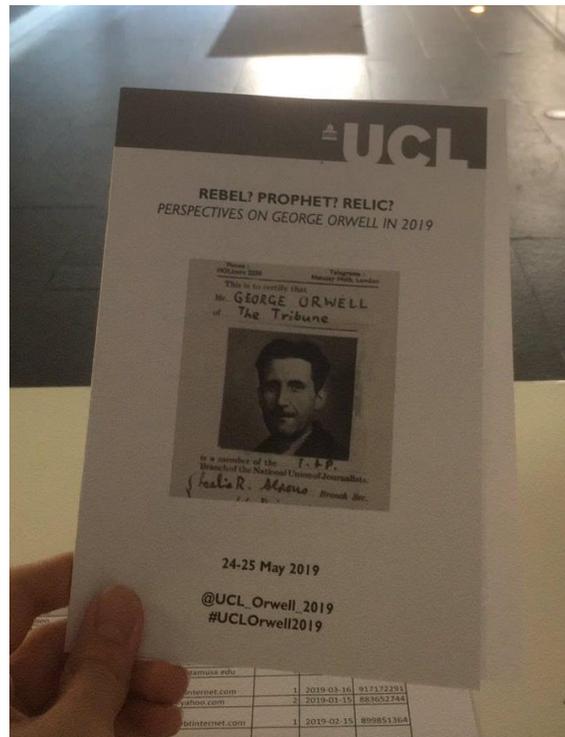


Conference:
Rebel? Prophet? Relic?
Perspectives on George Orwell in 2019

24-25 May 2019
 University College London (UCL)



Conference Programme

Summary

UCL's first George Orwell conference, *Rebel? Prophet? Relic? Perspectives on George Orwell in 2019*, took place on May 24th and 25th. The event explored all aspects of the author's oeuvre and presence in popular culture, from the continuing significance of his masterpiece, the political dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), to his relationship to the British Empire and mid-century Fascism. Panelists discussed his reception history in different parts of the world, and adaptations of his work in a variety of media. The speaker list was international, and truly interdisciplinary. Presenters, who were academics, theatre directors, video game designers, authors, journalists, and members of the Armed Forces, traveled

from Australia, Canada, Iraq, the United States, China, Germany, Scotland, and all parts of England to participate. The conference brought together a number of Orwell-focused organizations and institutions: the Orwell Foundation, the Orwell Society, and UCL Special Collections, holder of the Orwell Archive. Approximately forty members of the public also joined the event. The support of the Octagon Small Grants Fund not only allowed scholars to participate in a conference dedicated to Orwell, very few of which exist, but also enabled the University to positively engage with the community and publicize its projects and collections. Twitter: @UCL_Orwell_2019; #UCLOrwell2019

Report

In 1945, George Orwell wrote of war-time rumours that American troops had come to England to thwart a communist revolution: “One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that. No ordinary man could be such a fool.”¹ UCL’s first Orwell conference, *Rebel? Prophet? Relic? Perspectives on George Orwell in 2019* (24-25 May), did include papers from a number of intellectuals, but it also featured presentations from theatre directors, video game designers, authors, journalists, and members of the Armed Forces. The variety in speaker disciplines and nationalities—participants traveled from Australia, Canada, Iraq, the United States, China, Scotland, and all parts of England—bear out one presenter’s comment that, even if you are not English, and even if literary study is not your profession, Orwell resonates. Orwell is personal.

The conference brought together a number of Orwell-focused organizations and institutions: the Orwell Foundation, the Orwell Society, and UCL Special Collections, holder of the Orwell Archive. The event began with a panel dedicated to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Papers considered the ongoing significance of Orwell’s seminal work in the seventy years since its publication. A session considering Orwell’s reception in Eastern Europe followed.

¹ Orwell, George. “Notes on Nationalism.” 1945. *George Orwell: Essays*, Penguin Books, 2000, pp. 316.



Session One: Nineteen Eighty-Four: Seventy Years On (Speakers: Tim Crook, Xiaozhou Li & Douglas Kerr)

Day One participants had the opportunity to visit the Special Collections Reading Room and view records from the Archive relating to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s composition, as well as rare editions of the novel. A discussion of Orwell's correspondence during the last year of his life followed. Archivist Sarah Aitchinson, along with biographer D.J. Taylor and Jean Seaton, Director of the Orwell Foundation, shared their insights into the materials. The afternoon concluded with panels about Orwell in academia, and his peculiarities as a biographical subject, along with an interview with Richard Lance Keeble concerning Orwell's journalism.



Masha Karp, D.J. Taylor, John Rodden & Jean Seaton discuss Orwell & biography.



Richard Keeble, chair of the Orwell Society, describes Orwell's development as a journalist (with Sarah Gibbs)

Day Two discussions examined adaptations of Orwell's work for stage, screen, and video games. Speakers included Jimmy Walters, director of the play *Mrs. Orwell*, and Imre Jele, the designer of the *Animal Farm* (1945) video game. Other panels focused on Orwell's relationship to the Empire and nationalist politics, and his influence on contemporary novelists around the world. Keynote speaker John Rodden considered Orwell's reception history, and argued that his absorption into popular culture has made him one of the most significant writers of the twentieth, and twenty-first, centuries.



Keynote Speaker John Rodden

In addition to speakers, the conference welcomed approximately forty members of the public, many of whom had never visited UCL before. The support of the Octagon Small Grants Fund not only allowed scholars to participate in a conference dedicated to Orwell, very few of which exist, but also enabled the University to positively engage with the community and publicize its projects and collections. The event proved that Orwell is personal, and public, and international.



End of Day Two with a few speakers and audience members