A Collection of Essays Study Guide

A Collection of Essays by George Orwell

BOOKRAGS

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Such, Such Were the Joys. . .

Such, Such Were the Joys. . . Summary

Part 1 - As a boy of eight, the author attends school at Crossgates, a boarding school. After spending about two weeks at the school, Orwell begins to wet the bed. He is warned that bedwetting is unacceptable - in fact, it is evil - but he is unable, from time to time, to avoid wetting the bed. Various beatings ensue, delivered by the headmaster. On the first beating, Orwell emerges from the headmaster's office and triumphantly announces the beating was not painful. Unfortunately, the headmistress overhears his remarks and he is immediately returned for a second, more severe beating. During this second beating, the handle of the cane breaks and the headmaster summarily blames Orwell for breaking the cane.

Part 2 - Successful Crossgates students continue on to public schools, usually to Harrow or Eton. The students at Crossgates run the social spectrum; some are from the aristocracy, most are from affluent families, and some, such as Orwell, are so-called scholarship students who are attending the school on reduced tuition. The curriculum at the school varies depending on the wealth of the student. Thus, poorer students are barred from participating in courses that carry an additional burden of fees. The discipline at the school also varies depending on the wealth or prestige of the student. Thus, aristocratic students are not particularly disciplined, while poorer students are rather severely disciplined. On social occasions such as birthdays, richer students receive gifts or treats from the school, while poorer students do not.

Orwell's only function in the school, or so he is told by the headmaster, is to garner one or more scholarships to public schools and thus to increase the prestige of Crossgates. To this end, Orwell's entire education is founded around areas of study that will allow him to score well on scholastic examinations. For example, he studies history without any context, simply to memorize dates and event names. The general consensus is that poorer students who do not perform exceptionally at school are basically ruined for life.

Orwell notes that, contrary to public opinion, beatings and other forms of corporal punishment work very well to instill discipline and rigor in students. The entire establishment demands a student's acceptance because the institution is unanswerable to the students who are all children. Children have no sense of proportion and therefore cannot adequately judge things for what they are. As a result, children usually develop an abiding hatred for their disciplinarians. Such hatred exists, even if it is typically veiled or disguised.

Part 3 - Orwell remembers that attending school did involve several simple pleasures aside from the suffering. He remembers catching insects and amphibians. He recalls taking occasional nature walks with one kindly instructor. The headmistress, referred to disparagingly as Bingo, is hated but simultaneously adored by the sycophantic students

who are always trying to impress her with their particular situation. She is a penurious and mean-spirited woman who appears to be highly volatile.

However, Orwell also recalls how most illnesses, especially among the poorer students, were considered by all to be a form of moral defect. Ill-treatment and poor feeding were the standard practices of the day. Indeed, most schools did not feed their students enough to survive on the premise that students would supplement their cafeteria allotment with additional, privately purchased food. Since students' monies were confiscated and managed by the headmaster, however, Orwell rarely had opportunity to purchase additional food. However, boys in general feel that misfortune is a disgrace and strive to hide the negative aspects of their existence.

Part 4 - During one period at school, the students are generally and vaguely accused of some form of deviant sin. Orwell, nearly sexless, does not understand what could be wrong but is nonetheless accused. In later life, he will come to believe that the so-called sin of the students involved several boys participating in a group masturbation, but at the time, he finally decides the sin referred to must be having an erection. Various anti-sin lectures and accusations become common for a period. One lecture indicates that students who are sinful will exhibit their crime through black rings around their eyes. Orwell, as a child, becomes worried that some day his inadequacy will become manifested as ringed eyes. Orwell subsequently believes he is vaguely sinful and somehow worthless until the age of about fourteen when he rejects religion and the notion of sin.

Part 5 - The school is founded upon a particular form of social snobbery that was prevalent in England before 1914. Wealth is viewed as good, poverty is considered evil, and therefore obscene displays of wealth indicate moral goodness. For example, Scotland, subjugated, is viewed as the resort of the wealthy where game and hunting is enjoyed by those of high moral character. Poor boys, such as Orwell, who have never been off hunting in Scotland, are clearly of moral insignificance. Aside from the institution itself, the boys each highly contest their position and are very critical of each other's claims to wealth. Orwell is judged as inferior not because of what he can do, but because of what he is - his social background lacks prestige, his father is not rich.

One day Orwell has an altercation with another student, Johnny Hall. Orwell suffers the insult and then retaliates by smashing Hall in the face seconds before a teacher enters the room, thus obviating retaliation. Orwell is later ashamed of his actions because they violate his own code of conduct. He is further ashamed because Hall does not retaliate in a similar fashion, instead but challenged Orwell to fight, as is chivalrous. Orwell repeatedly declines, which further diminishes his own self-worth.

Eventually Orwell completes his education. Although he has won two impressive scholarships, the headmistress dismisses him out-of-hand. By receiving the scholarship awards, he has completely discharged his responsibility to the school that thusly gains in prestige. Once the scholarships are awarded, Orwell has nothing left to offer to the school and is therefore ignored. He is happy to leave what he has considered a horrible place and spends the next several years lazing about instead of applying himself.

Part 6 - Orwell wonders if modern schools are the same. He notes recent enlightened changes in society. Beatings have been discredited and the overall status and well being of children has improved. Orwell wonders if these changes carry over into boarding schools. Orwell notes that, although it is certainly acceptable to love a child, it is probably erroneous to assume that the child returns the love. He notes several physical qualities of adults that are distasteful to children. He notes that children have no valid conception of age, and consider most adults to be ancient and decrepit creatures who smell bad. He concludes by noting he has never returned to Crossgates but assumes that if he did he would no longer find it a horrible place - he would simply find it small and somewhat insignificant.

Such, Such Were the Joys. . . Analysis

The essay on early school experiences is divided into six sections. In Part 1, Orwell considers his experiences as a bedwetting student at Crossgates, noting that he was warned and then beaten for his offense. He says the beatings were unquestionably effective and after only a few of them, he quit wetting the bed. The most interesting aspect of this section is the exploration of the nature of sin. The headmaster defines bedwetting as wicked and sinful, yet the behavior is literally beyond the control of Orwell. As a boy, Orwell concludes, therefore, that performing a sin is quite literally sometimes inescapable - sin is not something you do, it is something that happens to you. Orwell will later, at fourteen, reason that since sin is unavoidable, then the entire Christian cosmology is suspect.

In Part 2, Orwell examines the nature of being a child in society. The treatment of children at boarding schools is entirely dependent upon their family's status. Rich children are coddled and praised while poor children are beaten and subjected to harsh demands. Rich children bring the school prestige simply because they are rich, but poor children must demonstrate academic excellence to benefit the school in any way they can. The children themselves accept this as factual simply because they lack any sense of proportion and are not capable to judge matters for themselves.

In Part 3, Orwell examines the essential nature of existing at boarding school. Children are not fed sufficiently and are not clothed well. Little attention is paid to their daily grooming; thus, children who chose not to brush their teeth simply have their teeth decay while children who chose not to take the coldwater public bath are simply dirty and smell bad. The school officials do not attempt to ensure that children's physical health is maintained, as illness is viewed as a sort of moral ineptness rather than an organic process. Although the headmistress would presumably be in charge of this, she in fact does not care.

In Part 4, Orwell relates an experience resulting from a discovered event of group masturbation, in which Orwell was not involved. The selected ringleader was ejected from the school and the remaining students were subjected to repeated lectures about the sanctity of the body. The bizarre process mystified Orwell, who was unaware of sex in general and was oblivious to the specific event in question. He notes that the student

identified as the ringleader was a poor student who seemingly prospered after being ejected from school, a fact that is at variance with what the school taught about its own vaunted social value.

In Part 5, Orwell considers how fundamentally different English culture was before the Great War. In 1914, wealth was equated to moral rightness while poverty and illness represented some form of moral turpitude. Thus, it was assumed that rich people deserved their station and poor people were manifestly inferior. After the slaughter and destruction of the Great War, these attitudes generally were not held to such an extreme degree. Orwell examines some of his own behavior that he considers to be unsavory because it violates principles. This is an example of how one can be defined by what one does rather than by what one is born into.

In Part 6, Orwell speculates about the then-current (1947) state of schooling - he wonders if it is the same horrific experience or if society's generally enlightened views of childrearing and care have percolated through to the boarding school system. The section investigating the relationship between adult and child from the child's perspective is interesting and compelling. Orwell concludes by noting that his past experiences, while very interesting as a subject of contemplation, have little bearing on the man he has become.

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens Summary

Part 1 - The writer and novelist Charles Dickens is widely critiqued in various ways. Nearly all reviewers, however, agree that Dickens was a social radical who attacked the fabric of several common social institutions of his time; even so, he remains a generally admired author. Orwell finds it remarkable that Dickens succeeded in attacking everybody without antagonizing anybody.

To better understand what Dickens accomplished, it is easiest to first enumerate what he did not attempt. Dickens does not write about the proletariat. Dickens is not a revolutionary writer - he maintains that society's ills are principally due to lack of morals, but he does not suggest an alterative system and, in fact, does not even suggest doing away with the established system. Dickens' body of work seems to suggest simply that if men would be decent, society would be decent. Orwell notes that throughout Dickens' career, the importance of the character of the kindly affluent individual gradually diminishes as if Dickens was finally cognizant that a single good individual cannot single-handedly put a grotesquely unfair society to rights.

Dickens does not challenge the established social order even as he criticizes it. Even though he states that gifted children should not be forced to work long shifts in crushing labor, he does not state that all children should be free from such practices. Dickens is against trade unionism. When Dickens does recognize revolutionary acts as proper, the proper acts are only those that are deemed historically inevitable, not those that are historically necessary. Dickens views revolution as terrible and disgusting and sees in it nothing positive. Dickens was particularly insightful when writing about children and children's perceptions. This was uncommon for that period. Although Dickens was not a revolutionary writer, he did challenge the moral structure of society by a sustained criticism of the implementation of the social system.

Part 2 - Dickens writes from a typical bourgeois viewpoint. He appears unconscious of the future and focuses on the institutions of the past. Aside from policemen, Dickens treats all petty officials with contempt. Dickens feels that the entire apparatus of government is unnecessary - individual success is paramount. Dickens' strongest portraits are those of unimportant, middling-class characters. Dickens, though untouched by European culture, is remarkably free of virulent nationalism, which so characterizes other contemporaneous authors and destroys the enduring value of their work. Dickens, unlike many of his contemporaries, is not anti-Semitic. Orwell concludes the section by noting that Dickens never wrote of battle or war.

Part 3 - Dickens is often characterized as a champion of the poor. This is true to a certain degree, but Dickens was not fully aware of the really, desperately poor. For Dickens, therefore, the poor are small shopkeepers or valets, usually not the industrial and agricultural workers. Dickens displays a marked repulsion for the rough proletarian

that lives in slums. Dickens similarly displays repulsion for criminality and criminals. The laboring poor are held in high esteem but not quite treated as moral equals to the middle-class. All of Dickens' heroes speak with a middle-class accent and sensibility while characters speaking with a lower-class accent are principally dolts or comical elements.

Dickens' attitude toward gender and class is typical for the period in which he wrote. Rich men seducing poor women are somewhat acceptable, if distasteful, yet poor men seducing rich women are abhorrent. Dickens usually treats a poor man's sexual cravings for a rich woman as a sort of distasteful joke. Typical servants are usually caricatures; those servants who are well-rounded characters are based on an anachronistic feudal type of lifelong personal servant - as usual, Dickens reaches for the idealized version of existing things.

Part 4 - Dickens never writes about agriculture but writes endlessly about food. Dickens does not fully understand how the world operates - for example, he never writes about work, *per se* - work is simply an event that happens elsewhere. This is because the author knew very little about the actual mechanics of factories or other businesses. The typical Dickens novel instead focuses around a type of melodramatic plot and the real concerns of the working classes are subrogated to the solution of the plot. Dickens cannot develop the story about the characters' daily lives and thus the story develops around a series of unlikely and complex events. Dickens describes appearances but does not describe processes, as he has a notable lack of mechanical understanding. The lack of reactionary violence in most of his novels is also peculiar and displays the author's distaste for carnage. Similarly, Dickens does not understand sport.

These various deficiencies in Dickens' novels lead one to the conclusion that the only decent thing to do is marry the heroine, settle down, and be properly affluent and kind. The ultimate happy ending is to retire into complete idleness and live either with, or, at the very least, near family in an insulated, pastoral setting, devoid of commotion and intrigue.

Part 5 - Dickens' popularity and universality in English life is indicated in his pervasive presence in literature and daily life. Orwell argues that Dickens is more than simply a great author; in fact, he has become an institution. Reading Dickens reminds one of childhood and happier times, and his characters are intelligible and recognizable even to those who have not read his novels.

Dickens novels are often imitated. He is particularly famous for the inclusion of many unnecessary details that do not advance the plot but simply add texture around the margins of scenes. Orwell argues that Dickens' fertility of imagination greatly hampered him as a novelist by overburdening his prose with needless flowery descriptions and irrelevant details. These imaginative details - Orwell calls them "gargoyles" - are Dickens' strength, even though his overall architecture is "rotten." Dickens is often regarded as little more than a caricaturist: Orwell does not disagree, but argues that this is the essential genius of Dickens. His characters are shallow and have no mental life,

and it is unreasonable to expect that Dickens would do well outside of the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, Dickens' work has unquestionably stood the test of time.

Part 6 - Dickens survives because he was a moralist with something to say - his characters cared about their respective spheres and the author cared about presenting them correctly. When Dickens' prose suffers when he departs from his emotional construction. Dickens' popularity is grounded in his capacity to display the common man's native decency. Dickens' code of equality and decency was heartily believed in by his contemporaneous readers: Orwell concludes that Dickens was "a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls" (p. 104).

Charles Dickens Analysis

In Part 1, Orwell provides a background that includes a general critique of Dickens. He notes that Dickens is nearly universally appreciated and valued but ironically by primarily those whom Dickens most savagely critiques. Orwell attempts to establish that Dickens is a primarily a moral rather than a political writer. Although he attacks existing institutions, he does not offer methods of correction or replacement ideas. Dickens' only solution to all societal ills is simply for individual people to be good to each other.

In Part 2, Orwell examines Dickens' socio-political viewpoints. He is characterized as a middle-class, bourgeois thinker without any real connection to the desperately poor or even the typical working class. Dickens does not value government or the aristocracy because, even as he adores things of the past, his essentially bourgeois outlook is forward looking beyond the strictures imposed by government. Further, Dickens is particularly repulsed by violence and war.

In Part 3, Orwell further examines Dickens' class consciousness. The author is generally considered to be a "working-man's novelist" and yet he is unable to portray the true working class with any sort of accuracy. Poor characters in Dickens' work are either possessed of the criminal element, simply insane, or are provided as absurd comic relief. The essential trait of the working class - work itself - is foreign to Dickens who has no experience with, or interest in, how daily work is accomplished. Dickens also holds typically Puritan and middle-class values about gender and sexual relations.

In Part 4, Orwell considers the idealized Dickens novel construction. Since his characters are limited in complexity, the typical Dickens novel revolves around an extremely unlikely series of complexly interrelated events that combine to form a melodramatic plot. The somewhat one-dimensional characters are then forced to act outside of their standard roles to avoid unpleasant results or to simply help others by performing a decent act. Dickens' preconceived notions about some types of characters - for example, criminals - restricts his ability to develop them in completely realistic ways.

In Part 5, Orwell discusses the function of Dickens in English life; his presence is so pervasive that references to his characters or novels are widely understood even by those who have never read his works. Orwell then examines the common critique that Dickens is merely a caricaturist. While Orwell does not necessarily disagree with this criticism, he argues that, in fact, this is Dickens' especial genius and an essential quality of his work.

In Part 6, Orwell briefly concludes the essay by noting that Dickens has survived the test of time - indeed, has remained as popular as ever among a wide range of social and economic classes. After comparing Dickens to many other authors, and comparing several of his novels to other novels, Orwell concludes that Dickens' solution for societal ills - people being decent to other people - is not as shallow as it first sounds.

The Art of Donald McGill

The Art of Donald McGill Summary

Most shops and newsstands carry a type of semi-illicit postcard that is simultaneously obscene and vulgar, and designed to elicit a laugh. These so-called "comic postcards" are very similar in design and appearance. The jokes are usually not particularly funny but the artwork is usually fairly good, while the colors are garish. About half of the postcards are the work of one Donald McGill. McGill may or may not be a real person, but many postcards are attributed to him. McGill postcards may be said to be the very embodiment of a comic postcard as they are so typical in content, design, and execution.

Several examples of typical joke material are enumerated in the essay to illustrate that the jokes are not witty but humorous. More than half of the postcards deal with sex, and the basic premise is that marriage only benefits women and that sex appeal instantaneously evaporates at the age of about twenty-five. Home life is also a favorite topic and the standard jokes emphasize that no marriage is happy and a man can never win an argument with a woman. In third place is drunkenness and teetotalism, which are apparently by definition humorous. These drinking comic postcards establish that all drunken men have optical illusions and only middle-age men can become drunk. Other comic postcard topics include the toilet, class snobbery, and politics. Most characters illustrated are stock figures - that is, a drunken middle-aged man represents all drunken middle-aged men.

These comic postcards are very frequently more obscene than any other printed material available in England. Similar cartoons would not be tolerated in any magazine or newspaper. However, they are usually tolerated because they are based on fundamentally accepted values - after all, men do drink, and people do get married. The focus is on the drinking and the marriage; the implication being that society is stable and intelligible.

The postcards give expression to the dual nature in all people; what Orwell calls the Sancho Panza view of life. That is, we all want to be the noble Don Quixote, but we all recognize the Sancho Panza side of ourselves. The dirty postcards are not really an attack on the moral society of fabric, but simply a nod to admit that, from time to time, people wish that society was not so civilized. Although people are generally heroic, they also need to occasionally give vent to their base sentiments. Thus, the comic postcard stands for the worm's-eye view of life.

The Art of Donald McGill Analysis

This brief essay is essentially a discussion of the duality of human experience. Society demands certain high standards from individuals - men must go to war, couples must

stay married, women must bear children. Most individuals are willing to usually shoulder their burden and perform their quietly heroic duties. However, there is also a general rebellion against this notion - people want to be good, but not too good, and they do not want to be good all the time. Since fidelity in marriage is such a critical aspect of successful society, the natural topic of lowbrow humor in free societies is, of course, sex. The comic postcards drawn by Donald McGill and others focus to a large extend on sex and, secondarily, male-female relationships, particularly within the institution of marriage. The postcards make numerous assumptions. For example, all men have a roving eye and all women desire to be married. These assumptions, however, must necessarily be very close to the mark for the postcards to function.

The essay additionally describes the postcards' appearance, production, and distribution. Perhaps a dozen typical postcard joke lines are reproduced and some are funny, if not particularly creative. Orwell notes that the most obscene always have a potential non-obscene double meaning, presumably to avoid litigation. For example, in one postcard a woman holds her hands far apart while her friends look on with shocked disbelief. Behind her, hanging on the wall, are two photographs - one of a fish, one of a man. By present standards, of course, these comic postcards would be neither obscene nor particularly vulgar.

Rudyard Kipling

Rudyard Kipling Summary

Kipling has been despised by five literary generations because he is reportedly fascistic. Orwell condemns Kipling's imperialist view of life as untenable and egregious, and concludes that Kipling is, in fact, a jingo imperialist, morally insensitive, and aesthetically disgusting. Yet, with all of these horrible aspects, Kipling continues as a popular poet.

Although usually condemned as a Fascist, Kipling was not guilty of this particular worldview. For example, one poem typically indicated as Fascist is in actuality anti-Germanic and refers to the Germans as being lawless. To a modern sensibility, much of Kipling's philosophy is nonsensical. The post-Hitler world realizes that force may only be overcome with greater force - morality has no Part 1n the equation - there is no law, only power. Kipling, however, believed there was indeed a natural law and order to politics that was not only morally right but also inevitable. Thus, it is seen that the nineteenth-century imperialist outlook espoused by Kipling is not in fact equivalent to the modern gangster outlook. Although the Great War embittered Kipling, it did not fundamentally alter his worldview.

Kipling strongly self-identified with the official ruling class, and felt a deep sense of responsibility that is nearly unintelligible to the modern middle-class. Kipling felt suppressing and controlling native peoples for their own betterment was viable and, in fact, honorable. Modern sensibilities find this opinion grotesque and yet the actual living conditions around the world have not much changed since Kipling's era - only the way in which those conditions are discussed.

Kipling was widely traveled and presented nearly the only literary descriptions of much of nineteenth-century Anglo-India. Even though he was pro-military and pro-Empire, he was not simply a yes-man. His romantic ideas about England and the Empire were intermingled with his class prejudices. These romantic ideas result in poetry that, for example, generally praises junior officers and makes common soldiers fools - Kipling's typical phraseology has all the lower ranks talking with thick accents and behaving not quite bravely while the officers speak with intelligence and respond heroically. Kipling's depictions of battle and war are memorable and horrible.

Kipling's legacy is so enduring that many of his phrases are used in common speech without any knowledge of their origin. This penetration into everyday language is largely because Kipling essentially told the truth. However unpalatable, there is no arguing that Kipling often saw things for what they were. Kipling's poetry is often described as being simply verse or as just awful. Orwell refers to it repeatedly as "good bad poetry," indicating that it is remembered not because of its poetic value but primarily because of the subject matter and the semi-lyrical and brutal way in which it is presented - vulgar thoughts vigorously delivered.

Rudyard Kipling Analysis

Orwell considers the poetry of Rudyard Kipling. Although Orwell finds much of Kipling vulgar and awful, he does not agree with the common approach of writing of Kipling as some sort of Fascist. The introductory paragraphs of the essay are, in effect, an apology of Kipling based upon contextualizing him with the times in which he wrote. Orwell notes, for example, that all of Kipling's war knowledge dated from a pre-machine-gun era when breech-loading rifles were new-fangled and battlefield deaths were more likely to come from disease than enemy-inflicted wounds. Kipling's great desire to "paint the map red" through British imperialism was once thought to be not only morally right but economically sensible.

Orwell then moves on to consider Kipling's work and its strangely enduring success. For all of his distasteful aspects, Kipling was a keen observer of many things and used easily accessible verse to convey imagery and conditions that, for better or worse, resonate with British middle-class readers. Orwell notes several colloquialisms that are lifted from Kipling as samples of how fully his work has penetrated the English language. Orwell concludes by noting that Kipling is often misunderstood and can perhaps best be quantified as a so-called good bad poet. That is to say, bad poetry framed in good verse with simple language on sentiment that is essentially true.

Raffles and Miss Blandish

Raffles and Miss Blandish Summary

Raffles is a fictional character appearing in a series of magazine stories and novels. He is a so-called gentleman bandit; robbing others but for the most part avoiding serious or violent crimes while maintaining his own code of strict, if somewhat arbitrary, conduct. Although he is a criminal, Raffles is a gentleman and maintains standard that are simply not violated. The Raffles fiction was extremely popular and succeeded in capturing the public imagination at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Raffles stories place the criminal in the limelight and glamorize crime. The author, Hornung, goes to great lengths to establish Raffles as a moral man, including, Orwell notes, making him a cricketer who excels as a slow bowler. Of course, in the social structure of the Raffles fiction, crime did not pay and Raffles is eventually caught out in strange circumstances that pit his identity against his patriotism. He surrenders his identity for the Empire and subsequently makes good his life of crime by being killed in battle.

No Orchids for Miss Blandish is another novel, appearing in 1939, which places the criminals in the limelight and glamorizes crime. It is substantially different in attitude than the Raffles novels, which preceded it in publication by some four decades. The novel's plot involves a millionaire's daughter, Miss Blandish, who is kidnapped and held for ransom. She catches the eye of one sadistic criminal who serially rapes and brutalizes her under his own mother's tutelage. After more sensationalist crimes and rapes, the police apprehend and kill the rapist. Miss Blandish has by then become accustomed to the rapists caresses and feels unable to live without him. Instead of being rescued by the police, she commits suicide by leaping from a high window. The plot contains numerous murders, tortures, and sexual perversions and is based on the premise that everyone seeks only to increase their personal power. Therefore, all characters in the novel strive to gain power over those who are weak. The novel, very Americanized in tone and language, became very popular during the air-war - the "Blitz" - of World War II. One concludes from the novel that being a criminal is only reprehensible because it does not pay - not because being a criminal is immoral. The police in the novel, scarcely better than criminal themselves, are paid better and are therefore the better individuals.

In the later novel, one is not engaging in escapist fantasy into an exciting world of action such as that presented in the earlier novels. Instead, one is engaging in a sort of power-worship and escaping into the attendant cruelty and sexual perversion. The term "realism" is often used to describe such works: this is only accurate insofar as "realism" is defined to mean "might makes right." The novel's tone is simply a distillation of the then-modern political sense. Both books can be considered morally equivocal, but the later novel is so far advanced, and so brutal in outlook, that its wide popularity signals a fundamental change in British society; "snobbishness, like hypocrisy, is a check upon behaviour whose value from a social point of view has been underrated" (p. 147).

Raffles and Miss Blandish Analysis

Orwell's fundamental objective is to evaluate the change in British culture and society that occurred between 1910 and 1939 by way of examining two popular novels from their respective periods. Both novels were widely popular, both glamorized crime, and both were told from the criminal's point-of-view. Neither novel presents a moral or socially redeeming outlook. They are therefore suitable novels to compare and contrast, though Orwell notes several other novels from each period that would do just as nicely.

For Orwell, the fundamental difference between the two novels is summarized in the behavior of the principle characters and in the tone of the fiction. The earlier novel features a protagonist who is bounded by social stigma and the desire to be accepted in the social sphere. He, therefore, will simply not do many things because they are simply not done, not because they are right or wrong. For example, he will not steal from his host, though he will steal from someone else also staying at the host's lodging. The later novel features a presumptive protagonist who is not bounded by any social strictures whatsoever. He murders often, sometimes casually, sometimes with great brutality and intent; he rapes repeatedly and brutally, beating his victim in order to become aroused; he blackmails and he kidnaps - in fact, there seems to be nothing he will not do. His utter lack of principle and moral code sets him apart from the so-called gentleman burglar of the earlier novel. Finally, the earlier novel's tone is one of a boyish prank while the later novel features gritty language and obscene and vulgar passages.

Orwell takes this difference as symbolic of a general degradation in British culture. He hopes, though doubts, that this is perhaps temporary and due only the constant bombing during World War II. He notes that it is always easier to read about someone else's difficult times than to experience being a passive victim during war. For Orwell, the development of the so-called "realistic" novel is indicative of a great lapse in the public fiber of morality.

Shooting an Elephant

Shooting an Elephant Summary

Orwell is stationed in Moulmein, Lower Burma, and serves as a sub-divisional police officer. Anti-British sentiment is pervasive and Orwell is generally hated because of his position as an officer. Orwell likewise detests his job and finds imperialism to be untenable. One day an elephant goes wild in the town where Orwell is stationed, ravaging buildings and destroying property. The elephant's mahout is miles away and will not arrive on the scene for hours; therefore, Orwell, as the local police presence, is called upon to do something. He considers his duty weapon - a small-bore rifle - and leaves it behind as useless. He travels the town and tours the area where the elephant has rampaged, not seeing much destruction and not locating the elephant. Then he discovers the corpse of a local man who has clearly been killed by the elephant.

Orwell determines that he must at least find the elephant and visually determine how wild the elephant is at the present. His intention is to merely ascertain the situation and then leave the elephant to its own devices. However, to be cautious, he sends a local boy to a hunting shop to procure an elephant rifle on loan. The boy soon returns with Orwell's defensive weapon and five cartridges. Orwell notices that a crowd of nearly 2,000 locals has assembled to watch him. He goes forward with the weapon over his shoulder and finally comes upon the elephant. The animal appears completely calm and stands eating grass and grooming. Orwell does not want to shoot the animal, but the huge crowd has followed him and they clearly expect action. Feeling the social pressure, Orwell drops to a prone position, takes a careful bead, and shoots the elephant in the head - all the while knowing he is not doing something that is necessary, but only doing something to avoid looking like a fool. The shot staggers the animal but does not drop it. Orwell fires a second, and then a third time before the elephant finally drops to the ground.

He approaches the animal and discovers it is still alive. He shoots his remaining two cartridges into the elephant's chest without any apparent effect. He sends a boy for his duty rifle; the boy returns with the rifle and a load of ammunition. Orwell repeatedly shoots the elephant in the head, chest, and even down the throat, all to no avail as the beast does not die but continues its laborious breathing. Orwell finally leaves with sentiments of mixed disgust and foolishness. A subsequent investigation finds Orwell justified in the shooting of the elephant. Orwell is glad that a native man had been killed because this justifies his decision to shoot the elephant - he realizes he would have shot it anyway.

Shooting an Elephant Analysis

This brief anecdote is interesting and darkly amusing. Orwell approaches the elephant merely because he feels he must - he then shoots the animal simply to avoid looking

foolish. Simply put, he does not want to be laughed at. He compares the elephant to an expensive piece of mechanism, and notes that the owner suffered an appreciable financial loss through the death of the elephant. But he nevertheless killed it to avoid looking foolish. He is happy, in retrospect, that the killing of the elephant was legally justified in that it had killed a local man. In an allegorical sense, Orwell himself is the elephant - the unwanted British officer who stands out in the village; the man who the native peoples want dead, or at least gone.

Politics and the English Language

Politics and the English Language Summary

Orwell begins by providing five writing samples culled from disparate sources which illustrate later points made in the essay; these samples are clearly noted as bad examples. Orwell then summarizes several common writing errors, including: the use of dying metaphors; false operators - that is, entire phrases that stand for single words; pretentious diction; and, the use of meaningless words. Samples of bad English writing are provided for each. Using bad English is easy, and good English writing demands attention. Orwell then reviews some examples of poor writing, and then develops several strategies for good writing.

In general, bad English voids the language of meaning and, thus, bad English is an excellent vehicle for political speech. Bad English becomes automatic and meaningless, and can be developed and used without effort. When the political truth is difficult or unpalatable, meaningless euphemism becomes acceptable - indeed, preferable. Orwell provides several examples of political misdirection that defend the indefensible. If automatic and uncritical thought corrupts language, it is equally true that bad English language corrupts thought. Although it is possible to undo the contemporaneous ill usage of English, it is not likely to occur. Orwell lists several simple rules to help in the elimination of bad English.

Politics and the English Language Analysis

The essay investigates the practice of using "bad English writing" - a form of writing which makes complex sentences out of stock phrases that, in general, have no real meaning but sound good. Entire paragraphs and whole speeches can be assembled from bad English. This practice has proved very successful in politics where the unpalatable truth of political actions can be couched in vapid phrases and party-line statements. The essay is replete with examples taken from contemporaneous pamphlets, newspapers, and other publications. As an example, Orwell translates a verse from Ecclesiastes (King James Bible) into typical bad English. The result is humorous and illustrative. The essay concludes by offering a primer on avoiding bad English writing.

Reflections on Gandhi

Reflections on Gandhi Summary

Although Gandhi was anti-British, his strongly non-violent methods appeared to benefit British rule, and the British government therefore thought of Gandhi somewhat favorably. He was similarly accepted by the Indian affluent classes because he simply urged, rather than demanded, that they share their wealth. Even though Gandhi's political views were not widely accepted in England, he was personally liked by nearly everyone. Gandhi was remarkably honest and forthright about his politics as well as his spiritual and personal life.

In early life, Gandhi was typically pro-European and tried to assimilate British culture. It was only in later life that he became politicized through his experiences of discrimination. Orwell rather admires Gandhi but does not see that his political theory can be separated from his religious belief. Orwell enumerates Gandhi's religious beliefs as including a desire to escape from the illusion of existence, strict vegetarianism, celibacy - indeed the very elimination of sexual desire, and the avoidance of having close friends. Orwell argues the specific point that vegetarianism is untenable and, in fact, inhuman in some extreme circumstances; and thereafter the general point that humanity stands in opposition to perfection - to be human is to accept imperfection, and politics is firmly entrenched in the real world and not in a perceived afterlife. Gandhi's pacifism is not as firmly based on religion, however, and can be separated entirely from his religious beliefs and will stand alone as a successful political tool, even though the implementation of pacifism may cost millions of lives. Orwell sees in Gandhi's approach to pacifism a potential solution to many of the world's political problems.

Orwell questions whether Gandhi truly understood the nature of totalitarianism, as Gandhi's methods relied upon a certain freedom of information to circulate, which is not available in some countries. Although the British allowed Gandhi to popularize his methods and opinions, other regimes may not have been so tolerant - Orwell points to the Ukraine as a negative example. Orwell also notes that Gandhi's basic approach assumes that all involved are addressable and sane - again, not necessarily true in all circumstances.

Reflections on Gandhi Analysis

This brief section is ostensibly a review of a partial autobiography of Gandhi, which was published serially in various newspapers in at least two languages. Orwell does not confine himself to simply reviewing the text, however, and instead makes a general statement about Gandhi and his role in Indian independence. Orwell does not seem to particularly care for Gandhi as an individual, but does find him to be beyond reproach morally and ethically. That is, Orwell disagrees with Gandhi's philosophies, but notes

that they are internally consistent and that Gandhi adhered strictly to his own rules, a quality which is rare for a world leader.

Orwell dismisses most of Gandhi's philosophical thought because it is too-largely based on a religion that holds no appeal to most western readers. In particular, Orwell rejects vegetarianism as a spiritual practice. He does, however, state that Gandhi's pacifism can be entirely successful if completely separated from religious belief. Orwell sees in Gandhi's pacifism a possible solution to many of the world's political problems. However, pacifism as practiced by Gandhi has several limitations, which are enumerated. Orwell notes several modern examples of regimes that would, or did, simply obliterate pacifists through mass killings. For example, Gandhi's methods required freedom of the press and the freedom of assembly - both civil liberties allowed under British rule but clearly not universally allowed. Finally, Gandhi's methods presupposed that the British regime would react in a rational and sane manner. This was somewhat true for England but would notably not be true in, for example, Nazi Germany.

Marrakech

Marrakech Summary

Orwell sits in a city park in Marrakech and feeds bread to an antelope. He thinks that the antelope looks like it would be good to eat. A municipal employee considers Orwell for some time and then mentions that he could eat the bread - Orwell gives him most of the remaining bread.

The Jews in the city are crowded into restricted zones and are horribly poor. Many of the children are sick and most of the men work twelve-hour days just to subsist. Rumors of Hitler's pogroms circulate. Nearly everyone is malnourished, and the working peasants seem to simply blend into the background and vanish. Farming the desiccated and eroded soil is backbreaking toil and women are treated harshly. Most Europeans are appalled at the harsh treatment meted out to the local donkeys but none of them seem overly concerned with the harsh fate of the local peoples.

Orwell watches a troop of black Senegalese soldiers marching by, their white officers mounted and their white NCOs in the ranks. One soldier looks at him with wide, wondering eyes. Orwell realizes that all white men harbor the secret thought that one day the oppressed peoples will realize their oppression and throw off the white yoke.

Marrakech Analysis

This brief article is set in the Moroccan city of Marrakech, for which it is titled. Orwell makes several remarkable observations about the local conditions, noting how the local populace is destitute but manages to further discriminate against the Jewish sub-population. In addition, all of the men force the women to do the worst work. Of course at the "top" of the social pyramid sit the English imperialists, here symbolized by the white officers riding their large horses alongside the struggling black marching soldier. Orwell closes by noting that no armed force - only the soldier's perception of things - maintains the social structure.

Looking Back on the Spanish War

Looking Back on the Spanish War Summary

Part 1 - Orwell reminisces about his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. He remembers the foul living conditions, the overflowing latrines, and the poor quality of the meager food. It is often necessary to fight wars to preserve one's life or the freedom of the nation, and war is necessarily evil and vile.

Part 2 - Atrocities are perpetrated by all sides in nearly all wars - the Spanish Civil War was no exception. Orwell has no especial insight into any specific atrocity and instead considers them collectively and only briefly. He notes that the reality of atrocities is rarely considered in the press - only the political implications receive any wide consideration, and the political process is able to create or dismiss atrocities to fit the current political atmosphere's needs. Nevertheless, atrocities are committed whether or not they are officially recognized.

Part 3 - One day during the war, Orwell is positioned to shoot at the Fascist lines. He sees an enemy running along in full view, but the man is using his hands to hold up his trousers. Orwell does not shoot at him because he feels a momentary connection with him - how can someone trying to hold up his trousers be a Fascist?

On another day, Orwell discovers some personal property has been stolen, and he reports this to the officer in charge. The officer searches a young, new recruit who is proven innocent of the theft. Later, Orwell makes some friendly gestures to the young man. Still later, the man takes Orwell's side in a dispute about the division of labor. Orwell notes that such magnanimous feelings would be rarely possible in normal times. Revolution and warfare make people behave differently in numerous ways.

Part 4 - The intra-party struggles of the Spanish Republicans are intricate, distant, and in retrospect are largely insignificant. The various intricacies are not discussed, but the aggregate nature of them has caused a large amount of so-called history to be produced that is patently false. Orwell considers these putatively historical accounts of intra-party minutiae to be completely unsubstantiated and created merely to serve political purposes. Only the broad details of the war are truthful, the smaller details that are bandied about indicate an unfortunate but prevalent attitude that objective truth is somehow unobtainable. Orwell notes that non-objective truth is a diagnostic symptom of a totalitarian state. For example, the slaves and poor of history existed but are simply ignored and therefore are forgotten.

Part 5 - The working class remains the most reliable enemy of Fascism, because Fascism cannot meet their needs. Orwell compares the working class to a plant, ever growing upward toward the sun and heedless of apparently endless injuries inflicted upon it. The Spanish Civil War was essentially a class war, and had it been won by the Republicans. working people the world over would have benefited from the victory.

Part 6 - The Spanish Civil War was lost not because of the much-publicized disunity of the Republicans, but because the Fascists were stronger and better armed. Britain and the international community were strangely absent from the conflict, and allowed Hitler's Germany to support Franco's defeat of the working class. This ultimately strengthened Germany and was therefore harmful to Britain's interests. Stalin's support of the Republicans is equally as confusing as Britain's lack of opposition to the Fascists. Orwell concludes that Russia's involvement came about because of several contradictory motives and that Stalin's foreign policy was both opportunistic and stupid.

Part 7 - Orwell remembers hearing wounded militiamen singing patriotic songs. He also remembers an Italian militiaman he met on the day before enlisting in the Spanish militia. For Orwell, the Italian man symbolizes the very flower of the European working class and what was good and right about the war. Orwell attacks the contemporaneous notion that the working class should be free of materialism, and then concludes with a rather bad poem about the Italian militiaman.

Looking Back on the Spanish War Analysis

The essay presented is best viewed as a follow-on chapter to Orwell's previous autobiographical book, *Homage to Catalonia*, about the Spanish Civil War. Indeed, later editions of that book frequently include the entire essay as an appendix or final chapter. Many of the themes Orwell developed in that book are revisited in this essay with the benefit of several years of historic perspective. For example, Orwell has lost interest in trying to pin down the details of specific atrocities, simply noting that they were unfortunately frequent as in all wars. He likewise dispenses with the tortuous minutia of the Left's inter-party political machinations and notes that all so-called historical accounts are essentially political propaganda. Since the Left lost the war, the facts are more muddied than ever. Nevertheless, in broad detail, the war was between the working class and the wealthy and was a signal moment in the history of the world's poor and working peoples. Orwell asserts that, eventually, the war will be won by the working classes and hopes to live long enough to see that eventuality transpire. Orwell finally analyzes the root cause of the Republican defeat, noting that England and other nations harmed their own self-interest by not participating more actively in the war against Fascism. He then concludes with a brief summary of an Italian militiaman who was prominently, if briefly, featured in his earlier book about the war. The Italian becomes for Orwell, symbolic of all that was good and right about the revolutionary spirit - he notes that the man is almost certainly buried in an unmarked grave.

Inside the Whale

Inside the Whale Summary

Part 1 - Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* was greeted with cautious praise upon its publication in 1935. The novel is written in an autobiographical style and is considered to be largely autobiographical and factual. It is set in Paris during the pre-World War II boom and the characters are expatriate artists, bums, and idlers. The success of the novel is remarkable, particularly considering the unfolding events of World War II that surrounded its publication. Orwell first largely disregarded the novel as it was full of unprintable words, though once read the imagery remained, and grew more prominent in his memory. Orwell contrasts the novel to several other novels of similar construction and tone. Miller writes about the ordinary man, though as an expatriate artist his connection to the ordinary man is not a connection with the proletariat but with other poor expatriate artists and idlers. The dialogue in the novel is coarse and incredibly realistic and Miller is clearly a master of his artistic element. Miller is able to accept society and the world as he finds it. Orwell finds this broad attitude of acceptance to be somewhat troubling when espoused, yet unavoidable due to contemporaneous world politics. Orwell now turns his attention to examining other authors in a historical context.

Part 2 - Houseman is an example of a writer who, although enormously popular in his own time, has not withstood the passage of years particularly well. Although Orwell once found Houseman to be enjoyable, he now finds his work to be somewhat quaint. He considers Houseman's popularity in terms of the contemporaneously prevailing social situation. He then considers the next movement of literature which focused on a pessimistic outlook - thus, English literature moved from a focus on the glorious beauty of nature to a focus on the tragic nature of life. Orwell considers several authors and several works of literature and concludes that most of the post-Great War writers had no special attention to the problems of their times. They wrote without much political conviction. The pre-war writers focused on subject, whereas the post-war writers of the 1920s focused on literary form and structure.

As the 1930s emerged, a new group of writers began to focus on the ideal of a serious purpose in life. The younger writers therefore consciously became political, and their politics was Communism. This was made possible by the pre-World War II unofficial alliance of England, France, and Russia against Fascist Germany and driven by massive middle-class unemployment. This willful association with the totalitarian Russian state was enabled by a lack of real experience of totalitarianism by the writers involved. As the war unfolded, the brief one-time popularity and acceptability of Communism eroded. Orwell feels that the 1930s produced very little lasting fiction - the greatest writers were poets because the stringent social conformism of the 1930s was not suitable to the crafting of great fiction.

Part 3 - Henry Miller is perhaps the first novelist of a new group of novelists. He feels unable to control the world and furthermore hardly wishes to control it. When Orwell met

Miller in 1936, Miller told Orwell that his goal of direct participation in the Spanish Civil War was idiotic. Miller believes that the social order will eventually collapse into chaos but feels no sentiment about it. Orwell obliquely refers to one of Miller's writings, which considers being swallowed by a whale, as was Jonah. Being inside a whale frees one of all responsibility - Orwell finds the idea a little distasteful, but Miller found it palatable enough. Orwell judges Miller's novel as being not necessarily edifying but worth reading and likely an enduring piece of literature. After all, the tide of politics has turned to war and Miller's insight into and acceptance of this seemingly inevitable series of catastrophic events is, perhaps, the only sensible approach.

Inside the Whale Analysis

Inside the Whale is one of the longer essays included in the collection and is a sprawling, rambling review of Henry Miller's novel *The Tropic of Cancer*, as well as two other Miller novels. The essay is divided into three parts and ironically includes many of the common writing faults that Orwell would denounce in *Politics and the English Language* (published six years after). The essay refers several times to Biblical imagery and derives its title from the story of Jonah being swallowed by a large fish, presumably a whale. To Orwell, the inside of the whale is an insulated and safe place where one can relax regardless of conditions obtaining in the external world. It is therefore a tenable place to find oneself during the opening stages of a second world war.

In Part 1, Orwell considers the untimely publication of the novel and notes how remarkable the novel's success was considering the timing of its release. He also briefly notes his own initial reaction to the book. In Part 2, Orwell delivers a lengthy and rambling recounting of English literature from the early 1900s into the late 1930s, dividing the era into a few schools of writing which succeeded each other. As usual for Orwell, art is always political and his major school divisions are informed by the prevailing world politics of the time. Orwell cites numerous authors and books; many quite obscure even for the time, as examples of his theses. In Part 3, Orwell returns to Henry Miller and reconsiders Miller's view of the world - passive acceptance of horrible conditions; a sort of quietude. Surprisingly, Orwell is not particularly critical of Miller's lack of politics or even his personal position of desiring to be 'inside the whale.' Orwell concludes his lengthy and tedious review of Miller by strongly recommending the novel to all readers, noting that it is perhaps the first piece of interesting and enduring prose produced in many years.

England Your England

England Your England Summary

Part 1 - The nation of England is embroiled in World War II, and as Orwell writes the essay, German airplanes are bombing London. In England and other modern nations, the strength of patriotism and national loyalty is displayed. Although patriotism is nearly everywhere, national differences indeed exist - that is to say, Germany is different from England, which is in turn different from France. Although it is often difficult to realize the national flavor of one's home country, the flavor is nevertheless present. There is, for example, something recognizable and distinctive about English culture. Although England has changed and will continue to change, it remains characteristically English; it could not, for example, become Germany through gradual change any more than a turnip seed could slowly grow into a parsnip.

Part 2 - National characteristics are not always easy to define, but English characteristics include a lack of artistic inclination, a dull un-intellectualism, a certain ability of collective action without collective thought, and word-famous hypocrisy. English citizens also have a love of flowers, but not because of aesthetics. Rather, flowers represent another essential characteristic of English life; namely, private inner life and private liberty. Even as society is modernized and private life becomes jeopardized, England resists the loss.

The common people in most countries must live against the existing order. English culture contains many elements that are highly regulated or simply forbidden, but still persist. The common people are not puritanical: they like to gamble, they drink as much as they can afford, they tell bawdy jokes, and they use incredibly foul language. Although they exhibit a type of Christian feeling, they are decidedly not religious. The character of the common people is marvelously encapsulated on comic postcards that demonstrate a sort of obscene vulgarity.

The most marked characteristic of England, however, is in its gentleness. Most citizens hate war and militarism. A very small minority is responsible for the military demonstrations that do occur. This contrasts with England's huge empire and gives rise to the world feeling that England is full of hypocrites. However, the common people care nothing for the Empire or militarism.

Even though English law is brutal and clearly discriminatory, the common people support it because they value the rule of law; they have respect for constitutionalism. This respect is so deep-rooted that England has very little ability to even comprehend totalitarianism.

Part 3 - England has a vast division between the rich and the poor. Similarly, there are regional differences between various populations. This is reflected in the various names used to describe England, including Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, and the

United Kingdom. However, these distinctions of wealth and small culture are nearly entirely erased by the overarching theme of patriotism, which is stronger than class hatred.

England is notably xenophobic and prefers to exclude foreigners and remain insular. This self-centered approach allows the English to collectively react in a similar way. Unfortunately, it does not allow them always to think things through. England's emotional unity ensures that public officials are kept in some modest check because outrageous or scandalous behavior is not tolerated.

Part 4 - One of the dominant aspects of English culture is the continual and rapid decay of the ability of the ruling class. For example, in the prelude to World War II, the ruling class nearly always did the wrong thing. The ruling class, the so-called idle rich, must constantly justify their own existence. Since they have no logical reason for continuing to exist in modern society, they become deliberately stupid and cling to the past. This usually results in England initiating all wars with a series of disasters enforced by the deliberate stupidity of the ruling class. This also results in the ruling class tenaciously clinging to old-fashioned ideas and mannerisms from a time when their existence was somewhat justified. Their worldview is therefore so dated that they are not capable of making sound policy decisions. The ruling class is not cowardly or treacherous, but simply stupid and possessed of an infallible instinct for doing the wrong thing. They are not wicked; they are simply not teachable.

Part 5 - England and the Empire suffered dramatic declines in prosperity and prestige during the inter-war years. The Blimp class suffered precipitous decline because the telegraph enabled centralized command, which eliminated the need, indeed the desire, to officially employ large numbers of individuals with initiative. Eventually few able men entered public service. A second class that suffered a similar decline was the intelligentsia, which were gradually forced out of public service and life nearly altogether. As a result they are nearly entirely left wing, generally negative, and incapable of offering constructive suggestions. Over the past decades, they have become Europeanized and decidedly anti-British.

Part 6 - The changes apparent in England have been accompanied by a rapid expansion, both upward and downward, of the middle class. This has made a Marxist view of England somewhat obsolete. The working class, too, are far better off than they previously were partly due to trade unions and partly due to the advancements of physical science. This has combined to generally soften the manners of the English. Thus, the attitudes and manners of the working class and the middle class are drawing together. The current war, if won, will eradicate most existing class privileges and, hopefully, allow England to have the power to change for the better.

England Your England Analysis

Note this essay in some editions is printed as the first section of a larger work - it may therefore be encountered in print as part one of a lengthy three-part essay. In it, Orwell

essentially reviews the character of England. The title humorously indicates that his description is not necessarily of the England that he would personally desire. In Part 1 he states the thesis that all nations are possessed of a particular character that can be essentially described. It is worth noting that he does not refer to any nations beyond Europe and, briefly, the United States of America. This is acceptable, however, because he principally limits himself throughout the essay to a discussion of England. In Part 2, he reviews the essential characteristics of English life. It is interesting to note how accurate or inaccurate Orwell was in his estimation of how others view England.

In Part 3, Orwell considers how England is composed of varied classes and, in fact, nationalities. He concludes, however, that these differences, though marked, are not more divisive than the unifying patriotism of being English. In Part 4, he considers the social history of approximately the past three decades of life in England, spanning the period from roughly the Great War to the opening stages of World War II. He concludes that the ruling class has no purpose in the modern world, but of course is unable to admit this and is unwilling to voluntarily rescind its privilege. Therefore, the ruling class has only the option of becoming willfully stupid, an attitude that has disastrous consequences for the nation.

In Part 5, Orwell considers how the advent of technology and changing social and political circumstances has altered the importance and prestige of two classes of individuals - the so-called Blimps, and the intelligentsia. Each class suffered notable declines in the inter-war years, although for disparate reasons. They both become a troublesome and damaging element in modern England. In Part 6, Orwell concludes with a review of the working and middle classes, noting that as the middle class expands and the working class gains in affluence, the two large divisions begin to blur and become indistinct. In the concluding paragraphs of the essay, Orwell looks forward to and provides his personal predictions for the future; they are remarkable accurate and, of course, predicated upon England's eventual victory in World War II - a cause that was far from certain when Orwell wrote this essay.

Boys' Weeklies

Boys' Weeklies Summary

All large towns have newsagents' shops stocked with garish comic postcards and dozens of daily or weekly periodicals. The topics of these periodicals accurately reflect the thinking and feeling of the common English person. A specific type of periodical is the so-called boys' weekly, often described as "penny dreadfuls," which include serialized stories aimed at boys from the ages of about twelve to perhaps sixteen. Titles include the *Gem*, *Magnet*, *Modern Boy*, *Triumph*, *Champion*, *Wizard*, *Rover*, *Skipper*, *Hotspur*, and *Adventure*. Nearly every English boy who reads at all passes through a phase of devotedly reading every issue of one or more of these weeklies.

The *Gem* and *Magnet* have been in continuous publication for over thirty years' time. These two papers are "sister" papers, published by the same company, and the standard characters from each paper often make brief appearances in the storylines of the other paper. The principle serialized story of each magazine focuses on the school life of a group of boys, but other serialized adventure stories are also included. The school stories focus on putatively realistic schools and purport to portray the typical behavior of schoolboys. However, the characters and plots have remained static for thirty years and are obviously anachronistic; the same few characters have now been attending sixth form for thirty years and show no signs of aging.

The stories have been continuously written by the same authors and are highly stylized and incredibly repetitive and structured. The tone and background of the stories are created by tautological repetition of events and phrases and the characters do not develop or learn from their experiences - they are essentially stereotypes. The *Gem* and *Magnet* stories are notable for their absolute lack of any sexual desires or activities, homosexual or otherwise. They instead focus on the supposed glamour of public school life and endlessly recite the rituals and events of an idealized school. Some proportion of the students are titled, most are wealthy, and only a few are poorer scholarship children.

Many readers continue reading the papers throughout their lives, and the letters columns in the magazines are interesting in that they display that many readers apparently willfully believe the characters are real; that is, they believe the fiction to be non-fiction. The enduring appeal of the stories is partially explained because instead of focusing on a single boy, the stories focus on a group of boys who span a certain idealized spectrum of public life. Thus, any given reader can always find a character with which to identify. This is further enabled by the nearly complete lack of a focus on any sort of leader - every boy is treated more or less equally by the story development.

Current events are, by and large, ignored in the storylines, which seem frozen in time during about 1910. The stories are generally conservative, but conservative in the sense of the past. They portray foreigners in highly stereotyped ways - for example, all

French characters are excitable and gesticulate wildly, all Spaniards are treacherous and sinister, and all Chinese, aside from being treacherous and sinister, wear a pigtail. Working class characters are either comical or semi-villains. Unpleasant aspects of real life simply do not enter in the plots. Yet, for all of the anachronistic events and improbably staid plots, the school stories of the *Gem* and *Magnet* remain fantastically popular.

The other papers noted are more modern in sensibility. They are technically superior, feature more single-issue stories, and feature a broad range of topics from numerous authors. There is more action, less padding, and a lack of tiresome stylization. The newer papers focus on stories of the Wild West, the Frozen North, the Foreign Legion, detective adventures, the Great War, Tarzan, and similar exciting settings. Other modern stories feature Martians, death rays, and spaceships. Most of the newer weeklies also feature random scientific facts, such as the ages of continents or the numbers of spiders living in Great Britain. The papers also feature a heavy dose of bully-worship and markedly graphic violence. Most stories focus on the events of a specific leader or adventurer - an air ace, a master spy, or a pugilist. The leading characters are supermen with astounding abilities.

Another class of weeklies newly available and frequently read by English boys is the threepenny "Yank Mags," including *Fight Stories* and *Action Stories*. These magazines feature "real blood-lust, really gory descriptions of the all-in, jump-on-his-testicles style fighting, written in a jargon that has been perfected by people who brood endlessly on violence" (p. 299). The Yank Mags have received wide circulation though they have no English counterpart, which demonstrates the essentially gentle nature of English culture. Other Yank Mags focus on the glamour of crime, torture, scandal, or nude women.

Even though the newer magazines differ from *Gem* and *Magnet* in many ways, in most respects they are the same type of publication; in fact, the same company publishes many of them. They utterly lack political development, they focus on stylized plots, foreigners are still stereotyped and the working class is still funny and semi-evil - nobody actually works in the stories. In social outlook they are essentially the same dull brand of conservatism and they continue to prominently feature school stories.

This state of publication is troubling but sensible and commonly accepted even though everyone admits that the stories are fanciful and stylized. The real debate is in regard to the potential influence these weeklies have on impressionable readers - are they responsible for forming a worldview which is anachronistic and untenable? Orwell argues that they in fact are deliberately crafted to maintain a genteel and conservative worldview and to broadly instill principles and values acceptable to the owning classes. Orwell concludes by noting and regretting there are no left-leaning boys' weeklies.

Boys' Weeklies Analysis

This somewhat verbose essay does not present any particularly startling information and develops its thesis only slowly and somewhat unimaginatively. Orwell focuses on a category of serialized publications known as boys' weeklies, or colloquially as "penny dreadfuls." The magazines are targeted at young boys and feature serialized fiction and various write-in-letters columns. The stories have in some amazing cases persisted for decades and feature the same twenty-odd characters eternally persisting in the same grade at school. Orwell considers several of these publications in painstaking detail, including frequent and lengthy quotes to illustrate that they present tautological stories featuring highly stylized plots slowly developed around stereotypical characters.

He then notes that newer magazines feature somewhat more modern stories and plots but are more alike the older magazines than different. He also briefly discusses imported magazines from the United States of America, which feature garish descriptions of gratuitous violence - Orwell's concise summary of their collective plot, quoted above, is humorous and quite accurate. He finally notes that, although many girls read the boys' weeklies, there are numerous magazines that could be categorized as girls' weeklies. His assertion that the girls' weeklies are to girls what boys' weeklies are to boys indicates a profound assumed gender distinction that Orwell does not discuss or even admit.

Orwell finally comes to his thesis, which is only lightly developed when he claims that early reading profoundly influences one's later thinking. Thus, generations of English boys have grown up on the same semi-Conservative and stale plots which inculcate a desire to attend a posh school and an ability to view all foreigners as ridiculous, comical, and sinister. It is unfortunate that after so strongly characterizing several boys' weeklies, Orwell does not more fully develop the essay's central argument, and his discussion is somewhat unconvincing. He concludes by bemoaning the fact that there are no left-leaning boys' weeklies that would, presumably, instill values and viewpoints more akin to Orwell's personal views.

Why I Write

Why I Write Summary

From a very early age, Orwell knew that he would be a writer. His early attempts were, of course, crude and focused on comic poems and internal running dialogue. Through his late teenage years, he tried to abandon the idea but still knew that eventually he would have to become a writer. Throughout his life, Orwell widely read and enjoyed literature and early in life decided he would write long, naturalistic novels with unhappy endings. Writers must not completely escape their primal emotional temperament or they will destroy the impulse to write.

Writers are compelled to write by one or more of four reasons. The first is the desire to seem clever and to be talked about. This urge is shared by the entire successful segment of society and should not be ignored. Writers are generally vain and self-centered, though not particularly interested in money. The second desire is the perception of beauty and the enjoyment of the well-turned phrase or good story. This culminates in a desire to share experiences that the writer perceives as valuable. This impulse varies from writer to writer, but is shared to some degree by all artists. The third desire is to see things as they are and to store true historical facts for the use of posterity. The fourth and final desire is to push the world in a certain direction by altering other peoples' ideas. No book is entirely free from political bias, and the opinion that art is divorced from politics is in itself a political attitude.

These four enumerated desires strain against each other and, through time, one gains and then loses ascendancy in any particular individual. Orwell considers his own nature to favor the first three impulses at the expense of the fourth, the political impulse. However, Orwell's life experiences have caused the political impulse to come to the forefront. His employment as a police officer in Burma and his combat and political experiences in the Spanish Civil War forced a new worldview upon him. Orwell states that, since 1936, everything he has written has been political, written against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism. Orwell has attempted to make political writing into an art form; even though his message is clearly political, he attempts to include aesthetic elements in his work.

This approach of artistic politics is not always viable and often leads to problems of construction. For example, Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* has a distinctly journalistic feel and includes political minutia that makes the book difficult for many readers. Through his career, Orwell has tried to write more exactly and less artistically. Orwell concludes by noting that he is, in fact, vain and desires success and has generally only written solid prose when his political purpose was well defined.

Why I Write Analysis

This brief and concluding essay is somewhat oddly placed at the end of the collection. In it, Orwell examines his own personal bias in writing. He admits to a certain vain pleasure in receiving attention for his works and points out that all artists necessarily share this tendency to self-centeredness. He then lists four main reasons for producing literature and briefly considers each of them. The last reason is an essentially political reason - the desire to shape the attitudes and ideas of others. Orwell initially did not find this reason particularly interesting - indeed, most writers do not. However, Orwell's life experiences brought the political reason to the forefront and his work is markedly political, which he freely admits.

Characters

George Orwell

Mr. and Mrs. Simpson ("Sim" and "Bingo")

Charles Dickens

Donald McGill

Rudyard Kipling

Mohandas Karamchand ("Mahatma") Gandhi

Senegalese Soldier

The Italian Militiaman

Henry Miller

Blimps

Objects/Places

Crossgates Boarding School

Orwell attends Crossgates School from age eight to about age fourteen. Crossgates, a fictionalized name for St. Cyprian's School, in Eastbourne, Sussex, is a boarding school for young boys. The school is said to be a common recruiting resource for Harrow and Eton, and most of the students come from aristocratic or affluent families. Some few students, including Orwell, attend on scholarship which is essentially a reduced-rate tuition offered to promising students from poorer families. Scholarships are offered in the hope of counting scholastic achievers among the school's alumni - as such, scholarship students are held to a very high academic standard and are nearly required to excel and obtain subsequent scholarships to remain in the school. The various scholarships awarded to school graduates of course increases the school's overall prestige and standing. Orwell is highly critical of the instructional methods used at Crossgates.

Dickens' Novels

Charles Dickens wrote numerous English-language novels, many which have become standard canonical reading texts. Orwell examines Dickens as an author and social commentator in the essay Charles Dickens. Most of Orwell's textual citations come from Dickens' major novels, including *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*. Most of Dickens' works were published in serialized format, and his novels are generally considered to contain a large amount of autobiographical information. All of Dickens' novels are still in print, a century-and-a-half after their original publication.

McGill's Postcards

McGill's Postcards were a type of comic postcard common in early-to-mid 1900s England, featuring usually vulgar color-washed illustrations coupled with a printed joke, usually obscene. The jokes were frequently subtly worded so they could be interpreted in two ways - one obscene, but one at face value. This not only added to their supposed humor value, but also presumably allowed them to evade legal challenges.

Raffles, a Thief in the Night and *Mr. Justice Raffles*

Orwell cites two novels written by Ernest W. Hornung in 1899 and 1909, respectively. The first novel listed was based on collected stories initially published in various British magazines during the 1890s and subsequently republished under several titles, including the one used by Orwell. The novels feature the exploits of one A. J. Raffles, a

so-called gentleman thief who executes his crimes while simultaneously holding high, if arbitrary, standards.

No Orchids for Miss Blandish

No Orchids for Miss Blandish is a novel written by James Hadley Chase and originally published in 1939. The author later released some revised editions. The novel's principle character, Miss Blandish, is kidnapped and held for ransom, then kidnapped from the kidnappers by a rival gang and involved in blackmail. She is then serially raped and brutalized by a criminal until she becomes accustomed to his touch. When the police finally locate her and the rapist is killed, she throws herself to her death rather than return to her previous life. Orwell considered the book despicable and vulgar.

The Elephant

While Orwell is on the police force in Moulmein, Lower Burma, an elephant goes crazy and wrecks part of the town, and kills one native man. Orwell obtains a large-bore rifle and shoots the elephant, ostensibly to prevent more carnage. Orwell is aware, however, that the elephant is probably calm enough to not pose further danger, but he does not want the locals to laugh at him for posturing with a gun - so he kills the animal.

Orwell's English

Orwell develops several basic principles for "good" English writing in Politics and the English Language. Orwell's English is neither proscriptive nor necessarily grammatically correct, but it is devoid of several typical structural and usage errors that serve to destroy meaning in written communication. Orwell's "good" English conveys information clearly and concisely.

The Partial Autobiography of Gandhi

Gandhi wrote an incomplete autobiography that was serialized in local newspapers and was translated and reprinted in English newspapers. The autobiography spans the period from his birth to 1920, and is the subject of Orwell's review *Reflections on Gandhi*.

Marrakech

Marrakech, alternatively spelled Marakesh, is a principle city in southwestern Morocco. It is an important trade center and was once the capital city of the country. The city is the principle setting of Orwell's brief essay, *Marrakech*.

The Spanish Civil War

Orwell enlisted in the Spanish militia during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939, on the Republican side of the conflict. He fought as an infantryman against the Fascists led by General Francisco Franco. Ultimately, the Republicans were defeated because the Fascists received extensive monetary aid and equipment deliveries from Germany and Italy, while the Republicans received only scant weapons supplies from Communist Russia. The war came to be viewed as a sort of preface to World War II.

The Tropic of Cancer

The Tropic of Cancer is a sexually explicit novel by Henry Miller, published in 1934 in Paris. The novel's setting is Paris during the 1930s boom. The novel is written in the first-person and is largely autobiographical. Orwell refers to the novel as being the most important book of the 1930s.

Boys' Weeklies

Boys' Weeklies are a type of weekly magazine published in England, the United States of America, and elsewhere, that carry stories and information aimed primarily at boys from the ages of twelve to perhaps sixteen. The individual titles considered by Orwell had been continuously published for between five to thirty years and generally featured serialized stories centered on the social life of a cast of boy characters attending an affluent public or private school. Other popular topics included Wild West, detective, and science fiction adventures.

Themes

Imperialism is Untenable

Several of the essays included deal with England's Empire and the form of government known as Imperialism. Even in essays where imperialism is not the primary focus, it is briefly discussed or indirectly referenced. All of the included essays were written during a period when England's Empire was in a state of decline and loss, in large part due to World War II. Orwell's primary objection to imperialism lies in the gross inequities which arise because of the system - England profits and the Empire suffers.

In *Shooting an Elephant,* Orwell notes that he served as a police officer in Burma for several years during a period of English rule. He found the gross inequalities extremely troublesome and his personal experience provides irrefutable facts and strong opinions that are difficult to argue against unless one has similar background. In *Politics and the English Language*, Orwell discusses methods used by English politicians to obscure the truth about the reasons for maintaining the empire. In *Reflections on Gandhi*, Orwell considers some of the events surrounding the eventual independence of India from British rule. Finally, in *Marrakech*, Orwell examines some of the mechanisms that allow imperialism to persist. Several other essays include brief discussions of the evils of empire or anecdotes about problems or corruption caused by imperialism.

Orwell primarily discusses the English Empire, but his writing makes clear that his objection is to imperialism and empire in general not to the specific English implementation. Indeed, he occasionally appears to state that the qualities of England allow for a gentler and softer imperialism, but one that is nevertheless fundamentally tainted by greed, corruption, and power-worship. Orwell's final assessment that empire is evil and imperialism is untenable proved to be largely correct. Within his lifetime, the English Empire and other world imperialist powers had suffered huge political losses to numerous local independence movements. This decay would continue for many years until ultimately the European concept of imperialism would be thoroughly discredited and nearly completely abandoned.

Literature is Political

In *Why I Write*, Orwell states that all literature springs from four principle compulsions: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse, and political purpose. All writers are inspired in some degree to all four compulsions, though for most writers of what is termed literature it is the fourth principle - political purpose - that is minor. For example, in *Inside the Whale*, Orwell discusses at length Henry Miller's marked reticence to consider overtly political purposes in his contemporaneous fiction.

Orwell differs from the norm because nearly all of his writing, especially including his two novels, is highly political in nature. Orwell is often criticized or praised for the overt

political nature of his works. Nearly every essay in the collection deals with a particular political opinion or situation. Some essays, such as *Looking Back on the Spanish War*, are nearly entirely political. Given his highly political focus, it is remarkable that Orwell's work has persisted as long as it has; most political writings are fairly short-lived and are intended to serve an immediate political purpose rather than persisting as social criticism beyond the events described. The enduring quality of Orwell's work, however, arises because of, not in spite of, Orwell's political views. Orwell was primarily motivated by his political sensibilities, and his approach to writing nearly required that he be outraged or amused about some aspect of politics.

In several essays, Orwell points out, however, that even writers who are not overtly political are still unable to produce literature that is entirely free of politics. Examples of this are found in the essays *Charles Dickens* and *Boys' Weeklies*; the long-running serialized stories discussed in the latter essay are quite interesting as Orwell points out that, despite a deliberate attempt to avoid politics and current events, the fictional pieces establish quite obviously a conventional conservative atmosphere. Thus, all literature - particularly prose - is to some degree political.

Direct Experience Trumps Conventional Wisdom

Every society is based upon conventional mores and understandings that are widely held even if they are not well examined. Orwell points out many of the conventionally English characteristics of Great Britain in his essay, *England Your England*. One such characteristic, for example, is the essentially gentle nature of the English people. This self-stated gentleness does not fit particularly well with the expansive Empire held through force of arms, and resulted in most of the world considering England to be full of hypocrisy; while English people enjoyed their gentle lives at home, the English army and navy were claiming new conquests for the Empire through force of arms. While the English commoner did not think too much of imperialism, he or she certainly had no direct contact with it and therefore had no method to contextualize political statements that imperialism was somehow for the benefit of the so-called savage, non-Christian, and conquered lands. Thus, the conventional wisdom about the essentially gentle nature of English life is, in fact, untenable and wrong.

Orwell, in *Shooting an Elephant*, briefly describes his personal experiences as a police officer in India while that nation was under British rule. He observes that he was hated because he was symbolic of the conquering and controlling Empire. He also observes that he came to hate his job and his position as a cog in the great mechanism of English imperialism. Fortunately for the reading public, Orwell eventually gave up being a police officer and began to write. He produced essays such as *Reflections on Gandhi* and *Looking Back on the Spanish War* which, in some measure, directly contradict the conventionally held opinions of his time. He stated directly that Empire was evil, that imperialism was inequitable, and that the ruling class was in a state of remarkable decay of ability. Orwell's direct personal experience with these aspects of life allowed him to write strong critiques of conventionally held opinions based on facts and actual experience. Orwell's stated goal in writing was to be overtly political - that is, to change

the ideas of readers. He was able to successfully accomplish that in large measure because of his ability to present facts gathered from personal experience to refute generally accepted political positions espoused by those in power.

Style

Perspective

Orwell, born Eric Arthur Blair during 1903 in India, traveled to England with his mother at an early age and received what was then considered an excellent education. He attended a small parish school prior to attending St. Cyprian's School for several years. His experiences at St. Cyprian's School are summarized in the essay *Such, Such Were the Joys*. . . Orwell then attended Wellington and Eton on scholarships. After school, he obtained employment with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma where he worked for several years, developing a hatred for imperialism. He then returned, briefly, to England and subsequently moved to Paris where he worked various odd jobs and attempted to establish himself as a writer. He then returned to England and, while staying at his parents' house, continued to work odd jobs and to write, enjoying some success.

From 1936 to 1937, he fought as an infantry soldier on the side of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War against Francisco Franco's Nationalist insurrection. During the fighting, he was shot through the neck, an injury that he miraculously survived. He returned to England to recuperate and continued to write on a wide variety of subjects. During World War II, he worked producing official English war propaganda; his experiences would later appear in fictionalized form in the novel *1984*. Toward the end of the war, he began writing for independent journals and produced the anti-Stalinist allegory *Animal Farm*. After World War II, he continued to write numerous essays and articles until his death from tuberculosis, 1950, in London.

There is no doubt that Orwell's political views changed throughout his life, but he was always associated with the left. Much of the body of his work, including several of the selections in the text, is essentially political in nature. Orwell attempted to support himself as a writer but he also attempted to put forward a cohesive world-view that championed socialist causes. Orwell's writing is always, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and generally posits democratic Socialism as the best viable alternative.

Nearly all of the selections contained in the book were written after Orwell had established himself as a well-known and professional writer. At the time the selections were published, however, Orwell had not produced his most famous works of fiction for which he is today most widely associated.

Tone

The book contains a combination of fourteen essays, articles, and reviews written over the course of several years. As such, the tone and mood varies somewhat from entry to entry. In general, however, the tone of the entire collection is serious and insightful, but simultaneously humorous. Orwell is never above laughing at himself when appropriate,

and nearly always deliberately points out his own shortcomings and personal opinions regarding the topic of discussion.

The essays included in the text are generally objective in perspective. When Orwell provides sections which he considers are subjective, he clearly announces them as such. His intent as an essayist is not to politicize or convince, but to state his opinion clearly and develop his thesis from facts and personally observed events. This transparent style allows the reader to ascertain the facts, analyze the argument, and come to their own conclusion regarding Orwell's analysis. Orwell is notable in confining himself almost entirely to the narrow issue at hand and by staying on topic throughout each essay.

The serious but accessible tone, coupled with Orwell's obvious subject mastery, allows the book to be engaging and easily accessible. The topics remain timely for the most part, and are still enjoyable to read after over half a century has passed. Although Orwell is best remembered as a novelist and satirist, this collection makes it clear that his strength as a writer extended well beyond those genres with which he is typically associated.

Structure

The 316-page book contains fourteen selections, including essays and reviews. The selected entries were originally published between 1936 and 1949. The entries are not arranged chronologically and are of varying lengths, running from eight to fifty-six pages. At the conclusion of each essay, the year of original publication is noted in brackets, which is a useful practice. The selections cover a broad range of Orwell's body of work and all are engaging; however, the selection is perhaps too small and excludes several of Orwell's seminal essays. It is additionally unfortunate that the edition does not have any introductory materials of a biographical or explanatory nature.

It is worth noting that all of the essays contained in this text have been published in various formats, editions, and revisions. Additionally, most are available on-line in the public domain. Thus, versions of the essays may vary in minor details from publication to publication: for example, the individuals "Sim" and "Bingo," from *Such, Such Were the Joys . . .* are referred to as "Sambo" and "Flip', respectively, in other published revisions of the essay. Some printings of the essays maintain the original British spelling while other revisions feature Americanized spelling.

Quotes

"I knew that bed-wetting was (a) wicked and (b) outside my control. The second fact I was personally aware of, and the first I did not question. It was possible, therefore, to commit a sin without knowing that you committed it, without wanting to commit it, and without being able to avoid it. Sin was not necessarily something that you did: it might be something that happened to you. I do not want to claim that this idea flashed into my mind as a complete novelty at this very moment, under the blows of Sim's cane: I must have had glimpses of it even before I left home, for my early childhood had not been altogether happy. But at any rate this was the great, abiding lesson of my boyhood: that I was in a world where it was *not possible* for me to be good. And the double beating was a turning-point, for it brought home to me for the first time the harshness of the environment into which I had been flung. Life was more terrible, and I was more wicked, than I had imagined. At any rate, as I sat on the edge of a chair in Sim's study, with not even the self-possession to stand up while he stormed at me, I had a conviction of sin and folly and weakness, such as I do not remember to have felt before." (*Such, Such Were the Joys . . .*, p. 5)

"A sympathetic attitude towards children was a much rarer thing in Dickens's day than it is now. The early nineteenth century was not a good time to be a child. In Dickens's youth children were still being 'solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen', and it was not so long since boys of thirteen had been hanged for petty theft. The doctrine of 'breaking the child's spirit' was in full vigour, and *The Fairchild Family* was a standard book for children till late into the century. This evil book is now issued in pretty-pretty expurgated editions, but it is well worth reading in the original version. It gives one some idea of the lengths to which child-discipline was sometimes carried. Mr. Fairchild, for instance, when he catches his children quarrelling, first thrashes them, reciting Dr. Watts's 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite' between blows of the cane, and then takes them to spend the afternoon beneath a gibbet where the rotting corpse of a murderer is hanging. In the earlier part of the century scores of thousands of children, aged sometimes as young as six, were literally worked to death in the mines or cotton mills, and even at the fashionable public schools boys were flogged till they ran with blood for a mistake in their Latin verses. One thing which Dickens seems to have recognised, and which most of his contemporaries did not, is the sadistic sexual element in flogging. I think this can be inferred from *David Copperfield* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. But mental cruelty to a child infuriates him as much as physical, and though there is a fair number of exceptions, his schoolmasters are generally scoundrels.

"Except for the universities and the big public schools, every kind of education then existing in England gets a mauling at Dickens's hands. There is Doctor Blimber's Academy, where little boys are blown up with Greek until they burst, and the revolting charity schools of the period, which produced specimens like Noah Claypole and Uriah Heep, and Salem House, and Dotheboys Hall, and the disgraceful little dame-school kept by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt. Some of what Dickens says remains true even today. Salem House is the ancestor of the modern 'prep school', which still has a good deal of

resemblance to it; and as for Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, some old fraud of much the same stamp is carrying on at this moment in nearly every small town in England. But, as usual, Dickens's criticism is neither creative nor destructive. He sees the idiocy of an educational system founded on the Greek lexicon and the wax-ended cane; on the other hand, he has no use for the new kind of school that is coming up in the fifties and sixties, the 'modern' school, with its gritty insistence on 'facts'. What, then, does he want? As always, what he appears to want is a moralized version of the existing thing - the old type of school, but with no caning, no bullying or underfeeding, and not quite so much Greek." (*Charles Dickens*, pp. 61-63)

"If you look into your own mind, which are you, Don Quixote or Sancho Panza? Almost certainly you are both. There is one part of you that wishes to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin. He is your unofficial self, the voice of the belly protesting against the soul. His tastes lie towards safety, soft beds, no work, pots of beer and women with 'voluptuous' figures. He it is who punctures your fine attitudes and urges you to look after Number One, to be unfaithful to your wife, to bilk your debts, and so on and so forth. Whether you allow yourself to be influenced by him is a different question. But it is simply a lie to say that he is not part of you, just as it is a lie to say that Don Quixote is not part of you either, though most of what is said and written consists of one lie or the other, usually the first." (*The Art of Donald McGill*, p. 113)

"Kipling is in the peculiar position of having been a byword for fifty years. During five literary generations every enlightened person has despised him, and at the end of that time nine-tenths of those enlightened persons are forgotten and Kipling is in some sense still there. Mr. Eliot never satisfactorily explains this fact, because in answering the shallow and familiar charge that Kipling is a 'Fascist', he falls into the opposite error of defending him where he is not defensible. It is no use pretending that Kipling's view of life, as a whole, can be accepted or even forgiven by any civilized person. It is no use claiming, for instance, that when Kipling describes a British soldier beating a 'nigger' with a cleaning rod in order to get money out of him, he is acting merely as a reporter and does not necessarily approve what he describes. There is not the slightest sign anywhere in Kipling's work that he disapproves of that kind of conduct - on the contrary, there is a definite strain of sadism in him, over and above the brutality which a writer of that type has to have. Kipling *is* a jingo imperialist, he is morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting. It is better to start by admitting that, and then to try to find out why it is that he survives while the refined people who have sniggered at him seem to wear so badly." (*Rudyard Kipling*, pp. 116-117)

"The Raffles stories, written from the angle of the criminal, are much less anti-social than many modern stories written from the angle of the detective. The main impression that they leave behind is of boyishness. They belong to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards. Their key-phrase is 'not done'. The line that they draw between good and evil is as senseless as a Polynesian taboo, but at least, like the taboo, it has the advantage that everyone accepts it." (*Raffles and Miss Blandish*, p. 137)

"But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes - faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd - seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives', and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing - no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at." (*Shooting an Elephant*, pp. 152-153)

"I think the following rules will cover most cases:

Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Never use a long word where a short one will do.

If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

Never use the passive where you can use the active.

Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

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

These rules sound elementary, and so they are, but they demand a deep change of attitude in anyone who has grown used to writing in the style now fashionable." (*Politics and the English Language*, p. 170)

"Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent, but the tests that have to be applied to them are not, of course, the same in all cases. In Gandhi's case the questions one feels inclined to ask are: to what extent was Gandhi moved by vanity

- by the consciousness of himself as a humble, naked old man, sitting on a praying mat and shaking empires by sheer spiritual power - and to what extent did he compromise his own principles by entering politics, which of their nature are inseparable from coercion and fraud? To give a definite answer one would have to study Gandhi's acts and writings in immense detail, for his whole life was a sort of pilgrimage in which every act was significant. But this partial autobiography, which ends in the nineteen-twenties, is strong evidence in his favor, all the more because it covers what he would have called the unregenerate part of his life and reminds one that inside the saint, or near-saint, there was a very shrewd, able person who could, if he had chosen, have been a brilliant success as a lawyer, an administrator or perhaps even a businessman." (*Reflections on Gandhi*, pp. 171-172)

"When you walk through a town like this - two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up in - when you see how the people live, and still more how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact. The people have brown faces - besides, there are so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff, about as individual as bees or coral insects? They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyard and nobody notices that they are gone. And even the graves themselves soon fade back into the soil. Sometimes, out for a walk, as you break your way through the prickly pear, you notice that it is rather bumpy underfoot, and only a certain regularity in the bumps tells you that you are walking over skeletons." (*Marrakech*, p. 181)

"Whether the British ruling class are wicked or merely stupid is one of the most difficult questions of our time, and at certain moments a very important question." (*Looking Back on the Spanish War*, p. 205)

"On the whole the literary history of the 'thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics. For any writer who accepts or partially accepts the discipline of a political party is sooner or later faced with the alternative: toe the line, or shut up. It is, of course, possible to toe the line and go on writing - after a fashion. Any Marxist can demonstrate with the greatest of ease that 'bourgeois' liberty of thought is an illusion. But when he has finished his demonstration there remains the psychological *fact* that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away. In the future a totalitarian literature may arise, but it will be quite different from anything we can now imagine. Literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship. And this is even truer of prose than of verse. It is probably not a coincidence that the best writers of the thirties have been poets. The atmosphere of orthodoxy is always damaging to prose, and above all it is completely ruinous to the novel, the most anarchical of all forms of literature. How many Roman Catholics have been good novelists? Even the handful one could name have usually been bad Catholics. The novel is practically a Protestant form of art; it is a product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual. No decade in the past hundred and fifty years has been so barren of imaginative prose as the nineteen-thirties. There have been good

poems, good sociological works, brilliant pamphlets, but practically no fiction of any value at all. From 1933 onwards the mental climate was increasingly against it. Anyone sensitive enough to be touched by the *zeitgeist* was also involved in politics. Not everyone, of course, was definitely *in* the political racket, but practically everyone was on its periphery and more or less mixed up in propaganda campaigns and squalid controversies. Communists and near-Communists had a disproportionately large influence in the literary reviews. It was a time of labels, slogans, and evasions. At the worst moments you were expected to lock yourself up in a constipating little cage of lies; at the best a sort of voluntary censorship ('Ought I to say this? Is it pro-Fascist?') was at work in nearly everyone's mind. It is almost inconceivable that good novels should be written in such an atmosphere. 'Good novels are not written by orthodoxy-sniffers, nor by people who are conscience-stricken about their own unorthodoxy. Good novels are written by people who are *not frightened*. This brings me back to Henry Miller." (*Inside the Whale*, pp. 240-242)

"One rapid but fairly sure guide to the social atmosphere of a country is the parade-step of its army. A military parade is really a kind of ritual dance, something like a ballet, expressing a certain philosophy of life. The goose-step, for instance, is one of the most horrible sights in the world, far more terrifying than a dive-bomber. It is simply an affirmation of naked power; contained in it, quite consciously and intentionally, is the vision of a boot crashing down on a face. Its ugliness is part of its essence, for what it is saying is 'Yes, I *am* ugly, and you daren't laugh at me', like the bully who makes faces at his victim. Why is the goose-step not used in England? There are, heaven knows, plenty of army officers who would be only too glad to introduce some such thing. It is not used because the people in the street would laugh. Beyond a certain point, military display is only possible in countries where the common people dare not laugh at the army. The Italians adopted the goose-step at about the time when Italy passed definitely under German control, and, as one would expect, they do it less well than the Germans. The Vichy government, if it survives, is bound to introduce a stiffer parade-ground discipline into what is left of the French army. In the British army the drill is rigid and complicated, full of memories of the eighteenth century, but without definite swagger; the march is merely a formalized walk. It belongs to a society which is ruled by the sword, no doubt, but a sword which must never be taken out of the scabbard." (*England Your England*, p. 259-260)

"The mental world of the Gem and Magnet, therefore, is something like this:

The year is 1910 - or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half-minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly round the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim grey battleships of the British Fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the niggers at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meat, jam and doughnuts.

After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match against Rookwood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever. That approximately is the atmosphere." (*Boys' Weeklies*, pp. 294-295)

"The Spanish war and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects. Everyone writes of them in one guise or another. It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows. And 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." (*Why I Write*, p. 314)

Topics for Discussion

Orwell's early school days are described as remarkably distasteful. Discuss your own experiences in primary education - were they as awful as Orwell's? How is contemporary public education different today from the public education of the early 1900s?

Charles Dickens remains one of the most respected and widely read authors of all time. Which Dickens novels have you read? Did you consider them enjoyable and insightful? Did you find Dickens difficult to read?

Orwell describes a category of comic postcards that he states are obscene and vulgar. What is the difference between obscenity and vulgarity? Do such postcards exist today? Where could you purchase a newly printed postcard that is simultaneously funny, vulgar, and obscene?

Like Sherlock Holmes, A.J. Raffles was a character in early British detective novels. Today the Sherlock Holmes novels enjoy wide circulation in the United States of America while the Raffles novels do not. What aspects of the Raffles novels do you think accounts for their lack of appeal to Americans?

Imagine yourself in Orwell's position in Burma, facing a complacent elephant with an elephant rifle in your hand a thousands of people behind you that expect you to shoot the elephant. Would you shoot the elephant?

Orwell notes in *Politics and the English Language* that political speeches are full of strange-sounding phrases that are commonly accepted to be 'code' words with thinly veiled reference to political stances. Do politics in the United States of America follow this same use of language to obfuscate real meaning?

After Gandhi's successes in liberating India through non-violent civil disobedience, other people around the world adopted similar methods. What famous political leaders can you think of that have used non-violent civil disobedience to generate social change?

Orwell considers the Spanish Civil War to be one of the most important political developments in the history of the modern world. Do you agree with this opinion? Do you think that Orwell's participation as a combat infantryman in the war might have made the conflict more important to him than it really was?

In *England Your England*, Orwell notes several characteristics of English life. What characteristics can you think of that essentially describe your country?

Did you ever read a boys' weekly magazine such as the *Gem* or *Magnet*? Do you agree that fundamental political opinions are formed early in life through reading and exposure to the media?

Orwell's writing is principally political in nature. Does this make his writing more interesting to read?