



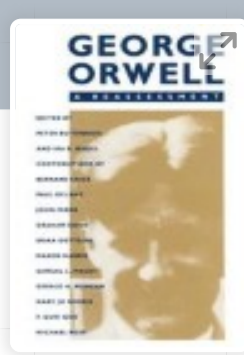
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## Orwell and English Socialism

[Bernard Crick](#)

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### Abstract

In 1946 in an essay ‘Why I write’ Orwell wrote, ‘What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.’ And he might well have added, into a popular art, for I believe that he developed his famous clear, plain, simple, colloquial and forceful style precisely in order to reach what he was more apt to call ‘the common man’ than the working class. His debt to Swift has often been noted, especially for the strategies of his two major satires, but his deliberate choice of rhetoric, his adopted style and conscious persona as a writer may owe more to Daniel Defoe; and he wrote for much the same kind of audience.

### Keywords

Labour Party Lower Middle Class Home Team Time High Education

Political Writing

*These keywords were added by machine and not by the authors. This process is experimental and the keywords may be updated as the learning algorithm improves.*

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### Preview

## Orwell and English Socialism

Bernard Crick

In 1946 in an essay ‘Why I write’ Orwell wrote, ‘What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.’ And he might well have added, into a popular art, for I believe that he developed his famous clear, plain, simple, colloquial and forceful style precisely in order to reach what he was more apt to call ‘the common man’ than the working class. His debt to Swift has often been noted, especially for the strategies of his two major satires, but his deliberate choice of rhetoric, his adopted style and conscious persona as a writer may owe more to Daniel Defoe; and he wrote for much the same kind of audience.

Orwell’s pre-war novels had all been written to catch the attention of the public for whom Charles Dickens and H. G. Wells had written, a public composed of both working class and lower middle class who used and depended upon the free public library and had, like Orwell himself, missed the overrated advantages of full-time higher education. From his own experience he deeply believed in the potential moral superiority of the self-taught over the institutionally educated (there is at least this parallelism between Orwell and Rousseau!). But as his sales showed, he singularly failed to reach this audience until he became literary editor of and a columnist in the left-wing *Tribune*, which enjoyed a large readership in war-time conditions, and until he wrote *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Yet their very success played a trick with his reputation. Many on the Left held that it is never timely to tell salutary home truths about the home team. Many on the Right accepted his fierce libertarianism but either ignored his egalitarianism or dismissed it as silly and superficial. And perhaps ordinary readers who did not know where Orwell stood already might be forgiven for thinking that the two satires are solely against the Soviet Union and not also against all forms of power hunger and rational hierarchy. Indeed, I have met whole school classes who have skipped

### Notes and References

4. Bernard Crick, *Socialist Values and Time*, Fabian Tract 495 (London, 1984).

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