The Lion and The Unicorn

"Socialism and the English Genius"

"Essential Orwell Classics-XII"

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GEORGE ORWELL

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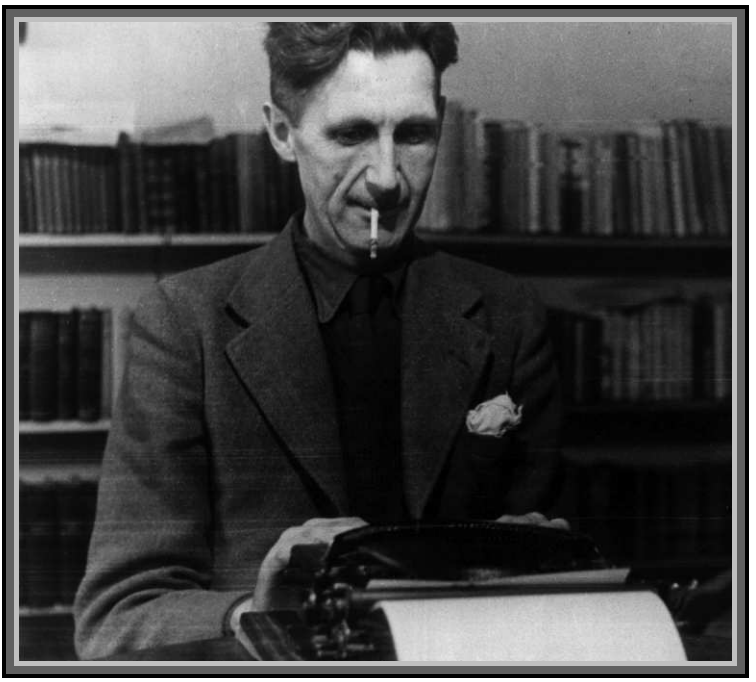
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About the Book & Author

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The Lion and the Unicorn*: Socialism and the English Genius* was published in February 1941, well into the Second World War, after Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. It is a long essay, divided into three parts.

1. England Your England (35 pages)
2. Shopkeepers at War (19 pages)
3. The English Revolution (9 pages)

The three essays 1. describe the essence of Englishness and records changes in English society over the previous thirty years or so 2. make the case for a socialist system in England 3. argue for an English

democratic socialism, sharply distinct from the totalitarian communism of Stalin.

Now, at this distance of 76 years, the political content seems to me almost completely useless. After the war, the socialist policies carried out by Attlee's government, thirty years of 'Butskellism' and Britain's steady industrial decline into the 1970s which was brutally arrested by Mrs Thatcher's radical economic and social policies of the 1980s, followed by Tony Blair's attempt to create a non-socialist Labour Party in the 1990s, and all the time the enormous social transformations wrought by ever-changing technology – the political, social, economic, technological and cultural character of England has been transformed out of all recognition.

That said, this book-length essay is still worth reading as a fascinating social history of its times and for its warm evocation of the elements of the English character, some of which linger on, some of which have disappeared.

* * *

Who Was George Orwell?

George Orwell was an English novelist, essayist and critic most famous for his novels 'Animal Farm' (1945) and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (1949). George Orwell was a novelist, essayist and critic best known for his novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He was a man of strong opinions who addressed some of the major political movements of his times, including imperialism, fascism and communism.

Family & Early Life

Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, India, on June 25, 1903. The son of a British civil servant, Orwell spent his first days in India, where his father was stationed. His mother brought him and his older sister, Marjorie, to England about a year after his birth and settled in Henley-on-Thames. His father stayed behind in India and rarely

visited. (His younger sister, Avril, was born in 1908. Orwell didn't really know his father until he retired from the service in 1912. And even after that, the pair never formed a strong bond. He found his father to be dull and conservative.

According to one biography, Orwell's first word was "beastly." He was a sick child, often battling bronchitis and the flu.

Orwell took up writing at an early age, reportedly composing his first poem around age four. He later wrote, "I had the lonely child's habit of making up stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons, and I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued." One of his first literary successes came at the age of 11 when he had a poem published in the local newspaper.

Education

Like many other boys in England, Orwell was sent to boarding school. In 1911, he went to St. Cyprian's in the coastal town of Eastbourne, where he got his first taste of England's class system.

On a partial scholarship, Orwell noticed that the school treated the richer students better than the poorer ones. He wasn't popular with his peers, and in books, he found comfort from his difficult situation. He read works by Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells, among others.

What he lacked in personality, he made up for in smarts. Orwell won scholarships to Wellington College and Eton College to continue his studies.

After completing his schooling at Eton, Orwell found himself at a dead end. His family did not have the money to pay for a university education. Instead, he joined the India Imperial Police Force in 1922. After five years in Burma, Orwell resigned his post and returned to England. He was intent on making it as a writer.

Early Writing Career

After leaving the India Imperial Force, Orwell struggled to get his writing career off the ground and took all sorts of jobs to make ends meet, including being a dishwasher.

'Down and Out in Paris and London' (1933)

Orwell's first major work explored his time eking out a living in these two cities. The book provided a brutal look at the lives of the working poor and of those living a transient existence. Not wishing to embarrass his family, the author published the book under the pseudonym George Orwell.

'Burmese Days' (1934)

Orwell next explored his overseas experiences in *Burmese Days*, which offered a dark look at British colonialism in Burma, then part of the country's Indian empire. Orwell's interest in political matters grew rapidly after this novel was published.

War Injury and Tuberculosis

In December 1936, Orwell traveled to Spain, where he joined one of the groups fighting against General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell was badly injured during his time with a militia, getting shot in the throat and arm. For several weeks, he was unable to speak. Orwell and his wife, Eileen, were indicted on treason charges in Spain. Fortunately, the charges were brought after the couple had left the country.

Other health problems plagued the talented writer not long after his return to England. For years, Orwell had periods of sickness, and he was officially diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1938. He spent several months at the Preston Hall Sanatorium trying to recover, but he would continue to battle with tuberculosis for the rest of his life. At the time he was initially diagnosed, there was no effective treatment for the disease.

With World War II raging on, Orwell found himself acting as a propagandist to advance the country's national interest. He loathed this part of his job, describing the company's atmosphere in his diary as "something halfway between a girls' school and a lunatic asylum, and all we are doing at present is useless, or slightly worse than useless."

Orwell resigned in 1943, saying "I was wasting my own time and the public money on doing work that produces no result. I believe that in the present political situation the broadcasting of British propaganda to