
**ORWELL: THE
TRANSFORMATION**
by Peter Stansky and
William Abrahams
Knopf, 1980
302 pp. \$12.95

Eric Blair, a.k.a. George Orwell (1902–50), proffered readers his passionate humanism and prose as clear as any in English. In *The Unknown Orwell* (1972), critics Stansky and Abrahams recounted Blair's unhappy youth in British public schools and his stint (1922–27) as an assistant district superintendent of police in Burma. This second volume of their trail-blazing biography covers the period from Orwell's first book, the autobiographical *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), to his socialist conversion while a Loyalist soldier in the Spanish Civil War. It is fundamentally the story of a young man trying to unite his ambitions as a social critic with his desire to become a "serious" creative writer. The authors painstakingly recount the reconciliation of these callings that produced his first major work of nonfiction—*Homage to Catalonia* (1938), in which he eloquently described the undermining of the anti-Franco cause by the communists—and resulted, during the 1940s, in his best-known fiction, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Yet, drawing on interviews with his friends, the authors also show Orwell as his contemporaries probably saw him—a man of deliberate eccentricities (e.g., his shabby clothes) and professional self-doubts.

—Frank McConnell ('78)

PARTISAN JUSTICE
by Marvin E. Frankel
Farrar, 1980
134 pp. \$9.95

The U.S. courts today are plagued by inequities. The criminal justice system, as it has evolved, has fostered "unduly elaborate and effective means of blocking the proof of guilt." So contends Frankel, a former federal judge. Among the defects Frankel cites is the old-fashioned ideal of the lawyer as a single-minded champion (the result: advocates too often obfuscate the truth on their client's behalf). Due-process rules have made it impractical to hold criminal trials in all but a small percentage of cases; most charges are now disposed of through plea bargaining, "the dispensation of justice by lawyers [acting] as traders." And today only big corporations, the very rich, and the very poor can retain

good attorneys (the majority cannot afford top legal talent and are ineligible for legal aid). Frankel would require trial lawyers to expose false evidence, even if this implicates a client. This duty has already been imposed on federal government lawyers. Frankel would also ease the severity of sentences for those who persist in seeking a trial—thereby lessening the incentive to plea bargain. Finally, he favors a federally funded legal service available not just to the poor but to all, in both criminal and civil suits. The public might balk at such substantial government investment in lawyers. But it would be the average taxpayer who would gain greater access to the courts, now constricted by the steep costs of litigation.

—John T. Noonan ('80)

**SOCIAL JUSTICE AND
THE LIBERAL STATE**

by Bruce A. Ackerman
Yale, 1980
393 pp. \$17.50

No one is entitled to say that he is better than anyone else. Nor is one person's view of the "good life" superior to another's. Through a series of imaginary dialogues based on these premises, Ackerman, a Yale law professor, attempts to show that liberal ideals—e.g., equal distribution of economic resources and equality of educational opportunity—can be rationally defended against all rival theories. Ackerman's conversations take place among the planners of a hypothetical society; they touch on such topics as population policy, abortion, education, and the limits of parental authority. Some readers (especially meritocrats) may find their views inadequately represented in the refined abstractions of Ackerman's egalitarian "planners." But this work surely joins social philosophy's Big Books list—so recently augmented by John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974).

—Peter Singer ('79)