

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-85842-7 - The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell

Edited by John Rodden

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[More information](#)THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell is regarded as the greatest political writer in English of the twentieth century. The massive critical literature on Orwell has not only become extremely specialised, and therefore somewhat inaccessible to the non-scholar, but it has also contributed to and even created misconceptions about the man, the writer, and his literary legacy. For these reasons, an overview of Orwell's writing and influence is an indispensable resource. Accordingly, this *Companion* serves as both an introduction to Orwell's work and furnishes numerous innovative interpretations and fresh critical perspectives on it. Throughout the *Companion*, which includes chapters dedicated to Orwell's major novels, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm*, Orwell's work is placed within the context of the political and social climate of the time. His response to the Depression, British imperialism, Stalinism, the Second World War, and the politics of the British Left are all examined. Chapters also discuss Orwell's status among intellectuals and in the literary academy, and a detailed chronology of Orwell's life and work is included.

John Rodden has taught at the University of Virginia and the University of Texas at Austin. He has authored or edited several books on George Orwell, including *The Politics of Literary Reputation: the Making and Claiming of 'St George' Orwell* (1989), *Understanding Animal Farm in Historical Context* (1999), *Scenes from an Afterlife: the Legacy of George Orwell* (2003), *George Orwell Into the Twenty-First Century* (2004), and *Every Intellectual's Big Brother: George Orwell's Literary Siblings* (2006).

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GORDON BOWKER taught at Goldsmith's College, University of London. He now works as a full-time biographer and journalist. His books include *Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano: A Casebook* (1987); *Malcolm Lowry Remembered* (1985); *Pursued by Furies: A Life of Malcolm Lowry* (1993); *Through the Dark Labyrinth: A Biography of Lawrence Durrell* (1996); and *George Orwell [Inside George Orwell in the US]* (2003). He is now working on a book about literary exile.

WILLIAM E. CAIN is Professor of English at Wellesley College. He is the editor of *A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau* (2000) and *American Literature*, a two-volume anthology (2004).

ROBERT CONQUEST is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He is the author of some thirty-one books of history, biography, poetry, fiction and criticism, including *The Great Terror*, which has appeared in more than twenty languages, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, and *The Dragons of Expectation*.

BERNARD CRICK is Professor Emeritus of Birkbeck College, University of London. His prolific writings span both the academic and the popular, a public intellectual in the old sense. His best known books are *In Defence of Politics* (1962 and still in print) and *George Orwell: A Life* (1980); and also four books of essays including *Essays on Politics and Literature*, *Political Thoughts and Polemics*, and *Essays on Citizenship*. More recently he wrote *Democracy*. In 2002, he was knighted 'for services to citizenship and political studies' after having chaired the advisory group that brought citizenship into the national curriculum for England. He has lived since 1984 in Edinburgh, where he has been active in the Scottish devolution movement.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN is Distinguished Professor of English at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he teaches courses in literature, film and American cultural history. He is a senior fellow of the Center for the Humanities,

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which he founded in 1993. His books include a study of the 1960s, *Gates of Eden* (1977), which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism; *Double Agent: The Critic and Society* (1992); and *Leopards in the Temple* (2002), a widely reviewed social history of postwar American fiction. His latest book is a collection of essays, *A Mirror in the Roadway: Literature and the Real World* (2005). He is completing a cultural history of the United States in the 1930s.

ERIKA GOTTLIEB is the author of *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* (2001); *The Orwell Conundrum: A Cry of Despair or Faith in the Spirit of Man?* (1992); and *Lost Angels of a Ruined Paradise: Themes of Cosmic Strife in Romantic Tragedy* (1982). Her essays are published in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, *Shakespearean Criticism*, and *Utopian Studies*. Gottlieb has taught at McGill and Concordia Universities in Montreal, at the faculty of English in Budapest's ELTE University, and in Toronto at Seneca College and Ryerson Polytechnic University.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS is among the best known and most controversial figures in contemporary intellectual life. He is a prolific author, journalist, literary critic and public intellectual who is often described as a 'contrarian'. Now living in Washington, DC, he has been a columnist at *Vanity Fair*, *The Nation*, *Slate* and an occasional contributor to many other publications. He is the author of *God Is Not Great: The Case Against Religion* (2007); *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America* (2005); *Love, Poverty, and War: Journeys and Essays* (2004); *A Long Short War: The Postponed Liberation of Iraq* (2003); *Why Orwell Matters* (2002), among other books.

MICHAEL LEVENSON is the William B. Christian Professor of English at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine, 1908–1922* (1984); *Modernism and The Fate of Individuality: Character and Form in the Modern English Novel* (1991); *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (2000; co-author Karen Chase), the forthcoming *Modernism*, and editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Modernism*.

NEIL McLAUGHLIN teaches sociological theory, and works in the broad area of the sociology of culture, knowledge and intellectuals. He is working on the concept of the 'global public intellectual' and is researching the social context of 'academics as public intellectuals' in Canada in two projects funded by the Canadian Federal government's Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). He has previously published on the sociology of reputations and critical theory in journals such as *The Sociological Quarterly* and *Sociological Theory*, on the topic of Canadian sociology in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* and *The American Sociologist* and on political issues in *Dissent*.

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JOHN NEWSINGER is senior lecturer at Bath Spa University. He is the author of *Orwell's Politics* and numerous articles on Orwell. His most recent book is *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement* (London: Merlin Press, 2004.) He is currently working on a history of the British Empire.

JOHN RODDEN has taught at the University of Virginia and the University of Texas at Austin. He has authored or edited several books on George Orwell, including *The Politics of Literary Reputation: the Making and Claiming of 'St. George' Orwell* (1989), *Understanding Animal Farm in Historical Context* (1999), *Scenes from an Afterlife: The Legacy of George Orwell* (2003), *George Orwell Into the Twenty-First Century* (with Thomas Cushman, 2004), and *Every Intellectual's Big Brother: George Orwell's Literary Siblings* (2006).

JONATHAN ROSE is Professor of History at Drew University. His books include *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, *The Holocaust and the Book: Destruction and Preservation*, and *The Revised Orwell*. He recently coedited (with Simon Eliot) *A Companion to the History of the Book*. He was the founding president of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, and he currently coedits (with Ezra Greenspan) the journal *Book History*.

JOHN P. ROSSI is a Professor of History at La Salle University in Philadelphia. He has written widely about Orwell's career.

MARGERY SABIN is Lorraine Chiu Wang Professor of English at Wellesley College. She is the author of *English Romanticism and the French Tradition* (1976), *The Dialect of the Tribe: Speech and Community in Modern Fiction* (1987), and *Dissenters and Mavericks: Writings about India in English: 1765–2000* (2002), as well as essays and reviews in journals, including *Raritan*, *Essays in Criticism*, *Prose Studies*, and *College English*. An earlier and partial version of her essay here was presented at the George Orwell Centenary Conference at Wellesley College (May, 2003), and published as 'Outside/Inside: Searching for Wigan Pier', in *George Orwell Into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Thomas Cushman and John Rodden (2004).

IAN WILLIAMS's book *Rum: A Social and Sociable History of the Real Spirit of 1776* was published in August 2004 which Kirkus Reviews calls 'rambunctious, rollicking history, sodden with tasty lore'. His previous was *The Deserter: Bush's War on Military Families, Veterans and His Own Past*. His first, *The Alms Trade*, was published in 1989, and his second, *The UN For Beginners*, was published in 1995. He has chapters in *George Orwell Into the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Thomas Cushman and John Rodden (2004), *Why Kosovo Matters: The Debate on the Left Revisited*, edited by Danny Postel (forthcoming), *Irving Howe and the Critics: Celebrations and Attacks*, edited by John Rodden (2005), and *The Iraq War*, edited by Rick Fawn and Raymond Hinnebusch (2006).

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PREFACE

JOHN RODDEN

George Orwell's public reputation far exceeds that of any other writer of his generation, and indeed of any other political writer of the twentieth century. Six decades of commentary about his work and life – which has included five biographies, at least four dozen book-length scholarly studies, and hundreds of literary essays and scholarly articles – has all become part of an Orwell cottage industry that continues to churn at a phenomenal rate. His centennial year in 2003 alone witnessed the publication of three new biographies as well as at least a half-dozen critical books and dozens of essays and articles. This enormous secondary literature has taken on a life of its own and gone beyond the work of Orwell to cover also the phenomenon of 'Orwell' – the cultural icon and mythic figure who is probably more quoted and referenced than any other modern writer.

Given the plethora of Orwell criticism, one could argue that another critical study of Orwell is superfluous and unnecessary. But the fact is that this massive critical literature has not only become extremely specialised, and therefore somewhat inaccessible to the nonscholar, but it has also contributed to and even created misconceptions about the man and writer and his literary legacy.

These realities make clear that an overview covering the broad range of Orwell's writing and influence can be an indispensable resource. Accordingly, this Cambridge Companion serves as both an introduction to Orwell's work and furnishes numerous innovative interpretations and fresh critical perspectives on it. It is designed to address both the needs of a general reader newly acquainted with Orwell and to challenge the student or scholar of Orwell thoroughly familiar with his work and the controversies swirling about it. The diversity of critical perspectives – literary, cultural, political and historical – reflects the extraordinary range and scope of commentary devoted to Orwell. Most importantly, they do what excellent critical essays ought to do, which is indeed to function as a 'companion' to the original

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literary work, whereby they stimulate the reader to discover (or rediscover) the author's achievement for themselves.

Orwell presents special challenges for an editor who seeks to be comprehensive. He is regarded as the greatest political writer in English during the twentieth century. The world fame of George Orwell is due to a combination of high esteem from intellectuals and immense popularity with the general reading public. Although he died at the early age of forty-six, his last two works – *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) – have sold more than forty million copies and stand as the most influential works of political fiction of the twentieth century.

Yet Orwell was far more than a novelist; he wrote essays, reportage, opinion columns, book reviews and even film reviews and poetry. *The Complete Works of George Orwell* comprise twenty thick volumes in Peter Davison's monumental edition published by Secker and Warburg. In addition, there is 'Orwell', the cultural icon, the mythic literary and public personality, the canonised author in the schoolbooks, and the literary Cold Warrior who towers over political events of the past six decades and has become a culture hero for intellectuals across the ideological spectrum. No critical survey of his writings and heritage can ignore this remarkable development.

Rather than survey in cursory fashion the full range of Orwell's life, work and reputation – that is, the achievement of Orwell and the phenomenon of 'Orwell' – the chapters in this Cambridge Companion address what is central to his work and legacy, with an occasional foray into an unfamiliar area of interest. They concentrate on the fiction and documentary writings, but they also cover Orwell's prose style and such topics and issues of keen interest to readers as his literary style, his patriotism, his positions on war and pacifism, and his anti-Communism. Throughout this Companion, Orwell's work is also placed within the context of the political and social climate of the time. His response to the Depression, British imperialism, Stalinism, the Second World War, and the politics of the British Left are all examined. The contributors also discuss Orwell's status among intellectuals and in the literary academy.

The volume closes with a bibliographic essay that highlights the key issues and critical studies of Orwell, and it opens with a detailed chronology of Orwell's life and work.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1903 25 June. Eric Arthur Blair born in Motihari, Bengal.
- 1904 Ida Blair returns with children Marjorie and Eric to England and settles at Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire.
- 1908–11 Attends day-school at Henley run by Ursuline nuns (as did his two sisters, Marjorie and Avril).
- 1911–16 Boards at St Cyprian's, private preparatory school at Eastbourne, Sussex.
- 1912 Richard Blair retires from the Indian Civil Service and returns to England. Family moves to Shiplake, a village two miles south of Henley in Oxfordshire (probably late autumn).
- 1914 2 October. First appearance in print with poem, 'Awake! Young Men of England', *Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard*.
- 1917–21 King's Scholar at Eton. Contributes to *The Election Times* and *College Days*.
- 1917 13 September. Father commissioned as 2nd Lieut; posted to France, he spends eight months 'in the field', and the last four months of the war with the Royal Artillery in Marseilles.
- 1922–27 Serves in Indian Imperial Police in Burma; resigns while on leave in England in November 1927, effective in January.
- 1927 October. First tramping expeditions to East End of London.
- 1928 Winter. Tramping in vicinity of London.

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- 1928–29 Lives in working-class district of Paris; writes (and destroys) one or two novels. Begins early drafts of *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Burmese Days*.
- 1929 7–22 March. Admitted to Hôpital Cochin, Paris, after coughing up blood.
- 1930–31 Uses parents' home in Southwold as base, writing there but going off to tramp and live with down-and-outs in London.
- 1932–33 Teaches full-time at The Hawthorns, a small private school for boys, in Hayes, Middlesex.
- 1933 9 January. *Down and Out in Paris and London*, by 'George Orwell', published by Victor Gollancz.
- 1933 Autumn. Teaches French at Frays College, Uxbridge in Middlesex.
- 1934 January–October. Lives with parents in Southwold. Writes *A Clergyman's Daughter*.
- 1934 25 October. *Burmese Days* published by Harper & Brothers, New York.
- 1934–36 October–January 1936. Part-time assistant (with Jon Kimche), at Booklovers' Corner, 1 South End Road, Hampstead.
- 1935 11 March. *A Clergyman's Daughter* published by Gollancz.
- 1936 31 January–30 March. In North of England to collect material for a book commissioned by Gollancz on unemployment conditions.
- 1936 20 April. Publication of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* by Gollancz.
- 1936 9 June. Marries Eileen O'Shaughnessy at parish church in Wallington, Hertfordshire.
- 1936 September. 'Shooting an Elephant', *New Writing*.
- 1936 November. 'Bookshop Memories', *Fortnightly*.
- 1936 Christmas. Leaves to fight for Republicans in Spanish Civil War.

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- 1937 January–June. Serves in Independent Labour Party contingent with militia of the POUM (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification).
- 1937 8 March. *The Road to Wigan Pier* published by Gollancz in trade and Left Book Club editions.
- 1937 28 April–10 May. On leave in Barcelona during Communist attempt to suppress revolutionary parties (including POUM). Spied on by Communist agents.
- 1937 20 May. Shot in throat by Fascist sniper at Huesca and taken successively to hospitals in Monflorite, Sietamo and Lerida, then to sanatorium outside Barcelona.
- 1937 23 June. Escapes with Eileen from Spain into France by train.
- 1937 Early July. Arrives back at Wallington; begins writing *Homage to Catalonia*.
- 1938 25 April. *Homage to Catalonia*, having been refused by Gollancz, is published by Secker & Warburg.
- 1938 June. Joins the Independent Labour Party.
- 1938 24 June. 'Why I Joined the I.L.P.', *New Leader*.
- 1938–39 12 September–26 March. In French Morocco (mainly at Marrakech); writes *Coming Up for Air*.
- 1939 12 June. *Coming Up for Air* published by Gollancz.
- 1939 3 September. War breaks out. Shortly thereafter, Orwell leaves Independent Labour Party because of its opposition to the war.
- 1940 11 March. *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*.
- 1941 19 February. *The Lion and the Unicorn* published by Secker & Warburg (first of 'Searchlight Books' edited by Orwell and T. R. Fyvel).
- 1941–43 August 1941–November 1943. Talks Assistant, later Talks Producer, in Indian section of BBC's Eastern Service.
- 1941 September. Writes 'The Art of Donald McGill', *Horizon*.
- 1943 24 November. Resigns from BBC and joins *Tribune* as Literary Editor (until 16 February 1945).

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- 1944 14 May. Birth of Orwell's son; adopted June 1944 and christened Richard Horatio Blair.
- 1945 15 February–end March. War correspondent for *The Observer* and *The Manchester Evening News* in France and Germany.
- 1945 29 March. Eileen Blair dies while under an anesthetic to undergo a hysterectomy. After the funeral, Orwell returns to Europe to report the aftermath of the war.
- 1945 17 August. After many rejections, publication of *Animal Farm* by Secker & Warburg in an edition of 4,500 copies.
- 1946 14 February. *Critical Essays* published by Secker & Warburg.
- 1946 April. 'Politics and the English Language', *Horizon*.
- 1946 Summer. 'Why I Write', *Gangrel*. 26 August. *Animal Farm* published in USA.
- 1947 31 May. Sends Fredric Warburg a version of 'Such, Such Were the Joys'; final version probably completed about May 1948. First draft composed as early as 1946.
- 1947 20 December. Patient in Hairmyres Hospital, East Kilbride (near Glasgow), suffering from tuberculosis; stays seven months.
- 1948 13 May. Publication of *Coming Up for Air*, first volume in Secker's Uniform Edition.
- 1948 28 July. At Barnhill, Jura for five months.
- 1948 15 November. Publication of first volume of *British Pamphleteers*, by Allan Wingate, introduced by Orwell.
- 1949 6 January–3 September. Patient in Cotswold Sanatorium, Cranham, Gloucestershire, with serious case of tuberculosis.
- 1949 8 June. Publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Secker & Warburg. July. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* appears as Book of the Month Club selection.
- 1949 3 September. Transferred to University College Hospital, Gower Street, London.

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CHRONOLOGY

- 1949 13 October. Marries Sonia Brownell and names Sonia and Richard Rees as his literary executors. Plans extended trip to Swiss sanatorium.
- 1950 21 January. Dies of pulmonary tuberculosis, age 46.
- 1950 26 January. Funeral at Christ Church, Albany Street, London. Buried, as Eric Arthur Blair, All Saints Cemetery, Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire.