Orwell the Teacher: Such, Such Were The Joys.

By Tim Crook

**Abstract**

Orwell’s essay ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’ was an excoriating condemnation of the preparatory school system. The young Eric Arthur Blair graduated from this by scholarship to Eton – regarded as the pre-eminent elitist institution in British private education. Orwell further denounced many aspects of the private education system of the 1920s and 30s in his novel *A Clergyman’s Daughter*. He also took up teaching and private tutoring during the early 1930s. Biographers and writers have reported on what it was like to be taught by him. In this paper, Tim Crook investigates the significance of Orwell’s adventures in education. How credible were his views on teaching and the nature of the education that he received? How good a teacher was he in the context of the professionalization of teaching at the training colleges of the time? To what extent was his writing on education tantamount to another development of his self-fashioning and transformation from Eric Arthur Blair, child of imperialism to the materialising fantasy of the democratic socialist writer George Orwell?

**Key words:** education, teaching, Eton, private schools, St Cyprians, Thomas Raymont.

**Introduction**

Orwell made education a key issue in his fictional and essay writing. It was a pervasive factor whenever he challenged the perniciousness of the English class system, and criticised the gross inequalities of social injustice he observed in Britain during his lifetime. Orwell declared in his 1936 novel *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* ‘Probably the greatest cruelty one can inflict on a child is to send it to school among children richer than itself (Orwell 1962:46)’.

The essay he wrote several years later about his time at preparatory school indicates strongly that he was speaking from personal experience when his narrator says of the central character Gordon Comstock’s education: ‘A child conscious of poverty will suffer snobbish agonies such as a grown-up person can scarcely even imagine (ibid)’.

This analysis will seek to investigate Orwell’s experiences of education as a child, adolescent and young man in the private preparatory, and British public school system of the early part of the 20th century. These have been a focus of great interest by all his biographers. His own account and reflection of those experiences have been controversial. He said ‘…people are wrecked by those filthy private schools (Davison 254:1998a)’. His well-known essay ‘Such, Such Were the Joys’ on his time at St. Cyprian’s school in Eastbourne was written between 1940 and 1947 and represents a construction by a writer who had transformed his identity from his real name of Eric Arthur Blair to George Orwell. Orwell the public intellectual and published writer would remember the emotional bullying of the headmaster’s wife that left him ‘as helpless as a snake before a snake-charmer (Davison 372: 1998b & Bott 1958:4)’. He recalled a boy who was beaten for bed-wetting, and whose confidence was annihilated by relentless bullying. He alleged she humiliated him before the whole school with the words: ‘You know you’re not going to grow up with money, don’t you? Your people aren’t rich … Don’t get above yourself! Davison 363: 1998b)’

The exploration of Orwell and education will extend to the impact, significance and representation of his time at Eton – regarded as the preeminent school for the elite during the period he was there and which retains this status one hundred years later. Orwell’s account of his privileged time at Eton is ambiguous. He could tell a woman friend ‘If only I’d been sent to another school, a freer co-educational school, I should have been much happier than at Eton (Myers 2001:45)’. At the same time, he could also agree with a woman he had known in Burma that his ability to show minute care and fairness in dealing with legal disputes, and his passion for justice was ‘the most important part of the education’ he received at Eton along with ‘the capacity to think for myself (ibid 46)’.

Then there is the significance of Orwell as a teacher in private tutoring and classroom instruction at private schools he worked at during the early 1930s in West London. His mischief in teaching his students how to make and detonate bombs (Shelden 1992:156) and popularity with pupils when working as a schoolmaster at a small private school in Hayes, was tempered by the fact that he would exercise an authoritarian streak and beat those who misbehaved severely leaving at least one boy with ‘really bad bruises’ and unable to sit down comfortably for a week (Wadhams 1984:53-4). But Orwell’s use of corporal punishment as a teacher was very much out of step with the prevailing culture of teaching the teachers in the country’s leading teacher training college. Leading educationalists at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London had been practising a much more progressive pedagogical professionalism from 1905. This exposes Orwell as the product and practitioner of anachronistic methods.

In the wider context, Orwell as the social democratic writer could be reflective about the inadequacies and shortcomings of his educational experiences as Eric Arthur Blair. But he was by no means an original or pioneer thinker in this area. Individuals at Goldsmiths’ with genuine working-class backgrounds, who had won a much more challenging struggle in educational attainment and expertise, put their theory into action many decades before he would write his essay ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’.

They included, Thomas Raymont, the second Warden (head) of Goldsmiths’ who was one of thirteen children born to a Devonshire farrier and blacksmith in the Victorian age, and started his educational career as a boy teacher at the age of 13 (Raymont & Scupham 2012:45-65). By the time he joined the new teacher training department of Goldsmiths’ in 1905 at the age of 41, he had gained Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from the University of London, and a Professorship in Education from University College, Cardiff following the publication of his influential book *The Principles of Education* in 1904 (ibid).

Raymont’s later book *Modern Education: Its Aims and Method*, (1931) and publication by his Goldsmiths’ colleague Nancy Catty of *A First Book On Teaching* (1929), and her edited volume *Modern Education of Young Children* (1933) demonstrate that Orwell expressed no clear conception and understanding of the developing professional standards of modern education being advanced in the wider public and private sectors of education during his time as a pupil and teacher. It was a Goldsmiths’ lecturer, J.H Wimms, who wrote and published the standard textbook, *An Introduction to Psychology For The Use of Teachers*, in 1908- some three years before the 8 year-old Eric Arthur Blair was delivered into the care, or lack of it, of St. Cyprian’s in Eastbourne.

Orwell’s references were from an elitist patronymic world. Women educationalists such as Alice Woods were charting a wider transformation of progress in teaching. She was able to declare with some optimism in her 1920 book *Educational Experiments in England* that ‘Freedom is likely to be brought about in the teaching profession itself. Some form of autonomy will probably take the place of perpetual government direction. The head masters and head mistresses will be free to carry out plans of development for their schools (Woods 1920:244)’.

**St. Cyprian’s – ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’**

It was his fellow St. Cyprian’s and Eton compatriot Cyril Connolly who probably agitated Orwell to write the *J’accuse* of all bitter recollections of prep school days. D.J. Taylor dubbed the Orwellian diatribe as ‘one of the most damning indictments of an educational system ever committed to paper (Taylor 2003:29).’ Connolly had sent him a copy of his volume *Enemies Of Promise*, which at chapter 19 ‘White Samite’ profiled the pseudonymous St Wulfric’s as a school ‘well run and vigorous example which did me a world of good (Connolly 1938:174)’. Connolly had a broader view of what he had gained and lost in going to a school ‘typical of England before the last war; it was worldly and worshipped success, political and social; though Spartan, the death rate was low, for it was well run and based on that stoicism which characterized the English governing class and which has since been under-estimated (ibid 175)’.

But Connolly’s account was by no means eulogistic to the bountiful gifts of enlightenment bestowed upon him by the proprietors Leslie and Cecily Wilkes whom, like Orwell, he had characterised in his account by their nicknames of Sambo and Flip. He recalled Flip’s propensity when angry ‘to slap our faces in front of the school or pull the hair behind our ears, till we cried. She would make satirical remarks at meals that pierced like a rapier (ibid 177)’. Connolly described the humiliating manipulation of her boys by spinning them in and out of favour as if in an ‘Elizabeth and Essex relationship’ and she was ‘hotting them up like little Alfa-Romeos for the Brooklands of life (ibid)’.

With writing of that quality, it was not at all surprising that George Orwell was inspired to write an essay based on his traumatic memory of his time at St. Cyprian’s. In a letter to Connolly in 1938 he said: ‘I wonder how you can write about St. Cyprian’s. It’s all like an awful nightmare to me, & sometimes I think I can still taste the porridge (out of those pewter bowls do you remember?) (Davison 1998a 175)’. Later that year Orwell, in another letter to Connolly, described Mrs Wilkes as ‘that filthy old sow’ and gave notice that ‘I’m always meaning one of those days to write a book about St Cyprian’s (ibid 254)’.

What he did write about his time there between 1911 and 1916 was a complex and disturbing expression of hatred for the couple who ran a school that prepared him successfully for scholarships to two of the world’s most famous private schools: Wellington and Eton. They are confusingly called ‘Public’ schools in British culture because of their origin, many centuries before they achieved their elite status, as charitable foundations set up to educate the able children of the poor. Mr and Mrs Wilkes admitted him for half fees. She was an excellent French teacher and has been credited with guiding the young Eric Blair in the crystal pane style of clear and lucid English that became the hallmark of his writing (Bowker 2003:34). Bowker said rather pointedly in his biography: ‘Her more admiring pupils recalled her great insistence on simplicity and clarity in prose, the very qualities George Orwell later sought to emulate, and he had to admit in certain ways she encouraged him (ibid)’.

Orwell said: ‘I hated Sambo and Flip, with a sort of shamefaced, remorseful hatred (Davison 1998b:366)’. The main source of his bitterness was his belief that they discriminated against him because of his scholarship status and their imposition of a regime of humiliation that included rationing his pocket money, denying him the privilege of ever having a birthday cake, and not even passing on ten shillings his parents had sent for him to buy a cricket bat; something he so desperately wanted. All the while he observed how the rich boys were spared the ghastly floggings, and enjoyed special privileges including mid-morning milk and biscuits. He resented being ‘crammed with learning as cynically as a goose is crammed for Christmas (ibid 360-1)’. In addition to the physical abuse, Orwell lamented most intensely the psychological torture of never feeling that it was ever possible to be good. He recalled Flip’s ability to search the inner core of his conscience ‘with her baleful eyes’ and her ‘peculiar, wheedling, bullying style (ibid 364)’.

Orwell could recall word for word thirty years later how he would be assailed with verbal putdowns such as ‘He wants to be a little office boy at forty pounds a year’, ‘I don’t think it’s very straight, the way you are behaving’ and ‘You are living on my bounty’. He accused the school of squalor and neglect, of forcing him to exert himself physically when he was afflicted with bronchial illness, of imposing an almost punitive environment of hard beds, and a Spartan diet so limited the children plundered scraps left over from masters’ dinners.

He was all too aware that this essay was in 1948 ‘really too libellous to print (ibid 356)’. The first version was published in the US *Partisan Review* in 1952 and it could not be read in British publication until after the death of Mrs Wilkes in 1967. It is hardly surprising when he conjured a world of sour porridge, slimy water, damp towels with cheesy smell, human turd floating during a swimming lesson, dilapidated and banging lavatory doors without fastenings, and forks with old food between the prongs. Orwell described St. Cyprian’s as an evil-smelling compound where periodically boys would hear the ‘long, desolate wails’ and howling of other boys ringing through the house while being flogged for group masturbation, or other beastly sins that had corrupted the temple of their bodies.

Orwell’s biographers have subjected ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’ to detailed investigation. Bernard Crick referred to a contemporary St. Cyprianite who claimed that the bed-wetter publicly beaten was another boy who went onto become a Colonel in the British Army and Victoria Cross holder (Crick 1982:69). Crick quoted extensively from the Blair family portfolio of happy letters that Eric sent home during his boarding days in Eastbourne, and concluded ‘if he intended it to be literally truthful, then memory played him some curious tricks, but none the less it was a brilliant polemic – not entirely about the past (ibid 80)’. All the biographers found as many St. Cyprian’s old boys who thought the essay had inflicted a cruel injustice on Mr and Mrs Wilkes as those who corroborated and backed up Orwell’s vicious denunciation.

Cyril Connolly regretted blithely mocking the Wilkes when he later discovered family papers showing how much they had genuinely helped him get his scholarship to Eton and surmised Mrs Wilkes ‘was warm-hearted and an inspired teacher. The worldliness and snobbery of the Wilkes which Orwell so much condemns was characteristic of the competitive middle class of the period, not a singular aberration (ibid 98)’.

Michael Shelden located a memoir by an old boy, Walter Christie, who was also on half fees, and strongly challenged Orwell’s characterisation: ‘It reminded me of a cobra discharging its self-generated venom by spitting at a harmless tree whose roots had sheltered it (Shelden 1992:31)’. Shelden argues that the true significance of Orwell’s essay is that he strove to articulate the impressions and feelings of his boyhood, a time when he lacked the articulate voice to speak up for himself (ibid 35)’. But this creative recollection of the past would be intensively controversial and hurtful to the targets of his vituperation. Mr and Mrs Wilkes’s eldest son John was a contemporary of Orwell at St. Cyprian’s during the First World War and later Eton. He dismissed the Orwell diatribe as nonsense and explained the charge of boys being hungry as a situation where ‘dash it all, so was everybody, whether they were at school or anywhere else. Everything was rationed (Wadhams 1984:11)’. All photographs of the boys at the time present well-nourished, healthy, and happy looking faces. Orwell had no experience of the real poverty, malnutrition, and stunted development of pupil teachers entering Goldsmiths College before the First World War. The college’s delegacy archives for 1907-8 reveal a crisis in the state of health of a significant proportion of new 18-year-old trainee teachers: ‘As in previous years, a considerable number of otherwise acceptable candidates showed defects of eyesight which were either not corrected, or not adequately corrected, by spectacles; and a still larger number had defective and neglected teeth (Goldsmiths Archive 1907)’. It was not unknown for student teachers as late as the 1930s to do their training in local schools in Deptford south east London where children were without shoes.

**Eton**

Jeffrey Meyers, observed that Eton gave him what prep school had ‘notably failed to provide: freedom, leisure, stimulating classmates, lively teachers, a civilized environment and a cubicle of his own’ (Meyers 2001:27)’. It was a time to be relaxed and self-possessed. Again, there would a clear contradiction between the construction of being poor and disadvantaged and the evidence of his friends and contemporaries; one of whom Sir Steven Runciman said: ‘No, he wasn’t this embittered boy at school where he was the poorest of all the pupils, longing to get away and too poor to go up to university. I think that’s all fictitious (Wadhams 1984:20)’. Meyers depicts a time of intellectual swagger, when he could develop a character described by Runciman as ‘a rather sardonically cheerful sort of boy – I mean loving the irony, loving to have a slight grievance against masters and older boys, but enjoying it (ibid)’. Meyers reports that: ‘The indolent, cocky and rather bolshy Eric inevitably clashed with the more overbearing and uncongenial masters (Meyers 2001:41)’.

John Newsinger has a clear view on Eric Arthur Blair’s educational trajectory via Eton as ‘the product of the Imperial administrative middle class, brought up, educated and indoctrinated to take his place in its ranks (Newsinger 1999:1)’. As Newsinger says St. Cyprian’s was ‘one of many “cradle and crèche” of Empire schools’ (ibid)’. And the young Eric Blair’s sojourn of cynical awkward squad character development at Eton did not divert him from that path. Newsinger observes that his decision to become an officer of the Indian Imperial Police, adhering loyally to the family tradition, was ‘hardly the action of a member of the awkward squad (ibid 2)’.

That was the purpose of the Etonian elitist process then. It is argued that Eton’s dominance in the educational sphere prevails today. It continues to be referred to by alumni as ‘School’ with an arrogant presumption that the concept of ‘school’ does not have any equivalent validity anywhere else. According to old boy, Will Buckley, Eton endures as a con trick that will run and run. He defines the successful inculcation of inner confidence: ‘If you are told regularly enough that you are at a school for excellence then you are likely to leave believing you can achieve anything (Buckley 2016)’.

George Woodcock decided Orwell had a double-standard in his attitude to education (Woodcock 1970:216). Orwell would be writing in the *Observer* in 1948 that Eton’s great virtue was ‘a tolerant and civilized atmosphere which gives each boy a fair chance of developing his individuality (ibid 216-7). But Woodcock would criticise him for ‘an extraordinary passage of rabid anti-scholasticism in which he praises the workers because “where ‘education’ touches their own lives they see through it and reject it by a healthy instinct” (ibid)’. Woodcock offers a further insight into Orwell’s educational ambivalence in the revelation of a private discussion he had with him about the future education of his adopted son Richard: ‘he did not want to send Richard to a boarding school when he was very young, as had happened to him. On the other hand, in spite of his socialism, he was not impressed with the results of state education, and felt that while the present system lasted, there might be worse places to which a boy could be sent, when he was old enough, than a good public school (ibid 159)’.

Stansky and Abrahams argue that when Eric Blair left Eton in December 1921 ‘Eton, it might be said, did not leave him – its mark was upon him, in a certain authority and assurance of manner, as later in the authority and assurance of his prose (Stansky & Abrahams 1979:135). Meyers assembled the biographical evidence proving that the young George Orwell could have gone to Oxford or Cambridge University with or without a grant. He emphasises Blair probably ‘rebelled at the thought of university (Meyers 2001:44).’ And Stansky and Abrahams are confident that had he gone ‘it is permissible to suggest that then there would not have been George Orwell. Not going to university was a decisive part in the making of the writer (Stanksy & Abrahams 1979:135).

Running throughout any analysis of George Orwell’s evaluation as a subject of education is the issue of who was George Orwell, how did he think and what did he believe in? There is a consistent finding in George Orwell authorship, from the time Eric Arthur Blair assumed this professional writing pseudonym in 1933, when the textual emanation of Orwell is contradicted and challenged by the evidential investigation of Blair. Robert Colls engages this issue head on in *George Orwell: English Rebel*. Colls argues that what makes Orwell such a difficult subject is that in ‘his old school slang, he was a “scrub”: someone who liked to do what is not done (Colls 2013:2)’.

Consequently, George Orwell would be pre-occupied with depicting his educational heritage as the victim of a totalitarian culture that had lied to him, and bullied him as a snotty, smelly and unloved inferiority. Yet St. Cyprian’s educated Eric Arthur Blair to win a scholarship at arguably the most prestigious school in the world. Blair was there because he was clever and Colls poignantly suggests ‘Whatever else we learn of Eric Arthur Blair, we should remember his natural gifts (ibid 13)’. While there he earned the ‘right to wear flannels, “fag, fags”’ and it ‘afforded him some measure of independence which over the years grew into a mild delinquency (ibid 14)’.

Colls concludes that it is never clear that Orwell and Blair are the same man. He decides George Orwell ‘is the decent Englishman who goes into corners, puts himself to the test, and can be relied upon to speak the truth, or try to (ibid 41)’. He defines Blair as ‘more like the writer Orwell left behind … [who] knows what he wants before he finds it (ibid)’. He accepts that over time Blair and Orwell grew inwards together, but it was also possible ‘that he never did rid himself of the basic split in who he was and who he wanted to be, and indeed drew on it for insight and empathy (ibid 42)’.

**Private tutoring and teaching in West London**

Bernard Crick quoted at great length the affectionate remembrance of Professor Richard Peters having Eric Arthur Blair as a private tutor when a schoolboy in Southwold in 1930: ‘He was a mine of information on birds, animals, and the heroes of boys’ magazines … But of all the activities which we indulged in with him, the one that stands out in my memory most is the making of bombs (Crick 1982:209-10)’. Blair spent so much time blowing up various parts of his tutee’s garden that they coined a kind of war cry ‘Blarry Boy for Bolshie Bombs’, ‘Blarry Boy’ having become Mr. Blair’s somewhat irreverent nickname. In 1932 after several years of dossing and writing, the emergent George Orwell taught in two private schools in West London. He had neither a degree nor teaching qualification though they still employed him because of the prestige of his famous former school and posh accent. Colls says: ‘they were just about the worst places on earth Orwell could have chosen to work in’ (Colls 2013:35)’. The exhaustion of doing his best for his students and striving to write his next novel probably contributed to pneumonia and the end of his teaching career. What Orwell saw as high profit racketeering in private middle-class schooling would inform his rather Dickensian depiction of Mrs Creevy’s Ringwood House where the medium paying parents would have children whose ears were twisted because they left no marks. Mrs Creevy’s advice to her new teacher Dorothy on how to punish the children of bad payers was ‘I don’t care what you do to that lot – well, short of a police-court case, naturally (Orwell 1964:181-82)’.

One of his former pupils, Geoffrey Stevens, said of Orwell ‘Without a shadow of doubt he was the best teacher I remember at the school … Whether it was handwork or natural history, he would wholeheartedly support a boy and try to teach him (Wadhams 1984:51-52)’. In this account Orwell was clearly a popular and enthusiastic teacher of natural history, animals, insects, plants, painting, with French lessons only in French, and who took the trouble to lead children on long educational country walks. This sounds like a progressive ethos set against the contemporary writing of Thomas Raymont who in *Modern Education: Its Aims and Methods* was arguing: ‘The fundamental change that has taken place is that the new freedom has made possible the exorcism of the spirit of slavery, and the substitution of the spirit of comradeship and discipleship. Plays, concerts magazines, camps, and all that makes school a great piece of team work (Raymont 1931:270)’.

But Stevens also reported that Orwell ‘was pretty strict and rather harsh … he kept a rule on his desk … he would prod us in the stomach … we had six of the best. I remember I couldn’t sit down on it for at least a week. They were really bad bruises. I had a job to sit in the bath, I remember … pretty unjust for such a trivial complaint (Wadhams 1984:53-4)’. Such brutality in the class-room was fast becoming ‘a thing of the past (Raymont 1931:271). It was the kind of regular punishment and chastisement expected in the Royal Naval School in New Cross that had occupied Goldsmiths College’s premises in during the 19th century. The college’s first woman Vice President, Caroline Graveson, recalled how in her first year in 1905 she had been horrified when a former Royal Naval School pupil entered her office to describe how he had been flogged there. She said: ‘I wanted to disinfect the room!’ after he left (Dymond 1955:94)’. In a speech to an educational conference in 1938 Graveson’s colleague, Nancy Catty, said: ‘Rewards were indeed undoubtedly of more use than punishments, as they did achieve something. To punish a child only left him tired or inclined to be resentful. Nobody ever realised after being punished that they deserved their punishment (*Sevenoaks Chronicle* 1938)’.

**Education, the media, society and the wider context**

At around the same time it is estimated that Orwell was grinding his antipathy towards St. Cyprian’s, he was also writing his cultural assessment of *The English People* for the ‘British People in Pictures Series’. On the penultimate page, bearing an illustration of the modernist 1944 sculpture ‘The Family’ by Henry Moore, Orwell wrote: ‘…there is still need for a conscious effort at national re-education. The first step towards this is an improvement in elementary education, which involves not only raising the school-leaving age but spending enough money to ensure that elementary schools are adequately staffed and equipped (Orwell 1947:47)’. His pretence at expertise on matters of educational policy was not based on one day of professional training, or experience in the state education system. There is no evidence that he would have been aware that in 1933 Nancy Catty’s edited volume on *Modern Education of Young Children* was advancing analysis of the transition from formal teaching to project work and methods by which children, free to play singly or in groups, were gaining general education and rapidly acquiring skill in the three Rs. Mrs Catty and her colleagues were putting into practice the theory of the free child in the child-centred school: ‘There are many attempts made to counteract the evils of the formal work that often follows in the wake of the time-table, the fixed syllabus, the rule of the specialist, and the tyranny of the examination. (Catty 1933:ix)’.

To be fair to Orwell there were concessions of grudging balance in ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’. He accepted: ‘Whoever writes about his childhood must beware of exaggeration and self-pity. I do not want to claim that I was a martyr or that St. Cyprian’s was a sort of Dotheboys Hall (Davison 1998b:396).’ His essay was recollecting and polemicizing education ‘thirty years ago and more’ and he was seeking to ask the question ‘Does a child at school go through the same kind of experiences nowadays? (ibid 382)’. When Orwell said that ‘we do not with certainty know (ibid)’ it can be argued that he was postulating speculatively. He accepted that there was a prevailing attitude towards education that was ‘enormously more humane and sensible than that of the past (ibid 383).’ He somewhat patronisingly observed ‘a general growth of “enlightenment” even among ordinary, unthinking middle-class people (ibid).’ He hoped that the domination of religious belief had vanished, beating had been discredited and largely abandoned from many schools and ‘I imagine that very few people nowadays would tell a child that if it masturbates it will end up in the lunatic asylum (ibid)’.

Orwell’s thinking was turning to the significance of the educational context of wider media when he talked of ‘immense educational possibilities in the radio, the film, and—if it could be freed once and for all from commercial interests—the press (Orwell 1947:47)’. Sarah Lonsdale situates this view in the atmosphere of intense criticism of press ethics and plurality that was accompanied and followed by the Royal Commission into the Press in 1948. She says this most likely contributed to the dystopian depiction of fabricated news production in *Nineteen Eighty Four*: ‘some of the most resounding criticisms of the British press submitted to the inquiry focused on its failure to fulfil its most fundamental duty in a liberal democracy: to help produce, through articulating divergent views of public opinion, an enlightened public which could conduct its civic duty in full knowledge of events (Lonsdale 2016:162)’. Yet profound understanding of the impact on education that a competitive and superficial media had on the minds of school-children had been publicly ventilated more than twenty years before by Goldsmiths’ College Warden Thomas Raymont.

The *Dover Express* reported his sophisticated understanding of media effects when he said the Press as an agency with education had to be reckoned with by teachers. Raymont warned: ‘They had with them “the new journalism,” with its emphasis on the daily triviality, and its avoidance of all that related to permanent principles in ethics, economics, and politics (*Dover Express* 1925:5)’. Raymont appreciated the more sophisticated involvement of teachers utilising ‘improvements in the education of boys and girls over 12 years of age as would make it possible for them to read with greater discrimination as they grew up. Then, and not till then, would the newspapers improve (ibid)’.

**Conclusion**

George Orwell was both a very good and very bad teacher who never had any ambition to commit his life to education in terms of vocation. His mission in life after returning from his imperial sojourn as a policeman in colonialized Burma was that of a writer. Periods of private tutoring and jobs in private schools in West London were instrumental phases of working to write. In the process, he collected intense and poignant experience to inform some of his novels of the 1930s such as *A Clergyman’s Daughter*.

He was a good teacher in inspiring the imagination and curiosity of his pupils with the wonders of nature, though the instruction he offered in showing young people how to cause explosions would be regarded as somewhat irresponsible today. There is no doubt he was committed to his students. The exhaustive work in devising and producing drama productions made him aware that extra-curricular commitments diverted him from the necessary energy and focus needed to succeed as a famous writer. He had clearly been conditioned by the brutal punishment techniques at St. Cyprian’s and Eton to beat and physically intimidate children under his care. Though this widespread abuse may have been standard in the private schools of the 1930s, it was regarded as anachronistic and unprofessional in the leading training colleges for teachers going into state schools.

Orwell had no clear insight or appreciation of the many gifts and advantages that the hated teachers at St. Cyprian’s had given him. Equally he was rather supercilious and off-hand about how the privileges and opportunities of Eton had propelled and advanced him in the elite milieu. Skills, knowledge, confidence, contacts, tenacity, cunning, and even a powerfully inculcated perspicacity of writing style had been invested in a young man who would go on to be one of the most influential novelists and political writers of his century. Eton gave him educational spaciality to develop as an individual thinker.

Although Orwell was disconnected and not fully grounded in the progressive developments taking place in professional education he must be credited with having a fundamental emotional understanding of how children feel and experience education that is not working for them. ‘Such, Such Were The Joys’ has passages of insight that have been often overlooked by his biographers so engaged with the mythology of the young Orwell as Oliver Twist, Tom Brown, or Dotheboys Hall victim. In the concluding pages, he questioned ‘whether it is still normal for a schoolchild to live for years amid irrational terrors and lunatic misunderstandings (Davison 1998b:383)’. He acknowledged the difficulty for adults to actually know what a child actually thinks and feels. There is great sensitivity and sympathy expressed in the observation: ‘A child which appears reasonably happy may actually be suffering horrors which it cannot or will not reveal. It lives in a sort of alien under-water world which we can only penetrate by memory or derivation (ibid)’. Mrs Cecily Wilkes was utterly perplexed by Orwell’s denunciation. Her son John recalled that ‘she had a great respect for him and was very much hurt when he said the things about the school he did (Wadhams 1984:10)’. D.J Taylor argues that the dark depiction of St. Cyprian’s as a miserable penal colony may have had something to do with the fact that the essay was written during the conception and development of *Nineteen Eighty Four*: ‘The idea of the school as a police state, Mrs Wilkes with her arbitrary favouritism – all this, it could be said, is the mental baggage of *Nineteen Eighty Four* shifted back in time (Taylor 2003:35)’. Certainly, Orwell’s first biographer Bernard Crick considered if he was ‘transfiguring imaginatively aspects of his early experiences into what was soon to become the helplessness of Winston Smith (Crick 1982:71)’.

A critical view of Orwell is that he was clever at exploiting all the advantages of his ugly, elitist and imperialist privileges to enter and dominate the elite status of the eventual role of successful and famous writer. Was he too selfish to be a good teacher, or continuing teacher? Great writers often are. It is easy to be a tramp and rock’n roll with the poor when you have comfortable bourgeois friends and family who can lend a bath, bed and refuge.

Many of Goldsmiths’ College teaching pioneers were genuine working-class people who achieved much more in educational advancement and the professionalisation of teaching. They liked their students and did not necessarily hate themselves, or pretend to, in order to be intellectually and ideologically superior. Yet the vocation of teaching in the end endures through the success and progress of students. It is the success and fame of the student that is recognised and that of the teacher often taken for granted, occasionally dismissed, and sometimes condemned for being responsible for that derided ‘in spite of’ past only worth resurrecting for the purpose of literary polemics.

Eric Arthur Blair’s success as the author ‘George Orwell’ depended on rebelling against the authoritative and effective education given to him. At St. Cyprian’s he had an education in animosity, grievance, unfairness and bullying. At Eton, he gained a diploma in cynicism. When he worked as a teacher himself he could equivocate with orthodox and unorthodox methods. When he was fully flown as the writer, his prose and essays could constitute their own literary pedagogy of dissidence and political writing as an art form.

**Note on the contributor**

Tim Crook is a professor in the department of media and communications at Goldsmiths, visiting professor in Broadcast Journalism at Birmingham City University, chair of the Professional Practices Board of the Chartered Institute of Journalists, and a longstanding author, playwright and academic. He has written a number of academic articles and chapters on George Orwell’s literature and cultural significance, and is completing a monograph on *Orwell On The Radio* for Ashgate.

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