


# Would George Orwell have blogged?

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 My instinctive feeling as a big fan of [George Orwell](#) and (as you see) of blogging is that the author of [1984](#) and [Politics and The English Language](#), would definitely have been a blogger. (But he was also an anti-social git so perhaps he wouldn't have [Tweeted](#)). However, [others](#) are less sure.

The [George Orwell Prize](#) is a splendid annual award to the best political writing of the year. Until this year it went to books and journalism but now they have stooped into the digital gutter to pluck blogging into their fold. (I am acutely conscious that Orwell would have been appalled at the metaphor-mangling involved in that last sentence).

As you see from the [judges](#), this is a high-minded exercise that sees itself as a way of 'preserving standards'. And every year it is, indeed, a useful reminder that loads of wonderful political writing is produced. This is despite the gloomy predictions from people like, well, people like the Orwell Prize judges.

The [list of bloggers](#) this year is proof that the blogosphere has 'matured' sufficiently to meet their criteria. And there are some very good blogs on the longlist. I enjoy them all.

However, it is clear that the Orwell judges have a very literary, intellectual understanding of political writing and journalism. So no [Guido Fawkes](#), for example.

But that is not to say that their list doesn't have some great examples of how blogging is revitalising the English political language. [Alix Mortimer's](#) prose may be full of lofty liberal distain and foreign words but it is absolutely her blogging voice:

*"When you stop to think about all this for anything above twenty seconds, whoever you are and whatever your situation, you will realise that this is just a bit sick. When did we lose sight of the basic truth that house and flats are there to be lived in? It came back rather quickly to haunt one of the buyers, whose own house is now (ooh! the delicious irony!) in danger as a result of her failed buy-to-let experiment. There's a decent chance she'll lose it by 2009, or as she tremulously put it, "By this time next year I could be . . . **homeless**." No, you terrifyingly self-absorbed baby-booming old baggage, you'll be a private tenant. Come on in, the dry rot's lovely."*

They also have a tendency to go on a bit. It is often essay-writing by default. I am not sure that [1400 words on Conservative european policy](#) is classic blogging, but I have been known to over-write and some people say they like a bit more meat on their digital bone.

There is an MP and two BBC correspondents on the list, and inevitably, Iain Dale makes the cut. But would Orwell have been a candidate were he around today?

[Tom Colls](#) has written a good feature for the BBC on precisely this question which quotes me in the affirmative:

*"He was a contrarian, he loved a row and he didn't mind people having a go at him..he would have blogged. Fact."*

Orwell biographer DJ Taylor is less sure:

*“On the one hand he would have been interested in the democratic possibilities of it – anyone can do it as long as they’ve got access to a machine..On the other, the misuses to which blogging has been put certainly would have appalled him. There would, in all probability, have been an essay on Blogging and the English Language.”*

For more on Orwell may I suggest this [wonderful piece in the NYRB](#) by Julian Barnes:

*“One of the effects of reading Orwell’s essays en masse is to realize how very dogmatic—in the nonideological sense—he is. This is another aspect of his Johnsonian Englishness. From the quotidian matter of how to make a cup of tea to the socioeconomic analysis of the restaurant (an entirely unnecessary luxury, to Orwell’s puritanical mind), he is a lawgiver, and his laws are often founded in disapproval. He is a great writer against. So his “Bookshop Memories”—a subject others might turn into a gentle color piece with a few amusing anecdotes—scorns lightness. The work, he declares, is drudgery, quite unrewarding, and makes you hate books; while the customers tend to be thieves, paranoiacs, dimwits, or, at best—when buying sets of Dickens in the improbable hope of reading them—mere self-deceivers. In “England Your England” he denounces the left-wing English intelligentsia for being “generally negative” and “querulous”: adjectives which, from this distance, seem to fit Orwell pretty aptly. Given that he died at the age of forty-six, it’s scary to imagine the crustiness that might have set in had he reached pensionable age.”*

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