

“A Hanging”
By George Orwell

“It is better to risk saving a guilty person than to condemn an innocent one.”

Voltaire, a French philosopher strongly against the death penalty, spoke this quote. He was saying that it is better to save someone guilty, than kill someone innocent. In “A Hanging,” George Orwell clearly states the fact that he is also opposed to the death penalty. Throughout the story, he gives many subtle examples of his opinion on the death penalty. There is also a very definite and distinct mood in “A Hanging.” It is one of an eerie nature that assists the reader in interpreting Orwell’s negative view on the death penalty.

Orwell obviously agrees with Voltaire, in that they are both against the death penalty. In “A Hanging,” Orwell’s protagonist is a guard who would be suspected to favor the death penalty, but he doesn’t. Multiple times a day he must witness the murder of people who very well might be innocent. On page 15, the narrator says, “I saw...the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide.” This is a clear example of Orwell’s opposition to the death penalty because it is demonstrating the fact that Orwell acknowledges the inhumanity of the death penalty. Also, Orwell’s character was horrified and shocked by how easily the hangman was able to take someone’s life. Throughout the entire story it is clear that Orwell agrees with Voltaire on the wrongness of the death penalty.