
BOOKS & WRITERS

Orwell & the Intelligentsia

By John Wain

IT IS COMING UP to twenty years since the death of George Orwell, and already the signs are that he is generally accepted as a classic of English literature, whose best books—and even the best passages from his less successful books—will live as long as the language.

This alone would make it important to rescue every stray scrap of his writing and present it in chronological order, so that, whichever of his major writings we happen to be studying in detail, we can see at a glance what kind of underbrush surrounded it. But there is another reason why a complete Orwell is important to us, and that is his contemporaneity, his relevance to our own day-to-day situation. If he had had a normal life-span he would be still working away in full vigour. Whether or not he would have been as closely engaged with the contemporary scene, it is impossible to guess, for all his life he hankered to get away from journalism, away from immediate involvement with political and social issues, and produce at least one big book that would be not a tract for the times but a pure work of literature; and he had already taken the all-important first step to this by retiring to Jura before illness struck him down. But even if Orwell had given up journalism, or limited himself to the occasional pronouncement, one thing is clear: the task he set himself is still there to be done. The situation that faces us (and by “us” I mean the citizens of liberal democratic countries, who each day have to decide afresh whether we want to go on being

such) is still the same one that faced Orwell during his mature life, that is from 1933 to his death in early 1950.

More of that in a moment. One's first duty is to try to describe the collection¹ that provokes these thoughts. It is a remarkable labour of love, a handsome tribute from the editors and their publisher. I said harsh things, once, in these pages about Secker & Warburg's unsatisfactory *Collected Essays of George Orwell* (1961), which not only failed to add any new material to that already in print, but even contrived to leave some of it out. So let me say what a pleasure it is to welcome these four handsome, clearly-printed, scrupulously-edited volumes. Even the price—given the fantastic overhead costs of publishing in the 1960s—is very reasonable for what must be something like a thousand pages of matter, most of it virtually inaccessible since its first appearance. And it is a pleasure, too, to pay tribute to the courage with which the firm of Secker & Warburg took on Orwell in the shivering days of the late 1930s, when the much more powerful firm of Gollancz had dropped him as a political hot potato because of *Homage to Catalonia*.²

Briefly, the plan of this collection is as follows. It reprints all Orwell's writings, except those that exist as books in their own right and are available separately, *i.e.*, the novels and the three books of reportage. With that exception, everything is here that the editors could find: book reviews, miscellaneous journalism, scraps of reporting, rough drafts and notes that did not get into print, Letters-to-the-Editor, wartime journals, the lot. Everything is in chronological order, and the separate books are listed in their right place with dates of the first editions in England and America. In addition, Mr. Angus has added two very useful appendices: a brief list of Orwell's writings (a more elaborate bibliography is in process of being assembled by two other specialists) and a “chronology” that sorts out the main dates and events of Orwell's life.

¹ *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*. Four volumes. Edited by SONIA ORWELL and IAN ANGUS. London, Secker & Warburg. £10. New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, \$34.80.

² See Orwell's letter of 31 July 1937. “Gollancz is of course part of the Communism-racket, and as soon as he heard I had been associated with the *POUM* and Anarchists and had seen the inside of the May riots in Barcelona, he said he did not think he would be able to publish my book, though not a word of it was written yet” (I, 279).

The editing seems to me exceptionally well done. Everything that needs a footnote is given one, and the text is very tidy. Naturally, in such a vast compilation, a few errors will slip in, and here, offered in a spirit of co-operation, are the ones I noticed. In III, 281, John Masefield is given a knighthood, which he didn't have, and in III, 180, some lines by Humbert Wolfe are ascribed to Hilaire Belloc. The North Staffordshire village of Endon is called "Eldon" (I, 171), though I don't know whether this is a misprint or whether Orwell simply misheard the name of this little place which he once passed through on foot, *en route* for Wigan and the coal-mines. That is the sum total of the errors I found in all these thousand pages! It takes some beating, even if every reader finds two or three more.

NATURALLY, THE RELEASE OF a large bulk of previously uncollected material is bound to cause some nervousness to those of us who have already put our general interpretation and assessment of Orwell's work on record. With this new material in front of us, is there anything in our earlier estimate that needs to be corrected? Speaking for myself, I feel inclined to withdraw my remark, made in an essay first published in ENCOUNTER in 1962 and later collected in a volume, that Orwell was too hard on the intelligentsia, that his constant accusation against them of power-worship was "nagging" and sprang from "an emotional attitude." Confronted with Orwell's judgment that

It would be grossly unfair to suggest that power-worship is the only motive for Russophile feeling, but it is one motive, and among intellectuals it is probably the strongest one...

I entered a respectful protest:

Considering how much "intellectuals" have done to fight régimes based on cruelty and power, how many of them have died under torture in the last thirty years because they refused to get into line with "power-worship," this seems a particularly uncalled-for judgment.

Since then, having lived for a few more years in this vale of tears, and now having the opportunity to read some of the controversies which implanted this opinion in Orwell, I feel, sadly, that he was more right than I. One doesn't, of course, reduce this kind of thing to a matter of arithmetic, but the number of "intellectuals" who have risked their skins, or put themselves to the slightest inconvenience, financial or otherwise, in order to resist power and oppression must be balanced against the large (larger?) number of them who have made very comfortable bargains with it of one kind and another. Certainly, if the political and social attitudes of

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some of my fellow-writers—the sort of thing they feel called upon to say and, still more significantly, the sort of thing they feel called upon to shut up about—are not dictated by “power-worship,” it is hard to see what they are dictated by.

ORWELL’S intellectual history, looked at from one angle, is a diagram of a particular classic kind of political disillusionment. He went more or less straight from Eton to the Burmese branch of the Indian Imperial Police and stayed with them for nearly five years, at a formative time when one year is the equivalent of at least three in later life. This meant that his early experience of his fellow-countrymen must have been exclusively with (1) schoolmasters, (2) blimps. Both these groups, and especially the second, must have been made up chiefly of the type who “read *Blackwood’s* and publicly thanked God [he was] ‘not brainy.’” Such a prolonged exposure to the anti-intelligentsia must have given Orwell a predisposition to admire literary, artistic, and clever people generally. In particular, he evidently made the very natural assumption that the intelligentsia, not being directly interested in money or high office, would be against tyranny and sympathetic to the idea of human equality and justice. We all start out with this kind of idea, and it is the more painful to discover, when one comes up against them in increasing numbers, that many “intellectuals” are in fact natural authoritarians who see no reason at all why people—other people, that is—should have freedom of speech or action. The besetting sin of the “intellectual” is his tendency to look down on the ordinary man, to assume that the ordinary man’s solution to human problems cannot possibly work because it has been arrived at without his help and without using any of the specialised techniques that he has so painstakingly acquired. He comes into any human situation like a grown-up entering a disordered nursery, ordering the children to tidy up their toys and line up for their spoonful of medicine. Since the grown-up has a natural right to order the children about, being older and wiser, it follows (on this view) that the cool-headed managing “intellectual” has a right to line himself up with the secret police and all the other machinery of modern coercion; all this then balloons more and more wildly until we reach the situation where the Right-wing intelligentsia can see nothing wrong with Mussolini and Hitler and the Left-wing intelligentsia can see nothing wrong with Stalin; in either case, all they can see is that the children are being kept in order instead of being allowed to mess up the nursery.

The objection to this view is that ordinary non-intellectual human beings are not children; or, if they are, they are no more childish in their attitudes than politicians, managers, and “intellectuals.” Hence the opposition to such people will always start at grass-root level, with an affirmation of the value of our ordinary, shared humanity. And a conviction of this value is precisely what one finds lacking in so many of the “intellectuals” who, with undoubted achievements to their credit in one sphere or another, issue from their laboratories or their studies or their deaneries and begin putting the world to rights with the aid of the NKVD. In doing so they are obeying two impulses: one, to tidy up the mess; two, to enjoy the sense of ordering people about, exercising their authority and generally being top-dog. (One sees this in a very naked form in those ladies of *haute bourgeoisie* or aristocratic families who become totalitarians of one kind or another: the impulse to interfere with people’s lives, to force soup and tracts on them, combined with a heart of stone.)

WHEN WE ARE YOUNG, especially if we are growing up in Philistine surroundings (and it isn’t necessary to join the Imperial Police in order to do *that*), it is natural to imagine that when we finally get into contact with our own kind, with writers, scientists, “intellectuals,” we shall find them champions of humanity, full of unselfish love of their fellow-men. Then we do get into contact with them, and the douche of cold water comes more or less immediately. Power of one kind and another is so important in the centralised modern world, which has fewer and fewer neglected corners where a man can live a decent quiet life, that the fear of it, the wish to placate it, the masochistic love of it, the outright lust for it, run all the way through society, from the industrial worker who would rather be an assembly-line hand at a big factory than do more skilled and self-fulfilling work at a small one, to the scientist who will make a bargain with any set of murderers who will give him funds and tell him how important his work is. The big factory makes the worker feel safe, which is exactly what the big movement, whether it is a political party or an ideological vogue, does for the “intellectual.”

Tyranny, we imagine in the springtime of our days, is so hideous a force that all men except the criminal and the sub-normal will naturally combine against it. Alas, the attractive power of tyranny is just as great as its repulsive power. To come back to Orwell, if one follows the history of his mind in detail, as it is now possible to do without getting out of one’s armchair, one sees this realisation sinking in from month to month, from the Spanish experi-

ence through the days of the Russo-German Pact to the first year or two of the war. In March-April 1942, writing a "London Letter" to the *Partisan Review*, he noted sombrely:

The quisling intellectual is a phenomenon of the last two years. Previously we all used to assume that Fascism was so self-evidently horrible that no thinking person would have anything to do with it, and also that the Fascists always wiped out the intelligentsia when they had the opportunity. Neither assumption was true, as we can see from what happened in France. Both Vichy and the Germans have found it quite easy to keep a façade of "French culture" in existence. Plenty of intellectuals were ready to go over, and the Germans were quite ready to make use of them, even when they were "decadent." At this moment Drieu la Rochelle is editing the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Pound is bellowing against the Jews on the Rome radio, and Céline is a valued exhibit in Paris, or at least his books are. . . . If the Germans got to England, similar things would happen, and I think I could make out at least a preliminary list of the people who would go over.

This statement gives us a perspective in which to see all the controversies in which Orwell was enmeshed year after year, from the struggle to get his views on the Spanish war into print, through the war-time argufying with various defeatist groups, to the wrestle in the last five years of his life against the various people in important positions who were censors in all but name, like the man who said that it would be all right for *Animal Farm* to be published if Orwell would choose some kind of animal other than pigs to represent the Russian rulers. The line taken by such people was always that nothing was actually *prohibited*—God forbid, in England, the home of liberty and free speech!—but to say certain things might be "premature" or worsen a situation which, in official judgment, was delicate. On which Orwell's comment was: "Circus dogs jump when the trainer cracks his whip, but the really well-trained dog is the one that turns his somersault when there is no whip."

WITH THIS KIND OF THING in mind, I think it necessary to withdraw the caveat that Orwell is unfair to the intelligentsia. No doubt it could be shown that he is a little hard on them, in some of his sweeping statements about "intellectuals." But it was, so to speak, his function to be hard on them. He had undertaken the task of keeping their consciences alive. For this task he was uniquely fitted, being able to observe the intelligentsia both from the inside and the outside. From the inside, because of his standing as a writer; from the outside, because his own life-

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style was that of the common man, the non-intellectual who finds himself pushed around and has his life planned for him by other people. Nor was this life-style, as is so persistently hinted, a matter of affectation. From letters, from stray items in the "As I Please" column, and of course from the abundant evidence of the novels, it is clear that Orwell genuinely did find simple pleasures the most attractive. He enjoyed digging his garden, strolling about in the countryside, drinking beer at the local pub, reading a book by a good coal fire. A piece like "The Moon Under Water," describing the ideal pub that turns out to exist only in his imagination, is as good a guide as any to his inner vision of happiness.

To begin with, its whole architecture and fittings are uncompromisingly Victorian. It has no glass-topped tables or other modern miseries, and, on the other hand, no sham roof-beams, ingle-nooks or plastic panels masquerading as oak. The grained woodwork, the ornamental mirrors behind the bar, the cast-iron fire-places, the florid ceiling stained dark yellow by tobacco-smoke, the stuffed bull's head over the mantel-piece—everything has the solid comfortable ugliness of the nineteenth century.

In winter there is generally a good fire burning in at least two of the bars, and the Victorian layout of the place gives one plenty of elbow-room. There are a public bar, a saloon bar, a ladies' bar, a bottle-and-jug for those who are too bashful to buy their supper beer publicly, and upstairs, a dining-room.

Games are only played in the public, so that in the other bars you can walk about without constantly ducking to avoid flying darts.

In "The Moon Under Water" it is always quiet enough to talk. The house possesses neither a radio nor a piano, and even on Christmas Eve and such occasions the singing that happens is of a decorous kind.

And so it goes on—the middle-aged barmaids who know their customers by name, the garden with chairs and tables and a chute for the children, the china mugs out of which "beer tastes better," the draught stout you can have with your lunch. It sounds like perfection. It also sounds like the sort of place no *New Statesman* intellectual would be seen dead in, or would go in only to patronise it and draw disadvantageous comparisons with the Continental *bistro*. "The solid comfortable ugliness of the 19th century"—Orwell enjoyed this unfashionable taste unself-consciously, without being defiant about it and without making it into a programme à la Betjeman.

Orwell's fondness for a good pub where "it is always quiet enough to talk" reminds one rather of Samuel Johnson's verdict that "a tavern chair" was "the throne of human

felicity," and again that "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn." Indeed it is rather surprising to find that, in the various pieces of literary criticism collected here, there is no mention of Johnson, whom Orwell must have known at any rate through Boswell. It is true that most of his 18th-century reading was in fiction; the essay on Swift is well known, and there is a (to my mind) even more perceptive article on Smollett ("Scotland's Best Novelist," III, 244-248) and an affectionate tribute to *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Obviously, it was one of Orwell's pleasures to spend a few hours in the 18th century now and then. He liked its directness; 18th-century people were tough and coarse, but they were willing to make a few basic assumptions about life and then act openly on those assumptions. It had not yet become difficult for the left hand to know what the right hand was doing. Orwell would have fitted straight into the 18th century; even his prose style could be passed off as 18th century with very little trimming. It is not periwigged, but then a lot of 18th-century prose is not periwigged either. There is a direct, conversational tone which such writers as Swift and Defoe carry on from Bunyan, and Orwell belongs to this tradition very exactly.

IN HIS GENERAL POSITION, however, the 18th-century figure with whom Orwell has most affinity is probably Samuel Johnson. Of course certain things are missing from the parallel; Orwell is without the whole scholarly-antiquarian side of Johnson's mind, for one thing. But consider the resemblances. Both men spent their mature years chiefly in the company of people from whom they felt themselves to be marked off by certain differences in background and attitude. Johnson's friends were mostly either scholars, church dignitaries, important political figures like Burke, great figures in the arts like Reynolds and Garrick, or—on the other hand—young men of good family like Beauclerk, Langton, and Boswell. With his provincial roots and his background of poverty, Johnson did not feel himself to be cast in the same mould as these people, and his celebrated sharpness in seeing through their various kinds of "cant" derives in part from this. Similarly with Orwell, who, as we have seen, spent most of his earlier manhood among colonial functionaries or, back at home, the very poor. It was not until the 1940s that he seems to have found himself mixing chiefly with the big-city intelligentsia, and then, like

Johnson, he was in an excellent position to offer the recurrent advice: "My dear sir, clear your mind of cant."

The same applies to their political attitudes. Johnson was a Tory, and throughout most of his life the Tories were very remote from power. But he did not imagine that this obliged him to spend a lifetime shouting abuse at the Whigs and crediting the dispossessed Tories with impossible virtues. It amused him to use the word "Whig" as a synonym for "rascal," yet when Whig statesmen took a line that happened to fit in with his own convictions, he was ready to support them (e.g., in the attempt to tax the American settlers). His great contribution to Toryism was that he was an unshaken Tory who was at the same time utterly different from the obedient party hack, ready to lie and equivocate for his own side and to keep inconvenient facts out of sight. Is this not exactly Orwell's position *vis-à-vis* the Left in the 1930s and '40s? "I belong to the Left, and must work inside it," he wrote to the Duchess of Atholl, explaining why he found it impossible to join something called the League for European Freedom (IV, 30); but his way of "working inside" the Left was at any time apt to produce the sort of embarrassment that one can see in, say, the preface that Victor Gollancz found it necessary to write for *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

Orwell's main task, like Johnson's, was to challenge people to "think their thoughts down to the roots," as he once put it. Hence his running warfare with the kind of "intellectual" who would rather half-think twenty thoughts than think one right out. This is why, during the '40s, Orwell found it necessary to keep banging away at certain points that dominant "progressive" opinion simply would not face: such as that if you are not prepared for people to die in war, you must be ready for them to be killed in some other way; or that, since the British Empire was a system for exploiting cheap coloured labour, the true "proletariat" of England had dark skins and lived thousands of miles away; or that people who enjoy feeling holy are usually living in safety and comfort because of the distinctly un-holy actions committed on their behalf, "like Huxley advocating non-violence behind the guns of the American navy."

BUT MOST DEEPLY OF ALL, at the bedrock level, both Orwell and Johnson had the same fundamental approach to human life. They both resisted any form of superficial optimism, any idea that a few wipes with a damp sponge could clean the slate and humanity could start again, freed from the burden of guilt and error.

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Johnson accepted the Christian doctrine of original sin, but Orwell, without this theological underpinning, had something of the same attitude on a mundane, historical level. "We have all touched pitch. . . . We do not have the chance, in a time like this, to say 'Tomorrow we can all start being good.'" In a moment, I shall quote the longer passage from which those sentences of Orwell's are taken. What he was combating was the notion that individuals or groups here and there, by adopting hygienic and superior moral attitudes, could somehow keep their hands clean while everyone else's were dirty. Human life, as he saw it, was more of a piece than that; we were all in it together. To declare that the world situation was hopeless, that the only thing left was to retire into a corner and see to it that there, at any rate, sanity and benevolence would prevail, was merely to choose another kind of acquiescence in wickedness. During World War II, for instance, many English pacifists claimed that Hitler could only be opposed by a force similar to himself, that to beat down Nazism it would be necessary for us to become Nazis, and that, therefore, no difference existed between the two sides and the best thing would be to drop all resistance and fight against force and terror by the power of love. This claim arose, in Orwell's view, from people's unwillingness to "think their thoughts down to the roots"—the roots, in this case, being (1) a conviction that high-mindedness will always be suitably rewarded and (2) a comfortable indifference to large-scale human suffering, leading to the assumption that it would be better not to try to rescue the people who were in the clutch of the Nazis. Orwell demolished this position a number of times—without effect, of course, on the minds of those entrenched within it—and it is worth quoting one of these demolitions, if only because so much of present-day radicalism, particularly of the youthful student-protest-and-hippy variety, makes the same assumption. Once again one hears talk of the futility of armaments and the efficacy of resisting cruelty and oppression by "love," though I notice that not many people in Czechoslovakia tried to kiss the Red Army. Only the other day, there was a commemoration ceremony at Belsen or Dachau or some similar place of ultimate horror, a ceremony designed to express pity for the victims and shame that *homo sapiens* could do such things; and the inevitable youths and girls turned up with a demonstration "against militarism." In view of the fact that places like Dachau and Belsen were only thrown open, and the survivors rescued, because men were willing to join armies, to drive tanks and to fire guns, it seemed a slightly less than tactful

moment to come out against "militarism." A concentration camp, if anywhere, is a good place to recall the fact that *some* positive things have been achieved by the willingness of soldiers to fight. And now back to 1941, and let Orwell speak for a moment. He is taking off from a review of a pacifist propaganda-novel:

The notion that you can somehow defeat violence by submitting to it is simply a flight from fact. As I have said, it is only possible to people who have money and guns between themselves and reality. But why should they want to make this flight, in any case? Because, rightly hating violence, they do not wish to recognise that it is integral to modern society and that their own fine feelings and noble attitudes are all the fruit of injustice backed up by force. They do not want to learn where their incomes come from. Underneath this lies the hard fact, so difficult for many people to face, that individual salvation is not possible, that the choice before human beings is not, as a rule, between good and evil but between two evils. You can let the Nazis rule the world; that is evil; or you can overthrow them by war, which is also evil. There is no other choice before you, and whichever you choose you will not come out with clean hands. It seems to me that the text for our time is not "Woe to him through whom the evil cometh" but the one from which I took the title of this article, "There is not one that is righteous, no, not one." We have all touched pitch, we are all perishing by the sword. We do not have the chance, in a time like this, to say "Tomorrow we can all start being good." That is moonshine. We only have the chance of choosing the lesser evil and of working for the establishment of a new kind of society in which common decency will again be possible. There is no such thing as neutrality in this war. The whole population of the world is involved in it, from the Eskimos to the Andamanese, and since one must inevitably help one side or the other, it is better to know what one is doing and count the cost.

BYOND ALL THIS, another question arises. Was it not a tragic waste for Orwell, a major writer, to be involved year after year in this kind of arguing? The regular column in *Tribune*, the series of "London Letters" to the *Partisan Review*, the book reviews, the bits of pure pot-boiling journalism like his piece in the *Evening Standard* detailing the eleven golden rules for making a good cup of tea (III, 40-43)—in which last, incidentally, he joins hands again with Johnson, "a hardened and shameless Tea-drinker . . . who with Tea amuses the evening, with Tea solaces the midnight, and with Tea welcomes the morning." Was Orwell

wasting his gifts? Ought he to have found some way, by hook or by crook, of doing without all this journalism and getting on with his real work?

The answer, I think, is that the nature of Orwell's "real work" was slowly undergoing a change, and that this change was held back by the circumstances of his life, notably World War II, so that it had not worked itself out at the time of his premature death. He started, at the very beginning of his career, with all the gifts of the ideal pamphleteer. He could sketch a scene vividly, and leave it on one's mind not merely as a scene but as a social comment. His first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, is, in almost every way, as good as anything he ever did. The switch from Paris to London, from the world of sweated kitchen employees and picturesque émigrés to the world of hopeless, endlessly badgered human refuse, the petty officials and policemen who dealt with them, the housemaids who refused them a drink of cold water at the door ("We're not allowed to give anything to tramps"); all the atmosphere of boredom and futility, of endless movement which never results in getting anywhere, is conveyed with perfect skill and economy. Obviously, to write like this, Orwell needed continual contact with the actual social scene, particularly in those aspects which stimulated him to a violent response. *The Road to Wigan Pier* is another solidly well-done job on the same lines.

Then came *Homage to Catalonia*, which I am inclined to think his best book; certainly it contains his most memorable individual passages. Admittedly, some of the expository material about the nature of the Spanish political cross-currents is hard to read, as Orwell knew it would be when he felt impelled to put it in. For once, he has not been able to assimilate the social comment effortlessly into the descriptive reportage, not because his skill has failed him but because the material is too unfamiliar, too densely packed with detail that has to be explained. Meanwhile he was writing a whole series of novels, from *Burmese Days* in 1934 to *Coming Up For Air* in 1939, which are on the whole less satisfactory than his reporting books; they are interesting, honest, and very readable; but the good qualities they have are the same as the good qualities of the others. One does not feel, in going from, say, *Down and Out to Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, that one is crossing a barrier, going from one kind of book to another. And of course this is just the feeling one ought to have. A novel, to realise its true potentialities, ought to have an entirely different feel from a book whose basic intention is documentary; it should take the



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reader more deeply into the situations it describes, making him feel his way more intricately, leading him in the end not so much to take sides, or to understand the nature of an immediate problem, but to expose him to the richness of life itself. (I agree that this is an old-fashioned ideal and that many present-day novelists write as if they had never heard of it; but that is their misfortune, not the novel's.)

THERE ARE MANY SIGNS that Orwell, as the '30s wore on, was coming to feel that he had done his stint of work in the reporting, pamphleteering, polemical kind of book and wanted to hold steady for a year or two and contemplate some big subject until he was able to write a real, old-fashioned, large-scale novel, with characters much more fully imagined than the brilliant pavement-artist sketches he had been doing up to that time. Thus he writes to a friend that what he really wants is two years' peace and quiet, but "as things are now, one might as well ask for two years on the moon." From this point of view everything got worse instead of better, and just when his interior tide was beginning to turn towards slower, more deeply meditated work, events forced him deeper into journalism and controversy. The war, in its early months, disorganised life so much that the writing of books was out of the question; later, from about 1942 onwards, things settled down on a makeshift basis, and there was on the face of it no reason why Orwell, as a man unfit for military service, shouldn't have gone to some quiet country spot where he could have grown potatoes and written novels—provided, of course, that he could have got anyone to pay him for the novels. But, by that time, he was too much embedded in war-time London, in his attempt to serve the Allied cause by broadcasting to India, in his cross-talk with people like Alex Comfort. In addition, his journalism was becoming well known, resulting in more and more pressure on him to write articles—a kind of pressure very difficult for a professional writer to resist. So it went on until, with the war safely over, he was at last able to get away to Jura. It was the wrong place for him, with his bad lungs, but he had been dreaming for at least five years of settling down a long way from London, which he hated, and out of the reach of editors, who were beginning seriously to persecute him.

ORWELL'S two last books, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, are on the earlier side of the great divide, a divide he had probably crossed

already in some interior region of his being but was never to inhabit as a writer. The years of fighting against half-baked notions, against complacency and mental dishonesty, against the refusal to "think thoughts down to the roots," had left him with a dread of totalitarianism and the habits of mind it engendered. And, during those dismaying years just after 1945, when so many "intellectuals" seemed ready to sell out to Stalinism as blithely as they, or their counterparts, had sold out to Hitlerism ten years earlier, it was not in Orwell's nature simply to bow off the scene, to settle down in a book-lined retreat and begin the long wrestle with the problems of a "pure" literary art. If he had had a normal life-span, my guess is that by about 1953 he would have felt that the situation had at any rate reached stalemate and that there was no need for him to keep up his sentry-go. But, as we know, he died before even *that* unsatisfactory corner was turned. And whether he would have been successful in metamorphosing from a "committed" writer to a fully-formed imaginative novelist, there is no one who can say.

What is obvious is not only that whatever he wrote would have been valuable; but also that, as I said at the beginning, the work he actually did is still palpably with us, still making a difference in our lives. For my own part, I know that when I hear the pronouncements made by various influential people in the England of the '60s, I long for Orwell back again. But, since we can't have him, it is good to be able to use his work for its purpose: as an example, an incitement, and a justification. To read him is to be reminded of what honesty, goodwill, compassion for the unfortunate, really look like. And these things, as Samuel Johnson knew, are the starting-point of civilisation. As for his relevance: who can feel that the situation that faces free men has changed much from what it was in the '40s, or in the '30s, for that matter? The thing most to be feared is still a *trahison des clercs*: freedom still needs to be defended against those whom she most favours, whom she showers with advantages. At whatever point we are engaged in the never-ending battle against cant, whether we are trying to reckon up the myriad ways in which Western writers can get a good price for their integrity behind the Iron Curtain, or sorting out the multiple confusions in the latest pronouncement by someone like Cohn-Bendit, or keeping some kind of watch on politicians whose mouths speak of freedom for Africans while their brains think of money-bags for Europeans, it is Orwell who provides us with the best model of how to do it, and the most generous and communicable vision of why it should be done.

The Sense of American Gobbledygook

By D. W. Brogan

MR. ROBERT MCNAMARA has just announced his pleasure that some rioting students were using the slogan, "*Down with Aristotle!*" It was not that Mr. McNamara was specifically against The Philosopher, but he was delighted to see the students moving away from mere semantics to discussing philosophical questions, even on the wrong side. There are no semantics in Mr. William Safire's book¹ nor are there any discussions of the meaning of meaning in the political vocabulary, no refutation of Weldon, no discussion of the ambiguities of the classical vocabulary. What Mr. Safire has admirably done is described in his sub-title: "An anecdotal Dictionary of Catchwords, Slogans, and Political usage." It is, of course, the new language of American politics and as such it is an indispensable guide to American political jargon. It is in fact an interesting guide to many aspects of American political life, and indeed to American life in general. But Mr. Safire does not confine himself to American political jargon. He often reaches back to discover European origins of words, phrases, and slogans and out even to Japanese parallels with American political gobbledygook. (It is a pity that Mr. Safire has not devoted more time to examples of "federal prose," that sticky jargon which flows slowly into the political bloodstream with usually disastrous results.)

Then Mr. Safire has not been content with consulting dictionaries or newspapers or historians. He has often consulted the living authors of certain, for the moment at any rate, important phrases or has had the question of the origins of terms like "the Cold War" discussed by those who think they know where they came from. He has been helped by Mr. Raymond Moley, Mr. Richard Nixon, and a great many other actors in recent American history, and for that alone his book would be of great value.

It is of great value not only in the sense that it tells us the origins of some of these weapons of political warfare, but that it uses some of the slogans, phrases, and linguistic creations to

illustrate the nature of American political society. Arranged alphabetically, the book at first appears as rather a rag-bag of a great many different kinds of pieces of information, some important, some quite unimportant. But if read through to the end, a kind of pattern begins to appear, and it is quite easy to read through to the end because Mr. Safire has an intelligent and amusing clutter of examples, and if there is not a laugh on every page, there is a laugh on every second page. More than that, his investigations can lead to serious thought by his readers which may immunise them against some of the sillier legends enshrined in the American political vocabulary.

While it was very wise of Mr. Safire to look for origins of some American phrases, words, etc., outside the United States, he has sometimes not pushed his researches far enough. For example, he stops short in discovering the history of the metaphor of the torch bearer. It is not merely a kind of reference to modern relay races; it goes much further back than that, and finds its classical expression in a famous line of Lucretius, *quasi cursores vitai lampada tradunt*. Sometimes a phrase is given a purely American origin when it is, in fact, borrowed from another political system. For example, "three acres and a cow" was the slogan of Jesse Collings, one of Joe Chamberlain's collaborators in his Radical agrarian days. Other examples of political wit and wisdom dragged in from other political systems are wrong. Sir Winston Churchill never said of Clement Attlee that he was "a sheep in sheep's clothing." I have this on the excellent authority of Sir Winston himself. The phrase was totally inapplicable to Mr. Attlee. It was applicable, and applied, to J. Ramsay MacDonald, a very different kind of Labour leader.

Then some famous phrases are taken in their latest meaning and not in their first. For example, the term "Grand Old Man," applied to Gladstone and abbreviated to GOM, was originally applied to him by that cynical Radical Henry Labouchère, "the Christian member for Northampton" (the other member being the notorious atheist Charles Bradlaugh), as a rather irreverent joke. It was at once adopted by loyal

¹ *The New Language of Politics*. By WILLIAM SAFIRE. Random House, New York, \$10.