

George orwell's journalism

Business



A journalist should have a strong sense of right and wrong, a moral compass and attitude: this is what Eric Arthur Blair, better known by his pen name George Orwell, claimed all life. Journalism is not an objective science, as many think, but Orwell comments, in his essay “ Why I write”, that, « before he begins to write», a journalist « will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never escape». And he adds: « if he escapes from his early influences altogether, he will have killed his impulse to write».

Together with a political purpose, he describes the other great motives that push him to write: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm and historical impulse, that is « the desire to see things as they are, to discover concrete facts and store them for posterity».

He proved his point of view in his varied works which extend from political essays to the reviews of books, from the personal columns kept in newspapers (he wrote for the Observer for seven years) and magazines to radio texts and services for the BBC, Orwell is considered an innovator of the genre. Among his inventions there were imaginary interviews, with Swift for example. He also adapted famous books for the radio, like “ The Fox and the Cameliars” by Ignazio Silone. Despite the circumstances, he spoke of great books like the Qur’an and The Capital of Marx and in the early forties he organized debates on social problems such as Muslim minorities in Europe and the status of women. Literary editor of Tribune magazine, his column “ As I please”, today can be read as a kind of proto-blog. His mission was to combat all forms of totalitarianism.

Sincerity and non-adherence to orthodoxy were considered by Orwell as the necessary ingredients to write well. In a broadcast to the BBC in May 1941

<https://assignbuster.com/george-orwells-journalism/>

entitled *Literature and totalitarianism* the first thing that asks a writer is not to tell lies, to say what he thinks and really feels. « If a writer commits himself wholeheartedly to a political movement, in the sense of seeking to express its distinctive outlook and principles in his creative writing, he invariably poisons the wellsprings of his inspiration by sub-ordinating his own beliefs to the strategic distortions of his colleagues». It is no coincidence that three of his books, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Homage to Catalonia* (personal account of his experiences and observations in the Spanish Civil War, where he was a reporter) and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, are the result of his journalistic primary themes are literary criticism, social justice, the evils of imperialism, censorship. The last one emerges clearly in “ The freedom of the press”, intended preface to his masterpiece “ *Animal Farm*”, in which he asks himself: « Is every opinion, however unpopular, entitled to a hearing?».

Of course, the answer is yes, but not everyone agrees, as he highlights that an attack to Stalin would not be accepted by British intellectual community. This overwhelms him: « The sinister fact about literary censorship in England is that it is largely voluntary. Unpopular ideas can be silenced, and inconvenient facts kept dark, without the need for any official ban. Anyone who has lived long in a foreign country will know of instances of sensational items of news — things which on their own merits would get the big headlines being kept right out of the British press, not because the Government intervened but because of a general tacit agreement that ‘ it wouldn't do’ to mention that particular fact». So, here it is, the power of the fourth estate: it can be either used for good aims or misused, such as in his masterpiece “ *Nineteen Eighty-Four*”, where the protagonist, Mr Winston

Smith, works in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth as an editor, revising past newspapers, in the set of a dystopian London, where all news are either slanted or fake.

After all, his amazing work, despite living only 46 years, inspired in many journalists the “ power to face unpleasant facts”. According to Orwell, to bear witness to the great failings of power was fundamental, but the journalist's responsibility also demanded the most clear and compelling record-keeping, as he asserts in his most famous quote: « Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed. Everything else is public relations».