

A Cultural Materialist Approach to George Orwell's text *The Road to Wigan Pier*

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Abstract: The period of the production of George Orwell's book *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the 1930s, was very crucial and critical on both intellectual and political levels. The book was published in 1937, that is, the period between the two world wars and after the Great Depression (1929). At that time both intellectuals and politicians were faced with vexed problems such as mass unemployment, poverty and democracy. Committed writers such as George Orwell took interest in the way to represent these problems at that critical moment of human history. The problems facing genre during that period reflect the complexity of the situation, hence the problematic of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Orwell's text is problematic due to the ambiguity of its status as a literary genre and the way it deals with vital issues facing intellectuals as part of the social structure. The text is subversive on many levels. Apart from the form of the book which is effectively very challenging, another essential aspect of subversion can be explored in this work of art. In fact, contrary to the conventional view of the fictional novel as an isolated entity, the study of Orwell's text from a different perspective, that is, the materialist historical theory, reveals the social dimension of the book. Challenging the bourgeois conception of the novel, the author diagnoses the social ills, namely, poverty and unemployment, in the first part of the book in order to provide the necessary treatment in the second part, that is, Socialism. There is a close connection in the novel between reality and language as an essential medium of representation. Thus, literary creativity and representation are mediated. Furthermore, as a committed writer, Orwell is deeply involved in the problems concerning literature and politics. For Orwell, literature cannot be dissociated from politics. Consequently, the exploration of the novel from different angles does not aim at the pure application of some literary and critical approaches on Orwell's text. This may be misleading since the investigation may fall in superficiality and simplicity. But each strategy deployed is actually a further contribution to the author's general argument and a manifestation of the novel's status as a creative and subversive text.

Keywords: Socialism, Cultural Materialism, Materialist Historical Theory, Fictionality, Factuality, Representation, Literariness.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of fictionality could be tackled from a Marxist point of view. The contribution of the Marxist materialist approach to literature is very significant. Indeed, different Marxist theorists have tried to produce a systematic view of literature. The emphasis on the literary work as a material social product has resulted in a different view of fictionality. Since the literary canon is a construct and value is a transitive term, literature cannot be studied in terms of a distinction between fact and fiction. Literary form is not a stable, well-defined entity. In fact, the literariness of a work actually depends on the way it is perceived and received in a particular social and historical reality. Therefore, Orwell's text will be explored from a materialist perspective to show that it is not an isolated work but rather a product of certain specific socio-economic conditions in a particular historical stage.

The purpose of this research is to advance a conception of fictionality according to which the

fictionality of Orwell's narrative discourse can be defined not solely in terms of truth-falsity criteria, but mainly in terms of its interactive and communicative effect in social reality. Orwell's interaction with his specific socio-political context has encoded in the text certain ideological attitudes which will be decoded through the process of interpretation. Therefore, the research will reveal what specific analytic tools can be deployed, how they are used, and for what purpose(s).

This investigation will be carried out within the framework of Terry Eagleton and Mikhail Bakhtin's view of literature to reveal the social dimension of the text as well as its cultural determinism. Focus will be on the different strategies of re-assessment used by the author to liberate himself from the cultural bourgeois prejudices of his class. His aim is to offer an alternative to Capitalism and its cruel effects, that is, Socialism. For more validation of his project, the inquiry and the results will be inferred from his personal experience and

observation during his two-month journey to the industrial north of England.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This investigation will be carried out from the materialist mode of text analysis. This section comprises three main divisions. The socio-economic determination deals with significant issues in the text such as housing, working conditions, mass unemployment and hideous scenery on the outskirts of the industrial North. It consists of the different extrinsic structures which have contributed whereby *The Road to Wigan Pier* [1], as a subversive novel, is produced. These elements will be spotted within the text itself. Moreover, cultural determinism includes social prejudices such as dirt, smell, passivity and crowding. The cultural dimension shows how the social relations are mainly determined by cultural factors, that is, bourgeois assumptions and prejudices, rather than by economic factors. The last division concerns Socialism as an alternative, including the Socialist type analysis and Socialist propaganda, Socialism Vs Fascism and finally cultural understanding and communication. This section explores the strategies of reassessment deployed by the narrator. It is presented as an alternative through the example of the narrator's personal experience. The general purpose of this analysis, which is based on the aforementioned approach, is to present more validity to the thesis proposed in this research paper.

Socio-economic Determination

Given his belief in the appalling and dreadful situation which is the product of a cruel machine, Capitalism, a responsible writer, namely George Orwell, feels aware and committed to express this reality. As a committed writer, he writes politics in literary practice. So, what are the different aspects and the main strategies deployed by this committed writer to represent this tension in his work? How does he depict this cruel picture in a creative way in his novel? The main issues concerning the cruel effects of Capitalism on the poor and unemployed English people in the 1930s are essentially the housing problem, the working conditions of coal miners, mass unemployment and its effects, the problem of food especially for the unemployed and finally the portrayal of filth and smoke on the outskirts of the northern towns.

Housing Problem

This section is about squalid housing. It deals with the two main aspects of the crucial issue facing the working class and particularly the unemployed. The first aspect is the lack of decent lodging-houses while the second one is the acute housing shortage in the northern industrial areas. So how are these problems manifested in the text?

Concerning the first aspect, that is, the lack of decent lodging- houses and its effects, the characteristic feature of common lodging-houses is their squalid state.

They are different from the commercial hotels in many ways. First, most of them have poor tenants. The lodgers are miserable pensioners. One typical example is the Brookers' lodging-house. In fact, the Brookers consider their tenants as intruders or even dreadful parasites (*RWP* 10-11): "They couldn't, they complained perpetually, get the kind of lodgers they wanted-good class 'commercial gentlemen' who paid full board and were out all day. Their ideal lodger would have been somebody who paid thirty shillings a week and never came indoors except to sleep" (*RWP* 13). This will lead to the landlord's jealous attitude and hatred towards poor old-age pensioners. This category of lodgers are victims of a bad system, the Means Test, by which the tenant is forced to live in somebody else's house without being a member of the family.

The other aspect of the housing issue is the acute housing shortage in the industrial areas and its effects. Apart from the squalid conditions of the common lodging-houses, the narrator contends, coal miners suffer from the squalor of the slums. The squalid conditions in the slums in Wigan, Leeds, Sheffield and Barnsley are un-bearable. These slums are condemned to be pulled down. Yet, despite the abject squalor of the frightful northern slums, the local authorities can neither make these existing houses more livable nor actually condemn them to be pulled down. The 'paralytic slowness' (*RWP* 59) of slum clearance is due to the inability of the authorities to build new houses and substitute the old ones.

Hideous Working Conditions

Another aspect of the horrible reality of Capitalism witnessed by the narrator and represented in the text is the cruel exploitation and oppression of the working class, hence their hideous conditions of work and suffering. There is a threefold description of the miners' working conditions: description of the coal-pit; of the job, that is, coal-mining; and of the coal-miners at work. The interaction of these three elements will produce an effect which ultimately constitutes another contribution to the general effect of the whole text.

First, the conditions of work down the coal-pit are hideous. The author makes a skilful portrayal of the mine which has a crucial and determining role in the miners' life. In fact, it is part of their discussion and their daily life since they spend most of their time there. Nevertheless, the mine, their place of work resembles hell. Through his personal experience, the author depicts the coal-pit as a hell for the following reasons: "Most of the things one imagines in hell are there-heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space" (*RWP* 19). The first characteristic, that is, heat reveals how the conditions down the coal mine are difficult and terrible. Heat which varies from pit to pit, has great impact on workers: "It is suffocating-and the coal dust that stuffs up your throat and nostrils and collects along your

eyelids, and the unending rattle of the conveyor belt, which in that confined space is rather like the rattle of a machine-gun" (*RWP* 20). Thus, apart from the relatively great depth and darkness in the pit, the machine produces awful deafening noise; "The first impression of all, overmastering everything else for a while, is the frightful, deafening din from the conveyor belt which carries the coal away" (*RWP* 20). This machine equally sends clouds of dust that make it almost impossible to breathe and see more than a few feet ahead. All these factors obviously produce unfavorable conditions for work underground.

A second element necessary to construct an accurate picture of what is happening in the coal-pit is the detailed description of work there. The author provides the reader with much information about the nature of the work, that is, coal-mining, and the different processes involved in coal-extraction. His aim is to produce effect on his / her reader. In fact, the first impression he gives is that coal-extraction is actually a dreadful job for a variety of reasons. In addition to the previously mentioned factors, namely unbearable cramped space, suffocating heat, coal dust, foul and black air, depth, darkness, and dusty fiery smell, the miners have to do a very savage job. Though this job is carried out by machines in some mines, unlike old-fashioned ones, the process of getting coal out is hard and risky. The process of extracting coal consists of a threefold operation: cutting, blasting and extraction. These operations are done in separate shifts. Yet, this stupendous task has great effects both on the environment and on nature.

The third link necessary in this chain and which is in interaction with the other elements, namely, the mine and the job, is miners themselves. The later play an important role in the process of coal extraction and therefore in the development of the capitalist economy. However, they suffer from very bad conditions of work. The narrator makes an accurate portrayal of the miner at work from his descent to his journey to the coal face and ultimately his journey back home. Miners have to travel approximately half a kilometer down through the mine shaft in the cage nearly at sixty miles an hour: "But because of the speed at which the cage has brought you down and the complete blackness through which you have travelled, you hardly feel yourself deeper down than you would at the bottom of the Piccadilly Tube" (*RWP* 22).

In addition to the problem of the acute shortage of houses throughout the industrial districts and the hideous conditions of work in the pit, coal miners suffer from very low salaries. In fact, despite their long hours of strenuous and risky work, their average gross earnings per shift are very low. The narrator uses the technique of facts and figures to reveal the position of thousands of young as well as adult mine workers whose wages are much below the average. This

technique adds validity to his argument and more objectivity to his information. Furthermore, the colliery company imposes stoppages on these wretched earnings since they are only gross earnings. These stoppages are actually weekly deducted, which adds to their appalling conditions.

Mass Unemployment and Food Problem in Industrial Areas

In this section emphasis will be put on another product of the Capitalist system. Mass unemployment and its effects on the northern industrial areas of England during the 1930s is a critical issue. A rigorous study of this problem and the other related problem of food requires a close examination of Orwell's text. Thus, the first task consists in analyzing the problems of unemployment and food.

The narrator constructs a sinister and gloomy picture of the living conditions of an unemployed man in his book. It has already been shown previously that he is really leading a dreadful life. In fact, it is obvious that the circumstances of a person living on the dole or on the P.A.C (Public Assistance Committee) are much worse than those who are actually earning a living – however low it is. Due to the First World War and the Great Depression (1929), the number of the unemployed people soared especially, in industrial towns such as Wigan, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Barnsley and so on. The narrator's technique in calculating and examining the increasing unemployment figures is based on facts and figures. This strategy allows the narrator and his reader to realize how the unemployment figures are greater than those actually drawing a dole.

The situation of the impoverished family living on the dole is aggravated by the cruelty of a system named Means Test: "The Means Test is very strictly enforced, and you are liable to be refused at the slightest hint that you are getting money from another source" (*RWP* 70). As a matter of fact, if an unemployed draws a pension and at the same time is assumed to have been working by means of 'spying' or 'talebearing', his dole will be immediately reduced. The most dreadful and cruel effect of the Means Test is surely "the way it breaks up families. Old people, sometimes bedridden, are driven out of their homes by it" (*RWP* 70). Therefore, old age pensioners who live with their children are deprived of their right to receive their dole; otherwise they are forced to live in a lodging-house threatened by starvation.

Therefore, in order to hold the unemployed down, the governing class has plundered whole sections of the lower class of all that they need. This oppressing ruling class has compensated them by cheap luxuries, as substitutes for their vital necessities. On their side, the desolate unemployed people have tried to

psychologically adjust themselves in such circumstances by lowering their standards: "They have neither turned revolutionary nor lost their respect; merely they have kept their tempers and settled down to make the best of things on a fish-and-chip standard" (*RWP* 80). The result is that in the period between the two world wars twenty million people are underfed in England but they have access to cheap palliatives.

One basic effect of unemployment is the problem of food. In fact, the author clearly demonstrates that the unemployed family is living on an appalling diet. This is mainly due to the very low income which is generally about thirty shillings a week. Based on vital statistics and on lists of the family's weekly expenditure, the narrator conducts a research to study the unemployed diet and its possible effects on his family. For instance, the narrator asks an unemployed miner and his wife to make a list which represents "as exactly as possible their expenditure in a typical week" (*RWP* 83). The purpose of this investigation is to study the diet an average family is living on with an income of round thirty shillings a week of which a quarter is for rent (*RWP* 83). His research is based on references such as newspapers and magazines, namely, *New Statesman* and *News of the World* along with direct contact with people during his journey in many northern industrial towns. The general effect of the extremely bad diet on the unemployed is physical degeneracy. The perception of this reality is possible by means of observation, inference or a look at the vital statistics. For instance, one sign of the terribly low physical average in industrial towns is that you can see a population of 'troglodytes' in Sheffield (*RWP* 86). All these facts explain the prevailing bad physique in the mining towns in the North.

In the North, particularly in Wigan, the governing class has adopted a technique, similar to the development of cheap luxuries, as a mitigation of mass unemployment there. This strategy consists in the cheapness of coal. Miners are allowed to buy coal directly from the pit at low prices in order to sell it illicitly to the unemployed. Apart from the illegal trade of cheap fuel in the northern industrial towns, there exists the "immense and systematic thieving of coal by the unemployed" (*RWP* 90). The wretched people in the North, in order to satisfy their vital need for coal, spend all day long over slag-heaps picking it. This fierce process of "scrambling for the coal", that is, waste coal, consists in "getting on to the train while it is moving; any truck which you have succeeded in boarding while it is in motion counts as 'your' truck" (*RWP* 91). All men, women and children participate in this operation, that is, loading their sacks with robbed dirt from trains. This recurrent scene depicting the same "wild rush of ragged figures" (*RWP* 92) is undoubtedly very dangerous and risky.

Hideous Scenery on the Outskirts of the Industrial North

A close examination of the problem of filth and smoke in the North reveals the extent to which the scenery has become hideous. In fact, the cruelty of the Capitalist system has great impact not only on man but also on his environment. Similar to the scenes created by the author to depict the hideous housing and working conditions of the coal miners and the unemployed, he also tries to produce the frightful scenery to reveal the ugliness of industrialism. The most obvious sign of filth in the industrial North is the great number of slag-heaps standing like mountains: "On the outskirts of the mining towns there are frightful landscapes where your horizon is ringed completely round by jagged gray mountains" (*RWP* 94).

In addition to this detailed description of slag-heaps, other significant elements of the 'dreadful environs' are mentioned. For instance, factory chimneys constitute another factor to the pollution and ultimate destruction of the environment. This great number of chimneys belching out large amounts of smoke in the air creates gloomy and dark scenes which can be easily perceived between the mountains of slag. Then, there is the stench- this very unpleasant smell of sulphur, gas and foul water. Moreover, you can add to this sinister picture the stinking slums-a common feature of the northern mining towns such as Wigan. These sets of elements are the constitutive parts of an unfamiliar scene to the bourgeois reader.

To conclude, throughout the first part of the book, it has been shown that social relations are economically determined. The narrator has created concrete scenes which manifestly illustrate the plight of the workers, particularly the miners and the great number of unemployed people in the industrial North. Many issues are discussed such as housing problem, hideous working conditions, mass unemployment and the hideous scenery on the outskirts of the North. It has also been argued that these appalling conditions are undoubtedly the result of an oppressive and cruel social system, that is, Capitalism. Yet, the narrator believes that, though social relations are economically determined, cultural determinism is much more significant. Therefore, the next section will deal with the role of prejudices and assumptions in determining social relations.

Cultural Determinism

The previous section has shown how appalling the two-sided picture Orwell has painted. On the one hand he has described the plight of slum-dwellers which is strangely ignored by the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, he has graphically described "Large parts of not only industrial Britain but also of rural Britain as well. It explains the dreadful picture of life void of colour and beauty"[2]. This picture, which is depicted by the

narrator, has produced a depressing feeling about the living conditions of coal-miners and the unemployed. These social conditions are supposed to be directly determined by the general mode of production in England, that is, Capitalism in the 1930s. The forces of production have generated typical relations between the ruling class and the working class based on exploitation and oppression. This state of affairs has made the lower classes suffer deprivation of their rights to job, food, lodging and so on.

It is true that these wretched people are “typical victims of economic misfortune and social injustice” [3]. Yet, Orwell contends that social conditions are culturally determined. The lower classes are victims of social prejudices and assumptions held by upper classes. So, how are these cultural prejudices and assumptions expressed in the text? And what is the importance of their role in determining both working class and upper middle class relations within the British social formation? Therefore, in order to study the complexity of prejudices and assumptions, it is essential to examine how the narrator sees things and defines them. In other words, focus will be on the strategies of reassessment of prejudices and the possibility of lifting them. The main prejudices are namely dirt, smell, passivity and crowding.

Dirt

The first assumption concerns dirt. The narrator starts by stating the social prejudice: “Middle-class people are fond of saying that the miners would not wash themselves properly even if they could” (*RWP* 33). Given that this statement is false and impertinent, the narrator immediately refutes the idea completely saying “But this is nonsense” (*RWP* 33). The condemnation of this statement is based on logical arguments and discussion. In fact, the first argument is that wherever there are pithead baths they are used by the miners.

Besides, the second argument deployed by the narrator to demonstrate that this commonly held assumption is unfounded is that “The pit head baths, where they exist, are paid for wholly or partly by the miners themselves, out of the Miners ‘Welfare Fund’” (*RWP* 33-34). But despite all this, old ladies in Brighton still claim that ‘if you give those miners baths they only use them to keep coal in’ (*RWP* 34).

Smell

The second social prejudice, which is closely related to dirt, is that “The lower classes smell” (*RWP* 112). This early-acquired prejudice is a significant mark of class distinctions in the West in general and in England in particular. The immediate reaction of the narrator is that while these frightful words, that is, the lower classes smell, were freely exchanged in the past, nowadays people are chary of uttering them. He strongly believes that these words should not be uttered

due to their potential harm and to the great horror and hatred they may cause.

In his discussions of this prejudice and its connectedness with dirt, the narrator tries to analyze the reasons why lower classes are supposed to smell and why they are dirtier than the upper classes. On the one hand, he argues that considering the circumstances in which the lower classes live, they are bound to be dirty. Furthermore, due to the acute housing shortage and to the hideous living conditions of a working class family, it is rather difficult to overcome the problem. Nevertheless, the narrator argues that as they gradually acquire the habit of washing themselves daily, the English are getting cleaner.

Passivity

The third class-prejudice, which is important in determining the relationship between the lower and upper classes, is passivity. In fact, the narrator begins by the illusion that the passive role of a working man is inherent in working – class life. The narrator further explains this bourgeois attitude as follows: “A thousand influences constantly press a working man down into a *passive* role. He does not act, he is acted upon” (*RWP* 43). In the same vein, middle class people still talk about ‘lazy idle loafers on the dole’ and even dare say ‘these men could all find work if they wanted to’ but these people don’t want to work (*RWP* 76). The narrator also, trying to further illustrate the middle class opinion about unemployed people, reports what someone used to hear at a decent tea-table a few years before “My dear, I don’t *believe* in all this nonsense about unemployment. Why only last week we wanted a man to weed the garden, and we simply couldn’t get one. They don’t *want* to work, that’s all it is!” (*RWP* 77)

Crowding

The fourth and final cultural prejudice assumed by the bourgeoisie is crowding. Middle-class people pretend that lower classes don’t mind living in Caravan-dwellings. The narrator deploys the same strategy as used for the previous prejudices. He first states the assumption clearly, demonstrates that it is unfounded by means of logic, arguments and examples and usually the rejected prejudice is substituted by an alternative one. The narrator poses the statement as follows: “No doubt there are still middle-class people who think that Lower Orders don’t mind that kind of thing and who, if they happened to pass a caravan-colony in the train, would immediately assume that the people lived there from choice” (*RWP* 56). This statement has a great impact on the narrator. That is why he does not hesitate to demolish it saying: “I never argue nowadays with that kind of person” (*RWP* 56). In his process of examining ideas and prejudices, the narrator argues that “It is not that slum-dwellers want dirt and congestion for their own sakes, as the fat-bellied bourgeoisie love to believe” (*RWP* 62). After denouncing the middle-class opinion, the author

immediately suggests an alternative. He suggests a twofold solution. First, people should be given a decent house. If they are provided with a decent dwelling, they will make it decent. Second, living in a decent house will bring about self-respect and cleanliness. Their children will start life with better opportunities (*RWP* 62).

Consequently, the previous study has shown how the class- issue is significant for the understanding of the working class. The narrator believes that in order to understand social reality, priority should be given to the problem of class distinctions rather than to the economic situation. He explains that the relationships between the lower and upper classes are primarily determined, not by financial questions, but essentially by culture. In fact, cultural prejudices govern people's attitudes and ideas. They are deployed by the bourgeoisie to impose its false beliefs and ideas, that is, its ideology, on the lower classes and ultimately to dominate as well as oppress them. The author's strategy of re-assessment has revealed the falsity of his and the middle class's prejudices and assumptions, hence the necessity of their condemnation and demolition. The hegemonic governing class uses this set of class prejudices as a method of escape and protection from the fear of revolution from the dominated and oppressed working class. Therefore, any real and radical change requires the emancipation from these false cultural prejudices and assumptions.

Socialism as an Alternative

The previous section has revealed that the relationship between the working class and the middle class is primarily based on false and unexamined prejudices. The analogy between the false bourgeois prejudices and the false joke of Wigan pier may be of great significance. Hunter argues that the narrator refers to Wigan pier as "a joke based on knowledge that it does not exist. The joke provides an analogy for all the assumptions that he has broken down. They, too, were founded on no substantial reason, and when understood are themselves a joke" [4]. Thus, after expressing his like of people in Wigan and his dislike of its scenery, the narrator states that "the celebrated Wigan pier, which he had set his heart on seeing...Alas!...had been demolished, and even the spot where it used to stand is no longer certain" (*RWP* 66). Given that the bourgeois prejudices are merely a false joke and that, by analogy, Wigan pier is similarly a false joke, it is therefore necessary to seek an alternative road-Socialism. Yet, Socialism, as a system, is wrongly viewed by bourgeois Socialists themselves. That is why the problem should be tackled from various perspectives.

Socialist Type Analysis and Socialist Propaganda

The narrator has adopted a strategy which consists in the establishment of the Socialist type. His strong criticism of bourgeois socialist grotesque manners and attitude toward the working class is

manifest especially in the second part of the book. He believes that Socialists have caused much harm to Socialism in many ways.

First, the narrator contends that a bourgeois Socialist, merely wearing the mask of Socialism, does not necessarily imply his adoption of proletarian manners. It makes no difference since the bourgeois Socialist's habits, manners and tastes often remain the same without any real change: "His tastes in food, wine, clothes, books, pictures, music, ballet, are still recognizably bourgeois tastes; most significant of all he invariably marries into his own class" (*RWP* 119). The narrator affirms that he listened so many times to bourgeois Socialists' attacks on their own class but they still cling to their manners. This is due to the fact that "In his heart he [the Socialist] feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear, and despise the working class" (*RWP* 119). Many bourgeois Socialists endorse Socialism and even idealize the proletariat but still their habits only very little resemble the working class manners.

Furthermore, similar to his caricatured picture of the working class, namely, the Brookers and their typical lodging-house, the narrator equally denounces the comic grotesque manners of the middle-class Socialists. Richard Hoggart in his "*Introduction to The Road to Wigan Pier*" summarizes the reasons for the narrator's intemperately violent attack on all left-wing intelligentsia, literary intellectuals and middle-class Socialists as follows:

...at bottom his attack was probably inspired as much as anything by his puritanical mistrust of self-indulgence, physical or mental. His great antagonism to the left-wing intelligentsia was founded in his feeling that they were intellectually and imaginatively self-indulgent...He thought they wanted to remain dominative or at least distantly paternal in their attitude towards the workers rather than to recognize the need for a radical change of outlook... [5].

Not only does the narrator attack the bourgeois Socialists' attitude about the unjust capitalist system, he also strongly denounces the typical left-winger's attitude toward British imperialism. He criticizes every left-wing intellectual's 'advanced' opinion about being anti-imperialist. Every Socialist "claims to be outside the empire-racket as automatically and self-righteously as he claims to be outside the class-racket" (*RWP* 139). However, the narrator immediately rejects this feeble and ineffective argument exclaiming "a thoroughly flabby, boneless attitude it is" (*RWP* 139).

Socialism Vs Fascism

The previous discussion was about the analysis of the Socialist type: how he hinders communication

and creates antagonism between both working and middle classes. In this section, focus will be on Socialism itself as an inevitable alternative to an anachronistic and unjust class system. Close examination of Socialism and its assumptions which alienate certain people from it will be carried out in detail. The first assumption concerns the connection between Socialism and machinery while the second deals with mechanization and its negative effect. However, a close examination of Socialism and its different concepts seems necessary before the study of its underlying assumptions.

Given the rising number of unemployed people and the fears of the menacing future, particularly fears from growing totalitarian and fascist regimes, the narrator believes that the only way out is Socialism. This world system seems the best alternative to avoid the cruelties of an anachronistic capitalist system as well as to prevent an imminent disaster. Yet, despite the urgent need for this system, Socialism has failed in its appeal. Instead of gaining ground it is rather losing it. So, the narrator poses the following problems. Why has Socialism failed in its appeal? Besides, what makes it inherently distasteful? Moreover, how to remove this distaste?

The narrator, in order to tackle these problems, has rather adopted a paradoxical procedure. Instead of searching for solutions, he seeks objections to Socialism, hence his role of advocatus diaboli (or, the devil's advocate). Thus, he thinks that "the worst advertisement for Socialism is its adherents" (*RWP* 152). Socialist adherents have different underlying motives and consequently various conceptions of Socialism. Each distinct conception generates particular effects.

On the one hand, Socialism is a theory which is totally restricted to the middle-class. The typical bourgeois Socialist is rather 'a youthful snob-Bolshevik' who is not ready to drop his social position (*RWP* 152) and who may have vegetarian leanings as well. On the other hand, there exists "the horrible-the really disquieting-prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together" (*RWP* 152). Socialists of the last type have eccentric things such as vegetarian diet. In fact, eccentricity may be a significant factor in alienating decent people from Socialism since for an ordinary man "a crank meant a Socialist and a Socialist meant a crank" (*RWP* 153). Finally, the narrator mentions a third type of adherents whose theoretical and apparent claim is a classless society but in reality they "cling like glue to their miserable fragments of social prestige" (*RWP* 153).

Therefore, in order to combat the spreading scare of the fascist movement in Europe and in England in particular, the narrator calls people to endorse Socialism as the only way out. Given the desperate

present situation and the inability of the capitalist-imperialist regimes to improve the conditions under the present economic system, the urgent action is to combine for the underlying ideal of Socialism, justice and liberty. That is why the narrator insists that "Unless Socialist doctrine, in an effective form, can be diffused widely and very quickly, there is no certainty that Fascism will ever be thrown. For Socialism is the only enemy that Fascism has to face" (*RWP* 188).

Cultural Understanding and Communication

Based on the previous discussion, the narrator's task in this section consists in establishing a strategy to get rid of the prejudice against Socialism and to solve the vexed issue of class assumptions. The narrator takes his personal experience as an example so as to add weight to his argument. Thus, engaged in this polemic, the narrator poses the following problems in an attempt to provide possible and adequate answers. First, what is the most effective form for the diffusion of Socialism facing Fascism? Besides, how to move those millions of normal decent people toward Socialism and further away from threatening Fascism? Also, how to make a reconciliation between Socialism and its intelligent enemies?

The discussion of these intricate issues will be founded on two main axes: the first concerns the process whereby the prejudice against Socialism can be broken down while the second main axis is about the way class distinctions can be dropped within the framework of the narrator's personal experience. Concerning the first reason for people's recoil from Socialism, it is based on a false presupposition. The narrator contends that their reason is not valid since they presuppose an alternative which actually does not exist. An enemy claims that "I object to mechanization and standardization – therefore I object to Socialism"; which means that "I am free to do without the machine if I choose" (*RWP* 192). The narrator's immediate reaction is the total rejection of this false assumption against Socialism saying it is just 'nonsense' (*RWP* 192).

Therefore, the prejudice against Socialism is not based on a serious objection since most people are repelled not by Socialism as such but primarily by Socialists. The narrator emphasizes that "For the moment the only possible course for any decent person...is to work for the establishment of Socialism" (*RWP* 193). He adds that "Nothing else can save us from the misery of the present or the nightmare of the future. To oppose Socialism *now*, when twenty million Englishmen are underfed and Fascism has conquered half Europe, is suicidal" (*RWP* 193). So the urgent need is to fight for the cause of justice and liberty along with the necessity to get rid of the prejudice against Socialism.

Moreover, the narrator believes that there is a close relation between Socialism and the issue of class. He states that it is necessary to raise the vexed problem of class distinctions. For the narrator, the class issue is distinct from the economic status. For instance, in England, “economically, no doubt, there are only two classes, the rich and the poor, but socially there is a whole hierarchy of classes” (*RWP* 197). He further explains that “The manners and traditions learned by each class in childhood are not only very different but this is the essential point—generally persist from birth to death. Hence the anomalous individuals that you find in every class of society.” (*RWP* 197) That is why social status cannot be determined solely by income. It is essentially over determined by other cultural factors such as class distinctions. As the narrator puts it “It is in fact very difficult to escape, culturally, from the class into which you have been born” (*RWP* 198).

In order that his argument carries weight, the narrator resorts to his personal experience. He is very aware of his social status and he puts it in a straightforward language: “Here am I, for example, with a bourgeois upbringing and a working-class income. Which class I belong to? Economically I belong to the working-class, but it is almost impossible for me to think of myself as anything but a member of the bourgeoisie” (*RWP* 198). But there are millions of English people similar to the narrator, that is, with middle class origin yet with low income the same as that of the working class: “All of these people have the same interests and the same enemies as the working class. All are being robbed and bullied by the same system” (*RWP* 198). Thus, economically, the narrator is on the same ground as the miner or any other labourer but culturally, he is totally different from them.

To conclude, the analysis of the Orwellian text *RWP*, based on the Marxist materialist mode, has revealed the significant role of the social dimension for the understanding of the literary work. Studying a literary text out of its historical context is not sufficient to have a full understanding of the book. A close examination of the text from a materialist perspective has revealed that social relations, as represented in a creative way by the narrator, are not only determined by the economic conditions, but mainly by cultural elements. These cultural structures include a whole set of class prejudices and assumptions which are the product of an unjust class system. Thus, the narrator’s strategy, which is based on his personal experience, is the re-examination of these prejudices which could impede Socialism. A real change necessitates the adoption of Socialism which can provide liberty and justice as well as understanding and communication between all the social strata.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of George Orwell’s text *The Road to Wigan Pier* from a Materialist Historical perspective

has revealed the validity of the new definition of the notion of fictionality. In fact, the application of this theory to literature, with its prominent figures Eagleton and Bakhtin, has not only put in question the conventional ways of defining literature and fictionality, but also provided another contribution from a different field of research. The deployment of the materialist strategy has revealed the external elements of the text, that is, its social and cultural dimension. The subversive nature of the novel, especially through the character of the narrator himself, has shown to what extent language can contribute to social change. Orwell’s challenge of the status quo is a strategy to liberate himself from the cultural prejudices and assumptions which enslaved and kept him pinned up to bourgeois snobbishness. However, Orwell’s discussion of class issue has revealed that he is not ready to completely sacrifice and drop out his cultural bourgeois traditions. He strongly claims that, while preserving one’s distinctive class habits, both lower and upper social classes could find channels and common grounds for communication and mutual understanding.

Consequently, as the novel has been subversive at both levels of form and content without completely discarding literary norms, similarly its author has been challenging throughout his text and his writings in general. In his attempt to gain a voice and take a firm political position, Orwell has always been a committed writer during his literary career.

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