

Orwell censored over his disgust for "the great masturbator"

Essay on autobiography reveals how the puritanical Orwell felt repulsed by Dalí

If they were both alive today, George Orwell and Salvador Dalí would be two old men of 100. This might be the year of Dalí's centenary celebrations, but we learn more about Orwell through the wonderful exhibition *Viatge a una guerra: George Orwell a Catalunya i al front d'Aragó* (Journey to a War: George Orwell in Catalonia and at the Aragon Front). In addition to recreating Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War, the exhibition shows the crucial effects the war had on his life afterwards, fuelling his conviction that Stalinist totalitarianism was as bad as Nazism, as expressed in his classic work, *Homage to Catalonia*. Orwell never mentioned Figueres, but he knew of the town's most famous son, about whom he wrote a long essay in June 1944.

Orwell had just read the recently-published *Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, and the book had evidently infuriated him. Nevertheless (and typically of Orwell), instead of just writing off the work, he tried to analyse why it disgusted him so much. For Orwell, Dalí's book was a scan-

dalously fraudulent work - a performance piece, a "striptease act" filled with patently unbelievable incidents and stripped of anything that could be considered normal. However, precisely because of that, Orwell concluded that the book was a valuable document, being proof of the "perversion of instinct" produced by the machine age. Orwell cited a few of the more shocking incidents, such as when Dalí boasted about giving his three-year-old sister a kick in the head and describing the pleasure he got from it. Later on, the painter describes how, as a teenager, he had invented what he called a "five-year plan", which consisted of spending 5 years erotically exciting a girl and then humiliating her.

The writer also criticises him for not taking sides when the Civil War broke out, but simply fleeing to Italy. Then, just before World War II, he only worried about finding a place from which he could escape if danger came too close. And so he went off to the United States.

It is fascinating the way Orwell was scandalised by Dalí's "perv-

sions". With his strong sense of Victorian puritanism, Orwell was exasperated by Dalí's scatological themes, and he described Dalí (ironically) as having all the perversions one could wish for, except for homosexuality. And no doubt due partly to his wartime experiences, when he witnessed death at first hand, he felt a particular disgust for Dalí's fascination with rotting corpses. For Orwell, *Secret Life* was a book that "stinks", and he wondered whether that comment would amuse Dalí, who claimed to have smeared himself in goat faeces when he had gone to court Gala.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the essay is that Orwell very consciously anticipated what became a focal point of the first conference held in honour of Dalí's centenary. Although Dalí repulsed him, Orwell recognised that Dalí the artist had exceptional qualities. Dalí, he thought, was not a fraud, and had much more talent than most of those who denounced his immorality or made fun of him. The essay's title, *Benefit of Clergy: Some Notes on*

Salvador Dalí, derives from the medieval idea that the clergy were exempt from the powers of secular courts. To Orwell, the defenders of Dalí's work had placed him in a privileged category in which he could enjoy moral irresponsibility. Orwell believed that two things should be accepted about Dalí: that he was a good artist, but also a disgusting person. *Benefit of Clergy* was published in 1944 in a collection of essays by different writers, but the Hutchinson publishing company soon removed the article from the book, deeming it obscene. Orwell once stated that despite all his criticism, he did not agree with such an intolerant idea as censoring Dalí's writings or paintings.

Ironically, it was not in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy or Stalin's USSR, but Churchill's heroic England that people tried to suppress Orwell's essay about Dalí, which, of course, contains absolutely no obscenity at all.

Henry Ettinghausen is Emeritus Professor of Spanish Studies, University of Southampton

Conference explores Cervantes heritage

Don Quixote, that sad multi-faceted idealist who has spawned so many pages of literary criticism and is now seen as a symbol of European culture - not to mention as the quintessence of the Spanish character was the main subject of an international convention that opened yesterday in association with Forum 2004. *Quixote and modern thought*, which is being held at the Centre de Convencions for the whole of this week, represents an attempt to assess and debate the importance of this novel, which has influenced so many literary genres including the romantics, the baroque and even the existentialists.

The convention is taking place as an introduction to the coming year's celebrations of the 400th anniversary of Cervantes' masterpiece. Around a hundred specialists are attending the conference - including university professors, students and researchers, many of whom will be meeting up again in 2005 to analyse the most well-known character in Spanish literature.

The inaugural session was opened by the philosopher Eugenio Trias, who spoke about the huge range of interpretations which have been made of the novel, as well as exploring Cervantes' acute sense of tragedy. Later on, the writer Antonio Regado discussed the contrasts that exist within the book between ideas and reality, while Montserrat Herrero's presentation dealt with Quixote's influence on the romantic novel and the way in which the main character was appropriated by the romantic movement as a symbolic figure.

Meanwhile, Christof Strozetski examined the sad knight from the viewpoint of Hegelian philosophy, and subsequently went on to address an aspect of the novel which touches more recent historical events - the reasons that the central character gives which he believes justify war, and particularly preventive attacks. Strozetski reminded us that Quixote considered there were five causes which would justify the opening of hostilities against an enemy: firstly, an attack on the Catholic faith, secondly, self-defence, thirdly, defence of one's honour, home and family, fourthly, to serve the king, and finally, to defend one's homeland, thereby showing that some things never change over the centuries. The conference will close on Friday with a debate and speech by the writer Carmen Riera, who will be presenting Quixote from the point of view of Catalan nationalism.

To celebrate the occasion of Cervantes' anniversary in 2005, La Real Academia Española will be publishing a special popular edition of the novel which will be 1,400 pages long and will cost 9 Euros.



To Orwell, the defenders of Dalí's work had placed him in a privileged position in which he could enjoy moral irresponsibility

Bacardi: I never knew he was a Catalan...

ALEX LEFF

The "Cuba libre" and the Daiquiri would never have been possible were it not for an astute Catalan. Born in Sitges in 1814, Facundo Bacardi Massó changed the way people viewed the rum cocktail. In fact, his innovative fermentation process turned rum from what was considered at the time as an unrefined drink into a classy spirit.

After emigrating to Cuba in the early 19th century, Don Facundo, a wine merchant, purchased a small tin-roofed distillery in Santiago de

Cuba in 1862.

He tried several techniques until discovering the key to making rum into a refined liquor: filtering it through charcoal to remove the impurities, then ageing it in oak barrels to "mellow" the taste.

The Bacardi brand became much loved in the US, to the point that the American general Leonard Wood appointed Don Facundo's eldest son mayor of Santiago de Cuba. Later on, the company also helped to attract Americans to the island. During Prohibition, Bacardi invited



Don Facundo Bacardi Massó

them to "Come to Cuba and bathe in Bacardi rum."

When Fidel Castro arrived, the company was not viewed with the same fondness by the revolutionaries, and the feeling was mutual. The company fled Cuba for the Bahamas and Fidel seized the assets it left behind. Hernando Calvo Ospina claimed that Bacardi financed anti-Castro groups in the 1960s, helped to found the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) in 1981 and supported the Helms-Burton legislation of 1996.