylistic qualities: vigor, clarity, precision, forcefulness, confidence and commonsense, have also received a good deal of attention. But the two most serious criticisms of Orwell, made by T.S.Eliot (p. 20), George Woodcock (No. 76) and Bertrand Russell (No. 91), are his bitterness, pessimism and negativism, and the superficiality and inconsistency of his political ideas.

Critics agree that the early novels are Orwell's weakest books and that he is a superb reporter and critic. His essays on Swift, Dickens, Gissing, Kipling, Koestler and Henry Miller are now considered essential to an understanding of these writers, and both 'Shooting an Elephant' and 'Politics and the English Language' have become modern classics. But there is no consensus about what constitutes his best work. *Homage to Catalonia* is perhaps his most characteristic and passionate book, *Animal Farm* the most popular and perfect, and *1984*, which created the concepts of Big Brother, Doublethink and Newspeak, the most powerful and influential. It is clear, however, that Orwell's reputation was extremely high when he died at the age of forty-six in January 1950 and has continued to rise since then.

#### *Down and Out in Paris and London*

In an autobiographical passage of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell explains how the overpowering guilt that resulted from his years as a policeman in Burma forced him to seek expiation among the outcasts at the extreme fringe of society:<sup>3</sup>

I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against the tyrants.... I could go among these people, see what their lives were like and feel myself temporarily part of their world. Once I had been among them and accepted by them, I should have touched bottom and—this is what I felt: I was aware even then it was irrational—part of my guilt would drop from me.

Orwell's squalid experiences as a tramp and dishwasher during the late 1920s provided the subject of his first book, which was published by Gollancz in January 1933. Orwell's real name was Eric Blair, and his pseudonym was selected from a list that included P.S. Burton, Kenneth Miles and H. Lewis Allways.

Orwell's contrast between the luxury of the grand hotel and the exploitation of the workers, his analysis of the psychology of poverty, and his direct experience and personal involvement in human degradation met the demand for social realism in the 1930s and his book was well received. He was praised for his honesty and sincerity—which were recognized in *Down and Out* and have been commented on ever since—his sensitive social conscience, his practical suggestions for the alleviation of poverty, and his portrayal of the differences in national temperament in the contrasting sections on Paris and London. But the reviewers had little to say about the characterization of Bozo and Boris; and they ignored what many critics now consider the most interesting literary and biographical aspects of the book: the *persona* which revealed his emotional need to share poverty and hardship.

The first review of *Down and Out*, in the TLS, rightly emphasizes his sympathy with the underdog and criticism of the casual ward system (No. 2). C. Day Lewis responds to Orwell's vividly presented 'tour of the under-world' by stating, 'if you wish to eat a meal in a big hotel without acute nausea, you had better skip pp. 107–109' (No. 3). But a restaurateur with the unlikely name of Humbert Possenti, writing from the Hotel Splendide in Piccadilly and claiming forty years' experience in the trade, vigorously protested against Orwell's defamations in a letter to *The Times*: 'Such a disgusting state of things as he describes in such places is inconceivable. The kitchens of large and smart restaurants have to be clean... are cleaner than those of most private houses.'<sup>4</sup> Orwell took the offensive eleven days later and replied:

M. Possenti seems not to realise that these remarks are quite beside the point. The passages objected to in my book did not refer to Paris hotels in general, but to one particular hotel. And as M. Possenti does not know which hotel this was he has no means of testing the truth of my statements. So I am

afraid that, in spite of his 40 years' experience, my evidence in this case is worth more than his. (I, p. 116)

But Orwell's response ignores the fact that he *did* generalize about all luxury hotels from his experiences in one, in order to develop his ideas about the degrading relationship between those who labor and those who consume.

W.H.Davies relates the book to his own experience as a tramp and discriminates between kinds of beggars, praises its truth about real life and says it is 'packed with unique and strange information' (No. 4). Though Herbert Gorman suspects that Orwell's indignation has 'colored the facts a trifle,' he mentions the effectiveness of his 'rough-and-ready styleless style.' He notices Orwell's masochism and shrewdly observes that he 'rather enjoys being down and out.'<sup>5</sup> The reviewer in the *Nation* comments on Orwell's ability to convey a 'powerful sense of destitution and helplessness' and his 'damning indictment of society' (No. 5). The novelist James Farrell mentions that Orwell had been to Eton, stresses the utter degradation and waste of poverty and praises the account as 'genuine, unexaggerated and intelligent' (No. 6). Daniel George discusses Orwell's characterization and, like Gorman, questions some of the facts and raises the important issue of whether the book is fiction or autobiography (No. 7).

In an interview with the *Paris Review* in 1962, Henry Miller, another connoisseur of Parisian low-life, said, 'I was crazy about his book *Down and Out in Paris and London*; I think it's a classic. For me it's still his best book. Though he was a wonderful chap in his way, Orwell, in the end I thought him stupid. He was like so many English people, an idealist, and, it seemed to me, a foolish idealist.'<sup>6</sup> Miller's cynical judgment reaffirms his earlier opinion. For when Orwell met Miller in Paris in 1936 on his way to fight in Spain, the American novelist, who was completely indifferent to the Civil War, told Orwell that he was an idiot. In 'Inside the Whale' and three enthusiastic book reviews Orwell revealed his fascination with and attraction to Miller's astonishing passivity and his total rejection of the concept of decency.

### *Burmese Days*

Kipling was the first major English writer to deal extensively and seriously with the British colonies. He was the most popular and influential author of his age, and his ideas about colonialism were the ones that overwhelmingly prevailed until the 1930s and beyond. It was Kipling's image of India that inspired the ideological opposition

in the novels of empire that followed in the genre he had created. In *A Passage to India* and *Burmese Days*, the English officials who express Kipling's ideals and values are portrayed in a negative light; and what was serious for Kipling becomes ironic in the novels of Forster and Orwell, who record the decline of British imperialism just as Kipling had celebrated its greatness.

Though Orwell later wrote that the English in India 'could not have maintained themselves in power for a single week, if the normal Anglo-Indian outlook had been that of, say, E.M. Forster' (II, p. 187), critics noticed that *Burmese Days* was strongly influenced by *A Passage to India*, which was published in 1924 when Orwell was serving in Burma. Both novels concern an Englishman's friendship with an Indian doctor, and a girl who goes out to the colonies, becomes engaged and then breaks it off. Both use club scenes to reveal a cross-section of colonial society, and both measure the personality and values of the characters by their racial attitudes. The themes of lack of understanding and the difficulties of friendship between English and natives, the physical deterioration and spiritual corruption of the white men in the tropics, are sounded by Forster and echo through Orwell's novel. But *Burmese Days* is a far more pessimistic book than *A Passage to India* because official failures are not redeemed by successful personal relations. There are no characters, like Fielding and Mrs Moore, who are able to prevail against the overwhelming cruelty of the English and maintain a civilized standard of behavior.<sup>7</sup>

In 'Why I Write' Orwell, who believed that good prose should be unobtrusive, 'like a window-pane,' suggested the limitations of his first novel, *Burmese Days*: 'I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed descriptions and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound. And in fact my first completed novel, *Burmese Days*, which I wrote when I was thirty but projected much earlier, is rather that kind of book' (I, p. 3). Gollancz at first rejected the novel when colonial officials complained it would give offense in India and Burma, but after Harper had published it in New York in October 1934 he changed his mind and brought out the English edition in 1935.

Fred Marsh calls *Burmese Days* a 'superior novel' in which 'Orwell has made his people and his background vividly real,' and relates it to Orwell's experience in the Burmese police force during 1922-7.<sup>8</sup> Sean O'Faolain, by contrast, considers it 'very heavy-handed,' dislikes the bitter tone and condemns Flory as a 'misanthropic and

unimpressive character' (No. 8). The anonymous pukka-sahib in the *TLS* also criticizes Orwell's 'pen steeped in gall,' recognizes the anti-Kipling bias, and makes a spirited imperialistic defense of the newer type of Burman official and of the higher English officials 'who really run the country' (No. 9). G.W.Stonier comments on the 'glaring realism' and admires Veraswami's ironic defense of English imperialism (No. 10). Malcolm Muggeridge calls it a 'not particularly satisfactory' novel but admires the portrayal of U Po Kyin and the two best scenes: the jungle shoot and the native riot. He compares Orwell's experiences with his own years in India at the same time, and states 'there was a Kiplingesque side to his character which made him romanticise the Raj and its mystique' (No. 11).

### *A Clergyman's Daughter*

Orwell was ashamed of *A Clergyman's Daughter*, called it 'bollox' and 'tripe,' and when he finished it late in 1934 wrote to his agent Leonard Moore: 'I am not at all pleased with it. It was a good idea, but I am afraid I have made a muck of it—however, it is as good as I can do for the present. There are bits of it I don't dislike, but I am afraid it is very disconnected as a whole, and rather unreal' (I, p. 141). And Orwell was thinking of this novel when he said in 'Why I Write,' 'Looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a *political* purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally' (I, p. 7)—the very antithesis of the qualities that normally distinguish his writing.

Orwell was a good critic of his own work and recognized that 'One difficulty I have never solved is that one has masses of experience which one passionately wants to write about...and no way of using them up except by disguising them as a novel' (IV, p. 422). In *A Clergyman's Daughter* his experience as a hop-picker, tramp and teacher is 'disguised' too transparently and is reported rather than rendered into a convincing and coherent work of art.

Fortunately, the critics were kinder than Orwell to his weakest book, which was published by Gollancz in March 1935. Like *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Coming Up For Air*, this novel also concerns an attempt to escape from the boredom and triviality of a middle-class existence and the inevitable return to the *status quo*. Though L.P. Hartley finds Reverend Hare 'exaggerated to the point of being a monster,' and the thesis 'neither new nor convincing,' he feels that Orwell's treatment of 'man's inhumanity to man' is sure and bold and

his dialogue ‘always appropriate, and often brilliant’ (No. 12). Victor Pritchett emphasizes the negative rather than the nostalgic portrayal of religion, calls the satire ‘a whip for vicarages’ and praises the ‘immense knowledge of low life.’ Like Peter Quennell and Michael Sayers, Pritchett compares the Trafalgar Square episode to the Nighttown scene in *Ulysses* (1922). Though the scene is not really Joycean, his statement that Orwell’s Joycean style ‘utterly ruins the effect’ is still repeated today (No. 13).

Quennell calls the novel ‘ambitious yet not entirely successful.’ Though the writing is ‘uncommonly forceful,’ Dorothy ‘remains a cipher’ (No. 14). Sayers correctly prophesies that Orwell’s ‘future work is going to be unusually interesting’ and he admires his clarity and honesty. Despite Orwell’s statement about the purple passages in *Burmese Days* and his angry anti-imperialism, Sayers finds the novel objective, and states there is no local color, ‘nor bitterness, nor cynicism, nor contempt’ (No. 15). Perhaps Sayers skimmed too quickly through *Burmese Days*, which Jane Southron rightly criticizes as ‘too obviously bitter and too savagely prejudiced to be classed as first-rate fiction’—though she goes too far in condemning Orwell’s ‘apparent contempt for humanity.’ Despite the feeble Freudian explanation of Dorothy’s behavior, Southron believes that *A Clergyman’s Daughter* represents ‘a big jump in quality’ from his earlier books, and she admires its sympathetic understanding.<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Stone, on the other hand, emphasizes Orwell’s temperamental pessimism (No. 16).

Vincent McHugh’s perceptive review recognizes that the book is ‘a minor novel in Gissing’s tradition,’ that Dorothy’s school is Dickensian, that the book’s greatest weakness is the ‘rather loose construction,’ and that the main theme concerns the middle-class fear of losing respectability.<sup>10</sup> Considering Orwell’s condemnation of his novel as disconnected, unreal, lifeless and badly written, the reviews were remarkably generous.

### *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*

Orwell was well aware of the weak plot, style and characterization of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) but published it anyway because he needed the money. As he wrote in 1946:

There are two or three books which I am ashamed of and have not allowed to be reprinted or translated, and that is one of them. There is an even worse one called *A Clergyman’s Daughter*. This was written simply as an exercise and I oughtn’t to have published it, but I was desperate for money,

ditto when I wrote *Keep the A*. At that time I simply hadn't a book in me, but I was half starved and had to turn out something to bring in £100 or so (IV, p. 205).

William Plomer remarks that Orwell 'spares us none of the horrors of sordid loneliness and a hypertrophied inferiority complex,' but he accepts the rather unconvincing happy ending (No. 17). But the reviewer in *TLS* states that the happy ending evades the final issue of 'whether an educated man could continue to let himself sink as a matter of principle' (No. 19). Cyril Connolly loyally calls the novel 'a completely harrowing and stark account of poverty...written in clear and violent language' (No. 18). Richard Rees mentions the influence of Dickens, Butler, Joyce and Lawrence, and enthusiastically praises the 'consistent seriousness and real vigour' of the 'fundamentally honest' book (No. 20). Kenneth Macpherson says it is 'a remarkable and subtle distillation of reality' (No. 21).

The longer and more perceptive reviews of the first and posthumous American edition of 1956, written after Orwell had published all his books and had been recognized as a major writer, provide an interesting retrospective view of both the man and his work. Anthony West's article is one of the most original and stimulating interpretations of Orwell. He sees the seeds of *1984* in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*— 'his mind is already warming to the idea of a universal smash-up'—and relates the later novel to Orwell's autobiographical essay on his sadistic prep. school. West writes that the terrors of *1984* 'are of an infantile character, and they clearly derive from the experience described in "Such, Such Were the Joys".... what he did in *1984* was to send everybody in England to an enormous Crossgates to be as miserable as he had been.' West concludes his interpretation by suggesting that 'only the existence of a hidden wound can account for such a remorseless pessimism' (No. 22).

Henry Popkin believes that *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* expresses 'the strange ambiguity of his attitude toward middle-class life,' and his regretful admiration for it; and that the theme becomes even more prominent in *Coming Up For Air* (No. 23). Dorothy Van Ghent emphasizes Orwell's insistent and furious 'satirical energy,' but feels that he is not 'in complete command of his feelings and judgments' (No. 24). This lack of control is also mentioned by Isaac Rosenfeld, who thinks 'he was full of self-hatred, rage, spite and contempt.' Rosenfeld also recognizes the conservative strain in Orwell's radicalism, and finds the conclusion unconvincing: 'the regenerative

meaning [of Gordon's marriage] cannot reach him...it is too late to save him' (No. 25). Louis Simpson makes the surprising judgment: 'This may be the best book Orwell wrote,' and says that 'Rosemary is unique as a created character in Orwell's fiction,' though she closely resembles Julia in *1984* (No. 26).

*The Road to Wigan Pier*

In January 1936 Orwell was commissioned by Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club to write a personal report about economic and social conditions in the depressed industrial areas of northern England. He gave up his job in a Hampstead bookshop and spent the next three months gathering material for *The Road to Wigan Pier* in a very deliberate attempt to compensate for the failure of theoretical Socialism to make contact with the working class. He expressed his characteristic commitment when he wrote to Richard Rees from Wigan: 'Have you ever been down a mine? I don't think I shall ever feel quite the same about coal again' (I. p. 164). In the spring Orwell moved to the village of Wallington in Hertfordshire where he finished the book and kept some barnyard animals.

But Orwell's book, which was published by Gollancz in March 1937 in a public edition and as a Left Book Club choice (43,000 copies were printed in the familiar orange cover), was not at all what his backers expected and typified Orwell's attacks on both the Right *and* the Left. Gollancz states that Orwell expresses his 'burning indignation against poverty and oppression,' but that he finds Socialists 'a stupid, offensive and insincere lot.' Gollancz insisted on adding a Foreword that attempts to draw the venom from Orwell's sting and to pacify the outraged sentiments of the members of the Left Book Club, which published works to help in the struggle against Fascism and war, but did not, as an apolitical character in one of Orwell's novels assumes, concern books left in railway carriages.

Orwell's attack on 'pansy-left circles' was a specific jab at the disciples of Edward Carpenter, social reformer and homosexual propagandist, and Gollancz gallantly steps into the breach to dissociate sodomy from Socialism. He anticipates Marxist critics of *Animal Farm* and *1984* by blindly refusing to recognize the brutal methods used by Stalin to achieve industrialization; and he condemns Orwell for committing 'the curious indiscretion of referring to Russian commissars as "half-gramophones, half-gangsters"' (No. 27).

The reviews tend to divide along party lines. Walter Greenwood, writing in the Socialist *Tribune*, notices the dichotomy between Orwell's *reportage* and his vivisection of Socialists. He praises the first part of the book as 'authentic and first-rate' and calls Orwell 'a keen observer with great skill at character drawing.' But he says of the second part, 'I cannot remember having been so infuriated for a long time' (No. 28). Arthur Calder-Marshall, by contrast, agrees that Orwell's criticism of Socialism is essentially valid, and reveals that the book is typical of the 1930s. For in the working class 'Orwell, in common with many writers of his generation, sees the cultural and political hope of the present and future' (No. 29). H.J.Laski notices the influence of *Hard Times* (1854) and *Germinal* (1885), dismisses Orwell's attack as 'an appeal to "better feelings" ...an emotional plea for socialism addressed to comfortable people,' and concludes with a rather boring lecture (No. 30). But to Douglas Goldring, 'this brilliant, disturbing book' explains why the Socialist party 'has been steadily losing ground during the past ten years' (No. 31). Hamish Miles emphasizes Orwell's 'own conflict with English caste-consciousness' and admires the moving description of the 'human cost' of coal (No. 32).

Robert Hatch's more objective review of the first American edition of 1958 sets the book in its historical perspective and calls it 'an elegy on the spirit of poverty' (No. 33). Philip Toynbee emphasizes Orwell's personal relation to English social problems and characterizes him as the best reporter of his generation. But in an important discussion of Orwell's *persona*, Toynbee writes that he 'sees himself too consciously as the tough and honest man who has really found out the truth instead of simply dealing in high-minded abstractions' (No. 34). In a valuable review in the *New Yorker*, Dwight Macdonald compares Orwell with Engels, Mayhew, Jack London and Trotsky and calls his book 'the best sociological reporting I know.' He particularly commends the exuberant 'rhetoric of abuse' that 'combines indignation with specificity' and Orwell's 'emotional identification with the people he lives among.'<sup>11</sup> The main difference between the contemporary and posthumous reviews is the shift in emphasis from the political issues to the committed man, from the Socialist squabbles to Orwell's personal qualities and self-characterization.

### *Homage to Catalonia*

Orwell went to Spain in December 1936, five months after the outbreak of the Civil War, to write newspaper articles. But he immediately enlisted in the rather obscure and ill-equipped Trotskyist

POUM militia at the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona ‘because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do.’<sup>12</sup> After a week of so-called training, he became an ordinary soldier in the revolutionary army and fought with the Independent Labour Party contingent on the Aragon front in northeast Spain. He experienced the static trench warfare in a freezing climate until he was shot through the throat by a Fascist sniper on 10 May. When he began to recover from his wound the following month, he volunteered to return to battle. But POUM was suddenly declared illegal in mid-June and Orwell, investigated and hunted by the Communist police, barely managed to escape across the French frontier.

Orwell’s experiences in Spain marked the crucial turning-point in his political beliefs. Though he wrote that ‘we started off by being heroic defenders of democracy and ended by slipping over the border with the police panting on our heels’ (I, p. 279), he nevertheless felt ‘no one who was in Spain during the months when people still believed in the revolution will ever forget that strange and moving experience.... I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before’ (I, pp. 287, 269).

In ‘Why I Write,’ Orwell said ‘*Homage to Catalonia* is, of course, a frankly political book, but in the main it is written with a certain detachment and regard for form. I did try very hard in it to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts’ (I, p. 6). Yet Gollancz, who had given Orwell trouble with *Burmese Days* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, refused to publish *Homage to Catalonia* because of Orwell’s attacks on Stalin’s Communists, just as Kingsley Martin, the editor of the *New Statesman and Nation*, refused to publish his articles and reviews on Spain. Fortunately, Secker & Warburg said they would take any book Orwell wrote about his experiences and in April 1938, while the war was still raging, they published what is probably his best book. It sold only a few hundred copies during his lifetime.

The reviews of *Homage to Catalonia*, like those of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, were more political than literary. The *TLS* reviewer mentions that in Spain the fighting was amateurish and the equipment poor, and (like Geoffrey Gorer) grasps the essential fact that the Communist influence in Barcelona was not progressive, but reactionary (No. 35). Gorer recognizes Orwell’s ‘personal and political protestant integrity,’ praises his contrast between the fighting on the front and in Barcelona, and his description of the ‘emotional atmosphere of a revolutionary militia,’ and commends the book as

‘a work of first-class importance’ (No. 36). John McNair’s propagandists review emphasizes the spirit of comradeship that was so important to Orwell and confirms the reliability of his political reporting (No. 37). Philip Mairet agrees with Gorer that ‘The book is likely to stand as one of the best contemporary documents of the struggle,’ and notes Orwell’s political *naïveté*, ‘the heart of innocence that lies in revolution’ (No. 38). This review reveals the difficulty of knowing what was really happening in Spain, for the warfare was both ideological and military, and the Anarchists and Socialists were fighting the Communists as well as the Fascists.

The *Manchester Guardian* reviewer finds Orwell’s ‘defence of the Trotskyist P.O.U.M. convincing,’ and realizes that the conflict on the Left was between the Trotskyists who wanted immediate revolution and the Stalinists who wanted to win the war (No. 39). In the end, of course, they achieved neither revolution nor victory. Douglas Woodruff, writing in the conservative *Tablet*, states that Orwell is a romantic who does not understand the Fascist point of view, but who nevertheless ‘reached the conclusion that the one thing at stake in Spain is certainly not Democracy, but a choice of dictatorships’ (No. 40). Stephen Spender, writing just after Orwell’s death, calls him ‘one of the virtuous men of his day...a man of outstanding courage.’ ‘He was really classless, really a Socialist, really truthful.’ Though *Homage to Catalonia* contains both common sense and crankiness, it is a ‘better book than 1984’ and ‘one of the most serious indictments of Communism which has been written’ (No. 41).

*Homage to Catalonia* was first published in America during the Korean War when—in contrast to the 1930s—Orwell’s anti-Communism was particularly persuasive. T.R.Fyvel’s propagandistic review calls Orwell a ‘romantic, typically English figure’ and attributes the poor sales to ‘Communist machinations,’ though they were really due to the unpopular point of view which characteristically antagonized both the Left and the Right (No. 42). George Mayberry notes Orwell’s ‘fairness and good temper’, and that the war was lost because the Fascists intervened with men and arms while the western democracies kept out (No. 43). Herbert Matthews’s review is extremely valuable for the historical background of the book and for Juan Negrín’s astute analysis of Orwell’s character, and he states that Orwell’s ‘experience in Catalonia was a turning-point in his life’ (No. 44). Hugh Thomas agrees with Matthews that Orwell’s book is the best account of the Civil War, but that it is limited to Barcelona

and the Aragon front, gives only the POUM point of view, and is misleading about the war as a whole (No. 45).

### *Coming Up For Air*

In March 1938 Orwell became ill with tuberculosis, a recurrence of his childhood disease, and with the help of an anonymous gift of £300 (from the novelist L.H. Myers) was able to spend the winter in the mild climate of Marrakesh, Morocco, where he wrote *Coming Up For Air*. This novel, published by Gollancz in June 1939, a few months before the Second World War, is Orwell's central transitional work. It is at once synthetic and seminal, gathering the themes that had been explored in the poverty books of the 1930s and anticipating the cultural essays and political satires of the next decade.

Philip Henderson's description of the ambivalence of the Socialist writer, William Morris, applies with equal force to Orwell's attitude toward the past in *Coming Up For Air*:<sup>13</sup>

Emotionally he was attached to the past, to an unchanging order: intellectually he was convinced of the necessity of a new order, and in social revolution he saw the only hope for the future. He appears now as a Janus figure facing both ways. His work is that of a traditionalist: as a thinker he was in the vanguard of the most progressive movements of his time.

Orwell's work concerns an apocalyptic vision that destroys the dream of childhood; and he was thinking of the nostalgic novels, *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) and *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), when he wrote of *Coming Up For Air*: 'Of course the book was bound to suggest Wells watered down. I have a great admiration for Wells, i.e. as a writer, and he was a very early influence on me' (IV, p. 422). And in a review of Edmund Blunden's *Cricket Country*, he spoke of 'his nostalgia for the golden age before 1914, when the world was peaceful as it has never since been' (III, p. 48).

The *TLS* reviewer characterizes *Coming Up For Air* as a 'cautionary tale' with 'an impassioned and ruthless honesty of imagination' (No. 46). Winifred Horrabin notes that Bowling takes refuge in fantasy and fails to find his paradise (No. 48). John Cogley speaks of Orwell's desperate nostalgia for the pre-war world of security and continuity, but lapses into a rather fatuous conclusion (No. 49). Margery Allingham mentions the theme of disillusion and rather blandly calls it 'a fine book, a fair comment on one aspect of life today' (No. 47). Her criticism of Orwell's use of the first-person narrator anticipates his own comment on the novel: 'Of course you

are perfectly right about my own character constantly intruding on that of the narrator. I am not a real novelist anyway, and that particular vice is inherent in writing a novel in the first person, which one should never do' (IV, p. 422).

Just after Orwell's death in 1950, *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Burmese Days* were reprinted and *Coming Up For Air* was published for the first time in America, and the reviews of Irving Howe, Edmund Fuller, Charles Rolo and Isaac Rosenfeld consider all three books. Howe praises the character of Bozo and the description of the different 'kinds of humiliation' in *Down and Out*, but calls *Coming Up For Air* 'completely predictable.' He believes that Orwell does not possess 'the creativity of the true novelist' and convincingly argues that he is best in his essays and reportage (No. 50). Fuller makes two rather surprising judgments. He claims that the 'narrative skill, characterization, and evocation of place [in *Burmese Days*] are of a high order... [it] might possibly be Orwell's finest piece of literary art'; and that Orwell, who is frequently praised for his great compassion, 'did not just dislike the human race; he downright despised it' (No. 51).

By contrast James Stern maintains that 'England never produced a novelist more honest, more courageous, more concerned with the common man.' He speaks of the breadth of Orwell's experience but claims, less convincingly, that a 'less subjective writer never lived.' Unlike Howe, Stern considers *Coming Up For Air* 'a masterpiece of characterization, an astonishing *tour de force*' (No. 52); and Rolo, who calls Orwell 'a witness to his time,' also believes that the novel is a 'masterly achievement' (No. 53). Rosenfeld, one of the best critics on Orwell, feels that his characteristic ideas were expressed in his earliest work and that he 'underwent no apparent development,' and he sees the connection between John Flory and Winston Smith. Rosenfeld thinks *Coming Up For Air* 'fails to catch the anxiety of the pre-war days,' but makes the acute and influential observation (which also links Orwell with William Morris) that he was 'a radical in politics and a conservative in feeling' (No. 54).

### *Inside the Whale*

Orwell's first collection of essays, published by Gollancz in March 1940 shortly after the Second World War broke out, emphasized a new and extremely important aspect of his work, which was recognized and appreciated by the critics. 'Charles Dickens,' the longest of his essays and one of the earliest critical studies of the novelist, is still

valuable for its freshness and vigor as well as for Orwell's suggestive identification with his subject. 'Boys' Weeklies' examines the political implications of those magazines 'sodden with the worst illusions of 1910.' And 'Inside the Whale' uses Henry Miller to exemplify the attractive and comfortable declaration of irresponsibility which Orwell himself was unable to make.

Calder-Marshall's enthusiastic review praises the 'brilliant' and 'superb' essays and patriotically attacks writers who, unlike Orwell, abandon their political conscience (No. 55). Mairet mentions the influence of Marxism on Orwell's sociological thought and states 'He is too sincere to write except when he is interested and too active in temperament to be interested in anything without doing something more than write about it' (No. 56). Victor Pritchett praises the 'lucid revelation of a mind that is alive, individual and nonconforming.'<sup>14</sup> But the *TLS* reviewer, while recognizing the 'blunt and tenacious honesty of mind,' feels that Orwell exaggerates the political significance of boys' weeklies and unfairly criticizes Dickens for his "'negative, rather unhelpful political attitude'" (No. 57). Later critics of *Animal Farm* and *1984* often make this same criticism of Orwell. Max Plowman believes the three essays are unified by the theme of political responsibility, and prophetically writes that Orwell is 'a complete critic but essentially a satirist' (No. 58).

Robert Herring feels that Orwell overrates Henry Miller, who lacks political commitment; but he observes that Orwell's 'sharpness and detachment, which is after all merely sanity,' seems brilliant (No. 59). This is a tribute to Orwell's ability to convey partisan feeling in an objective fashion. Queenie Leavis's review in the influential *Scrutiny*, edited in Cambridge by F.R. Leavis, states that Orwell is not essentially an imaginative writer: 'I have read three or four novels by him, and the only impression those dreary books left on me is that nature didn't intend him to be a novelist.' (Orwell confirms this judgment in IV, p. 422, quoted on page 17.) But she was one of the first critics to draw attention to the distinctive qualities of Orwell's non-fiction, which is closely related to his personal experience and based on independent thought: 'he has lived an active life among all classes and in several countries, he isn't the usual parlour-Bolshevik seeing literature through political glasses' (No. 60).

### *The Lion and the Unicorn*

*The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, the first in a series of Searchlight booklets which offered socialistic solutions to wartime problems, analyzes the distinctive cultural characteristics and class structure of England at the same time that it

attacks the political system from a Left-wing point of view. It was published by Secker & Warburg in February 1941 in an edition of 7,500 copies; and the first section was later reprinted as the title-essay of *England Your England*. Dwight Macdonald mentions Orwell's confident but false prophecies (which continued through 1984), praises 'the *human* quality to Orwell's political writing' and summarizes his political program as 'nationalization of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries; democratization of education; equalization of personal incomes; freedom for India' (No. 61). Many of these plans were later implemented when the Labour government was elected in 1945.

### *Animal Farm*

In his Preface to the Ukrainian edition of 1947, Orwell describes the creative impulse of his barnyard bolshevism:

I saw a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat. I proceeded to analyse Marx's theory from the animals' point of view.

And he also states that 'For the past ten years,' that is, since the Spanish Civil War, 'I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement' (III, pp. 405–6).

*Animal Farm* was written between November 1943 and February 1944, after Stalingrad and before Normandy, when the Allies first became victorious and there was a strong feeling of solidarity with the Russians, who even in defeat had deflected Hitler from England. Orwell was nevertheless shocked when his satire was rejected for political reasons by Gollancz, Cape, and Faber. T.S.Eliot, a director of Faber, softened the blow by comparing Orwell to Swift and praising the literary qualities of the fable. But Eliot, who wrongly assumed that the most intellectual animals are best qualified to run the farm, was unwilling to publish what he considered to be a negative, Trotskyist criticism of the Russian ally:<sup>15</sup>

We agree that it is a distinguished piece of writing; that the fable is very skilfully handled, and that the narrative keeps one's interest on its own plane—and that is something very few authors have achieved since *Gulliver*. On the other hand, we have no conviction (and I am sure none of the other

directors would have) that this is the right point of view from which to criticise the political situation at the present time....

My own dissatisfaction with this apologue is that the effect is simply one of negation. It ought to excite some sympathy with what the author wants, as well as sympathy with his objections to something: and the positive point of view, which I take to be generally Trotskyite, is not convincing. I think you split your vote, without getting any compensating strong adhesion from either party—i.e. those who criticise Russian tendencies from the point of view of a purer communism, and those who, from a very different point of view, are alarmed about the future of small nations. And after all, your pigs are far more intellectual than the other animals, and therefore the best qualified to run the farm—in fact, there couldn't have been an *Animal Farm* at all without them: so that what was needed (someone might argue), was not more communism but more public-spirited pigs.

Orwell was quite naturally frustrated and angry by the rejections, and in July wrote to his agent that if Secker & Warburg did not publish it, 'I am not going to tout it round further publishers, which wastes time & may lead to nothing, but shall publish it myself.... I have already half-arranged to do so & have got the necessary financial backing' (III, p. 187). Though Orwell made arrangements with his friend Paul Potts at the Whitman Press, who had the necessary paper despite wartime shortages, *Animal Farm* was in fact published by Secker & Warburg in August 1945, at a crucial moment in world history. In the previous four months, Roosevelt, Mussolini and Hitler had died, Churchill had been voted out of office, Germany had surrendered and, on 6 August, the atomic bomb had exploded over Hiroshima. Of the Big Three, only Stalin still survived.

That month was also a turning-point in Orwell's history, for half a million copies of *Animal Farm* were sold through the American Book-of-the-Month Club and it was translated into thirty-nine languages. Orwell earned about £12,000 from the book by 1950 and became financially successful for the first time in his life. There were BBC radio versions of the satire in 1947 and 1952, it was made into an extremely effective animated cartoon in 1954, and by 1972 sales in hardcover and paperback editions had reached eleven million.

Though one bright American editor at Dial Press rejected *Animal Farm* because 'it was impossible to sell animal stories in the USA' (IV, p. 110), most of the American resistance to it came from Communists and fellow-travellers. As Peter Viereck wrote in a journal edited by a promising young academic called Henry Kissinger:<sup>16</sup>

With the characteristic hatred of literary Stalinoids for genuine democratic socialists (a hatred more frenzied and frothing than any they expend on fascists), [Angus] Cameron also was among those who after the war prevented Little, Brown from publishing George Orwell's anticommunist satire, *Animal Farm*. Some 18 to 20 publishers, almost all the leading ones, turned down the best anti-Soviet satire of our time. In view of its wit, its readability, its sale-ability, and its democratic outlook, the most likely motive for these rejections is the brilliantly successful infiltration (then, not now) of Stalinoid sympathizers in the book world.

All the evaluations of *Animal Farm* were influenced by the politics of the reviewers and their attitude toward Stalinist Russia. Graham Greene describes Orwell's difficulty in publishing the satire in the face of wartime appeasement and prophesies the animated cartoon of the book (No. 62). The review of the 'Stalinoid,' Kingsley Martin, who had refused to publish Orwell's reports on Spain, gives a distorted view of Orwell's political development, for his criticism of the Soviet Union, which began with *The Road to Wigan Pier*, was not a recent development. Like Eliot, Martin calls Orwell a Trotskyist (the common name for anyone who opposed Stalin), claims that he has 'lost faith in mankind' and that his satire 'is historically false and neglectful of the complex truth about Russia' (No. 63).

Connolly describes Orwell as 'a revolutionary who is in love with 1910' and paints a brighter picture of Stalinist Russia than Orwell would allow (No. 64). Arthur Schlesinger Jr, writing on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, calls the satire 'the most compact and witty expression of the left-wing British reaction to Soviet Communism' and 'a wise, compassionate and illuminating fable for our times.'<sup>17</sup> He also anticipates Irving Howe's *Politics and the Novel* (1957) and links Orwell with Silone and Koestler as political novelists. Rosenfeld also compares Orwell with Koestler and admits Orwell's allegiance belongs to an old and honorable liberalism that 'still holds as its dearest thing the right to liberty of judgment.' But he nevertheless feels 'this is a disappointing piece of work,' inspired by a middle of the way imagination that 'cannot seriously deal with events that are themselves extreme' (No. 65).

By contrast, Edmund Wilson, who mentions Orwell's difficulty in publishing *Burmese Days* in England, feels unqualified enthusiasm. Wilson, in a rare accolade, calls the book 'absolutely first-rate,' compares Orwell with Voltaire and Swift, and thinks that he is 'likely to emerge as one of the ablest and most interesting writers that the English have produced' in the last decade (No. 66). Wilson's influential

*New Yorker* review praised Orwell's literary qualities just as Schlesinger had admired his political beliefs, and these two authoritative estimates helped to solidify Orwell's reputation in America. Northrop Frye is very perceptive about the inconsistencies of Orwell's satiric allegory. He believes 'The final metamorphosis of pigs into humans at the end is a fantastic disruption of the sober logic of the tale' and that the parallelism of Stalinism and Czarism is 'complete nonsense, and Mr Orwell must know it to be nonsense' (No. 67).

*Critical Essays* (US title: *Dickens, Dali and Others*)

Orwell's second collection of ten essays, published by Secker & Warburg in February 1946, reprinted the earlier studies of Dickens and boys' weeklies and included eight other social interpretations of Kipling, Wells, Yeats, Koestler, Wodehouse, Dali, comic postcards and thrillers. In each of his essays on popular culture Orwell favorably compared the static and old-fashioned view expressed in these works with that of their harsher and crueler successors. His book confirmed the considerable reputation he had established with *Animal Farm* and was greeted enthusiastically by the critics, who saw the originality and importance of Orwell's essays on the political and social implications of popular art. Stuart Hampshire, Evelyn Waugh, Eric Bentley, nearly everyone but Edmund Wilson himself, compared Orwell's essays with those of Wilson, who was generally regarded as the greatest American critic.

Pritchett describes the essays as 'brilliant examples of political anthropology applied to literature by a non-conforming mind' and, returning to ideas that originated in connection with *Coming Up For Air*, says 'His traditions are those of the Right, and he cannot quite forgive the world for driving him to the Left.'<sup>18</sup> Hampshire calls Orwell a 'moralist-critic' with 'enlightened good sense,' commends his 'penetration and integrity' and considers him 'potentially the most authoritative and interesting of English critics' (No. 68). Waugh's essay is valuable for its discussion of Orwell's capacity for clear-sighted analysis and his lack of religious beliefs. He writes that the essays represent 'the new humanism of the common man,' and says: 'he never seems to have been touched at any point by a conception of religious thought and life.... He frequently brings his argument to the point when having, with great acuteness, seen the falsity and internal contradiction of the humanist

view of life, there seems no alternative but the acceptance of a revealed religion, and then stops short' (No. 69).

Harry Levin places Orwell in opposition to the tradition of English critics from Pater and Arnold through Eliot, Empson and Connolly, and praises his unfashionable yet 'comprehensive grasp and trenchant analysis of the patterns of popular culture' (No. 70). Bentley, like Howe, believes that the essays represent Orwell 'at his best,' compares him to Dickens, and emphasizes the connection between his life and art: he 'has sought experiences which would bring him close to the central events of the time.' Bentley also admires his 'straight-forwardness, generous intelligence, and serious devotion to culture' (No. 71). Wylie Sypher agrees with Orwell's definition of himself as 'a liberal writer at a moment when liberalism is coming to an end.' He praises Orwell's independence and flexibility, and identifies one of his dominant political ideas: the abiding disillusionment with 'the left-wingers who have wished "to be anti-fascist without being anti-totalitarian"' (No. 72).

Wilson also praises Orwell as 'the only contemporary master' of sociological criticism, though he is surprised that he takes Dali's infantile and self-conscious outrages so seriously. He commends Orwell's 'readiness to think for himself, courage to speak his mind, the tendency to deal with concrete realities rather than theoretical positions, and a prose style that is both downright and disciplined' (No. 73). Middleton Murry considers Orwell and Connolly 'the two most gifted critics of their generation.' Like Waugh, he comments on Orwell's lack of religious philosophy and then presents his own fuzzy and narcissistic beliefs (No. 74). Arvin places Orwell in the commonsensical school of English critics who are free from abstractions, impatient with 'nonsense' and capable of realistic perceptions, and writes that his work is 'humane at the core and salutary in its main effects' (No. 75).

#### GEORGE WOODCOCK ON ORWELL

George Woodcock, who knew Orwell in the 1940s, wrote the first serious essay about him in 1946, before the appearance of *1984*. This provides a biographical introduction to and a fair and far-sighted judgment of his work. He describes Orwell as 'an independent socialist with libertarian tendencies,' writes that his works are 'essentially autobiographical and personal' and that the 'literary merits...are

much more consistent and impressive than the political qualities.’ Woodcock also places Orwell in the tradition of the English radical novelists— Godwin, Dickens, Wells—and makes a fundamental criticism of his two main weaknesses: the superficial ‘failure to penetrate deeply into the rooted causes of the injustices and lies against which he fights, and [as Eliot observed] the lack of any really constructive vision for the future of man’ (No. 76).

### 1984

1984 was begun in August 1946 and finished twenty-seven months later in November 1948, and Orwell was seriously ill for much of that time. He was sick in bed in April 1947, ill in May and September, and forced into bed again in October. He entered a tuberculosis sanatorium near Glasgow in December 1947 and remained there until June 1948; suffered a relapse in September and October, and was seriously ill in November and December 1948. He entered another sanatorium in the Cotswolds in January 1949, corrected the proofs there, and was in hospital in Gloucestershire and London for the last year of his life. In October 1948 Orwell wrote to Fredric Warburg:

I am not pleased with the book, but I am not absolutely dissatisfied. I first thought of it in 1943. I think it is a good idea, but the execution would have been better if I had not written it under the influence of T.B. I haven’t definitely fixed on a title but I am hesitating between Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Last Man in Europe. (IV, p. 448)

1984, which had a first printing of 26,500, was published on 8 June 1949, during the Cold War, and created some bitter political controversy. Orwell attempted to clarify his position as early as 16 June and wrote:

My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralised economy is liable and which have already been partly realised in Communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it *could* arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences. The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasise that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere. (IV, p. 502)

Critics immediately recognized that Orwell's expression of the political experience of an entire generation gave *1984* a veritably mythic power and that it was one of the most important books of the age. It was condensed in the *Reader's Digest* and translated into twenty-three languages, and has sold eleven million copies. In 1956 the novel was made into a film with Edmund O'Brien as Winston Smith.

Fredric Warburg was the first to read *1984*, and his perceptive publisher's report notes the influence of Swift, Dostoyevsky, Jack London and Arthur Koestler. He observes the element of sadomasochism and the unrelieved pessimism, and feels that the brief lyricism merely intensifies the later horrors (No. 77). Julian Symons states that the book is really about power and corruption, and that Orwell is 'a novelist interested in ideas, rather than in personal relationships' (No. 78). Orwell agreed with Symons that the novel is marred by the schoolboy sensationalism of the torture scenes.

In a long, brilliant, pessimistic letter, written from California in October 1949, Aldous Huxley praises Orwell's book, suggests that the horrors of *1984* are destined to modulate into the nightmare of *Brave New World* and expresses his fears about a devastating atomic war:<sup>19</sup>

I had to wait a long time before being able to embark on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Agreeing with all that the critics have written of it, I need not tell you, yet once more, how fine and how profoundly important the book is....

The philosophy of the ruling minority in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a sadism which has been carried to its logical conclusion by going beyond sex and denying it. Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and that these ways will resemble those which I described in *Brave New World*....

Within the next generation I believe that the world's rulers will discover that infant conditioning and narco-hypnosis are more efficient, as instruments of government, than clubs and prisons, and the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience.... The change will be brought about as a result of a felt need for increased efficiency. Meanwhile, of course, there may be a large-scale biological and atomic war—in which case we shall have nightmares of other and scarcely imaginable kinds.

Harold Nicolson, like many others, compares Orwell to Huxley, writes that 'The Inferno atmosphere of the story is cunningly created and well-maintained,' and finds the book impressive even though

the vision of the future is not convincing (No. 79). Mark Schorer praises the ‘work of pure horror’ and calls it an ‘expression of Mr Orwell’s moral and intellectual indignation before the concept of totalitarianism.... No other work of this generation has made us desire freedom more earnestly or loathe tyranny with such fulness.’<sup>20</sup> Lionel Trilling, who mentions Orwell’s connection to the culture of the past and Winston’s severance from it, describes *1984* as a ‘profound, terrifying and wholly fascinating book’ about ‘the ultimate threat to human freedom,’ and as a work in which ‘the nature of power is defined by the pain it can inflict on others.’<sup>21</sup> The influential reviews of Schorer and Trilling virtually guaranteed the success of the book in America.

Diana Trilling speaks of the ‘cruelty of its imagination’ and believes that Orwell’s purpose is to make us ‘understand the ultimate dangers involved wherever power moves under the guise of order and rationality’ (No. 80). Daniel Bell and Philip Rahv shrewdly observe that the satire is an extreme version of what is actually present today, and Bell agrees with Diana Trilling that Orwell is concerned about how to control the abuse of power (No. 81). Rahv distinguishes Orwell’s qualities from the weaknesses of many Left-wing writers and thinks *1984* is ‘far and away the best of Orwell’s books.’ Rahv considers the novel in the context of Utopian fiction and places it in ‘the melancholy mid-century genre of lost illusions and Utopia betrayed’ (No. 82).

Samuel Sillen’s abusive review, entitled ‘Maggot-of-the-Mont,’ dismisses the novel as ‘cynical rot’ and a ‘diatribe against the human race’ (No. 83). It is typical of the violent attacks of the Communists, who felt that Orwell, more than any other writer, was the greatest danger to their cause. By contrast, Golo Mann’s review in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* is interesting as a liberal German’s reaction to *1984* during the Cold War. (Golo’s father, Thomas Mann, who had gone into exile and lived in America since 1939, left that country in 1952 during Senator McCarthy’s anti-Communist witch-hunt.) Writing from California, Golo Mann warns against the present danger of totalitarian ideology in Germany as well as in Russia, and significantly emphasizes that the novel is not merely an attack on Communism (No. 84). As a historian, Mann is particularly concerned with the importance of historical truth and with the dangers of destroying the past in order to strengthen the present dictatorships, ideas that Orwell had considered in his essays ‘Politics and the English Language’ and ‘The Prevention of Literature.’