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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **LIFE**  George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, born in 1903 in Bengal, India, during the time of the British colonial rule. Young Orwell was brought to England by his mother and 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. Orwell won scholarships to Eton, where Aldous Huxley (author of *Brave New World*) was one of his teachers, and where Orwell published his first writing in college periodicals.    After 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. He served in a number of country stations and at first appeared to be a model imperial servant, and yet he realized how much against their will the Burmese were ruled by the British, and came to feel ashamed of his role as a colonial police officer. Later he was to recount his experiences and his reactions to imperial rule in his novel *Burmese Days* and in two autobiographical sketches, “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging,” classics of expository prose.    After five years in Burma, Orwell resigned his post and returned to England, intent on making a living as a writer.    In 1941, he took a position with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as the person in charge of broadcasting to India and Southeast Asia. Orwell disliked this job immensely, being, as he was, in charge of disseminating propaganda to these British colonies — an act that went against both his nature and his political philosophy. In 1943, Orwell took a job more to his liking, as the literary editor of *The Tribune.*    In 1944 Orwell finished *Animal Farm*, a political fable based on the story of the Russian Revolution and its betrayal by Joseph Stalin. It has, however, been overshadowed by his last book, *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), a novel he wrote as a warning after years of brooding on the twin menaces of Nazism and Stalinism. Orwell wrote the last pages of *Nineteen Eighty-four* in a remote house on the Scottish island of Jura, which he had bought from the proceeds of *Animal Farm.* He worked between bouts of hospitalization for tuberculosis, of which he died in a London hospital in January 1950.    Orwell's writing career spanned nearly seventeen years. Ironically, although Orwell considered himself more a journalist and essayist than a novelist, he wrote two of the most important literary masterpieces of the 20th century: *Animal Farm* and *1984*.    Establishing herself as a writer in her hometown, in 1964 she gained recognition for her essay “Notes on Camp.” She published four novels and nine works of non-fiction, and directed four feature-length films. She died in 2004 in New York City.  **KEY IDEAS IN ONG’S *ORALITY AND LITERACY***  How the psychologies of sight and sound differ  Consciousness  Writing as a technology  Language and its influence on self and society  Media in history  How knowing the ancient world helps us understand the present and future | **COMMENTARIES ON ORWELL**  Attempting to sum up George Orwell, biographer Richard Rees reminds us of Orwell’s own description of Charles Dickens: a man who was “generously angry . . . a nineteenth century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all those smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls.” Orwell could have been describing himself, says Rees.  According to Raymond Williams, Orwell’s position in the lower-upper-middle-class, gave him a “double vision, rooted in the simultaneous positions of dominator and dominated.”  Orwell’s controversial political legacy has so intertwined with the complexities of…ideological politics that a culture war has periodically raged over which groups stake a claim to him as a forerunner. The competing claims to his mantle range from neo- and cultural conservatives on the Right to democratic socialists and independent or libertarian radicals on the Left. Indeed, what is most strikingly distinctive about Orwell’s posthumous history is that the claims and counter-claims to him occur at all points on the ideological spectrum—Right, Center, and Left.” (11)  — John Rossi and John Rodden, *The Cambridge Companion to*  *George Orwell.* | |  |  | |

***“I****n a peaceful age I might have written ornate or merely descriptive books, and might have remained almost unaware of my political loyalties. As it is I have been forced into becoming a sort of pamphleteer.”*

— George Orwell, “Why I Write”

***Down and Out in Paris and London***

Having felt guilty that the barriers of race and caste had prevented his mingling with the Burmese, Orwell decided to immerse himself in the life of the poor and outcast people of Europe. Donning ragged clothes, he went into the East End of London to live in cheap lodging houses among laborers and beggars; he spent a period in the slums of Paris and worked as a dishwasher in French hotels and restaurants; he tramped the roads of England with vagrants and joined the people of the London slums in their annual exodus to work in the Kentish hop fields. Those experiences gave Orwell the material for *Down and Out in Paris and London*, in which actual incidents are rearranged into something like fiction.

**George Orwell**

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