

A New Introduction



Without *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), it is unlikely that George Orwell's most famous works, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), would have come into existence with quite the same purposes, storylines and themes which have captivated – and terrified – generations of readers around the world. It is usually through one of these two internationally renowned books, which have been assimilated into school and university curricula for decades, that readers first encounter his plain and direct yet extraordinarily vivid and powerful style of writing. There is, however, a lot more to Orwell than these two iconic works: he wrote nine books in total as well as scores of essays and a dazzling array of journalism. The latter included hundreds of reviews and dozens of columns on literary, cultural and political topics. In the context of his oeuvre, *Homage to Catalonia* stands out as a key turning point. It charts his transformation from naïve idealism upon his arrival in Spain in December 1936 – where he joined the POUM (or Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) militia, believing he had entered a promised land of egalitarian Socialism united against Fascism – to intensive self-examination of his outlook and misjudgments following a harrowing escape from the country six months later.

Significantly, *Homage to Catalonia* is the last of Orwell's three books of documentary reportage. This form of journalism suited his instinct for authoritative storytelling based on first-hand observations and lived experiences rather than just dry facts. Along with *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), *Homage to Catalonia* is a product of Orwell's immersive approach. However, although there are parallels (like material deprivation and rough sleeping), serving as a volunteer on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War was bound to be markedly different from his previous reportage on poverty and injustice. Unquestionably, Orwell was in mortal danger, despite his complaints about a lack of real frontline action (which stemmed from his involvement in the trench stand-offs around Huesca rather than the main fighting around Madrid). In the book, after describing 'the first time in my life that I had fired a gun at a human being', he ominously admits: 'I made no attempt to keep my head below the level of the trench.' He rues ducking when 'a bullet shot past my ear with a vicious crack' but learns, in due course, the familiar drill of self-preservation:

If their machine-gunners spotted you, you had to flatten yourself out like a rat when it squirms under a door, with the bullets cutting up the clods a few yards behind you.

The periods of inaction by the ragtag militia are humorously summed up, almost prophetically, in Orwell's quotation of his impressive commander Georges Kopp that this was 'not a war' but 'a comic opera with an occasional death'. Arguably the best

passage in the book is his distinctly unheroic, detached and understated recollection of near-death from what he called his 'very interesting' experience of being hit by a Fascist sniper's bullet through his throat after he stuck his head above the parapet at dawn on 20 May 1937, near Huesca. This was a 'dangerous time', as his head would have been 'outlined against the sky' while he was talking to sentries in preparation for changing the guard. Orwell describes 'the sensation of being *at the centre* of an explosion (...) no pain, only a violent shock' and imagines 'you would feel much the same if you were struck by lightning'. The shock is compounded by his initial disbelief. He miscalculated that he had been shot accidentally, but: '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.' The immediate trauma seems painless, but he is aware he has been seriously wounded: 'I had a numb, dazed feeling, a consciousness of being very badly hurt, but no pain in the ordinary sense.' The in-the-moment shock is mirrored by the American sentry he had been talking to, who 'started forward', uncertain of what had just happened, asking: 'Gosh! Are you hit?'

For Better or Worse

Absorbingly, the reader becomes privy to the serene inner world of what are perilously close to being Orwell's final thoughts, as frantic efforts ensued to save his life. His first thought was for his wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy Blair. (Orwell was the pen name, of course, of Eric Blair.) Her role in *Homage to Catalonia* is somewhat patchy, yet repeatedly critical in helping Orwell to stay

alive. Here the thought of her helps to distract, calm and sustain him at a time of extreme physical distress and vulnerability: '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.' This thought, however, is fleeting, as Orwell turns his attention to the location and extent of the wound. Nevertheless, Eileen is a reassuring presence at this moment and other points in the story. She sends him welcome supplies and risks her own safety to visit him at the front. Having handled the advanced stages for publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, she had travelled to Barcelona, in February 1937, where she supported the arrival processes of British volunteers via the Independent Labour Party (ILP) office of John McNair. The ILP had issued Orwell with his credentials and its primary Spanish contact was the POUM militia, which Orwell duly joined – not expecting that this group of dissident Anarcho-syndicalists would soon incur the wrath of the Soviet-backed Communists in charge of what was left of the Socialist government.

After he was wounded and returned from the front, Eileen's intervention to ward off his arrest during the frightening anti-POUM purge might well have saved him from certain death rather than indefinite imprisonment; and she accompanied him – as a fugitive too – as they eluded capture and finally escaped the country. Her role also helps to clarify, emphatically, that Orwell was not there solely, or even chiefly, in a journalistic capacity. After their escape, Eileen shared Orwell's sense of loyalty, commitment and possibly 'survivor guilt': 'both of us wished that we had stayed to be imprisoned along with the others'. At the start of the book, Orwell confides that he 'had

come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles' but 'had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do'. His political idealism, rather than his journalism, had taken precedence. 'It was,' he adds, 'the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle'. He was amazed by the signs of what appeared to be successful revolutionary egalitarianism, such as waiters who 'looked you in the face and treated you as an equal', and the lack of servile speech and smart dress:

Nobody said '*Señor*' or '*Don*' or even '*Usted*'; everyone called everyone else '*Comrade*' and '*Thou*' (...) Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls or some variant of the militia uniform.

Such forms of speech and dress appear, notably, in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Moreover, the passage confirms that Orwell was not really what we might consider today an 'embedded' war reporter; nor was he there as a journalist, bearing witness as a neutral observer. He was there principally as a believer in, and fighter for, the Socialist cause, which he understood to be unequivocally and unimpeachably anti-Fascist. He had no inkling that his erroneous assumption of unity among the anti-Fascist factions could cost him his life – and Eileen's. He did not anticipate they could become fugitives from terror squads from their own side. Later, amid rumours of treachery following the fall of Málaga, he would register his 'first vague doubt about

this war in which, hitherto, the rights and wrongs had seemed so beautifully simple'. However, his initial view had been shaped by geopolitics: he was among many of that historical period who situated the Spanish Civil War as a pivotal test case within the drift of a wider European scission. This was, broadly, between Anarchists and Communists, advocating global revolution based on the 'Bolshevik' template, and Fascists, championed by the likes of Hitler and Mussolini, who were stoking populist nationalism and military ambition. Writ large, the prospect of defeat of Spain's democratically elected Socialist government through a Fascist coup appeared to spell, potentially, the ultimate triumph of Fascism in Europe and beyond.

Between Life and Death

The entangled ethics of Orwell's reportage, as an openly staunch soldier of Socialism, colour the entire account and give rise to his considerable anxieties about its 'objective' merit. Yet it remains – and must be stressed – that Orwell delivers reportage par excellence, as the rest of his recollection of being shot illustrates so movingly. His first thought, of Eileen, is displaced by wondering 'where I was hit, and how badly'. He tries to speak, only to learn that the reason he finds it so difficult is because he has been shot through the throat – although he still feels 'nothing'. He recalls:

As they lifted me up a lot of blood poured out of my mouth (...) I felt the alcohol, which at ordinary times would sting like the devil, splash on to the wound as a pleasant coolness.

Hearing that the bullet had 'gone clean through' his neck, he 'took it for granted' he was about to die. His resignation is palpable. With blood 'dribbling out of the corner of my mouth', he 'wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut; not many minutes, presumably'. At this point, when everything 'was very blurry' and there 'must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed', Orwell's reportage transcends the drama of the emergency situation and enters the stillness of a deeper intellectual, even spiritual, level. 'And that too was interesting,' he reflects. 'I mean it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time.'

Turning to this morbidly fascinating subject is nuanced, exceptional reportage. Orwell allows us to listen in, as it were, with discomfiting curiosity and intimacy to his private thoughts at a time of life-threatening physical trauma. This existential eavesdropping has individual and universal appeal, given the inevitability yet mystery of one's own final thoughts, too. What he considers his distinct second thought is in stark emotional contrast to his quite pleasant first thought of Eileen, but consistent with her desire that he should survive the war. He describes his 'violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well'. He is furious at the silliness and meaninglessness of being 'bumped off' in this unheroic and squalid manner, and reverts to dark humour: this would be death 'not even in battle, but in this stale corner of the trenches, thanks to a moment's carelessness!' He then wonders about who shot him. Potential audience empathy for Orwell is skilfully stirred into his own controlled measure of empathy for the sniper:

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 in this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting.

Expertly, again, Orwell snaps the audience out of the illusion he has conjured by reminding us that he does not actually die: 'It may be, though, that if you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different.'

Orwell thus transports his audience back to the 'reality' of his body on the stretcher where, at last, he experiences the excruciating pain we have known all along was coming. His 'paralysed right arm came to life and began hurting damnably' but 'the pain reassured me, for I knew that your sensations do not become more acute when you are dying'. More empathy is stirred into the mix when, even in his own suffering, he feels 'sorry for the four poor devils who were sweating and slithering with the stretcher on their shoulders' to cover the 'mile and a half to the ambulance (...) over lumpy, slippery tracks'. 'I knew what a sweat it was,' he reports, 'having helped to carry a wounded man down a day or two earlier.' Orwell concludes with some of the most beautifully poetic, yet graphically disturbing, lines in the history of reportage:

The leaves of the silver poplars which, in places, fringed our trenches brushed against my face; I thought what a good thing it was to be alive in a

world where silver poplars grow. But all the while the pain in my arm was diabolical, making me swear and then try not to swear, because every time I breathed too hard the blood bubbled out of my mouth.

Impressively, the entire passage is brilliant within its original narrative context as well as on its own. The latter was demonstrated by John Carey for *The Faber Book of Reportage* (1987).

No Details Spared

This distillation of his traumatic experience into 'stunning prose, alternating between tranquillity and intensity, is a striking instance of how *Homage to Catalonia* 'reminds us that Orwell was a superb journalist and reporter', as Julian Symons commented in general terms in his introduction to the book in 1989. He described how the book provides ample evidence of Orwell's proficiency:

Nobody has described the experience of this kind of warfare, which was still essentially the trench warfare of 1914–1918, better than it is done here. The boredom and confusion; the apparently meaningless orders taking men forwards and back; the shells that failed to explode and the hopelessly antiquated rifles; the mysterious call to retire after reaching an excellent defensive position; all are portrayed in a way that gives a wonderful sense of actuality.

Moreover, Orwell's references to unhygienic conditions are memorably pungent, revolting and, so to speak, skin-crawling. For instance, he describes 'the characteristic smell of war – in my experience a smell of excrement and decaying food'; the 'wintry stubble fields whose edges are crusted with dung'; how 'you could smell a sickening sweetish stink that lived in my nostrils for weeks afterwards (...) a deep festering bed of breadcrusts, excrement, and rusty tins'; how the 'position stank abominably, and outside the little enclosure of the barricade there was excrement everywhere (...) militiamen habitually defecated in the trench, a disgusting thing when one had to walk round it in the darkness'; and how 'every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles. We kept the brutes down to some extent by burning out the eggs and by bathing [in an ice-cold river] as often as we could face it'.

Orwell is not being regularly disgusting or offensive for the sake of it. On the contrary, as with his unsparing depictions of bleeding profusely after being shot or, for instance, his candid denouncement of how his young POUM colleague Bob Smillie died pointlessly in jail 'like a neglected animal', such unsavoury and unsettling details are indicative of his fidelity to the demands of top reportage. As a form of journalism with a long history, as Carey points out, reportage can either utilize the 'power of language to confront us with the vivid, the frightening or the unaccustomed' or the opposite, which is 'to muffle any such alarms'. Many historical examples of reportage, according to Carey, err on the side of 'scrupulous exclusion of any mention of killing' and are 'designed to neutralize and conceal experiences the writers felt were too terrible or too unseemly or too prejudicial to the future

of good order and military discipline to record directly'. Orwell does not indulge any such qualms. Whereas, as stated by Carey, euphemisms 'illustrate one major function of language, which is to keep reality at bay', Orwell does not hold back by sugar-coating or suppressing what others might not wish to know. A hallmark of top reportage is that it battles against the 'retreat of language from the real'; the reporter must work to 'isolate the singularities' that will make the account real for readers as 'not just something written, but something seen' – and as Orwell's prose so sharply shows, even smelt if possible.

The Art of Reportage

This extends, also in Orwell's case, to making the actuality of the account keenly felt. Through his complex sensory snapshots, he is capable of contrasting, for instance, beauty and discomfort:

sometimes the dawn breaking behind the hill-tops in our rear, the first narrow streaks of gold, like swords slitting the darkness, and then the growing light and the seas of carmine cloud stretching away into inconceivable distances, were worth watching even when you had been up all night, when your legs were numb from the knees down, and you were sullenly reflecting that there was no hope of food for another three hours.

Similarly, he is able to conjoin the sublime and the foul: 'The scenery was stupendous, if you could forget that every

mountain-top was occupied by troops and was therefore littered with tin cans and crusted with dung.' When he describes hills as 'grey and wrinkled like the skins of elephants', he is evidently drawing from his memories of colonial Burma where, as a police officer in the 1920s, he witnessed the capitalist rapacity which would shape his Socialist outlook. His constant effort at highly personalized and original image-making is indicative, again, of top reportage which, as Carey explained, to be effective 'must be individual'. The account 'must restore to [the reporter's] experience the uniqueness it rightly possesses' and 'resist language's – and reportage's – daily slide into sameness'. The ever-present danger is that massive 'accumulations of standardized language and hackneyed story-lines lie in wait, ready to leap' from the reporter's fingers to the page. While 'this is any writer's problem (...) it is worse for the reporter' who 'must stay true to the real, yet constantly defamiliarize it'. Ultimately, the reporter 'must see it, and tell it, as if for the first time'.

Notably, Orwell eschewed euphemisms and hackneyed journalism, displaying his penchant for striking diction and unique imagery within his descriptive eyewitness accounts. This confirms that, in *Homage to Catalonia*, he was already practising elements of the writing approach he would later articulate in detail in his essay 'Politics and the English Language' (1946), which stressed the necessity of thoughtful, active and clear language usage; innovative, vivid and powerful imagery; and plain and simple (i.e. neither convoluted nor simplistic) writing style. The influence of this essay on UK journalism practice, as I have shown in my 2022 paper in *George Orwell Studies* entitled 'A Textbook Case: Aligning Orwell and NCTJ Teaching', can be

detected historically in news organizations' style guides and the 'significant development' of its appearance in the latest manual for trainees released under the auspices of the National Council for the Training of Journalists. Readers who wish to reflect on the quality of Orwell's reportage will be richly rewarded by close scrutiny of some of the many descriptive passages in *Homage to Catalonia* which, although direct, bristle with intellectual, emotional and/or sensory complexity. Consideration of such passages through the lens of Orwell's subsequent six 'rules' to support decision-making in prose construction 'when instinct fails', as described in his essay and which appear in the NCTJ manual, can enhance appreciation of the value to Orwell of paying his dues in the trenches, as it were, of reportage:

- 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 when a short one will do.
- iii. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- iv. Never use the passive when you can use the active.
- v. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- vi. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

In the essay, Orwell also posed six questions he suggested should steer a scrupulous writer's composition of 'every sentence'. Again, reading *Homage to Catalonia* with this in mind can enhance appreciation of how reportage placed demands on

Orwell to meticulously craft his prose in order to be informative, engaging and impactful. To list his questions:

1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will express it?
3. What image or idiom will make it clearer?
4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?
5. Could I put it more shortly?
6. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

A Very Personal Account

A major strength of Orwell's reportage is, of course, that he largely witnessed what he was writing about. According to Carey, eyewitness evidence 'makes for authenticity' because 'knowledge of the past which is not just supposition derives ultimately from people who can say "I was there"'. The authenticity of Orwell's reportage, based on having genuinely experienced or borne witness to events in Spain, also enabled him to question, and see through, false news reports and commentary on such events (and non-existent events) along 'party lines'. The political dimension to his concern with language usage and writing practice that Orwell describes in 'Politics and the English Language' – where he calls out euphemisms, evasions and lies in arguing that 'the great enemy of clear language is insincerity' – is already being brought to bear in *Homage to Catalonia*. A further advantage of reportage 'is stylistic', as explained by Carey: eyewitness accounts 'have the feel of truth because they are quick, subjective and incomplete, unlike "objective" or reconstituted history, which is laborious but dead'. Although *Homage to Catalonia* has the

authenticity and zing of Orwell's first-hand storytelling, he struggles to square his subjectivity, and the inherently partial or limited nature of being an eyewitness, with his overall effort to present as objective and informed a narrative as possible. In the final analysis, he admits failure. On his account of the fighting in Barcelona, he reflects that he has 'tried to write objectively (...) though, obviously, no one can be completely objective on a question of this kind'. He asserts that it should 'be clear enough which side I am on' and confesses: 'I must inevitably have made mistakes of fact, not only here but in other parts of this narrative.' He adds: 'It is very difficult to write accurately about the Spanish war, because of the lack of non-propagandist documents.' He concludes candidly: 'I warn everyone against my bias, and I warn everyone against my mistakes. Still, I have done my best to be honest.'

As the title *Homage to Catalonia* indicates, the book is not intended as a definitive historical treatise. It is a form of tribute in which Orwell is aware of his own partisanship and fallibility. The book is the outcome of a dislocation between Orwell's memories as an eyewitness in Spain (with his photographs stolen and notes confiscated there) and his distanced, exhausted processing of the period, back in England. Inevitably, he battles to resolve the discrepancy. Nevertheless, he endeavours, passionately, to set the record straight by addressing what he sees as injustice towards his erstwhile POUM comrades and widespread misrepresentation of events. He would later resume his defence in the essay 'Why I Write' (1946), arguing that 'no book is genuinely free from political bias' and: 'The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude.' By this time, Orwell had come to see *Homage to Catalonia* as a turning point in his politics and writing.

In his essay, he explains that until 'Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, etc.' he had not gained from his experiences 'an accurate political orientation'. It was the 'Spanish war and other events in 1936-7' which 'turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood'. 'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936', he reflects, 'has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it.'

He proceeds to argue that, rather than being able to avoid or remain neutral in politics, contemporary writing is 'simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows'. He also holds that 'the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity'. In this vein, he reveals:

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice.

Specifically, in 'Why I Write' he refers to *Homage to Catalonia* in order to illustrate his difficult job as a writer attempting to 'reconcile my ingrained likes and dislikes with the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us'. The exigencies of subjectivity versus objectivity present 'problems of construction and of language', raising 'in a new way the problem of truthfulness'. Although *Homage to Catalonia* is a 'frankly political book', it is written primarily 'with a certain detachment and regard for form'. 'I did try very hard,' Orwell insists in his essay, 'to tell the whole truth without violating my literary instincts'. However, he recounts criticism of his journalistic approach

for apparently marring the book, owing in particular to his inclusion of a long defence of his former POUM comrades whom he refers to bluntly, in 'Why I Write', as 'Trotskyists who were accused of plotting with Franco'. He concedes that the criticism is 'true' but is adamant that he 'could not have done otherwise':

I happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I should never have written the book.

A Lasting Influence

Orwell's concession helps to explain why *Homage to Catalonia* is his final book of reportage, although he continued to produce excellent journalism. The form of the book and its truth-telling purpose did not cohere or convince to his satisfaction. Moreover, it was a commercial failure. Yet Secker & Warburg's willingness to publish it paid off in other ways, for the crucial lessons that Orwell drew from writing it were very much the making of him as the author of his masterpieces *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which became – and continue to be – spectacularly successful. His assertion in 'Why I Write' that *Animal Farm* 'was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political and artistic purpose into a whole' perhaps obscures how various facets of Orwell's experiences in *Homage to Catalonia* can be discerned within its pages – not least, for instance, the persecution of Snowball who can be associated with Trotsky and therefore related in part to his scary experience of the anti-POUM purge. Lisa Mullen argues

broadly, in her 2021 introduction to the book, that the 'contours' of Orwell's experience in Barcelona during the May Days period

inform the narrative of *Animal Farm*, which depicts an idealistic Socialist paradise being traduced by a top-down, quasi-Soviet dictatorship, eventually becoming indistinguishable from the Fascistic human system it purportedly replaced.

The impact extends, she adds, to how the

assault on truth, and the frailty of personal memory and agency in the face of totalizing propaganda, also clearly provide the terrifying outline for the State-induced neurosis and government mind-control of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Similarly, DJ. Taylor points out in his 2013 introduction to the book – by way of Orwell's essay 'Looking Back on the Spanish War' (1943) – that 'many of the seeds for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were sown in the Spanish Civil War':

It was in Catalonia, fighting for the Trotskyist POUM militia, that for the first time in his life he saw newspaper articles that bore no relation to the known facts, read accounts of battles where no fighting had taken place, saw troops that had fought bravely denounced as cowards and first suspected that, as he later put it, 'the concept of objective truth was falling out of the world'.

In the essay, Orwell also expresses his dismay at the 'newspapers in London retailing these lies and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures over events that had never happened'. 'I saw,' he adds, 'history being written not in terms of what happened but of what ought to have happened according to various "party lines"'. His questioning of how the history of the Spanish Civil War would be written in future leads, tellingly, to a rumination on Nazism which 'denies that such a thing as "the truth" exists'. He reasons: '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*.' This is, of course, what happens in *Animal Farm* where, for instance, Snowball's part in the Battle of the Cowshed is negatively revised; and the famous equation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is spelt out here: 'If [the Leader] says that two and two are five' then 'two and two are five'. Orwell discloses: 'This prospect frightens me much more than bombs – and after our experiences of the last few years that is not a frivolous statement.'

Having speculated that the gnawing rats in the trenches of Huesca were on Orwell's mind when he introduced rats into his novel to terrify the central character Winston Smith, Symons writes that *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'have their roots in (...) the deceptions and persecution carried out by the Communist parties and their dupes or allies in pursuit of power' in Spain. He is careful to point out, however, that 'nothing Orwell learned, either in Spain or afterwards, affected his belief in Socialism or his desire for an equalitarian society'. Symons warns those 'who think the picture of Oceania carries a message of disillusionment' against neglecting Orwell's statement of clarification in 1949, shortly before his death in 1950, that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'is NOT intended as an attack on

socialism, or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter)'. Symons also highlights Winston's entry in his secret diary: '*If there is hope (...) it lies in the proles*'. Nevertheless, it is also fair to say that in *Homage to Catalonia*, despite his 'mostly evil' memories of the Spanish 'disaster', Orwell's belief in Socialism and desire for an egalitarian society are ultimately enriched. The book is, after all, a mark of respect. He expresses increased, rather than decreased, faith in human decency. For *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he evidently draws on this wellspring of faith without abandoning his push, also so central to *Homage to Catalonia*, for critical thinking:

Curiously enough the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings. And I hope the account I have given is not too misleading. I believe that on such an issue as this no one is or can be completely truthful. It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan. In case I have not said this somewhere earlier in the book I will say it now: beware of my partisanship, my mistakes of fact, and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the Spanish war.

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