

THE ANNUAL JOAN GILI MEMORIAL LECTURE

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George Orwell in his Centenary Year
A Catalan Perspective

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This is the fifth in the regular series of lectures convened by The Anglo-Catalan Society, to be delivered at its annual conference, in commemoration of the figure of Joan Lluís Gili i Serra (1907-1998), founder member of the Society and Honorary Life President from 1979. The object of publication is to ensure wider diffusion, in English, for an address to the Society given by a distinguished figure of Catalan letters whose specialism coincides with an aspect of the multiple interests and achievements of Joan Gili, as scholar, bibliophile and translator. This lecture was given by Miquel Berga at Aberdare Hall, University of Wales (Cardiff), on 16 November 2002.

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The author

Miquel Berga was born in Salt (Girona) in 1952. He took a doctorate in English Philology from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. He lived in London from October 1972 to December 1973, the first of several long periods of residence in England. For ten years he was Deputy Mayor of his home town while occupying a senior post in a secondary school. Always interested in journalism, he was for a time London correspondent for a short-lived Catalan newspaper of tabloid tendencies, and more recently, for the last ten years, he has written a regular Sunday column for *El Punt*.

His principal publications are: *Entre la ploma i el fusell* (1981), a study of British writers who died in the Spanish Civil War; *Mil nou-cents vuitanta-quatre: radiografia d'un malson* (1984), on the Catalan influence in George Orwell's last novel; *John Langdon-Davies: una biografia anglo-catalana* (1991). He has also translated and edited texts by Langdon-Davies: *La setmana tràgica de 1937* (1987) and *Mites i felicitat del catalans* (his version of *Dancing Catalans*, 1998). Miquel Berga has lectured on George Orwell in the universities of London and Oxford, and also, in the USA, at Cornell, Harvard and Brown universities. A selection of his journalistic writing has been collected in the book *Amants i altres estranys* (2000) and in 2001 he edited the anthology *Cinco mujeres locas: cuentos góticos de la literatura nortamericana*. He has translated works by various contemporary British and North-American playwrights, the latest (2001) being Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* (*Engany*).

In 1992 Miquel Berga was made full professor of English Literature at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona where he is currently Dean of the Humanities Faculty. He is also President of the Associació de Professors d'Anglès a Catalunya.

GEORGE ORWELL IN HIS CENTENARY YEAR A Catalan Perspective

I wish to begin by expressing my gratitude to The Anglo-Catalan Society for having considered me as someone qualified to deliver the Annual Joan Gili Memorial Lecture. I am not too sure that I deserve this honour. Be that as it may, for anyone interested in Anglo-Catalan matters the name of Joan Gili is an indispensable reference point. Although I never had any direct dealings with him, I have recently read with great admiration his edition and English translation of Josep Carner's *Nabi*. And, while I was preparing my biography of John Langdon-Davies - an author to whom I shall be making frequent reference today - I would often come across the name of Joan Gili. In *Gatherings from Catalonia* (1953), Langdon-Davies's Catalan riposte written in order to bury the Hispanic clichés planted in the Anglo-Saxon imagination by Richard Ford with his *Gatherings from Spain* (1846), the author takes the trouble to recommend to his readers a visit to The Dolphin Book Company, the bookshop run by Joan Gili in Oxford, if they want fuller information about Catalonia.

It is also a great privilege for me to join the company of the four illustrious lecturers who have preceded me, persons for whom I profess both respect and intellectual admiration. That said, I should like to think that my pleasure in being here today is a sort of consummation of certain auspicious contingencies connected both with the subject of my talk and with the idiosyncrasy of this singular institution called The Anglo-Catalan Society.

First of all I think that the topic is a relevant one - or, to put it with our characteristic Catalan frankness, *clar i català*, it so occurred to the indefatigable Alan Yates - because of the imminence of a centenary which has obvious Anglo-Catalan resonances. I refer to the birth in 1903, in the jewel of the British imperial crown, of the person who would become the author of *Homage to Catalonia*. We are now on the threshold of this Orwell centenary, a figure whom neither time nor history have deleted from the map of the twentieth century's literary imagination and ideological passions. We can safely say that his work shines - as the cliché has it - with its own bright light and illuminates what some have called 'the midnight hours of the twentieth century'. This centenary is, then, the justification for my being here to address you, because of my relation with the work of George

Orwell. I said earlier, though, that there is also a connection with our Anglo-Catalan Society, because this organization played a decisive role in fostering my interest in Orwell.

In the autumn of 1978, just graduated from university, with a months-old infant to provide for and as poor as a church mouse, I landed in London with the irresponsible optimism of thinking that we would survive thanks to two most meagre sources of income: the unlikely payments due to me as correspondent of a sensationalist Barcelona newspaper, the long-since defunct *Catalunya Express*, and the scholarship awarded to me by The Anglo-Catalan Society. I shan't go into the details now, but you can imagine perfectly well that the scholarship did not amount to the equivalent of a Fulbright award. Yet, on the other hand, the brief message sent to me by the then Secretary of the Society, Dr Alan Yates - welcoming me to the country, putting himself at my disposal and informing me that the Treasurer, Dr Geoffrey Walker of Cambridge, would soon be sending me the modest sum of pounds stipulated - made me feel more thrilled and welcomed than if he had come to meet me with a full marching band. In the sensitivity of a young man the most insignificant things can, sometimes, increase spectacularly the share of boldness that his ignorance would normally warrant. And thus it was that, academically and financially spurred on by Alan's missive, I had the nerve to introduce myself to Professor Bernard Crick, at that time teaching at Birkbeck College, London. And he, with the eccentricity and the generosity corresponding to the best tradition of British academic life, welcomed me on the quiet, that is without fees, into his seminar on politics and literature which, that year, was devoted to Orwell, as Crick was then working on what would become the standard biography of the author. That seminar and the resulting friendship with Crick sharpened, as you can imagine, my interest in the writer. Thus it is that, twenty-five years later, I have the impression of coming home to my Anglo-Catalan Ithaca, to be reunited with Orwell and to use the centenary to explore some salient aspects of the Catalan connections of the author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

I want to put before you some brief considerations upon Orwell's 'Catalan' book, hinging on certain questions which relate clearly to it: first, the title itself, *Homage to Catalonia*; then, a couple of sharp controversies concerning Orwell's experiences in Barcelona. One of these disputes was with John Langdon-Davies, the most conspicuous Anglo-Catalan figure of that period and the author the contemporary best-seller, *Behind the Spanish Barricades* (1936). The second was with the most emblematic poet of the so-called 30s Generation, W.H. Auden. As an epilogue, if I

can succeed in holding your attention, there will be some reflections on the Catalan reception of Orwell and his famous *Homage to Catalonia*.

The title

There is nothing in Anglo-Saxon culture that has so opened the name of Catalonia to multiple resonances as this book. As Doris Lessing recalled when she was awarded the Premi Internacional Catalunya in 2000, for any educated person of her generation Catalonia existed in direct relation to Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. That small country becomes a place in the literary imaginations of many people, an unknown land which Orwell's book converts into the chronotope of a time and a country inhabited by simple, generous people who free themselves from the oppressor and strive to create a society that is egalitarian, supportive, free and fraternal. I have in mind, obviously, the people who actually read the book and not that silent majority who normally get no further than its title. On this point it is ever necessary to clear up a misunderstanding, a particularly uncomfortable misunderstanding when it is propagated by Catalan nationalists in the latter category, not great readers, who, irresistibly flattered by the title, ignore that the subject matter is not what it might seem to be. Here we must take into account the half-hearted and infrequent attempts at communication by Orwell with Catalan militiamen. For a study I published some years ago (*Mil nou-cents vuitanta-quatre: radiografia d'un malson*, 1984), only after a real struggle was I able to document three or four 'relationships' of a sort with Catalans, demonstrating, in any event, an indifference which is poles apart from the emotional exaltation that Orwell recreates in his meeting with the illiterate, anonymous Italian militiaman who appears in the memorable opening of his narration. We must also remember that the book contains practically no references to the Catalan language nor to the *fet diferencial* that underwrites Catalan affirmations of national identity. Nor does Orwell take into consideration nationalist feelings which also undoubtedly played an important role in the ideological confrontations sparked off in Catalonia by the Civil War.

My own modest proposal is to read the title of the book as though it contained an ellipsis: *Homage to (the days I spent in) Catalonia*. These are the days which enable him to make the often-quoted confession contained in a letter (dated 8 June 1937) to Cyril Connolly: 'I have seen wonderful things & at last really believe in Socialism, which I never did before.' A confession which has added value if we recall that it was made after the lamentable Events of May 1937, and from the Sanatori

Maurin, in Barcelona's Putxet Park, where the writer was convalescing from the wound caused by a Francoist bullet that had gone through his neck shortly after he had returned to the front-line. Orwell, with his head in bandages, affirms that the physical and political experiences he has just gone through serve to strengthen, 'against all the odds', his deepest convictions and to give definitive political direction to his work as a writer. After what he has lived through, Orwell can write with the conviction of the 'rebels with a cause' and with the passion, perhaps inevitably caustic and slightly desperate, of those who recognize themselves as defenders of a 'lost cause'. Fortunately, though, Orwell is no adolescent. He is a man of thirty-four whose literary vocation is firmly decided upon and who will be capable of filtering his impressions through an efficient astuteness as a narrator, thanks to which his work will become an indispensable element for the construction of the cultural memory of the Civil War. *Homage to Catalonia*, over and above what might be suggested by the title, is an impassioned vindication of the POUM (the independent communist *Partit Obrer d'Unificació Marxista*) written by an eyewitness, a militiaman with a difference who knows that to make oneself heard one has to master the art of fiction, of story-telling. Whence his famous declaration in *Why I Write* (1946): 'I write because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is *to get a hearing* [my emphasis].' In spite of the cliché about Orwell as the frank and honest writer who proclaims uncomfortable truths without beating about the bush, I think it clear that what we really have is a narrator who knows full well that the *tale* is only listened to if there is a full command of the art of *telling*, as I have argued in detail elsewhere. In more than one sense Orwell was one of the 'losers' in the Civil War, but he has obtained posthumously an indisputable political and literary victory, as one of that war's most respected and listened-to witnesses. The historian Pierre Vilar detected this perfectly when, writing about *Homage to Catalonia* in his introduction to a major History of Catalonia, he evaluates Orwell's book in a way which tucks his own scant sympathy for the writer's politics beneath a piece of rhetorical verve unusual in an historian: 'The image of a country (even when it is inaccurate) which is projected by a widely-read eyewitness (even if his own views are debatable) becomes part of the history of that country.'

The 'homage' in *Homage to Catalonia* has, I thus think, a lot to do with all these considerations concerning the political and literary - artistic - evolution of the author, and it has very little at all to do with any expectation that might be created of a will to exalt the language, the culture or the history of the little homeland of Catalonia discovered by a foreign traveller.

Polemics in the heat of the moment: John Langdon Davies

For different reasons John Langdon-Davies and George Orwell are the two English writers who find themselves in Barcelona at the outbreak of the deplorable Events of May 1937. The term refers to the open clashes in the streets of that city, between anarcho-syndicalists on one side and communists on the other, in a fratricidal struggle to determine the most appropriate strategy to win the war against Franco's army. In order to oppose the military coup the Republic had availed itself of the revolutionary fervour of the workers, who insisted on the creation of an army made up of popular militias. This initial reaction brought about the formulation of (the objectives of the war in terms of social revolution rather than strictly in terms of the defence of a Republican legality conforming to the model of the so-called bourgeois democracies. After some months of virtual stalemate in the military conflict, while all the time the European democracies maintained a timid, if not cynical, attitude towards aiding the Spanish Republic, strength was being gained by those who argued for less revolutionary fervour and for more pragmatism. This meant acknowledging that their only real support was coming from Stalin's Russia and from the International Brigades (an operation that was clearly communist in inspiration and design). It also meant acknowledging the consequent necessity of following the strategy openly advocated by the Party, that is to say the transformation of the militias into a regular, hierarchically structured army, and adoption of the policy of first winning the war and only then undertaking social revolution. The emergent Communist Party (the PSUC), in these circumstances, thus became, paradoxically, the party of law and order in Catalonia. The anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT and the FAI or revolutionary marxist parties like the POUM detected or intuited in this situation the long arm of Stalinist totalitarianism, and they opposed the change in strategy from the conviction that without binding a new revolutionary social order to the war effort the necessary energies would not be found to resist the fascist onslaught. These were the issues which were settled by gunfire and between barricades in the streets of Barcelona during the first week of May 1937. And they are the essential issues raised in *Homage to Catalonia* which were at the heart of Orwell's polemical confrontation with two writers of the Left, each individually a participant in the conflict, as I shall now proceed to discuss. We shall thus be reliving some of the textual battles that witnesses of historic events must go into in order to establish their own 'truth' within the collective cultural memory.

Langdon-Davies is following events as an accredited journalist for the liberal *News Chronicle*, and the stay in Barcelona also enables him to advance a project to provide foster-parents for refugee children, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, one of several pro-Republican humanitarian initiatives in which he is involved. Orwell is in the city as a militiaman of the POUM detailed for the Aragonese front, preparing to enjoy a short period of leave reunited with his wife who is also in Barcelona. The two writers do not know one another and their individual relationships with Catalonia are quite different, but both of them will appreciate immediately the seriousness of the situation. Langdon-Davies begins to make notes for his reports sitting in the Rugby Bar, on the corner of Pau Claris and Aragó streets, at 11 o'clock on the night of May 3. Orwell begins to ponder upon the situation from the roof of what is now the Poliorama theatre, on the Rambla, where he has been sent to keep guard and protect the POUM headquarters located in a building directly opposite. Langdon-Davies is able to use his Catalan contacts. The author of two successful books about Catalonia, *Dancing Catalans* (1929) and his best-selling *Behind the Spanish Barricades* (1936) dealing with the first months of the Civil War, he follows events aided by personal acquaintance with many of the protagonists and able to speak with the authorities as an accredited professional journalist. Orwell spends three sleepless nights up on the flat roof of the Poliorama, reading Penguins, in the company of other English volunteers, perplexed by the fighting which he watches going on in the Rambla. Subsequently, when these street battles have been processed in his mind, they will become a crucial epiphany in the political vision of the author of *Animal Farm*.

Both writers had arrived in the city at the end of April (one on the 25th, the other on the 26th) and they were thus able to observe the subtle changes in the atmosphere of the rearguard which denoted a new 'state of play' compared with how things were at the outbreak of war. Orwell notes that 'the revolutionary atmosphere had vanished' and he describes numerous details which he sees as typical of a bourgeois city. The great change, according to Orwell, is the result of two new phenomena:

One was that the people - the civil population - had lost much of their interest in the war; the other was that the normal division of society into rich and poor, upper class and lower class, was reasserting itself.

Langdon Davies detects the same thing, and in the preface to the third edition of his *Behind the Spanish Barricades* he writes that most of the barricades have

disappeared from the city and that, on the Rambla, *el petit i modest burgès* (the Catalan phrase used by the author himself) dared once more to go out wearing hat and tie. What Orwell describes as a backward movement in the situation is, however, viewed by Langdon-Davies as a positive symptom of normality. Langdon-Davies has moved from his initial fascination with Catalan anarchism to an ever-closer siding with the theses of the Communists, and for much of the war he acts, quite consciously, as a 'fellow traveller' of the Party. The steady changes in his political position can be followed in the entries in *El vel de Maïa*, the famous diary written by his friend Marià Manent during the war. Thanks to Manent's account we are made aware, moreover, that the Englishman is someone who is very well informed, with clear insight into the likely course of events. On 9 February 1937 Manent writes:

Yesterday, with our friend Langdon-Davies, there was also conversation about Russia. According to him, many Marxists regret that Communism, rather than being first implanted in Russia, was not established in Spain. In this case it would have had a less rigidly dictatorial, more libertarian character... He also told me that he sees as inevitable, eventually, a violent clash between the CNT and the POUM, on one side, and the Generalitat [the official Catalan government] with the UGT on the other. The Trotskyists, he says, are counter-revolutionaries, despite claims they might make to being 'pure' revolutionaries.

The divergences between the two writers become sharper as the anticipated May Day celebrations approach. Both of them see in the murder of Roldàn Cortada, a UGT trade-unionist secretary of the PSUC Minister of Labour, Rafael Vidiella, something likely to ignite the tension simmering on the streets. Cortada was struck down by gunfire from rogue elements in the anarchist FAI, and his interment on the afternoon of April 27 brought the latent tension to the surface. Witnessing the impressive parade of dignitaries and thousands of soldiers of the new Popular Army, Orwell reflects as follows:

At the end of April, just after I got to Barcelona, Roldàn Cortada, a prominent member of the UGT, was murdered, presumably by someone in the CNT. The Government ordered all shops to close and staged an enormous funeral procession, largely of Popular Army troops, which took two hours to pass a

given point. From the hotel window I watched it without enthusiasm. It was obvious that the so-called funeral was merely a display of strength; a little more of this kind of thing and there might be bloodshed.

Langdon-Davies, it goes without saying, makes a more enthusiastic appraisal and interprets that same parade from a very different perspective:

The challenge of anarcho-syndicalism had been accepted. For the first time the non-anarchist workers and petty bourgeoisie of Barcelona were standing up against a social revolution whose only offspring was chaos heading to defeat. In face of murder, robbery, threats, discrimination, the UGT policy had been to retire and wait. And here in this vast procession, felt the UGT, was the tangible proof that only through socialism can revolutions be successful... Marching rank on rank in perfect military formation, perfectly uniformed, obviously disciplined, came thousands of the new People's Army, the Army which the socialists and communists along with the republicans had strained every effort to build up out of early reckless brave militiamen...

We have already remarked, though, that Langdon-Davies is very familiar with Catalan society of the time, and the fact is that, despite his expressions of enthusiasm, he glimpses the contradictions and the potential conflict in the situation. Thus he hastens to advise his readers that the same procession is not necessarily seen in the same way by everybody:

You might have thought that anti-fascist Barcelona would have viewed the coming of this new Army with unmixed delight. But if you could have talked to certain members of the crowd, and with some of the people who stayed away, you would have found a host of contradictory reasons for its unpopularity.

He ends his description of the funeral with some incisive observations that deserve to be quoted at length:

Consider this: here is Barcelona turning out by the hundred thousand to demonstrate for socialist order against anarchist disorder. But this is the same Barcelona that turned out a few

months ago at Durruti's funeral to honour anarchism. And the same Barcelona that has turned out time and again at funerals to honour Catalan nationalism in its struggle against a central Spanish Madrid Government. That is what makes the situation so complicated. You have three main currents of political emotion, each used to express [a particular commitment] by means of public demonstration at which hundred of thousands attend. Here they are:

- 1.- Anarchist: anti-state, therefore anti-central Spanish Government, anti-bourgeois and pro-anarchist social revolution.
- 2.- Socialist-Communist: anti-anarchist and pro-State and therefore pro-central Spanish government, pro-orderliness and therefore pro-alliance with petty bourgeois.
- 3.- Catalan Nationalist: petty bourgeois and therefore anti-anarchist social revolution. Anti-central Madrid Government and therefore anti-socialist-communist. As nationalist playing off regionalist anarchists against centralist social-communists, but as lover of democratic order playing off social-communists against anarchists.(...)

And so we can say that the crowd looking on, or staying away, think as follows of Roldàn Cortada's funeral: The anarcho-syndicalist: 'They are using this murder as an excuse to rattle the sabre of authoritarianism. Every state is devilish and here we have the Stalinists threatening to enslave the worker in a communist state.'

The Esquerra Catalana bourgeois: 'Thank goodness here is a force which will bring order to the rearguard and keep the Murcian FAI anarchists in its proper place. But of course if this force tries to impose Valencia on Catalunya we will oppose it to the length of joining up with the anarchists.'

Such was the state of 'anti-fascist unity' in Barcelona when May 1st 1937 came round.

Two days later Manent records in his diary:

Langdon-Davies tells me that last night, at midnight, while he was broadcasting to the USA from the Karl Marx Centre,

reporting that everything was quiet in Barcelona, he could see men moving around setting up machine guns in the building, where there were 500 militiamen and 500 soldiers on guard duty.

Langdon-Davies is abreast of the situation and well informed, then, but when trouble begins on May 3 he writes a long report for *The News Chronicle* in which the fellow traveller's vision overrides investigative journalism, and he comes out with the official party line: it is all down to a frustrated putsch started by the POUM (a party he mischievously describes as Trotskyist) which has taken the government forces by surprise. It is a way of saying that there is full justification for the effort under way, determined by the Stalinist strategy, to pursue and capture the POUM leader, Andreu Nin, and any other dissidents.

Several pages of *Homage to Catalonia* are devoted to a lengthy, patient and detailed refutation of Langdon-Davies's version of events published in *The News Chronicle*. The journalist is soon provided with a perfect opportunity to reply in defence of his own position when *The Daily Worker*, the official organ of the British Communist Party, commissions from him a review of Orwell's book and some others on the Civil War. We can now lament the fact that, for *The Daily Worker's* special supplement on Spain (21/5/1938), Langdon-Davies chose to ignore the allusions to himself and not to make a personal response in the controversy. Instead he dismisses Orwell's book with a couple of malicious sentences directly inspired by the communist orthodoxy of the moment:

Better than these [two books by Allison Peers] are some books produced by individualists who have splashed their eyes for a few months with Spanish blood. Typical is Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. The road to Wigan Pier leads on to Barcelona and the POUM. The value of the book is that it gives an honest picture of the sort of mentality that toys with revolutionary romanticism but shies violently at revolutionary discipline. It should be read as a warning.

If any of the communist daily's readers actually read *Homage to Catalonia*, their minds must have been put at rest by this assessment. Orwell is a poor, misguided devil who is incapable of accepting revolutionary discipline, meaning, naturally, that the tiresome 'purists' fail to understand that the end justifies the means, however squalid these might be. Just note the implication of the sentence

'The road to Wigan Pier leads on to... the POUM'. Langdon-Davies clearly has in mind the controversial second part of Orwell's previous book where he was critical of the attitude of many socialist militants. The implication is, then, that one begins to get used to raising objections to the working of any left-wing organization and one ends up joining the POUM, initials which, for *The Daily Worker* and at that moment, signify a nest of dangerous counter-revolutionaries, perverse Trotskyists, who must be eliminated in the name of the cause.

It must be said that, after the Germano-Soviet pact of August 1939, Langdon-Davies will become a fervent anti-Stalinist and will go on to denounce the perversions of the system. Despite this, he never undertakes any self-criticism in relation to his malevolent attitude towards *Homage to Catalonia*, and in an unpublished article from the 1960s about the Civil War, there are still echoes of the old dispute:

An excellent writer, George Orwell, has written about it all, but unfortunately he was impelled by a hatred of Stalinism almost as powerful as his love of Spain and liberty and apt to blind him; and what he wrote is most tendentious.

This is where we must leave it. The textual battles of that war amply demonstrate that some wounds are very, very slow to heal.

Polemics in a cooler atmosphere: W.H. Auden

That month of May 1937, so decisive in the gestation of *Homage to Catalonia*, also sees publication of the most famous poem on the Civil War written by an Englishman: a long poem entitled 'Spain' that Auden publishes in pamphlet form in order to raise money for humanitarian organizations affiliated to the Popular Front. It is an important poem, shot through with a powerful dialectical sense of history. The poetic voice moves between yesterday, today and tomorrow, in a fusion of time with individual and collective consciousness perceived in the terms of some earlier lines dedicated by Auden to Christopher Isherwood on his birthday:

And all sway forward on the dangerous flood
Of history, that never sleeps or dies,
And held one moment, burns the hand.
(August for the People', August 1935)

Orwell himself viewed 'Spain' as one of the few significant, serious pieces of literature to have emerged from the conflict. Now, those lasting wounds that I mentioned a moment ago, the great split in the Left that was played out on the streets of Barcelona that May, supurate both in Auden's poem and in the vigorous critique of it made by George Orwell. The essential problem homes in on a stanza that Orwell finds especially revealing. Auden writes:

To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death,
 The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder;
 To-day the expending of powers
 On that flat ephemeral pamphlet and the boring meeting.

This 'necessary murder' sticks in Orwell's throat, written as it is by a conspicuous fellow traveller of the Communist Party. In his mind are the 'necessary murder' of Andreu Nin, his own desperate efforts to save POUM companions like Georges Kopp from Stalinist prisons, the sordid death in those same prisons of the young Bob Smillie which he was powerless to prevent despite all the representations made, the leaders of the POUM awaiting judgement now formally accused of being agents in the service of Franco's army... On the one hand there is that atmosphere of political (error from which he himself has narrowly escaped, and on the other hand there is what Orwell perceives as the voice of someone who parrots slogans, safe in the knowledge that they are at a distance from where history can really, physically, burn your hand. Certainly, this criticism is not unconnected with Orwell's prejudices against homosexuals (the 'fashionable pansies like Auden and Spender' in his own words) nor with his instinctive hatred of intellectuals, the corruptible elites that he satirizes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. At any event, in an article for *The Adelphi* (1 December 1938) he fires off angrily and poisonously:

Somebody in Eastern Europe 'liquidates' a Trotskyist:
 somebody in Bloomsbury writes a justification of it. And it is,
 of course, precisely because of the utter softness and security of
 life in England that the yearning for bloodshed - bloodshed in
 the far distance - is so common among our intelligentsia. Mr.
 Auden can write about 'the acceptance of guilt for the necessary
 murder' because he has never committed a murder, perhaps
 never had one of his friends murdered, possibly never ever seen
 a murdered man's corpse. The presence of this utterly
 irresponsible intelligentsia, who 'took up' Roman Catholicism
 ten years ago, 'take up' Communism to-day and will 'take up'

the English variant of Fascism a few years hence, is a special feature of the English situation. Their importance is that with their money, influence and literary facility they are able to dominate large sections of the Press.

In *Inside the Whale* (1940) Orwell insists on his objections to this same stanza of Auden's. Now he supplies an added measure of sarcasm and he satirizes the daily life of the hypothetical militant, the 'good party man', reflected in the poet's lines:

In the morning a couple of political murders, a ten-minutes' interlude to stifle 'bourgeois' remorse, and then a hurried luncheon and a busy afternoon and evening chalking walls and distributing leaflets. All very edifying. But notice the phrase 'necessary murder'. It could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a 'word'. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder... The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but... they don't speak of it as murder; it is 'liquidation', 'elimination' or some other soothing phrase. Mr. Auden's brand of amoralism is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled.

Unlike Langdon-Davies, Auden understands that he is the one being alluded to here, and he takes Orwell's comments on board. Including the poem 'Spain' in his collection *Another Time* (Faber & Faber, 1940) he introduces some very significant changes into the text: '*deliberate* increase in the chances of death' becomes '*inevitable* increase...', and 'necessary murder' is changed into 'the fact of murder'. The two amendments, obviously, are aimed at substituting what sounded like personal conviction with a distanced and objective description of the situation's tragic consequences. Even so, years later he will disown the poem and explicitly ask for it never to appear in any anthology of his poetry.

Auden's explanation for his change of attitude regarding 'Spain', in the preface to the 1965 edition of his *Collected Poems*, is limited to some remarks on the last two lines of the poem ('History to the defeated / may say Alas!, But cannot help or pardon'). Auden says that this suggests that the worth of causes is determined by their success:

It would have been bad enough if I had ever held this wicked doctrine, but that I should have stated it simply because it sounded to me rhetorically effective is quite inexcusable.

This sounds, frankly, like a very strange and flimsy argument for discrediting the 104 lines of a poem which is so central to his trajectory. Auden's real reasons are difficult to elucidate. This is due as much to the many ingenuous readings that have been made of the problematical stanza as it is to Auden's own reluctance to make matters clear, despite the passage of time and his notorious abandoning of the political stance he held in the 1930s. Symptomatic of this is the interpretation given very recently by Christopher Hitchens, a fervent Orwellian, in his book *Orwell's Victory* (2002). Hitchens considers that in his objections Orwell slips into demagogy ('one of the few thuggish episodes in his prose', according to the critic). The problem is that Hitchens interprets Auden's stanza as though it were the idealistic declaration of the intellectual who sees the need to abandon neutrality, the ivory tower, and who decides that the time has come to 'get his hands dirty', even if this means, as Hitchens puts it, 'to endorse the use of force in self-defence'. He seems to think that Auden is writing of the necessity to take up defensive arms against fascist aggression, but Auden knew perfectly well that it was not exactly this idea which inspired his stanza. It was not this which lay behind the decision to revise the poem and to amend the lines. What the poet spoke of was not 'the use of force', but rather 'necessary murder'.

Auden wrote 'Spain' after his stay in the country between 13 January and 2 March 1937. The date of the poem's publication in the fund-raising pamphlet for Spanish Medical Aid is April 1937. That is to say, we are in the very middle of the period of profound tension between the two strategically and ideologically opposing currents within the Republican administration, a conflict which would end in the outbreak of armed clashes in the streets of Barcelona in early May. Auden 'takes sides' not only in an anti-fascist stance but also in relation to the internal debate in the Republican camp, and he writes the poem subliminally (and in a disciplined way) propounding the positions of one of these currents. When he says that 'Madrid is the heart' or when he talks of 'the People's army' he is not writing anti-fascist metaphors. At that moment, in that political circumstance, they are metaphors in favour of the Communist Party's position: Madrid is the priority and not the Aragonese Front being defended principally by the anarchists and the POUM. And the 'people's' army is the popular army that the central government wishes to create in order to do away once and for all with the revolutionary militias controlled by the CNT and the POUM. The famous 'Today the struggle' resounding in the poem, counterposed to 'Tomorrow', is an echo of the communist slogan '*Avui guanyar la guerra. Demà ja parlarem de la revolució*-Today victory in the war. Tomorrow we can talk about

revolution'. Nicholas Jenkins in a detailed study of 'Auden and Spain' has detected this perfectly:

As the war dragged on, the language and structure of 'Spain' became increasingly compromised by their links to a Government which was more and more clearly the tool of a repressive Soviet foreign policy (...) It was against this wholesale debasement, not against a particular line or phrase, that Auden, later on, took such drastic measures.

What resounds in Auden's lines derives, in large measure, from his taking on a perverse strand of the party line - 'the advisability of liquidating the POUM'. And, like Langdon-Davies in his critique of *Homage to Catalonia*, the poet acts as an intellectual fellow traveller providing reassuring arguments to the militants who have to carry out or connive at the dirty work demanded by the circumstances, in accordance with the party line. What embarrasses Auden is the use of this rhetoric, and what obliges him, eventually, to disown the poem is his ensuing sense of guilt. When, many years afterwards, Hugh Ford asks him for observations on his Spanish experience, for a study on Civil War poetry, Auden responds in a most significant way:

I did not wish to talk about Spain when I returned because I was upset by many things I saw or heard about. Some of them were described better than I could ever have done by George Orwell, in *Homage to Catalonia*.

This is another of Orwell's political and literary victories, also inevitably posthumous.

An epilogue: Catalonia and the memory of George Orwell

With regard to Catalonia I am not so sure about Orwell's posthumous victories. It is true that several attempts were made by Catalan publishing houses to put out his narrative account of the Civil War, from 1964 onwards, in the depths of the Francoist dictatorship. Despite the usual ingratiating comments made for the censors' eyes, for example the claim that the book was a strong denunciation of 'the insidious behaviour of Spanish Stalinism', these various attempts ran up against the brick wall of the censorship which, obviously, saw in Orwell an enemy of the regime. The publishers Ariel finally obtained permission to bring out *Homage to Catalonia* in,

Catalan and Castilian, in February 1970 (although the Catalan edition erroneously carries 1969 as the year of publication). The price paid, naturally enough, was that Folch i Camarasa's translation appeared with significant changes and omissions. My colleague from the University of Alcalà de Henares, Alberto Lázaro, has published a minutely detailed study which follows the vicissitudes suffered by the book at the hands of Franco's censors. Lázaro consulted *the Archivo General de la Administración* which, in a nicely Orwellian paradox, has all the reports of the censors catalogued under the denomination *Fondo de Cultura*. And this is not the only irony in the situation. There is a much more sinister note in the observation that fifty-two years after the author's death, twenty-seven years after the death of the dictator, and seven editions on, Ariel is still publishing Orwell's book - in Catalan and in Castilian - scrupulously following the directions of the Francoist censors. At this point in time, we are talking about unforgiveable negligence on the part of the publishers, and a national embarrassment. We may wish to note that a concern called Círculo de Lectores/Galàxia Gutenberg had the worthy idea of publishing a luxury edition of *Homage to Catalonia* to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Civil War. If this is the good news, the bad news is that this edition reproduces the same censored text as that of Ariel. But then there is an additional piece of irony. The prologue is signed by Teresa Pàmies, a well-known militant of the PSUC who had written all sorts of abuse of Orwell in her various books of memoirs. Here, though, her memory dries up, and she indulges in great eulogies of Orwell without any recall of her earlier opinions. Orwell himself, of course, had already portrayed this kind of intellectual behaviour among the Party elites in the fictional world of his *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

If Orwell were to turn up again in Barcelona today he might well wish to discuss details like this with his publishers. In view of how things have developed, he might even be tempted to change the title of his book. We must acknowledge, however, that if he were walking through the old part of the city he would have a pleasant surprise: he would find a small square bearing his name. In 1998 the then mayor, Pasqual Maragall, unveiled the plaque naming this square - in one of the most run-down quarters of the city, just off the Rambla - after the author of *Animal Farm*. There was a simple but moving ceremony, with addresses from the civic dignitaries, a speech by the old POUM man Victor Alba and another by me. This initiative by the Ajuntament de Barcelona is interpreted by Christopher Kitchens, in the recent book I have already mentioned, as a significant homage to George Orwell paid by Catalonia. He finds that 'that small, informal investiture and naming in Barcelona

summarized much of the moral grandeur of the Left'. Perhaps we are talking about a small posthumous victory for Orwell in Catalonia? Possibly so, but it also includes the Orwellian paradox we have come to expect: a couple of years ago the municipal authorities chose precisely this Plaça George Orwell to install some inconspicuous cameras in a pilot scheme for surveillance of public thoroughfares. The measure awoke much controversy on account of its dubious legality, but the square is still endowed with a sort of grotesque eye watching over the passers-by, and I have photographs which show it. For any reader of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the irony of the artefact is self-evident. It sums up nicely our 'Homage to George Orwell'.

I would not want to finish, though, on such an unsettling note. When Orwell first set foot in Barcelona on that Boxing Day of 1936 he was convinced he was going to take part in a war 'against Fascism', to collaborate in the defence of Civilization against a military uprising which seemed to show that fascist madness was out of control throughout Europe. Orwell, like many others from the UK, thought that finally somebody - the Spanish people - had stood up to the fascist beast. This was a sign for those who defended freedom and those who dreamed of a new social order based on fraternity and equality. The revolutionary atmosphere he could feel as soon as he arrived in Barcelona fascinated him. But then, immediately, that pragmatic Englishman, the defender of 'common decency', the denouncer of those obfuscations of political language designed to blur elemental truths, felt disconcerted to read the jumble of acronyms confusingly referring to different factional supporters of the same cause: PSUC, POUM, FAI, CNT, UGT, JCI, JSU, AIT... The kaleidoscope of ugly names 'exasperated' him. 'It looked at first sight as though Spain was suffering from a plague of initials', as he records in *Homage to Catalonia* (echoed subsequently by Professor Valentine Cunningham of Oxford in the question, 'What on earth was the Spanish Civil War all about? The "alphabet"?'). This is why Orwell himself advises the readers of *Homage to Catalonia* to skip the pages he devotes to explaining that hotchpotch of nomenclatures and what they stood for. Going into detail about the disagreements between the parties is most tiresome, a nightmare:

It is like diving into a cesspool. But it is necessary to try and establish the truth, so far as it is possible. This squalid brawl in a distant city is more important than might appear at first sight

He himself, having learned that in that war the letters on your party card could become a matter of life or death, felt the moral obligation to 'dive into the cesspool'.

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, able to view with historical compassion that generous and criminal struggle which devastated the land of Spain in the middle of last century, it seems clear to me that Orwell's struggle to untangle the words of that 'squalid brawl' in the Republican camp was worthwhile. Orwell's book reminds us that writers in arms leave their legacy in words and that the war never ends; it becomes rather a textual battle in the struggle for the writing of history and the establishment of our cultural memory of past events. In more than one sense I think we can affirm that, while Eric Blair, *the fighter*, had to escape from Catalonia as a man defeated by enemies from his own side, George Orwell, the *writer*, has obtained the posthumous victory that makes his testimony, initially maligned and despised, perhaps the most respected and widely-read eyewitness account of those events.

And I conclude: Orwell was a precocious anti-imperialist, a precocious anti-fascist and a precocious anti-Stalinist. He marched, seemingly out of step, against the advance of the most perverse '-isms' of that vertiginous twentieth century. History now, in his centenary, restores to us his solitary figure, eccentric perhaps, phlegmatically combative and generous, marching taller than all the rest, with a dignity that we simply cannot do without if we are to be reconciled with his times and with our own past.