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## Happy 60th Birthday, Orwell's 1984

by [BLOGGER Jili\\_Dearman](#) on 05-28-2009 11:43 AM - last edited on 06-22-2009 01:20 PM by [ADMIN PaulH](#)

Does anyone remember the "Memory Hole" from George Orwell's 1984? If not, don't just read this blog, read or re-read the book...

Robert McCrum recently wrote a piece for The UK Observer, "The Masterpiece that Killed George Orwell," to coincide with the upcoming 60th anniversary of the publication of 1984.

"Ironically," McCrum notes "part of Orwell's difficulties derived from the success of Animal Farm . After years of neglect and indifference the world was waking up to his genius. 'Everyone keeps coming at me,' he complained to his friend Arthur Koestler, 'wanting me to lecture, to write commissioned booklets, to join this and that, etc --you don't know how I pine to be free of it all and have time to think again.'"

And you thought keeping up with Facebook was hard!

Somehow though, like Flannery O'Connor (noted in last week's blog post), Orwell managed to leave behind a body of work of great depth and originality, despite his lifelong frail health. When writers complain about the various reasons we don't have time to write, the pressures, etc., it's worth noting that Orwell struggled for success for years and then once he found it struggled to find time to complete his groundbreaking masterpiece. Let's remember that next time we complain about our allergies or "jumper's knee" (don't ask; it's between me and my orthopedist).

By coincidence, I just re-read 1984 myself a few weeks ago, while up in the country. (Relaxing huh?) It was utterly fresh in every way. In today's world of banal illiteracy 1984 seems that much more relevant than ever. Meanwhile, a breezy current novel I picked up after Orwell left me cold with its lack of soul. After that literary disappointment I was ready to drive home to the city to re-read *Against the Machine* : Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob, a great recent critical treatise on the 21st Century dumbing down of humanity through technology by my personal hero, Lee Siegel.

As we text and twitter and yes, blog (!) we give in to a tendency to gloss over depth of meaning in the service of quick communication. To that end, here's a somber exercise to try and channel a little desperation and meaning to counteract the snappy but soulless and the blasé and blah non-committal prose groove you may have accidentally fallen into:

**This Week's Exercise for Key-Bangers: Down With Big Brother!**

Try writing two pages (or 500 words) as if the Thought Police might walk in at any moment and confiscate it and imprison you. These are pages that may reveal a side of you, a way of thinking that the conventional world (which includes your spouse, your colleagues, your pet ferrets) would find shocking. Allow yourself not just to write from your own angst, but channel what you see around you in the world. Feel, observe, take risks. And if writing those two pages does lead to your downfall, so be it. At least you will have spoken your truth brothers and sisters!

Perhaps we will meet again in the place where there is some darkness. As Orwell showed us, "the place where there is no darkness" is actually a prison.

Report back and Bang the Keys!

<http://www.bangthekeys.com/>

Message Edited by PaulH on 06-22-2009 01:20 PM

All Users' Tags: [George\\_Orwell](#) [Lee\\_Siegel](#) [Memory\\_Hole](#) [Robert\\_McCrum](#) [View All \(4\)](#)

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by [oiloncanvas](#) on 05-28-2009 12:05 PM

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## About Unabashedly Bookish

Unabashedly Bookish features new articles every day from the Book Clubs staff, guest authors, and friends on hot topics in the world of books, language, writing, and publishing. From trends in the publishing business to updates on genre fiction fan communities, from fun lessons on grammar to reflections on literature in our personal lives, this blog is the best source for your daily dose of all things bookish.

## Announcements

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## Book Clubs Twitter

Who introduced you to reading? RIZZO'S WAR author Lou Manfredo thanks his dad. <http://bit.ly/1RZHRM> about 6 hours ago

A fantasy world where people's souls go down a spirit stream and end up on Earth when they

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thanks jill for another illuminating message...you're consistently reminding me of the hard work and time and dedication that even the best, most celebrated writers must endure! keeps me motivated. will definitely revisit mr. orwell.

Permalink

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by [Blogger: Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 05-28-2009 12:08 PM

Options

Nice to meet you and thanks for stopping by. Hard work seems to be at the root of all good; and don't get me started on the root of all evil! Good luck w/your writing (and painting?) and keep me posted.

Permalink

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by [KathyS](#) on 05-28-2009 01:25 PM

Options

Jill, I'm enjoying reading your 'blog'. Thank you.

I don't have a problem finding 'my darkness', or expounding on my observations, or touching those "feelings of the day", in writing, but I wonder, sometimes, just how much 'people' want to hear all of those thoughts. So often I've heard, Oh, Kathy, you're too deep! Kathy, my brain just doesn't work like yours, or, Kathy, I don't have the time to think that much...etc.. So, I keep it light-surface. You get the picture?

Question: What constitutes calling yourself (collectively) a writer. I write daily, but never seriously/world wide published. If I call myself a writer, does that make me one? A friend of mine, just last night, called me a writer. I thought that interesting, but I didn't comment. I'm an artist, and a half dozen other things...but what do people really see you as? Is it what you see yourself as?

Kathy

Permalink

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by [LFeeney](#) on 05-29-2009 07:30 AM

Options

Jill you attract the painters! That's terrific.Great blog and responses.

Writing is not hard work. Bartending till 2a.m. five nights a week is hard work. Cooking on your feet forty hours a week is hard work.

Writing is a joy. And I am going to go write right now.

L

Permalink

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by [Blogger: Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 05-29-2009 08:40 AM

Options

I guess I think the title writer is not so important -- it's a lable -- it's the feeling of "tapping in" that one feels when writing. What do other folks think.

And HA! how true re: bartending and cooking.

Permalink

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by [KathyS](#) on 05-29-2009 11:07 AM

Options



By [Jill\\_Dearman](#)

***I guess I think the title writer is not so important -- it's a lable -- it's the feeling of "tapping in" that one feels when writing.***

A minute thought-Fiction:

***"tapping in"....***

Is it being a 'parent', 24-7, to all of your characters[children] - knowing them; understanding them so well...guiding them; loving them, and yes[importantly] even needing them?

Permalink

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by [GSimmons](#) on 05-30-2009 12:13 AM

Options

die. Sound familiar? <http://bit.ly/4FuJdG> about 23 hours ago

Stop by and chat with Debbie Macomber. <http://bit.ly/sgTVQ1> day ago

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## Latest Articles

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[KathyS](#) on: Reading as Self Defense

[Vermontcozy](#) on: Let's Have A Round for These Friends of Mine

"I have named the destroyers of nations: comfort, plenty, and security - out of which grow a bored and slothful cynicism, in which rebellion against the world as it is, and myself as I am, are submerged in listless self-satisfaction." John Steinbeck describes our time of shallow thought that substitutes intensity for depth. When I read Steinbeck I don't feel like a writer. If I published articles in throw away magazines for the price of a vente, non-fat, chai tea latte with two extra pumps, am I a writer? If my gaze glazes over when a friend is speaking because I imagine her words, in print, tweaked a bit on a blog, am I a writer? If napkins at sushi restaurants are used more for desparate squiggles than mouth blotting, am I a writer? If a cook is one who cooks, then a writer must be one who writes. Jill, I appreciate your call to take risks. I've already shocked my entire family, but my ferret is unflappable.

Permalink

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by [Blogger: Jill\\_Dearman](#) on 05-31-2009 09:55 AM

Options

I say yes on being a parent to your writing projects and kudos to that unflappable ferret!

Permalink

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by [starrXX](#) on 06-05-2009 12:40 PM

Options

Orwell is also on the mind of other writers - witness a new book about the relationship between Orwell and Evelyn Waugh who admired Orwell's work. What they had in common was a hatred of the ghastly common era. One loathed it from the left, the other from the right.

Permalink

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by [BurtShulman](#) on 06-18-2009 12:49 AM

Options

I just wanted to put in a word for Orwell's non-fiction. I read parts of The Road to Wigan Pier without knowing anything about it, many years ago while sleeping over at a friend's house. I found the book on a shelf, had never heard of it, and was completely blown away by the writing even more than what the writing was about. Just incredibly forceful, immediate, vivid prose with an idiosyncratic yet perfectly tuned sense of voice and a gritty lyricism that I felt added up to some of the finest, most powerful writing I'd ever read. His descriptions of going down into the coal mines were (and I presume still are!) enthralling and unforgettable. I still remember the sense of claustrophobia -- as if the memory is mine, as if I went down there with him. Also, the guy was just an unbelievably gifted essayist. So there's the no doubt underappreciated fiction, but don't forget the non-fiction -- in a way the real birth of the New Journalism 30 years before the birth of the New Journalists.

Permalink

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[LizFenton](#) on: My Own Mr. Right

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