

Homage to Catalonia Study Guide

Homage to Catalonia by George Orwell

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Plot Summary

The Spanish Civil War began in July 1936, and continued through April 1, 1939. The civil war commenced, when a military coup was launched against the elected government of Spain, during the Second Spanish Republic. It resulted in the eventual defeat of the legitimate government. During the civil war, numerous groups with an extremely wide range of political and social views, generally referred to collectively as the Republicans, supported the government. The Republicans included strong contingents of Communists and anarchists and additionally included many residents of urban population centers. The Republican government was also particularly strong in industrial regions, including Catalonia and the Basque region.

The military coup, generally referred to collectively as the Nationalist cause, included primarily rural, wealthy and conservative elements. The Nationalists were also strongly supported by the Roman Catholic Church, as the Republicans were vehemently anti-clerical. While the Republicans favored a non-centralized, regionally independent approach to governance, the Nationalists favored strongly centralized power. The Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, ultimately triumphed and installed a dictatorship, which would be pro-Fascist, though officially neutral during World War II.

George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* was first published in 1938 and is a first-person narrative relating his personal experiences as an infantry soldier fighting on the Republican side of the conflict, from December 1936 through June 1937 in or near Catalonia and Aragon. It is worth noting that when Orwell wrote and published the first edition of the book, the outcome of the Spanish Civil War was still far from certain. Orwell arrives in Barcelona in late 1936 as a journalist. He gets caught up in the revolutionary spirit of the times and joins the militia. He is assigned to a POUM unit. He spends some time in basic training and then spends three months in the trenches at the front. He sees some combat, but is mostly bored, hungry and exhausted.

He then receives some leave and returns to Barcelona to join his wife who has, by this time, also traveled to Spain. In Barcelona, however, fighting breaks out between rival Republican groups. Orwell is caught up in several days of street fighting, which eventually dwindles away. He briefly returns to the front and is seriously wounded and evacuated to a hospital, where he partially recuperates. Continued political rivalry in the Republican government eventually leads to the suppression of POUM, the political group with which Orwell is affiliated. As POUM is suppressed, former members are arrested, jailed, and sometimes executed. Orwell, his wife, and a few comrades escape arrest and flee to France. Orwell then travels to England, where he makes an extensive review of news accounts of the war and writes the book. He intersperses his journalist account of his personal war experiences with two lengthy sections describing the political situation in Catalonia, and with numerous corrections to what he sees as unjust views of, and information about, the war.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

George Orwell arrives in Barcelona, Spain, in late December 1936 as a journalist. The revolutionary spirit in Barcelona is remarkable. Orwell sees pamphlets, posters and flags everywhere. Busses and buildings are painted in red and black, indicating that they have been collectivized. Formal and ceremonial forms of speech have been abandoned. Although women were treated equally in combat roles, only months previously they had been. One day, Orwell sees an Italian militiaman and is inspired by his friendly confidence. Orwell gets caught up in the revolutionary spirit and enlists in a militia unit. He is largely unaware of the political situation at the time, as well as largely uninterested in labyrinthine Spanish politics. Orwell happens, by chance, to enlist in a militia unit of POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificaciun Marxista, or Party of Marxist Unification - a small Trotskyist Communist group), mostly because of his prior affiliation, in England, with the ILP (Independent Labour Party - an early democratic socialist political party.)

Most new militia recruits are sixteen or seventeen-years-old and have no prior military training or orientation. The militia units are typically organized into a Section, containing about thirty soldiers, three of which are joined into a Centuria of about one hundred soldiers. Several Centuria join into a Column, which in practice, simply means a large number of soldiers. The militia recruits receive military instruction consisting almost entirely of marching drills, as there are no weapons available with which to train. The militia is organized in an egalitarian way. Officers are not particularly regarded as anything more than a fellow comrade-in-arms. Orders are discussed and declined, though, in general, a militia officer is in nominal control of the unit.

Over time, Orwell's unit of militia is partially equipped in a piecemeal fashion. Orwell is amazed at the lack of coordination or seeming preparation for warfare. He wonders when weapons and ammunition are issued. Eventually, his militia unit is mobilized for the front, and the unit joins in a general parade of units throughout Barcelona. The parade winds back and forth through most of the city's major streets, and the proceeding is a festive occasion for the local populace. After parading, the unit boards a train bound for Barbastro.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Orwell speaks English and French, but masters only rudimentary Spanish. His Spanish is further complicated by the Catalanian dialect. So, for several weeks, he does not fully understand much of what he overhears. Orwell notes that Spanish culture definitely is not punctual or necessarily efficient, but individuals are very friendly and charitable. The description of the revolutionary aspect of Barcelona focuses on the social changes, and the excitement that is evident throughout the city. The day before he enlists in the militia,



Orwell sees an Italian militiaman reading a map with an officer. Orwell and the Italian man speak briefly, shake hands, and part ways. The man becomes, for Orwell, symbolic of the entire revolutionary mood of Barcelona at that point in time.

The political situation seems hopelessly and ridiculously complex to Orwell, who simply wants to fight against Fascism. He enters a POUM militia unit because of his English official papers. It's a detail that seems almost completely insignificant to Orwell, but one that will have grave repercussions within the next several months due to continuing political developments. Indeed, Orwell was willfully ignorant of the internal political situation in Catalonia for several months. He only came to terms with it after being personally involved with some aspects of the politics. Note that Chapter Five includes a considerable amount of political detail with which Orwell gradually became familiar.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The militia unit arrives in Barbastro and then proceeds by bus to Sietamo, and then Alcubierre. Some of the towns passed through are very war torn and life has evidently become greatly disrupted. Other towns seem relatively untouched. Some Fascist deserters are being quartered in a small town. They are being well-fed and cared for. After three days in Alcubierre, which is very close to the front lines, the militia are issued rifles. Most of the weapons are in dreadful condition, and most of the soldiers do not know how to operate their new weapons. Orwell is disgusted that no effort is made to match superior weapons to knowledgeable marksmen. He receives a decrepit German Mauser manufactured in 1896.

After being armed, the militia units march to the front lines near Zaragoza. The front is static and entrenched, reminiscent of World War I trenching. The country is very steeply hilled, and the opposing fronts typically face each other across a deep ravine or valley. The trench systems are generally not continuous. Instead, they run intermittently only along the crests of adjoining hills. Near Zaragoza, the Fascist front is over seven hundred meters distant, much too far for effective rifle fire even with good rifles and ammunition. Nevertheless, the militia soldiers happily engage in useless and ineffective desultory fire at the Fascists. The Fascists fire back, and occasional bullets whine overhead.

The trenches are muddy, filthy, and stink of human excrement. The area behind each trench system is full of refuse that slowly builds up, and then sloughs down the hillside. The area between the trenches, the so-called no-man's land, is open, rocky, and steeply inclined. The living conditions in the trenches are terrible, and supplies are in chronically short supply.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The rifle that Orwell receives is described as a German Mauser manufactured in 1896 - probably a Fusil Mauser Espagnol Modelo 1893 in 7 x 57 mm. It's a weapon that is forty-years-old (Orwell is thirty-four years old at the time, approximately twice the age of most of his fellow militia soldiers.) Orwell notes that, although he is something of an accomplished rifle shot, he is not given preferential treatment in the allocation of weapons. Instead, he receives an ancient and rusted arm in deplorable condition. Newer, better, rifles are indiscriminately handed out to young soldiers, who don't even know how to load a rifle. Orwell and others offer some brief practical instruction in weapons handling.

Chapter 2 includes extensive description of the physical layout of the trench system, as it zigzags intermittently from hilltop to hilltop. The distance between the opposing front

lines makes rifle fire ineffectual, except by accident. However, this does not prevent the profligate waste of scarce ammunition. The description also includes the horrible living conditions in the trenches during the freezing winter months. Note that reference to a good atlas will enable a solid geographical reference point for the events described in the subsequent few chapters.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Each hilltop redoubt flies a flag. It serves to identify the side, Nationalist or Republican, which controls that hilltop. The front line zigzags from hilltop to hilltop so extensively that, without the flags, ownership would be difficult to ascertain. Most of the Nationalists fly the Fascist or Monarchist flag, while the Republicans fly the POUM, PSUC, Loyalist or anarchist flag.

Orwell gets promoted to Cabo, roughly the equivalent of Corporal, and is sent out on numerous, pointless patrols. The steep terrain makes the patrols difficult, and the bitter cold makes the particularly unappealing. The entire Republican front line in this area is held by militia units, as, beginning in 1937, the Popular Army is being organized in the rear areas.

At the outbreak of war, many unions and political groups immediately fielded small militia units to resist the Nationalist attack. The militia units were surprisingly effective at defensive fighting and even launched a limited amount of offensive operations, generally without significant successes. The Popular Army was meant to combine all fighting forces into a single cohesive and effective structure to prosecute the war effort in the future. At least on paper, all militia units were organized into the Popular Army structure, though at the front, this had no practical effect. The Popular Army, more rigid in discipline and class structure, arrives on the Aragon front in June of 1937. The popular conception of the absolute need for strict and ruthless military hierarchy was apparently contradicted by the early militia successes. However, most militia units appeared at least nominally supportive of joining the more organized and presumably more efficient Popular Army structure.

The front is a miserable place to live. The freezing cold is incredible. There is never enough food or clothing, and everything is always filthy. The water supplies are insufficient and nearly undrinkable, and all water is packed in on mules. The food, however, is surprisingly good. Wine and cigarettes are plentiful. Aside from old and rusted rifles, there are very few weapons at the front. Ammunition is always scarce and of highly variable quality. There is no other military equipment at the front. Orwell becomes extremely bored, as the weeks pass with virtually no meaningful activity.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Orwell is still largely and willfully ignorant of the political situation. The profusion of various hilltop flags seems confusing to him. His age and apparent responsibility quickly earn him a minor promotion to the rough equivalent of Corporal, and he is sent out on patrol after patrol. The patrols generally consist of trying to keep one's feet while walking quietly. The extremely steep and rocky terrain makes these goals difficult to achieve.



Chapter 3 continues to provide interesting and colorful information about the trench-living lifestyle of the Spanish militia. It is peculiar to note that food, wine and cigarettes are apparently in good supply, while fuel and ammunition are not. Things, such as binoculars and grenades, are virtually non-existent.

A key part of the chapter deals with the slowly changing nature of the Republican armed forces. The initial resistance against the Fascist attack came from quickly organized but loosely affiliated militia units. For example, a given trade union might have fielded a hundred or so men and women as soldiers who would fight alongside of a unit fielded by, perhaps, an obscure political organization. Although this militia system is virtually unique in the history of modern warfare, it proved to be remarkably capable and flexible. In the subsequent months, however, as the political situation continued to change the central government became more and more hierarchically oriented with the establishment of the Popular Army, which would gradually replace the revolutionary militia structure.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

After three weeks at Monte Pocero Orwell is transferred to Monte Oscuro to join a POUM contingent of about thirty English ILP members, the group is part of the 29th Division. This effectively groups Orwell with other soldiers of his own nationality and political affiliation. Williams, another Englishman, is also transferred. At Monte Oscuro, the enemy lines are three to four hundred yards distant; still too far for effective rifle fire.

Constant but ineffectual patrols are mounted, the soldiers never get enough sleep, and the winter cold continues. Water is always in short supply. Several soldiers on each hilltop are assigned propaganda duty. They use megaphones to shout political slogans and derision across the front lines. Orwell considers this, at first, to be ridiculous. However, as he watches the constant trickle of Fascist deserters, he comes to appreciate the effectiveness of the propaganda war. One day, a Fascist airplane flies overhead and drops numerous copies of the *Heraldo de Aragon*, a Fascist newspaper, which contains information about the fall of Mblaga. The story is initially discounted as propaganda, but later proves true. Rumors circulate that the city fell due to treachery from within.

An abortive and unenthusiastic Fascist infantry attack follows, which dissolves after only a few minutes. Orwell is frightened, and surprised to be so frightened. He notes that later printed news reports of the attack claim it to be a furious assault including tanks, which was repulsed only by incredible zeal. Orwell finds the contradiction to reality amusing and typical. Other than the rudimentary Fascist attack, the days at the front are monotonous and uneventful. Finally in mid-February, the militia unit is sent to support an upcoming attack on the city of Huesca.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Orwell's experiences of monotonous and uneventful trench life continue throughout Chapter 4. His transfer to a unit of Englishmen is somewhat welcomed, as he finds himself surrounded by older and more-capable soldiers with whom he can more fully communicate, even though Orwell still is not very politically engaged. The fall of Mblaga, in Southern Spain, on February 8, 1937, is a significant setback for the Republicans and results in Fascist forces conducting extensive executions, numerous mutilations, and mass rapes in the city and surrounding areas.

The use of propaganda at the front is pervasive, and both sides shout insults and slogans at the other side. Orwell initially considers the behavior ridiculous, but soon comes to realize that it is effective. The Nationalist side rarely is successful, while the Republican side frequently talks Nationalist soldiers into deserting their posts. Orwell notes that many of the Fascists are poorly clothed and equipped, and are obviously

malnourished. The Republicans, therefore, spare the life of a fellow peasant and conserve their material. Orwell's description of the tactics and verbiage used makes for amusing reading.

The foreshadowed attack on Huesca will occur in Chapter Seven. Orwell's militia unit does not participate directly in the attack, but is instead used on the flank of the main thrust against Huesca to pin down Fascist forces, which would otherwise be free to converge to Huesca's defense.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Orwell and his militia unit occupy the Huesca front. The Fascist forces are 1200 meters distant, making any rifle fire useless. The front is stagnant and devoid of activity until late March, when the attack on Huesca begins. The soldiers suffer from the intense cold, and food becomes scarce.

The remainder of Chapter Five is devoted to a general outline of the start of the war, and a fairly detailed analysis of the politics in Catalonia during the period covered by the book. General Francisco Franco, backed by the Spanish aristocracy and the Catholic Church, attempted to seize power from the legitimately elected government. The government was supported by some loyal government troops, but other troops defected to Franco. The Spanish working classes and liberal bourgeoisie also support the government. In the initial stages of the civil war, the peasants seized large areas of land. Many trade unionists seized and collectivized factories and transportation systems. The Republicans largely viewed the Catholic Church, as a parasitic instrument of oppression. Churches were wrecked and hundreds of priests were executed or expelled. The initial military resistance to Franco was provided by decentralized militia units raised by trade unions, anarchists and socialists.

Francisco Largo Caballero headed the national Spanish government. It was a far-left-wing, Socialist, government with strong elements of UGT (Unión General de Trabajadores, or Workers' General Union - socialist trade unions) and CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, or National Labour Confederation - Syndicalist unions controlled by the Anarchists.) In the semi-autonomous region of Catalonia, the primary organizational force, the Generalitat de Catalunya, was led by Anarcho-Syndicalist unions. Other regions in Spain varied in their initial organization. The beginnings of a widespread social revolutionary spirit spread quickly and strongly through Republican controlled regions of Spain. Although the foreign press suppressed this information, instead casting the civil war in the context solely of Fascism opposed by democracy. Over the next several months, both the Catalan and the national Spanish government underwent continual reshufflings from the extreme left to the right on the political spectrum.

In October and November of 1936, the USSR commenced to supply arms and material to the Republicans. As the only source of supply to the government, the USSR quickly gained enormous influence in the Republican regions of the country. The USSR Communists' political views were on the extreme right of the political spectrum of the groups engaged in the Republican struggle. The Stalinist USSR soon ordered POUM expelled from the Generalitat de Catalunya, and then POUM was declared illegal and suppressed. The USSR later ordered the expulsion and suppression of other revolutionary groups toward their ultimately successful goal of entirely suppressing the



Spanish social revolution. By autumn of 1937, the Spanish government was once again a Capitalist Republic.

Before the USSR entered the war, the early Catalan government was composed of three significant political parties, PSUC (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, or Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia), POUM, and FAI (Federaciun Anarquista Ibyrica, or Iberian Anarchist Federation). PSUC, the party that triumphed in the internal struggle, was under Communist control. PSUC was the political organ of UGT, essentially composed of members of Socialist trade unions, workers, and small bourgeoisie. It had about one and one-half millions of workers. The public goal of PSUC was essentially war victory, at all costs. In effect, this goal included a general suppression of the social revolution, which would be sorted out after the civil war was concluded. POUM, based in Lyrida, was also Communist but a Trotskyist and anti-Stalinist organization with perhaps twenty thousands of members. Most POUM members belonged to UGT or CNT. The public goal of POUM was to win the civil war in conjunction with the social revolution, as the two were seen to be inseparable. FAI was the political organ of CNT and composed of about two millions of individuals with a wide spectrum of political views ranging from pure anarchist through socialism. FAI held many public goals, including worker control of industry, decentralized governmental authority, and uncompromising hostility to the bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church. Although POUM and CNT-FAI allowed for the free discussion of ideas, PSUC media was generally rigidly and centrally controlled. The internal struggle in the Republican government, therefore, fundamentally devolved to the USSR-backed Communists and PSUC in opposition to POUM and CNT-FAI. Eventually, the anti-revolutionary PSUC emerged triumphant, and POUM and CNT-FAI were suppressed.

The national press, with small circulation and no international presence, was generally correct in its political analysis of the civil war. The international press, regardless of political affiliation, was wildly inaccurate in its reporting. The international press ignored and downplayed the significance of the Spanish revolutionary sentiment and cast the war as a simple struggle of Fascism against democracy.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Note that in some editions of the book, Chapter Five has been removed from the main narrative and is often included as Appendix A. The change was requested by Orwell, after the Spanish Civil War had ended. He felt that many readers would not want to read the political material.

Chapter Five is complex, long, and difficult to understand. Along with Chapter Eleven, it summarizes the political minutia of Catalonia in 1936 and 1937. Although an understanding of the politics is not necessary to read and enjoy the book, the political situation is vital to a complete understanding of the causes of the Spanish Civil War in addition to a better understanding of why the Republicans were unable to secure most international support, as well as why they were ultimately defeated. The text does a good job of summarizing the enormously disparate political views of numerous



organizations, although the practice of using only initials to represent Spanish terms is somewhat confusing at first. The chapter also departs from the heretofore primarily chronological presentation of data. Instead, it organizes the material in a logical way. Careful attention must be focused on the timing of events described, and how they relate, chronologically, to the remaining chapters of the book. Many of the events described in Chapter Five took place either before or after Orwell was in Spain. Thus, the chapter covers a much longer period of time than the remainder of the narrative.

Two key facts are presented in Chapter Five that warrant especial consideration. First, the Stalinist USSR Communist party and PSUC were on the far-right of the left-wing Republican political spectrum. This is difficult for many present-day readers to realize. The USSR, today, is viewed as a very left-wing political organization, and the USSR Communists were certainly to the left of Franco's Nationalist government. Second, the USSR Communists and PSUC were anti-revolutionary and wanted to suppress the social revolution, while simultaneously prosecuting the war effort. CNT-FAI and POUM, among other groups, viewed the social revolution as the reason for the war and saw the two causes as inseparable. This difference in the politics of the social revolution led to, among other things, the eventual suppression of POUM.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Chapter Six returns to the daily journalistic narrative of Orwell's experiences as an infantry soldier. The front remains inactive and static for nearly two months, as Orwell continues nightly patrols. The Fascists keep up a very minor but continual shelling of the front lines. However, their artillery ammunition dates from 1917, and much of it does not explode. The Republicans frequently scavenge unexploded rounds, refurbish them, and fire them back at the Nationalists. Orwell and others engage in routine exploration of the so-called no-man's land between the opposing trenches. An ineffectual attack against the Fascists is finally conducted only to be quickly recalled. There are shortages of all supplies. Orwell's wife has moved to Barcelona, and she frequently mails him care packages. In late March, Orwell suffers from what he calls a "poisoned hand" (p. 77) and is sent to a rudimentary field hospital in Monflorite for several days of recuperation. The hospital orderlies rob all of the belongings from the patients.

In mid-April, the weather starts to warm up, but still nothing happens on the front. Eventually, spring arrives, and the peasants in the area begin crop planting. The local front line has a large bulge in it, away from the Fascist lines. The area commander orders the line to be straightened out by advancing it several hundreds of yards toward the Fascist position. The process is remarkably efficient and successful, is performed in a single night of hard work, and draws no fire from the Fascists. The next night, a large assault against the Fascist lines is planned, but called off at the last moment. Over the next few days, the distant sounds of continual battle indicate that the anarchists are attacking the Fascists in Huesca.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In Chapter Six, the book returns to the journalistic narrative of Orwell's direct experiences in the Spanish Civil War. His unit is located on the Aragon front within a few miles of the city of Huesca and is positioned there to pin down Fascist troops and prevent them from converging to the defense of Huesca. Trench life seems to improve markedly with the arrival of spring, as the soldiers are no longer suffering from intense cold. However, the plentiful food, wine and cigarettes of earlier days are long gone. Nearly everything is either completely unavailable or in very limited supply. For example, Orwell's wife sends him a small flashlight, and it is the only portable light source available in the entire section of the front.

Orwell's poisoned hand most likely is a bacterially infected, small wound. He spends some time at the hospital in Monflorite and describes it in considerable detail. It does not appear to be a place conducive to healing, and Orwell is glad to return to his unit with his arm still in a sling. During the advance of the trench, Orwell is exempted from manual labor due to his recuperating hand. He smugly lounges in the muddy trench,

while his companions dig and work. Orwell's descriptions of infantry life continue to be colorful, interesting and engaging.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The planned but cancelled assault against the Fascist lines is finally to be carried out. Orwell and fourteen other soldiers volunteer and are led by Benjamin to Torre Fabian. They assemble with other troops under the command of Georges Kopp, who outlines the operation first in Spanish and then in English. Orwell's section is to attack the Fascist line at a point where it forms a sharp outward bend, and each of the soldiers is issued three hand grenades. Rain is constant, and the area is a vast sea of slippery thick mud.

At night, the troops advance and cut through two lines of wire. When they are just yards away from the Nationalist trench, they are fired upon and respond by hurling grenades. A brief but intense exchange of fire takes place, and the Republican forces advance to the Nationalist trench. Orwell throws a telling grenade, leaps into the trench, and pursues a fleeing Fascist, trying unsuccessfully to bayonet him. The section secures the trench area and investigates, finding several items of use, including boxes of ammunition and rifles.

A Fascist counter-attack is mounted from the flank. Orwell and others hurriedly construct a makeshift wall out of sandbags and successfully thwart the counter-attack. After several minutes, a more serious counter-attack is mounted. The section begins to draw heavy fire, though they successfully hold their position. A few minutes later, they are ordered to evacuate and fall back to their own trenches. They scramble away from the area to relative safety.

Back at the Republican trenches, Orwell learns that two men are still missing and presumed to be out in the Fascist-controlled area. Orwell and a few other men sneak back out to the Fascist trench. They slither through thick mud, while they search for the missing men. However, they cannot find them. Upon their return to their own lines, they learn the men were injured and removed to a hospital at the beginning of the initial attack. Orwell then returns to his own dugout, where he finds all his comrades fast asleep in their full gear. He scrounges some scraps of wood and lights a small fire. Then, he sits and smokes a cigar that his wife had previously sent to him. Orwell learns some days later that the mission was considered a success, as it drew Fascist forces away from Huesca.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter Seven contains the first description of significant military action in which Orwell is engaged. The narrative is particularly interesting, fast-paced, and very exciting. The text includes several scenes of brutality. For example, Orwell throws a grenade at a man and then hears the man screaming in agony for a considerable amount of time.



The description of Orwell pursuing a fleeing Fascist, ineffectually lunging at his back with a bayonet, is comical, but also horrific. The descriptions of trench warfare at night are compelling. The confusion of battle is well presented, including the brief but exultant feeling of victory followed by the seemingly bizarre orders to fall back.

Orwell's willingness to return to the Fascist lines on a rescue mission is particularly telling of the man's bravery and loyalty to his fellow soldiers. Out of the dozens of men engaged in the fighting, two are presumed missing. This is, needless to say, a natural and expected result of combat. However, putting his own life back in grave danger, Orwell returns to the Fascist lines with a few other men to search for their putatively fallen comrades. They do not find them, however, because the men they are searching for were injured several hours earlier and have already been evacuated to a field hospital. After Orwell's spirited description of the action, he reveals, that it was not much more than a feint aimed at pinning down enemy troops.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Continued improvements in the weather make life in the trenches more pleasant. Flowers begin to bloom and river bathing becomes a pleasure. Peasants begin various summer activities, including quail hunting. Eventually, however, the days become brutally hot. The soldiers' equipment and clothes begin to rust and rot away. Cigarette rations end entirely. Clouds of mosquitoes rise from the ground, and hordes of enormous rats are everywhere. The anarchist attack on Huesca falters and ends without taking the city. In June, another huge assault, assisted by airplanes, also fails to take the city. Orwell has been on the front lines, isolated from most news, for one hundred and fifteen days.

Orwell will come to remember the experience of social equality and revolutionary spirit on the front with great fondness. The time will become greatly important to him in his later life, and he will remember many small details vividly. Insignificant incidents will stay with him into the future.

On April 25, 1937, Orwell's militia unit is finally relieved. The unit marches to Monflorite and then takes a bus to Barbastro. Orwell then catches a train through Lyrida and arrives in Barcelona on April 26.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This short chapter recounts the warming weather, and the pleasant and brief interlude spring allows between freezing cold and brutal heat. Orwell then recounts the summertime unpleasantness of trench life, including incredible numbers of lice, rats and mosquitoes. The descriptions of the rotting clothing and equipment make it clear that the unit was in dire need of even such necessities as boots and shirts, let alone weapons and ammunition.

Further introspection by Orwell discloses that, although at the time he considered his three months at the front to be an almost completely pointless exercise in discomfort, he would come to view it as an enormously influential interregnum in his life. Orwell also discusses, at some length, the revolutionary and social aspects of the war, and how these aspects impacted him personally.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Barcelona is a radically changed city. Within the past three months since Orwell's last visit, the city seems to have become hostile to the militia units and is decidedly non-revolutionary. Popular Army officers swagger about, receiving higher pay and nicer uniforms. The officers are all armed with pistols, which are virtually unobtainable at the front lines. Forced conscription is taking place, and war enthusiasm is flagging or completely absent. As the social revolution dwindles away, many people see no reason to continue the armed struggle. Propaganda channels enthuse about the Popular Army and denigrate the militias. Class and privilege have returned to Barcelona. The wealthy can get anything, but the poor are truly destitute; "A fat man eating quails while children are begging for bread is a disgusting sight" (p. 115). Orwell manages to procure a tiny, automatic pistol from the black market.

Rumors circulate that Madrid is still a revolutionary city. Orwell makes inquiries about being transferred from his POUM unit to a unit of the International Column, so he will be routed to the fighting around Madrid. He puts his transfer plans on hold, while he commissions a new pair of boots. Subsequent events then overtake him.

Trouble is brewing in Barcelona. PSUC has largely gained political control and is actively seeking to disarm CNT. PSUC has the only large influx of arms in the area due to its close association with the USSR, and these arms are not distributed to CNT militias. Further, the militia units are being slowly dispersed and incorporated into the Popular Army. As PSUC attempts to suppress CNT and militia units, numerous inter-party assassinations take place. Orwell hears occasional rifle fire and explosions in the distance. The political stresses in the city are so great that no official May Day celebrations are held in Barcelona, which is widely considered to be one of the most revolutionary-minded cities in the world.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The changes in the social and political areas in Barcelona are truly astounding. Orwell is shocked by the almost total absence of the revolutionary ardor of previous months. Orwell makes numerous observations about the absence of the spirit of revolution, and how the city has reverted to a typical Capitalist institution. The posters and pamphlets are gone, flags are missing, the rich are present in nice clothing, and the poor are completely destitute. It is notable that no official May Day celebrations were held in Barcelona. Modern readers may, perhaps, underestimate the significance of traditional May Day celebrations in Communist and revolutionary areas.

The pistol that Orwell purchases on the black market in Barcelona is interesting. Some editions of the book describe it as a 26 mm weapon, which is patently ludicrous for a



pistol Orwell described as tiny. Other editions describe the handgun as a 26-inch weapon, which is also ridiculous. Orwell was almost positively describing a .25 caliber automatic handgun of the so-called 'Ruby' type, a style of handgun, which was quite common in Spain at the time, in spite of its relative ineffectiveness as a defensive weapon. However, note that in Chapter Twelve, he will twice refer to this sidearm as a revolver.

Orwell's attempt to be transferred to the International Column (a reference to what is today more commonly called the International Brigades) is put on hold, because he is in desperate need of new boots. His feet are too large for regulation boots, so he commissions a pair from a local merchant. He plans to transfer to the International Column in several days, when the boots are complete. However, rioting in Barcelona, described in the next chapter, prevents Orwell from transferring. This major turning point occurs because of a pair of boots. It's interesting from a literary point of view, and Orwell himself comments on the unlikely twist of fate.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In early May of 1937, fighting breaks out in Barcelona. The Civil Guards, essentially a governmental police force, demand that CNT surrender the Barcelona telephone exchange. CNT declines, and the Civil Guards attempt to storm the exchange. Over the next few hours, the fighting spreads throughout the entire city. Orwell proceeds to the Hotel Falcon, an unofficial POUM rallying point, and is joined by many other POUM soldiers. POUM arms the soldiers with what weapons are available, but after a few hours, someone sneaks off with Orwell's issued rifle. The evening the fighting starts, Orwell sneaks out and calls his wife's hotel. He discovers that she is safe.

The night passes in confusion, and weapons are extremely scarce. No one is sure, exactly, what is going on in the city. Rumors circulate that the government did not order the attack on the telephone exchange. It was actually mounted independently by the Civil Guards. In the first light of the morning, numerous street barricades are erected all over the city. After a few hours, a brief but intense firefight erupts between POUM in the Hotel Falcon and a Civil Guard unit that occupies a hotel directly across the street. In an act of incredible bravery, Kopp rushes into the street, personally disarms, and stops the fighting, insisting that there should not be any casualties. He then informs POUM soldiers that POUM was ordered to engage only in defensive fighting. Orwell and a few other soldiers go to POUM executive headquarters building, very close to the Hotel Falcon, to serve as guards.

The situation over the next two days is extremely confusing to everyone on the ground. Orwell has no clear idea of what is happening, or why it is happening. Distant noises of combat come from all parts of the city, although the area immediately around the Hotel Falcon is relatively quiet. Orwell notes that no artillery or aerial bombardments took place at any time during the entire period. Food quickly becomes scarce, then critical, and then non-existent. The generally held attitude seems to deem the conflict insignificant, and most feel it will evaporate quickly. Various lulls are interrupted by tense moments for about a week, when general hostilities effectively cease.

Then, a large contingent of government troops arrives from Valencia and begins to patrol the streets. Over the next few days, they restore general governmental control of Barcelona and also begin to disarm CNT and other anarchist troops. Within a few days, it becomes clear that the USSR-Backed PSUC, now firmly in power, intends to blame POUM for all of the trouble. PSUC labels POUM a Fascist and subversive organization. Numerous arrests of POUM and CNT personnel begin, and many foreigners are arrested and jailed. Orwell is disgusted with the Communist tactics and infighting and describes the political maneuverings as a cesspool. When he is subsequently invited to transfer to the Communist controlled International Column, he vehemently declines the offer. Barcelona becomes filled with an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and hatred. Food remains scarce.



Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter Ten is somewhat confusing in that it details fighting between two Republican groups. These are the Civil Guard, representative of the official Spanish government, and CNT and POUM, who are nominally allied with the Republican government. The inter-party fighting described takes place in Barcelona, a city well behind the front lines, where the main fighting is taking place between the Republicans and the Nationalists. To fully understand Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven, it is necessary to closely track the various political groups and organizations. In fact, later editions of the book frequently contain footnotes, which correct errors or briefly explain obscure political relationships.

The chapter summarizes Orwell's personal experiences in Barcelona, in early May of 1937. Orwell does not attempt to present a general summarization of the entire situation. This will be presented in Chapter Eleven. Rather, Orwell presents a first-hand account of being on the ground as the fighting began, developed, and then dwindled away. Although casualties were somewhat light for the amount of widespread combat, the aftermath of the fighting included extensive arrests followed, eventually, by a large number of executions.

The most interesting aspect of the chapter is the near total lack of information available to Orwell and others at the time in which the events were transpiring. Most individuals in the narrative have little or no idea of what is happening beyond what they can immediately perceive. Although the initial fighting takes place at the telephone exchange, telephone service is not interrupted for more than a few hours, water is not shut off during the fighting, some stores and hotels remain open, and other strange inconsistencies are noted. Many groups have unofficial agreements to not fire upon opposing units, while other groups maintain a zealous aggressiveness and fire on nearly anything that moves within their zone of fire. Orwell is sickened by the inter-party fighting and views it all as disgusting political machinations, which will harm the overall war effort even as he is drawn into the political debate that he has for so long resisted.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Chapter Eleven is devoted to a fairly detailed analysis of the politics leading up to the street fighting in Barcelona, as well as an overview of the political results of that fighting. As reliable records of events do not exist, a complete and credible picture of the situation cannot be fully created. Instead, eyewitness accounts are provided to contradict much of the inflammatory and idealistic rhetoric, which has been reported as fact.

The political situation in Barcelona involved considerable friction between two main political camps, which Orwell refers to as the Communists, including PSUC and the Spanish Government, and the anarchists, including CNT-FAI and POUM. The situation was escalated when the government ordered the surrender of all privately-held weapons and simultaneously decided to establish a heavily-armed police force that excluded trade union members. These decisions were clearly aimed at reducing the political and real power of CNT-FAI, composed nearly entirely of trade union members. Additionally, the working class of Barcelona was becoming increasingly resentful of the growing contrast between the rich and the poor, and a general feeling that the social revolution had been sabotaged was evident through the city.

In early May, the government took over the telephone exchange. It remains unclear whether this action was initiated by the Barcelona chief of the Civil Guards or from higher in the government. At any event, truckloads of Civil Guards arrived at the Telephone Exchange and several other strategic locations in Barcelona and attempted to take possession of the buildings by force. Many people apparently assumed a general uprising was occurring, and the fighting quickly escalated into a general riot that persisted for four days. No artillery or tanks were used, and the fighting was of a defensive character. In general terms, CNT-FAI and POUM forces held the working class neighborhoods. The Civil Guard and PSUC held the central and official locations in the city. CNT seemed to win in the fighting. However, as there was no centralized organization or goals, the fighting trickled to an end when food shortages became critical, and CNT and UGT leadership requested that all combatants cease hostilities and return to work. On the evening most of the fighting ceased, thousands of Assault Guards arrived from Valencia. Order was completely re-established. The government then enforced the surrender of all private weapons by confiscating large numbers of arms. Casualties amounted to potentially four hundred killed and one thousand wounded.

After the riots ended, they were used as an excuse to bring Catalonia fully under the control of the national government, as an excuse to hasten the break-up of the militias, and as an excuse to suppress and outlaw POUM. Orwell feels, however, that the riots did, in the long-term, help CNT workers establish themselves as a significant and long-term political force.



Many interested parties maintain that the riots were the result of a concerted effort of POUM to instigate instability in rear areas to cripple the war effort. Numerous methods were proposed for how this process was putatively orchestrated, and what its intended goals were. Orwell discounts these all as after-the-fact fabrications to make political gain out of a complex situation, by reducing it to a manufactured and simple situation. Several foreign newspaper accounts of the rioting are presented and then examined critically, such that all are demonstrated to be internally inconsistent or spurious. Several commonly held conceptions about the rioting and political situation are also examined critically and either repudiated or presented in different terms.

One minor event is examined in greater detail. After the outbreak of the violence, a small political organization called The Friends of Durruti putatively published and distributed a radical leaflet or poster calling for sustained revolution. CNT publicly distanced itself from the leaflet or poster, while POUM publicly supported it. This was later seized upon by PSUC. The distinguishing point between CNT and POUM involvement in the riots and POUM, vastly smaller and therefore an easier scapegoat, was targeted as the instigator and suppressed as a supposedly Fascist subversive element.

Orwell then examines and debunks the various Communist versions of events circulating in the media, and debunks charges that POUM is a Fascist organization in the pay of Franco and Adolf Hitler. For example, while supposedly an agent of Franco, POUM suffers thousands of combat casualties assaulting Fascist strongholds around Huesca. All subsequent investigation into anti-POUM allegations have concluded the allegations are without basis in fact. Nevertheless, about two weeks after the Barcelona riots, POUM is suppressed and declared illegal. POUM leader, Andry Nin, is arrested, jailed and disappears. Rumors circulate that he has been murdered in jail. Orwell then moves from POUM specifics to a brief but general critique of the standard Communist operating tactics of libel and divisive labeling of political groups.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Note that in some editions of the book, Chapter Eleven has been removed from the main narrative and is often included as Appendix B. The change was requested by Orwell after the Spanish Civil War had ended. Orwell felt that many readers would not want to read the political material.

Chapter Eleven is complex and difficult to understand; along with Chapter Five. It summarizes the political minutia of Barcelona in May of 1937. Although an understanding of the politics is not necessary to read and enjoy the book, the political situation is vital to a complete understanding of the causes of the Republican inter-party street fighting, which Orwell experienced in Barcelona.

In general, the chapter details the cause and effect of a power struggle taking place between CNT-FAI and the official Catalan government, dominated by USSR-Affiliated Communists. POUM and other anarchist groups, including The Friends of Durruti, sided



with CNT-FAI, while PSUC and the Civil Guard sided with the government. The fighting rather spontaneously broke out after a unit of Civil Guards attempted to take by force the Telephone Exchange, which was managed by CNT members. It is unclear whether the initial attack on the Telephone Exchange was ordered by the chief of police or with a more-legitimate political person. After several days of fighting and street barricades, the situation faded away, as food reserves became critical. The event caused the rapid suppression of POUM, leading to trouble for Orwell and other POUM-affiliated soldiers. The event also caused the semi-autonomous Catalan government to lose most of its autonomy and come under control of the national Spanish government, which Orwell usually refers to as the Valencia Government.

Orwell reports several sets of casualty figures, and discusses how the figures are unreliable due to political manipulations. He then sets forward a number of officially reported versions of events and systematically debunks them. Included in the chapter are numerous concise quotes from news media, which often contradict each other from article to article. Orwell notes his own biases and admits that they may cause him to view things incorrectly, though he asserts his objectivity. The chapter concludes with a general critique of the Communist party and the left in general.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

A few days after the Barcelona riots, Orwell's militia unit returns to the front lines. Orwell speculates that the social revolution has ended in defeat, but the military war continues as a fight against Fascism. He decides that the war is still important, so that Spain can reject Franco. The alternative is probably another dictator and not a worker-controlled democracy. Franco stands for the old Feudal order with strong ties to the Catholic Church and the military. The Republican government, although increasingly authoritarian, is still somewhat peasant-oriented, strongly anti-clerical, and is focused on building the country's infrastructure. Finally, the war is anti-Fascist and in the pre-World War II era of the book. Orwell feels this is a critical reason to continue the fight.

Bob Smillie, an ILP-affiliated POUM militiaman, concludes his tour of duty and attempts to return home to England. He is arrested at the border, supposedly for smuggling arms, and jailed. News of the arrest reaches the front, where it demoralizes POUM units. Orwell is promoted to *teniente* (roughly equivalent to 2nd Lieutenant) and is in command of about thirty men. Benjamin is promoted to Captain, and Kopp is promoted to Major.

The trenches, at this point in the line, are one hundred and fifty yards apart, flanked on both sides by Fascist trenches, due to a bend in the salient and lower in elevation than the Fascist trenches. Thus, snipers are a constant and real problem. The weather is uncomfortably hot, mosquitoes and lice are ubiquitous, and mud is thick and fills the trenches. The soldiers begin the routine patrols and duties of trench life. Orwell finds a hiding place and uses it, day after day, to shoot at the Fascist lines. However, Orwell himself is eventually struck by a sniper's bullet, which penetrates through his neck. In some of the most memorable paragraphs of the book, he describes the physical and mental sensation of being shot through the neck. At first, he assumes he will die, but the wound proves non-fatal, but very serious.

Orwell is evacuated to Sietamo, where some of his friends divvy up his belongings before they are stolen by the hospital staff. He is then subsequently evacuated to Barbastro, and then finally to Lyrida. Orwell meets other soldiers and some old friends, now wounded, at the hospital and spends a week recuperating. He is then transferred to a hospital in Tarragona, where his neck wound is finally examined by a doctor for the first time, over a week after the shooting. Orwell comments broadly, though not entirely negatively, on the Spanish medical services available to soldiers. He spends some time in the Tarragona hospital, where he gradually recovers from his critical wound and is joined by his wife.



Chapter 12 Analysis

In Chapter Twelve, the book returns to the journalistic narrative of Orwell's direct experiences in the Spanish Civil War. His unit is returned to the Aragon front within a few miles of the city of Huesca. It's placed in a new location in the lines, which is very close to the Fascist lines in an unfavorable geographical position. Most of the men are discouraged to be returning to the difficulties and unpleasantness of trench life, but Orwell takes some pleasure in the fact that, at least, he is now able to routinely shoot at Fascists. The news of Bob Smillie's arrest and imprisonment provides foreshadowing of events shortly to befall many of the POUM militiamen, including Orwell himself. Smillie's treatment is also a severe blow to the morale of POUM units.

The major turning point of the book then takes place, and Orwell is critically wounded by being shot clean through the neck. Miraculously, he is not fatally wounded or even permanently disabled. However, at the time, he assumes that he is moments from death. The description of the physical sensation of being shot is detailed and makes some of the most interesting reading in the entire book. Orwell also relates his thought process of the moments before he realized he might not be fatally wounded. This is also a very interesting section of the book.

Orwell's subsequent evacuation through several first-aid stations and medical clearing stations is remarkable. His wound was bandaged over at the front lines and apparently not examined again until eight or nine days later at a hospital, located hundreds of miles from the front. This delay of critical care, Orwell notes, resulted in thousands of needless deaths. Once at the hospital, however, Orwell's medical care appears to be first-rate and state-of-the-art. Orwell loses his voice for several weeks and suffers pain and numbness, along with some loss of motion in one arm and hand, but eventually recovers almost completely. Orwell also notes an amusing anecdote related to Spanish rail transportation and telegram communications that results in a slight miscommunication with his wife about his final hospital destination.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Orwell and his wife return to Barcelona, where he spends several weeks recuperating at the Sanatorium Maurin, a recovery location run by POUM. Williams is at Sanatorium Maurin as well, recovering from a leg wound. Also there is Stafford Cottman, a young English POUM militiaman, who is thought to be suffering from tuberculosis. Other soldiers, of course, are also residents.

Orwell notes that Barcelona is wracked by rumors of internal sabotage, the air has an ugly feeling, and there are constant arrests and imprisonments. Service in the militia is no longer voluntary. Militiamen are now compelled to remain in the militia, and the Popular Army begins conscription. The Civil Guard and the Assault Guard presences in Barcelona are obvious, and censorship becomes widespread. Food shortages are chronic. Orwell describes the feeling as a nightmare atmosphere.

Orwell finally decides to return to England to complete his recovery. He returns to Sietamo to have his papers processed, and the trip takes a total of five days. On his return to Barcelona, Orwell meets Kopp, at random, and learns that Kopp is on his way to Valencia to accept a special and critical military assignment. In Barcelona, Orwell learns that POUM has been suppressed and declared an illegal organization. About four hundred POUM militiamen, including grievously wounded men, have been arrested and detained. Some have been executed. Nearly everyone at the Hotel Falcon, including Andry Nin and most members of the POUM executive committee, has been arrested. Williams, Cottman and McNair are all in hiding. A warrant is circulated for McNair. Kopp, traveling through Barcelona on a military mission to the front, is arrested and jailed. Kopp, a Belgian national, left Belgium and joined the Spanish army while still in the Belgian Army Reserve. He is considered a criminal in Belgium. Therefore, the Belgian authorities are not interested in his release from prison.

Orwell destroys all evidence that he is POUM-affiliated, except his military service papers. These are required for travel and crossing the Spanish border, which indicate that he is a member of the 29th Division, a POUM unit. He then goes into hiding and sleeps on the streets in bombed-out buildings. The police raid Orwell's abandoned hospital room and his wife's hotel room. They search everything, confiscating nearly all items of worth.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter Thirteen deals with the political fallout of POUM affiliation, after POUM is officially determined to be a Fascist organization. It's a charge that Orwell has previously repudiated in Chapter Eleven. Orwell fortunately avoids arrest and imprisonment, simply by being out of town at the right moment. Upon his return to



Barcelona, he is immediately forced into hiding. He comments liberally on the absurdity of jailing hundreds or thousands of militiamen during a war and describes the atmosphere of fear and mistrust present in Barcelona. Kopp's arrest particularly outrages and concerns Orwell. Kopp has become his personal friend, and Orwell despairs at the senseless detainment of a valiant anti-Fascist soldier.

Orwell describes the police search of his wife's hotel room in considerable detail. Fortunately, his wife was in bed, when the police burst into the room. She remained in bed, while the exhaustive search was performed. The Spanish police were too proper to demand a woman leave her bed and did not search the bed or her person. By this curious oversight, Orwell's wife managed to retain their passports, some money, and a few other important documents. Orwell makes a few good-natured but insightful criticisms of the Spanish police, comparing their efficiency to the Gestapo in an unfavorable manner.

In a broader sense, the senseless arrests and political pogrom of POUM-affiliated persons, including the lower rank and file, exemplifies Orwell's Chapter Eleven criticisms of the USSR-Backed Communist government and justifies his gradual but constant change in political opinion, away from the traditional Communist left. Orwell also notes that news of the events in Barcelona was heavily censored. It was restrained from the front lines, where thousands of POUM militiamen were holding important positions in the trenches across from the Fascists who, supposedly, were their secret allies. The very nature of the situation and its handling by the authorities exposes the truth.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Orwell and others hide out for several days, spending nights in abandoned buildings and days wandering back streets to avoid police. He remains in contact with Cottman and McNair. After a few days, they go to the consulate to get their papers in order. They learn that Bob Smillie is dead, presumably executed while in jail. Although, Orwell is told later that he in fact died of acute appendicitis. Orwell considers either explanation plausible.

Orwell and his wife visit Kopp in prison. The visit is extremely dangerous, as Orwell is likely to be arrested if recognized as a POUM sympathizer. Kopp is in good spirits, even though the situation is obviously quite grave. Conditions in the prison are appallingly bad. Among the inmates are children and veteran amputees. While visiting the prison, Orwell sees many other POUM militiamen he has served with. They all studiously ignore him, and he leaves the prison. Orwell then manages to recover some of Kopp's military papers from the police and tries to have Kopp released, but all to no avail.

Orwell, Cottman and McNair hide for a few more days. Orwell writes a letter in defense of Kopp, and then wanders Barcelona unsuccessfully searching for others to testify in Kopp's behalf. Orwell finally realizes that if he continues to attempt to assist Kopp, he will not only be unsuccessful, but will also end up arrested. The three men and Orwell's wife then travel to France, crossing the border without incident. The border guards are apparently unaware that the 29th Division, in which all the men served, is a POUM unit. In France, the first newspaper that they read carries a story announcing McNair's arrest. Orwell and his wife then return to England, where he spends several days marveling at the strange, dreamy contrast between England and Spain.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Orwell and a few friends spend approximately one week in Barcelona, living in hiding. This entails sleeping in abandoned or wrecked buildings during the night and whiling away the daytime hours by avoiding the police and trying to find a good meal. Orwell's wife is not arrested, but watched carefully by the police. She uses several stratagems to avoid leading the police to her husband. For example, the two travel on the same days to the same destinations, but proceed separately. This period is particularly trying for Orwell, still recovering from a serious wound. It's also mentally taxing, as he discovers that in spite of his volunteer wartime service in defense of the legitimate Spanish government, he is now a wanted political criminal.

Orwell's unsuccessful attempts to help Kopp are magnanimous. Orwell clearly realizes the extreme danger that he is in, but refuses to give up on his friend, until it becomes evident that Kopp will remain imprisoned regardless of any legal defense. Even then,



Orwell leaves behind a sum of money with a trusted friend, who will use it to buy food for delivery to Kopp in the prison and writes letters of protest.

Orwell credits his own escape, as well as that of Cottman, McNair and others, to the Spanish police system's relative inefficiency. Once again, he contrasts their methods with other secret police forces. In a good-natured, but critical way, he concludes that they are relatively incompetent by design, not by desire. The news article announcing the arrest of McNair indicates, in a very concrete way, that the timing of their flight was critical. In England, Orwell battles with the enormous mental shift required to move from war-torn Spain to the placid and beautiful English countryside. He spends the next several months amassing a wealth of information about the war, corresponding with friends, and, of course, writing the book, which is the subject of this summary.



Characters

George Orwell

George Orwell is the author of the book, which consists almost entirely of his journalistic observations of and personal participation in the Spanish Civil War from December of 1936 through June of 1937. Orwell originally traveled to Spain as a journalist, but was caught up in the revolutionary spirit of Barcelona and joined a local militia unit to fight against the Fascist forces being led, by that time, by General Francisco Franco. Orwell is assigned to a POUM militia unit and serves for several weeks at the front. He is then transferred to the 29th Division, another POUM unit, where he serves for several months with other English soldiers. Orwell is promoted first to Corporal, and then to 2nd Lieutenant, and participates in a few combat firefights. He is granted some leave and travels to Barcelona, where he meets his wife, who has traveled from England. Curiously, she's never named in the book.

Orwell's leave in Barcelona is interrupted by the May rioting in which he participates by guarding a POUM building. After the rioting ends, Orwell returns to the front lines, where he is shot through the neck. Surprisingly, the injury proves non-fatal. Orwell spends several weeks in recovery and is then forced into hiding by the political suppression of POUM. As a POUM soldier, he is wanted for political reasons but manages to flee to France and ultimately return to England. There, he writes the book which is the subject of this summary. In addition to his participation in combat, Orwell spends a great deal of time thinking about the political situation before and during the Spanish Civil War. He also adds numerous comments throughout the book, covering everything from politics to the Spanish countryside.

The Italian Militiaman

The book opens with a description of an Italian militiaman. Orwell sees the man on the day before Orwell joins the militia. The man is standing in front of an officer, reading a map. He's about 25-years-old and in good physical condition. Orwell sees in the man's face a kind of personification of friendship and senses a great kinship in him. They speak briefly, only to learn that they do not share a common language. They shake hands knowingly, and then part ways. Orwell will never see the man again, though he recalls him thereafter as symbolic of his early time in Barcelona.

General Francisco Franco

Franco is the dictator and head of state of Nationalist Spain from 1936 through the end of the Spanish Civil War. He ultimately triumphs over the USSR-supported Republicans and rules the entire country. Prior to the Spanish Civil War, Franco was out of favor with the Liberal government. He commanded a small contingent of troops on the Canary Islands, in virtual exile. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Franco did not fully support the



Nationalist government. However, within several weeks, he assumed more control over the armed forces. After the Nationalist leader General Josy Sanjurjo was killed in an airplane crash, Franco assumed essentially complete control of the Nationalist government. During the period covered by the book, Franco is the undisputed dictator of the Nationalist government and is closely allied with Fascist elements from Germany and Italy.

Williams

Williams is, initially, the only other Englishman in POUM militia unit that Orwell belongs to. They join the militia at approximately the same time. Williams, as a native English speaker, befriends Orwell. The two men spend a great deal of time in military service together. Williams is an otherwise typical militiaman, though he is married to a beautiful, Spanish woman. Williams' Spanish brother-in-law also belongs to the same militia unit. Williams is wounded in the leg and evacuated to the Sanatorium Maurin, where he remains until POUM is suppressed. While recuperating, he is nearly arrested, but manages to flee and remains in hiding for some period of time. His ultimate fate is not disclosed in the book.

Georges Kopp

Kopp is the easy-going veteran commander of the POUM column to which Orwell's militia unit is assigned. Kopp is described as a stout Belgian and apparently an accomplished horseman. Kopp makes frequent inspections of the front line, seems to enjoy an easy rapport with his soldiers, and has a keen sense of humor. Kopp is usually in the front of attacks and coordinates the planning of coming actions, first in Spanish and then in English. When Kopp's close friend, Jorge Roca, is apparently missing after an attack on the Nationalist lines, he is very distraught and enlists Orwell and a few others to return to the Nationalist lines and search for Roca.

Kopp, gazetted to Major, later goes through the Barcelona riots and does what he can to secure the safety of his soldiers. In one particularly dangerous situation, Kopp exhibits incredible bravery, as he runs between opposing troops, under fire, and instigates a cease-fire which lasts for several days. Kopp appears to be extremely calm and collected, and is very casual when under fire. After the Barcelona riots, Kopp goes to Madrid, where he is assigned to an engineering mission. He returns to Barcelona to retrieve equipment and is arrested and jailed because of his service with a POUM militia unit. Orwell visits Kopp in prison, a very dangerous prospect, and tries, unsuccessfully, to have Kopp released. When the book concludes, Kopp is either still in jail or has been executed.

Captain ("Benjamin") Levinski

The veteran commander of Orwell's militia Centuria is known to everyone as Benjamin. Benjamin, a Jew, was born in Poland, but his native tongue is French. He speaks



terrible English, is short, about twenty-five years old, has stiff black hair, and a pale face. Benjamin is usually covered in mud or dirt, but pursues war victory with an intense eagerness. He is nominally in command of Orwell's unit for a prolonged period of time and shows the soldiers their duties when they arrive at the front and report to his command. Benjamin is involved in most of the combat Orwell experiences and appears to be a capable and effective leader of men and a good combat soldier.

Paddy Donovan

Donovan is the second-in-command, after Benjamin, of Orwell's militia section. He plays a minor role in the book, ordering the retreat from the Fascist lines after a brief but successful assault.

Bob Smillie

Smillie is an ILP-affiliated Englishman, who joins a POUM militia unit in October of 1936. Orwell joins Smillie's unit near Huesca. Smillie's grandfather was a well-known miner's organizer, and Smillie gave up a career at Glasgow University to join the Spanish armed forces. Smillie is described as easy to get along with and a good infantryman. Smillie is lightly wounded in the face during an attack on the Fascist lines. After his three-month commitment expires, Smillie attempts to leave Spain, due to the Barcelona riots. He is arrested for putatively trying to smuggle arms, while trying to cross the frontier. The arms in question were a pair of deactivated grenade casings, with explosives and igniters removed, really just metal shells intended as souvenirs. Smillie remains in jail for several months and is reportedly transferred to a prison in Valencia, where he dies. Orwell is unable to ascertain whether Smillie was executed or died of appendicitis, but feels that either cause is possible.

Douglas Thompson

Thompson is an ILP-affiliated Englishman, who belongs to a POUM militia unit. Orwell joins Thompson's unit near Huesca. Thompson is an aggressive soldier and a good shot. During an April, 1937, attack on the Fascist lines, he is shot through the arm but continues to fight with his one, good arm. After the attack ends, Thompson is sent to a hospital in Tarragon, where he recuperates for a few weeks. He is then sent to Barcelona at the beginning of May. Thompson and Orwell meet by accident during the Barcelona fighting. Thompson, his arm still nearly useless, returns to his hotel. There, he's arrested and jailed, because of his affiliation with POUM. He is held in a packed jail cell for eight days, and then released.

Jorge Roca

Jorge Roca is a battalion commander of the Republican militia on the line near Huesca, nominally Benjamin's superior officer for a period of time. Jorge leads the attack, which



was Orwell's first principle combat experience, personally cutting the wire and advancing on the Fascist trench. He is injured in the shoulder by the first Fascist volley early in the attack, though not seriously, and is then evacuated to a hospital. He's later feared to be missing in action. Orwell and a few other men return to the Fascist trenches under fire to unsuccessfully search for the presumably missing Jorge. Jorge appears to be a capable and effective leader of men and a good combat soldier.

John McNair

McNair is the ILP representative in Barcelona. He braves the Barcelona fighting one night to deliver cigarettes to some of the ILP soldiers. McNair is in France when POUM is declared illegal, but returns to Barcelona to help other ILP members escape the country. McNair and Orwell help each other get their papers in order and evade arrest. For several nights, McNair sleeps in derelict buildings to avoid the police. McNair learns that a warrant has been issued for his arrest, and he flees Spain. He is able to cross the border, only because of the inefficiency of the local police. In France, he reads a clearly inaccurate newspaper account of his arrest for espionage. Once out of Spain, he proceeds to Paris.

Stafford Cottman

Cottman is an eighteen-year-old ILP-affiliated Englishman, who belongs to a POUM militia unit. Orwell joins Cottman's militia unit near Huesca. Cottman is removed from the front lines and sent to the Sanatorium Maurin, because he displays the symptoms of tuberculosis. He is at the sanatorium when Orwell is there with a wounded hand, and is still there weeks later when POUM is suppressed. Cottman evades arrest and lives in hiding for several days, until he meets up with John McNair and Orwell. They all manage to escape from Spain. Once out of Spain, he proceeds to Paris.

Andry Nin

Andry Nin was a co-founder of POUM and, at the time of the Spanish Civil War, the leader of POUM. A one-time associate of Trotsky, Nin eventually broke with Trotsky in an acrimonious political dispute. The USSR-Backed Communists, who wished to discredit POUM, of course, seized upon this one-time association with Trotsky. Nin led POUM, until its suppression after the Barcelona rioting. Nin was then arrested and held *incommunicado* in jail, then transferred to Valencia and Madrid. After this, he simply disappears. Rumors eventually circulated that he was executed. This was eventually established as the unfortunate truth.



Objects/Places

Barcelona

Barcelona is a large city in the Northwest of Spain, in Catalonia. Orwell arrives in Barcelona as a journalist, but is immediately caught up in the intense revolutionary spirit of the place. He quickly joins a militia unit to fight against Fascism. Later, Orwell returns to Barcelona to discover the revolutionary spirit is missing and sees the city devolve into brutal street fighting. Barcelona is described in great detail in the book and is the location of much of the book's narrative action.

Huesca

Huesca is a small city in the Northwest of Spain, in Aragon. Orwell is sent to join a POUM militia unit, composed mostly of ILP-affiliated Englishmen, on the outskirts of Huesca. The anarchist forces make a prolonged effort to take Huesca and Orwell's unit supports the attempt by attacking along the Nationalist flank, pinning down units that would otherwise converge to the defense of Huesca. Although Orwell never visits the actual city, and the Republicans never manage to take the city, it is in close proximity to most of the trench fighting recounted in the book.

The Militia

The militia is a loosely organized fighting force composed of all volunteer members. Officers were nominally in charge, but orders could be challenged or ignored, and all members were considered equals. The basic organization consists of a Section of about thirty soldiers. About three Sections are joined together into a Centuria, consisting of about one hundred men. Several Centuria are joined together into a Column which, in practice, means any large number of men. The militia spontaneously arose after the Nationalist coup attempt in July, 1936, and was remarkably successful in stopping the Nationalist army's advance. Most militia units were raised by political groups or trade unions. Most of the units remain loyal to the leaders of the cause to which they are attached. The militia units continued to fight the war, while the so-called Popular Army was raised, trained and equipped in the rear areas. Once the Popular Army was established as an effective force, the militia was denigrated and eventually suppressed by the USSR Communist affiliated Republican government. The militia is poorly equipped and armed. It's given very little logistic support. For example, most militia units have piecemeal and non-standardized uniforms, scant equipment, and old, dilapidated weapons.



The Popular Army

After the militia stopped the initial Nationalist advance, the central Spanish government organized a national Popular Army. Unlike the militia system, the Popular Army had a traditional military hierarchy with about one officer for every ten soldiers. The officers received higher pay, were better equipped, and had better uniforms. Officers gave orders, which were not open to challenge. The Popular Army was largely equipped with weapons and material purchased from the USSR. As a result, the USSR exerted enormous influence over the Republican government. Existing militia units were, at least on paper, incorporated into the Popular Army, although the actual transition took much longer. Eventually, the Popular Army was established well enough to begin taking over the primary war effort from the militia and supplanted militia units altogether before the Republican government surrendered to the Fascist Nationalist led by General Franco. It is worth noting that the Popular Army did not take sides or participate during the Barcelona riots.

POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificaciun Marxista, or Party of Marxist Unification)

POUM is a small Communist political group based in Lyrida, Spain, and composed of perhaps twenty thousands of members. POUM is an anti-Stalinist and Trotskyist group, whose members also belong, largely, to UGT or CNT. As Orwell arrives in Spain with ILP-affiliated papers, he is assigned to a POUM militia unit where he serves with several other Englishmen. POUM units are excellent and spirited fighters during the initial months of the Civil War. POUM public goals include winning the war and winning the social revolution in tandem. POUM insistence on the necessity of the social revolution puts them at odds with the pro-Stalinist PSUC. After the USSR enters the political spectrum POUM is increasingly attacked by PSUC. Eventually, POUM is declared illegal and suppressed, and thousands of POUM members are arrested and jailed. Many were subsequently executed, as supposed saboteurs or spies.

PSUC (Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, or Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia)

PSUC is the pro-Stalinist political organ of UGT, composed of about one and one half millions of members. PSUC includes members of Socialist trade unions, workers and small bourgeoisie. The public goal of PSUC is war victory at all costs. In effect, this goal includes a general suppression of the social revolution, which would be sorted out after the civil war was concluded. PSUC is closely allied with the USSR and, as such, controls the distribution of weapons and materiel. In turn, it's largely dominated by official USSR political doctrine. PSUC is at odds with POUM and eventually causes POUM to be declared illegal and suppressed.



CNT (Confederaciun Nacional del Trabajo, or National Labour Confederation)

CNT is a large Syndicalist trade union, composed of about two millions of workers. The political organ of CNT is FAI (Federaciun Anarquista Ibyrica, or Iberian Anarchist Federation). Orwell does not regularly distinguish between CNT and FAI and, in fact, regularly refers to them as the same organization; CNT-FAI. The goals of the two organizations are largely similar, if not well defined. The group is composed of individuals with a wide spectrum of political views ranging from pure anarchism through socialism. CNT-FAI members are often referred to collectively as 'the anarchists.' CNT-FAI holds many public goals, including worker control of industry, decentralized governmental authority, and uncompromising hostility to the bourgeoisie and the Catholic Church. During the outbreak of the Civil War, CNT ruthlessly attacked the Catholic Church, destroying structures, executing priests, and suppressing religious sentiment. CNT also championed the social revolution, which took strong hold in Republican Spain. That is, until the USSR-backed PSUC and Communists suppressed the revolution in the interest, or so publicly stated, of winning the war.

Old Mauser Rifle

Orwell is initially given a rifle, which he describes as a rusted and deplorably maintained German Mauser manufactured in 1896. The weapon is probably a Fusil Mauser Espasol Modelo 1893 in 7 x 57 mm. The weapon is forty-years old, several years older than Orwell, and perhaps twice the age of most militia soldiers. The Republicans had an extremely difficult time arming their troops, as indicated by their issue of abused and obsolete weapons such as Orwell's Mauser. Within the Republican forces, POUM and CNT were particularly poorly equipped, because the rival PSUC controlled the distribution of all arms secured from the USSR. This was the only source of external supply to the Republican government. In addition to the rifle, Orwell is issued fifty rounds of poor quality ammunition and a few unreliable and dangerous hand grenades.

The Front Lines

Although the Spanish Civil War is often regarded as the initial stages of World War II, it was fought with a strategy reminiscent of World War I. Both sides established entrenched defensive systems and placed machine guns and riflemen at strategic locations. The front line trenches were often separated from the enemy by distances of hundreds of meters, which made effective offensive rifle fire nearly impossible. Defenses were extremely strong, and successful assaults were costly and often pointless.

Side trenches were added in dangerous areas, and the soldiers lived in muddy dugouts. The trenches were always muddy and filthy, stank of excrement and rot, and surrounded by refuse and the carnage of war. In addition, the trenches were home to



disease, lice, mosquitoes and rats. Supplies, ammunition, weapons, food, water and fuel were nearly always in chronically short supply. During the winter months, the trenches were freezing cold. During the summer months, they were horribly hot. Orwell describes life in the trenches as particularly distasteful and, remarkably, extremely boring and uneventful.

The Friends of Durruti

The Friends of Durruti was a small, extreme political organization within FAI. In general, they were bitterly hostile to POUM, and no one was a member of both groups. Within a few hours of the start of the Barcelona rioting, The Friends of Durruti is said to have produced and circulated either a pamphlet or a poster, which was inflammatory and revolutionary in nature. POUM officially supported the politics espoused in the pamphlet or poster, while CNT-FAI officially discredited the politics. This minor and seemingly insignificant fact was later seized upon by PSUC as supposed proof that POUM was a subversive, Fascist political group. The incident was used to justify the suppression of POUM.



Themes

War vs. Revolution

The Spanish Civil War was a war of combat, fought with the tactics of World War I, but with the weapons of early World War II. Orwell and his fellow soldiers lived in trenches infested with rats, lice and mosquitoes, suffered from lack of weapons, supplies, ammunition, food and water, and occasionally attempted to kill enemy soldiers. The nation of Spain was divided and at war, with all of the evil and discomfort that accompany armed conflict. Casualties mounted, grievous injuries and death were commonplace, and international political machinations were constant. Thus, the Spanish Civil War, in many respects, is simply a war like any other. However, this aspect of the war held little interest for Orwell and thousands of other volunteer soldiers. Instead, it was the Revolution, the Social Revolution, Orwell and others found to be so compelling. The concept of an anarchistic society spontaneously arising to the defense of the common good, where volunteer militias threw the professional war machine back and entrenched church and government power bases were destroyed by the common consent of the working class, was a powerful attractant to lovers of freedom.

Orwell found the revolutionary spirit of Barcelona intoxicating and profoundly appealing. The revolution, coupled with Orwell's anti-Fascist philosophy, was enough to cause him, like thousands of others, to put down their prior lives and take up arms not for war, but for revolution. The book deals with the period of the war, when the revolution was being put down in the putative interest of victory in war. Orwell's focus is often devoted to noting the causes and effects of this internal division. The book's lasting merit is due, primarily, to the insightful treatment of the war and the revolution, as two complementary, but ultimately disparate efforts.

The Quibbling Left

At the start of the war, the left-wing Republican government seemingly held all advantages. The government controlled Madrid, the capital of Spain, as well as Barcelona, Valencia, and other major cities. The Republicans were joined by the wealthy and industrially important Basque region of Northern Spain. The Republicans held the nation's substantial gold reserves and most of the nation's manufacturing facilities, and remained in control of the majority of the national armed forces. The Republicans, the legally elected and established government of Spain, initially could look to international opinion to oppose the Nationalist rebellion. Finally, the Republicans had the backing of powerful trade unions, the working class, and the peasantry. However, as Orwell illustrates, the Republicans lacked the ability to put aside their internal petty differences to focus on defeating the Nationalists. Meanwhile, the Nationalists established a centralized government, organized with traditional hierarchical structures, forged close ties with Fascist Germany and Italy, eagerly engaged themselves in international politics, and put forward a cohesive and stable, if



somewhat distasteful, public message. The Republicans were never able to mount a sustained and effective offensive due to a lack of logistics, planning, and centralized coordination and political power. Although the Republicans were excellent at defense, it is axiomatic that defense does not win wars. The Fascistic Nationalists were able to organize logistical support and concentrate military force on strategically important objectives. Largely due to their ability to enforce long-term strategic planning, the Nationalist military forces inexorably advanced on Republican Spain. Meanwhile, the Republican government came increasingly under the sway of the anti-revolutionary USSR-Backed Communists.

Once the social revolution was put down, many Spaniards lost the initiative to aggressively continue the armed conflict. Orwell's own circumstances illustrate the ridiculous nature of left-wing politics during the Spanish Civil War. Entire POUM militia units, totaling perhaps some twenty-thousands of veteran troops, were disarmed and disbanded, due solely to trivial political reasons. Seasoned combat leaders and veterans were arrested, jailed, and even executed for holding revolutionary political opinions, which were at odds with the political opinions of a nation thousands of miles away. This constant internal quibbling soon alienated international opinion. It eventually resulted in the collapse of several Republican governments and, ultimately, the loss of the war to Franco's Nationalists.

Common Soldiers

At its core, the book is the story of infantry soldiers fighting in the trenches of Spain. Nearly every person mentioned in the book is an infantry soldier, and the bulk of the scenes in the book portray the daily life of an infantry soldier. The subject is covered thoroughly, from the equipment and weapons used, to the relative merit of things at the front, which Orwell lists in order of decreasing importance as firewood, food, tobacco, candles, and the enemy. Mosquitoes, rats and lice are all discussed. Mud, ice and rain are considered. Rotting clothes and boots are part of daily life, as is dud ammunition and rusting weaponry. While at the front, the soldiers are nearly completely out of communication with any person beyond their immediate area. Thus, when Orwell returns to Barcelona for a few days of rest, he is shocked at the change in the political state of affairs. Even on his leave, he is drawn into yet another round of fighting before being sent back to the front.

Orwell discusses tactics, defenses and assaults, and of course, relates in considerable detail the fascinating experience of being shot through the neck and surviving. In fact, the book is quite readable as simply a war memoir, stripped of nearly all political discussion. Orwell seemed to realize this when, in later editions, he moved the political discussions out of the main text and into appendices. Alternatively, Orwell's ability to focus on interesting details provides a gritty and textured reading experience, allowing the book to be read as a simple and enjoyable adventure story. Nevertheless, the book's enduring value comes from the presented political and historical perspectives of what many historians now regard as the opening salvo of World War II.

Style

Point of View

The book is written using the first-person, limited, point of view. Orwell is candid about relating his wartime experiences in a straightforward, journalistic method and openly states his bias on several situations. This personal narrative style leads to an inescapably authoritative text, which is both compelling and informative. The book has the authentic feeling of being the narrative of one who has, indeed, been there and done that.

The first-person point of view is highly appropriate to the material presented in the book. The combat and combat-related scenes are enjoyable and engaging, because of the intimate feel propagated by the point of view selected. Although the political chapters could potentially be presented in third-person, they would suffer for the change. Orwell does not attempt to present the politics as a completely researched historical account, but rather presents them as seen from his perspective on-the-ground in Spain, supplemented with research into contemporaneous media accounts. Thus, the first-person point of view is again applicable and useful in Orwell's honest assessment of the situation.

Setting

The events described in the book take place in the Northeast section of Spain in two regions, namely, Aragon and Catalonia. Orwell spends about four months of 1937 in the muddy trenches in Aragon, as a militia soldier fighting for the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. He spends about three months in 1936 and 1937 in or around the city of Barcelona. Orwell also unhappily participates, somewhat, in the combat associated with the May, 1937, riots in Barcelona. Additionally, Orwell travels several times through the two smaller towns of Sietamo and Barbastro, and spends some weeks recuperating at a hospital in Tarragona. Readers that are unfamiliar with the basic geography of Spain, particularly Catalonia, would be well rewarded to consult a present-day world atlas to visualize the layout of the land and the spatial relationships of the various places mentioned in the book.

The sense of place presented is both believable and vivid. Of course, the locales described are real places visited at a certain point of time, when the very social fabric of the region was in a state of flux. Orwell describes Barcelona differently on every visit. On his first visit in December of 1936, he sees it as a vibrant and free city, full of life, revolution and spirit. When he returns three months later, he finds it a dreary place wracked with internal dissention and street rioting. When he returns for the final time a few months later he finds it a sinister place full of evil foreboding, where the police are, quite literally, looking to arrest him. The sense of setting is vital to the success of the book. One of Orwell's great achievements in the book is his ability to convey to a



present-day, English reader the fascinating events and seminal thought of a distant time and place with such clarity.

Language and Meaning

The book is presented in standard journalistic English. Facts and events are presented in an unemotional and professional manner, which allows a great deal of confidence to be placed in the narrative structure. The narrative contains a large amount of subdued but insightful humor and, in general, is extremely enjoyable and imminently accessible. The book is written, structured and presented as a statement of personal involvement and perception of a major world event. The author is keenly aware of the historic nature of the events described in the book, and therefore presents his own bias and personal feelings as such, rather than attempting to justify them by presenting them as facts. In this way, the book allows an informed reader to draw conclusions that differ from those of the author, without rejecting the author's highly reliable observations.

The events in the book take place in Spain. Spanish-language words are infrequently used, but are usually translated within the text for the reader. The author notes that many other languages were common in the place and time that form the backdrop of the events portrayed in the book. For example, the book opens with a description of a meeting between the author and an Italian militiaman. The two men size each other up, immediately like what they see, and grasp hands in a friendly gesture. However, their only verbal exchange is limited to a statement of languages, which are not commonly shared: "I answered in my bad Spanish: 'No, Inglys. ?Y t?' 'Italiano.'" (Chapter 1, p. 1). It is interesting that beyond an inability to speak, the two men form a nearly instantaneous understanding, because of the time and place that they meet. This theme repeats, quite frequently, through the remainder of the book.

Structure

The 232-page book is divided into fourteen chapters of uneven length. Twelve of the chapters deal with Orwell's day-to-day experiences, while two of the chapters (Chapter Five and Chapter Eleven) summarize the political situation in Spain, particularly in Catalonia, during the period when Orwell was in the country. In some later editions of the book, these two chapters appear as appendices.

The chapters are arranged in a largely chronological fashion, such that events are related in the order they occurred. The exception to this general timeline is the political discussion, which ranges throughout the text. However, it's particularly focused in Chapters Five and Eleven. These political discussions often regress in chronology to establish background, and will then often range ahead of the narrative, as they reach conclusions. When the book returns to the journalistic reporting of direct participation, however, the relatively straightforward timeline is again picked up and carried through.

In general, each chapter treats a distinctly identifiable period of time in Orwell's experience. Each chapter doesn't cover the same number of days or weeks, but each

chapter details a definable event. Thus, Chapter Ten details only a few days of time during rioting in Barcelona, while Chapter One spans several weeks of basic infantry training. This attention to interesting events is natural and allows the narrative to flow smoothly, engage the reader, and retain interest throughout.



Quotes

"This was in late December 1936, less than seven months ago as I write, and yet it is a period that has already receded into enormous distance. Later events have obliterated it much more completely than they have obliterated 1935, or 1905, for that matter. I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and cafe had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Senior' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias'." (Chapter 1, pp. 4-5)

"I admit, too, that I felt a kind of horror as I looked at the people I was marching among. You cannot possibly conceive what a rabble we looked. We straggled along with far less cohesion than a flock of sheep; before we had gone two miles the rear of the column was out of sight. And quite half of the so-called men were children - but I mean literally children, of sixteen years old at the very most. Yet they were all happy and excited at the prospect of getting to the front at last. As we neared the line the boys round the red flag in front began to utter shouts of 'Visca P.O.U.M.!' 'Fascistas - maricones!' and so forth - shouts which were meant to be war-like and menacing, but which, from those childish throats, sounded as pathetic as the cries of kittens. It seemed dreadful that the defenders of the Republic should be this mob of ragged children carrying worn-out rifles which they did not know how to use." (Chapter 2, pp. 19)

"There were three types of rifle in use. The first was the long Mauser. These were seldom less than twenty years old, their sights were about as much use as a broken speedometer, and in most of them the rifling was hopelessly corroded; about one rifle in ten was not bad, however. Then there was the short Mauser, or mousqueton, really a cavalry weapon. These were more popular than the others because they were lighter to carry and less nuisance in a trench, also because they were comparatively new and looked efficient. Actually they were almost useless. They were made out of reassembled parts, no bolt belonged to its rifle, and three-quarters of them could be counted on to jam after five shots. There were also a few Winchester rifles. These were nice to shoot with, but they were wildly inaccurate, and as their cartridges had no clips they could only



be fired one shot at a time. Ammunition was so scarce that each man entering the line was only issued with fifty rounds, and most of it was exceedingly bad. The Spanish-made cartridges were all refills and would jam even the best rifles. The Mexican cartridges were better and were therefore reserved for the machine-guns. Best of all was the German-made ammunition, but as this came only from prisoners and deserters there was not much of it. I always kept a clip of German or Mexican ammunition in my pocket for use in an emergency. But in practice when the emergency came I seldom fired my rifle; I was too frightened of the beastly thing jamming and too anxious to reserve at any rate one round that would go off." (Chapter 3, p. 34)

"In every suitable position men, usually machine-gunners, were told off for shouting-duty and provided with megaphones. Generally they shouted a set-piece, full of revolutionary sentiments which explained to the Fascist soldiers that they were merely the hirelings of international capitalism, that they were fighting against their own class, etc., etc., and urged them to come over to our side. This was repeated over and over by relays of men; sometimes it continued almost the whole night. There is very little doubt that it had its effect; everyone agreed that the trickle of Fascist deserters was partly caused by it. If one comes to think of it, when some poor devil of a sentry - very likely a Socialist or Anarchist trade union member who has been conscripted against his will - is freezing at his post, the slogan 'Don't fight against your own class!' ringing again and again through the darkness is bound to make an impression on him. It might make just the difference between deserting and not deserting. Of course such a proceeding does not fit in with the English conception of war. I admit I was amazed and scandalized when I first saw it done. The idea of trying to convert your enemy instead of shooting him! I now think that from any point of view it was a legitimate manoeuvre. In ordinary trench warfare, when there is no artillery, it is extremely difficult to inflict casualties on the enemy without receiving an equal number yourself. If you can immobilize a certain number of men by making them desert, so much the better; deserters are actually more useful to you than corpses, because they can give information. But at the beginning it dismayed all of us; it made us feel that the Spaniards were not taking this war of theirs sufficiently seriously." (Chapter 4, p. 42)

"I had accepted the News Chronicle-New Statesman version of the war as the defence of civilization against a maniacal outbreak by an army of Colonel Blimps in the pay of Hitler. The revolutionary atmosphere of Barcelona had attracted me deeply, but I had made no attempt to understand it. As for the kaleidoscope of political parties and trade unions, with their tiresome names - P.S.U.C., P.O.U.M., F.A.I., C.N.T., U.G.T., J.C.I., J.S.U., A.I.T. - they merely exasperated me. It looked at first sight as though Spain were suffering from a plague of initials. I knew that I was serving in something called the P.O.U.M. (I had only joined the P.O.U.M. militia rather than any other because I happened to arrive in Barcelona with I.L.P. papers), but I did not realize that there were serious differences between the political parties. At Monte Pocero, when they pointed to the position on our left and said: 'Those are the Socialists' (meaning the P.S.U.C.), I was puzzled and said: 'Aren't we all Socialists?' I thought it idiotic that people fighting for their lives should have separate parties; my attitude always was, 'Why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war?' This of course was the correct 'anti-Fascist' attitude which had been carefully disseminated by the English newspapers,



largely in order to prevent people from grasping the real nature of the struggle. But in Spain, especially in Catalonia, it was an attitude that no one could or did keep up indefinitely. Everyone, however unwillingly, took sides sooner or later." (Chapter 5, p. 47)

"All of us were lousy by this time; though still cold it was warm enough for that. I have had a big experience of body vermin of various kinds, and for sheer beastliness the louse beats everything I have encountered. Other insects, mosquitoes for instance, make you suffer more, but at least they aren't resident vermin. The human louse somewhat resembles a tiny lobster, and he lives chiefly in your trousers. Short of burning all your clothes there is no known way of getting rid of him. Down the seams of your trousers he lays his glittering white eggs, like tiny grains of rice, which hatch out and breed families of their own at horrible speed. I think the pacifists might find it helpful to illustrate their pamphlets with enlarged photographs of lice. Glory of war, indeed! In war all soldiers are lousy, at least when it is warm enough. The men who fought at Verdun, at Waterloo, at Flodden, at Senlac, at Thermopylae - every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles. We kept the brutes down to some extent by burning out the eggs and by bathing as often as we could face it. Nothing short of lice could have driven me into that ice-cold river." (Chapter 6, p. 76)

"The Fascists had brought up a machine-gun now. You could see it spitting like a squib a hundred or two hundred yards away; the bullets came over us with a steady, frosty crackle. Before long we had flung enough sand-bags into place to make a low breastwork behind which the few men who were on this side of the position could lie down and fire. I was kneeling behind them. A mortar-shell whizzed over and crashed somewhere in no man's land. That was another danger, but it would take them some minutes to find our range. Now that we had finished wrestling with those beastly sand-bags it was not bad fun in a way; the noise, the darkness, the flashes approaching, our own men blazing back at the flashes. One even had time to think a little. I remember wondering whether I was frightened, and deciding that I was not. Outside, where I was probably in less danger, I had been half sick with fright. Suddenly there was another shout that the Fascists were closing in. There was no doubt about it this time, the rifle-flashes were much nearer. I saw a flash hardly twenty yards away. Obviously they were working their way up the communication-trench. At twenty yards they were within easy bombing range; there were eight or nine of us bunched together and a single well-placed bomb would blow us all to fragments. Bob Smillie, the blood running down his face from a small wound, sprang to his knee and flung a bomb. We cowered, waiting for the crash. The fuse fizzled red as it sailed through the air, but the bomb failed to explode. (At least a quarter of these bombs were 'duds'). I had no bombs left except the Fascist ones and I was not certain how these worked. I shouted to the others to know if anyone had a bomb to spare. Douglas Moyle felt in his pocket and passed one across. I flung it and threw myself on my face. By one of those strokes of luck that happen about once in a year I had managed to drop the bomb almost exactly where the rifle had flashed. There was the roar of the explosion and then, instantly, a diabolical outcry of screams and groans. We had got one of them, anyway; I don't know whether he was killed, but certainly he was badly hurt. Poor wretch, poor wretch! I felt a vague sorrow as I heard him screaming. But at the same instant, in the dim light of the rifle-flashes, I saw



or thought I saw a figure standing near the place where the rifle had flashed. I threw up my rifle and let fly. Another scream, but I think it was still the effect of the bomb. Several more bombs were thrown. The next rifle-flashes we saw were a long way off, a hundred yards or more. So we had driven them back, temporarily at least." (Chapter 7, p. 96)

"The essential point is that all this time I had been isolated - for at the front one was almost completely isolated from the outside world: even of what was happening in Barcelona one had only a dim conception - among people who could roughly but not too inaccurately be described as revolutionaries. This was the result of the militia - system, which on the Aragon front was not radically altered till about June 1937. The workers' militias, based on the trade unions and each composed of people of approximately the same political opinions, had the effect of canalizing into one place all the most revolutionary sentiment in the country. I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragon one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilized life - snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc. - had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money - tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master. Of course such a state of affairs could not last. It was simply a temporary and local phase in an enormous game that is being played over the whole surface of the earth. But it lasted long enough to have its effect upon anyone who experienced it. However much one cursed at the time, one realized afterwards that one had been in contact with something strange and valuable. One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism, where the word 'comrade' stood for comradeship and not, as in most countries, for humbug. One had breathed the air of equality. I am well aware that it is now the fashion to deny that Socialism has anything to do with equality. In every country in the world a huge tribe of party-hacks and sleek little professors are busy 'proving' that Socialism means no more than a planned state-capitalism with the grab-motive left intact. But fortunately there also exists a vision of Socialism quite different from this. The thing that attracts ordinary men to Socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the 'mystique' of Socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people Socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all. And it was here that those few months in the militia were valuable to me. For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society. In that community where no one was on the make, where there was a shortage of everything but no privilege and no boot-licking, one got, perhaps, a crude forecast of what the opening stages of Socialism might be like. And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see Socialism established much more actual than it had been before. Partly, perhaps, this was due to the good luck of being among Spaniards, who, with their innate decency and



their ever-present Anarchist tinge, would make even the opening stages of Socialism tolerable if they had the chance." (Chapter 8, pp. 103-105)

"Everyone who has made two visits, at intervals of months, to Barcelona during the war has remarked upon the extraordinary changes that took place in it. And curiously enough, whether they went there first in August and again in January, or, like myself, first in December and again in April, the thing they said was always the same: that the revolutionary atmosphere had vanished. No doubt to anyone who had been there in August, when the blood was scarcely dry in the streets and militia were quartered in the smart hotels, Barcelona in December would have seemed bourgeois; to me, fresh from England, it was liker to a workers' city than anything I had conceived possible. Now the tide had rolled back. Once again it was an ordinary city, a little pinched and chipped by war, but with no outward sign of working-class predominance." (Chapter 9, p. 109)

"What the devil was happening, who was fighting whom, and who was winning, was at first very difficult to discover. The people of Barcelona are so used to street-fighting and so familiar with the local geography that they knew by a kind of instinct which political party will hold which streets and which buildings. A foreigner is at a hopeless disadvantage. Looking out from the observatory, I could grasp that the Ramblas, which is one of the principal streets of the town, formed a dividing line. To the right of the Ramblas the working-class quarters were solidly Anarchist; to the left a confused fight was going on among the tortuous by-streets, but on that side the P.S.U.C. and the Civil Guards were more or less in control. Up at our end of the Ramblas, round the Plaza de Catalusa, the position was so complicated that it would have been quite unintelligible if every building had not flown a party flag. The principal landmark here was the Hotel Colon, the headquarters of the P.S.U.C., dominating the Plaza de Catalusa. In a window near the last O but one in the huge 'Hotel Colon' that sprawled across its face they had a machine-gun that could sweep the square with deadly effect. A hundred yards to the right of us, down the Ramblas, the J.S.U., the youth league of the P.S.U.C. (corresponding to the Young Communist League in England), were holding a big department store whose sandbagged side-windows fronted our observatory. They had hauled down their red flag and hoisted the Catalan national flag. On the Telephone Exchange, the starting-point of all the trouble, the Catalan national flag and the Anarchist flag were flying side by side. Some kind of temporary compromise had been arrived at there, the exchange was working uninterruptedly and there was no firing from the building." (Chapter 10, pp. 131-132)

"The seizure of the Telephone Exchange was simply the match that fired an already existing bomb. It is perhaps just conceivable that those responsible imagined that it would not lead to trouble. Company, the Catalan President, is said to have declared laughingly a few days earlier that the Anarchists would put up with anything. But certainly it was not a wise action. For months past there had been a long series of armed clashes between Communists and Anarchists in various parts of Spain. Catalonia and especially Barcelona was in a state of tension that had already led to street affrays, assassinations, and so forth. Suddenly the news ran round the city that armed men were attacking the buildings that the workers had captured in the July fighting and to which they attached great sentimental importance. One must remember



that the Civil Guards were not loved by the working-class population. For generations past *la guardia* had been simply an appendage of the landlord and the boss, and the Civil Guards were doubly hated because they were suspected, quite justly, of being of very doubtful loyalty against the Fascists. It is probable that the emotion that brought people into the streets in the first few hours was much the same emotion as had led them to resist the rebel generals at the beginning of the war. Of course it is arguable that the C.N.T. workers ought to have handed over the Telephone Exchange without protest. One's opinion here will be governed by one's attitude on the question of centralized government and working-class control. More relevantly it may be said: 'Yes, very likely the C.N.T. had a case. But, after all, there was a war on, and they had no business to start a fight behind the lines.' Here I agree entirely. Any internal disorder was likely to aid Franco. But what actually precipitated the fighting? The Government may or may not have had the right to seize the Telephone Exchange; the point is that in the actual circumstances it was bound to lead to a fight.

It was a provocative action, a gesture which said in effect, and presumably was meant to say: 'Your power is at an end--we are taking over.' It was not common sense to expect anything but resistance. If one keeps a sense of proportion one must realize that the fault was not - could not be, in a matter of this kind - entirely on one side. The reason why a one-sided version has been accepted is simply that the Spanish revolutionary parties have no footing in the foreign press. In the English press, in particular, you would have to search for a long time before finding any favourable reference, at any period of the war, to the Spanish Anarchists. They have been systematically denigrated, and, as I know by my own experience, it is almost impossible to get anyone to print anything in their defence." (Chapter 11, pp. 158-159)

"They laid me down again while somebody fetched a stretcher. As soon as I knew that the bullet had gone clean through my neck I took it for granted that I was done for. I had never heard of a man or an animal getting a bullet through the middle of the neck and surviving it. The blood was dribbling out of the corner of my mouth. 'The artery's gone,' I thought. I wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut; not many minutes, presumably. Everything was very blurry. There must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed. And that too was interesting - I mean it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time. My first thought, conventionally enough, was for my wife. My second was a violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well. I had time to feel this very vividly. The stupid mischance infuriated me. The meaninglessness of it! To be bumped off, not even in battle, but in this stale corner of the trenches, thanks to a moment's carelessness! I thought, too, of the man who had shot me - wondered what he was like, whether he was a Spaniard or a foreigner, whether he knew he had got me, and so forth. I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting. It may be, though, that if you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different. (Chapter 12, pp. 186-187)



"I slept a night at Monzun Hospital, where I went to see my medical board. In the next bed to me there was an Assault Guard, wounded over the left eye. He was friendly and gave me cigarettes. I said: 'In Barcelona we should have been shooting one another,' and we laughed over this. It was queer how the general spirit seemed to change when you got anywhere near the front line. All or nearly all of the vicious hatred of the political parties evaporated. During all the time I was at the front I never once remember any P.S.U.C. adherent showing me hostility because I was P.O.U.M. That kind of thing belonged in Barcelona or in places even remoter from the war. There were a lot of Assault Guards in Sietamo. They had been sent on from Barcelona to take part in the attack on Huesca. The Assault Guards were a corps not intended primarily for the front, and many of them had not been under fire before. Down in Barcelona they were lords of the street, but up here they were *quintos* (rookies) and palled up with militia children of fifteen who had been in the line for months." (Chapter 13, p. 202)

"As I write, six months after the event, Kopp (if he has not been shot) is still in jail, untried and uncharged. At the beginning we had two or three letters from him, smuggled out by released prisoners and posted in France. They all told the same story - imprisonment in filthy dark dens, bad and insufficient food, serious illness due to the conditions of imprisonment, and refusal of medical attention. I have had all this confirmed from several other sources, English and French. More recently he disappeared into one of the 'secret prisons' with which it seems impossible to make any kind of communication. His case is the case of scores or hundreds of foreigners and no one knows how many thousands of Spaniards." (Chapter 14, p. 227)



Topics for Discussion

Bob Smillie gave up a promising career at the University of Glasgow so he could join the Spanish militia and fight against Fascism. What ideological outlook might have motivated his decision?

Georges Kopp is arrested, despite being a high-ranking military officer on an important military mission. His papers are confiscated, and he is held in jail for a prolonged period of time. How does his arrest, and thousands of others like it, potentially change the course of the war? What do you think eventually happened to Georges Kopp?

The USSR was the only nation that sided with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. As such, the USSR came to wield enormous political sway in the Republican government. In the final analysis, did this influence help or harm Spain?

Why do you think the Spanish Civil War is often referred to as the opening stages of World War II?

The outcome of the Spanish Civil War was, in most essentials, like the outcome that Orwell foresaw in Chapter Eleven. What insights did Orwell have that allowed him to see the likely outcome with such clarity?

How would the book be different if Orwell had remained simply a journalist during his stay in Spain? Was Orwell right to abandon a journalistic involvement in the war to take up arms against Fascism? At thirty-five years of age, was Orwell simply too old to start soldiering?

How does the modern conventional, but incorrect, perception of the political theory of anarchy cloud a complete understanding of the Spanish Civil War?

At the outbreak of war, the Republicans seemingly held numerous advantages, including stockpiles of weapons and gold and retention of industrial areas and most of the nation's armed forces. How and why did the Republicans lose the war?

Discuss the role played by Orwell's wife during the events described in the book. Why do you think Orwell declined to present his wife's name in the book?

In one memorable passage from the book, Orwell describes his putative 'final thoughts' after he was shot through the neck, when his assumption was that he was dieing. He concludes the passage with the humorously flippant remark "It may be, though, that if

you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different" (Chapter 12, p. 187). Describe how this turn of phrase encapsulates Orwell's realization of his personal bias as an eyewitness reporter.



As a student of history, how is this eyewitness account useful in a study of the Spanish Civil War? Orwell disagrees with much of the conventionally held views of the war. Does this mean that Orwell was fundamentally incorrect in his perception of the events?

Is the book a story of military adventure or an eyewitness account of historic events?

Imagine yourself in Barcelona, Spain, during late 1936. Do you think you would volunteer to join a Republican militia unit? What do you think it is like to be a soldier in an icy, muddy trench with rats, lice, a rusting and obsolescent Fusil Mauser Espasol Modelo 1893, and a handful of unreliable cartridges?

Consider your personal political views. Are they closer to those espoused by POUM, CNT-FAI, PSUC, or Fascism?

How would the world be different, today, if the Republicans had been victorious over the Nationalists?