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George Orwell

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Eric Blair, was born in Bengal, India, in 1903. Educated in England at Eton, he moved to Burma in 1922 where he joined the Indian Imperial Police for five years. He eventually resigned because of his increasing disillusionment with British imperialism.

After a period doing a variety of jobs in France he returned to England where opened a village shop. Using the pseudonym, George Orwell, he began writing articles for magazines. His first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) described his experiences as a struggling writer. This book was followed by three novels, *Burmese Days* (1934), *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936).

In 1936 Orwell was commissioned by Victor Gollancz to produce a documentary account of unemployment in the north of England for his Left Book Club. *The Road to Wigan Pier* established Orwell as one of Britain's leading writers and marked a high point in literary journalism. A. J. Ayer met him at this time. He later recalled in his autobiography, *Part of My Life* (1977): "Though he held no religious belief, there

was something of a religious element in George's socialism. It owed nothing to Marxist theory and much to the tradition of English Nonconformity. He saw it primarily as an instrument of justice. What he hated in contemporary politics, almost as much as the abuse of power, was the dishonesty and cynicism which allowed its evils to be veiled.... His moral integrity made him hard upon himself and sometimes harsh in his judgement of other people, but he was no enemy to pleasure. He appreciated good food and drink, enjoyed gossip, and when not oppressed by ill-health was very good company. He was another of those whose liking for me made me think better of myself."

Orwell, a committed socialist, went to Spain in December 1936 to report on the Spanish Civil War. He soon decided to join the struggle against the Nationalist Army and became a member of the Lenin Division in Barcelona, a unit under the control of the Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM).

In January 1937 Orwell, given the rank of corporal, was sent to join the offensive at Aragón. The following month he was moved to Huesca. After 115 days at the frontline he was granted leave and he returned to Barcelona. While there he witnessed the May Riots.

Orwell returned to Huesca on 12th May. Promoted to second lieutenant, he commanded a unit of 30 men. Soon after arriving back at the front he was hit by a sniper's bullet which passed through his neck. As a result of the wound, Orwell's left side was paralyzed and he temporarily lost his voice.

While in hospital Orwell heard that the Workers Party of Marxist Unification had been declared an illegal organization. Orwell was now in danger of being murdered by communists in the Republican Army. With the help of the British Consul in Barcelona, Orwell was able to escape to France.

When Orwell returned to England he wrote about his experiences of the Spanish Civil War in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). In the book Orwell attempted to expose the propaganda disseminated by newspapers in Britain. This included attacks on both the right-wing press and the *Daily Worker*, a paper controlled by the Communist Party. Although one of the best books ever written about war, it sold only 1,500 copies during the next twelve years.

Orwell published *Coming up for Air* in 1939. In August 1941 Orwell began work for the Eastern Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). His main task was to write the scripts for a weekly news commentary on the Second World War. Orwell's scripts were broadcast to the people of India between the end of 1941 and early 1943. During this period Orwell also worked for the *Observer* newspaper.

In 1943 Aneurin Bevan, the editor of the socialist journal *Tribune*, recruited Orwell to write a weekly column, *As I Please*. Orwell's plain, lucid style, made him highly effective as a campaigning journalist and some of his best writing was done during this period.

Orwell next book, *Animal Farm*, was a satire in fable form of the communist revolution in Russia. The book, heavily influenced by his experiences of the way communists behaved during the Spanish Civil War, upset many of his left-wing friends and his former publisher, Victor Gollancz, rejected it. Published in 1945, *Animal Farm* became one of Britain's most popular books.



George Orwell with his adopted son in 1946.

Orwell's final book was influenced by his failing health and his disillusionment with a Labour government that had been elected with a large majority in the 1945 General Election but made little attempt to introduce the kind of socialism that he believed in.

In 1945 Orwell reviewed the anti-Utopian novel *We* by Yevgeni Zamyatin for *Tribune*. The book inspired his novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Published in 1949, the book was a pessimistic satire about the threat of political tyranny in the future. The novel had a tremendous impact and many of the new words and phrases used in the book passed

into everyday language.

George Orwell died of tuberculosis in 1950.

Primary Sources

[^ Main Article ^](#)

(1) George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)

I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black.

Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Senor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'. Tipping was forbidden by law; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from an hotel manager for trying to tip a lift-boy. There were no private motor cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport were painted red and black. The revolutionary posters were everywhere, flaming from the walls in clean reds and blues that made the few remaining advertisements look like daubs of mud. Down the Ramblas, the wide central artery of the town where crowds of people streamed constantly to and fro, the loud-speakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night. And it was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no 'well-dressed' people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls or some variant of the militia uniform. All this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. Also I believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a Workers' State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers' side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being.

(2) George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)

I had been about ten days at the front when it happened. The whole experience of being hit by a bullet is very interesting and I think it is worth describing in detail.

It was at the corner of the parapet, at five o'clock in the morning. This was always a dangerous time, because we had the dawn at our backs, and if you stuck your head above the parapet it was clearly outlined against the sky. I was talking to the sentries preparatory to changing the guard. Suddenly, in the very middle of saying something, I felt - it is very hard to describe what I felt, though I remember it with the utmost vividness.

Roughly speaking it was the sensation of being at the centre of an explosion. There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all round me, and I felt a tremendous shock - no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal; with it a sense of utter weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shrivelled up to nothing. The sandbags in front of me receded into immense distance. I fancy you would feel much the same if you were struck by lightning. I knew immediately that I was hit, but because of the seeming bang and flash I thought it was a rifle nearby that had gone off accidentally and shot me. All this happened in a space of time much less than

a second. The next moment my knees crumpled up and I was falling, my head hitting the ground with a violent bang which, to my relief, did not hurt. I had a numb, dazed feeling, a consciousness of being very badly hurt, but no pain in the ordinary sense.

The American sentry I had been talking to had started forward. Gosh! Are you hit?' People gathered round. There was the usual fuss - 'Lift him up! Where's he hit? Get his shirt open!' etc., etc. The American called for a knife to cut my shirt open. I knew that there was one in my pocket and tried to get it out, but discovered that my right arm was paralysed. Not being in pain, I felt a vague satisfaction. This ought to please my wife, I thought; she had always wanted me to be wounded, which would save me from being killed when the great battle came. It was only now that it occurred to me to wonder where I was hit, and how badly; I could feel nothing, but I was conscious that the bullet had struck me somewhere in the front of the body. When I tried to speak I found that I had no voice, only a faint squeak, but at the second attempt I managed to ask where I was hit. In the throat, they said. Harry Webb our stretcher-bearer, had brought a bandage and one of the little bottles of alcohol they gave us for field-dressings. As they lifted me up a lot of blood poured out of my mouth, and I heard a Spaniard behind me say that the bullet had gone clean through my neck. I felt the alcohol, which at ordinary times would sting like the devil, splash onto the wound as a pleasant coolness.

They laid me down again while somebody fetched a stretcher. As soon as I knew that the bullet had gone clean through my neck I took it for granted that I was done for. I had never heard of a man or an animal getting a bullet through the middle of the neck and surviving it. The blood was dribbling out of the corner of my mouth. 'The artery's gone,' I thought. I wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut; not many minutes, presumably. Everything was very blurry. There must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed. And that too was interesting - I mean it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time. My first thought, conventionally enough, was for my wife. My second was a violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done suits me so well. I had time to feel this very vividly. The stupid mischance infuriated me. The meaninglessness of it! To be bumped off, not even in battle, but in this stale corner of the trenches, thanks to a moment's carelessness! I thought too of the man who had shot me - wondered what he was like, whether he was a Spaniard or a foreigner, whether he knew he had got me, and so forth. I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting. It may be, though, that if you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different.

(3) George Orwell, *The Observer* (1st August, 1948)

Whatever may happen to the great public schools when our educational system is reorganized, it is almost impossible that Eton should survive in anything like its present form, because the training it offers was originally intended for a landowning aristocracy and had become an anachronism long before 1939.

It also has one great virtue and that is a tolerant and civilized atmosphere which gives each boy a fair chance of developing his own individuality. The reason is perhaps that, being a very rich school, it can afford a large staff, which means that the masters are not overworked.

(4) George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

Sheffield, I suppose, could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the Old World: its inhabitants, who want it to be pre-eminent in everything, very likely to make that claim for it. It has a population of half a million and it contains fewer decent buildings than the average East Anglian village of five hundred. And the stench! If at rare moments you stop smelling sulphur it is because you have begun smelling gas. Even the shallow river that runs through the town is usually bright yellow with some chemical or other.

Once I halted in the street and counted the factory chimneys I could see; there were thirty-three of them, but there would have been far more in the air had not been obscured by smoke. One scene especially lingers in my mind. A frightful patch of waste ground trampled bare of grass and littered with newspapers and old saucepans. To the right an isolated row of gaunt four-roomed houses, dark red, blackened by smoke. To the left an interminable vista of factory chimneys, chimney beyond chimney, fading away into a dim blackish haze. Behind me a railway

embankment made of slag from furnaces. In front, across the patch of waste ground, a cubical building of red and yellow brick, with the sign 'Thomas Grocock, Haulage Contractor'.

(5) George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

It hardly needs pointing out that at the moment we are in a very serious mess, so serious that even the dullest-witted people find it difficult to remain unaware of it. We are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive. For enormous blocks of the working class the conditions of life are such as I have described in the opening chapters of this book, and there is no chance of those conditions showing any fundamental improvement. The very best the English working class can hope for is an occasional temporary decrease in unemployment when this or that industry is artificially stimulated by, for instance, rearmament.

And all the while everyone who uses his brain knows that Socialism, as a world-system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. The world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must all co-operate and see to it that everyone does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it unless he had some corrupt motive for clinging to the present system.

(6) George Orwell, *Charles Dickens* (1939)

In *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, Dickens attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached. Yet he managed to do it without making himself hated, and, more he has become a national institution himself. In its attitude towards Dickens the English public has always been a little like the elephant which feels a blow with a walking-stick as a delightful tickling. Dickens seems to have succeeded in attacking everybody and antagonizing nobody. Naturally this makes one wonder whether after all there was something unreal in his attack upon society.

The truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. Hence the utter lack of any constructive suggestion anywhere in his work. He attacks law, parliamentary government, the educational system and so forth, without ever really suggesting what he would put in their places. Of course it is not necessarily the business of a novelist, or a satirist, to make constructive suggestions, but the point is that Dickens's attitude is at bottom not even destructive. There is no clear sign that he wants the existing order to be overthrown, or that he believes it would make very much difference if it were overthrown. For in reality his target is not so much society as 'human nature'.

It is said that Macaulay refused to review *Hard Times* because he disapproved of its "sullen Socialism". There is not a line in the book that can properly be called Socialistic; indeed, its tendency if anything is pro-capitalist, because its whole moral is that capitalists ought to be kind, not that workers ought to be rebellious. And so far as social criticism goes, one can never extract much more from Dickens than this, unless one deliberately reads meanings into him. His whole message is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent.

(7) George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941)

England is a family with the wrong members in control. Almost entirely we are governed by the rich, and by people who stay in positions of command by right of birth. Few if any of these people are consciously treacherous, some of them are not even fools.... The shock of disaster brought a few able men like Bevin to the front, but in general we are commanded by people who managed to live through the years 1931-9 without even discovering that Hitler was dangerous. A generation of the unteachable is hanging upon us like a necklace of corpses.

(8) George Orwell, BBC radio broadcast (20th December 1941)

The Japanese successes are still very serious for us. At present the pressure of Japanese troops has died down in Malaya, where heavy casualties have been inflicted upon them. Large Indian reinforcements have been landed in Rangoon. The Governor of Hong Kong states that heavy fighting is in progress, on the island itself.

In all this we must remember that the Japanese power, though great, can only aim at a rapid outright victory. The three Axis powers together can produce 60 million tons of steel every year, whereas the USA alone can produce about 88 million. This in itself is not a striking difference. But Japan cannot send help to Germany, and Germany cannot send help to Japan. For the Japanese only produce 7 million tons of steel a year. For steel, as for many other things, they must depend on the stores they have ready.

If the Japanese seem to be making a wild attempt, we must remember that many of them think it their duty to their Emperor, who is their God, to conquer the whole world. This is not a new idea in Japan. Hideyoshi when he died in 1598 was trying to conquer the whole world known to him, and he knew about India and Persia. It was because he failed that Japan closed the country to all foreigners.

In January of this year, to take a recent example, a manifesto appeared in the Japanese press signed by Japanese Admirals and Generals stating that it was Japan's mission to set Burma and India free. Japan was of course to do this by conquering them. What it would be like to be free under the heel of Japan the Chinese can tell us, and the Koreans.

(9) George Orwell, BBC radio broadcast (28th March 1942)

The Daily Mirror, one of the most widely read of English newspapers, has been threatened with suppression because of its violent and sometimes irresponsible criticisms of the Government. The question was debated in both Houses of Parliament with the greatest vigour. This may seem a waste of time in the middle of a world war, but in fact it is evidence of the extreme regard for freedom of the press which exists in this country. It is very unlikely that the Daily Mirror will actually be suppressed. Even those who are out of sympathy with it politically are against taking so drastic a step, because they know that a free press is one of the strongest supports of national unity and morale, even when it occasionally leads to the publication of undesirable matter. When we look at the newspapers of Germany or Japan, which are simply the mouthpieces of the Government, and then at the British newspapers, which are free to criticise or attack the government in any way that does not actually assist the enemy, we see how profound is the difference between totalitarianism and democracy.

(10) George Orwell, BBC radio broadcast (6th June 1942)

On two days of this week, two air raids, far greater in scale than anything yet seen in the history of the world, have been made on Germany. On the night of the 30th May over a thousand planes raided Cologne, and on the night of the 1st June, over a thousand planes raided Essen, in the Ruhr district. These have since been followed up by two further raids, also on a big scale, though not quite so big as the first two. To realise the significance of these figures, one has got to remember the scale of the air raids made hitherto. During the autumn and winter of 1940, Britain suffered a long series of raids which at that time were quite unprecedented. Tremendous havoc was worked on London, Coventry, Bristol and various other English cities. Nevertheless, there is no reason to think that in even the biggest of these raids more than 500 planes took part. In addition, the big bombers now being used by the RAF carry a far heavier load of bombs than anything that could be managed two years ago. In sum, the amount of bombs dropped on either Cologne or Essen would be quite three times as much as the Germans ever dropped in any one of their heaviest raids on Britain. (Censored: We in this country know what destruction those raids accomplished and have therefore some picture of what has happened in Germany.) Two days after the Cologne raid, the British reconnaissance planes were sent over as usual to take photographs of the damage which the bombers had done, but even after that period, were unable to get any photographs because of the pall of smoke which still hung over the city. It should be noticed that these 1000-plane raids were carried out solely by the RAF with planes manufactured in Britain. Later in the year, when the American airforce begins to take a hand, it is believed that it will be possible to carry out raids with as many as 2,000 planes at a time. One German city after another will be attacked in this manner. These attacks, however, are not wanton and are not delivered against the civilian population, although non-combatants are inevitably killed in them.

Cologne was attacked because it is a great railway junction in which the main German railroads cross each other and also an important manufacturing centre. Essen was attacked because it is the centre of the German armaments industry and contains the huge factories of Krupp, supposed to be the largest armaments works in the world. In 1940, when the Germans were bombing Britain, they did not expect retaliation on a very heavy scale, and therefore were not afraid to boast in their propaganda about the slaughter of civilians which they were bringing about and the terror which their raids aroused. Now, when the tables are turned, they are beginning to cry out against the whole business of aerial bombing, which they declare to be both cruel and useless. The people of this country are not revengeful, but they remember what happened to themselves two years ago, and they remember how the Germans talked when they thought themselves safe from retaliation. That they did think themselves safe there can be little doubt. Here, for example, are some extracts from the speeches of Marshal Goering, the Chief of the German Air Force. "I have personally looked into the air-raid defences of the Ruhr. No bombing planes could get there. Not as much as a single bomb could be dropped from an enemy plane", August 9th, 1939. "No hostile aircraft can penetrate the defences of the German air force", September 7th, 1939. Many similar statements by the German leaders could be quoted.

(11) George Orwell, *Why I Write* (September, 1946)

I think there are four great motives for writing, at any rate for writing prose. They exist in different degrees in every writer, and in any one writer the proportions will vary from time to time, according to the atmosphere in which he is living. They are:

1. Sheer egotism. Desire to seem clever, to be talked about, to be remembered after death, to get your own back on grown-ups who snubbed you in children, etc. etc.
2. Aesthetic enthusiasm. Perception of beauty in the external world, or, on the other hand, in words and their right arrangement. Pleasure in the impact of one sound on another, in the firmness of good prose or the rhythm of a good story. Desire to share an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed.
3. Historical impulse. Desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity.
4. Political purpose - using the word 'political' in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.

It can be seen how these various impulses must war against one another, and how they must fluctuate from person to person and from time to time. By nature - taking your nature to be the state you have attained when you are first adult - I am a person in whom the first three motives would outweigh the fourth. In a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books, and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties. As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer.

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic Socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows.

(12) A. J. Ayer, *Part of My Life* (1977)

Another new friend that I made at this time in Paris was George Orwell, who was then a foreign correspondent for the *Observer*. He had been in College at Eton in the same election as Cyril Connolly, but had left before I came there. I first heard of him in 1937 when he published *The Road to Wigan Pier* for Gollancz's Left Book Club. By the time that I met him in Paris, I had also read two of his other autobiographical books, *Homage to Catalonia* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and greatly admired them both. Though I came to know him well enough for him to describe me as a great friend of his in a letter written to one of our former Eton masters in April 1946, he was not very communicative to me about himself. For instance, he never spoke to me about his wife, Eileen

O'Shaughnessy, whose death in March 1945 left him in charge of their adopted son, who was still under a year old. I had assumed that it was simply through poverty that he had acquired the material for his book *Down and Out in Paris and London* by working as a dish-washer in Paris restaurants and living as a tramp in England, before he escaped into private tutoring, but I came to understand that it was also an act of expiation for his having served the cause of British colonialism by spending five years in Burma as an officer of the Imperial Police. Not that he was wholly without respect for the tradition of the British Empire. In the revealing and perceptive essay on Rudyard Kipling, which is reproduced in his book of *Critical Essays*, he criticizes Kipling for his failure to see "that the map is painted red chiefly in order that the coolie may be exploited," but he goes on to make the point that "the nineteenth century Anglo-Indians... were at any rate people who did things," and from his talk as well as his writings I gained the impression that for all their philistinism he preferred the administrators and soldiers whom Kipling idealized to the ineffectual hypocrites of what he sometimes called "the pansy left".

Though he held no religious belief, there was something of a religious element in George's socialism. It owed nothing to Marxist theory and much to the tradition of English Nonconformity. He saw it primarily as an instrument of justice. What he hated in contemporary politics, almost as much as the abuse of power, was the dishonesty and cynicism which allowed its evils to be veiled. When I first got to know him, he had written but not yet published *Animal Farm*, and while he believed that the book was good he did not foresee its great success. He was to be rather dismayed by the pleasure that it gave to the enemies of any form of socialism, but with the defeat of fascism in Germany and Italy he saw the Russian model of dictatorship as the most serious threat to the realization of his hopes for a better world. He was not yet so pessimistic as he had become by the time of his writing 1984. His moral integrity made him hard upon himself and sometimes harsh in his judgement of other people, but he was no enemy to pleasure. He appreciated good food and drink, enjoyed gossip, and when not oppressed by ill-health was very good company. He was another of those whose liking for me made me think better of myself.

(13) John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (1959)

All this did not make me question communism. But it shook my belief in Stalin's infallibility, in Soviet perfection. It made me eager to re-examine all policies, all ideas, everything. My mind was receptive to new ideas for the first time in many, many years.

It was in this context that I decided to read George Orwell's *1984*, which was in the prison library. There would seem to be nothing remarkable about deciding to read a book; but we had considered Orwell a Trotskyite, which meant his books were anathema, to be denounced but not read. For years I had been curious about *1984* because it had had such a profound effect on liberals and former Communists, but I could never bring myself to read it; even if I had, I would have rejected every word of it. When I first became a Communist, my mind was opened up to a vast new body of ideas, broadening my knowledge and outlook (for the works of Communist writers were largely proscribed in our capitalist America which has its own subtle forms of censorship).

But I also entered upon a closed system of thought which cut us off from large areas of human knowledge and eventually narrowed and stultified our minds. Reading Orwell did not open my eyes; rather it was the fact that events had opened my eyes and this caused me now to read Orwell. I did not like his book. I felt it to be negative and despairing of humanity. Nevertheless I had to admit that much of what he said was true; at least he was presenting an important aspect of truth, despite the faults and distortions of which I considered him guilty. I was certain that his savage picture of the - danger of totalitarianism was true for capitalist society, as well as for communism. But then I had long known this about capitalism. What hurt now was the recognition that some of the evils which he depicted existed under communism.

(14) Thomas Pynchon, *The Road to 1984*, *The Guardian* (3rd May, 2003)

There is a photograph, taken around 1946 in Islington, of Orwell with his adopted son, Richard Horatio Blair. The little boy, who would have been around two at the time, is beaming, with unguarded delight. Orwell is holding him gently with both hands, smiling too, pleased, but not smugly so - it is more complex than that, as if he has discovered something that might be worth even more than anger - his head tilted a bit, his eyes with a careful look that might remind filmgoers of a Robert Duvall character with a backstory in which he has seen more than one

perhaps would have preferred to.

Winston Smith "believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945... " Richard Blair was born May 14, 1944. It is not difficult to guess that Orwell, in 1984, was imagining a future for his son's generation, a world he was not so much wishing upon them as warning against. He was impatient with predictions of the inevitable, he remained confident in the ability of ordinary people to change anything, if they would. It is the boy's smile, in any case, that we return to, direct and radiant, proceeding out of an unhesitating faith that the world, at the end of the day, is good and that human decency, like parental love, can always be taken for granted - a faith so honourable that we can almost imagine Orwell, and perhaps even ourselves, for a moment anyway, swearing to do whatever must be done to keep it from ever being betrayed.

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