



Essays

George Orwell , Bernard Crick (Introduction)

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This outstanding collection brings together Orwell's longer, major essays and a fine selection of shorter pieces that includes *My Country Right or Left*, *Decline of the English Murder*, *Shooting an Elephant* and *A Hanging*.

With great originality and wit Orwell unfolds his views on subjects ranging from the moral enormity of Jonathan Swift's strange genius and a revaluation of Charles Dickens to the nature of Socialism, a comic yet profound discussion of naughty sea-side picture postcards and a spirited defence of English cooking. Displaying an almost unrivalled mastery of English plain prose style, Orwell's essays challenge, move and entertain.

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Essays Details

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Sookie says

George Orwell was probably one of the most important social critique of his times. Being in the army, he traveled the world, became part of a society he was alien to and provided well thought out feedback on various issues. He was outspoken about British imperialism during his trip to India and Burma, criticized willful ignorance of liberals during Spanish war and wrote about writers, artists and their works. His body of work is vast and this one large volume doesn't cover it entirely.

George Orwell as an essayist has more impact as a writer than as a novelist. As an essayist he displays an edge, a harshness towards the (British) society that doesn't bat an eye at the world that is on fire. It is a time when there is chaos in Europe and the empire is warring in several parts of geographies. It isn't dissimilar to the world today. His observations is heavily laced with socialism and he isn't one to disagree when asked. There is an unpublished letter that is essentially Orwell telling off a publisher to stop sending him rubbish questionnaire. His book reviews include works by Oscar Wilde, Mukul Raj Anand, T S Elliot, Graham Greene, Sartre, H.G.Wells, D.H.Lawrence, to name a few. Orwell was incredibly well read and followed world politics closely.

Orwell's essay collection gives a glimpse of the world through his eyes. A fierce social critique, his opinions isn't limited to everyday politics but extends to war elsewhere, literature in different countries and art. This collection shows evolution of a man and how he changes as a person as he faces new challenges in new places and gains new experiences. Must read for any who love to see the world from the point of view of an author who believed that a dystopian future was humanity's legacy.

Paul Bryant says

Update - this just like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get next. As the dark war-torn year of 1940 begins, what does Orwell begin the year with? Why, a 50 page dissection of the work of Charles Dickens... and expressed with such breathtaking authority too :

in spite of his generosity of mind, he is not free from the special prejudices of the shabby-genteel. It is usual to claim him as a "popular" writer, a champion of the "oppressed masses"... but there are two things that condition his attitude. In the first place, he is a south-of-England man, a Cockney at that, and therefore out of touch with the bulk of the real oppressed masses, the industrial and agricultural labourers. It is interesting to see how Chesterton, another Cockney, always presents Dickens as a spokesman of "the poor", without showing much awareness of who "the poor" really are. To Chesterton, "the poor" means small shopkeepers and servants. ... The other point is that Dickens's early experiences have given him a horror of proletarian roughness...

I never read Orwell! Ok, *Animal Farm* back in school. That's all. And he must be one of the most banged-on-about authors in the history of the written word. So it really became incumbent upon one to give him a go. I wasn't looking forward that much. Wasn't he just going to be spouting the received centre-left opinion of his day and waxing on about Spain and The Beano and Greta Garbo and the lost ha'penny sherbet dib-dabs of 1938?

Anyway I browbeat myself into giving him a go so I got this big beast, the almost complete non-fiction. 1369 pages. The complete edition includes all known laundry and shopping lists.

Well, I was wrong. Now I get it. And now I'm a fan. He's so easy to read, and so interesting. He becomes your very slightly know-it-all friend. It will take me a couple of years to chew through this substantial volume but it's so full of stuff right from the first page that I thought it deserved to be reviewed section by section, starting with the first which is catchily named "1928-37".

*

The first of several surprising ideas was in essay number one – that in 1928 there were such things as almost-free newspapers. They cost a farthing then, which was a quarter of a penny. The loss they incurred was made up entirely by advertising. So, the same economic model as the online versions of every newspaper now (except those behind a paywall). And of course there are many actual free actual newspapers around. Well, I thought this was a recent-ish phenomenon, just a little bit older than the internet itself. How wrong I was.

Number two – holy crap! In an essay called "Clink" (August 1932) he's using the f AND the c words to demonstrate the kind of language used by the common criminals of England. Was this essay ever published? Surely not. But it's a good one... so I'm confused.

Number three – "Bookshop Memories" – ha, remember that popular thing *Weird Things Customers Say in Bookshops*? This is the 1936 version. People were saying pretty much the same things then. In those days some bookshops also ran lending libraries, and here Orwell turns his spotlight on another interesting question :

In a lending library you see people's real tastes, not their pretended ones, and the one thing that strikes you is how completely the "classical" English novelists have dropped out of favour. It is simply useless to put Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Trollope, etc, into the ordinary lending library; nobody takes them out... Yet it is always fairly easy to sell Dickens

I would say the same thing now, of course – no one reads anything from say before 1950... oh, EXCEPT Jane Austen!

Number four – in a review of a forgotten prison memoir called *Walls Have Mouths* Orwell reveals the ubiquity of homosexual activity up to and including male rape in a paragraph which must have stunned his readers – we were still getting used to this kind of reality in the work of James Gilligan and in movies like *American History X*. But hear Orwell :

In a convict prison homosexuality is so general that even the jailors are infected by it, and there are actual cases of jailors and convicts competing for the favours of the same nancy-boy

Well, we may dislike the homophobic terms Orwell uses but still, again, I was amazed at this subject being given any attention in public in 1936.

Number five – reading one of his acknowledged hits "Shooting an Elephant", and finding out that it was Orwell who shot the elephant! ("I did not want to shoot the elephant"). This was when he was a colonial police officer in Burma. He had a chequered career.
Onward to part two.

David says

Orwell writes so well you want to give him a standing ovation. This collection contains several classic essays -- "Shooting an Elephant", "Politics and the English Language", "Such, Such were the Joys" (memories of his schooldays) -- as well as amazing pieces on Dickens, Kipling, and the state of literature in the 1930s ("Inside the Whale"). Whether writing about the English national character, analyzing the content and effect of popular comics for boys, or explaining his own compulsion to write, Orwell is always engaging and writes in clear, crisp prose that most essayists can only aspire to.

These extraordinary essays will sweep away any niggling resentment of Orwell you might feel because you were forced to read "Animal Farm" and/or "1984" in high school, and inspire you to seek out more of his work.

Nick Black says

man, this book is such a great old friend.

Orwell is skyrocketing up my list of major 20th century writers with every one of the 255 pages I've thus far read of this 1300+ page behemoth. The man was amazingly prescient, at a deep, detailed level.

This was one of the best collections of essays I've ever read, probably second only to Freeman Dyson's *The Scientist as a Rebel*. Across 1363 pages of essays from 1928-1949 (the vast majority of them coming from 1938-1946), written for a wide gamut of publications, Orwell manages to repeat himself only a few times (usually clearly-relished zingers) -- a fine show of editing, as each annoying bit of repetition is found within an essay that simply couldn't have been left out due to other unique, interesting points. Having read it, I feel far more conversant with the politics of the pre-war years, the Fabian Society-inspired English breed of socialism, the demise of *realpolitik* as Fascism's yoke was affixed, battled and finally thrown off...Orwell is one of the most intelligent, aware and just amazingly foresighted authors of the twentieth century, and this book will find itself a place near my mattress for some time.

William2 says

Selected essays. I thought the essays here on Dickens and Kipling were revelations. About ninety percent of the essays cited by other authors that I have read are included here. I also particularly liked "Inside the Whale," a paean to Henry Miller's masterpiece, *Tropic of Cancer*.

Randy says

Given the 70+ years that have passed since the publication of most of these essays, I've weighted my evaluation of this collection toward those essays that still retain some relevance.

And granted, there is some seriously anachronistic stuff here. Some real snoozers that are stuck so firmly in time and place that only the most devoted anglophiles or Orwellians would be interested ('The Art of Donald McGill', 'England Your England', 'Boys' Weeklies').

But the majority of essays are written with terrific clarity and foresight, carried by Orwell's power of observation and knack for capturing insight in pithy, memorable sentences. Indeed, this is probably one the most quotable books I've read in a long while. Some examples:

"...you can only create if you care."

"...when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom he destroys."

"The great enemy of clear language is insincerity."

"No doubt alcohol, tobacco, and so forth are things a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing human beings must avoid."

This command of the sentence is reminiscent of Emerson's best work. But unlike Emerson, Orwell retains full command of the essay in form and function as well. Even the most anachronistic essays in this collection are still focused and rooted in finely observed detail. For this alone, 'Marrakech' and 'Such, Such Were the Joys' are worth reading.

But Orwell's sharpest and most relevant commentary can be found in the essays about the nature of political power, language, and writing ('Shooting an Elephant', 'Politics and the English Language', 'Why I Write'). In these he articulates the interplay of language and power--the way words can conceal as well as clarify. No surprise that he's thought so deeply about what would be at the heart of his masterpiece.

Even the critical pieces on Dickens and Rudyard Kipling offer insights about those authors that I hadn't considered before ('Charles Dickens', in particular, is both savage and enlightening).

Worth reading for the political essays alone and if you're an impatient reader, pick and choose what interests you from the rest.

Pink says

I've said it before. I'll say it again. It's Orwell. It's fantastic. I actually read a free Gutenberg version of his 50 essays, but it's much the same as this edition. A few of the essays were too political and only relevant to certain past events. A few were quite boring or about very obscure subjects. Yet the vast majority were absolutely fantastic, topical, relevant for today and incredibly well constructed. Essential reading for Orwell fans. Otherwise a condensed version of his best pieces might be the way to go. Several of them should be required reading for school students.

Sarah (Presto agitato) says

This is an enormous doorstop of a book, with over 1,300 pages of George Orwell's essays. Of course that doesn't cover everything he wrote, but it's an awful lot. While best known for his novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell was probably a better essayist than a novelist. This volume contains Orwell's best and most famous essays, printed many places (including online), like "Such, Such Were the Joys," "Shooting an Elephant," and "Politics and the English Language." It also includes other thought-provoking but harder to find essays like "A Hanging," and "Notes on Nationalism," as well as the excellent and still very relevant preface to the first edition of *Animal Farm*, "The Freedom of the Press."

As you would expect, there's plenty here of Orwell's favorite topics, totalitarianism, fascism, communism, and imperialism, but also much about the little details of everyday life, from how to make the perfect cup of

tea to his concept of an ideal pub. This collection has all 80 of the “As I Please” columns that Orwell wrote for the *Tribune*, a column that can be political but just as often addresses grammar and word choice, attacks clichéd writing, and bemoans the lack of technological advancement in activities such as washing dishes. Orwell wrote many book reviews as well, most of which serve more as a format for him to express his opinions than as a discussion of the books themselves. Sometimes these are on surprising but intriguing topics, such as Orwell's criticism of Tolstoy's criticism of Shakespeare. There are also some funny little gems, like a rant of a letter Orwell wrote in response to a questionnaire he was sent about the Spanish Civil War that begins, “Will you please stop sending me this bloody rubbish” and escalates from there.

This book is organized chronologically, which makes sense, but unfortunately suffers from the lack of an index. Still, for those who want to go beyond the same 10-15 essays that are printed in most anthologies, this edition will provide as many Orwell essays as just about anyone could possibly want to read.

K.D. Absolutely says

The **best** collection of essays that I've read so far.

14 well-written essays by Eric Arthur Blair (1903-1950) also known as **George Orwell**. It covers a wide range of topics from his childhood, Spanish Civil War, Mahatma Gandhi, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, Jewish religion, politics, etc to his shooting of an elephant while serving as a police in Burma. Perfectly-written in his trademark direct, clear and taut writing the style that I first encountered in his political satirical sci-fi *1984* and political fable *Animal Farm*. The only difference is that these are non-fiction. The essays made me understand what kind of a man George Orwell was: a lover of equality, justice and free will.

Such, Such Were the Joys **5 stars** - Amazing!

A very moving memoir of Orwell's stay at Crossgates, a school for the rich students in England. He only afforded to go to that school because he was a bright boy. The school kept him because he had a good chance of passing entrance exams in the prestigious universities later and that would help maintaining the image of the school. The one part that I found so sad was that the little George did not have a cake year after year during his stay at that school because his parents *could not afford it* and this was just one of the ways for a poor but bright pupil could be discriminated. This boyhood memoir is better than Roald Dahl's *Boy: A Story of Childhood* as this is more inspiring and meatier.

Charles Dickens **5 stars** -Amazing!

David Copperfield and *A Tale of the Two Cities* are my two novels that I first read when I was in a fresh college graduate in the mid-80s. That's why they will always be among my favorite classic works. In this essay, Orwell analyzes the works of Dickens in a way that is very easy to understand and will help you appreciate Dickens as a writer. Orwell said that Dickens is a moralist: he wanted to correct the wrongs that are perpetuated by either those in power or those who were rich in England during his time. However, there are a couple of his works that do not belong to this so-called social propagandist drama and they are *A Tale of the Two Cities* and *Hard Times*. All the works, including *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Our Mutual Friend* follow a certain formula and fall into the same morality theme. Orwell just made me want to line up next all the other books by Dickens that are in my to-be-read (tbr) file.

The Art of Donald McGill **3 stars**- I liked it!

Donald McGill (1875-1962) was a cartoonist whose comic strips were very popular in England during Orwell's time. Prior to this, I did not know that Britons would love daily comic strips in a way that I and my friends used to read *Baltic and Co.* on the dailies when we were growing up. Orwell examined the comic strips over the years and wrote a detailed analysis of its main theme and McGill's outlook on marriage, sex, gender equality and drunkenness. He did not say that he was McGill's fan but he would not be able to write his conclusion of this long-running comic strip had he not been a fan. Orwell, a comic strip's fan?!

Rudyard Kipling **4 stars** - I really liked it!

Orwell gave his view on T. S. Eliot's defense of Kipling being branded as a "Fascist." This label seemed to be triggered by Kipling's written article regarding a white British soldier beating a "nigger" (yes, during that time this "n" word was still printable). Orwell tends to disagree with Eliot by saying that "*there is a definite strain of sadism in him, over and above the brutality which a write of that type has to have. Kipling is a jingo imperialist, he is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting.*" Juicy, right? Considering that they were both Englishmen and highly esteemed classic novelists. However, the essay is not all negative about Kipling in Orwell's point of view. He says that Kipling was the only English write of their time who has added phrases to the language and they all became popular like: *East is East and West is West; The white man's burden; What do they know of England who only England know?; The female of the species is more deadly than the male; Somewhere East of Suez; and Paying the Dane-geld.*

Raffles and Miss Blandish **4 stars** - I really liked it!

Detailed comparison between a 501-mystery book, *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (1939) by James Hadley Chase and the book that Orwell said to be the book that inspired it, *Raffles*. I have been looking for a copy of this *Miss Blandish* book. What Orwell basically gave the plot of the story (about a girl who was raped for a long period of time and she fell in love with her rapist) but I did not take it as a spoiler. Rather, he made me want to order the book via Amazon so I can read it right away. Well, maybe in my next Amazon horde!

Shooting the Elephant **5 stars** - Amazing!

Very short yet I guess this is the best essay in the book. It talks about Orwell's stay in Burma as a policeman. He hated his job because he feels that the Burmese people do not like English people as they are the colonizers, i.e., oppressors. In this particular essay, there is a runaway elephant that has killed a native. Being a policeman, Orwell is asked to kill the elephant. I will not tell you the rest as it is too much of a spoiler. If you have no time to read the whole book, just read this while standing in the bookstore. I assure you that it will be worth the time and the pressure on your legs. You will get a glimpse – a good glimpse – of what kind of man the young Orwell was that probably drove him to write his books that are said to be anti-totalitarianism.

Politics and the English Language **4 stars** - I really liked it!

Orwell criticizing the way school professors expressed themselves in written form. He even gave excerpts of these English professors' formal passages. He said that the decline of the English language is brought about by the foolish thoughts of the writers. These thoughts were made possible because of the slovenliness of the English language. Hence, the situation was similar to a man drinking because he feels himself to be a failure and he becomes a complete failure because he drinks. He gamely offered these pieces of advice for writers:

- (i) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- (ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- (iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- (iv) Never use the foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

(v) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Reflections of Gandhi **4 stars** - I really liked it!

Orwell hailed Gandhi and his non-violence but he emphasized that the old man did not do anything without personal ambitions. If E. M. Forster's *Passage to India* was about British hypocrisy, there were also a hint of hypocrisy in Gandhi's stance and writings. For example, when Gandhi was asked what should be done with the Jews in Europe, Gandhi allegedly said that German Jews ought to commit collective suicide, which "would have aroused the world and the people of Germany to Hitler's violence." After the war, Gandhi justified himself: the Jews had been killed anyway, and might as well have died significantly.

Marrakech **3 stars** - I liked it!

Before Hitler rose in power in 1931, Jewish jokes were common in Europe. This explained the negative Jewish references that turned me off when I read my first book by Orwell a couple of years back: *Down and Out in Paris and London*. Now I know better. The Jews have that distinctive look (that was also intimated by Howard Jacobson in his Booker-award winning book, *The Finkler Question* that was my first book read this year) but they are cunning as they are gutsy in business and fond of money-lending with interest. Well, that was according to Orwell.

Looking Back on the Spanish War **3 stars** - I liked it!

The resistance of the working class against Franco. British, France and Russia sided with the urban trade union members while the Nazis Italy and Germany sided with Franco. However, Orwell questioned the intent of Russia in the war. This should have been an interesting essay but I found that war to have of little impact on me compared to WWII in the Pacific. All I know is that American novelists like Hemingway or Cummings volunteered during this period as ambulance drivers. This was because there was the Great Depression in the States so job was scarce.

Inside the Whale **5 stars** - Amazing!

This is about the feeling of claustrophobia that must have been similar to what the prophet Jonas felt while inside the whale. Orwell used as a springboard Henry Miller and his opus *The Tropic of Cancer*. Orwell praised Miller for his courage of writing something that belong to the 20's and not in fashion.

"When *Tropic of Cancer* was published the Italians were marching into Abyssinia and Hitler's concentration camps were already bulging. The international foci of the of the world were Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. It did not seem to be a moment at which a novel of outstanding value was likely to be written about American dead-beats edging drinks in the Latin Quarter (France). Of course a novelist is not obliged to write directly about contemporary history, but a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a fooler or a plain idiot."

Orwell went on explaining why he found this Miller book outstanding:

"When I first opened *Tropic of Cancer* and saw that it was full of impritable words, my immediate reaction was a refusal to be impressed. Most people's would be the same, I believe. Nevertheless after a lapse of time, the atmosphere of the book, besides innumerable details, seemed to linger in my memory in a peculiar way. Together with his other book, *Black Spring*, these two books "created a world of their own" as the saying goes. The books that do this are not necessarily good books, they maybe good bad books like *Raffles* or the *Sherlock Holmes*

stories, or perverse and morbid books like *Wuthering Heights* or *The House of the Green Shutters*... Read him (Miller) for five pages, ten pages, and you feel the peculiar relief that comes not so much from understanding as from *being understood*. ” He knows all about me,” you feel; “he wrote this especially for me.” It is as though you could hear a voice speaking to you, a friendly American voice, with no humbug in it, no moral purpose, merely an implicit assumption that we are all alike.”

England Your England **3 stars** - I liked it!

An essay that he wrote while Nazi airplanes were flying on the British skies dropping bombs. Contains his many complaints about Britain’s political system, its stand during the war, its alliances, its expanding middle class, etc.

Boys’ Weeklies **4 stars** - I really liked it!

Orwell sold newspaper dailies when he was a young boy and this essay includes his analysis of the dailies during his time. I don’t know of any newspapers in Britain so I was not able to relate to this one. However, I also sold newspapers in the province when I was a young boy.

Why I Write **5 stars** - Amazing!

From the tender age of 5 or 6, Orwell already knew that he wanted to become a writer. He was the only boy in the family of 4 that includes his mother and two sisters , older and younger. He was a lonely boy probably because he did grow up with a father and he found comfort in books: reading stories and novels and and writing poetry. At the age of 16, he read Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that made him realized that the beauty of the English language. He gave the following as motivations the drive writers to write:

- (1) Sheer egoism
- (2) Esthetic enthusiasm
- (3) Historical impulse
- (4) Political purpose

Orwell did not say it but I think the last one was what drove him to write *1984* and *Animal Farm*. He wanted “to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people’s idea of the kind of society that they should strive after. No book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.” (p. 313).

Sorry for the long review. I was just carried away by this book. I did not know that reading essays could be as exciting and enriching as reading works of fiction.

notgettingenough says

Having discussions lately about the topic that keeps academics in business, I guess: what is literature as opposed to other forms of fiction, I'd like to give access to this Orwell essay as a meaningful point of departure. I feel like I keep talking and arguing without any lines/definitions/meanings in place.

Good bad books. Essay by George Orwell. First published 2 November 1945.

Not long ago a publisher commissioned me to write an introduction for a reprint of a novel by Leonard Merrick. This publishing house, it appears, is going to reissue a long series of minor and partly-forgotten novels of the twentieth century. It is a valuable service in these bookless days, and I rather envy the person whose job it will be to scout round the threepenny boxes, hunting down copies of his boyhood favourites.

A type of book which we hardly seem to produce in these days, but which flowered with great richness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is what Chesterton called the "good bad book": that is, the kind of book that has no literary pretensions but which remains readable when more serious productions have perished. Obviously outstanding books in this line are RAFFLES and the Sherlock Holmes stories, which have kept their place when innumerable "problem novels", "human documents" and "terrible indictments" of this or that have fallen into deserved oblivion. (Who has worn better, Conan Doyle or Meredith?) Almost in the same class as these I, put R. Austin Freeman's earlier stories--"The Singing Bone" "The Eye of Osiris" and others--Ernest Bramah's MAX CARRADOS, and, dropping the standard a bit, Guy Boothby's Tibetan thriller, DR NIKOLA, a sort of schoolboy version of Hue's TRAVELS IN TARTARY, which would probably make a real visit to Central Asia seem a dismal anticlimax.

But apart from thrillers, there were the minor humorous writers of the period. For example, Pett Ridge-but I admit his full-length books no longer seem readable--E. Nesbit (THE TREASURE SEEKERS), George Birmingham, who was good so long as he kept off politics, the pornographic Binstead ("Pitcher" of the PINK 'UN), and, if American books can be included, Booth Tarkington's Penrod stories. A cut above most of these was Barry Pain. Some of Pain's humorous writings are, I suppose, still in print, but to anyone who comes across it I recommend what must now be a very rare book--THE OCTAVE OF CLAUDIUS, a brilliant exercise in the macabre. Somewhat later in time there was Peter Blundell, who wrote in the W.W. Jacobs vein about Far Eastern seaport towns, and who seems to be rather unaccountably forgotten, in spite of having been praised in print by H.G. Wells.

However, all the books I have been speaking of are frankly "escape" literature. They form pleasant patches in one's memory, quiet corners where the mind can browse at odd moments, but they hardly pretend to have anything to do with real life. There is another kind of good bad book which is more seriously intended, and which tells us, I think, something about the nature of the novel and the reasons for its present decadence. During the last fifty years there has been a whole series of writers--some of them are still writing--whom it is quite impossible to call "good" by any strictly literary standard, but who are natural novelists and who seem to attain sincerity partly because they are not inhibited by good taste. In this class I put Leonard Merrick himself, W.L. George, J.D. Beresford, Ernest Raymond, May Sinclair, and--at a lower level than the others but still essentially similar--A.S.M. Hutchinson.

Most of these have been prolific writers, and their output has naturally varied in quality. I am thinking in each case of one or two outstanding books: for example, Merrick's CYNTHIA, J.D. Beresford's A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH, W.L. George's CALIBAN, May Sinclair's THE COMBINED MAZE and Ernest Raymond's WE, THE ACCUSED. In each of these books the author has been able to identify himself with his imagined characters, to feel with them and invite sympathy on their behalf. with a kind of abandonment that cleverer people would find it difficult to achieve. They bring out the fact that intellectual refinement can be a disadvantage to a story-teller, as it would be to a music-hall comedian.

Take, for example, Ernest Raymond's WE, THE ACCUSED--a peculiarly sordid and convincing murder story, probably based on the Crippen case. I think it gains a great deal from the fact that the author only partly grasps the pathetic vulgarity of the people he is writing about, and therefore does not despise them. Perhaps it even - like Theodore Dreiser's An AMERICAN TRAGEDY - gains something from the clumsy long-winded manner in which it is written; detail is piled on detail, with almost no attempt at selection, and in the process an effect of terrible, grinding cruelty is slowly built up. So also with A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH. Here there is not the same clumsiness, but there is the same ability to take seriously the problems of commonplace people. So also with CYNTHIA and at any rate the earlier part of Caliban. The greater part of

what W.L. George wrote was shoddy rubbish, but in this particular book, based on the career of Northcliffe, he achieved some memorable and truthful pictures of lower-middle-class London life. Parts of this book are probably autobiographical, and one of the advantages of good bad writers is their lack of shame in writing autobiography. Exhibitionism and self-pity are the bane of the novelist, and yet if he is too frightened of them his creative gift may suffer.

The existence of good bad literature - the fact that one can be amused or excited or even moved by a book that one's intellect simply refuses to take seriously - is a reminder that art is not the same thing as cerebration. I imagine that by any test that could be devised, Carlyle would be found to be a more intelligent man than Trollope. Yet Trollope has remained readable and Carlyle has not: with all his cleverness he had not even the wit to write in plain straightforward English. In novelists, almost as much as in poets, the connection between intelligence and creative power is hard to establish. A good novelist may be a prodigy of self-discipline like Flaubert, or he may be an intellectual sprawl like Dickens. Enough talent to set up dozens of ordinary writers has been poured into Wyndham Lewis's so-called novels, such as TARR or SNOOTY BARONET. Yet it would be a very heavy labour to read one of these books right through. Some indefinable quality, a sort of literary vitamin, which exists even in a book like IF WINTER COMES, is absent from them.

Perhaps the supreme example of the "good bad" book is UNCLE TOM'S CABIN. It is an unintentionally ludicrous book, full of preposterous melodramatic incidents; it is also deeply moving and essentially true; it is hard to say which quality outweighs the other. But UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, after all, is trying to be serious and to deal with the real world. How about the frankly escapist writers, the purveyors of thrills and "light" humour? How about SHERLOCK HOLMES, VICE VERSA, DRACULA, HELEN'S BABIES or KING SOLOMON'S MINES? All of these are definitely absurd books, books which one is more inclined to laugh AT than WITH, and which were hardly taken seriously even by their authors; yet they have survived, and will probably continue to do so. All one can say is that, while civilisation remains such that one needs distraction

from time to time, "light" literature has its appointed place; also that there is such a thing as sheer skill, or native grace, which may have more survival value than erudition or intellectual power. There are music-hall songs which are better poems than three-quarters of the stuff that gets into the anthologies:

Come where the booze is cheaper,
Come where the pots hold more,
Come where the boss is a bit of a sport,
Come to the pub next door!

Or again:

Two lovely black eyes
Oh, what a surprise!
Only for calling another man wrong,
Two lovely black eyes!

I would far rather have written either of those than, say, "The Blessed Damozel" or "Love in the Valley". And by the same token I would back UNCLE TOM'S CABIN to outlive the complete works of Virginia Woolf or George Moore, though I know of no strictly literary test which would show where the superiority lies.

Mark says

A few years ago I read a study about Bette Davis by someone or other. I cannot recall the name of the author or of the book but I remember very clearly how at the end I admired the skill of Davis as an actor more than I had before reading but admired her as an actual person a good deal less. You probably never thought that Bette Davis, drama queen and 'movie siren' would sit comfortably alongside George Orwell in a review and perhaps they don't, (though I have heard George did a mean Joan Crawford impression), but at the end of this series of essays I think I have a similar reaction to him and his craft.

The essays and articles span the last 20 years of his life and include the prose for which he is famous such as his account of taking part in the execution of a rebel in Burma and of the shooting of a rogue elephant down through his accounts of sleeping rough or his being hospitalized in a mediocre hospital in France and then on through his clarion calls for the ending of the inequality and oppression of the state, the hypocrisy and obfuscation of varying Governments' 'doublespeak' and then more lilted and amusing reflections on the power of a nice cup of tea, the draw of the bookshop and the unlikely herald of spring, the toad.

The articles and essays are fascinating and are eminently quotable but I will restrain myself, to a large extent, but the most interesting aspect I found was the way you saw the plots and theories that were to dominate Orwell's fiction and more extended factual work being brought to birth as it were in these shorter reflections. His loathing of hypocrisy, his joining of battle against the forces of totalitarianism wherever they are found, his intense loathing for the lack of principled thought in so much political life, his hatred of the mealy mouthed use of words in which meanings and understandings are blurred and warped; all of them were seen growing and developing.

His flashes of humour and sarcastic wit can be found in the most unexpected of places and his honing in on one little detail to make his point is a regular occurrence. Speaking at one point of the patriotism present in most people in times of conflict he defends this and points it out as natural but then says (of England)

'It is a family. It has its private language and its common memories, and at the approach of an enemy it closes its ranks. A family with the wrong members in control...'

that sentence captures the genius, as I see it, of Orwell. A man fighting, always fighting for justice but with a great use of prose to make his point.

At another point, whilst criticizing the hypocrisy of the leftist politicians between the wars,

'It is a strange fact, but it is unquestionably true, that almost any English intellectual would feel more ashamed of standing to attention during 'God save the King' than of stealing from a poor box'

or again of truth and history

'I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history could be truthfully written.....the implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but the past. If the Leader says of such and such an event, 'it never happened' - well, it never happened. '

He deals with quite apposite questions for our own day, certainly here in Britain; political correctness, the freedom of the press of The Leveson Enquiry as of today still investigating phone hacking and persecution of innocent private lives by the press, the misuse of league tables and the like in Schools and cramming just for short term exam success and not for a lifetime of educated and balanced people. This is all fascinating and intriguing but the negative aspect of Orwell lurks in the background. That he had a hard and difficult life

is not to be denied, that there was much for him to become embittered about cannot be ignored and recognizing the differences of 1930 and 40's mores or outlooks then his pejorative descriptions of 'Jews ', his disgust of homosexuality and his rather dismissive outlook towards women might be understandable even if not welcomed but it is his underlying lack of respect for the 'working class' that is so off-putting.

His feelings that they should have a better standard of living, and there is no doubting his sincerity concerning the need for a radical overhaul and redistribution of wealth and opportunity, does not seem to extend to his actually liking them. He speaks incredibly high-handedly of their grossness and ugliness and stupidity, of course he recognizes the individual strengths of individual examples but, as a group, he is wholly unimpressed. Maybe this is inevitable as the two sided coin of the chasm between classes in the first half of the 20th Century alongside Orwell's own miserable persona but it makes for uncomfortable reading.

On a lighter side to finish. Orwell was intelligent, clear thinking, insightful and perceptive but he still thought that by the 1970's there would only be about 13 milion people in the UK...yeah right Georgie

MJ Nicholls says

Numerous inadequate volumes of Orwell's superlative essays are available from legit presses and bootleggers, bundled together under thematic pretences or skinned down to the longer more 'essential' writings. This monolithic hardback includes the famous and forever pleasurable classics 'Shooting an Elephant' (best thing written on Burma ever), 'Charles Dickens' (best criticism of Dickens ever), 'Bookshop Memories' (best thing written on bookshops ever), and so on. Included here are the 'As I Please' columns (all 80), presenting the more relaxed and conversational side of George, along with the magnificent book reviews (George's fondness for Henry Miller and Joyce on show). The longer essays include, to name some more, 'Such, Such Were the Joys' (perhaps the finest encapsulation of Orwell's politics and outlook), 'Books v. Cigarettes' (the greatest guilt-trip about not buying books ever), 'Politics and the English Language' (the finest handbook for journalists ever). And so on. No bookshelf is complete without a volume of these essays. (Preferably this one).

Roy Lotz says

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.

George Orwell is one of the inescapable writers of the last century. Far from becoming irrelevant, his works seem to become more significant with each passing year (as most recently evidenced by the present administration's strained relationship with the truth). Orwell himself said that the "final test of any work of art is survival," and his works seem on track to pass this final test. His dystopian novel recently became a surprise best-seller, almost seventy years after its initial publication. That is more than mere survival.

And yet it isn't for his political insights that I opened this collection of essays. It was rather—and I feel somewhat silly saying this—for his writing style. Orwell's writing is, for me, a model of modern prose. His style can accommodate both the abstract and the concrete, the homely and the refined, the pretentious and the vulgar; his prose can satisfy both the academic and the artist, the intellectual and the layperson, the Panurge and the parish priest. It is unmistakably modern, even sleek, while obviously informed by the tastes and standards of the past. It is fiery, angry, and political, while remaining intimate, human, and honest.

Something that repeatedly struck me while reading this collection was an inner conflict in Orwell's worldview. There are two sides of the man, sometimes in harmony, and sometimes at odds: the writer and the activist. Orwell the writer is captivated by the rhythms of words, the sounds of sentences; he loves ruminating on a strange personality or a memorable story; he is enchanted by the details of daily life. Orwell the activist is outraged at injustice and uncompromising in his moral sense; he sees people as a collection of allies and enemies, taking part in a grand struggle to bring about a better society, or a worse one.

Orwell himself discusses this tension in his little essay, "Why I Write." In a more peaceful age, he thinks, he could have been an entirely aesthetic writer, perhaps a poet, not paying much attention to politics. It was his firsthand experience of imperialism, poverty, and fascism that activated his political conscience. Specifically, it was the Spanish Civil War that "tipped the scale" for him: "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism."

Be that as it may, Orwell seems to have repeatedly struggled to reconcile this aim with his more humanistic side. In his brilliant essay on Dickens, for example, he spends page after page trying to analyze Dickens as a kind of social philosopher, examining Dickens's views on work, on the state, on education, and so on. Since Dickens was anything but a philosopher—as Orwell himself admits—this repeatedly leads to frustrating dead ends, and fails completely to do justice to Dickens's work. It is only in the last section, where Orwell drops this pretense and treats Dickens as a novelist, that the essay becomes deeply insightful. Indeed, it soon becomes clear—it seems clear to me, at least—that Orwell likes Dickens for his writing, and not his activism, however much he may wish to think otherwise.

Other essays exhibit this same tension. In his essay on vulgar postcard art, for example, he notes how backward is the social worldview expressed in the cards; but he is obviously quite fond of them and even ventures to defend them by likening their humor to Sancho Panza's. His essay on boy's magazines follows an identical pattern, exposing their conservative ideology while betraying a keen interest in, even a warm fondness for, the stories. In his appreciative essay on Rudyard Kipling's poems, he even goes so far as to defend Kipling's political views, at least from accusations of fascism.

It is largely due to Orwell's influence, I think, that nowadays it is uncontroversial to see the political implications in a movie cast or a Halloween costume. In all of these essays, Orwell worked to undermine the naïve distinction between politics and everyday life, showing how we absorb messages about standards, values, and ideologies from every direction. He did not merely state that "All art is propaganda," but he tried to show it, both in his analyses and his own fiction. At least half the time, he is utterly convincing in this. (And indeed, Orwell was such a brilliant man that, even when I think he's involved in a pointless exercise, he makes so many penetrating observations along the way— incidentally, parenthetically—that his writing fully absorbs me.)

We owe a tremendous debt to Orwell for this insight. Nevertheless, I can't help thinking that there is something terribly limiting about this perspective. All art may be propaganda, but it is not *only* propaganda; it is not even primarily so. There needs to be room in criticism, as in life, for the non-political. We need to be able to enjoy a novelist because of his characters and not his views on the state, a poet for his lines rather than his opinions, a dirty joke or a trashy magazine just because we want a laugh and a break. Orwell would agree with me up to a point, I think, but would also say that every decision to be "non-political" implicitly accepts the status quo, and is therefore conservative. This may be true; but it is also true that such "non-political" things are necessary to live a full life.

Where I most disagree with Orwell is his conviction that the media we consume—magazines, post cards, popular novels, television—nefariously and decisively shape our worldview. For my part, I suspect that people absorb their opinions more from their community, face-to-face, and then seek out media that corresponds with their pre-existing views: not the reverse. Media may reinforce these views and give them shape and drive, but I don't think it generates them.

All this is besides the point. I admire Orwell, for his fierce independence, for his sense of outrage and injustice, for his facility with words, for his attempt to blend art and truth. In other words, I admire both the writer and the activist, and I think his work should be read until judgment day.

Salam Almahi says

Okay so, let's get one thing straight: My review is not of this particular book, but I've read *a collection of Orwell's essays* and didn't know how to mark them.

The essays I read are:

- **Politics and The English Language:** It was what intrigued me to read these bunch of essays in the first place. I got the idea that it was what gave birth to the idea of **Newspeak** (the language used in *1984*), but upon reading it, it was very different.. More like a critique of changes in writing styles. Orwell was very "bitter? lol" in his criticism, though.
- **Some Thoughts on the Common Toad:** This was, I think, my favorite of the collection. It basically sends the message that: even though the world is crumbling around us, doesn't mean that we can't appreciate the little beautiful things surrounding us.
- **Shooting An Elephant:** This essay, was the most thought-provoking of them all. It made me think of colonization in a deeper way. It was very interesting to see the point of view of someone among *the colonizers*.
- **You and the Atomic Bomb:** I could see many ideas that ended in the book in *1984* forming in this essay, and like *1984* it was somewhat prophetic.
- **Confessions of a Book Reviewer:** I thought I'd relate more to this essay but it was in fact, more like a description of how a life of a professional book reviewer is (someone who does it as a job). So naturally- did not relate. But George Orwell did build a realistic, almost tangible setting and atmosphere.
- **Poetry and the Microphone:** Reminded me of what we now call Podcasts. Orwell would've been proud that this thing exists now. But the dilemma of the image of poetry, and its accessibility is still unfortunately, present.
- **Books Vs. Cigarettes:** THE BEST ARGUMENTS AGAINST BOOK-BUYING HATERS!

In conclusion, I can say with confidence, that I prefer Orwell's nonfiction, over his fiction.

Jonathan says

I don't have much to add about Orwell, his prescience, his style, etc. I did find something that I confess made me wonder whether Orwell is quite as egalitarian, or as strict about avoiding bad rhetoric, as the people who talk about him now would like him to be. These lines come from "Inside the Whale," a review of *Tropic of Cancer*: "In mid-nineteenth-century America men felt themselves free and equal, *were* free and equal, so far as that is possible outside a society of pure Communism. There was poverty and there were even class-distinctions, but except for the Negroes there was no permanently submerged class." With all due respect, you've got to be in some kind of a stupor to write a thing like that. (Look at that "except" again.) His

commitment to his argument—that people, all people, had more of a license to be themselves, back in the old days—brings him this close to trying to make the entire levels-deep institution of American white-on-not-white racism disappear. It's pretty awkward. The guy who wrote "Politics and the English Language," Mr. Tell It Like It Is, wouldn't have written it, except that he did.
