Homage to Catalonia

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE ORWELL

Eric Blair was born and spent his youth in India. He was educated at Eton in England. From 1922-27 he served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. Through his autobiographical writing about his experiences with poverty (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, 1933), in colonial Burma (*Burmese Days*, 1934), and in the Spanish Civil War (*Homage to Catalonia*, 1938), and the plight of unemployed coal miners in England (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937), Blair (who wrote under the name George Orwell) exposed and critiqued the human tendency to oppress others politically and economically. *Homage to Catalonia* marked a clear shift in Orwell's political thinking. His experience in the Spanish Civil War convinced him of the value of revolutionary socialism and led him to become a vocal critic of the Communist Party, controlled by the USSR, as well as of any form of political persecution. In 1947, a lung infection he contracted in Burma worsened, and in 1950 Orwell succumbed to tuberculosis at the age of 46.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Spanish Civil War began in 1936, at a time when two other European countries were already under brutal, anti-democratic regimes: Fascist Italy, under the rule of Benito Mussolini since 1922, and Nazi Germany, controlled by Adolf Hitler since 1933. The Spanish Civil War exacerbated political divisions across Europe. On the right, it intensified fears of Communism, while, on the left, it bolstered opposition to Fascism. Many non-Spanish citizens joined the Republican cause voluntarily, fighting in the Communist-run International Brigades. However, the Nationalists ultimately won the war in 1939 and Francisco Franco ruled Spain as a military dictator until his death in 1975. The war became famous for the atrocities that were committed on both sides. Today, the Spanish Civil War is often seen as setting the stage for the Second World War, as various fascist, nationalistic political regimes were taking power across Europe.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Orwell cites as inspiration for *Homage to Catalonia* Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit*, another eye-witness account of the Civil War. His later novels were marked by his strong political convictions; the dystopian, satirical works *Animal Farm* (1944) and *1984* (1949) condemn totalitarianism and the political persecution to which it gives rise. George Orwell is not the only author to have written about the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republicans. American novelist and Nobel-prize winner Ernest Hemingway left for Spain in 1937 to cover the war as a journalist and to help with the filming of a pro-Republican movie. This experience inspired him to write one of his most famous works, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), which tells the story of a young American in the International Brigades.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Homage to Catalonia
- **When Written:** 1937-1938
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 25 April 1938
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Memoir, non-fiction, political writing
- **Setting:** Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1937)
- **Climax:** Orwell witnesses the Barcelona street fighting in May 1937
- **Antagonist:** The Communist Party
- **Point of View:** First-person narration

EXTRA CREDIT

The Orwells on Trial. After the Orwells' escape to England, both George and his wife were charged in Spain with Trostskyism and being agents of the POUM. The trial took place in their absence in 1938.

Critical Reception. *Homage to Catalonia* was a commercial failure when it was published in 1938 in Britain. It was not until the success of Orwell's novels in the 1950s that the book received greater attention and, in 1952, was published in the United States to critical acclaim.

PLOT SUMMARY

In December, 1936, George Orwell leaves his English home for Spain, a country in the midst of a brutal civil war. Like most international observers, Orwell sees the war in Spain as a struggle between democracy and Fascism. He volunteers to fight on the side of the Republicans (a coalition of pro-democracy, leftwing parties) against the Nationalists (a conservative, Catholic, rightwing group led by General Franco).

Upon his arrival in Barcelona, he is amazed to find that a large-scale social revolution has taken hold in the city. Communist and Anarchist **flags** hang on all the buildings, shops have been

collectivized, and everyone treats each other with an air of perfect equality. The bourgeois, it seems, have all but disappeared, and the working class appear in complete control of the city. The atmosphere of equality and freedom that reigns strengthens Orwell's conviction that he has made the right decision to fight for such a noble cause.

He soon joins the POUM militia, a Marxist group affiliated with the Anarchists, and is sent to the front. The POUM are organized on the principle of social equality, which means that differences in rank are treated as irrelevant and soldiers are free to disagree with their superiors' orders. While Orwell respects these ideals, he realizes that the militia is mainly composed of young, inexperienced Spanish recruits. He is dismayed at the group's inadequacy and expresses skepticism about the militia's capacity to maintain discipline and win the war. However, his personal experience changes this initial impression. Over time, Orwell learns to admire the POUM for its capacity to breed loyalty and commitment in its soldiers and to foster a sense of democratic involvement. All in all, despite the militia's inefficiencies, Orwell concludes that the POUM serves as a convincing model of how an ideal, classless society can function.

In the meantime, life at the front is characterized by stagnation. Because of the complicated nature of the terrain and the lack of adequate resources, soldiers spend most of their time worrying about everyday survival instead of actually fighting the enemy. Attacks are extremely infrequent, and Orwell finds himself spending his days collecting firewood instead of preparing for battle. Ironically, casualties are less often the result of enemy fire than a fellow soldier's blunder. In this context, where the war seems to consist only of endless days of waiting, Orwell begins to lose faith in the nobility of the war and the meaningfulness of his commitment.

In April 1937, after four months and a half of life at the front, Orwell is given leave to return to Barcelona. This moment marks a turning point in his understanding of the war. In only a few months, the city has changed drastically from a society controlled by the working class to an ordinary city where poverty and class differences are once again apparent. The city is also filled with political tension among leftwing parties. In May, this tension suddenly gives way to violence as fighting erupts between the POUM and the Communists, and the city turns into a maze of barricades. The Communist Party seizes this opportunity to attack the POUM in the media, accusing them of being Fascist traitors. With shock, Orwell discovers that the Communist Party is often undemocratic in its proceedings and manipulates the truth in order to crush its political rivals. He realizes that political divisions within the Spanish left run deeper than he had initially imagined, and that these divisions threaten to hobble the Republican's war effort against the Nationalist enemy. As a result, Orwell soon becomes completely disillusioned with the possibility for Spain to maintain a healthy democracy.

A few days after the fighting, Orwell returns to the front. There, he discovers with surprise that life carries on as usual, and the soldiers seem unaware of the gravity of the political situation on the home front. One day, while speaking to a colleague, Orwell is suddenly shot in the neck by a Fascist sniper. He is taken to a hospital where, when doctors finally examine his wound, they conclude that he will never be able to speak again—a diagnosis that turns out to be incorrect.

Injured, Orwell returns to Barcelona, a city now marked by deep political division that has turned to hatred, fear, and suspicion. When he goes to meet his wife in their hotel, she panics and tells him to go into hiding at once. The Spanish Government, she explains, has outlawed the POUM, so that anyone affiliated with the POUM is now being thrown into jail. Orwell is outraged by this political reign of terror. Many of his friends and admired companions are arrested and sent to prison. He does not understand how, in a time of war, the Government could afford to imprison able-bodied people that are desperately needed at the front.

Finally, one morning in June 1937, after multiple days of hiding, Orwell and his wife manage to get on a train to leave the country. The couple escapes to France, leaving the chaos of war behind. Once in safe territory, Orwell reflects on the powerful impression that the Spanish Civil War has left on him. More than the bitterness and cruelty of the political climate in Barcelona, he was struck by the atmosphere of his everyday life as a militiaman, and what he saw as the courage and dignity of individuals fighting at the front lines of the war. Inspired by the courageous people he has met, he is left with a feeling of hope and a strong "belief in the decency of human beings."

Upon his return to England, he is surprised by the nation's tranquil and its isolation from the war. After the revolutionary ebullience he has witnessed in Spain, he wonders if the only thing that will ever force England to become more politically aware, more awake to the injustices of the world, will be the brutal "roar of bombs"—a comment that serves as a dark foreboding of the violence that World War II will bring.

Orwell dedicates two Appendixes, separate from the rest of the narrative, to the complex issue of Spanish politics. In Appendix I, he lays out the ideological differences between the various parties within the Republican coalition. He explains that infighting among leftwing groups, which he had originally considered an issue of little importance to the war, ultimately proved stronger than the Republicans' commitment to fight the Fascists. Orwell accuses the pro-Communist media, as well as international actors, of defending narrow political interests that ultimately weakened and divided the Spanish left. The Spanish Civil War, Orwell concludes, was never a war for democracy but, rather, an opportunity for parties to assert their dominance in the political game.

In Appendix II, Orwell examines in detail the news articles written about the Barcelona fighting in May 1937 with the goal of pointing out the ways in which the media is used as a tool to serve specific group's political interests. He criticizes journalists for stating wrong facts, contradicting themselves, engaging in fabrication and, in general, producing articles that fail to represent the truth of what actually happened. The result of such bad practices is that the POUM, which has little influence with the press, is unable to defend itself against accusations of treason, however unfounded they might be. In the end, Orwell argues, such scapegoating of the POUM had the effect of further weakening the anti-Fascist coalition.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Orwell – The narrator and protagonist of the story, Orwell is a well-educated, upper-middle class English citizen. Before he travels to Spain to volunteer with a leftist militia known as the POUM, his ideology is limited to a vague distaste for upper-class attitudes and habits. In the Spanish Civil War, he is introduced to concepts of social equality and working-class control, which revolutionize his thinking. While his attitude toward the revolution that he witnesses is initially naïve and characterized by idealistic notions of morality and freedom, over time he turns into an informed critic of Spanish politics. His time as a soldier in the POUM militia converts him to revolutionary socialism. At the same time, the Barcelona street fighting in May 1937, leaves him disillusioned with the Communist Party. After this, he becomes a vocal critic of Communist propaganda and of the press's attitude toward the war in general. He is forced to flee the war with his wife when the Government begins to persecute members of the POUM. Upon his return to England, Orwell realizes that his experience in Spain has left a strong mark on his vision of politics and humanity. He is animated by a renewed trust in the values of democracy, social equality, and personal bravery.

Orwell's wife — While Orwell never names his wife in the story and she largely remains in the background of the narrative, she plays an important role in supporting him throughout his time in Spain. From Barcelona, she sends Orwell food and goods. When Orwell returns to their hotel in Barcelona after the POUM has been declared illegal, she informs him of the situation and tells him to go into hiding at once. In June 1937, she and Orwell manage to escape the country. Despite her fleeting presence in and out of the narrative, it appears that she, too, has been deeply marked by the Spanish Civil War. In France, she, like Orwell, wishes to return to Spain to show solidarity to their Republican comrades.

Georges Kopp – Orwell's commander in the POUM militia. He demonstrates his commitment to the Spanish Republican cause by sacrificing his Belgian nationality in order to fight in a foreign army. Characterized by a cheerful, nonchalant attitude toward even the most perilous moments in the war, Kopp becomes Orwell's personal friend and impresses him with his effective leadership in moments of difficulty. During the Barcelona street fighting, he distinguishes himself by parleying with the enemy in the middle of rifle-fire and, through successful negotiation, saving tens of lives. Once the POUM is declared illegal, Kopp is imprisoned. Orwell repeatedly attempts to get him freed but all his efforts fail in the face of police bureaucracy. Kopp, however, assumes he will probably be shot and accepts his fate with good humor. When he is sent to a secret prison, once Orwell has already left the country, Orwell loses his trace.

Bob Smillie – A fellow Englishman in the POUM militia. Orwell considers twenty-two-year-old Smillie one of the strongest, most talented fighters he has met in the war. Arrested in Valencia on spurious charges, he is kept incommunicado and, ultimately, dies in prison from appendicitis, an ordinary illness left untreated. Orwell is outraged at the senselessness of this death. To him, Smillie becomes a symbol of the cruelty of political persecution.

John McNair – The Independent Labour Party (ILP) representative in Barcelona. He is characterized by selflessness, bravery, and a dignified commitment to the Republican cause. During the Barcelona street fighting, he braves the dangerous, barricaded streets of Barcelona to bring Orwell and his friends a couple of packets of cigarettes. Even though he had left the country for France, when the POUM was declared illegal he decided to return to Spain in order to show solidarity to his companions. McNair goes into hiding with Orwell during the wave of arrests in Barcelona in June 1937 and leaves the country on the same train as Orwell and his wife.

Williams – A fellow Englishman in Orwell's militia, married to a Spanish woman. For multiple weeks, he is the only Englishman in Orwell's company and Orwell shares a trench dug-out with him and his brother. After three weeks at the front, both Orwell and he are sent to join a contingent of English volunteers that has recently arrived. During the political persecution of the POUM, he avoids arrest and goes into hiding.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Benjamin – A Polish captain in the trenches. Characterized by a strong French accent, he leads a raid against the Fascist forces which Orwell and other volunteers participate in.

Stafford Cottman – An eighteen-year old fellow Englishman in the POUM militia. Like McNair, he goes into hiding with Orwell during the wave of arrests in Barcelona in June 1937. He leaves the country on the same train as Orwell and his wife.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

THE POSSIBILITY OF REVOLUTION

Orwell goes to Spain because he believes it is his duty to fight the rise of Fascism in Europe. When he arrives in Barcelona, he is fascinated to discover that a social revolution is underway and he supports the attempt to build a democratic society with neither poverty nor class divisions. While he initially finds the political climate in Spain inspiring and believes that he is living in a society that has made social equality a reality, Orwell comes to realize that his rosy initial impression of the socialist revolution was simplistic and naïve. Although Orwell never ceases to believe in socialist ideals, he comes to doubt that people could truly come to embody such ideals in their daily lives.

Upon his arrival in Barcelona, Orwell has a naïve and idealistic impression of the city as a perfect example of social equality. Everyone is wearing working-class dress, treating each other as equals, and using the informal pronoun "*tú*." Revolutionary songs are playing everywhere. Orwell sees no poverty and notices that everyone seems hopeful and satisfied. He is convinced that this is a situation of perfect equality and freedom, a model for what the results of a successful socialist revolution could be. Similarly, Orwell's initial experience as part of the Marxist (or "POUM") militia leads him to believe that an egalitarian militia bonded by political passion rather than military hierarchy can be effective in battle. The POUM militia is organized without barriers of rank, so all members of the militia treat each other as equals. In fact, men who disagree with orders are even allowed to argue with their officers. Orwell is originally shocked by this, since he sees it as a potentially chaotic or ineffectual way to organize troops. However, Orwell quickly comes to admire the militia. An equalitarian system of this sort, he argues, instills an uncommon sense of loyalty in its members, who are bonded by a belief in the principles of democracy and a feeling of comradeship. Rather than obeying orders out of fear, revolutionary soldiers act out of personal conviction, making them less likely to desert their post and abandon the cause.

As the war drags on, Orwell realizes that his initial ideas about Barcelona and the militia were far too idealistic. After fighting for three and a half months, Orwell returns to Barcelona to find that the social climate has changed, with the working class no longer seeming to dominate the city. He realizes that class divisions had never actually disappeared. Rather, many upper-class members of society were cultivating a working-class appearance to fit in and keep themselves safe from political violence against the wealthy. As Barcelona lost its revolutionary spirit, the city returned to the status quo in which poverty and class divisions were not only present, but palpable. Orwell also reconsiders his rosy initial assessment of the militia in light of the fact that fighting for revolution failed. He acknowledges that, while the revolutionary militias may have been useful at the beginning of the conflict, a more efficient and well-organized military might have handled the complexity of warfare more successfully overall.

Although Spain's attempts at political revolution failed, Orwell does see flashes of possibility for success during his time there, as well as reasons to be cautious about believing in the possibility of revolution. He remarks that social equality seemed most like an attainable goal at the front, where soldiers were united in their life-and-death fight against a common enemy. He describes interpersonal interactions at the front as being characterized by respect and feelings of comradeship, which suggests that political strife can foster the conditions of equality by moving people to act in defense of their shared beliefs. However, a society cannot flourish if it is constantly under siege, and in places like Barcelona that were removed from any actual fighting, civilians quickly lost sight of the revolutionary ideals that made war necessary. Class hierarchies re-emerged, and civilians went back to focusing on their daily lives and waited for the war to be over. People lose sight of their political ideals in the mix of practical concerns and everyday life, Orwell suggests—a fact which makes staging a successful socialist revolution extremely difficult, if not impossible.

POLITICAL INFIGHTING AND THE MEDIA

National and international newspapers portrayed the Spanish Civil War as a fight between good and evil, or democracy and Fascism, but personal experience of the war ultimately convinced Orwell that this was an overly simplistic—and even misleading—way of reporting on the conflict in Spain. Although Orwell came to Spain to fight Fascism, he quickly realized that the political left (those opposed to Fascism) was a loose coalition of parties with divergent political interests and different visions for the future of Spain. Orwell's disillusionment with the left was the result of his realization that infighting among political leftists, rather than the military assault from the political right, handed the Fascists a victory, and that leftist parties do not hesitate to use undemocratic tactics to assert their political dominance. Thus, Orwell comes to see that the left is not unambiguously "good," and the heart of the Spanish Civil war is not a fight between democracy and Fascism so much as a struggle for dominance among the different parties of the political left.

Ideologically, the Spanish political left is divided into two camps:

those supporting and those opposing social revolution. Orwell does not initially believe this difference to be of much relevance to the war. On one side, the Liberals, Communists, and right-wing Socialists aim to rebuild the prewar democratic society with a central government and a militarized army. They believe that pursuing revolutionary goals detracts from the more important objective of winning the war. As such, they wish for the social revolution to be suppressed. On the other side, the Anarchists, POUM (Marxists), and left-wing Socialists want to build a new society controlled by the working class. To them, the war and the revolution are inseparable, for a return to ordinary democracy would simply mean accepting capitalism, a system that is oppressive of the working class. However irreconcilable the two camps might be, Orwell does not initially believe this ideological rift to be of much importance. He believes that, in the context of war, the political left will be able to remain united against its common enemy, Fascism.

However, as the war drags on, Orwell realizes that the issue of infighting among left-wing parties is not tangential to the war—rather, it's at the heart of the conflict. In May 1937, Barcelona is paralyzed by street fighting between Communists and the POUM that soon turns into an all-out political war. While Orwell believes that the POUM were merely defending themselves against an attack by the police, the Communists present an entirely different narrative of the street fighting, accusing the POUM of rebelling against the Government and being Fascist sympathizers. Orwell is dismayed by this version of events, which he sees as outright lying and misinformation. Nevertheless, it is the Communists' version of events that the media picks up and reports. As a result, the Government declares the POUM illegal and the Communist-controlled secret police begins to arrest anyone previously connected to the POUM militia. Orwell is shocked by the Government's choice to eliminate a faction that is fighting on its own side. He realizes that he has underestimated the seriousness of political divisions in Spanish society and he comes to believe that political rivalry is a more powerful influence in the war than even the desire to protect democracy from Fascism.

As the persecution of the POUM increases, Orwell discovers that the political left is just as capable of engaging in authoritarian tactics as the political right. This leaves him disillusioned about the future of democracy in Spain. The suppression of the POUM is a "witch hunt" that affects people in every corner of society, including nurses, wives of POUM members, wounded soldiers, and even children. People are imprisoned on spurious charges and kept in prison without trial. The rule of law, as Orwell conceives of it, vanishes in the chaos of the conflict. Furthermore, the press becomes an instrument of Communist censorship and propaganda, spreading information that is at odds with the reality Orwell witnesses on a daily basis. The leftist press, he concludes, is just as vicious and inaccurate as Fascist propaganda, since it manipulates the truth in order to protect the interests of the Spanish Communist party. Simultaneously, capitalist Europe worried that revolution in Spain could undermine capitalist democracy, and as a result the Western European press chose to ignore the topic of revolution entirely, presenting the war as a simple opposition between "good" (democratic) and "bad" (Fascist) forces—the very narrative that convinced George Orwell to leave England to fight against Fascism in Spain in the first place. By dismissing the idea of revolution in Spain and exacerbating internal division in the Spanish political left, the media thwarted possibilities of political compromise, undermined democratic process, and ultimately changed the course of the war.

HUMAN DECENCY AND THE ABSURDITY OF WAR

Throughout *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell seeks to understand the meaning of the war and the value of his own involvement in it. While he initially conceives of the war as a noble struggle for democracy, his experience at the front is characterized by stagnation and absurdity, as soldiers spend more time worrying about everyday survival than fighting the enemy. Similarly, he discovers that the political atmosphere in Spain is a deeply fractured one, characterized by corruption, persecution, and terror. Nevertheless, despite the senseless suffering and injustice that Orwell witnesses, he does not despair of humanity. Inspired by numerous examples of individual generosity and courage, he affirms his trust in the inherent dignity and decency of human beings.

Much of Orwell's narrative dwells on the meaninglessness of life at the front. Although he had imagined his involvement in the Spanish Civil War would be a fight in the name of lofty ideals, Orwell is profoundly disappointed by the reality on the ground. Fighting is relatively infrequent, so soldiers are primarily concerned with food, warmth, and personal hygiene. Furthermore, bad luck and inefficiency prove more harmful than enemy fire. Orwell describes the soldiers as a "mob of eager children" who have never been taught to use a weapon and, as a result, they suffer often from self-inflicted wounds. He interrogates the meaning of his involvement in a war that, in many aspects, does not seem like a war at all, but rather like "a bloody pantomime." The absurdity of war seems to dawn on Orwell when he realizes that the fascist monsters he's fighting "were indistinguishable from ourselves, except that they wore khaki overalls." Regardless of the side soldiers are fighting on, they are united by something greater than political rivalry: their collective experience of the reality of war. Generally, then, life on the front was not particularly combative or violent, and it taught Orwell more about human unity than about the valor of violence or the meaningfulness of political differences.

While the front is animated by a spirit of comradeship and self-sacrifice, revolutionaries are persecuted mercilessly back in

Barcelona. Neither hierarchy nor the rule of law is respected as lower-ranking police officers take part in illegal arrests and disregard release orders issued by their superiors, hoping to imprison as many people as possible. Such political persecution proves counter-productive to the war effort. Like many others, Orwell's commander Georges Kopp is caught and imprisoned. Orwell attempts to free his friend, whom he considers an invaluable military leader, but he fails in his effort. Orwell despairs at seeing such a valuable commander imprisoned at the time when he is most sorely needed at the front. This wave of imprisonments leads to cruel, inhuman consequences. When Bob Smillie, one of Orwell's young companions, succumbs to illness in prison after being detained without trial, Orwell writes that "Smillie's death is not a thing I can easily forgive." A soldier might die in battle, he argues, but it is barbaric to leave a helpless, innocent young man to die when he has committed no crime. Orwell realizes that, to the politicians in Barcelona, a soldier's life has lost all value, as he is denied even the right to a dignified death.

Somehow, despite this generalized chaos and violence, Orwell maintains an undying belief in the goodness of humanity. Faced with the absurdity of war and the quagmire of political infighting, he turns to those around him for hope. After Orwell and his wife flee Spain, both of them are obsessed with the desire to return to the war. While they know that this idea is unrealistic and dangerous, they feel their comrades' suffering as their own and wish to share in their plight. In the end, what remains most salient in their mind is the feeling of solidarity and comradeship they experienced in the conflict. Orwell remains in awe of the exceptional courage and self-sacrifice he witnessed in the war. His commander Kopp, who sacrificed his Belgian nationality in order to join a foreign army, never loses his good humor. Not even the prospect of his own execution makes Kopp regret his commitment to the Spanish cause. He exemplifies dignity, fortitude, and courage.

Overall, Orwell's attitude after Spain is one of hope. Despite witnessing cruel political infighting, unchecked corruption, and injustice, he remains convinced of the value of revolutionary socialism. More generally, he is left with an optimistic "belief in the decency of human beings." Thus, as much as it denounces the dangers of political oppression, *Homage to Catalonia* is a testament to the human capacity to fight for idealistic beliefs and to maintain dignity in the midst of senseless violence and chaos.

SUBJECTIVITY AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Homage to Catalonia, Orwell's first-person account of the Spanish Civil War, is not a detached, scholarly account. Rather, it bears the mark of its author's experience and personality, as well as his political views. Orwell's account of the war is interwoven with his analysis of Spanish culture and politics, which evolves as his personal experience confirms or challenges his beliefs. Orwell is aware that his observations might occasionally be naïve, idealistic, or limited by his perspective as an outsider, but no account can be objective or unbiased, and Orwell's book affirms the value of its deeply personal perspective despite its limitations.

Orwell's identity as a bourgeois Englishman sets him apart from the local population of working-class Spaniards, and his perspective on the Spanish Civil War is clearly limited by his narrow personal experience of Spain. For example, Orwell's general assessment of Spanish politics is informed by the assumptions he makes about Spaniards based on his own limited interactions with them. Orwell becomes convinced that generosity is part of Spanish culture when two working-class soldiers offer him what he later discovers to be an entire week's ration of cigarettes, in a period when cigarettes were extremely scarce. This generosity moves Orwell, but he is less impressed with the lack of organization he sees in Spain. The Spanish bureaucracy is dysfunctional, soldiers often put off important tasks, and they are not even punctual when going into battle. Based on a seemingly limited amount of evidence, Orwell makes the general inference that generosity and disorganization are essential Spanish traits. This leads him to draw sweeping conclusions about Spain's political future, including the assumption that, since the Spanish are kind and somewhat ineffective, even if Franco (Spain's future fascist dictator) were to win the war, Fascist rule in Spain would likely be less severe than it was in Italy or Germany. However, the course of history does not adhere to Orwell's optimistic prediction. The Franco regime's long history of repression, torture, and murder proves that Spain was not insulated against the horrors of Fascism. In attributing so much weight to his own judgments of Spanish culture, Orwell was blind to some of the larger, less visible forces that were shaping Spain's political future.

Orwell concludes that no account of the war can be perfectly objective, but that first-person experience, while subjective, nevertheless contains its own truths. He defends the authority and validity of his account as an eyewitness, however partial it may be, by comparing it to journalism. Orwell explains that most reporting on the Spanish Civil War is compromised by limited access to information. When writing from abroad, journalists often lack crucial knowledge of local circumstances, and, when writing from Spain, foreign journalists are bound to receive much of their information from the unreliable Spanish Ministry of Propaganda. As a fighter in a local militia, not a traditional journalist, Orwell is able to avoid many of these problems. His on-the-ground experience also allows him to identify lies manufactured and disseminated by the press. In his evaluation of news reports on the street fighting in Barcelona, he notes that most journalists contradict themselves, omit crucial information, and publish factual errors. They sometimes

even engage in fabrication that has no foundation in reality. Unlike such journalists, Orwell suggests, he does not censor or tweak information for the mere purpose of defending his political views. Rather, he bases his political opinions on the reality he has witnessed with his own eyes.

In addition to noting the limitations of live reporting, Orwell believes that no objective account of the war will ever be written. "It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist," he writes. "Future historians will have nothing to go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda." This leads him to defend the value of recording his own personal experience, in lieu of any objective record. He points out that "it is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan." Therefore, despite warning readers to "beware of my Partisanship, my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events," Orwell argues for an understanding of "truth" that is not objective, but made up of different subjective accounts. He trusts that his firsthand experiences, however limited they may have been, make him qualified to write about the Spanish Civil War with the intelligence, sensitivity, and honesty it deserves.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

RED AND RED-AND-BLACK FLAGS

In the Spanish Civil War, red flags are meant to represent the Communist Party and The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (or the POUM), while red-and-black flags represent the Anarchist Party. When Orwell first arrives in Barcelona, the entire city is covered in both types of flags, symbolizing the fact that the city is under leftist, working-class control. At the front, because of the complicated nature of the terrain, flags are used to identify groups and individuals according to their political affiliation, Fascist or Republican. Even in the city of Barcelona itself, flags are crucial to grasping which buildings are controlled by which political group. For example, after the Barcelona street fighting, the POUM flags are torn down, signifying the downfall of that party. Throughout the book, flags serve as a reminder of the insurmountable divisions that exist even within the leftwing Republican coalition itself. Hanging from city's buildings or flown at military positions at the front, they remind the observer of the grave significance that political parties have taken on—and of the struggle for power that the different political groups are embroiled in.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Books edition of *Homage to Catalonia* published in 1938.

Chapter 1 Quotes

Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine. In the barbers' shop were Anarchist notices (the barbers were mostly Anarchists) solemnly explaining that barbers were no longer slaves. In the streets were coloured posters appealing to prostitutes to stop being prostitutes. To anyone from the hard-boiled, sneering civilization of the English-speaking races there was something rather pathetic in the literalness with which these idealistic Spaniards took the hackneyed phrases of revolution.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4-5

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell describes his amazement at discovering the city of Barcelona. When he arrives in December 1936, Barcelona is undergoing a profound social revolution that has put the working class in control of the city. Orwell is immediately struck by the unique atmosphere that the inhabitants are actively creating, a political ebullience he has witnessed nowhere else. He notices that in everyday life, people have rejected any form of hierarchy. Even in traditional circumstances of economic exchange, such as in a barber's shop or in the realm of prostitution, everyone is meant to be free, obeying only their own selves.

Orwell recognizes the practical aspects as well as the idealistic nature of this revolution. Himself a member of "the English-speaking race," he recognizes that, however enthusiastically he might view these attempts at social equality, he feels skeptical of the Spaniards' naïve enthusiasm, which can be seen in the revolution's focus on symbols (such as the use of the word "slaves" to describe the barbers). At the same time, he is deeply impressed by the optimistic outlook he witnesses.

Orwell's initial criticism of the Spaniards' idealism appears rather ironic in light of the rest of the narrative, in which he comes to embrace exactly the same ideals. Indeed, in the POUM militia, he will defend these ideals with his very life.

❝ Every foreigner who served in the militia spent his first few weeks in learning to love the Spaniards and in being exasperated by certain of their characteristics. In the front line my own exasperation sometimes reached the pitch of fury. The Spaniards are good at many things, but not at making war.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

From his very first days of training in the militia, Orwell becomes aware of the difference between him, an upper-class Englishman, and his Spanish companions, most of whom come from the working class and are less educated than him. Much of his initial wonder at life in Spain expresses itself through his assessment of what he considers to be a typically "Spanish" mode of behavior. Through his interaction with his fellow militiamen, he identifies certain traits, such as friendliness and a lack of punctuality, which he considers typical of the country as a whole.

While Orwell presents these cultural observations as valid judgments in their own right, they are in fact deeply subjective impressions based on Orwell's personal conception of what type of behavior is "normal"—which is itself the result of his own specific cultural background. He projects his own frustration onto the experience of "every foreigner." This cultural bias occasionally leads him to make broad generalizations, such as the idea that Spanish people are not good at making war. Such statements lack nuance and subtlety. They tend to consider a few individuals representative of an entire population and overlook the circumstances that might explain the behavior he considers unseemly or illogical.

While Orwell's understanding of the political and military situation in Spain evolves significantly throughout his narrative, his cultural attitude remains relatively fixed. Throughout the book, he maintains the tendency to explain what he sees using broad generalizations, referring frequently to what he considers to be typically Spanish attitudes or characteristics.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Many of the troops opposite us on this part of the line were not Fascists at all, merely wretched conscripts who had been doing their military service at the time when war broke out and were only too anxious to escape. Occasionally small batches of them took the risk of slipping across to our lines. No doubt more would have done so if their relatives had not been in Fascist territory.

These deserters were the first 'real' Fascists I had ever seen. It struck me that they were indistinguishable from ourselves, except that they wore khaki overalls.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

For the first time, Orwell has arrived near the frontline, in the town of Alcubierre. As he and his fellow militiamen are waiting to receive weapons and head to the front, the main source of action and entertainment is not actual fighting but, rather, the arrival of Fascist deserters.

Orwell's hatred of Fascism—which he considers a dangerous, undemocratic, retrograde political movement—does not keep him from recognizing that the fighters on the Fascist side are not necessarily all evil. In fact, as he notices, the only discernible difference between these Fascist deserters and the men in his own group is trivial: a difference in clothing. This outward similarity between the Fascist and the anti-Fascist fighters goes deeper, into the identities of these men. Orwell suggests that many of these soldiers might not be fighting out of political conviction, but rather out of constraint, economic need, or mere ignorance.

❝ It seemed dreadful that the defenders of the Republic should be this mob of ragged children carrying worn-out rifles which they did not know how to use. I remember wondering what would happen if a Fascist aeroplane passed our way—whether the airman would even bother to dive down and give us a burst from his machine-gun. Surely even from the air he could see that we were not real soldiers?

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

While Orwell had been critical of the militiamen's skills during his training in Barcelona, it is only once he is marching toward the frontline for the first time that he is seized by a deep sense of fear. He realizes that he and his fellow militiamen lack maturity, experience, and adequate resources to fight this war. In sum, he considers his group unfit to defend such an important cause as that of the Republic.

His sense that neither he nor the enemy should be able to take the militia seriously sustains his growing impression that this war is at odds with most of the expectations he had before coming to Spain. While he conceived of the Spanish Civil War as a noble conflict in the name of elevated ideals, he soon discovered that the reality was starkly opposed to this vision. Fighting in the revolutionary militias was often amateurish, ill-planned, or lacking crucial resources. The stagnation Orwell later experiences at the front will further convince him that this is not a "real" war with "real soldiers," but an absurd period of waiting and boredom.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ Up here, in the hills round Saragossa, it was simply the mingled boredom and discomfort of stationary warfare. A life as uneventful as a city clerk's, and almost as regular. Sentry-go, patrols, digging; digging, patrols, sentry-go. On every hill-top, Fascist or Loyalist, a knot of ragged, dirty men shivering round their flag and trying to keep warm. And all day and night the meaningless bullets wandering across the empty valleys and only by some rare improbable chance getting home on a human body.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

From Orwell's very first days at the front, his experience is marked by stagnation and boredom. This description of a soldier's activities varies little throughout Orwell's narrative, returning time and again to emphasize the fact that Orwell's experience at the front is repetitive and unchanging, endlessly focused on menial tasks of survival instead of more meaningful military activities.

In these circumstances, even bullets are considered "meaningless," as they are not being used in organized military campaigns, but rather as desperate attempts to break the monotony of trench life. Instead of being dangerous weapons, their success is unpredictable and governed by sheer luck. This is true on both sides of the conflict, Fascist and anti-Fascist (or Loyalist). This description shows that, in Orwell's experience of militia life, death does not occur as a not a glorious event in the defense of a noble cause, but as an unpredictable occurrence devoid of greater significance.

These descriptions convey Orwell's disillusionment with the war. What he had expected to be a noble fight turns into one of the most boring periods of his life. Much later, however, Orwell will conclude that these moments of stagnation concealed an important change within himself, a gradual political awakening influenced by sharing everyday life with passionate revolutionaries.

❝ In theory at any rate each militia was a democracy and not a hierarchy. It was understood that orders had to be obeyed, but it was also understood that when you gave an order you gave it as comrade to comrade and not as superior to inferior. There were officers and NCOs, but there was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel-clicking and saluting. They had attempted to produce within the militias a sort of temporary working model of the classless society. Of course there was not perfect equality, but there was a nearer approach to it than I had ever seen or than I would have thought conceivable in time of war.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell's first weeks at the front allow him to describe and judge the unique characteristics that separate a revolutionary militia from an ordinary army. The POUM militia applies its revolutionary ideals to everyday life. All fighters, regardless of rank, are meant to treat each other with equality and respect, in the name of social equality. As such, the POUM's vision of democracy is participatory, as all members of society are allowed the same right to challenge orders and express their own opinions, regardless of their specific role in the militia.

When he first came to Spain, Orwell was convinced that he

was fighting in the name of democracy. Over time, as he grows aware of undemocratic behavior within his very own anti-Fascist coalition, he becomes disillusioned with the prospect of democracy in Spain. However, his early days in the revolutionary militia convinced him of the nobility of the POUM's mode of organization. The POUM propounded the democratic ideal of a society not divided by class *and* brought this ideal to life through concrete actions. This experience opens Orwell's mind to the idea that capitalism is not the only way of organizing society. He concludes that revolutionary principles of equality, if brought to life by committed, passionate individuals, are capable of transforming society for the better.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ I think the pacifists might find it helpful to illustrate their pamphlets with enlarged photographs of lice. Glory of war, indeed! In war *all* soldiers are lousy, at least when it is warm enough. The men who fought at Verdun, at Waterloo, at Flodden, at Senlac, at Thermopylae – every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell describes himself and his fellow militiamen suffering from lice, he challenges the traditional vision of war. Instead of emphasizing human courage or dignity, he argues that the true, universal experience of war is marked by soldiers' daily struggle against ordinary ills such as lice. He references well-known conflicts, from the ancient Greek world (Thermopylae) to the much more recent First World War (Verdun), to challenge the common vision of these battles as heroic or glorious events. "Glory of war, indeed!" he exclaims sarcastically. Adopting a more realistic perspective, Orwell argues that these soldiers all endured unpleasant ordeals that are far from noble or glorious.

In sum, Orwell separates the politically noble motives for war from the real-life experience of war. As in his descriptions of Spanish politics itself, his goal is to force the reader to realize that the dynamics on the ground are often more ridiculous and messier than official narratives take into account.

This attitude fits in with Orwell's general distrust of the press, as well as with his desire to describe what he has seen in an honest and non-partisan way. His writing is marked by the willingness to accept that even the most difficult or tragic experiences can be viewed in a humorous way.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ The workers' militias, based on the trade unions and each composed of people of approximately the same political opinions, had the effect of canalizing into one place all the most revolutionary sentiment in the country. I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragón one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. [...] Of course such a state of affairs could not last. It was simply a temporary and local phase in an enormous game that is being played over the whole surface of the earth. But it lasted long enough to have its effect upon anyone who experienced it.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell reflects on his time at the front and his enthusiasm for the classless society that the POUM militia has created, he realizes that such a societal model was only possible under a specific set of circumstances. The fact that his fellow militiamen shared the same class background (mostly working-class) and the same political beliefs (a desire to create social equality across all classes) allowed the POUM's democratic project to work.

In sum, Orwell becomes aware that what he experienced as ordinary life in the Spanish Civil War was not at all representative of how most people in the anti-Fascist coalition thought and behaved. For example, members of the middle or upper classes, ordinary citizens who are not involved in politics, and leftwing parties that did not share the same commitment to social revolution would prove important obstacles to the establishment of perfect class equality. What he thought was typical of Spain, or at least of Catalonia, was nothing other than an extremely marginal political movement.

When Orwell becomes aware of the unique nature of his experience, he realizes that the POUM's model of democracy would be unsuccessful in real life. Nevertheless, it inspires him to adopt these ideals as his own. In other words, he decides to trust in his hope that society *can* change instead of using the failure of the Spanish revolution as proof that these ideals are not worth fighting for. Orwell realizes that his individual transformation is ultimately what mattered most in this entire experience, and that he will be forever marked by it.

❝ I am walking up and down the line of sentries, under the dark boughs of the poplars. In the flooded ditch outside the rats are paddling about, making as much noise as otters. As the yellow dawn comes up behind us, the Andalusian sentry, muffled in his cloak, begins singing. Across no-man's-land, a hundred or two hundred yards away, you can hear the Fascist sentry also singing.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of various impressionistic memories that Orwell recounts in order to convey the personal nature of what he experienced in Spain. He tries to immerse the reader in the feelings and sensations that he experienced, emphasizing that his time as a fighter impacted him on a highly personal level. His goal, in choosing not to focus exclusively on historical or political occurrences, to make his experience as an ordinary soldier come to life.

Indeed, Orwell's experience is often strikingly non-political in nature. In this episode, he is impressed by the powerful beauty of nature. The Andalusian sentry's singing signals the persistence of human life and joy in the midst of war. The Fascist sentry's similar song emphasizes the fact that, beyond political separations between friends and enemies, soldiers on both sides engage in the same activities, experience the same moods, and have the same respect for the beauty of life. Orwell's description of these two parallel moments aims to show the humanity of fighters on both sides of the conflict. In so doing, he suggests that individual values and behaviors are more important than political loyalties.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ A fat man eating quails while children are begging for bread is a disgusting sight, but you are less likely to see it when you are within sound of the guns. […] But God forbid that I should pretend to any personal superiority. After several months of discomfort I had a ravenous desire for decent food and wine, cocktails, American cigarettes, and so forth, and I admit to having wallowed in every luxury that I had money to buy.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell returns to Barcelona after various months at the front, he is shocked to discover that class differences are once again apparent. He expresses his disgust at the upper classes' obliviousness to the injustice of the unequal distribution of wealth. The fat man's obvious comfort, as he eats expensive, refined food, contrasts starkly with the poor children's misery. This image is meant to inspire revulsion and a sense of injustice.

Orwell's mention of guns suggests that the only way to abolish such differences in class and to foster a sense of solidarity among all members of society is for people to experience war. When they face common dangers, people will naturally want to unite and help each other instead of following the narrow interests of their own class.

However, this attitude is marked by a deep contradiction. While Orwell condemns class differences, he benefits from them himself. Even though he has lived through the unique experience of social equality at the front, where men are indeed selflessly absorbed in the goal of creating a more just society, this experience does not impact him enough to change the ways in which he benefits from his own wealth. Thus, when he decides to give in to his cravings for expensive foods, he is implicitly going against his proclaimed principles of social and economic equality. This goes to show that Orwell's political convictions are not invulnerable to criticism. Rather, he too is occasionally guilty of the very kind of unequal behavior he deplores.

Chapter 9 Quotes

On one side the CNT, on the other side the police. I have no particular love for the idealized 'worker' as he appears in the bourgeois Communist's mind, but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

During the street fighting in Barcelona in May 1937, the violence initially appears to be a clear-cut struggle between the Anarchists and the police. Orwell's decision to side with the POUM and the Anarchists pits him against the police and, as it later becomes apparent, the Communists.

This event highlights the hypocrisy of the Communist Party, which claims to defend the rights of the working class (as their ideology defends an idealized image of the "worker") but, in practice, fights against it. By contrast, Orwell explains that his commitment to fight alongside the working class is not vacuous political posturing, but rather a sincere desire to defend the weaker members of society. Orwell prides himself in reacting to the reality on the ground, not to abstract political ideals that are out of touch with the concrete experiences of real people.

This introduces the idea that there is a gap between some parties' political discourse and their actions. This gap will become increasingly obvious in the aftermath of the Barcelona fighting, when the Communist Party engages in a vicious campaign against the POUM and the Anarchists. It highlights the fact that the leftwing, anti-Fascist camp is deeply divided along ideological lines.

I was in no danger, I suffered from nothing worse than hunger and boredom, yet it was one of the most unbearable periods of my whole life. I think few experiences could be more sickening, more disillusioning or, finally, more nerve-racking than those evil days of street warfare.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

On the roof of the observatory from which Orwell is meant to protect the POUM building, he realizes that the street fighting in Barcelona is impacting him on both a personal and a political level. His physical experience of boredom and hunger is almost identical to what he has described at the front. However, unlike the front, where men are moved by values of unity and solidarity, here physical discomfort is accompanied by political misconduct—specifically, vicious infighting among parties that belong to the same coalition.

Orwell's memory of this moment as one of the worst in his life can be explained by the fact that he sees this bout of street violence as not simply unproductive, but harmful to the war effort. In other words, he becomes aware that winning the war against the Fascists is not necessarily the most important objective for all political parties within the anti-Fascist coalition. Rather, the Government and the Communists are willing to sacrifice the unity of the Republican coalition to defend their own political dominance. This is an unpleasant wake-up call for Orwell, as he becomes aware that this war is not only fought at the front against the rightwing enemy, but is also a fight within the left that is destructive to the anti-Fascist cause. His vision of the war as a simple fight between Fascists and anti-Fascists crumbles with this realization, and he now begins to lose faith in the nobility of the conflict.

When you are taking part in events like these you are, I suppose, in a small way, making history, and you ought by rights to feel like an historical character. But you never do, because at such times the physical details always outweigh everything else. Throughout the fighting I never made the correct 'analysis' of the situation that was so glibly made by journalists hundreds of miles away.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

As Orwell returns to his position on the roof after a short-lived armistice in the Barcelona street fighting, he realizes that he is incapable of focusing on the importance of his

task. Rather, he is overwhelmed by his personal experience and can no longer think of the conflict in terms of its political significance.

This focus on physical discomfort marks Orwell's entire experience of Spain, from his time at the front to his desperate escape from the country. It demonstrates his genuineness and humility as a writer, as he proves willing to present himself as a fallible human rather than a glorious hero. It also reminds the reader of the subjectivity of his account, introducing the idea that what Orwell focuses on is not necessarily what historians or journalists will later identify as the most important moments in this conflict. At the same time, precisely for this reason, it allows Orwell to note that there is often a gap between an individual's experience on the ground and official narratives of the conflict, which often simplify events in order to reach clear-cut but reductive conclusions.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ As for the newspaper talk about this being a 'war for democracy', it was plain eyewash. No one in his senses supposed that there was any hope of democracy, even as we understand it in England or France, in a country so divided and exhausted as Spain would be when the war was over. It would have to be a dictatorship, and it was clear that the chance of a working-class dictatorship had passed. That meant that the general movement would be in the direction of some kind of Fascism. Fascism called, no doubt, by some politer name, and—because this was Spain—more human and less efficient than the German or Italian varieties.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of the Barcelona fighting, as Orwell grows aware of the Communist Party's vehemently intolerant, undemocratic attitude, his entire conception of the conflict is turned upside down. He realizes that his previous understanding of this war as a fight between good (democratic) and bad (Fascist) forces was mistaken. Rather, even the leftwing, anti-Fascist camp is divided beyond repair. Political tolerance has disappeared in the face of political competition.

As pro-democracy forces such as the POUM are viciously eliminated and powerful political forces crush the working class resistance, Orwell concludes that the country's future is bound to be undemocratic. His trust in what he sees as typically "Spanish" traits such as kindness and inefficiency leads him to conclude that the post-war regime will not be as brutal as other Fascist regimes in Europe. This is one of many examples in which Orwell's generalizations about Spanish cultural proves extreme and, as history would show, incorrect. This episode also proves Orwell capable of sincerely rethinking his political convictions. Unlike the media he so vehemently denounces, he proves willing to re-evaluate his entire vision of the war in order to better represent the truth of what he has witnessed.

❝ It was like an allegorical picture of war; the trainload of fresh men gliding proudly up the line, the maimed men sliding slowly down, and all the while the guns on the open trucks making one's heart leap as guns always do, and reviving that pernicious feeling, so difficult to get rid of, that war *is* glorious after all.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

After being severely wounded, Orwell travels to a hospital far from the frontline. On his way, he sees a group of young, healthy, Italian militiamen heading to the front. The scene captures his imagination. Despite suffering from a serious wound and being disillusioned with the political aspects of this conflict, Orwell remains capable of being moved by traditional images of the glory of war.

This episode contrasts with many of the moments in which Orwell makes it clear to the reader that, in its concrete details, war is not as glorious as the it is often made to seem. However much certain aspects of this war might have disappointed Orwell, he maintains a strong trust in the inherent nobility of human beings and their capacity to engage in this conflict with dignity and even charm. Thus, his optimistic outlook proves resilient—as it reappears even in the most trying of circumstances.

Chapter 11 Quotes

In the intervening days there must have been numbers of men who were killed without ever learning that the newspapers in the rear were calling them Fascists. This kind of thing is a little difficult to forgive. I know it was the usual policy to keep bad news from the troops, and perhaps as a rule that is justified. But it is a different matter to send men into battle and not even tell them that behind their backs their party is being suppressed, their leaders accused of treachery, and their friends and relatives thrown into prison.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell's outrage at the inter-party fighting that is taking place in the media is both moral and personal. His focus on the fact that the troops at the front were unaware of the Government and the media's accusations against them seems to be personal. As a man who fought at the front, he can identify with the militiamen. He judges the military justification for keeping the news away from the fighters to be inadequate.

His plea for the disclosure of the truth to the soldiers rests on the principle of human dignity, not on any political aim. He believes that soldiers retain the right to know what is happening, even if they are to be thrown in prison afterward. Following his own vision of democracy and equality, Orwell argues that soldiers should be treated as humans with the full rights of any civilian and their loyalty should be rewarded with honesty and respect. Orwell focuses on this seemingly minor aspect of the vicious fight taking place in the press to insist that people's individual experience—and, in particular, people's dignity as human beings—should be protected as much as their right to express their political convictions. In so doing, Orwell denounces the cruelty that political intolerance breeds.

It did not matter what I had done or not done. This was not a round-up of criminals; it was merely a reign of terror. I was not guilty of any definite act, but I was guilty of 'Trotskyism'. The fact that I had served in the POUM militia was quite enough to get me into prison. It was no use hanging on to the English notion that you are safe so long as you keep the law.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell is confronted with the political persecution that is taking place in Barcelona, where the police are throwing POUM members in prison, he realizes that this situation lies outside the normal reign of the law. As an Englishman unused to such degrees of political intolerance—where belonging to the wrong party is considered a crime—Orwell is initially unwilling to accept that he, too, could be arrested. Soon, however, he is forced to accept that this wave of arrests follows neither the rule of law nor common sense, and that he must give in to this "reign of terror," an absurd and viciously intolerant state of affairs.

Democracy and hope for revolution have thus totally broken down. The war within the political left is proving as cruel and violent—in fact, in some ways, more so—than the fight against the Fascists at the front. This marks a shift in Orwell's view of the war. He no longer sees it as a noble crusade against an evil enemy, but as an illogical brawl within the anti-Fascist camp itself. The fight within the Spanish left ultimately proves more important than the fight against the Fascists. Orwell realizes that, in these circumstances, his personal identity as an innocent man matters less than his identity as a member of a political party. Political rivalry has essentially stripped members of society of their inherent dignity and respectability as human beings.

Chapter 12 Quotes

Smillie's death is not a thing I can easily forgive. Here was this brave and gifted boy, who had thrown up his career at Glasgow University in order to come and fight against Fascism, and who, as I saw for myself had done his job at the front with faultless courage and willingness; and all they could find to do with him was to fling him into jail and let him die like a neglected animal.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker), Bob Smillie

Related Themes:

Page Number: 179

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell's fellow English militiamen Bob Smillie dies in prison, Orwell's sense of moral injustice once again aligns with his personal feelings of revulsion. Orwell uses his emotional shock at learning about the death of his friend to show that the political persecution in Barcelona has reached the height of cruelty. He denounces the police for ignoring both a soldier's worth as a fighter and a human being's right to be treated with fairness and respect. In Barcelona, the persecution of political enemies has not only shifted attention away from fighting the enemy at the front, it has also turned into a truly horrific scenario, where people's basic humanity is ignored and innocent young adults are treated as "animals."

> It was queer how everything had changed. Only six months ago, when the Anarchists still reigned, it was looking like a proletarian that made you respectable. On the way down from Perpignan to Cerbères a French commercial traveller in my carriage had said to me in all solemnity: 'You mustn't go into Spain looking like that. Take off that collar and tie. They'll tear them off you in Barcelona.' He was exaggerating, but it showed how Catalonia was regarded. And at the frontier the Anarchist guards had turned back a smartly-dressed Frenchman and his wife, solely – I think – because they looked too bourgeois. Now it was the other way about; to look bourgeois was the one salvation.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

On the train to leave the country, Orwell and his wife are saved by their bourgeois appearance. Orwell reflects on the speed with which Catalonia has shifted from a working-class-dominated city to an ordinary capitalist haven where the wealthy are in charge. This brutal shift marks the end of revolutionary hopes in the city, as Orwell accepts that the revolution he so admired has come to an end for good. Beyond Orwell's feeling of regret over the end of the revolution, his description of these two contrasting periods (revolutionary and post-revolutionary) highlights one thing they have in common: people's intolerance toward others based on their class.

> This war, in which I played so ineffectual a part, has left me with memories that are mostly evil, and yet I do not wish that I had missed it. When you have had a glimpse of such a disaster as this – and however it ends the Spanish war will turn out to have been an appalling disaster, quite apart from the slaughter and physical suffering – the result is not necessarily disillusionment and cynicism. Curiously enough the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

As Orwell is about to conclude his narrative, he takes a moment to reflect on his understanding of the entirety of his personal experience. He realizes that the expectations he had before coming to Spain were completely overturned by the reality he witnessed on the ground. While he had joined the fight with the idea of actively defending a noble cause, he ultimately ended up having only a negligible impact on the course of the war itself. On the other hand, he knows that he is leaving the war a changed man. Despite his frustrations with life at the front, he has found inspiration in his militia's political ideals of social equality. More importantly, he has renewed his faith in human beings. He has learned to separate evil political manipulation and violent horrors (the endless "disasters" of this war) from the everyday decency that he witnessed in many of his comrades. Thus, he foregrounds his emotional experience, showing that the optimistic outlook he has drawn from the war is ultimately more important than his disillusionment with politics.

> I believe that on such an issue as this no one is or can be completely truthful. It is difficult to be certain about anything except what you have seen with your own eyes, and consciously or unconsciously everyone writes as a partisan. In case I have not said this somewhere earlier in the book I will say it now: beware of my Partisanship, my mistakes of fact and the distortion inevitably caused by my having seen only one corner of events. And beware of exactly the same things when you read any other book on this period of the Spanish war.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell reflects on his depiction of the war. He concludes that, in the face of such a passionately debated conflict, no one can be truly objective. In one way or another, people are inevitably moved by their own political convictions. In other words, Orwell does not claim moral or political superiority in his narrative. Rather, he accepts the subjectivity of his account and the fact that he only saw a very limited series of events in this complicated war. He also warns the reader about reading other accounts of the war (which might not be as transparently subjective as his own) as objective and neutral. Overall, he claims that his experience as an eyewitness gives him greater credibility than people writing from outside the conflict entirely.

Appendix I Quotes

I thought it idiotic that people fighting for their lives should *have* separate parties; my attitude always was, 'Why can't we drop all this political nonsense and get on with the war?' This of course was the correct 'anti-Fascist' attitude which had been carefully disseminated by the English newspapers, largely in order to prevent people from grasping the real nature of the struggle. But in Spain, especially in Catalonia, it was an attitude that no one could or did keep up indefinitely. Everyone, however unwillingly, took sides sooner or later. For even if one cared nothing for the political parties and their conflicting 'lines', it was too obvious that one's own destiny was involved.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

When Orwell arrived in Spain, he had no knowledge of the complexity of the situation on the political left. The foreign press he had read had convinced him to join the conflict because it presented the war as a simple conflict between Fascists and anti-Fascists. It took many months of living in Spain, culminating in the Barcelona street fighting in May 1937, for Orwell to realize that the conflict was more complex than that. A singular, unified "anti-Fascist" political front turned out not to exist, for the anti-Fascist camp was made up of parties with diverging resources, ideologies, and interests. Orwell argues that the foreign press's concealment of the political dynamics within the left was intentional, mean to hide "the real nature of the struggle" which Orwell later explains to be the issue of the social revolution.

Orwell argues that people's political allegiance is often shaped by necessity (one's "destiny") as much as by political conviction. This is true in Orwell's own experience, as well. Political persecution ultimately reached such extremes that people could be arrested merely for belonging to the wrong party. As such, this proved that the war against the Fascists was only *one* of the wars taking place. An equally dangerous and potentially more cruel one was being waged within the parties on the left, and it is this war that Orwell was ultimately forced to flee.

It is the same in all wars; the soldiers do the fighting, the journalists do the shouting, and no true patriot ever gets near a frontline trench, except on the briefest of propaganda-tours.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 215

Explanation and Analysis

Despite his optimistic trust in the dignity of human beings, Orwell remains unforgivingly critical of journalists and professional politicians. He concludes that this war, despite its elevated ideological premises, shares the same dynamics as most other conflicts and, therefore, is not any more moral in its foundations than other wars. In particular, Orwell denounces the gap between the lives of ordinary soldiers and those of the people commenting on events (journalists) or actively influencing them (politicians or, as he cynically calls them, "patriots"). This gap in both knowledge and personal sacrifice has concrete effects, as it tends to place most of the burden of war on the most vulnerable and deserving party: the soldiers. As much as Orwell denounces his Spanish soldiers' blunders, he is much more critical, on an ethical level, of the political decisions made by non-fighters, which he considers often dangerously out of line with reality and capable of harming innocent people.

Appendix II Quotes

A tremendous dust was kicked up in the foreign anti-Fascist press, but, as usual, only one side of the case has had anything like a hearing. As a result the Barcelona fighting has been represented as an insurrection by disloyal Anarchists and Trotskyists who were 'stabbing the Spanish Government in the back,' and so forth. The issue was not quite so simple as that. Undoubtedly when you are at war with a deadly enemy it is better not to begin fighting among yourselves; but it is worth remembering that it takes two to make a quarrel and that people do not begin building barricades unless they have received something that they regard as a provocation.

Related Characters: George Orwell (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 229

Explanation and Analysis

Orwell defends his own vision of the Barcelona street fighting. He makes a simple argument about the inherently two-sided nature of conflict, and insists that, under the circumstances in which the Anarchists and the Communists found themselves, it is impossible to consider only one side guilty. The side sparking the violence (the Communists) should be considered just as responsible as the side responding to the initial provocation (the Anarchists). The main reason the Anarchists were blamed for the violence lies not in any fault on their part, but in their weaker presence within the largely pro-Communist foreign press—in other words, in their inability to defend their point of view publicly.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

George Orwell arrives in Barcelona in December 1936 to fight in the Spanish Civil War. At the barracks where he is going to join a leftwing militia known as The Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (or the POUM), he meets a militiaman standing at the officers' table and is immediately impressed by him. He admires the man's build but, more powerfully, the impression he gives, which is a strange combination of violence and kindness. As Orwell watches the man examine a map, he realizes that he must be illiterate. Suddenly, the man looks up at Orwell. Both of them say only a few words, but they discover that they are both foreigners: while Orwell is English, this fighter is Italian. Without being able to explain why, Orwell is deeply moved by this exchange. He feels a sense of tenderness for this complete stranger. After a few minutes, the man leaves the room and Orwell is left with a warm feeling of comfort and intimacy.

The story opens with an anecdote that draws the reader into the action from the very beginning. In describing the mysterious nature of his conversation with this stranger, Orwell touches on their shared status as foreigners, his immediate fondness for the man, and his curiosity about where the man might be from—all of which conveys the sense of awe that Orwell was feeling at being thrown in an entirely new world. Like Orwell, the reader is meant to be intrigued and eager to discover what the greater context for this interaction might be. Orwell's focus on a conversation that only lasted a few seconds also introduces the idea that, in the war, people come and go unpredictably, but lasting impressions can be made in a matter of seconds.

Reflecting on this anecdote, Orwell mentions that he is writing this book more than seven months after the events have taken place. He mentions this Italian militiaman, he explains, because the man's appearance, unkempt but fierce, encapsulates what he perceives as the general atmosphere of that time. It reminds him of many particular sights and sensations he experienced in his early days in Spain: the **red flags** in the city, the troops of young soldiers taking the train to the front, and the rough living conditions in the trenches.

Orwell provides a brief contextualization of himself as a writer, informing the reader that the story that he is about to tell is based on memory and personal experience. It is not an objective historical essay but, rather, an impressionistic account of his involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell's emphasis on sensations, including the city's sights and sounds, highlights the fact that the story of this war, for him, is made up of vivid emotions and memories. The red flags evoke the political vibrancy that the Spanish revolution generated.

As he considers this period of his life, Orwell describes the context of his involvement in the war. While he initially believed he would serve as a journalist in Spain, he soon decided to join the militia because, in the context of the war, it seemed to be "the only conceivable thing to do."

Orwell attaches moral significance to the war, arguing that his decision to become involved needs no explanation. In doing so, he implies that fighting in the war was an urgent moral obligation that any reasonable human being would be able to understand.

Upon his arrival in Barcelona, Orwell is overwhelmed by the revolutionary ebullience he witnesses there. It seems as though the entire city is under working class control. Buildings have been seized by workers and covered in **red or red-and-black flags**, churches have been demolished, shops collectivized, and everyone seems to treat each other as equals. People address each other in informal terms and, apart from a few women and foreigners, everyone is dressed in working-class clothing.

Orwell is surprised by the profound societal transformation that he witnesses in Barcelona, which changes his understanding of what the war is about. This surprise hints at the fact that what he had read in England about the war did not convey the true nature of the political dynamics unfolding on the ground.

This state of affairs makes a deep impression on Orwell. He believes that perfect social equality has been achieved in the city and, as a result, is convinced that his decision to fight in the war is a decision in support of a noble cause. In retrospect, however, he realizes that he was naïve to believe in these appearances. Not all members of the Barcelona bourgeoisie had disappeared or joined the workers' side. Rather, many members of the upper class were merely disguising themselves in order to avoid acts of violence and retribution against the wealthy.

The social revolution in Barcelona is so unlike anything Orwell has ever witnessed that it makes a deep impression on him. It convinces him that it is possible for society to become a fairer, more equal place. Later, it becomes apparent that Orwell's first impressions were influenced by his romantic view of the war as a moral struggle, meant to produce a better, more just society.

In addition, despite an exciting atmosphere of revolutionary zeal, Orwell sees Barcelona as a city suffering from "the evil atmosphere of war." The town looks in poor condition and is experiencing shortages of many essential foods and goods, such as meat, milk, and coal. Nevertheless, to Orwell, the people seem satisfied with their lives. There is very little unemployment, the cost of living is low, and, in general, people are uplifted by their revolutionary ideals. They are filled with hope that the future will bring perfect equality and freedom.

Part of Orwell's enthusiasm about the revolution can be understood in relation to the fact that, when he arrived in Barcelona, the revolution was in its early stages and people were still full of hope for radical social change. As the war wears on, the "revolutionary ideals" Orwell writes about will be thwarted by political infighting and resistance to radical social change on the part of those who benefit most from economic inequality (i.e., the rich).

Meanwhile, during these early days in the city, Orwell trains for military service at the Lenin Barracks. While he was initially told that he would be sent to the front the day after he arrived, he soon discovers that he will have to wait about a week for a new section of soldiers to be ready before they can all be sent off to battle together. Life in the Barracks is chaotic, as the militiamen have turned the once elegant place into a disorganized, dirty space, full of broken furniture and rotting food—a degraded state of affairs that Orwell considers one of the typical side effects of revolution.

During his time in the barracks, Orwell uncovers serious problems with the organization of the militia. He is shocked by a generalized lack of punctuality and by the militia's lack of respect for its physical surroundings, attitudes which strike him as undignified and therefore unsuited to the noble cause for which they are fighting. The revolution, despite people's idealistic view of it, is often more unsightly and disorderly than everyday life.

Such disorganization extends to war necessities. As is typical of Spain, Orwell notes, everything is achieved by fits and starts. Uniforms, which are only distributed gradually, barely fit a general model, as each piece of clothing is made of a different color or material. As a result, when Orwell sees the men from his militia column in uniform, he mockingly describes the sight as "an extraordinary-looking rabble."

In its practical aspects, the war in Spain often appears ridiculous. Orwell cannot take the militia seriously, for there is nothing soldierly or organized about his fellow group of men. Rather, the entire situation at the barracks seems like a farce, a game in which men are merely playing at making war.

On Orwell's second day, the recruits are provided with military "instruction." With shock, Orwell discovers that most of his fellow soldiers are teenagers who hold passionate political views but have absolutely no real knowledge of war. In addition, as the POUM follows principles of social equality between members of all ranks, soldiers are allowed to speak out against any order they disagree with. Orwell is dismayed at this visible lack of discipline and, in general, by the militia's blatant inexperience and disorganization. His disappointment extends to their military training. While he had been excited to learn how to use a machine-gun, he discovers, with great disappointment, that the recruits are given no weapons but, rather, are taught a useless marching drill. Later, Orwell realizes that the main reason for this was a severe shortage of rifles, which meant that no weapons were available for practice.

Lack of military experience is evident not only in the militia's appearance, but also in the knowledge and capabilities of the men in the militia. However, beyond mere unpreparedness, Orwell realizes that there are political reasons for the militia's inefficiency. The militia's adherence to non-traditional principles of governance (such as social equality) creates a general impression of lack of discipline. Furthermore, militias such as the POUM do not have the same resources as a national army, so they are forced to make do with the few weapons they have. Thus, Orwell shows that successfully carrying out this revolutionary movement will be an uphill battle due to the lack of any concentration of political power in this time of upheaval.

After barely a few days, the militiamen—though still completely unprepared by Orwell's standards—are paraded throughout the city. At the end of this exercise, the men all run to buy wine at a local grocer's shop and Orwell is pleased to note that, in part because of his status as an Englishman, everyone is very friendly to him. However, he still feels dissatisfied with the military training they received and, in particular, with his lack of knowledge about machine guns. He pesters his lieutenant about this and is told that he will receive machine-gun instruction "*mañana*" ("tomorrow"). With no surprise to Orwell, that day never comes.

The soldiers' parade through the city brings to light a stark contrast between the supposedly solemn, ceremonial nature of war and the carefree attitude of militiamen who only want to enjoy the ordinary pleasures of life, such as drinking wine. Orwell's insistence on receiving formal machine-gun training demonstrates that he is not yet used to such an attitude of nonchalance regarding war, and that he wishes the militia took the practical aspects of war more seriously.

During this period, Orwell struggles with the Spanish language. There is only one other Englishman in the Barracks, and Orwell has to carry a small dictionary with him when he wants to communicate with locals. Nevertheless, Orwell is surprised by the friendliness of his Spanish companions, and says that he would sooner be a foreigner in Spain than in other countries because of how easy it is to make friends. His companions prove to be generous, humble men who do not hesitate to offer Orwell their entire packs of cigarettes or to admit that other troops might be braver than them. Orwell believes that these behaviors are proofs of the material and spiritual generosity of the Catalan working class.

Orwell's introduction to military life doubles as an immersion in a foreign culture. However limited his interactions with his fellow militiamen might be, he draws on these experiences to make broad generalizations about Spanish people. He does not seem aware that particular circumstances, such as the unique context of the war and his status as a foreigner, might color the behavior of the men around him. Rather, he assumes that the way his companions behave must be indicative of behavioral norms that extend throughout Spain's culture.

Orwell remains fully aware of the deficiencies of the militia system and of the Spanish culture. He reflects on his experience at the front line, where he was exasperated, to the point of fury, by the Spaniards' inefficiency. His companions constantly postponed pressing matters to the next day, invoking the word "*mañana*," and were terribly unpunctual, even in battle. "The Spaniards are good at many things," Orwell concludes, "but not at making war."

Perhaps in an effort to appear more objective, Orwell suggests that his excitement at discovering this new culture does not keep him from being honest about the problems he witnesses in the militia. However, once again, he generalizes about Spanish behavior and believes that the problems he identifies in the militia are typical of the entire nation.

Suddenly, in the Barracks, at two hours' notice, Orwell's company is ordered to the front. Orwell has to be shown how to put on his cartridge-box by the Spanish wife of a fellow Englishman named Williams. Meanwhile, preparations are so disorganized that some men leave for the front without their equipment. Nevertheless, the men's departure is filled with excitement. Following a political speech in Catalan and a march throughout the town filled with shouting, the playing of revolutionary tunes, and the waving of **red and red-and-black flags**, the men are finally packed tight into a train, which slowly crawls out of the city.

The mix of excitement and disorganization that Orwell witnesses is typical of his experience in the militia. It brings to light a problematic gap between political passion and military effectiveness. Orwell's passing mention of the speech in Catalan highlights his inability to understand the local language and culture and, in general, his lack of involvement in local politics. Political divisions, to him, are limited to superficial demonstrations such as the waving of flags. Over the course of the narrative, however, Orwell will come to realize that political dynamics within the Republican camp are just as important—if not more—as the military fight against the Fascists.

CHAPTER 2

Orwell's company is sent to Siétamo, then to Alcubierre, two cities in the Aragón province, to the west of Cataluña. In a town on the way, Orwell sees a poster from the previous year announcing a bullfight in the local arena. He notices how faded the poster's colors look and he jokes about the fact that bullfights, nowadays, no longer take place in this region because the best matadors happen to be Fascists.

When Orwell sees the poster of the bullfight, he realizes that the war has interrupted what is typically thought of as traditional Spanish culture. In the current context of the war, the country is indelibly divided into two irreconcilable halves (the Fascists and the anti-Fascists), even when it comes to a seemingly trivial activity such as bullfighting.

Between Siétamo and Alcubierre, the lorry driver gets lost and the men are forced to walk hours in the mist. Upon finally reaching Alcubierre in the middle of the night, Orwell experiences what he calls "the characteristic smell of war [...] a smell of excrement and decaying food." In general, he is struck by the misery of the villages in the Aragón region. The earth is dry and bleak, houses are small constructions made of mud and stone, and dirt roads often become muddy and difficult to travel. In the absence of a functioning lavatory, soldiers turn the church and the surrounding fields into a latrine.

Orwell's experience of leaving for the front does not conform to a glorious vision of war. Instead of reflecting on the political ideals that animate the militia, Orwell focuses on the unpleasant nature of everyday life that constitutes his true experience of the war. The soldiers' wrecking of the church stems from the Spanish revolutionary forces' anti-Catholic, anticlerical stance.

After two days of waiting, the men still have not been issued rifles. In the glum, quiet town, the only excitement is the arrival of Fascist deserters, who, Orwell discovers, are hardly distinguishable from the soldiers in his own company. The only reason they must have joined the Fascist cause, Orwell reflects, must be because they were conscripted and have family in Fascist territory. Even when they decide to desert, they still believe in legends about the cruelty of the other side. After a long walk in no-man's-land, the deserters arrive both terribly hungry and terrified of being shot by Orwell's leftist militia, which rumor has portrayed as unforgiving and cruel. In order to assuage the deserters' fears, Orwell's company shows the men affection and kindness.

When Orwell sees Fascist deserters, he realizes that the division of Spain into two camps is, in many ways, arbitrary. He understands that there is nothing inherently "Fascist" about the Fascist fighters. Rather, the men's allegiance to one side is often determined by local circumstances, seemingly trivial factors such as one's native city or family background. At the same time, the deserters' fear of Orwell's company highlights the intense polarization that is affecting the country. Political rivalry has reached such heights that the Fascists view the Republicans as an almost demonic force.

When the rifles finally arrive on the third day, Orwell feels disheartened once again as he discovers that his weapon is over forty years old and almost unusable. Weapons, he realizes, are distributed randomly, with no attention given to merit or rank. As a result, the best rifle is absurdly given to a fifteen-year-old boy who does not know how to use it. However, despite the men's inexperience, after only five minutes of instruction they are all sent to the Saragossa front line.

Once again, Orwell notices that the militia's principles of social equality tend to generate chaos. Orwell criticizes the random distribution of weapons as counter-productive to efficacious military organization, as the most capable men, such as him, are not given the tools to serve the militia as best they can. In this way, he shows that lofty ideals often don't square neatly with reality, especially in times of war.

Georges Kopp, a Belgian commander, leads Orwell and his company through bleak, infertile fields. During the trip, Orwell is privately seized by fear. Influenced by stories he has heard about the First World War, he realizes he is terrified of trench warfare and already dreads the cold. He is equally horrified at the thought of his fellow soldiers, which he considers a mob of pathetic, undisciplined children, a far cry from what real soldiers should be.

Orwell's sudden fear serves as a brutal reality check. Despite his enthusiasm for the militia's political cause, he is not truly prepared for the material difficulties of war. He is also skeptical that the principles of social equality that the militia abides by can actually produce decent soldiers and doubts that his companions are capable of fighting effectively in the war. In practice, Orwell thus implicitly adopts the anti-revolutionary, pro-Communist point of view, according to which revolutionary ideals hamper military efficiency.

After walking about three miles, the men arrive at a fortified post on a hill-top, known as a "position." There, while stray bullets fly overhead, they are greeted by a Polish commander known as Benjamin. Orwell, Williams, and Williams's brother-in-law immediately occupy a dug-out where they leave their belongings. A loud bang rings out, and suddenly one of the children in the company arrives with blood all over his face. As it turns out, the boy has wounded himself after involuntarily blowing out the bolt of his own rifle. It is the company's first casualty and, as Orwell notes ironically, "characteristically, self-inflicted."

Orwell's fears about the militia's incompetence are soon confirmed when the company's first casualty is self-inflicted, the consequence of a blunder. Orwell begins to grasp that his fellow soldiers' ineptitude might prove more dangerous to them than the enemy itself. In this way, Orwell's experience of war proves yet again to be drastically at odds with the glamorized vision of war he held when he arrived in Spain.

Benjamin then shows the men around the position. Before the trench lie a ravine and some hills. Surprised at not being able to spot the Fascist position, Orwell asks where the enemy is. Benjamin points to a spot in the distance, and Orwell suddenly discovers, with great surprise, that the enemy are only visible as a tiny spot in the distance, where ant-like figures are moving around. Bewildered at realizing that the Fascists are so far way, Orwell realizes that, in these circumstances, the rifles they have been given are completely useless.

Orwell is shocked by the futility of the situation in which he finds himself at the front. His surprise at discovering how far the enemy truly is highlights his increasing disappointment at the unfolding reality of this war for which he had such elevated hopes. It also emphasizes Orwell's sense of military superiority over his fellow militiamen.

The other men seem completely unaware of the fact that their distance to the enemy makes shooting rifles ineffective. Excited at finally being at the front, they begin to fire at anything and everything, convinced that they will be able to hit the enemy on the other hill. Against his will, Orwell is finally convinced by his companions to fire a single shot in the direction of the enemy. As Orwell sees it disappear in the distance, he realizes that this is the first time in his life that he has shot at a fellow human being.

Orwell's serious approach to war contrasts with what he perceives as his companions' childishness. When he sees their excitement at firing their weapons, despite the fact that the enemy is out of reach, his attitude is dismissive and critical. By contrast, when he fires his first shot himself, he is struck by the gravity of this action and realizes that he is capable of causing a man's death. Again, the reality of war is a rude and startling awakening for Orwell.

In these dispiriting circumstances, Orwell becomes profoundly disgusted by the war. He judges that, from such a great distance, the enemy will never be able to hit him and, therefore, he makes no attempt to hide inside the trench while he walks around. His judgment is soon proven wrong, as on one occasion a bullet suddenly cracks past his ear, causing him to duck. He concludes that, however much he might think of himself as a brave and unflinching soldier, he has, in fact, very little control over his body's instinct to protect itself.

Despite Orwell's air of authority, his assertions are not always correct. When he is almost hit by a bullet, he becomes aware that the situation in the trench is, in fact, more dangerous than he had judged. He also realizes that, like any normal human being, he, too, can be seized by fear and panic. The episode forces him to adopt a critical approach toward his own feelings of superiority.

CHAPTER 3

Immersed in life at the front, Orwell discovers that material concerns prove to be a more present worry than the enemy. In the trenches, what matters most is food, lighting, and, in particular, warmth. Orwell notes that, in general, throughout his time in Spain, he experienced very little actual fighting. He never lived through the bombings and attacks that are generally thought of as the horrors of war. Rather, in his experience of the trenches, opportunities to engage in combat and actually wound the enemy were extremely scarce.

The actual experience of the front in Spain does not conform to Orwell's expectations of the war. Instead of fighting valiantly on the battlefield, Orwell's energies are focused on surviving a scarcity of resources—a much less heroic hardship to endure. In this context, the Fascist enemy remains largely an abstract concept, something he is still fighting against but rarely gets to see with his own eyes.

During his day-to-day activities on the hill, Orwell reflects on the futility of this kind of war, while at the same time admiring the beauty of the landscape. He describes the long mountain chain of the sierra, the valley, the surrounding hills, and the Pyrenees seen in the distance. The landscape is quiet, bare, and strangely devoid of birds. To Orwell, it looks dead and empty.

Orwell's description of the landscape serves as a reminder that, even in the midst of war, he remains an attentive, poetic observer. It underlines the fact that much of Orwell's account of the war is impressionistic and sensorial, not just historical and political. Here, the bleak nature of the landscape mirrors the stagnation that Orwell experiences in this period of the war.

At night, patrols are sent to the valley between Orwell's position and the Fascist trench. Despite the cold and the chance of getting lost, Orwell often takes advantage of this opportunity to walk, which he considers a welcome break from trench life. After various attempts, he manages, on one occasion, to come close to the Fascist line. Suddenly, he hears the sound of steps approaching him and, in his panic at being discovered, hides behind a bush. Luckily, the enemy passes by without noticing him.

Faced with the boredom of trench life, Orwell seeks opportunities for personal diversion. His lighthearted attitude toward night patrolling takes a dangerous turn when he suddenly finds himself in a situation where he believes he might be caught by the enemy. The contrast between the pleasantness of the walk and Orwell's sudden, instinctual panic underscores the unpredictability of war—and the possibility for men to die or be caught in the most unexpected situations.

Orwell is given the title of corporal and put in charge of twelve men. He describes the difficulty of training the soldiers, most of whom are teenagers whose lack of discipline and experience represents a serious danger to their own companions. At the front, because of their need to sleep, young boys prove incapable of guarding a position at night. Orwell judges that, were the enemy to make any attempt to attack, they would have no difficulty in taking control of their vulnerable position.

The situation at the front is at once desperate and ridiculous, for Orwell judges that both the enemy and his own company are completely ineffective at warfare. His own soldiers are unable to guard the position but, at the same time, the enemy makes no effort to attack, resulting in utter stagnation. Orwell portrays the war as an absurd series of preparations for an attack that never ends up taking place.

Inefficiency, Orwell thinks, is inherent to the Spanish militias. As groups organized based on the founding principle of social equality, the militias aim to function as a model classless society, where all soldiers are treated just the same, regardless of rank and experience. Democracy is valued over hierarchy and, therefore, when it comes to obeying orders, men are free to disagree with their superiors. At the beginning, Orwell is skeptical of such a system. He believes that the militias are inefficient groups incapable of maintaining discipline and of winning the war. However, over time, his personal experience changes his views. The discipline that can be found in the militias, he argues, runs deeper than in ordinary armies, for soldiers' commitment is rooted in personal conviction, not in fear, and they are therefore less likely to desert. In addition, Orwell argues, history would later show that the militias were in fact capable of defending the front on their own for many months, without any help from better-organized troops.

Orwell's understanding of the militia's effectiveness evolves over time. In the end, he defends the militia's democratic organization on both a theoretical and a practical level. While he initially judges the militia's adherence to the principle of social equality to be impractical, he later becomes convinced that this principle is not only revolutionary but also militarily effective in the long run. Orwell wishes to show that the militias were not merely guided by idealistic views of human relationships but, rather, that their ideology had concrete advantages over a more traditional military system. The length and detail of his argumentation on this subject can be understood in light of his later criticism of the media for misrepresenting the militias as incapable troops.

Meanwhile, life goes on in the trenches, where the soldiers are obsessed with everyday survival. Firewood is so scarce that soldiers spend all their spare time running around looking for fuel. They are so used to the task that they become experts at classifying plants according to their burning properties. On their expeditions, even though they are occasionally shot at by Fascist machine-guns, their desperate search for firewood always proves more important than the threat of sudden death.

Orwell's focus on the soldiers' everyday search for fuel dramatizes the fact that trench life at the front is not based on fighting the enemy, but on ordinary survival. Instead of honing their fighting skills, soldiers engaged in the seemingly trivial task of categorizing plants. The image of a soldier dodging machine-gunfire as he searches for firewood is at odds with more heroic conceptions of warfare.

Other discomforts are less important than the cold. Dirt becomes a normal part of life, and soldiers are treated well when it comes to the food, wine, cigarettes and candles they are rationed. In the trenches, even seemingly trivial objects such as candles are potentially life-saving. During night-alarms, for example, when soldiers are crawling around in the dark, a candle can save a man from being trampled to death.

Orwell becomes used to the ordinary life in the trench, far from the comforts of urban civilization. In the process, he learns new tricks about war-making. For example, he discovers that everyday objects such as candles are as capable of determining a soldier's fate as the most sophisticated weapons.

This war of stagnation, which Georges Kopp calls "a comic opera with an occasional death," has causes that Orwell is unaware of at the time. The nature of the terrain made any attack extremely difficult. Perched on individual hilltops, the positions are well protected, such that only artillery—which neither side possessed—would have allowed for actual fighting to take place. Additionally, war materials of all kinds were in short supply. Rifles were mostly useless, ammunition was sorely lacking, and there were very few revolvers, pistols, or bombs. Finally, there was also a shortage of other necessities, such as maps, telescopes, and even gun oil. All of these circumstances made direct battle difficult and unlikely.

The boredom that Orwell experiences on a personal level has political causes that he could not have foreseen. Thus, what Orwell originally interpreted as incompetence and lack of preparedness is shown to be part of a larger political context of which Orwell, as a foreigner, was unaware. The precariousness of the militias' resources, which makes the war seem amateurish, highlights the gap between Orwell's expectations of engaging in a difficult conflict for a noble cause and the daily monotony of life at the front.

As a result of shortages at the front, most of the casualties continue to be self-inflicted, the consequence of the bad quality of weapons, the soldiers' general lack of experience, and the Spaniards' tendency to treat firearms as a harmless toy. Life-threatening errors are ordinary occurrences. On one occasion, Orwell's entire company shoots at him from the hilltop after mistaking him for the enemy. Another time, when Orwell is photographing soldiers with their machine-guns, one of them jokingly fires his gun, almost wounding him in the face.

Comical anecdotes of militiamen's blunders reinforce the impression that this war is cannot be taken wholly seriously. The soldiers' gaffes are humorous but, at the same time, fraught with the danger of taking away someone's life. In keeping with Orwell's tendency to make generalizations about others, he considers his companions' disregard for the seriousness of their actions to be typical of Spanish aloofness and negligence.

CHAPTER 4

After three weeks, a contingent of Englishmen arrives at the front. The volunteers are sent, like Orwell was, by the Independent Labour Party (or the ILP). Orwell and his fellow countryman Williams are told to join the men at their position at Monte Trazo, close to Saragossa, a key town currently occupied by the Fascists. Orwell is impressed by the physical and mental excellence of the British soldiers, and particularly that of a young man named Bob Smillie. He also applauds the Spanish for being so friendly to the English despite the language barrier.

On the one hand, Orwell's admiration for the British soldiers stands in stark contrast to his criticism of his clumsy, undisciplined Spanish companions. On the other hand, Orwell applauds the Spanish for their exceptional friendliness, which he has already identified as a typically Spanish. This friendliness has practical side effects. Indeed, while the Spanish might lack experience, they are capable of forging ties across groups and, therefore, of strengthening military cooperation. Orwell's mention of Bob Smillie as a uniquely talented soldier sets up the injustice of Smillie's later death in prison.

Despite being much closer to Saragossa and to the enemy, Orwell still suffers from the same boredom at the front, where nothing ever seems to happen. At the same time, the Fascists do not hesitate to fire their machine-guns at anyone who makes himself visible above the trench. Orwell concludes that daylight patrols are the most exciting activity available. By crawling on their stomachs, the soldiers go observe the Fascist lines. Sometimes, they even take aim with their rifles at Fascist targets, with very little hope—because of the distance and the bad quality of the rifles—of actually hitting an enemy soldier.

Once again, the war is presented as a trite game, in which Orwell's greatest struggle is to resist boredom and to find some measure of entertainment. Orwell's company's attempts to shoot at the enemy, despite the obviousness of their inadequate resources, suggests a similar, bored despair. The soldiers' eagerness to engage in real fighting underlines their deep trust in the nobility of the cause they are defending.

Orwell comments on the weather. Even though he bemoans the constant cold and admits to a personal hatred of mountains, Orwell is taken aback by the beauty of certain sunrises against the mountain backdrop. Because of guard duty, Orwell sees the sunrise during this period more than at any other time in his life. He admits that the scene never fails to take his breath away, despite experiencing a soldier's typical ailments: cold, physical exhaustion, and hunger.

Orwell's mention of the landscape and the weather highlights the utter boredom that he is experiencing at the front. It also reminds the reader that his function is, above all, that of an attentive writer, capable of engaging with his surroundings and appreciating the wonders of nature. This description highlights the intensely personal nature of what Orwell lives through in Spain and the fact that his memories of this time, beyond mere politics, are made of sensorial impressions.

Because the contingent is so small, Orwell and his companions are forced to endure longer guard duties. As a consequence, Orwell begins to suffer from lack of sleep and its side effect, a constant feeling of hunger. He begins to crave any kind of food, even the haricot beans that the soldiers are served over and over again in the trenches.

However little he might suffer from war wounds, Orwell does endure physical ailments. The fact that he craves the monotonous haricot beans suggests that, at least physically, he is becoming used to the tedious boredom of the front.

In the meantime, real fighting seems as distant as ever. As a result, instead of combatting the Fascists with their guns, the militias develop a new strategy to exhaust the enemy by using the megaphone. While both the Fascists and the Republicans are used to shouting insults whenever they are within earshot of each other, the Republicans turn the megaphone into a weapon. By repeatedly shouting leftist slogans over and over, day in and day out, they attempt to undermine the enemy's morale. Their goal is to convince the Fascist conscripts that they are fighting on the wrong side of the war and that they should, instead, trust in leftwing ideology and join the Republican troops.

The absurdity of the situation at the front reaches its climax in this episode, where real fighting, deemed completely out of reach, is replaced by the seemingly ridiculous act of shouting. In reality, this shouting serves a military as much as a political goal. Indeed, politically, the militiamen should not be seen as a group merely combatting the Fascist enemy. Rather, they are fighting in the name of revolutionary ideals, which they believe should be embraced by all members of the oppressed working class, including the Fascist conscripts themselves.

However absurd the megaphone technique initially appears to Orwell, it seems to have concrete effects, capable of influencing Fascist soldiers to desert. Orwell notes that soldiers in the Fascist camp are often poor, working-class men who have been conscripted against their will. As a result, they are likely to be deeply moved by the Republicans' ideology, centered around the need to unite and protect the rights of the working class. Such Fascist fighters are thus likely to be convinced that they are, indeed, fighting against their own interests.

The increased levels of desertion from the Fascist line, which Orwell considers at least in part a product of the megaphone technique, suggests that the leftwing Republican ideology is not only militarily useful, but also politically valid. Indeed, it appears to be capable of uniting all members of the working class, regardless of their background. This episode serves as a reminder that, however boring life at the front might be, Orwell is fighting in the name of elevated ideals.

Orwell is shocked at the use of such an unconventional war technique as the megaphone, but he gradually learns to respect it and consider it a legitimate war method. At first, he believed it was yet another proof that the Spaniards did not take the war seriously. Over time, though, he realized that in trench warfare, where stagnation makes it impossible to attack the enemy, converting Fascist fighters might be more useful than killing them. Deserters, he notes, unlike dead bodies, are at least capable of sharing information about the enemy.

This episode allows Orwell to reflect critically on his own biases. While he had initially seen the megaphone technique as yet another example of the Spaniards' improper attitude toward the war, this technique in fact proves both logical and militarily effective. Orwell is forced to reconsider his initial distrust and to applaud his Spanish militiamen's capacity to invent unconventional strategies in difficult circumstances.

Sometimes, to convince the Fascists to desert, soldiers on shouting-duty exaggerate the truth about how much better life is as a Republican soldier. They lie about having wonderful food, such as buttered toast. In the context of deprivation to which soldiers on both sides are reduced, such images are intensely evocative, capable of appealing to any hungry soldier. Orwell admits that it even made his own mouth water, despite the fact that he knew perfectly well his fellow companions' descriptions of food were outright lies.

However effective the megaphone technique might be from a military perspective, however, it is not necessarily ethically sound. There is a moral gap between the supposedly admirable political ideals the militiamen are defending and their choice to resort to lies in order to convert their listeners. This suggests that truthfulness and political expediency are perhaps sometimes at odds. Orwell notices that lies have a power of their own, for they are capable of appealing to even the most critical, well-informed spectators, such as himself. Even though, here, Orwell does not directly criticize his own camp, this episode foreshadows his later vehement criticism of the use of lies and deceit for political purposes.

One day, in February, a Fascist plane drops copies of a Fascist newspaper announcing the fall of Málaga, a town that was previously under Republican control. The same night, the Fascists initiate a poorly planned attack against Orwell's position. They fire their machine-guns and throw bombs, but they do so, in Orwell's view, in an extremely ineffective manner. As a result, their shells fall far away from Orwell's position and, as is so common with these low-quality weapons, often fail to explode.

Real fighting seems to have begun at last, although Spanish inefficacy still succeeds in turning a potentially tragic episode into a ridiculous event. Orwell's passing mention of the fall of Málaga reminds the reader of the larger scale of the conflict and, specifically, the fact that Orwell's experience is narrow and limited, incapable of providing a complete picture of all the events happening in this war.

Despite the enemy's incompetence, Orwell still finds himself in a dangerous situation. Indeed, the machine-gun in Orwell's company is out of use, which impedes his company from retaliating. Instead, the men are forced to stand in the trenches and be shot at. Out of pride, Orwell's Spanish companions deliberately expose themselves, refusing to take cover. When Orwell decides to imitate them, he is ashamed to realize that he is, in fact, terrified of being so exposed and defenseless. His fear transforms into a staunch conviction that a bullet is going to hit his body at any moment.

Paradoxically, even a poorly executed attack can prove deadly because of the lack of adequate defense resources. In the face of danger, forced to accept their helplessness, Orwell's Spanish companions resort to a basic sense of honor. While Orwell is often critical of his Spanish companions' lack of experience, this time he is forced to admit that their refusal to cower and give in to the enemy's threat is admirable. Orwell realizes that he is not necessarily capable of executing such a feat with the same courage.

After a couple of hours, the fighting suddenly ceases and Orwell's company discovers that it has sustained one casualty. The men soon discover that the enemy had no real intention of attacking them but, rather, had simply been celebrating the fall of Málaga. Orwell is surprised to discover that, when the story appears a few days later in the newspapers, the event is completely distorted, with his company's actions described as a heroic defense against a perilous Fascist offensive equipped with cavalry and tanks. After seeing such gross exaggeration, Orwell learns to read the media, including Republican news, with a more critical eye.

What Orwell experienced as a, terrifying attack was in fact nothing more than an episode of merrymaking. The contrast between Orwell's experience of the event and the enemy's intentions is striking. It highlights the utter unpredictability of this war, where jokes are as dangerous as murderous intentions. While in this case the media's exaggeration is relatively harmless, Orwell's disillusionment with the press foreshadows his later realization that his own camp is not as morally unimpeachable as he had initially imagined.

The fall of Málaga, which Orwell had initially believed to be a lie, is later confirmed in the news. The Republicans, it turns out, had evacuated Málaga before the Fascist troops arrived and, as a consequence, the fury and cruelty of the Fascists fell on the innocent civilian population. The men in Orwell's militia are dispirited by this detail, because they believe that the evacuation and subsequent fall of Málaga was an act of treachery. This is the first time that Orwell hears of such hypotheses and he is dismayed to realize that his own camp might be capable of treason. Affected by his companions' suspicions, he begins to doubt his vision of the war as a simple fight between good (Republican) and bad (Fascist) forces.

The fall of Málaga brings to light the possibility of mutiny and political rivalry within Orwell's own camp. The cruelty inflicted on the civilian population also suggests that Orwell's experience at the front does not represent all the horrors that are being inflicted on innocent people in other parts of the country. The passage highlights the fact that Orwell is, in many ways, witnessing only a narrow aspect of the war. In other parts of the country, the war might very well have political and military consequences of which he is unaware. Orwell begins to grasp that his previous understanding of the conflict might have been naïve and simplistic.

In mid-February, Orwell's ILP contingent and the POUM troops in the sector are sent to join the army that is going to lead an attack against Huesca, a town occupied by Fascist forces. A few months earlier, a Republican general, optimistic about his troops' capacity to occupy the town, had announced: "Tomorrow we'll have coffee in Huesca!" As the various Republican attacks against Huesca failed to lead to the town's fall, Republican troops made fun of the general's optimism and turned his words into a widespread joke. Orwell quips that, if he ever returns to Spain after the war, he will make a point to go have coffee in Huesca.

The general's optimism underscores the gap between military planning and the reality of fighting on the ground with troops that lack both effective training and adequate resources. The soldiers' parodying of his words shows their capacity to use humor in order to alleviate difficult situations and to maintain a healthy morale. Orwell's mention of postwar Spain reminds readers that he is, after all, a privileged foreigner who is only temporarily involved in this conflict.

CHAPTER 5

For over a month, until late March, absolutely nothing happens and the only danger at the front comes from stray bullets. Shell-fire is ineffective and, as such, serves as a small diversion for the men, who watch their shells fall far from their parapet. Orwell becomes attuned to the sound of shells and learns to recognize instinctively how close each will fall. The shells are of terrible quality and often fail to explode.

As usual, the militiamen learn to entertain themselves with whatever they can, however dangerous or deadly the activity might be. Orwell develops skills that have little use outside of the front. This highlights how separate a soldier's experience at the front is from everyday life. The militiamen are entirely isolated from the civilian population's concerns.

At night, small patrols are sent into no-man's-land to listen to the Fascist lines and try to deduce from the sounds of their activity what they are planning in Huesca. The men are told to pay particularly close attention to the sound of church bells, since the Fascists are said to be in the habit of attending mass before going into battle. Orwell reflects on the eerie feeling of having to cross no-man's-land for field duty and walk through fields which should have been harvested but whose crops, due to the outbreak of war, have remained untouched. The peasants, he imagines, must resent both sides of the conflict equally for creating such a useless, devastating war. The militiamen often crawl into the nearby potato field to gather potatoes, a dangerous job in which the men have to hide from enemy fire.

The militiamen's attentiveness to church bells underscores the ideological division between the Catholic Fascists and the revolutionary militiamen, who are violently opposed to the Catholic Church. Orwell suggests that such ideological differences might have little meaning for the peasants, who carry on their daily work as usual, indifferent to the politics of the war. At the same time, the very factions harming the peasants' harvest are in fact fighting over the peasants' future—specifically, over the economic organization of the country, including the status of the lower class and the distribution of land.

Meanwhile, the soldiers are restless and constantly wonder when actual fighting is going to start. Despite the dangers of war, they are desperate to engage in battle rather than suffer the boredom of trench warfare. Reflecting on this period, Orwell believes that rumors in the press about upcoming battles are probably lies that were deliberately spread in order to boost the troops' morale.

Orwell's fellow soldiers' restlessness indicates their eagerness to translate their political convictions into action. Orwell, who believes this goal to be noble, does not directly condemn the lies disseminated in the press. While he will later vehemently criticize lying for political purposes, he seems tolerant of lying for certain military purposes.

The only action that happens nearby is a Republican attack by a special unit called the Batallón de Choque (Shock Troopers) on the Manicomio, a disused building that the Fascists occupy as a fortress. Although Orwell considers the Shock Troopers one of the best groups in the Republican army, the attack fails because of gross incompetence. The captain of the troops that were supposed to support the Shock Troopers threw a bomb at the Fascists from too far away, thereby inadvertently warning the Fascists of their arrival. The man who threw the bomb was deemed a traitor and was shot dead by his men on the spot. Orwell approves of the execution. As a result, however, the Shock Troopers' surprise attack failed entirely. Orwell harshly criticizes the failure, commenting bitterly on the fact that Republican attacks constantly fail because of human mistakes.

Orwell is once again forced to confront the fact that his own side might be infiltrated by traitors. In this episode, he approves of the immediate execution of a captain whose status as a traitor has not officially been proven. His acceptance of such violent methods contrasts with his later rejection of the POUM's persecution, where militiamen were arrested without evidence. Here, it seems, Orwell considers the captain's action proof enough of his culpability, or perhaps believes his execution justified in the name of military efficiency. It remains ambiguous whether Orwell believes that Republican attacks most often fail because of such treasonous acts or because of mere incompetence.

In the meantime, as the cold has diminished, Orwell and his companions begin to suffer from lice. Orwell describes lice as the universal symbol of war—one that is particularly unpleasant and ignoble. To fight off the lice, the men attempt to burn out the eggs and bathe in the ice-cold river as often as possible.

In the midst of tales of battle, Orwell is forced to combat a much less noble foe than the Fascist enemy: lice. Such ordinary struggles, Orwell concludes, are the hallmarks of war, far from the common notion of war as a glorious fight on the battlefield.

There are shortages of most things, including much-needed uniforms and boots. Orwell's wife occasionally manages to send him tea, chocolate, and cigars from Barcelona, but even in the city things are running short. Toward the end of March, Orwell suffers from an injured hand, which forces him to stay ten days in the hospital. During that period, the hospital staff steals all his belongings, including his camera and photographs. Orwell notes that stealing at the front is extremely common and that hospital staff is notoriously bad in this regard.

Orwell's good fortune in receiving luxury goods from the city highlights his privileged status as an upper-class foreigner. This status, however, does not protect him from the ordinary predicaments of the front as he, like any other soldier, suffers from theft. His mention of personal belongings such as a camera brings to light his intention not only to fight in the war, but to record it on a personal and historical level.

Because of his wound, Orwell spends a few days resting at the hospital and walking around in the countryside. He visits Monflorite, the town where his hospital is, and when he walks into an empty flour-mill, he laments the fact that agricultural machines are left unused because of the war and that the soldiers have removed crucial pieces of wood from the mill to use as firewood. In general, Orwell notes that the buildings that the militias seize are always treated terribly, regardless of their historical or aesthetic value. Most rooms are generally used as latrines.

Orwell laments the effects of war on the ordinary life in the countryside. His observation of the destroyed flour-mill suggests that repairing the damage caused by this war will be a laborious task. The physical damage inflicted on this historical site represents, on a small scale, the damage that is currently being done to the country's culture and history as it is torn apart by a brutal civil war.

When spring finally arrives, peasants begin plowing again. Orwell does not succeed in figuring out what the official agricultural system is. He remains uncertain of whether the fields have been collectivized, but he notes that, whatever the official situation might be, the peasants seem happy to get back to work. He is impressed, in general, by their friendliness. However much the militia's presence might impede the workings of everyday life, he concludes, the peasants must be grateful for the fact that the revolutionary militias helped kick out their former, wealthy landlords.

While the peasants' ordinary activities might initially seem apolitical, Orwell notes that they are, in fact, tied to important political decisions about economic relations between employers and employees. In the countryside, the revolutionary militias played a crucial role in liberating the peasants from an oppressive system in which they were subservient to rich landlords. Orwell's comment that the peasants seem content, however, relies on anecdotal evidence rather than in-depth analysis of the situation, and can be read as a naïve rather than well-informed conclusion.

Occasionally, people seem to forget about the war. When Orwell asks an old lady who is carrying a small olive-oil lamp where he might be able to buy one, she replies, without thinking, that he should go to Huesca. When she realizes that Huesca is currently under Fascist occupation, they both laugh at her moment of forgetfulness.

The war is such an absurd event, at odds with the ordinary rhythms of everyday life, that it sometimes strikes the people who experience it as a surreal occurrence. The old woman's reaction highlights the extraordinary nature of this war. It shows that the war is destroying an entire local way of life, established over the course of many years.

Orwell comments on his shock at discovering the agricultural tools the peasants use, which are terribly out-of-date. Metal is so expensive that even common tools such as rakes and pitchforks are made out of wood. Orwell feels physically ill at the thought of the extreme poverty and the amount of effort that the peasants must have to exert to make such outdated implements work. As a result of these observations, he is moved by a renewed appreciation for industrialism, which he had previously viewed with a more critical eye.

Orwell is forced to reconsider his ideological views about industrialism. He realizes that industrialism—which it seems he considered an oppressive system for the working class—does have the power to lift the lowest classes of society out of extreme poverty. This suggests that modernization is not entirely bad, even if it is driven by capitalism. Orwell's witnessing of individuals' reality is thus capable of modifying his understanding of large-scale economic processes. This demonstrates his willingness to adapt his political opinions to the reality on the ground.

When Orwell wanders into the town's graveyard, he realizes, with shock, that in it he can find no sense of religious respect for the dead. All the plants are overgrown, human bones are to be found lying everywhere, and there are extremely few religious engravings on tombstones. In general, Orwell feels that this entire part of Spain is devoid of religious sentiment in the conventional sense. He concludes that the leftist, anti-Catholic revolution must have truly succeeded in annihilating the influence of the Catholic Church. Spaniards generally tend to see the Catholic Church as a fraudulent authority. Orwell reflects that Anarchism might have served a quasi-religious function for these people, replacing the age-old ideology of Catholicism.

In religion as in economics, Orwell draws general conclusions based on his own limited experiences. From the observation of a single town's graveyard, he establishes an entire theory of the nation's religious sentiment. His conclusions about the disappearance of the Catholic Church has in Spain are based on appearances and on impressions gathered from his limited interactions with the Spaniards he met during the war. As such, readers would do well to remember that they are liable to be at least partly false, incomplete, or lacking nuance.

On the day Orwell returns to the front, his company launches an attack to advance the line. The goal of this attack is to divert the Fascists while the Anarchists are attacking a more crucial target elsewhere. The conditions in which the soldiers find themselves are terrible: for seven hours, they have to lay in a horrible, smelly marsh, in the coldest night that Orwell can remember in Spain. However, the attack is planned and executed perfectly—a feat of organization that, Orwell concedes, the Spanish are occasionally able to pull off. In great silence, in the dead of night, the men build a large distance of parapet farther down the line and are able to surprise the Fascists with their advance in the morning.

This military success contrasts with the inglorious conditions through which he and his companions must suffer to achieve it. This episode serves as yet another reminder of the gap between people's ordinary conception of the glory of war and the messiness of the situation in reality. Orwell's admiration for this well-organized attack still signals that he tends to judge military occurrences in cultural terms, for he attributes the success of this event to yet another typically Spanish trait.

The next morning, the Fascists discover what has happened and begin firing their machine-guns at the newly-built Republican position. The men hurriedly dig trenches while Orwell, who cannot dig because of his wound, spends the day sitting in the wet earth reading a detective novel. The company begins to suffer casualties, although far fewer than they would have if the militiamen had not built the parapet so efficiently during the night. Getting wounded soldiers out of the trenches is a complicated operation, and ambulances that come too close to the trenches are often shelled by the Fascists, a move that Orwell considers justified since ambulances often conceal ammunition. Five Fascist sentries, his company learns from a deserter, are shot for negligence as a result of this attack.

Orwell's reading of a novel seems absurd in the face of such violence. This action can be understood as his attempt to maintain a sense of normality in the midst of the violence that surrounds him. This episode emphasizes the fact that his memories of the war are not historical, based on an objective assessment of military events, but entirely focused on his own sensorial experience. Orwell accepts the morally questionable act of attacking ambulances by taking a realistic approach to the war, accepting that the militiamen did in fact use ambulances for military (rather than medical) purposes. This demonstrates his capacity to criticize his own camp and, more generally, his commitment to honesty and truth.

After spending the following night waiting in a filthy barn, the attack the men were supposed to participate in is canceled at the last moment. During the following days, the militiamen hear the sounds of Anarchist attacks on Huesca. Torre-Fabián, the militia's cookhouse, is shelled by the Fascists but succeeds in producing food for the soldiers nevertheless, an exploit that Orwell admires. Meanwhile, on this side of the front, as always, almost nothing is happening. Orwell learns to distinguish the different sounds of guns and Fascist snipers occasionally manage to hit a few militiamen.

The cancellation of an attack at the last minute, despite hours of waiting, fits into Orwell's depiction of this war as an unpunctual, disorganized affair. Because of the lack of actual fighting at the front, war-time heroism is expressed in other ways, for example through the cooks' dedication to producing food for the soldiers. This suggests that typical visions of glory are not relevant in this war, but that men are still capable of expressing valor and courage in other ways.

CHAPTER 6

One afternoon, Benjamin asks for volunteers to join him in an attack on the Fascist position and Orwell decides to take part in the operation. Kopp explains the plan: the men are to drive the Fascists out of a section of their parapet with bombs and seize it before they can react. The militiamen are to be led by Benjamin and battalion commander Jorge Roca. After enthusiastically waiting for coffee with brandy only to discover that the rumor was false and that there was in fact no coffee, the volunteers are led out into the rain.

Orwell finally takes part in an attack against the enemy. The contrast between the violent actions he and his companions are going to engage in and the men's enthusiastic reaction to the seemingly trivial idea of drinking coffee highlights the strange atmosphere of this war—specifically, the seamless co-existence of everyday actions and sudden death. The false news about coffee seems like a bad omen before battle, and yet another signal of the troops' lack of organization.

The men walk through deep mud, often falling in the process. In the rain, Orwell raises his head to observe the line of men behind him, but Benjamin urgently tells him to keep his head down—an order that, for Orwell, makes little sense, since in the darkness people are barely visible, whereas speaking is more likely to reveal one's presence to the enemy. In the rain and the mud, however, it is impossible for the men's movements to be entirely quiet.

The men's march toward battle, as they tramp noisily through mud, is far from elegant, demonstrating once again that war is seldom a glorious affair. Orwell's curiosity at what is happening suggests that he is able to maintain at least a partly detached, writerly outlook on the action. At the same time, his reaction to Benjamin's order emphasizes his sense of greater military knowledge and his dissatisfaction with the way the militia is being run.

In the darkness, Orwell is anxious to reach their destination. He feels that Fascist sentries could shoot them with their machine-guns at any moment. The walk seems to stretch on and on, and Orwell begins to wonder if they have gotten lost. However, the Fascist parapet soon comes into view and Jorge cuts the first line of wire protecting it. In his nervousness, Orwell is convinced that they are making a terrible amount of noise, but they still manage to make it through unnoticed.

Orwell's nervousness and his impression that the walk is dragging on unnecessarily shows that he is deeply aware of the deadly situation he is in, at the same time as he mentions the troops' lack of professionality. The darkness he describes builds dread, intensifying the eeriness of the upcoming battle. It seems that he is lost in an endless, inescapable nightmare, where the enemy is invisible and death can strike at any moment.

All at once, there is a loud bang and it becomes apparent that the Fascist sentry has finally heard Orwell's company. Jorge throws a bomb over the parapet and multiple rifles are fired, all at once, from the Fascist side. The Fascists, Orwell concludes, had in fact heard them and been expecting them. Orwell is terrified and blinded by the bombs that are being thrown. He crawls down, throws a bomb himself, misses his target, and lies down on the ground in order to avoid the explosions. He hears a few men behind him announce that they have been hit.

The violence that Orwell has been dreading arrives suddenly, without warning. In the chaos of the situation, Orwell behaves less bravely or efficiently than he potentially could have, had he not been seized by fear. When he misses his target, he proves just as likely to make mistakes as his Spanish companions. This highlights the fact that Orwell's narrative is biased. It often focuses more on other people's faults than on his own.

When the firing suddenly stops, the men charge forward. They attempt to run but only manage to crawl clumsily through the mud. Orwell expects to see Fascists waiting for them at the position. When he arrives, he is surprised to note that no one is there. Suddenly, he sees a Fascist running away and runs after him in the dark, trying to hit the man with his bayonet, which Orwell remembers as a comic memory, although he supposes that it was probably terrifying for the pursued soldier. Finally, thanks to his better knowledge of the terrain, the man manages to escape.

The militiamen's crawl through the mud and Orwell's subsequent chase of a Fascist enemy are somewhat comic episodes. They confirm that this war is not a series of noble actions but, rather, amateurish efforts that the difficult conditions on the ground render clumsy and ridiculous. Orwell also acknowledges that the very same action can have an entirely different meaning for two people, depending on who the aggressor and who the victim are, making it impossible to produce an entirely objective account of the war.

The militiamen are told to search the position and gather anything worth saving. The men find ammunition, although what they actually need are usable rifles. Orwell pays no attention to the few dead men in the position. He is busy searching for the machine-gun and, when he reaches the machine-gun spot, is disappointed to realize that the Fascists must have taken it away with them when they fled. In general, Orwell is shocked that the Fascist position seems entirely lacking in personal objects such as books or food. The unpaid conscripts, Orwell notes with dismay, must own nothing but the very bare minimum needed to survive.

Orwell's disregard for the dead men is striking, since this is the first time he mentions seeing the dead with his own eyes. In this particular moment, his rush to complete a military task takes over any sense of shared humanity. However, he expresses compassion for the poor Fascist conscripts' material conditions. This emphasizes his commitment to social equality and the fight for a decent, comfortable life for all, as his sense of social justice is not limited by political allegiances such as the separation between Fascists and anti-Fascists.

Suddenly, the men come across an object that they mistake for a machine-gun case: a telescope, a precious object that is desperately needed at the front. At that moment, a voice announces that the Fascists are returning to attack, and Orwell and his companions quickly build a barricade to protect themselves. As he brings heavy sandbags to the barricade, Orwell realizes that he is horrified by the chaotic situation he finds himself in.

The men's excitement at finding the telescope signals the importance of understanding that war is not fought only on the battlefield. Rather, careful preparation and planning—which Orwell considers severely lacking in the Spanish militias—are just as important as physical engagement.

A few men from the Shock Troopers appear, leading Orwell's companions to hope that reinforcements have finally arrived. Soon, however, they learn that most of the Shock Troopers who were on their way to help Orwell's group got lost and were shot by the Fascists. At the parapet, the Fascists begin using their machine-gun and Orwell hides behind the barricade they have built. Despite the dangers he is facing, he begins to find the entire situation rather fun. He has time to think and, upon reflection, decides that he does not feel fear. He presumes that, had he found himself in a less dangerous situation that would have given him more time to think properly, he probably would have been completely terrified.

The horrific tale of the Shock Troopers' massive death emphasizes the ease with which a simple blunder can lead to a sudden, cruel death. It also highlights Orwell's group's luck at being alive. However, after his initial feeling of horror, Orwell finds himself so immersed in the action that he is unable to grasp the life-and-death magnitude of what is happening around him. After long weeks of boredom at the front, he finds enjoyment in the feeling of adventure and personal agency. For a few moments, the war is no longer an absurd, meaningless affair.

By throwing bombs, the militiamen manage to drive the Fascists back for a while. They are then told, suddenly, to retreat at once. In the hurry to escape, they are forced to abandon the precious telescope. As soon as they leave the parapet, they find themselves under enemy fire and they run away in the darkness as fast as they can, but soon, in their confusion, they realize they might be lost. They come into view of a parapet that they don't recognize. However, after an exchange of cries, they realize it is their own and they are able to crawl back into safety.

The men's chance encounter with their own parapet emphasizes that luck and unpredictability are important factors in war, beyond traditional conceptions of planning and professionalism. However, Orwell does not have time to reflect on such occurrences. Rather, his brief explanations convey a sense of the immediacy of the action.

The wounded have been taken away on stretchers, but Jorge and another wounded man are still missing. Distraught, Kopp asks for volunteers to go search for Jorge, his personal friend and one of his best men. Orwell joins the expedition. Darkness is fading away and, as they come near the Fascist parapet, they are shot at and forced to run away at full speed. Orwell is surprised to realize that, in a situation of life or death, regardless of how muddy the terrain or how heavy their equipment might be, men are always able to run fast.

Orwell demonstrates his affection toward Kopp, his commitment to the war, and his courage, when he decides to take part in a second, dangerous expedition. Despite his previous ironic comments about the lack of glory in the soldiers' actions, here he acknowledges that extraordinary circumstances can in fact lead men to perform feats of physical strength.

Orwell later goes off on his own to look for Jorge, but finds no trace of him. Later, they learn that Jorge and the other wounded man had been taken away earlier to receive treatment. As dawn arrives, Orwell notices how desolate and exhausted the landscape and his companions look. He returns to his dug-out and makes a tiny fire, lighting a cigar that he had been saving carefully. Later, the men learn that their night attack, which was meant as a diversion for the Anarchists to attack a more important area near Huesca, was considered a success. Nevertheless, Orwell still feels sorry for having lost that precious telescope.

Orwell associates the landscape with his companions' physical and emotional state, as both convey a sense of sullenness and gloom. These personal feelings contrast heavily with the official version of the story, according to which the men's operation was a success to be celebrated. This shows the gap between official narratives and men's real-life experience.

CHAPTER 7

As spring advances and the days grow hotter, Orwell notices the pleasant transformation of the world around him and goes out in the evening to hunt game birds with a net. He describes the group of Andalusians that is stationed next to them at the front. Catalans look down upon men from Andalusia, the southernmost region of Spain, and Orwell does indeed find that they are ignorant. The majority of them are illiterate and, most importantly, seem unaware of which party they belong to. However, they are unusually skillful at rolling cigarettes.

The battle recedes to the background and Orwell is soon immersed again in the daily activities of survival and life in the countryside. The Catalans' hostility toward the Andalusians' marks a cultural rift within Orwell's own camp—a divide which he, as a foreigner, would never had suspected. The Andalusians' political ignorance is striking to Orwell. It shows that he is beginning to understand the political relevance of this conflict beyond purely military considerations.

Orwell's main memories from this period are of heavy loads carried under the sun, crumbling uniforms, and mosquitoes and rats. Nothing happens except occasional fire from snipers and the sound of attacks on the other side of Huesca. The Anarchists are losing ground in their attacks on Huesca and it seems unlikely that the town is going to fall after all.

Once again, Orwell is stuck in the daily rhythms of a soldier's life outside of battle. The historical events happening near Huesca do not affect his group. Rather, he and his company seem entirely detached from the historical course of the war.

Orwell feels that his time in the war is the most useless period in his entire life. While he had joined the war for the noble cause of fighting Fascism, he realizes that all he has done as a soldier is endure the cold and lack of sleep. In retrospect, however, Orwell recognizes that this period was perhaps not as fruitless as he thought at the time, for it provided him with knowledge and experiences that he could never have obtained in any other way.

Orwell realizes that his subjective impressions in the moment do not convey the entire truth of his experience in Spain. It is only when he views his time as a militiaman through the lens of his entire personal life that he can draw meaning from it. Unlike what Orwell had expected before coming to Spain, the importance of his involvement in the war lay neither in his own actions, nor in his capacity to influence the historical course of events, but in the personal change it effected in him.

What was most striking about the experience of fighting with the POUM, Orwell reflects, is that he was completely secluded from the outside world. The militia system had the unique characteristic of bringing together men who shared the same political beliefs, which only served to heighten revolutionary sentiment in the troops. However ordinary they might have seemed to him at the time, the revolutionary ideals that Orwell was confronted with during his time in the POUM were in fact rare in Western European countries at the time. Overall, thanks to this immersion in a self-contained, revolutionary group, Orwell feels that he was able to experience the true essence of Socialism, where ambition, hierarchies, and class divisions disappear in favor of equality among all men. However transient such an experience might have been, it was powerful enough to leave a strong mark in Orwell's mind.

Orwell realizes that his experience in the POUM was neither representative of Spain as a whole, nor of most forms of Socialism. In being politically self-contained, his militia was in many ways an artificial creation, a political experiment that worked because all its participants shared the same political convictions. This was a crucial factor in making social equality a reality within the POUM. As such, it is apparent to him that social equality is less likely to succeed in real life, where people are usually more socially and politically diverse.

While Orwell knows that many critics consider Socialism a disguise for ordinary power-grabbing, the very impulse that drives capitalism, his personal experience opened his eyes to another possibility. In the militias, hope and trust, not ruthless ambition, were predominant, therefore establishing a powerful atmosphere of equality. This experience convinced Orwell that a classless society is not an impossible dream but, rather, a goal that it is possible for humanity to achieve. Instead of disillusioning him, his time in the POUM only heightened his desire to see Socialism applied in real life.

Orwell rejects cynical descriptions of Socialism as a disguised form of capitalism. His own experience teaches him that humanity can be moved by solidarity and trust as much as by materialism. At the same time, Orwell does not address the extraordinary circumstances in which he experienced Socialism. Specifically, in times of war, solidarity and trust might be a more logical response than in ordinary civilian life, when individuals are not united by a common sense of danger.

At the time, Orwell was too busy worrying about everyday survival to become aware of the ideological convictions that were slowly growing in him. Upon looking back, he realizes that such a period was unique in his life. It remains a sacred memory, imbued with the peculiar sights and sounds of war, however dreary or exhausting they might have been in the moment. Orwell proceeds to recount a few anecdotes that remain particularly vivid in his mind: a moment of warm companionship with Kopp; the suddenness of a shell attack on his position; the sound of men on both sides singing as dawn rises over no-man's-land.

Orwell's impressionistic memories of such an extraordinary time also affect his political convictions. This suggests that emotions, as well as the sense of being personally involved in a large-scale project, play an important role in shaping an individual's political and economic view of the world. In Orwell's narrative, everyday experiences play a more powerful role than theoretical arguments in shaping his views.

On April 25, Orwell, desperate for the comforts of civilized life, finally leaves the line. From Monflorite, he heads back to Barcelona and arrives there in the afternoon the next day. From then on, Orwell announces ominously, "the trouble began."

However much Orwell might declare his support for a leftwing coalition that defends the working class, he remains attached to his ordinary desires for comfort, such as escaping the problems of war.

CHAPTER 8

Upon returning to Barcelona, Orwell immediately notices that the atmosphere in the town has changed drastically since his last visit. In the train, as soldiers and peasants mingled in joyous commotion, the cheerful atmosphere of the front was maintained throughout the trip. However, as soon as they reach Barcelona, the men are met with deep hostility. The revolutionary atmosphere, Orwell notices, has entirely vanished and working-class control is no longer apparent. To whatever extent the city might still show signs of being in the midst of a war, it has returned to the normal rhythm of a bourgeois, capitalist city.

In Barcelona it seems the revolution was only a fragile, temporary event. Months later, as people's enthusiasm for the war has receded in the face of ordinary civilian life, Orwell is not yet able to grasp the reasons for this sudden shift. His surprise at the current state of affairs highlights the extent to which men at the front are unaware of political dynamics taking place in the rear. It also suggests that Orwell's initial optimism—his belief that revolutionary ideals had truly transformed the city of Barcelona—was probably naïve.

Instead of wearing working-class clothing, the crowds in Barcelona have gone back to wearing the fashionable outfits of the period. Orwell notices a surprisingly high number of members of the newly formed Popular Army, an army not affiliated with any political party, intended to replace the militias. In the meantime, while the revolutionary militias are fighting at the front, the Popular Army is training in the rear. The Popular Army is organized on a slightly more hierarchical basis than the militias and Orwell notices that they wear much homogeneous, official-looking uniforms, in stark contrast with the ragged militias.

Both the civilian population and the new Popular Army demonstrate conventionally capitalist habits. The Popular Army's superior dress signals that they enjoy greater resources than the militias. This suggests that the Republican Government might be intentionally transferring resources away from the militias and, more generally, away from the revolution. The differential treatment of these two types of troops appears incomprehensible and unjust. It suggests that Orwell's own camp might be more divided than he initially thought.

Even though most of these men have not yet fought in the war, they all carry an automatic pistol, a weapon that is desperately needed at the front. When he compares himself to these men, Orwell is extremely aware of how ragged and unkempt he and his fellow militiamen look to the civil population. When he notices how people stare at them, he feels uneasy, aware that the prestige he enjoyed before leaving the front has faded away.

Orwell becomes aware of the irreconcilable gap between his experience of the war in a revolutionary militia and ordinary civilians' attitudes toward the war. This also serves as an indication that the Republican camp is not as united and homogeneous as he had initially believed.

Over the next few days, Orwell becomes convinced that the city has undergone a profound shift. He identifies two main changes. First, the civilian population has lost all interest in the war. Second, society's normal class divisions are becoming apparent once again.

Everything Orwell sees in Barcelona is at odds with his personal mindset. For him, the effort to transform society for the better should be the center of attention, but this is no longer what most civilians believe.

Orwell is shocked by the population's indifference to the war. To a man returning from the dangers of the front, such disinterest is horrifying. Part of the reason for this civilian lack of interest, Orwell explains, is undoubtedly Barcelona's distance from the front. In other cities, such as Madrid and Valencia, which are much closer to actual fighting, people are much more capable of displaying solidarity and camaraderie. Another reason, he argues, is people's disappointment in the revolution. As working-class control slowly began to give way to ordinary class divisions, people became disillusioned with the idea of revolution and with the war more generally. Instead of keeping up the fight for working-class control, which they saw as a lost cause, people decided that they simply wanted the war to end.

Orwell realizes that geography can cause divisions within the anti-Fascist camp, and that a town's distance from the front causes its inhabitants to be more or less involved in the military fight against the Fascists. It seems that feeling personally involved in the conflict, as Orwell has been, is crucial in sustaining social and political convictions. The revolutionary fervor that Orwell had considered a permanent state of affairs was circumstantial and temporary. His own camp, therefore, does not unilaterally support the war.

As people's attention shifted away from the front, the more politically conscious members of society began to focus more on political infighting within the Republican coalition than on the greater goal of defeating Fascism. In turn, most of the population primarily cared about material needs and the problem of the food shortage. Men returning from the front were no longer celebrated and the ordeals of the front were largely ignored in everyday life. In addition, a propaganda campaign was underway, denigrating the militias and eulogizing the Popular Army. In theory, the militias were integrated into the Popular Army, but in practice, as Popular Army troops were busy training in the rear and the militias were fighting in the front, the militias retained their unique characteristics, separate from the Popular Army.

Orwell becomes aware of political divisions within his own camp, the anti-Fascist Republican coalition. He realizes that not all citizens are interested in politics, for there is a larger difference between politically engaged citizens and ordinary members of society than he would have thought. In addition, the political left is plagued by military and political divisions. Despite supposedly fighting the same enemy, the two Republican armies share different ideological principles and modes of organization. These tensions can destroy people's commitment to the anti-Fascist cause.

While Orwell was fighting at the front, vehement propaganda attacked the militias as disorganized, inefficient units, while the fact that the militias were the only forces actually defending the front was ignored as much as possible. In addition, since the militias were technically part of the Popular Army, their successes at the front were often attributed to the Popular Army in the press. The result, Orwell notes ironically, is that the news sometimes simultaneously condemned and celebrated the very same militia groups.

Political divisions within the left are evident in the media coverage of the war. The press does not provide an objective account of what is happening. Rather, it has adopted a one-sided stance to support the Popular Army and condemn the revolutionary militias. This causes the press to publish news articles that are contradictory, misleading, and unduly critical. Orwell thus shows that the press is not to be trusted.

In the city, Orwell begins to realize that what he had interpreted during his first visit as universal support for working-class control was often nothing but a ruse. While the working class was moved by revolutionary hope, the upper class fell prey to fear and adopted techniques to conceal their wealth so as to avoid retaliation. Four months later, the situation was slowly reverting to normal. Food shortages predominantly hurt the poor, who could not afford the rising prices of food, and beggars began to appear in large numbers in the street. People abandoned the informal mode of speech ("*tú*") and returned to distinguishing between formal and informal relationships in conversation ("*usted*").

Orwell realizes that his initial enthusiasm toward the revolution in Barcelona lacked nuance, subtlety, and political insight. While he believed that society had been completely transformed, Barcelona in fact remained divided along pre-existing (yet temporarily hidden) class lines. Evolving economic circumstances—the result of the war's heavy toll on ordinary life—brought to light these underlying class divisions. This suggests that people's attitudes toward revolution are weaker than he thought, moved as much by convenience as by political ideals.

A couple of days after arriving in the city, Orwell is shocked to pass by an elegant confectioner's shop selling sweets at outrageous prices. He wonders how, in a time of war, people can spend their money on such useless goods. At the same time, Orwell admits that he partakes in exactly the same behavior. After months at the front, desperate for the luxuries of everyday life, he treats himself to any extravagance he can afford.

Orwell is aware that his attitude is somewhat hypocritical. While he is disgusted by certain outward displays of wealth, he is nevertheless able to reap the benefits of his own wealth. His attitude toward social equality does not translate easily from the front (where he shared the same material hardships as his fellow soldiers) to ordinary urban society, where his wealth and status set him apart from the difficult lives of the working class.

During this period, Orwell indulges in refined food, begins to feel sick from such excesses, and acquires a revolver. At the same time, he also makes plans to leave the POUM and go fight with the Communists in Madrid, in order to take part in real battles. While he would have wanted to join the Anarchists, logistical reasons made it more convenient for him to join the International Column, a group of international volunteers attached to the Communist Party.

Orwell's decision to leave the POUM for another political group, the Communists, is not ideological but practical, intended to make him feel more involved in military life. The ease with which he considers switching from one political group to the next signals that he is not yet fully aware of the irreconcilable differences between Spanish leftwing parties.

Looking back, Orwell reflects on the street fighting between Communists and Anarchists that was soon to take place in Barcelona. Had he joined the Communists and been sent away from Barcelona, he argues, he would probably have accepted the common narrative about the street fighting that was presented in the press. However, for trivial reasons (such as the fact that Orwell was still waiting on a new pair of boots he had ordered), he postponed his arrangements to leave for the Madrid front. As a result, he was still under POUM allegiance during the Barcelona fighting.

Orwell realizes that political loyalty can be shaped by purely arbitrary circumstances, such as being present in the right place at the right time. His entire political destiny is, at least in part, shaped by the unpredictability of chance events. Subsequently, belonging to a particular group influences one's entire interpretation of events, making it impossible to retain an objective view of the conflict.

In the city, the atmosphere is so tense that an outbreak of violence seems inevitable. Political tensions are brewing under the surface and everyone can sense that trouble will soon emerge. The main reason for such tension is the division between leftwing parties that want for the revolution to continue (the Anarchists and the POUM) and parties that want to suppress it (the Communists). While the Communists hold most of the political power in Catalonia, the Anarchists are supported by a large section of the population and by members in key industries. The Communists want to assert their control in the political game and confiscate the weapons that the working class still possesses. As the Civil Guards (an armed police force traditionally protective of the upper class) are being reinstated, it becomes apparent that the Communists will unite with the police to seize the Anarchists' weapons by force.

Orwell realizes that, even among leftwing parties, the revolution was not accepted unilaterally. Paradoxically, while the issue of social revolution solidified Orwell's commitment to the anti-Fascist cause, it is in fact the major issue dividing the anti-Fascist coalition. This internal political disagreement within the left is a real conflict, pitting two camps with varying economic, material, and political resources against each other. The Communists, Orwell realizes, are not afraid to attack their own allies in order to uphold their anti-revolutionary views, regardless of the need for unity in time of war.

A few incidents prove that these tensions can indeed evolve into violence. In various cities in Spain, police forces attempt to seize buildings controlled by the Anarchists and, in one instance, kill a prominent Anarchist. In Barcelona, murders are committed by both sides, and the public funerals that follow often serve to heighten divisions between the Communists and the Anarchists. The foreign capitalist press does not take an objective stance on the topic, but adopts a one-sided view. It publicizes the murders of Communists while largely ignoring the fact that Anarchists are also being killed.

As the political tension between Anarchists and Communists mounts, Orwell realizes that the press is an unreliable and partisan source of information, as it always sides with the Communists. It becomes apparent that what Orwell had read in the press before coming to Spain, where the Spanish Civil War was presented as an easy conflict between Fascists and anti-Fascists, is at odds with the political reality on the ground.

CHAPTER 9

On May 3rd, Orwell hears of vague trouble at the Telephone Exchange but does not pay much attention to this information. Then, suddenly, shots are fired in the city and everyone realizes that the fighting they have been anticipating is finally happening. When Orwell hears rifle shots behind him in the center of town, he wants to return to his hotel to check on his wife. However, the firing has intensified and he ends up following an American doctor he knows to the Hotel Falcón, a POUM building.

After days of dread and tension, the divisions within the Republican camp become visible and concrete. Far from the front line, this new bout of fighting proves that the anti-Fascist camp is waging a war within its own coalition. The war that Orwell thought he was fighting against the Fascists has turned into a complicated, internal political mess.

Orwell asks his friend what is going on and is told that Assault Guards have attacked the Telephone Exchange, a building controlled by the Anarchists, and that fighting began when Anarchists arrived to defend the building. Orwell suddenly understands the vague mention of the Telephone Exchange he heard earlier in the day. The Government, he assumes, must have asked the Anarchists to surrender the building and, when the Anarchists refused, ordered the police to take the building by force.

Orwell immediately understands that the Republican Government is probably involved in sparking this inter-party violence. He also grasps that the fighting was a matter of defensive reaction on the Anarchists' part. It seems that the Government might be deliberately sabotaging the revolutionary working-class control of the city.

When Orwell and his friend reach the Hotel Falcón, which is full of confusion, Orwell walks to the Comité Local of the POUM across the street, where people are waiting to receive rifles. Orwell's status as a foreigner initially makes the POUM officers suspicious of him, but when he is recognized as a militiaman he is finally given a rifle. A rumor is circulating that the Comité Local is soon to be attacked and that people should remain to defend it.

In addition to the Anarchists who defended the Telephone Exchange, the POUM, too, believe themselves to be under attack. In the chaos of this outbreak of violence, Orwell immediately sides with the POUM, demonstrating that his involvement in the war is no longer a party-neutral fight against the Fascists, but that he has become a partisan of the revolutionary militia.

In the agitation of the moment, no one seems to know exactly what is happening. People are convinced that the Assault Guards have launched a direct attack against the Anarchists and the working class. No one mentions the possible involvement of the Government in the whole affair. The Anarchists and the POUM view the conflict as a clear fight between the working class and the police. Orwell immediately sides with the more vulnerable, and therefore more deserving side: the workers.

Orwell's decision to support the POUM is class-based, derived from his support of the revolutionary militia's ideology, which holds that the working class in a capitalist democracy is always oppressed by the more powerful.

For hours, nothing happens, and as evening begins to settle Orwell briefly exits the building to find something to eat. Shops are closed and the streets are completely dark, empty, and silent. Orwell tries to call his wife but cannot get through to her. He manages to get in touch with John McNair, the ILP representative in Barcelona. John decides to brave the dark and dangerous streets in order to bring the men a pack of cigarettes, a small gesture that Orwell finds heroic.

The city is eerie and foreboding, filled with a sense of impending doom. In this scary atmosphere, John McNair's decision to bring the men cigarettes stands out as unusually generous, demonstrating the sense of solidarity that is sustained between all members the POUM, even if there is no longer such solidarity within the anti-Fascist coalition as a whole.

Orwell wanders through the building, past the many people sleeping, the litter, and the broken furniture that he considers a typical by-product of the revolution. Despite the common rumors according to which all political parties in Barcelona possess a stock of arms, at the armory he is shocked to discover that there are no more weapons than the sixty rifles that were distributed earlier to the people in the building.

Despite Orwell's support of the POUM's values, he is still capable of looking at the revolution with a critical eye. He can separate its idealistic appeal from its application in reality, which tends to be messy and unappealing.

During the night, Orwell is put on guard at the window, and by dawn people are already building barricades in the street. As women, children, and men form a line to carry cobblestones and bags of sand to the barricade, Orwell is impressed by the sudden burst of efficient organization that the Spanish can achieve when they set their minds to it. After only a couple of hours, the barricades are ready for use and manned by riflemen.

When he is faced with a stunning example of good organization, Orwell is forced to reconsider his cultural criticism of Spanish inefficiency. The Spaniards' skill at building barricades also signals that people in Barcelona are accustomed to street fighting between political groups. This reveals an underlying state of tension within the left that Orwell was entirely unaware of before coming to Spain.

When the POUM takes Orwell's rifle away from him, he decides to return to the Hotel Continental, but bullets are flying throughout the city and he heads, instead, to the POUM Executive Building to receive orders. There, he finds Kopp and, when they hear the loud sound of guns firing below, he follows his officer to see what is happening. The night before, they discover, Assault Guards occupied the neighboring building, a café called the Café Moka, and were planning to attack the POUM building in the morning. Their attack is thwarted by POUM fire and the Assault Guards are forced to retreat.

It becomes clear that the POUM, in addition to the Anarchists, are indeed under attack by the police. As the police respond to Government orders, it is likely that the Government is (or might become) involved somehow. The POUM's refusal to surrender demonstrates that they still believe they can defend themselves. They do not yet realize that pro-Communist groups have more political clout than they do, making their resistance rather useless.

Kopp takes control of the situation and, courageously, in the middle of the fray, disarms so that he can parley with the Assault Guards. When Kopp returns, he explains that the Assault Guards are terrified and do not actually want to fight. POUM leaders, he tells Orwell, have issued orders to defend the building but only shoot if they are fired at. Orwell concludes that POUM leaders do not actually want to be involved in this outburst of violence but feel that they must stand with the workers during the fight.

The police are merely reacting to orders from above, while the working class is merely defending itself from an unexpected aggression. The POUM do not actually want to fight against their own leftwing allies, but class-based support for the workers ends up prevailing over the possibility of compromise with the Government or the police.

Despite the lack of immediate danger, Orwell assesses this period as one of the worst, most disillusioning moments in his life. He is placed as a guard on top of an observatory across from the POUM building and, from this vantage point, reflects on the folly of what he is witnessing. The city is in lockdown, trapped in a chaotic, surreal situation, in which it is extremely difficult to figure out who is fighting whom. Since people in Barcelona are used to street fighting, the city is immediately divided geographically into pro-Communist and pro-Anarchists neighborhoods, as each side retreats into its own political district. As a foreigner unaware of these political frontiers, Orwell is grateful for the political flags flown over each building, which allow him to grasp the political geography of what he is witnessing.

To a militiaman who has faced the dangers of the front, the outbreak of violence within the leftwing coalition in a city so far removed from the dangers of the front is an absurd and dispiriting sight. It also forces Orwell to realize his ignorance of local politics. To him, the fighting is a senseless waste of time, whereas to the locals it fits within a long-existing pattern of political rivalry. Orwell becomes intensely aware of his status as a foreigner in a city whose underlying political dynamics he had previously either ignored or underestimated.

Orwell waits for many hours on the roof, bored and reading a novel. He notices Kopp, who has by now become friendly with the Assault Guards, enter the Café Moka from time to time. A few, isolated episodes of shooting make Orwell believe that the fighting has started again, but nothing comes of it in the end. In other parts of the city, the firing goes on and on, but Orwell identifies the sounds as purely defensive reactions. He hears no artillery fire and concludes that the fighting is therefore not too serious.

Orwell's boredom in the city recalls his boredom at the front. Kopp's friendliness with the Assault Guards hints at the fact that ideological differences often matter less than the capacity to get along and treat others with respect. This attitude stands in stark contrast to the violent attitude currently defining political infighting within the left.

In the meantime, food begins to run short. At the beginning, before the food shortage becomes too severe, the street fighting is regarded as a trivial, unimportant event. People believe that it is a mere scuffle between the Anarchists and the police, an event of no great significance.

Orwell introduces the idea that material comforts influence people's political opinions. Like most people, Orwell, too, tends to focus on his own physical well-being, whether in the city or at the frontline.

On May 5th, things began to change. Tired of the pointless violence, people on both sides begin to fear that this fighting might divert energy from the greater fight against the Fascists. That evening, Kopp tells Orwell that the Government is planning to declare the POUM illegal as a means of suppressing it. Orwell is left with the dark presentiment that the POUM, the weakest party in the affair, is likely to be scapegoated and blamed for the entire event. In light of this threat, however, the POUM is no longer a neutral actor—it must protect itself. POUM leaders thus make plans to attack the Café Moka.

Orwell finds himself caught in a war within a war. The political infighting within the left detracts from the noble goal for which he came to Spain to fight. Paradoxically, he becomes an actor in the fight against the very Government he came to protect. The Government's decision to suppress the POUM demonstrates its lack of commitment to the social revolution that so fascinated Orwell—and, perhaps, its lack of commitment even to the war itself.

In the following hours, for the entire evening, men in the POUM building attempt to fortify the building. Exhausted and tense, Orwell tries to rest. He is convinced that he will soon be woken up to attack the Café Moka, where he will likely die. However, in the morning, he is surprised to discover that nothing has happened, for the Government has in fact taken no action against the POUM. Instead, a few hours later, an armistice leads everybody back into the streets, in search of food and anxious to know if the fighting will begin again.

As has happened many times in this war, political predictions fail to come true and an anticipated battle is delayed once again. In this context, it remains ambiguous whether the Government is truly committed to suppressing the POUM.

Unsurprisingly, shots are indeed fired once more and Orwell returns to his post on top of the observatory. He is moved by revulsion and anger as he contemplates the futility of this entire affair. He realizes that in the midst of these historic events, what matters most to him is not the political complexity of the situation but, rather, material discomforts such as lack of food and sleep, as they remind him of his frustrating days at the front.

Orwell realizes that what will stay with him after the war is perhaps less the political intricacies of what he has witnessed than the emotions and sensations that fighting in Spain has produced in him. His feelings of frustration at the mess of politics can be understood in part by his status as a foreigner, unaware of the deep roots of this conflict in Spanish politics.

Orwell spends one last night on the roof. The next day, there is little shooting and the Government orders people to get back to work. Ultimately, people do end up leaving the barricades, primarily because of the lack of food. By the afternoon the city has almost returned to normal. Orwell notices that the Anarchist flag has disappeared from the Telephone Exchange, which means that the Anarchists have lost the fight. He senses vaguely, as a dark foreboding, that when the fighting fully ends the Government will probably inflict punishment on those it considers responsible for the fighting.

The speed with which people return to work conveys an eerie feeling of forgetfulness, as though closure had not truly been achieved. The conflict has not reached an end thanks to political compromise but, rather, because of the mere material need to return to normal economic activity.

Later that evening, Government-ordered Valencian Assault Guards appear in the city. By the next day, they have invaded the streets, in a display of strength intended to intimidate the population into submission. Orwell is awed by the Valencian Guards' weapons, which are far better than the ones he has seen at the front and which he never suspected the Republic possessed. He notices that, in general, the police forces operating in the rear have far better weapons than those found at the front.

Orwell notes yet another injustice in the Government's supply of resources to armed forces. Paradoxically, the Government decides to give better weapons to the forces that are not actually fighting the Fascists at the front. This suggests that the Government is perhaps less committed to the success of the revolutionary militias than to maintaining political control in the rear.

The fighting in Barcelona allows the Government in Valencia to take control of the city. Republican flags are flown everywhere, barricades slowly brought down, and arms seized from Anarchist strongholds. The POUM's newspaper is censored, while Communist newspapers continue to appear, publishing anti-POUM stories, accusing it of deliberately instilling rebellion and of being secretly allied with the Fascists. Orwell concludes that newspapers only defend one side of the conflict.

The very flags that were the symbol of Barcelona's social transformation are taken down, signaling the end of the revolution in the city. The Government begins an undemocratic procedure against the POUM by keeping it from expressing its freedom of speech in the press. In this way, its desire to suppress the POUM becomes more and more obvious.

The atmosphere of suspicion that has been intensifying over the past few days becomes even worse, and Orwell is dismayed to realize that the official narrative of the conflict provides inaccurate facts in order to scapegoat the POUM and lead to its suppression. Orwell concludes that in such circumstances, in which the pro-Communist press is accusing the POUM of treason, he could never join the Communist unit fighting in Madrid. He feels that, even among Communists, any problem that emerges will always be blamed on the working class.

The Communist press takes part in an anti-democratic, untruthful campaign of denigration against the POUM. Orwell becomes aware of the gap between party ideology and the values it demonstrates in practice. He realizes that the Communist party, whose ideology he previously respected and agreed with, does not support the very group it is meant to protect: the working class.

After the fighting, Anarchist sympathizers are arrested and thrown into prison without trial. Foreigners with suspicious backgrounds go into hiding and Orwell, affected by the deep stress of the past few days, becomes obsessed with the idea that he might be arrested at any moment. Looking back on this period, Orwell is impressed by how strange the atmosphere was at the time: a complex mix of fear, hunger, and the constant threat of violence. He remembers interacting with a variety of civilians who were entirely unaware of the political complexity of what was happening, and who saw the fighting as a bout of meaningless violence.

The civilians' disregard for the complexity of the fighting mirrors Orwell's initial lack of understanding of local political dynamics. Unlike ordinary civilians, though, he is forced to experience such dynamics firsthand, as he becomes aware that merely having the wrong political opinions is sufficient to get him arrested. This is an absurd threat to face in supposedly democratic territory.

CHAPTER 10

About three days after the Barcelona fighting ends, Orwell returns to the front. Orwell—and, he argues, anyone reading the news at the time—is deeply disillusioned by the bitter fight playing out in the press. In particular, he is dismayed by the one-sided narrative that systematically and unjustly vilifies the Anarchists. Orwell realizes that this war, which he had thought of as a unique fight in the name of noble ideals, is in many ways just as immoral and cruel as any other war. In the Spanish Civil War, as in other conflicts, democratic standards such as personal freedom and honest journalism have disappeared in the name of military efficiency.

Orwell's rationale for joining the Spanish Civil War is turned upside down, as he realizes that his conception of the war is completely mistaken. The Republicans are not upholding democracy but, rather, are actively destroying it for political and military reasons. Although in other moments Orwell accepted the use of white lies to defeat the Fascist enemy (for example in order to boost the troops' morale), in this case he strongly condemns the use of lies in the press to divide the anti-Fascist camp and scapegoat the POUM and the Anarchists.

Certain political patters become apparent. Orwell is convinced that the current Government will soon be replaced by a more rightwing one under Communist influence, which would then attempt to break the trade unions' power. The political divisions in the country have become so apparent that neither democracy nor working-class control seems a likely outcome for the country anymore. After the war, Orwell concludes, Spain is bound to be a dictatorship, Fascist to at least some degree.

Orwell blames much of the divisions within the Spanish left on the Communists, whom he considers engaged in a crusade to dismantle working-class control. Orwell is so disillusioned that he compares his own leftwing, Republican camp to the rightwing, Fascist enemy. His conclusion that democracy is bound to vanish forever puts an end to his naïve understanding of the war as a fight in the name of working-class power and democracy.

Orwell's cynical reflections do not diminish his commitment to fighting on the side of the Republican Government. Whatever might happen to Spain after the war, Orwell explains, a Fascist dictatorship led by Franco would be significantly worse than any leadership by the anti-feudal, anti-Catholic Government, which would at least protect the interests of the peasants if not of the urban working class. Franco's brand of Fascism, to Orwell, means a return to an archaic, unjust past. The Government would at least be able to modernize the country in some respects, for example through education and health. Orwell also believes that this fight has international repercussions. Putting an end to Franco's advance might, more broadly, serve to halt the rise of Fascism across the world. This is a goal that Orwell considers worth fighting for.

Orwell does not believe that both sides in the civil war are equally dangerous. While he abandons his hopes revolution, he justifies his commitment to the Republican cause in class-based, economic terms, as a defense of the peasantry—likely inspired by what he witnessed of the Spanish peasants' poverty and hardships during his travels at the front. However much the Barcelona fighting might have impacted his outlook, he remains moved by ideals of modernization and progress. He remains convinced that this fight is not an ordinary war, but one that is still capable of impacting the course of history in Europe more broadly.

When he returns to the front, Orwell learns that his friend and fellow militiaman Bob Smillie has been thrown into prison. Orwell discovers that Smillie was arrested on the spurious charge of carrying arms, despite the fact that Smillie was not actually carrying usable weapons. Orwell explains this arrest as a vicious political tactic. Since Smillie was supposed to travel to England soon, the Spanish Government probably worried that, were Smillie to relate his experience in the POUM, he would contradict the Government-sanctioned version of events, according to which the POUM is a party of Fascist traitors that must be eliminated.

Once again, the Republican Government proves willing to use anti-democratic tactics to suppress its political opponents and present a skewed version of the truth. Smillie becomes a target for the Government's evil actions: illegal arrest, censorship, fabrication of the truth. In this way, Smillie becomes a martyr of the left's political cause. The Government's unwillingness to allow freedom of speech abroad hints at the possibility that it is benefiting from the support of international actors. Democracy, it appears, has entirely broken down.

Orwell is sent to Huesca and put in command of about thirty men. While nothing ever seems to happen, despite a few attacks by snipers, a bullet suddenly hits Orwell in the middle of the day. He describes this experience in great detail. He recalls feeling in the midst of an explosion, as though he were hit by a violent, electric shock. He falls to the ground, dazed, without feeling any pain. He feels nothing but realizes that his right arm is paralyzed and that he is not able to speak. His wife, he reflects, will be glad that he has been hit, for she had wanted him to be removed from the front before the beginning of the great battle.

Orwell's detailed description of being shot emphasizes that this book is as much about political history as it is about one individual's experience of war. Orwell is wounded suddenly during a period of utter stagnation at the front, emphasizing the utter unpredictability of war.

When Orwell realizes that the bullet has gone through his neck, he becomes convinced that he is going to die. For a couple minutes, he watches as his thoughts fleet by. First, he thinks of his wife. Then, he is outraged at having to die and leave the world he so enjoys. He is angry at the senselessness of dying at such a trivial moment, in the monotony of the trenches, far from any battle. As soon as he is put on the stretcher, his arm begins to hurt excruciatingly. At the same time, he is able to appreciate the landscape around him, and experiences wonder at the beauty of the silver poplar leaves that brush against his face. The doctor gives him quick medical care and he is sent to a hospital in Siétamo.

At the brink of what he believes to be death, Orwell remains convinced that his time as a militiaman at the front was a senseless experience, far from the glory-filled action he expected to engage in during this war. At the same time, his search for political meaning vanishes before the raw, bare meaningfulness of living as a human being. Orwell is overwhelmed by the sensations of nature and everyday life, suggesting that thoughts about bravery and worth are ultimately less important than the simple, non-political act of living.


At the hospital, despite suffering from a throat wound and being in great physical pain, Orwell notices that the nurse, in a fashion that he considers typically Spanish, attempts to make him swallow an entire hospital meal. A little while later, two fellow militiamen arrive. Instead of inquiring at length about his health, they proceed to take away all his possessions, a practice that Orwell explains is normal at the front, where tools and weapons of any kind are so desperately needed.

When he sees the nurse's behavior, Orwell once again both laughs at and feels frustrated by what he considers to be typical Spanish inefficacy. When Orwell's possessions are taken, he is confronted with two conflicting aspects of his identity in Spain: his status as an ordinary civilian and his role as a useful resource, in this moment, for the militia.

Orwell then travels to Barbastro in an ambulance that is so unsteady that, Orwell realizes, it would easily kill a man with a wound in the stomach. As the staff forgets to tie the wounded to their stretchers, one man is thrown to the floor, suffering unspeakable pain, while a woman vomits throughout the entire trip. Orwell is able to hold onto his stretcher with his one usable arm.

The pain that the people in the ambulance experience is unnecessary and, when compared with the battle that is being fought at the front, completely absurd. The inefficiency that Orwell has so often bemoaned extends even to these non-military actions, such as tying the wounded to a stretcher.

After one night in Barbastro, Orwell is sent to Lérida, where he spends five or six days. There, two militiamen on leave come to visit him. As a clumsy, shy gesture of affection, the soldiers offer him all the tobacco in their possession and leave hurriedly. Orwell later realizes that, because of this generous gesture, which he considers typically Spanish, the men have lost an entire week's ration of cigarettes.

Orwell is once again moved by Spanish generosity, which transcends linguistic barriers. However much war might strengthen people's sense of rivalry, Orwell discovers time and again that, individually, everyone is capable of generosity and greatness.

At the hospital, Orwell observes the hospital system. While the doctors seem good and medical equipment is readily available, these hospitals at the front only treat men who are too seriously wounded to be moved. Everyone else is supposed to be sent to bigger cities, but lack of available transportation and capable nurses means that they are often left for days without medical care and people with grave wounds are left seriously neglected.

Breaking with his habit of attributing most inefficiencies to cultural traits, Orwell identifies the root of the hospital system's problems as utter lack of resources. The real danger, paradoxically, is not necessarily being hurt at the front, but being left without care. As usual, the most dangerous enemy is not necessarily the Fascists themselves, but the Republican camp's own lack of resources and organization.


After being told that he is going to be sent to Barcelona, Orwell is in fact driven to the city of Tarragona. After a ghastly train ride, where men who have left their sick bed for the first time are rocked around and sent flying to the floor, Orwell arrives at the station in Tarragona, where a group of Italian volunteers is being sent to the front. Orwell is impressed by this graceful, smiling group of men, who seem to embody the traditional, heroic image of war.

Orwell experiences more of the lack of organization and punctuality that he considers typically Spanish. Orwell admits that there is something fascinating about the idea of war, thus proving that he is not completely disillusioned with the glorified ideal of this anti-Fascist struggle.

At the hospital in Tarragona, Orwell sees a variety of horrific wounds. At the same time, when after a few days he finds the strength to walk down to the beach, he is surprised to note that, by the seaside, civilian life is going on as usual. People are enjoying the sun and the ordinary pleasures of life as though the war were a distant dream.

Orwell's time in a seaside town demonstrates that the country is not only divided along political or class lines, but also between politically engaged and politically aloof citizens. From a broader perspective, this signals the difficulty of engaging an entire population in a political effort, such as launching a revolution.

Finally, after eight or nine days since being shot, Orwell's wound is examined. Cheerfully, without thinking twice about the gravity of what he is announcing, the doctor tells him that one of his vocal chords is paralyzed and that he will never be able to speak again. This prediction turns out to be wrong, as after two months Orwell would be able to speak again. Doctors often come to examine Orwell's wound. They consider it a miracle that he has survived a shot that came so close to touching the artery. Orwell comments that he would have preferred not to be shot in the first place.

Orwell's attitude toward his wound is humorously ironic. His description of the doctor is in line with his previous description of the Spanish as a people incapable of taking life-and-death matters seriously. It appears that death is so normal in time of war that the mere act of surviving is regarded as a wonderful feat. Humorously, Orwell hints that he cares less about the historic momentousness of this even than about his own personal comfort.

CHAPTER 11

During Orwell's last weeks in Barcelona, the city remains characterized by an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and hatred. After the May fighting, as Orwell had predicted, the previous Government was replaced by one under greater Communist influence, intent on crushing its political adversaries. The atmosphere of doom is so great that everyone feels that something evil is bound to happen any time soon.

The political tension in the city bears a striking resemblance to the atmosphere before the Barcelona fighting. This time, the distinction between victim (the POUM and the Anarchists) and aggressor (the Communists) is more easily laid out, and the fight within the left easier to discern along party lines.

Because the press is heavily censored, a variety of rumors abound on both sides. One rumor affirms that the current Government is abandoning the war effort, offering no support to the Basques in their fight against Franco. Orwell initially believes this might be true, but the rumor is later dispelled. Other rumors include the fear that the Communist Party will launch a coup d'état and that Catalonia will soon be invaded.

The censorship of the press is an obvious infringement on democratic rights. In the absence of reliable news, even the most basic assumption, such as the Republican Government's support for the anti-Fascists, is called into doubt. Paranoia replaces compromise and all political groups are treated as potential enemies.

In the city, the secret police is launching a series of arrests against Anarchists and POUM members. People are thrown into jail on vague pretexts and left with no possibility to communicate with the outside world. This is the case of Bob Smillie, who is still in prison. Imprisoned men are neither tried nor charged. They are kept in prison for an indefinite period.

A series of illegal arrests serves as yet another proof that democracy is seriously undermined. The injustice and absurdity of these arrests is obvious, as people are persecuted for their political beliefs, not for actual crimes.

In the street, local Assault Guards and Valencian Assault Guards check the papers of passers-by. Friends warn Orwell to hide any document that might attest to his involvement with the POUM. Anarchist newspapers are heavily censored and, since a new rule mandates that censored passages must be filled in with text, it is impossible to tell what has been cut out. In the meantime, the food shortage is only growing worse, as bread, milk, sugar, and tobacco are becoming extremely scarce. To buy olive oil, women wait in long lines controlled by Assault Guards who occasionally entertain themselves by trying to make their horses walk on the women's toes.

The police become a cruel, oppressive force, enforcing unjust laws and harassing the weakest members of society. Meanwhile, the censorship in newspapers reaches a new height. The Government is not only oppressive, but also hypocritical. While engaging in censorship, it tries to maintain a pretense of democracy, keeping the population from becoming aware of the extent to which news has been censored. Orwell seems to have stepped into a disturbing, dystopian reality.

Orwell explains that it is impossible for anyone who has not experienced it to understand how nightmarish the situation in the city is. In England, where political freedoms are guaranteed, no one can conceive of being persecuted for their political opinions. In Barcelona, by contrast, eliminating one's enemies instead of seeking compromise becomes part of ordinary political life. Apart from a few tourists confined to fancy hotels and oblivious to local politics, everyone in the city agrees that the atmosphere resembles that of a psychiatric hospital.

Orwell realizes that his English standards of political behavior are not useful in helping him understand the situation on the ground. He separates himself from the rich, oblivious English tourists, but also admits his inability to grasp the logic or local politics behind what is happening. The situation has degenerated so much that common-sense social behavior has vanished.

While Orwell is sill at a POUM-run hospital in the suburbs of Barcelona, he and his wife decide that they should try to leave the country as soon as possible. Because of his wound, Orwell will not be able to return to the front before many months, and he feels guilty about staying in the country and eating food that other people need to survive. More deeply, though, he is primarily moved by selfish motivations. He feels desperate to escape the dangers of war, political persecution, and all the oppressive aspects of everyday life that have defined his time in Spain.

Orwell realizes that his personal hardships have become more significant than his trust in the validity of the anti-Fascist fight. His situation mirrors, on a personal level, the people of Barcelona's rejection of the revolution and the war in the face of material difficulties. Orwell's ability to leave highlights his privileged status as a foreigner, whereas locals are forced to endure the war as long as it lasts.

To receive his medical discharge, Orwell must travel to Siétamo. There, he meets Kopp, who has just returned from the front and is excited about the fall of Huesca, which he mistakenly believes will happen very soon. Kopp is headed to Valencia to receive a letter from the Ministry of War putting him in charge of engineering operations at the front.

Even Kopp, whose judgment Orwell respects, believes in the fall of Huesca, even though the town was the object of a running joke among the militiamen. This episode emphasizes that, on the larger scale of the conflict, the Republicans at the front are stagnating in their fight against the enemy.

For five days, after Orwell spends a horrific night believing that he is going to have to fight again with the POUM in an attack that ultimately never takes place—and after a series of administrative correspondences and uncomfortable journeys in impossible lorries—he finally obtains his discharge ticket.

Even though he is trying to leave the country, Orwell is still subject to the unexpected twists and turns that have come to constitute his time in Spain, and which he has come to consider typical of Spanish disorganization. It seems as though he is trapped in an endless sequence of mistakes and delays.

Near the front line, Orwell realizes that political rivalries in the city have not affected the atmosphere at the front. At a hospital where he meets an Assault Guard who gives him cigarettes, the two of them laugh about the fact that, had they been in Barcelona, they would have been shooting at each other. At the front, Anarchists and Communists never express hostility toward each other and Orwell never feels looked down upon for his POUM membership.

Orwell never ceases to admire the values that the soldiers maintain at the front. It becomes obvious that, when faced with the threat of losing their life, men demonstrate extraordinary respect for each person's dignity. This situation emphasizes that two wars, not one (as Orwell had initially believed), are taking place in Spain: the military fight against the Fascists and the hateful political infighting in Barcelona.

During what he knows to be his final trip back to Barcelona, Orwell takes the time to consider his surroundings through the eyes of an external observer. He realizes that the town of Barbastro, which he had initially considered a cold, gloomy place, is in fact a picturesque town full of ancient, winding streets and artisanal shops. For six months, he realizes, he has never been able to look at Spain in this way. Rather, all the pleasant sights and sounds of the country were pushed to the background in light of the intensity of the war. Orwell suddenly begins to feel like a tourist, capable of appreciating the exotic allure of this country whose traditions and culture had previously so filled his imagination.

Orwell realizes that all his impressions of Spain were colored by the intensity of life as a soldier. This highlights the subjectivity of his narrative, suggesting that what he observed at one particular time and place is not a perfect reflection of truth but, rather, were often fleeting impressions that might be proven wrong or misleading over time. Orwell's description of himself as a tourist suggests the same thing, namely that his commentary is undoubtedly influenced by his foreignness.

As soon as Orwell arrives at his hotel in Barcelona, his wife walks toward him and hisses in his ear for him to exit at once. Orwell is confused, does not know what is happening, and quickly follows her outside. On the way, two friends communicate the same message: he must get out at once. As soon as they reach the street, Orwell's wife tells him that the POUM has been officially suppressed, their buildings occupied, their members thrown in prison and, it is rumored, shot.

The political tension in the city has become official and legal, as the Communist-led Government has decided to crush the revolutionary militia. Orwell becomes a potential victim in a political conflict he never chose to enter. His status as a foreigner does not protect him at all. He is subjected to the same, unjust system as everybody else.

Orwell learns that on June 15th the police assaulted the Hotel Falcón and transformed it into a prison. The next day, the POUM was declared illegal. Many people went into hiding but the police did not hesitate to use tactics such as taking wounded militiamen out of hospitals by force or arresting a POUM member's wife in order to force him to surrender. The Communist-controlled police engages in illegal arrests, refuses to obey release orders issued by the Chief of Police, and throws people in prison indiscriminately, regardless of the detrimental effect this might have on the war.

The illegal tactics that the Government uses to arrest militiamen are not only anti-democratic, but also inhuman and cruel. It becomes apparent that the Government is not privileging the fight against the Fascists. The fierceness of the situation suggests that this political conflict, of which Orwell was unaware when he arrived in Spain, was perhaps the true issue at the heart of the civil war in Spain.

What stuns Orwell most is that news of the suppression of the POUM never reached the front, probably because the Government did not want soldiers to desert or refuse to fight in protest. As a result, Orwell laments, militiamen are dying at the front fighting the Fascists without knowing that, in the rear, they are vilely accused of Fascist collaboration. Such manipulation and hypocrisy on the part of the Government, Orwell writes, is difficult to forgive.

Orwell upholds the values of honesty and openness against the tendency to lie and manipulate to achieve narrow political aims. What he deems most cruel is the Government's lack of respect for the dignity of the men who are sacrificing themselves in battle. The separation between politics at the front and in the rear is more obvious than ever.

Orwell learns from his wife that many of his friends have been arrested. He is particularly angry about Kopp's arrest, because he respects Kopp enormously as a friend and military officer and because Kopp has sacrificed his very nationality in order to fight in the Republican army (were he to return to Belgium, he would be tried and put into prison for this decision). Orwell's wife was not arrested, but the police have searched and confiscated all of Orwell's belongings, including his diaries, books, and war souvenirs.

Through Kopp's arrest, the political conflict affects Orwell on a personal level as much as on an ideological level. Once again, the Government's lack of respect for a soldier's sacrifice is appalling and signals its lack of sincere commitment to the anti-Fascist cause. Unhappy with merely suppressing the POUM, the Government seems to want to erase the very roots of its existence.

While still trying to understand why, if he is innocent, he should have to hide from the police, Orwell realizes that this is not a normal legal situation in which people are arrested for objective crimes. Rather, the rule of law no longer matters, and merely belonging to the wrong political party translates into a prison sentence. The only thing he can do, in this situation, is go into hiding.

Once again, Orwell is forced to accept that democratic rule has broken down completely and that he finds himself in a world where no standards of common sense, respectful behavior, and rule of law can be depended on. He has lost all trust in the political process.

Orwell makes arrangements with his wife to leave the country. While he assumes that he is probably on the secret police's black list, he trusts that Spain's disorganized bureaucracy will allow him to slip past the authorities undetected. In the meantime, he spends five days sleeping in uncomfortable but hidden spots in the city. Instead of being overwhelmed by political considerations about Spain, he remains obsessed with the daily discomforts he is experiencing and resents the situation he has found himself in.

Orwell's fear of being arrested is tempered by his trust in what he believes to be the typically Spanish trait of inefficiency. Once again, material hardships prove to be of more immediate concern than the historic nature of what he is experiencing. As such, his anger against this oppressive system is both personal (moved by frustration and anger) and ideological (condemning it as anti-democratic).

CHAPTER 12

At night, Orwell keeps a low profile, trying not to be caught by the police, while during the day he can lead a regular life, carefully avoiding spending time near POUM buildings. On his first day as a fugitive, he meets his wife and two friends, McNair and Cottman, at the British Consulate to try to obtain a passport to leave the country.

The absurdity of Orwell's double life shows that, while the police and the Government are committing horrific acts, ordinary life is going on as usual in the city. This is reminiscent of Orwell's time as a militiaman, when he noticed that the civilian population was often happy to turn a blind eye to what was happening in other cities in their country.

There, his friends tell him that Bob Smillie has died. While they initially believe he has been shot, Orwell later discovers that he probably died of appendicitis, an ordinary illness left untreated in prison. The news overwhelms Orwell, who cannot understand the senselessness of such a death. Smillie was a twenty-two-year old boy whom Orwell considered one of the strongest, most able men in the militia. He cannot fathom how such a tough, talented, courageous fighter could have been left to die like this, alone and neglected, because of senseless political rivalries.

Once more, the cruelty of the political persecution affects Orwell on a personal level. Smillie becomes a martyr-like figure, a model of the utter absurdity of what is happening in the political chaos. It also underlines the Government's unwillingness to put the fight against the Fascists first and celebrate its dedicated fighters. The Government, it seems, is implicitly sabotaging its own cause.

That afternoon, Orwell and his wife visit Kopp. In the makeshift prison, Orwell notices that most of the prisoners are poor, working-class men who rely on their wives to bring them the bare minimum of food. The place is extremely crowded and, among the prisoners, Orwell notices children and wounded men alike.

The poor conditions in the prison suggest that these arrests are not necessarily meant to incapacitate dangerous members of society but are, rather, an expression of blind political hatred. The fact that most prisoners come from the poorest levels of society also indicates that the Spanish revolution truly was supported by a strong working-class base, unlike the Communist Party which does not hesitate to persecute those it claims to represent.

When Kopp arrives, he is cheerful and lighthearted. He tells Orwell and his wife that he will probably be shot, but does not seem bothered by the news. During the conversation, Orwell realizes that the letter from the Ministry of War that was confiscated from Kopp could play an important role in getting him out of prison. The letter was addressed to an important colonel, and reaching out to that officer directly might help get Kopp free. Orwell decides to leave immediately and meet the man in person.

Kopp impresses Orwell with his sense of self-sacrifice and his knowledge that his commitment to the war in Spain implies accepting death. Despite Orwell's disillusionment, it becomes apparent that an important part of him still believes in the rule of law and trusts that, by using reason and logic, he can get Kopp freed.

When Orwell arrives at the War Department, bearing a letter that Kopp has written for the colonel, he is stopped by an Assault Guard who demands to see his papers. Orwell shows him his hospital discharge ticket and, as the man lets him through, Orwell realizes that he can't read. Orwell is sent a variety of different directions by people who do not actually know where the colonel's office is. He feels that he is stuck in a nightmare. Meanwhile, time to is running out, as Orwell believes that Kopp could be shot any time soon.

The guard's illiteracy highlights the fact that many of the people engaged in this conflict on either side are ignorant and, like the poor Fascist conscripts, perhaps involved out of sheer chance or necessity. As usual, the locals' inefficiency proves both humorous and potentially deadly, at odds with the organization that Orwell expects from an official institution.

Finally, Orwell is able to find the office and meet the colonel's secretary. When Orwell confesses that Kopp was part of the POUM, the secretary reacts with panic. Orwell is forced to admit that he, too, was part of the POUM militia, and is convinced that the man will order his arrest immediately. However, to Orwell's surprise, the man leads him to the Chief of Police without saying a word. There, after the secretary engages in a violent conversation with the police, he emerges with Kopp's confiscated letter from the Ministry of War. Despite this surprising success, this letter was ultimately not able to free Kopp.

When the secretary proves willing to help Orwell, Orwell realizes that not all members of the Government are evil POUM-haters. Even within the anti-POUM Republican Government itself, it is likely that people are divided in terms of their support for the suppression of the POUM. However, the failure of Orwell's efforts to free Kopp signals that the prison system no longer follows rules of logic and common sense but, rather, is a closed system that obeys only the rules or partisanship.

On his way out, as Orwell is saying goodbye to the secretary, the man decides to shake Orwell's hand. Orwell is deeply moved by this gesture, for in the atmosphere of political rivalry that has overtaken the city, such a gesture means publicly shaking hands with the enemy. Orwell reflects that such a gesture is typical of the Spanish nobility of character. Despite his horrible memories of Spain, he admits that he has almost nothing to complain about when it comes to Spanish generosity.

What Orwell calls the Spanish nobility of character is a deeply courageous attitude of respect for other people's dignity. The secretary's admirable gesture highlights the gap between the cruelty of official policies and the attitudes of the good, honorable men who are obliged to enforce them.

Orwell recounts an anecdote to illustrate his belief in Spanish nobility. When the secret police searched his hotel room, he explains, they examined every single object and possible hiding place in the room. However, since Orwell's wife was lying in bed, they refused to inspect the bed. Even though Orwell had nothing to hide, he explains that, had he been a Fascist spy, he very well could have concealed secret documents there. The police's refusal to inspect the bed, therefore, made their entire search for pro-Fascist material fruitless. This is an episode, Orwell assesses, where the Spanish deference to a woman's privacy proved more important than their brutal, Communist-style police tactics.

Orwell concludes that, while politics play a crucial role in Spanish life, Spaniards often privilege dignity and respect over political allegiance. This suggests that even brutal organizations such as the secret police are capable of respectable behavior on an individual level.

In the meantime, with his companions McNair and Cottman, Orwell hides at night and pretends to be a rich English tourist during the day. The situation, to him, is so absurd that he cannot truly consider himself in danger, since he believes that he has done nothing wrong.

Orwell cannot let go of his English conception of the rule of law and adapt to the current state of affairs in Barcelona. However, in addition to his foreign nationality, his upper-class status affords him a protection that the lower-class members of the POUM don't enjoy. In this way, Orwell remains a privileged outsider to the conflict.

Finally, one morning after receiving their passports from the British consulate, Orwell and his wife head to the train station. While waiting for the train, Orwell writes a final letter to the Ministry of War to try to get Kopp liberated. None of his efforts have any effect and Kopp remains in prison. Like so many other foreigners, Kopp is later sent to a secret prison and Orwell does not hear from him after this.

Despite his various setbacks and moments of disillusionment, Orwell still stubbornly believes in the reasonableness of the political system and in the possibility of saving his friend. However, what ends up happening to Kopp only confirms the injustice of the entire system, and the erosion of the rule of law in Spain.

Orwell and his wife succeed in boarding the train. They make sure to sit in the dining-car and, as they look like normal tourists, are left alone by the police. Orwell notes with irony that, when he arrived in Spain, showing off wealth was dangerous. At that time, to be respectable, one had to appear working class, while six months later the opposite is true. Thanks to inefficient Spanish bureaucracy, Orwell's name does not appear on the border authorities' list of wanted people, and he and his wife are able to cross the border.

In the train, Orwell realizes that all hopes for the revolution are dead and that Barcelona has become yet another capitalist city, where the wealthy hold more power than the working class. The ease with which the Orwells revert to their ordinary upper-class appearance highlights the fact that they were always tourists, poised to exit the conflict at a moment's notice and return to the comfort of their "real" lives.

As soon as they arrive in France, Orwell buys as many cigarettes as he can. Orwell and his wife get off the train at Banyuls, the first station. In the town, when they mention their story to strangers, they are treated with hostility and they realize that the town is largely pro-Franco. Once in France, instead of feeling relieved, the couple remains animated by what they have witnessed in Spain and ordinary civilian life suddenly seems boring. Their one secret desire is to return to Spain and share the plight of their friends and comrades.

While Orwell craves material comforts that he lacked in Spain, consumer goods are not as powerful as the spiritual ebullience he experienced in Spain. From afar, the dangers to which they were vulnerable seem negligible, and what they remember most is the excitement and nobility of fighting for a just cause. Despite being the victim of political persecution, Orwell still believes in the incredible dignity of the people he has met.

Orwell explains that, however horrible his memories of Spain might be, what he experienced there has left him with indelible memories, feelings, and sensations that, in the end, he is grateful to have had. After witnessing the horrors of the war, Orwell is in fact moved by optimism and a strong belief in the inherent dignity and generosity of human beings. He warns the reader that his account is inevitably marked by his personal point of view and opinions, and that this book, like any other account of the Spanish Civil War, should be regarded critically as containing mistakes and personal opinions.

Orwell examines the impact of the Spanish Civil War on his way of thinking and realizes that the personal nature of this experience carries a greater weight than the political or historical conclusions he might have drawn from it. The intensity of this personal experience was such that it colors his attempt to provide a truthful account of the historical episodes he witnessed.

After stopping in Paris, the couple returns to England. There, when Orwell witnesses the unchanged rhythm of everyday English life, isolated from all the violence in other parts of the world, he realizes how peacefully oblivious his home country is. In a dark, foreboding tone, he concludes that the only way the country could be woken from its comfortable lethargy would be through the attack of bombs.

If Orwell occasionally felt like a tourist in Spain, upon his return in England he realizes that here, too, he is marked by an almost foreign viewpoint, the result of his intense immersion in Spain. However difficult his experience of the Spanish Civil War might have been, it has left more of a positive than a negative impression on him. He believes that England should learn from the Spanish revolutionary fight, and it becomes clear that he has brought some revolutionary ideas back to his home country with him.

APPENDIX I

In this Appendix, separate from the rest of the narrative, Orwell dissects the dynamics of Spanish party politics. He argues that, beyond military considerations, the Spanish Civil War is at its heart a political war, characterized by inter-party infighting.

This Appendix constitutes Orwell's reckoning with his initially misguided understanding of the war, which he had seen as a simple fight between good (democratic) and evil (Fascist) forces.

When he first arrived in Spain, Orwell was unaware of the complexity of Spanish politics. He had joined the war to fight against Fascism in the name of what he calls "common decency." While he was fascinated by the revolutionary atmosphere in Barcelona, he did not try to understand its historical ramifications. Rather, the myriad parties and trade unions gave him the feeling that Spain was unnecessarily divided in its fight against Franco. He joined the POUM without realizing that there were serious differences between the different leftwing parties that formed the Republican coalition.

Orwell's reasons for joining the Republican coalition in Spain are rather vague. He claims to defend a supposedly universal moral concept, but it is difficult to ignore the fact that his ideas of morality and acceptable behavior are biased—affected by his own upbringing, class, and nationality. His belief in a universal moral code ultimately blinds him to the specific human and political complexity on the ground in Spain.

Later, Orwell realized that his perspective had largely been shaped by what he had read in English newspapers, which promulgated a simple, anti-Fascist attitude. The press ignored the fact that the underlying struggle was not necessarily a fight against the Fascists, but a fight for power within the Spanish left. Orwell argues that the series of events he lived through in Spain, from his boredom at the front to his escape from the country, were the direct result of his belonging to the POUM. Had he been part of a Communist unit, he would have had an entirely different experience of the Spanish Civil War.

Orwell's ignorance of the political divisions within the Spanish left means that he ended up joining the POUM out of sheer luck, without realizing the full implications of such a choice. Implicitly, he admits that he could been an anti-POUM supporter had he joined the Communists. This emphasizes the highly subjective and, more importantly, accidental nature of much of what defines his perspective.

Orwell argues that while many people saw the beginning of the Spanish Civil War as a brave attempt to stop the wave of Fascism sweeping through Europe, Fascism in Spain cannot in fact be compared to Fascism in other parts of Europe. First of all, while in other countries Fascist leaders were generally backed by the bourgeoisie, in Spain Franco alienated both the working class and members of the bourgeoisie. Secondly, the working class did not resist Franco in the name of democracy. Rather, their fight was part of a true revolutionary movement, aimed at establishing political and economic power for the working class. The energy liberated by revolutionary hopes, aimed at upturning the capitalist system, was the true driver of anti-Fascist rebellion. It was only through the power of trade unions and the arming of workers, Orwell argues, that Franco's military force was initially resisted.

Orwell re-examines his belief that fighting against Fascism in Spain would have international consequences, capable of protecting democracy in other parts of Europe. Democracy, he explains, was not the goal of the anti-Fascist camp in Spain. Rather, the anti-Fascists in Spain wanted something that existed nowhere else: working-class control of society. The Spanish Civil War, thus, is not just another example of the progression of Fascism through Europe, but, rather, an isolated event, unique in character.

Once workers were armed, they refused to give up their weapons. Peasants seized big estates, industries were collectivized, and workers attempted to create autonomous militias separate from the capitalist police. These revolutionary events, however, were mostly hidden in the foreign press. In so doing, international news effectively concealed the issue of revolution that lay at the heart of the conflict.

Workers saw the anti-Fascist fight as being in alignment with the complete overturning of many of society's institutions, demonstrating that their goal was two-fold: to defeat the Fascists and to create a new society. By refusing to talk about the revolution, the foreign press thus produced a version of the conflict that was entirely partial.

Orwell argues that the main reason for this press concealment was that the entire world opposed revolution in Spain. The USSR, following Communist principles, believed that at this stage revolution would fail and, therefore, decided that the Spanish revolution had to be crushed. Other capitalist countries, convinced that their economic investments in Spain would lose all value if revolutionaries gained political power, adopted the same approach. As a result, in order to discredit the Spanish revolution, foreign powers actively denied that any revolution was taking place at all. In Spain, by contrast, everyone knew that the revolution was a central issue in the war.

Orwell argues that the Civil War was not only fought within the boundaries of Spain. Rather, it was a conflict that also involved international actors whose political and economic influence impacted the course of the conflict. The press was not a neutral commentator on the war, but a powerful tool that reflected and deepened partisanship.

The revolution never became fully developed. While at the beginning the Spanish Government defended working-class interests, over time it began to shift to the right. When the USSR began to supply weapons to the Spanish Communist Party, political power shifted away from the Anarchists to the Communists. As a result, the anti-revolution Communists were able to prevent working-class control from advancing any further.

The Republican Government's gradually increasing anti-revolutionary attitude was the result of foreign support, proving that the fight in Spain was indeed being fought abroad as much as on local territory. The Communists' anti-revolutionary attitude proved more important than their belief in democracy, showing, once again, that democracy was not the central issue in this conflict.

At that point, the Government was moved by two separate goals: the need to fight Franco and the need to regain control of the trade unions so that the revolution would end. The Government took various steps to weaken the power of the Anarchists and the working class. Collectivization was halted, the police re-armed, and key working-class-controlled industries taken over. Most importantly, the revolutionary militias were incorporated into the non-political Popular Army, which did not follow the militias' revolutionary principles of social equality. Unlike in other countries, therefore, where Communist Parties belong to the extreme Left, the Spanish Communist Party was the most conservative, anti-revolutionary force within the leftwing Government.

Following Communist principles, the Republican Government was the most important actor in weakening its own coalition by alienating the leftist, revolutionary parties that made up the anti-Fascist camp. In so doing, the Government implicitly signaled that crushing the working class was a more pressing goal than defeating the Fascist enemy. In its attempts to bring an end to the revolution, the Government could even be seen as siding with the Fascists on the issues of working-class control and democratic principles, proving that the Fascist and anti-Fascist camps perhaps had more in common than Orwell had initially imagined.

Orwell proceeds to summarize the ideologies of the parties within the Spanish Left. On one side, the Spanish Communist Party believed that the revolution would alienate both the peasants and the middle class, and that revolutionary goals should be discarded in favor military efficiency. On the other side, both the POUM and the Anarchists believed that maintaining the status quo of parliamentary democracy was as harmful to the workers as capitalism and Fascism. They trusted that the only real alternative to Fascism was working-class control and that pressing the revolution forward was the only way to win the fight against Fascism.

The Spanish leftwing parties are divided on the issue of revolution and war. The anti-revolution camp believes that revolution is an obstacle to winning the war, whereas the pro-revolution camp believes that the war against Fascism cannot be won without the revolution. Both camps define democracy in different ways. Pro-revolutionary groups believe that democracy should be participatory, giving political voice to the weakest, whereas anti-revolutionary groups are satisfied with a more conservative vision of democracy as a representative system, in which the lower classes do not necessarily have a voice.

Initially, Orwell agreed with the Communists that fighting for the revolution was less important than winning the war. He was exasperated by the constant inter-party fighting that he read in leftwing Spanish newspapers on both sides. Over time, though his ideas changed, as he realized that the Communists were actively weakening the Government coalition. When the Communists accused the POUM not only of weakening the war effort by pushing the revolution forward but of deliberate collaboration with the enemy, they discredited the POUM and, in so doing, divided the anti-Fascist coalition.

While the Communist ideology initially seemed more practical, Orwell realized that, in practice, its attitude was not to win the war with the other political members of the Republican coalition, but to win the war without them, so that the revolution would be completely crushed. This position made little practical sense, for it ended up weakening the leftwing coalition and, therefore, lowering the Communists' chances of winning the war.

Orwell was disgusted by this pro-Communist narrative. He realized that much of that propaganda was disseminated by journalists and politicians who were not actually fighting in the war and who, therefore, were ignorant of what actually went on in the conflict. In general, Orwell was disillusioned to realize that the leftwing press was just as full of lies and bitter accusations as rightwing newspapers. The result of the interparty journalistic disputes was that leftwing newspapers ended up writing more bitterly against their leftist political rivals than against Fascism. When the Communists began to take power away from workers and to throw revolutionaries in jail, Orwell also realized that the Communists were not actually in favor of supporting the working class.

Orwell argues that his firsthand experience of the conflict was more valuable than the opinions of people who wrote about the war from afar and who, often, were more motivated by political motives than by a respect for democracy and truth. This judgment is valid both for journalists and for Communist Party leaders. Orwell realizes that the Communists actively hindered the democratic process by refusing to tolerate dissent, disregarding standards of transparency and truth-telling, and eliminating certain actors from the political process based on their beliefs.

Orwell also argued that, from a practical perspective, revolutionary goals could have drawn more supporters to the Republican side. Had more people abroad known about the revolution in Spain, they might have been willing to leave their country to fight in defense of the working class, as Orwell and his companions did. The same might be true within Spain itself. Had the Government emphasized its support of working-class control, workers fighting on Franco's side might have been more willing to desert and fight on the Republican side. The national and international effort to weaken public knowledge of the Spanish revolution was therefore detrimental to the anti-Fascist cause. The POUM and the Anarchists' idea that the revolution and the war were inseparable was, for these practical reasons, less absurd than it initially appeared.

Orwell initially respected the Communist ideology because he believed that launching a revolution could in fact draw crucial resources away from the greater fight against the Fascists. However, he argues that the loss of local resources in the local revolutionary effort could have been compensated by the arrival of resources from other parts of the world. Looking at the conflict as a purely Spanish affair was therefore a mistaken approach. It was important to consider the role of international actors in order to understand the true dynamics at play in this war.

At the beginning of his time in Spain, however, Orwell was not aware of these facts, and would gladly have exchanged his boredom as a POUM militiaman for greater action in a Communist unit. Unlike the Communists, who tended to attack anyone who did not follow party guidelines, the POUM were tolerant of Orwell's desire to join Communist troops and allowed him to express this idea freely without ostracizing him for this decision or pressuring him to join the party.

In retrospect, Orwell realizes that his enlistment with the POUM was a stroke of luck. The democratic values he saw at work in the revolutionary militia would have been unthinkable within the Communist party. His feelings of boredom and frustration in the moment ultimately proved far less important than the lessons he drew from the POUM's ideology.

APPENDIX II

Orwell warns the reader that no objective account of the war exists, as the only records available are those of party propaganda. After this warning, Orwell uses his authority as an eyewitness to analyze in detail the Barcelona street fighting of May 1937.

Orwell reminds the reader that his narrative is subjective. However, unlike most journalists, he did not rely on untrustworthy documents but, rather, on what he saw with his own eyes, which he considers trustworthy.

Orwell examines the events leading up to the street fighting. As political tension between Anarchists and Communists had been growing throughout Catalonia, a violent outcome was deemed inevitable. Workers began to feel that the Government was trying to impede the revolution. The Government's decision to build a non-political police force and to order citizens to surrender all private weapons were the immediate causes of the conflict.

The Government was hypocritical in its non-political approach to security. Under the guise of privileging military efficaciousness, for example by using private weapons for the war effort, it was in fact launching a provocation and attempting to weaken the working class.

On May 3rd, 1937, the Government took over the Telephone Exchange, which was controlled by the Anarchists. Believing that they were under direct attack, the Anarchists took to the streets and began fighting. The city was divided geographically into political sections separated by barricades, with the working-class neighborhoods under Anarchist and POUM control pitted against the city center, which was under police and Communist control. However, the fighting was mostly defensive on both sides. On May 7, people began to leave the barricades, primarily because of the food shortage. That same day, Government-sent forces (the Valencian Assault Guards) took control of the city and the Government seized all private arms.

Fighting erupted as a result of the Government's provocative action against the Anarchists. Beyond this planned aggression, however, the rest of the fighting was spontaneous, as each party was merely trying to protect itself. The Communist-led Government did not seek political compromise, but asserted its dominance through force, to which the Anarchists and the POUM were forced to surrender.

While the fighting had no direct effect on the war, it allowed the Valencian Government to assert its dominance in Catalonia, to further break up the militias, and to suppress the POUM. These things probably would have come to pass eventually, Orwell suggests, even if the fighting had never taken place.

The Barcelona fighting was used as a convenient excuse for the Government to carry out its long-term, premeditated plan of crushing the social revolution and the working class.

As to the nature of the outbreak, Orwell judges that it was entirely spontaneous. The Anarchist leaders disowned the affair from the start, while the POUM leaders, more hesitant, stood by the workers in the street, while at the same time urging the workers to only act defensively. In sum, neither the POUM nor the Anarchists were moved by revolutionary intentions or by rebellion against the Government. They were merely reacting to what they considered an unjust attack by the police. It was unlikely, too, that the Communists had planned or expected such a violent outbreak. If either side had contemplated large-scale violence, Orwell argues, there is no doubt that they would have brought troops to the city beforehand and made plans for food distribution, which was not the case.

Orwell describes the gap between party leadership and actions carried out on the ground. As with most Orwell's experiences in this war, certain events came to pass primarily thanks to the energies and convictions of ordinary men on the ground who were courageous in defending their ideals. The fact that none of the political parties involved had planned this uprising, however, does not mean that they benefitted equally from its outcome. With greater political power, the Communists were bound to be able to use this episode to their own advantage.

The spontaneous nature of the conflict was not represented in the press, which placed all the blame on the Anarchists and the POUM. The English press denounced the Anarchists for refusing to obey the Government's order to surrender their arms when such weapons were desperately needed at the front. This perspective, Orwell explains, disregards the complexity of the conflict between Communists and Anarchists. Both sides understood that political tension was likely to evolve into violence and that, as a result, it was important to keep arms for defensive purposes. To Anarchists, surrendering their arms meant capitulating to Communist dominance.

The English press's condemnation of the Anarchists and the POUM was merely a continuation of their mistaken view of the conflict as a fight between Fascists and anti-Fascists. Their ignorance of the dynamics at play in the revolution put all the blame on one side of the conflict, whereas Orwell believes that the responsibility was shared.

The Government's assault on the Telephone Exchange, Orwell argues, was bound to lead to violence. While the foreign press argues that the Anarchists should have surrendered the building without resisting (as any fight within the Republican coalition was harmful to the war effort), Orwell explains that this argument is beside the point. In the tense situation that Spain was in, the Government was bound to know that it would be met with resistance. It follows that both the Government and the Anarchists are at fault. The press, however, refused to produce a two-sided version of the events. This can be explained by the fact that Anarchists have virtually no influence in international press.

Orwell argues that the Government's action against the Telephone Exchange was not a neutral act but, rather, a deliberate provocation, which it knew would result in violence. In other words, in chronological terms at least, the true instigator of violence was the Communist-led Republican Government. Once again, the press's attitude is blind to the fact that two wars, not one, were being fought in Spain: the fight against the Fascists and the struggle for power within the Spanish left.

Orwell proceeds to examine the Communist and pro-Communist accounts of the conflict, which placed all blame for the violence on the POUM. The violence was described as a premeditated rebellion by the POUM, a Fascist conspiracy aimed at halting the Government's war efforts. Orwell offers three reasons for which it is impossible for the POUM to be part of a Fascist conspiracy against the Government. First, the POUM was too small a group to provoke such large-scale violence. Second, the accusation of Fascist collaboration with Italy and Germany is ridiculous considering that it relies on absolutely no evidence. Finally, trouble only arose in Barcelona and nowhere else. At the front and in the POUM stronghold of Lérida, life and the struggle against Fascists went on as usual. Had the POUM meant to orchestrate a Fascist uprising, it would undoubtedly have had consequences in other places besides Barcelona.

Orwell distances himself from his deeply personal approach to describing the war and attempts to examine press articles objectively, using reason and political arguments to identify the flaws in the news coverage of the event. Instead of mentioning his own conviction that the POUM is an admirable, democratic, anti-Fascist force, he takes the accusations against it seriously and counters them on their own terms. In so doing, he demonstrates his commitment to providing a just, truthful account of events. However subjective his opinions might be, they remain based on a reasoned, critical, and informed understanding of what happened.

After examining articles from the Communist press, Orwell concludes that it is full of contradictions. In one article, the Anarchists are presented as the ones who attacked the Telephone Exchange—which is, in fact, their very own building. In another, the police attacked the Telephone Exchange in order to remove fifty POUM militiamen who had occupied the building the night before. These and other instances convince Orwell that the Communist press is full of untruths, providing a confused and contradictory account of the event.

Orwell shows that the articles published in the pro-Communist press make little sense, thereby undermining their own arguments. It remains unclear whether journalists are merely misinformed or are deliberately muddling the truth as a political strategy.

The articles also engage in pure fabrication that demonstrates a complete ignorance of local dynamics. Some speak of machine-guns, tanks, and artillery fire, for which, Orwell notes, there is absolutely no evidence. Orwell describes these exaggerations as political necessity. In order to formulate a credible accusation against the POUM, newspapers needed to overemphasize the POUM's strength, which would allow them to convincingly portray the POUM as being fully responsible for the outbreak of violence.

Orwell concludes that the contradictions and gross inventions he has read are not innocent mistakes but, rather, deliberate manipulations of the truth. Instead of using facts to support their arguments, journalists put their political arguments first, manipulating the facts for their arguments to appear more convincing. This approach goes against all standards of journalistic ethics.

In sum, Orwell concludes, the Communist press was aimed at a public entirely ignorant of local circumstances in Spain. They were meant to instill hatred against the POUM and, in the case of some foreign capitalist newspapers, against the Anarchists, laying all blame for the fighting on one side. Orwell emphasizes that most foreign journalists in Spain depended on the biased Ministry of Propaganda for information.

Orwell once again puts forth the argument that, without firsthand knowledge of local circumstances—which he, unlike many other journalists, was able to acquire—the news cannot convey the truth.

Accusations that the POUM was a fascist organization lacked credibility, as all POUM leaders had serious histories of revolutionary involvement, and had played an important part in resisting Fascist forces. While the POUM's insistence on revolution could arguably be considered counter-productive to the war effort, it could not, in any circumstance, be understood as treachery. In fact, after the events, the falseness of such accusations came to light when most members of the Spanish Government rejected all charges against the POUM. While Fascist spies were always shot immediately, the POUM leaders have been kept in prison and official charges never formulated. These facts suffice to conclude that all charges against the POUM were direct inventions of the Communist press.

Orwell demonstrates that the accusations against the POUM were blatantly false. It is likely that the Government knew this even as it was arresting POUM members. In other words, the Government and the Communist Party's attitudes were highly hypocritical. They were intentionally sabotaging the revolutionary effort for political reasons, not because the POUM was an actual military threat to their chances of winning the war against Franco.

Finally, Orwell addresses the accusations that the POUM are a Trotskyist organization. By examining three different possible definitions of the word "Trotskyist," he argues that this charge revealed nothing about the POUM's actual ideology, but that it was merely used as an insult, equivalent to calling someone a traitor and a criminal.

Orwell focuses on the power of words to carry even nonsensical accusations. The word "Trotskyist" was never clearly defined in the press and, as such, conveyed a mysterious sense of shame and culpability, but it was not attached to any particular crime.

Orwell explains that he has discussed the accusations against the POUM in such detail because he believes that this fighting within the leftwing coalition was not trivial but, rather, was the most dangerous force undermining the anti-Fascist coalition. Eliminating political rivals through false accusations, Orwell argues, is a typical Communist technique. Its only effect is to breed political intolerance, divide the political left, and impede serious discussion of complicated events.

Orwell identifies the true enemy of the anti-Fascist cause not as the Fascists themselves, but as a group in the anti-Fascist coalition: the Communists. The Communists' anti-democratic behavior resulted in the breakdown of the very democracy for which they were supposedly fighting.

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