

# THE LAST MAN IN EUROPE

By Dennis Glover

## Discussion Questions

### Structure, writing, and language

1. How have your opinions or interpretations of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* changed since reading *The Last Man in Europe*?
2. How does Dennis Glover use excerpts from Orwell's diary entries, articles, and letters to enhance his story? Did you find these sections effective?
3. How would elements of this story be told differently in a biography? What are the advantages and disadvantages of reading a novelization of an author's life story, rather than a factual account?
4. In Glover's depiction in *The Last Man in Europe*, how is Orwell's writing affected by his personal circumstances? Where do you see elements from Orwell's personal life surfacing in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and his other novels?
5. What do you think of Basic English, the "synthetic language" that preaches "the fewer the words the better" (82, 94)?
6. Which woman do you think inspired Julia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Eileen or Sonia?

### Truth, deception, and propaganda

1. How is truth obscured or manipulated during Orwell's time in Spain, and later through his job as a radio broadcaster? In the absence of truth, what matters?
2. Glover's Orwell believes his strength as a writer lies in creating "slogans" like "Freedom is slavery" and "Some animals are more equal than others." What do you find most in appealing in advertisements—slogans, statistics, aesthetics, or something else? How is the power of slogans evident in recent political campaigns and debates?
3. Orwell stretches the truth writing the obituary of a family member who died at Dunkirk, attributing to him the "expected heroic death" (76).

Should Orwell be faulted for creating this deception that leans heavily into, and

cultivates, the British government's wartime propaganda?

Are falsehoods necessary or unavoidable in certain circumstances? When is it moral to purposely deceive someone, and when does it cross a line?

### Then and now

1. How does the World War II-era England described in *The Last Man in Europe* compare to other literary or historical depictions of this era?
2. Glover writes of Orwell in 1938, "He realised with a shudder that the future wasn't something to look forward to, but something to be frightened of" (69). Nearly a century later, do you agree?
3. Glover's Orwell thinks, "It wasn't so simple, this business of communicating with the future" (198). Later he decides, "To get people to alter the future, he had to terrify them" (211). Is he correct? If you could speak to a future generation, what would you say?
4. "Understand the great betrayal of human hopes over the previous decade and you understood everything; even the war could somehow be explained by it" (106). Orwell believes this to be true of 1940s Europe. Does this statement apply to today's world as well?
5. Glover's Orwell says, "The future's going to be much like the present, except maybe amplified" (89). What does this mean to you? How has this happened, or how do you imagine it will come to pass in the future?
6. Orwell believes that the past has been "altered". How is the past being altered today, by governments, news media, educators, and memory itself?
7. Glover's Orwell thinks, "Science is in the service of tyranny, not democracy" (88). Is he right to believe this? What purpose have recent scientific and technological advancements, such as the rise of social media and the 24-hour news cycle, served?
8. Glover writes of Europe in 1945, "The locals would turn away from the pitiful refugees; some would jeer and spit. . . It occurred to [Orwell] that if he had predicted in 1925 that peaceful and civilized Europe would be laid to waste like this—to become a set of ruins governed by resentment, distrust, and revenge—he would likely have been labelled a lunatic." (132). With regard to this quote, how is the world that inspired *Nineteen Eighty-Four* similar and dissimilar from our own?