

“Homage to Catalonia” by George Orwell [B2]

In questo capolavoro, l'autore inglese racconta le sue tristi esperienze al fronte e le lotte intestine all'interno del campo repubblicano durante la Guerra civile spagnola.

Born in India in 1903, the son of a minor British official, George Orwell served in the imperial [police](#) in Burma before establishing himself as a journalist and author. In December 1936, he arrived in Barcelona. He soon joined the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, becoming one of fifty thousand militia that formed the International Brigades.

INSPIRED BY THE WORKERS

In Spain, the Republicans were fighting the Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco, who had led a [coup](#) against a democratically-elected government. However, the Republican side was divided into many [left-wing](#) factions —Liberals, Anarchists, Communists, and Socialists among others—that [quarrelled](#) among themselves. Orwell records his experiences with the communist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista). He describes the [elation](#) he initially felt as he joined the fight against the [rise](#) of fascism in Europe. “I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. [...] It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle.” “Ero venuto in Spagna con la vaga idea di scrivere degli articoli per qualche giornale, ma mi ero arruolato nella milizia quasi immediatamente, perché a quel tempo e in quell’atmosfera sembrava la sola cosa che si potesse pensar di fare. Gli anarchici avevano ancora il virtuale controllo della Catalogna e la rivoluzione era ancora in pieno vigore. [...] Era la prima volta che mi trovavo in una città dove la classe operaia era al potere.” Orwell believed that working people should control their own destiny. In Barcelona in 1936 it seemed possible that this would

happen. The decency, friendliness and generosity of the Spanish working classes impressed him. For Orwell, protecting this emerging workers' state was a cause [worth](#) fighting for. "Every shop and café had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Señor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou', and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos días'. "Botteghe e caffè esibivano scritte che ne annunciavano la collettivizzazione; perfino i lustrascarpe erano stati collettivizzati e le loro cassette dipinte in rosso e nero. Camerieri e inservienti di negozio vi guardavano in faccia e vi trattavano alla pari. Forme servili o anche soltanto cerimoniose del parlare erano temporaneamente scomparse. Nessuno diceva «Señor» o «Don» e nemmeno «Usted»; ognuno chiamava gli altri «compagno» usando il «tu» e diceva «Salud!» invece di «Buenos días»."

HORROR

After just a few days' training, Orwell was sent to fight on the front in Aragon. He describes day-to-day life in the [trenches](#). The soldiers, some as young as fifteen, had very little equipment: there were few [weapons](#) and those they did have were old and often didn't work. The uniforms and boots were inadequate against the [freezing](#) Aragonese winter. Orwell remembers feeling more scared of the cold than of the Nationalists. Then there were the [lice](#) and rats: "In the barn where we waited, the floor was a thin layer of chaff over deep beds of bones, human bones and cows' bones mixed up, and the place was alive with rats. The filthy brutes came swarming out of the ground on every side. If there is one thing I hate more than another it is a rat running over me in the darkness." "Nel fienile dove stavamo in attesa, il pavimento era costituito da uno strato sottile di pula sopra sedimenti profondi di ossa, ossa umane e bovine commiste, e il luogo brulicava di ratti. Le ignobili bestie spuntavano a frotte dal terreno, in ogni direzione. Se c'è una cosa che odio particolarmente al mondo, è un topo che mi corra sul corpo al buio."

FACTIONS

In May 1937, Orwell returned to Barcelona. He writes in great detail about the different factions on the Republican side and how these groups then divided into smaller sub-factions **that ended up** fighting each other. Orwell writes that the Spanish Civil War was “above all things a political war.” “No event in it, at any rate during the first year, is intelligible unless one has some grasp of the inter-party struggle that was going on behind the Government lines. When I came to Spain, and for some time afterwards, I was not only uninterested in the political situation but unaware of it. [...] If you had asked me why I had joined the militia I should have answered: ‘To fight against Fascism,’ and if you had asked me what I was fighting for, I should have answered: ‘Common decency.’” “Nessun episodio di essa, almeno durante il primo anno, è intelligibile a chi non abbia nemmeno una pallida idea della lotta interpartitica che aveva luogo dietro le linee governative. Quand’ero venuto in Spagna, e ancora per qualche tempo di poi, non solo non m’ero occupato della situazione politica, ma l’avevo completamente ignorata. [...] Se m’aveste domandato perché mi fossi arruolato tra i miliziani, avrei risposto: «Per combattere il fascismo», e se m’aveste domandato per quale causa fossi venuto a battermi, avrei risposto: «Quella dell’onestà.»”

AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

Orwell describes in vivid detail what it is like to be in the middle of an armed conflict. We get a strong sense of his personality from the way he describes events. For example, after he’s been shot through the **throat**, he writes with **amusing** British **understatement**: “The whole experience of being hit by a bullet is very interesting and I think it is **worth** describing in detail. [...] Roughly speaking, it was the sensation of being at the centre of an explosion. There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all round me, and I felt a tremendous shock — no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal.” “L’intera esperienza di come si resta colpiti da una pallottola è molto interessante e penso che meriti d’essere descritta particolareggiatamente. [...] Improvvisamente, nel bel mezzo di una parola, sentii... è molto difficile descrivere quello che sentii, sebbene lo ricordi con estrema vividezza. Approssimativamente, fu la

sensazione d'essere al centro d'una esplosione. Parve che tutt'intorno a me si verificasse uno scoppio accompagnato da un lampo accecante e provai una tremenda scossa: nessun dolore, ma una scossa violenta, come quella che vi può dare l'estremità di un filo elettrico" *Homage to Catalonia* has had a huge impact on the way that the English-speaking world thinks about the Spanish Civil War. While some historians say that Orwell's depiction of the political detail is [misleading](#), as an [unflinching](#) autobiographical account the book is incomparable. Orwell is most famous for his novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which [warn](#) about the dangers of totalitarianism. However, the political ideas expressed in these later works were certainly [shaped](#) by Orwell's civil war experiences in Spain

Glossary

- **rise** = ascesa
- **weapons** = armi
- **understatement** = eufemismo
- **amusing** = divertente
- **misleading** = ingannevole
- **warn** = avvisare
- **coup** = colpo di Stato
- **elation** = euforia
- **worth** = valida
- **trenches** = trincee
- **that ended up** = finire per
- **left-wing** = di sinistra
- **unflinching** = deciso
- **quarrelled** = pelear
- **freezing** = gelato, congelato
- **lice** = pidocchi
- **throat** = gola
- **shaped** = influenzare