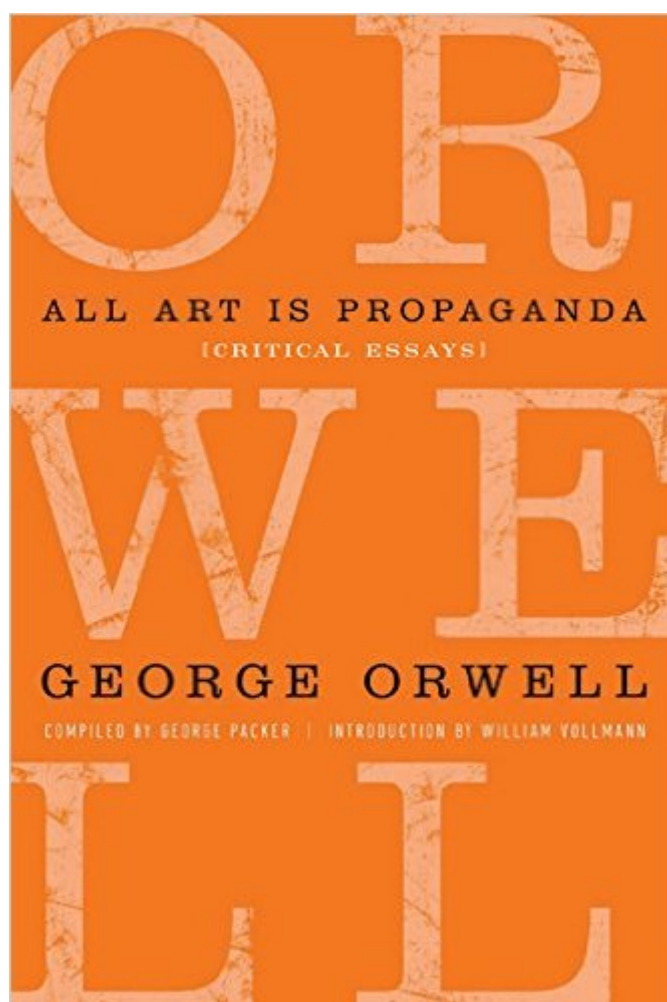


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All Art Is Propaganda: Critical Essays



Synopsis

As a critic, George Orwell cast a wide net. Equally at home discussing Charles Dickens and Charlie Chaplin, he moved back and forth across the porous borders between essay and journalism, high art and low. A frequent commentator on literature, language, film, and drama throughout his career, Orwell turned increasingly to the critical essay in the 1940s, when his most important experiences were behind him and some of his most incisive writing lay ahead. *All Art Is Propaganda* follows Orwell as he demonstrates in piece after piece how intent analysis of a work or body of work gives rise to trenchant aesthetic and philosophical commentary. With masterpieces such as "Politics and the English Language" and "Rudyard Kipling" and gems such as "Good Bad Books," here is an unrivaled education in, as George Packer puts it, "how to be interesting, line after line."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This collection of essays by George Orwell is part of a two-volume compilation. (The other volume is called *Facing Unpleasant Facts: Narrative Essays*.) In a foreword to this volume, George Packer explains that the focus of *All Art Is Propaganda* is Orwell's use of the essay genre as a means of holding something up for critical scrutiny. The theme of the volume, art as propaganda or as a tool for persuasion, recurs throughout these essays. We often think of propaganda in its perjorative sense; something used by the powerful to cajole the unthinking masses into actions that they would not normally undertake on their own. But for Orwell, "propaganda" is a neutral term. Any writing or other art that attempts to persuade, for good or ill, is propaganda. Orwell's essay on Charles

Dickens introduces this theme: "But every writer, especially every novelist, has a message," whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it. All art is propaganda." (p. 47) That the Dickens message is not always clear is illustrated by the fact that people of many conflicting political leanings have, as Orwell puts it, "stolen" Dickens. Both Marxists and Catholics have latched onto him as a spokesman. This essay seeks to understand the real Dickens. Some other literary heavyweights get a thorough Orwell examination in this volume: Henry Miller, Shakespeare, Kipling, T.S. Eliot, and Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy is known to have rejected Shakespeare as not even "an average author." Orwell finds the root of Tolstoy's displeasure with the Bard to be "the quarrel between the religious and the humanist attitudes toward life." (p.

This title is a companion volume to one titled Facing Unpleasant Facts. That volume dealt with many of the famous narrative essays produced in Orwell's career, whereas this one has selections of what the editor calls "Critical Essays". Both are highly valuable as source material for those interested in Orwell. In fact, I believe that he was a far better essayist and first-person writer than he ever was a novelist. The books that his legacy stands on for most readers are good, but in his essays we can see him explore the ideas that lead to the creation of both Nineteen Eighty-Four and Animal Farm: Centennial Edition. In fact, both the essays "Politics and the English Language" and "The Prevention of Literature" could be easily attached as appendices to those books (both essays are in the present volume). The only practical issue with this book is that many of the essays are more of the literary criticism approach or movie reviews (even if he would hate that characterization). If you do not have a familiarity with the source material that he is reviewing, you might seem out of sorts. In essays on both the careers of Dickens and Tolstoy I felt a disconnect because it taxed my limited familiarity with those authors.

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