



DOSSIÊ: GEORGE ORWELL

Entrevista: Richard Blair¹

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Matheus Cardoso da Silva: So good afternoon, Mr. Blair and Mr. Cooper, thank you very much for your time. As this interview will be recorded, I would like to start with some protocol introduction. If you are okay with that, okay, so in the name of Intelligere Journal sponsored by the University of San Paulo, we would like to thank you very much for your time to talk to us a little bit during this afternoon about the work of your father. I would like to start with a brief introduction about the dossier that we are organizing. On the occasion of the work of George Orwell entry into the public domain during this year of 2021, we are organizing the Dossier Reading Orwell in the 21st century, 70 years of his work. The idea is to get some reflections about George Orwell's works and relevance on the first Decades of the 21st century. So Débora would you like to start with the questions, please?

Débora Tavares: Yes sure. First of all, we would like to thank Mr. Cooper and Mr. Blair for the time for being so kind and answering us, we could never imagine that this would work and it's such a pleasure for us to talk with you. Matheus, Leonardo and I, we've been researching George Orwell's work for a long time here in Brazil, so, it's huge for us to be here, thank you again. And of course, we were super excited, and we've prepared loads of questions and as Mr. Cooper pointed out, we chose a few questions because we could have been here talking for hours and hours. We have five questions about many topics concerning the work, the legacy, the public domain and, anything else that we can talk about during the few hours that we have here with you.

¹ Richard Blair é filho do autor George Orwell e presidente da Orwell Society.

So, we would like to start with our first question. First of all, Mr. Blair, do you have a favorite piece of writing by your father? Do you have a favorite character from his books?

Richard Blair: Oh well that's very difficult question to answer, I guess. And I suppose really the favorite piece it has to be *Animal Farm*. And for all sorts of reasons, I think *Animal Farm* is a very, very complete book. And the other thing that I like about it is that we're all convinced now of course that my mother had a hand in the in the writing in the sense that after many decades when my father started writing in the sense that after many decades 1920s by the time it got to 1945 he had been prophetic or not, no one ever perfect their writing, but had improved his style and presentation so and so forth, in his in the various books that he had written, but I think there's no doubt that my mother Eileen when he was starting to write *Animal Farm*. Certainly, was a great influence.

Ben Cooper: If you must read on Eileen, fantastic book² written by one of our members, actually.

Richard Blair: Indeed, well worth reading well worth reading. I do recommend it. And it was when he was writing it, the background, I suppose to *Animal Farm* was of course he had been right working for the British Broadcasting Corporation during the war from 1941 to 1943. And after two years, he decided that he didn't think that what he was doing - he was broadcasting to the Far East to India - he wasn't sure that he was his message, he was doing features programs, his message was getting through, so he decided to need the BBC and I think it was for two reasons: one, was that he wanted to, he had *Animal Farm* in his mind, and he wanted to go away from it and sit down and write *Animal Farm*. I think there was another reason, and it's my particular theory and I have no proof of it, but when he got married in 1936 to Eileen he wanted to have children. And he felt at the time, for all sorts of reasons, they were unable to have children, and he thought he was at fault and whether he was or he wasn't it does not really matter, he had no children. So, he decided that he would like to best the next best thing to adopt. And I think at this time, I think it probably he decided that this was a time perhaps to think about having a child of some sort. So, and I think it took him a year to persuade Eileen that this would be a good idea. Because in 1944, this was when my adoption came along, and I was adopted by him.

So, I have a feeling, and I said before I no proof of it, that I think they're possibly, he wanted to leave the BBC because he wanted he was looking at that direction, and also to write *Animal Farm* which of course I guess was probably the more important part but nevertheless having a child was to him was an extremely important aspect of his life. He was in many ways, my father was

² Livro mencionado: TOPP, Sylvia. *Eileen: The Making of Orwell*. London: Unbound, 2020.

very conventional: he had a the middle class upbringing, he subscribed to good manners and just the things that English people did, because you having been born in India, he was born into a society where those sort of things were very important, how you conducted yourself, and how you spoke obviously when you went to school, he went to which was Eton, and everybody spoke with a very sort of very correct, English Oxford accent, I think is that the expression, and of course his accent stood out whenever he walked was working or working with people of a lower, you know, working-class people, everyone realizes this was what you would call – and I hate the word – a posh man.

So anyway, the point is we're getting off the story a little bit here, but yes, he said that he wanted to sit down and write *Animal Farm*. And there's no doubt that Eileen was a great help to him because that he would write a chapter. He would, then in the evenings, when she came back from work, because she could continue to work for the ministry of information, the ministry of food, rather for the government until 1944, and she would come back in the evening, and they would sit down, and they would discuss what he had written during the day, and I guess probably she made recommendations and suggestions to help improve it a lot and it turned out to be an extremely complete story. It has wonderful purpose behind it, wonderful moral. And it's just, and it can be read in so many different levels. It can be read as a youngster, I mean, I first read *Animal Farm* at the age of, I think I was 11. And I would think children of today would probably be younger still, you could be 9, 10. And you might not necessarily understand the content input as it were, but there's no doubt that as you got a little bit older than you would realize what he was trying to say. It really is a lovely story. As far as others, I think it's probably his best writings or something's of his best writings as entertainment, of course, if that's the right word entertainment, are his essays.

He has written some of the most brilliant essays, I think, you could possibly read. I mean, who cannot be moved by *The Hanging* for instance, or *Shooting an Elephant*? Or be amused by *Such Such Were the Joys*, his school days which was a third in elaborate piece of writing which was wasn't published until the 1950s. There are so many essays even in his books is novels, there are peas in there that you can take out, and they are standalone essays, which can just hold their own. And, you know, if you read *Down and Out in Paris London*, for instance, the description of what they call “the spikes”, where the tramps used to go to their when it stopped off at nighttime. They description of the places that they lived in. And how the poor diet in Paris again in, I don't know, comparison, London. *How Poor Die* when he was suffering from pneumonia had to go to the hospital, and he was watching this poor man in the next bed, how he died. His descriptive passages are brilliant, those are the things that I thoroughly enjoy reading.

Débora Tavares Well, I'm proud to say that I agree the descriptions they changed completely how we see literature, and how we analyze social and

literary aesthetical part, right? Thank you so much. Our second question is about *1984*. When we look at *1984* and the dystopia as a literary tool it's very interesting how Orwell have managed to build an elaborated satire about England and Europe, overall. What do you think about Orwell being considered someone who anticipated as some kind of prophet of control societies in the 21st century? If we think about the Chinese or the North Korean or even British and American societies, do you agree with this point of view?

Richard Blair: Well, I don't think I would put my father down as a prophet, that's probably over doing it a little bit. I think the whole point about *1984* of course was men has been trying to control men ever since time immemorial. So, there's nothing new about that, and as far as you and I are concerned, you know, the ordinary what we in England would call the ordinary man in the street, it matters very little who is controlling you and whether it's coming from the Left or the Right, and that is the point about *1984*. It is about what happens, it's a story about control of the ordinary human being and it's not prophetic or anything like that, he simply stumbled on some of the technology, I guess, that was in its infancy at the time, like television and so on and so forth and he used that as part of that, and of course surveillance. I mean, governments have been surveying their subjects since forever, you only have to read some of the histories, but any history of government you will find that there are spies who, you know, actually what's going with its people. So, *1984* is simply an extension of what has always happened in the world. And it just so happened, it resonated at the time, and it's still resonating today because of I suppose really the surveillance that he mentioned, and the views of television, which, of course, is still relevant today with our technology courses, obviously moved on since then. Nevertheless, it resonates with people. So as soon as somebody sees something that, you know, some government is doing something "Oh well, it's Orwellian". So, he's become an adjective unfortunately, for good or bad, and I guess it will probably continue to be like that because men always want to control men. And it will never be any different.

Leonardo Trevas: Yes, please if I may Mr. Blair. I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm Leonardo also researcher of your father's work. And deeply interested in *Homage to Catalonia*. It was the focus of my work at the University and one of the things that it seems to everyone who studies him, is that it was after the experiences in the Spanish Civil War that he became a strictly anti-totalitarianism, but the thing is, he says also in his *Why I write* essay which for me is one of his best writings that he's totally committed to fighting to totalitarianism, but also, as you said before, he was committed to advocating towards Democratic Socialism, right? So, can you say that this will of him to try to come to stay convicted to democratic ideas, do you think that this has somehow been wiped because some of the people who study him in a more

conservative way, in a more, sort of ignore this Democratic Socialism aspect of him?

Richard Blair: Oh well, yes the problem is of course is when, you know what he wrote, he was writing again against both. He was quite happy to criticize both sides of the argument as it were. And I suppose, if you say something, then, you bound to get somebody who will come back and either come up with a counter argument or - and I have to say this or deliberately misunderstanding or misunderstand what he was writing - and that, of course causes a problem. So, you know, so somebody misunderstands what he's saying, writes a controversial piece, and now everybody starts writing in, what we would call in England, their penny worth, their own particular opinion. And he was quite happy to criticize both sides. If he thought that, you know, as he saw it. I mean, one of the reasons why he wrote he said because to as he said, he wanted to uncover some grubby little lie that was being put forward by a government, whoever that government might be whether it was a labor government or a conservative governmental it mattered little to him, because they were always trying to manipulate the manipulate the truths in their favor. Have I answered your question or am I still evading it?

Leonardo Trevas: Now it just seems to me that your father, he tried to create a third way, you know. A sort of political thought that was neither communist, or Right-Wing. But something in the path of democracy, but yes, inspired by socialism, but not in an orthodox way.

Richard Blair: Yes. I think he was just a Democratic Labour, I suppose he was in favor of democracy and democracy might grow and might not work to everyone from time to time, but it's the best we've got, I think of all the systems that exist. And he was in favor of Democratic Socialism. In other words that the ordinary working, man should have some say in how he is being governed. It's a fairly, It might be idealistic, but that's you have to start from somewhere and that's how he saw himself, because he was, as you said, everything he has written since when he came back from the Spanish War, everything he wrote was against totalitarianism. It was the one thing that scared him, because of his experience of being nearby. Have you been caught and during the Spanish Civil War before he's escaped, there's no question he would have been would have been shot.

Débora Tavares All right. Thanks. Leonardo for your question. We have now something to ask you about his legacy, right? So, what is it like to maintain the legacy of one of the most important writers of the 20th century? And what are you most proud of Orwell's contributions to literature and Society in general?

Richard Blair: Well to answer the first part of the question, one of the benefits of me being his son it is of course I'm an adopted child. One of the other benefits of course is that everybody knows George Orwell as George Orwell, and people don't realize, of course his real name was Eric Blair and one of the benefits that I can hide in plain sight. And because people don't realize who I might be, so I'm in control of what I want to say, and whether I want to say who I am or not am as it were. And so, from that point of view, it's useful.

As far as his legacy is concerned, obviously I'm extremely proud of what he has achieved as a writer because I mean he set out, I suppose in many ways, he was saying when wrote *1984*, I think he wrote to a friend that either it's going to be a best seller or it's going to be completely ignored. It was going to be one or the other it wasn't anything in between. So, I guess, yes, I'm extremely proud of the fact I was a son of George Orwell. I always expressed myself by saying that I'm just the ordinary son of an extraordinary man.

Ben Cooper: Can I jump in, Richard on the Legacy in your role. Do you want to just talk a bit about the activities of the Orwell Society and the Orwell Foundation in that?

Richard Blair: Yes, the Orwell Society started in 2010, quite late actually. It was put forward by a lady called Dione Venables, who was a cousin of my father's first girlfriend, Jacintha Buddicom, now, we're going back to about 1910, 1920. She had for many years at the turn of the last century, had thought that there should be some sort of society because people had asked her, why is a no George Orwell Society? And everyone said, well no idea what really got an answer, so she put forward the proposal. And there were several people who didn't think it was a good idea. So, we started the society in 2010 and its purpose is to promote the works of George Orwell and that it is a charity. We have obtained charitable status and one of the presets of being a charity is that we should be focused on education and that is what we do, we write, we have essays prizes for journalism and so forth.

Also, we have events that take us to Spain, where he fought and to the island of Jura, where he wrote *1984*, where I was brought up as little boy. So, we have for our members all sorts of physical events that we organize, and they're always well attended, but the principle really is that we are promoting his works and the continuation for the pleasure of people to read and to understand. And I guess we run into the controversial problem, that nothing we can't handle and we're fully aware of what might or might not happen.

Débora Tavares Oh, yes, I've been following the Orwell Prize and all the essays and categories. It can be really interesting for young kids, nowadays to get in touch with that legacy, right?

Richard Blair: Oh yes, I have a stack of essays in my entry which we've just come up with a winner, not going to tell you who it is yet for these are the essays [The Orwell Prize]. With the other thing, of course, is not only is the Society of which I'm a big Patron and trustee, there is also the Orwell Foundation, which is quite a different organization. Its purpose, and it is made up by of trustees, with no members, just trustees, its purpose is to promote journalism and literature as prizes. And also, again the Orwell Youth Prize, which is going into schools and promoting good writing in schools. So, in many ways, the Society and the Foundation We don't thread on each other's toes, but we run in parallel with each other and we cooperate where they're necessary, and so far it is worked extremely well, we do our bit and they do theirs, but I am a trustee on both sides.

Leonardo Trevas: I wonder, Mr. Blair, do your children have any part in the society or are they willing to take any part forward?

Richard Blair: And well, my children, no. I have one son who lives in Australia and the other one works as another job. They're not, like me, they're not academically inclined. But they are well aware of the situation and my oldest grandson and granddaughter, I'm hoping that they will take on the mantle later on, at least of the continuation of the name within the Society, and also the Foundation, because to some extent, I'd like to say this but to some extent, I think I'm considered to be the glue that keeps the whole thing going. And, you know when I'm gone, I mean I'm not dead yet, but I'm in my late 70s, and so I hope my grandchildren will, in fact, step in and be the name at the top of the piece of paper as it were.

Ben Cooper: Just to add on the activities of these Societies. We organize a monthly talk on zoom on a different theme. Most of them are for members, but sometimes we open them up to the public, and it's all different sorts of aspects of Orwell's life and works and the people around him, we did a special talk with Sylvia who wrote this book, *Eileen: The Making of Orwell*. Our chair Quentin Kopp, he is the son of Orwell's commanding officer in Spain, I can see you're nodding, you know him, he gave a fantastic talk last time. I think that's an example of how we've managed to kind of update the society bring it to a modern medium, with those talks and they've been very successful.

Richard Blair: Yes, this was born really out of this Covid-19 business. Of course, when we were unable to do anything with our members and because all talks were a something that we devised, that could keep the members in touch and we will continue to do this. It's been very successful.

Débora Tavares There's an event today isn't there with DJ Taylor? I don't know if it's the Society or the Foundation.

Ben Cooper: I think that's a Foundation thing, DJ Taylor obviously, you know who he is. He's writing another biography of Orwell because he did, there's constantly he's written two major books on Orwell so far. And he's now bringing out third because he's just constantly updating his research and there's new things coming out all the time. I mean, you know, there's new letters that keep emerging either from Orwell or two or well. Fascinating stuff. So, DJ Taylor was probably, and I say this, well, he's probably in a sense, the leading researcher into sort you know, anything new that comes out. There's also Professor Richard Keeble who I mentioned in my email, I mean he's an incredible guy and he's, you know, he's what he doesn't know about Orwell is not worth knowing, he produces George Orwell studies, which is a quarterly sort of academic. Journal which comes out, he writes essays in it, he's written, you know, I mean, different contributors. I'm very proud to say I've contributed to it once.

Leonardo Trevas: Mr. Cooper do you know by chance anything about the Spanish Journal of all that supposedly hidden in the old KGB archives or anything?:

Ben Cooper: Oh wow. Actually we were talking about this the other day. Because there's so many mysteries about him and Quentin and George cop, who you mentioned. And the conversation was in light of George Cobb because he was obviously imprisoned by the NKVD and the secret police in Spain and he almost died and tortured, as you know. This this all sorts of blanks in his history that nobody seems to know about and the conclusion is often that the only way will ever going to know, is if the files that were kept on Kopp will ever be released, which is ambitious if you think about it, really. I mean, but it's interesting you mention it because it did come up, but I mean the person who gave this talk the other day about George Kopp, if he doesn't know where these files are, then again nobody knows, I think. I mean, why what's your interest in that?

Leonardo Trevas: Yeah, I'd like to see it and share it to the world.

Ben Cooper: You me and quite a few people.

Leonardo Trevas: Maybe we need to learn Russian and go to Moscow.

Ben Cooper: That's a good idea. Richard we're just, we're just talking about the secret files somewhere in the Kremlin on George Kopp and George Orwell.

Yes, the files in the Moscow archives. It's interesting because those were all the papers that were stolen from my mother in the Hotel Continental in Barcelona. When my father came back, she told him to clear off double quick time because they were going to catch him and the police had already with the

conniving obviously of the Soviet police, had raided the hotel room and confiscated all his papers, all his diaries, his notes. Fortunately, she was in bed, and she was sitting on the passports, so they didn't get that. The Spanish police being gentleman, didn't ask her to get out of bed. So, they escaped with their passports, so they were lucky. So it'd be very interesting to we do try and see from get into the archives in Moscow, but I think probably for the time being the answer, is *niet*.

But it would be interesting because I think it would be some fascinating information would come out of that because you know, when my father wrote *Homage to Catalonia* he makes it quite clear at the beginning of the book that he is writing this from memory. I think he had a very good memory and I think what he wrote in *Homage to Catalonia* he tried to make it absolutely honest as possible, but obviously there's some there's probably detail in there that could be clarified if one had all the notes that he had lost. But I know that when we do go to Barcelona and the Aragon front we've always received a very coordinate by the population there with the people we speak to, a very popular little group of people that have you probably covered that, Ben?

Ben Cooper: Well, no, I didn't go into as much detail as you, but I said that just saying, it's interesting that it came up in the George talk the other day, talking about that exact thing and how they may also be lots of interesting files on George Kopp, which we'd like to know about.

Débora Tavares: If you want to add something about his relevance on the 21st century before we finish up the questions.

Richard Blair: The thing about is that Orwell still matters because of what he had to say, and because it was clear cut, and a lot of common sense that he spoke and sadly, of course, he died at the age of 46 and I think he had a great deal more to say to add obviously. But his writing is very clear, a careful care of language. It's so easily understood, he doesn't use long sentences, we know that from *The Politics and the English Language*, he has the six rules of writing and the first one is “never use a long word when a short will do”, “don't use a cliché, or a foreign phrase” and there were six, the last one was “break any one of these, but don't say anything outrageous”.

So he perfected his writing over the years, there must be reams and reams of paper that he tore up because he was dissatisfied with what he had written, and hardly a day went by that he didn't write apparently. When he was first married, it used to be some arguments with his new wife Eileen that he said, “Well, I have to go” and he left all the washing to be done, all the chores to be done. He said “Well, I have to go now because I have to write” and hardly day would go by that he wouldn't sit down to his typewriter and bash at something. He could produce articles extraordinary quickly, there was a huge output of

material that he produced in the short time that he in the 20 odd years that he wrote.

Leonardo Trevas: Is there anything that hasn't been published? Or did the compilation from Professor Pete Davidson get everything?

Richard Blair: Oh, is there anything left? Well, that's a good question. Who knows what lies in the back of somebody's chest of drawers.

There are 50 letters here, these are letters from his girlfriends. But I've received the other day another three letters from correspondence with his girlfriends and some very interesting things in there. There are two things that nobody knows about yet only I know them, and not for publication yet because there is another biography of Orwell coming out, sometime in the next two years done by a chap called David Taylor, who did one in 2003 so he's destined this one I think 2023. So, I'm giving him first choice of these.

But is there anything else, apart from correspondence? I don't know, I think the only possible stuff that we don't know about is the Russian Archives, I suspect. And I don't think there's anything else that's going to come out of major importance. We're not going to find some manuscript or the book that says long been forgotten, I think, anything like that. You can forget it, I don't think that's going to happen.

Leonardo Trevas: We have seen after the 70 years of your father's death loads of new editions being published in Brazil and in other parts of the world. Some of them are a little bit iffy getting like TV Personalities in YouTubers to comment, and stuff like that. So, Mr. Blair, have you seen any weird or different editions, new editions that have called your attention in the good or bad way?

Richard Blair: Well, that they would, might would come to attention to the literary agent. So probably don't seem to forget of course that in Europe the copyright has now expired. It's quite complicated because in the Spanish-speaking countries, copyright is going to continue for another five years at a reduced rate. One of the problems of coming out of Europe was that we were signatories to the European copyright laws. Now that we have come out, it's so happened of course, that change back into in 1998 and it ran for another 20 years, it was harmonized with Germany, from 50 years to 70 years, and it coincided with the copyright expiring in that in 2000, in the UK of Orwell has now extended for another 20 years to 2020.

Now that we've come out of Europe, an agreement that we had with Spain was going to run of for another 10 years in Spanish-speaking countries. What has happened now in that particular contract is they said "Well, okay, we'll run it for another five years at reduced rates". The copyright in the United States runs for 95 years from the date of publication of a book, that has been approved by the United States government. So, all Orwell's titles are still

copyright protected in the United States and will continue to do so. The first ones, of course, will now start dropping out to the next few years, but essentially *Animal Farm* in 1984 will run to 2040 and 2043, before the copyright expires.

Débora Tavares - What about Eastern countries or in Asia do you have any? How is how is that for you? I mean, a totally different language and alphabet.

Richard Blair: I'm afraid it's open season it they can what they want, we have no control. But we knew that was coming and you know years it was obvious that eventually you know, you run out of copyright. Then it's a free for all people can do what they like. There's not much you can do about it, really. So, we're doing of course with trademarking quite a lot of stuff but it's not going to protect Orwell particularly but certain aspects of things he wrote might get trademarked, that's something that's happening at the moment.

Leonardo Trevas: I have a little personal question, if I may ask it. You said before that you love all as an essayist, right? I personally think that he's a better essayist than a novelist, your opinion on that? Do you think he's a better novelist or a better essayist?

Richard Blair: I think if you're pushing me into a corner, I guess he's a better essayist. He himself said that he didn't think some of his some of his novels, he felt were not as good as they ought to be. That was because it actually some of the problems came up were liable laws, and that he had to alter some of his early novels slightly because of the reliable laws in the UK, prevented him from saying certain things, so he had to change it, which kind of weakened the books likely, but I don't see.

I don't know that how, by how much I don't know, but yes, the essay I mean if you read, for instance, *The Road to Wigan Pier* there are wonderful passages in there that you can extract on their own and they stand alone as a brilliant piece of observation, very powerful observation on social life to occurred in that particular road, in Wigan Pier. What he was trying to do, of course, was to draw attention to the social inequalities and deprivation that existed in the UK as it did in all over the world, of course, During the Great Depression of the 1920s, 1930s, some countries more so than others. Certainly in the UK life was pretty harsh.

Ben Cooper: I've got a question for everybody else, the others. This was when we went on the radio Richard, you know on Radio 4, Mariella Frostrup asked you this question and it's always interesting. If you were going to recommend Orwell to somebody, who'd never read any of his books at all. That's what I mean, these are for the others. I want them to answer because it's interesting which one which book someone chooses as their introduction or how they would suggest someone gets into all well. So, what about you guys?

Leonardo Trevas: I would say it would be *The Road to Wigan Pier*, because half of it shows us his bubbling political thought at the time, and also the other half is very descriptive, it's like very realist it's almost like a 19th century novel. So, I think that would interest a lot of young people to maybe try to get into Orwell. I wouldn't get them *1984* first because it's a very it's a complex book, right? So, I just start with something more palatable, I would say.

Richard Blair: I'm going to throw in there when you're talking about *The Road to Wigan Pier* and a lot of people said that my father didn't have a sense of humor. I would disagree with that wholeheartedly, he did have had a very dry sense of humor, as you know that you were talking about *The Road to Wigan Pier*, his description of the tripe shop, where he first launched it's actually extremely funny if you read it. I've seen it done as a play.

Leonardo Trevas: And disgusting...

Richard Blair: Oh yes, if you like to try it before you read it you certainly wouldn't eat the stuff after you'd read it, that's for sure. I don't like tripe by the way, I've eaten it, I'm still not convinced nothing to do with it with his description of the tripe shop.

It's his humor *is*, you can find his humor in all sorts of places, I mean if you read *Such Such Were the Joys* about his life at Prep School it's funny from one end to the other. I think because I've experienced it. But there is humor everywhere, if you look for it. In *Homage to Catalonia* there's a little bit of humor when he said that he actually didn't really want to die after all, because he quite liked the life that he was leading up to that point and he hasn't realized he had a bullet down his throat and suddenly decided he did not want to leave this life because it was actually quite conducive to him. It's a little sort of throw away remarks that he would put in, but it makes you smile.

Ben Cooper: And some genuine humor, in his essay, *Confessions of a Book Reviewer*. I find that quite scary accurate to me because it's a story about this kind of miserable freelancer, who's sitting at home in a garage apartment, like mine, permanently stressed and without money, always looking for his notebooks and all these things. The first time I read that, I thought, "oh God, that's me"...

Richard Blair: Yes, we all do. Also, in *Bookshop Memories* when he is working in the bookshop, it's that it's always inhabited by complete lunatics, which is quite funny I think. So, he has humour there's no question about it, you might not find it in *1984* but it wasn't designed for humor.

Animal Farm there is a sort of background element of humor, it's not easy to pick out and it's difficult to explain, but it is there if you're reading it as a fairy

tale, it's quite dark in a way, but there is a human somewhere in the background. It's the way it's written, I think again, possibly because of Eileen's influence, she would add a little bit so get into a little bit, so there we go.

Leonardo Trevas: There's that scene where the pigs drink alcohol in *Animal Farm* and they get a massive hangover and they think they're going to die but they wake up okay, it's a really cute scene.

Richard Blair: Yes, I mean when the animals are looking at the window and they're seeing from man to animal, from pig to man and man to pig and they can't choose which is which, which of course it's the punchline of the book isn't it?

Débora Tavares: The countless committees that Snowball starts to do, it's totally Party politics, we are going to do this, you're in charge of that...

Richard Blair: With *Animal Farm* it's interesting, again you see this is manipulation of communication isn't it? They write up on the blackboard what you can and can't do and they suddenly change it, by saying it's not actually what we meant, when something happens.

Débora Tavares: I usually tell my students, I have been giving courses about Orwell here in Brazil, and usually they ask me where to begin to read Orwell besides *1984* and *Animal Farm*, and I usually tell them start reading *Why I write* because it's short, you know him as an essayist he points out what he means. Usually, people who try to make an interpretation of him that is not honest usually this person haven't read *Why I write*. You have all the information in there and it's a great start you know?

Richard Blair: I must go back and stop rereading a whole lot again. And you get a bit lazy after a while, and you suddenly realize it's time to refresh your mind on some of somebody's aspects. You can't rely on your memory forever.

Débora Tavares: What about you Mr. Cooper, what do you recommend?

Ben Cooper: Well, and it's by no means the best, but in a weird way, I've always had a strange soft spot for *Down and Out in Paris and London*. It was kind of I think as a child or a teenager, I read *Animal Farm* in 1984 and I think when I was in my 20s and studied journalism, the first, Orwell I read as an adult, really was *Down And Out* and there was just something about it.

I think it really sounds a bit over the top to say it sort of changed me, but it really actually did change me as a writer. I think in lots of ways, I think it was just astonishing the way it's written the clarity, the way he manages, as you said, Richard his descriptive powers, whilst also being very understated, you know, he manages to just describe the scene almost effortlessly, even though huge

amounts of effort did go in and as you said, Richard, he wrote and distilled and boiled down and boiled down and distilled it down to a very, very concise level. The first time I read, *Down and Out* I thought I wanted I want to write like this, it is this is serious writing in that kind of Journalism literary, journalism style, you know? And it made me want to read all well which I've now done, you know. But yeah *Down and Out*.

Interesting that three different four different choices. You know, this is this is what you get with Orwell everybody has their own sort of particular angle on it, which is always very interesting to find out. I do agree with you actually on both *Wigan Pier* and *Why I Write*, you know, in a way if you were just going to get someone really quickly started just hand them out *Why I Write*, just as a starting point because, you know, for logical reasons it's him laying out his stall, even though it's obviously late. It touches on all the things about the Spanish Civil War, his concepts of objectivity truth, political manipulation of writing, all of it is in that one essay.

Richard Blair: I'm just going back to Leonardo what you were saying about *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he was also a very good at pathos. Just after that the beginning of the book there is his description of the woman, whom he saw from the engagement kneeling down in a yard, the back of the house, hooking a stick up at a foul drain. Tremendous description, and full of pathos that, you know, he realized exactly what she was doing. She wasn't, you know, educated, and didn't understand what was going on and kneeling on a stone poking a foul drain, it's a wonderful piece of brilliant things, it almost brings tears.

Leonardo Trevas: He really did empathize with the common man, right? The common man and woman, the ordinary worker.

Richard Blair: Yes, that he said that his sympathies lay with working man, quote unquote. Which is why he said he was, he believed in Democratic socialism. We seem to have come full circle halfway with.

Ben Cooper: Well, Richard If you want to pay for me and you to go to Brazil, I don't mind. I really don't.

Débora Tavares You will be more than welcome.

Richard Blair: Well enough, there was a there was an Orwell member who lived in São Paulo, who wrote to me rather short notice would I come over and do a talk I email back I'm sorry, but yeah this was a very head about three for public codes six and weeks to make it, I said, unfortunately, I was busy, I couldn't do it, and he understood. So, he said look out, I would like you to come. I'll get in touch with you later on and we'll give you plenty of time, so he did and When you I had to reply back and said, sorry, but in 12 months' time, the date you have mentioned, I'm doing another talk to somebody else and,

and I'd really haven't got time to get onto an airplane from finishing that talk to get over to you to do your talk. So, one of the problems of course in this damn covid is that it's curtailed a lot of events that you know, I go to about my father but all that's gone out of the window for the time being.

Débora Tavares Well, if you ever want to do the Road to Brazil, we're here. You're more than welcome.

Richard Blair: Well, I mean, I have been to Brazil, quite a few years ago now.

Ben Cooper: The Road to Copacabana, slightly less pretty, and socialist than the Wigan Pier...

Richard Blair: Oh, I've walked in Copacabana, I've been to the Redeemer.

Débora Tavares You've seen the classic Brazil.

Richard Blair: Yes, yes. But it's the tourist Brazil, isn't it?

Débora Tavares Yeah, yeah.

Leonardo Trevas: I would say if Orwell were alive he would have plenty of material in the favelas of Brazil because there are lots of material for plenty works.

Richard Blair: I would think, yes, I imagine the stories that you could generate from that sort of places would keep you writing forever, wouldn't it? Writing about the families, how I don't want to make comment about what the favela is one way or the other, but, you know, there must be the characters that find themselves in these places. If you could just draw them out, you must have wonderful stories to tell you, and people who are highly intelligent who've just find themselves in a situation, but they can't get out of whatever reason and would have fabulous things to report, the social comment on that sort of places would be fascinating.

Débora Tavares Yes, for sure. Instead of going down the mine he would go up the hills in the mountains of the favelas.

Richard Blair: Yes, same difference.

Débora Tavares: Thank you so much for your kindness for your time and this will be forever in our hearts, you know, I'll never forget it.

Leonardo Trevas: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Blair and Mr. Cooper, it was a pleasure.

Richard Blair: Not at all, such a pleasure. I hope you got a little bit of something out of that be useful for you.