

## GEORGE ORWELL AND CLAUD COCKBURN: PARALLEL LIVES, DIVERGENT THINKING

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The Spanish Civil War was an extremely newsworthy event for British writers and journalists of the time, who produced a large number of texts from very different political perspectives. George Orwell's experiences in Spain when fighting for the Republicans triggered the writing of his famous *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a memoir of his time spent as a soldier on the Aragon front, whose version of the Barcelona May days was very different from the account given in the pro-Communist British press about the same events. In this book Orwell pinpoints a Mr Frank Pitcairn as the source of what he considers the lies and propaganda circulating in the British press about the Barcelona fighting. Frank Pitcairn was in fact the pen name of Claud Cockburn, an English journalist and novelist who, like Orwell, came to Spain to write about the Civil War, enlisted as a frontline volunteer for the Republicans and wrote a personal account of his experiences entitled *Reporter in Spain* (1936). This lecture sets out to compare and contrast the life and work of these two British writers, whose background, life experience and literary career were very similar, while offering a divergent view of the Spanish Civil War.

*Keywords:* George Orwell, Claud Cockburn, Frank Pitcairn, Spain, Civil War, war memoirs

The Spanish Civil War has been described as “the biggest world story” of its day (Sebba 1994: 95) and it certainly was an extremely newsworthy event for British writers and journalists of the time, who produced a large number of texts from very different political perspectives. George Orwell's experiences in Spain triggered the writing of his famous *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), a memoir of his time spent as a soldier for the Republicans on the Aragon front and his involvement in the street fighting of the Barcelona May days of 1937, when the Communists reacted against other political parties opposing Franco. Orwell's version of the Barcelona fighting was very different from the account given in the pro-Communist British press about the same events. Whilst Orwell supported the POUM (Partido Obrero Unificado Marxista), a Marxist but anti-Stalinist party that was declared illegal by the Republican Government, the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker* described the POUM as a treacherous party secretly working for Hitler and Mussolini. In *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell pinpoints a Mr Frank Pitcairn as the source of what he considers the lies and propaganda circulating in the British press about the Barcelona fighting. Frank Pitcairn was in fact the pen name of Claud Cockburn, an English journalist and novelist who, like Orwell, came to Spain to write about the Civil War, enlisted as a frontline volunteer for the Republicans and wrote a personal account of his experiences entitled *Reporter in Spain* (1936). This lecture sets out to compare and contrast the life and work of these two British writers, whose background, life experience, literary career

and interests were very similar, while offering a divergent view of the Spanish Civil War.

The first fact that strikes out attention is that both, Orwell and Cockburn, descend from families of Scots extraction with considerable wealth and social distinction. Orwell's real name was Eric Arthur Blair, his surname being of Scottish Gaelic origin, meaning "field" or "plain". His great-great-grandfather, Charles Blair (1743-1802), was the absentee owner of lands and plantations in the Island of Jamaica (Stansky 1979: 5). "Cockburn" is also a surname of Scottish origin. Among the forebears of Claud Cockburn was Lord Henry Cockburn (1779-1854), a leading Scottish lawyer, judge and literary figure who contributed regularly to the *Edinburgh Review*.<sup>1</sup> The families of our two authors joined the long tradition of Scottish emigration and went to live abroad; therefore, Orwell and Cockburn were born very far from Britain, both in the East. Orwell was born in Motihari, a town in what was then known as Bengal, a region in the northeast of India. Cockburn was born in Peking (now Beijing), China. Another common feature is the proximity of birth-dates. Less than a year separates their birth – Orwell was born on 25 June 1903 and Cockburn on 12 April 1904, which leads us to think of the possibility of identifying them as members of the same literary generation.

We could say that they were both children of the British Empire. Orwell's family belonged to the ruling class of *sahibs*, a term of respect for important white Europeans in colonial India. His father, Richard Walmesley Blair, was a British official in the Opium Department of the Indian Civil Service. The opium trade with China had been legalised after 1860 and his job included travelling round the district, advancing loans to the poppy farmers and checking on the quality of the crop (Shelden 1991: 14-15). Despite his apparently good, comfortable position within the British colonial Empire, Orwell spoke of his family as members of the "lower-upper-middle class" (1959: 123), whose pretensions to social status had little relation to their income. Similarly, Cockburn comes from a family with a colonial background. His grandfather worked for the old East India Company and became a judge in the administration of the Indian Empire. His father, Harry Cockburn, entered the Eastern Consular Service and became a British diplomat for more than thirty years in China and Korea. As the First Secretary of the British Legation, he was witness of the siege of the Legation Quarter of Peking in the summer of 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, the aim of which was to expel foreign powers from China. Cockburn describes his father's job in the following terms: "The political intrigues in which as British agent he became involved were intricate, dangerous and delightful. Once a month he conducted a public exercise in imperialism" (1981: 13). This "exercise in imperialism" consisted of going through a forbidden area of the city, where foreigners were not allowed, in order to visit the Governor. The way Cockburn depicts his father's diplomatic activities reveals the anti-imperial stance he took when he grew up. In recounting the political convictions of his youth, he refers to the revulsion he felt from what he calls "criminal imperialism", as the natural reaction of people of his age to the immediate post-war situation (1981: 163). Orwell, after serving for a few years as a member of the Imperial Police in Burma, articulated similar anticolonial views in several essays and in his first novel *Burmese Days* (1934).

Like many other writers of the time, such as Rudyard Kipling or Lawrence Durrell, our two authors soon left the country where they were born and were sent to Britain for their education. They are both products of the British public school system, that is to say, they went each to a prestigious and historic boarding school. Public schools had played an important role in the development of the Victorian social elite, developing a curriculum based heavily on the classics and physical activity for boys and young men of the gentlemanly class of British politics, armed forces and colonial

government. When Orwell was eight, he was sent away to St. Cyprian's boarding school in Eastbourne, "the conventional fate of a boy of his age and class" (Stansky 1979: 23). From there he entered the prestigious Eton College, a boarding school near London where many of the country's most famous men were educated. However, Orwell's general attitude towards his education in later life was dismissive, particularly of his first preparatory school, as can be seen in his essay "Such, Such Were the Joys". By the same token, Cockburn was educated at the prestigious Berkhamsted School, an independent boys' boarding school in Hertfordshire, whose headmaster then was Graham Greene's father, Charles Henry Greene. Cockburn's memories of this school, with its strict rules and regimentation were not very pleasant either: "... as a direct result of all this supervision and ordering about, one of the most valuable lessons my school taught me was how to break other people's rules" (1981: 15). A mark of their education that would stay with Orwell and Cockburn for the rest of their life was the public school accent. Orwell was well aware of his "educated" accent (1959: 115) when he visited a working-class area in the north of England to write *The Road to Wigan Pier* and was afraid of being "spotted as a gentleman" the moment he opened his mouth when he tried to know the living conditions of the social outcast for his book *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1959: 152). Similarly, in a chapter of his memoirs entitled "Oxford accent" Cockburn describes how his education at Keble College, Oxford, opened the path for a travelling fellowship to Berlin, which in turn gave him the possibility to get a job as a correspondent for *The Times*.

While at Oxford University, Cockburn showed an early interest and talent for writing. He edited a weekly paper called *The Isis*, wrote a weekly column during term time for one of the local papers, and occasionally "sold articles or a short story elsewhere" (Cockburn 1981: 25). He even placed an early short story in the *New York Dial*, a piece that Ezra Pound read and liked (1981: 40). After finishing his university studies, as it has just been mentioned, he became a foreign correspondent of the conservative London newspaper *The Times*. He arrived in New York during the summer of 1929, and so he was able to cover the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression that followed. His first book appeared in 1932: *High Low Washington* is a reportage on the capital city, its people and its politics. Orwell's beginnings as a writer were very similar. While at Eton he wrote satirical poems and short stories for various college magazines, contributing and helping to edit the magazine *College Days*. After his spell in Burma, in 1928 he began his career as a professional writer with an article on censorship published in the French newspaper *Monde* and another entitled "A Farthing Newspaper" printed in Chesterton's *G.K.'s Weekly*. While he was working as a regular book reviewer for the magazine *The Adelphi*, Orwell wrote about his experiences in the French capital and published his first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), a reportage about the living conditions of the poor in the two capitals.

Another striking similarity between Orwell and Cockburn revolves around their decision to use a pseudonym. As a deliberate action to break away from his past as a public school boy and an imperial policeman, Orwell changed his name when he published *Down and Out in Paris and London*. He tried to live almost as a new personality with a typically English name (George is the name of the patron saint of England) and using as a surname an East Anglian river (Meyers 2010: 5). In time the pen name became very closely attached to him, since he continued using it for the rest of his literary career; his essays, memoirs and famous fiction –*Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteenth Eighty-Four* (1949) were both published under the name of George Orwell. A similar attitude can be observed in Cockburn. On the cover of his first book, *High Low Washington*, his name is substituted by two numbers: "30-32". Then, when he

resigned from the conservative newspaper *The Times* and became a correspondent for the Communist *Daily Worker*, he signed his contributions as Frank Pitcairn (his paternal grandmother's maiden name was Eliza Anne Pitcairn). Later on, in the 1950s, he tried to distance himself from his political past by using several pseudonyms, such as Kenneth Drew and Patrick Cork, although James Helvick was the name he used for some of his novels of that period: *Beat the Devil* (1951), *Overdraft on Glory* (1955) and *The Horses* (1961). This last penname was suggested by Cockburn's wife and came from a place on the Irish coast called Helvick Head, which was near their house (Cockburn 1988: 34).

The similarities between Orwell and Cockburn go beyond birth-dates, family background, the homogeneity of their education, literary interests and use of pseudonyms, for Orwell's political orientation is analogous to Cockburn's commitment with the Left. Against the backdrop of the economic depression of the 1930s and the rise of fascism, many British intellectuals responded by adopting a left-wing position, envisioning a "just" society in which the principles of egalitarianism would be achieved. Both Orwell and Cockburn shared that vision. After leaving the Burma police in 1928 Orwell seemed to expiate his guilty conscience by living in extreme poverty among the poor and outcast. These experiences made him fully aware of the existence of the working-class and led him to a drift towards socialism. By the mid-1930s he put his convictions into action when he was commissioned by the Left Book Club to write about the social conditions of the miners in northern England. The result of this was *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Remembering those years, Orwell wrote: "I became pro-Socialist more out of disgust with the way the power section of the industrial workers were oppressed and neglected than out of any theoretical admiration for a planned society" (1970b: 456). Cockburn's journey to the Left also began at the end of the 1920s, during his years in Berlin, after leaving Oxford, when he read *Das Kapital* and some books by other Marxist ideologists, such as Lenin and Bukharin (Cockburn 1981: 44). His convictions became stronger during his coverage of the great depression in America and already in 1932 he was writing some articles for various extreme Left American newspapers (Cockburn 1981: 86). Two years later the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Harry Pollitt, asked Cockburn to cover the Gresford Disaster, one of the worst mining accidents occurred in Wales. Cockburn accepted, and this was the beginning of his collaboration with the *Daily Worker*, the official organ of the British Communist Party.

Their political commitments made them take an active role in Spain when the Civil War broke out in 1936. Orwell and Cockburn both came to Spain during the early stages of the war. Being journalists, they had the intention to write about Spain and the conflict, but, once they were in the country, they both joined the Republican forces and risked their lives for what they believed in. Cockburn arrived first. In fact, he was already in Spain, "on holiday", that July of 1936, although he expected that the existing tensions between Right and Left would explode at any moment (Cockburn 1981: 119).<sup>2</sup> He spent the early days of the war in Barcelona, then travelled by car to the Aragon front, went on to Madrid and joined the Fifth Regiment, a militia that had just been established by the Communist Party. After taking part in the militia training programme, he went to fight Franco's army that was trying to enter Madrid. He spent a few weeks at the front, but was called back to Britain to raise awareness of the plight of the Spanish Republic. When he returned to Spain, he was not involved again in action, but covered the conflict sending dispatches to the *Daily Worker* until autumn 1937. Orwell left for Spain a few days before Christmas 1936, with the intention of reporting about the war (Shelden 1991: 272-73), but on 30 December he enlisted in the militia of

the POUM and was sent to the Aragon front. In May 1937, while on the front line, he was wounded in the throat by a sniper and, after some time in various hospitals, he found out that the POUM had been declared illegal by the Spanish government, so he returned to Britain at the end of June 1937.

As anyone might expect from two writers, both Orwell and Cockburn wrote a book about their experiences in the Spanish Civil War: *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) and *Reporter in Spain* (1936). These personal accounts or memoirs nestle within the genre of literary reportage, a type of writing that blends documentary and reportage-style observations, with personal experience, perception, and anecdotal evidence, in a non-fiction form of literature. The particular details of the experiences are obviously different, but they share some common ideas and views. Their description of the special atmosphere of revolutionary spirit and comradeship that existed in Barcelona at the beginning of the war is very similar in both books. Here is Cockburn's description of his arrival in Barcelona at the beginning of the war:

“Long Live the Republic”.

As the shout rang out over the little station, railwaymen, peasant women, fisherfolk, clerks and businessmen and hotel porters surged towards the train, the people in the train leaned out to meet them and in unity they all took the cry together. People shook hands with people they had never seen before and called them “Comrade” ... (1936a: 32-33)

Five months later, when Orwell arrived in Barcelona, he was also astonished at the unity and lack of class distinction of the people there:

Waiters and shop-walkers look you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said “*Señor*” or “*Don*” or even “*Usted*”; everybody called everyone else “*Comrade*” and “*Thou*”, and said “*Salud*” instead of “*Buenos días*”. (1989: 3)

Although Orwell and Cockburn were both in Spain during the first months of the Spanish war, they never met and, after their first impressions, their experiences were very different. Orwell had been for over three months at the Aragon front with the POUM militia fighting against the Franco forces and, when he returned for a few days to Barcelona, he bumped into street battles between different factions of the Republican side. Units of the Assault Guard under the authority of members of Communist and Socialist parties tried to take over the Telephone Exchange and other strategic points of the city under the control of the anarchists and their allies, among them Orwell's POUM militia. Although at first Orwell had been unaware of these internal conflicts, he was soon about to discover exactly the details of the tragic events. He was also soon to learn that his militia had been declared illegal and their members persecuted.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Orwell found himself on the run from the Communist police, but managed to flee across the French border and return to Britain. What Orwell had witnessed in Spain put him in open conflict with the mainstream Left and, in particular, with the Communist party. In *Homage to Catalonia* he argues that the Barcelona events were a reflection of the internal political situation of the Soviet Union: “The ‘Stalinists’ were in the saddle, and therefore it was a matter of course that every ‘Trotskyist’ was in danger” (1989: 151). However, Orwell also states that “It will never be possible to get a completely accurate and unbiased account of the Barcelona fighting, because the necessary records do not exist. Future historians will have nothing to go upon except a mass of accusations and party propaganda” (1989: 216).

While Orwell was fighting with an anti-Stalinist militia, Cockburn had joined the Communist Fifth Regiment and was writing for the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker*, sending articles about the Spanish Civil War from Madrid and Valencia. He, therefore, followed the official party line, which blamed the fighting of the Barcelona May days on an anarcho-Trotskyist plot against the Republican government. The Communist Party even accused them to act in collusion with Franco's agents.<sup>4</sup> Cockburn contributed to spread this version of the events in Britain with some articles sent to the *Daily Worker*. On 11 May 1937 they published the article entitled "Pitcairn Lifts Barcelona Veil. Fascist Plot to Land Troops. Trotskyist Rising as Signal", which described Orwell's POUM as an "instrument" of the Italian and German governments, with the mission of creating a "situation of disorder and bloodshed" so that foreign troops could land on Catalan coasts (1937b: 1). In fact, Cockburn was simply reporting from Valencia on a message that the Spanish Communist party had radioed two days before, in which the POUM was being blamed for the Barcelona disturbances.<sup>5</sup>

The origin of these divergent experiences and points of views can be found in some anecdotal events that took place in Britain when Orwell and Cockburn were organising their trips to Spain. As Orwell explains in his essay "Notes in the Spanish Militias", he was told that in order to cross the frontier into Spain he needed papers from some left-wing organisation, so he first approached the secretary of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollitt. During the interview, Pollitt became suspicious and thought that Orwell was "politically unreliable" (1970a: 352); therefore, Orwell was refused assistance from the Communist Party.<sup>6</sup> He then got in touch with the Independent Labour Party (ILP), with which he had some personal connexions, and they gave him a recommendation letter for John McNair, their representative in Barcelona, who was working with the POUM. Therefore, when Orwell arrived in Barcelona under the auspices of the ILP, he naturally enrolled in the militia of the POUM. Cockburn's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, by contrast, came with the full support of Harry Pollitt, who had asked him to cover the war for the *Daily Worker* and "recognising the great impact that Cockburn's despatches were having", Pollitt also asked him to write a book about his experiences in Spain "with the same general purpose as the *Daily Worker* articles" (Pettifer 1986, 14). Cockburn accepted and wrote *Reporter in Spain*.

As a result of all this, their motives for writing about Spain were very different. Cockburn first wanted to denounce the armed rebellion of the right-wing parties against a genuine Spanish democratic Government supported by workers and the Left in general. So, like Orwell, he was defending the fundamental values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. However, he also had in mind to counter the propaganda that the British public was reading about Spanish Civil War, since he believed that Franco's rebellion against the Republican government was being "sold" by some newspapers as an "attempt to save Spain from a red government dominated by the communists" (1981: 118).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, his point of view was necessarily coloured by his close collaboration with the Communist Party. What is more, Cockburn was a brilliant journalist with experience in the arts of propaganda, as his son Alexander Cockburn acknowledges in an article, written on the occasion of his father's 100 anniversary, in which he describes his father as "a great connoisseur of propaganda techniques" (2004). *Reporter in Spain* also reflects his awareness of the nature of propagandistic activity in statements such as the following: "It was at all times curious how closely the stories retailed by British diplomatic and consular officials in Spain tallied with the stories being manufactured by the agents of the enemy" (1936a: 40).<sup>8</sup>

If Cockburn's writings tried to support the official policy of the Communist party, the main purpose of Orwell's account of his experiences in Spain was to provide a personal view of what he saw of Communist practices in Barcelona. He wanted to defend the POUM against what he considered a false accusation of treachery and reacted against the distortion of the truth from Stalinist quarters. Remembering how British newspapers presented the Barcelona May days, Orwell wrote: "I saw troops who had fought bravely denounced as cowards and traitors, and others who had never seen a shot fired hailed as the heroes of imaginary victories" (1970c: 294). In fact, Orwell's experience in Spain transformed his writing career. In his essay "Why I Write" he admitted: "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism as I understand it" (1970a: 28, original emphasis). Orwell understood democratic socialism in a different way from those who supported Stalin's policy.

The publication history of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and Cockburn's *Reporter in Spain* took very different paths as well. *Homage to Catalonia* was overshadowed by editorial censorship. Orwell's usual publisher, Victor Gollancz, refused to publish any reportage by Orwell as soon as he heard that Orwell had been associated with the POUM and anarchists in Spain. This publisher –who was "part of the Communist-racket," as Orwell himself put it (1970a: 312)– would not accept Orwell's attack on Stalin's Communists, even before Orwell had begun to write about it. Like many other people on the Left, Gollancz believed that a common front against the rise of Fascism should be preserved, and therefore it was not politically correct to bring out any kind of criticism against Stalinist Russia, then a staunch ally. Similarly, the editor of the left-wing magazine *New Statesman* refused to publish Orwell's articles about the Spanish Civil War. Eventually, *Homage to Catalonia* was published in April 1938 by Martin Secker and Warburg, a small publishing company that was formed two years before. Very different was the birth story of *Reporter in Spain*. Since the origin of the book was a request by Harry Pollitt, it was immediately published by Lawrence & Wishart, a publishing firm then associated with the British Communist Party. Such was the interest of Pollitt and the publishers that Cockburn had to write it in a few days. With his usual ironic tone Cockburn explains the writing process of this reportage in his autobiography: "I was locked into a bed-sitting-room in a nursing-home run by a friend of mine, and told not to come out until the book was done. A Nurse was in attendance to give me shots in the arm in case I fell asleep or dropped dead from exhaustion" (1981: 122).

*Reporter in Spain* enjoyed immediate success. It was widely read and largely advertised by leftist groups. A second printing of the book came out in January 1937, a few months after its debut. It is interesting to note that Cockburn's reportage was also published in the Soviet Union. There is an edition in English and another in German that appeared in Moscow in 1937, printed by the Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, two other translations were published within a few months of each other: one into Swedish in 1936 and the other into Danish the following year. The Spanish Civil War attracted much attention in Europe and those supporting the Republicans wanted to raise awareness about the challenge democracy was facing and encourage action, so books like Cockburn's were very welcomed at that time. However, it seems that *Reporter in Spain* did not stand the test of time. With the passing of years it became ignored by readers and critics. It is now out of print and there is no Spanish translation.<sup>9</sup>

After the initial difficulties to find a publisher, *Homage to Catalonia* did not hit the market with a splash. At the beginning sales were poor. The book sold only 683

copies in the first six months (Warburg 1959: 238). If we compare this figure with the over 40,000 copies sold of his previous book, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Shelden 1991: 272), which was commissioned by the Left Book Club and distributed among its built-in audience, it becomes apparent that the difference is very significant. The passing of time did not help much: the 1,500 copies of the first edition still had not sold out when Orwell died in 1950, twelve years later.<sup>10</sup> Although there was no official censorship, he believed that his heterodox views had been “boycotted a bit”, since the book did not have many reviews (1970a: 366). In fact, it only had four favourable reviews; the rest were rather negative, including one in the *Daily Worker*, which was a “short, venomous dismissal” (Bryant 1997: 55). If *Reporter in Spain* enjoyed translations into three languages in a single year after publication, *Homage to Catalonia* only had one translation into Italian in Orwell’s lifetime, ten years after its publication in England. However, when Orwell died and became famous with his two political fantasies – *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*– his reportage *Homage to Catalonia* began to enjoy some success: a second edition was printed for the Uniform Edition in 1951, the American edition by Harcourt Brace appeared in 1952 and a French translation was made in 1955. The book did not arrive in Spain until 1970, when distorted versions in Catalan and Spanish were authorised by Franco’s censorship.<sup>11</sup> Since then, many other editions have appeared in this country, being a celebrated book, often quoted whenever the Spanish Civil War is discussed.

Several other characteristics of these two writers’ lives and writings could be included in this comparative study. For example, they both decided to go into voluntary exile in the early post-Second World War years, one to the remote island of Jura, in the Scottish Hebrides, the other to a small coastal town in County Cork, Ireland. Similarly, the two authors suffered from tuberculosis and struggled continuously against pain; Orwell died of a massive haemorrhage of the lung at the age of 46, while Cockburn spent some time at an Irish hospital recovering from the tuberculosis that affected his two lungs. A detailed comparative analysis of the literary genres they practiced –hack journalism, reportage, literary criticism, fiction, autobiography, etc.– might also produce some interesting results. However, the common threads between Orwell and Cockburn we have seen here provide enough insight to be able to establish a close parallelism between both authors. They share many similarities: a common ancestry, proximity of birth-dates, a colonial background, homogeneity of education, literary interests and a state of conscience created by a particular political and historical context. Nevertheless, the moral and political complexity of the Spanish Civil War separated their paths. When in Spain, there were both journalists committed themselves with passion, completely convinced that they were right in their support of the Republican cause; but their affinity for two different political trends –the POUM and the Communist Party– gave them divergent experiences and points of view.

One could blame it on destiny or the result of that interview Orwell had with Harry Pollitt before coming to Spain. If Orwell had had Pollitt’s support, perhaps he would have joined a communist militia or the International Brigades, and his writings about the Spanish Civil War would have been very different, and also the books that came afterwards. Perhaps destiny was also responsible for the current success of *Homage to Catalonia* and the oblivion into which *Reporter in Spain* has fallen. Maybe fate had little to do with all this and it was a matter of attitude and responsibility towards reality and truth. We all know that in war coverage journalists take sides and it is not easy to distinguish fact from opinion, reality from myth. As the old saying goes, in war, truth is the first casualty. Regardless of who was right or who was wrong, the conflicting views of Orwell and Cockburn about Spain bring up some controversial



questions: What is a war correspondent's duty? Must they simply write about facts without allowing interpretation or personal feelings to enter into the text? Is it possible to be completely objective? Is objectivity the goal? These questions have no easy answers and I for certain can add little to what other, more authoritative voices, can say; so, I must leave it to them.

### Notes

1. For details about his family background, see Cockburn's memoirs *Cockburn Sums Up* (1981: 1-16).
2. Bill Alexander, who was the commander of the British Battalion in 1938, states in his book about the British volunteers in the Spanish Civil War that Cockburn was in Barcelona in July 1936 to report the Workers' Olympiads for the *Daily Worker* (1982: 222).
3. In June 1937 Andres Nin, one of the POUM leaders, was arrested, tortured and executed a few days later. In *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell suggests that this was done by policemen "under the control of foreign Communist elements" (1989: 244), that is to say, by Stalin's secret agents. Orwell also added that the Republican Government did consent to this, since they "could not afford to offend the Communist Party while the Russians were supplying arms" (1989: 242).
4. The version of these Barcelona events given in Dolores Ibárruri's *Historia del Partido Comunista de España* includes a document from the German ambassador which refers to how Franco's agents infiltrated in Barcelona turned the tensions between the communists and the anarchists into a full-blown conflict (1960: 162-63).
5. According to Cockburn, the speakers of that radio message were Joan Vallès i Pujals, former Councillor of Public Works in the Catalan Government; Vicente Uribe Galdeano, Minister of Agriculture in the Government of Spain; José Díaz Ramos, Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain; Dolores Ibárruri Gómez, la Pasionaria, another leader of the Spanish Communist Party, and Jesús Hernández Tomás, Minister of Education (Instrucción Pública y Bellas Artes).
6. Some months later, in March 1937, Pollitt also wrote a very negative review of Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* for the *Daily Worker*, in which Orwell is described as a "disillusioned little middle-class boy", a snob who decided to write on a "subject that he does not understand" (1937: 7). The review was published after it became known to the Communist Party that Orwell was serving with the POUM militia.
7. Similarly, the British Government, despite their adherence to a policy of non-intervention in August 1936, "did not look with disapproval on Franco's rebellion" (Edwards 1979: 1).
8. Being the director of the satirical periodical *The Week* surely contributed to his understanding of the principles of propaganda. It featured news, rumour and information that never appeared in the regular press. His wife Patricia, in a book about this magazine, once wrote that Cockburn "saw the propaganda battlefield of London as crucial in the struggle to contain the forces of Nazism threatening Europe" (1968: 239). Cockburn's articles in the *Daily Worker* with damning information about the POUM could also be seen as a product of this "propaganda battlefield".
9. Hopefully this will change, since I am myself preparing a Spanish edition of *Reporter in Spain* that will be published by Amarú Ediciones in 2012.
10. According to Tom Hopkinson, no more than 900 copies were sold of that first edition before Orwell's death (1962: 24).
11. For details about the encounters of *Homage to Catalonia* with Franco's censorship, see "George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*: A Politically Incorrect Story" (Lázaro 2001).

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