

Social Matrix in the Selected Novels of George Orwell

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ABSTRACT : *The 20th century English novel is best studied against the background of the Victorian novel from which it has evolved. The Victorian societies was homogeneous and stable with a generally accepted code of moral and social behavior. It was much interested in society as in the individual. The novel has continued to occupy the position it acquired in the modern age as the most popular form of literature. The modern age is definitely the age of novel. A number of trends and tendencies are visible in the 20th century fiction.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

The evolution of modern novel may be traced from several more and less clearly marked stages. The influences that changed the pattern of the Victorian novel to what it is today, have been—Henry James, French and Russian Realists, The new psychology of Bergson, William James and Freud, Post-impressionists, technological advances and communism, post-war crisis. Henry James, known as ‘the master’, because of the meticulous with which he constructed his stories and polished his style. James taught English novelists a salutary lesson in “in form”. The influence of James is reflected in such modern writers as Elizabeth Bowen, Rasomond Lehman, L.P.Hartley etc. side by side with the influence of James, was the influence of the French realists—Emily Zola and Guy de Maupassant. The realists, imitating the French impressionist painters headed by Claude meet aimed at presenting a scene in its salient features with a few broad strokes, but as they considered the individual, a product of the environment with the minute details or what is called the naturalistic style. Further as they were against the bourgeois convention of the Victorians, they emphasized the seamy side of life flith and squalor, vulgarity and violence. They freely used obscene and blasphemous language. The influence of this ‘Slice of Life’ tradition has been pervasive in English as well as American fiction.

In the early 20th century, a new school of painting called Post impressionists influenced English literature. The impressionists were concerned to express the external reality; the post-impressionists wanted to go further and express a new vision of reality, which was first reflected in the novels of Machel Proust in France and through him in the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. In the second decade of the 20th century came Freud and his two disciples Alder and Jung, added a new dimension to the study of character. D.H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, with its poetical treatment of sexual instinct, was suppressed in 1915 as obscene. After the First World War, there was a marked change in the poetic attitude and presentation of sexual love became common, as, may be seen in the novels of Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham and others. In the thirties and even before that writers turned to more pressing problems of practical life which came in the wake of advanced science and technology. The most brilliant of the writers who addressed themselves to those problems include— Huxley, Orwell etc. Essentially an Idealist, Huxley was in quest of right values of life. He was disturbed by the moral and spiritual vacuum created by increased psychological and scientific knowledge. His novels *Brave New World*, *the Perennial Philosophy*, reflect this outlook.

Another problem which engaged the attention the writers a little later was communism. George Orwell (1930-50), born radical, was fascinated by socialism, but later changed his stance and vehemently satirized communist ideology in *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). George Orwell was born on June 25, 1903 Motihari in Bengal, India. His father was a minor officer in the Indian customs and was retired on a small pension when his only son (George Orwell) was a few years old. There were also two daughters, one older than the boy and younger. Orwell was essentially a lonely child, which might account for the fact that the typical Orwellian hero is solitary. Orwell places his own family with typical precision as belonging to, as he wrote in such, such were the joys, “the lower-upper middle class”. In 1911, at the age of eight, Orwell went to crossgates, a preparatory school, where he remained for six years before going to Eton. Orwell was not happy at crossgates, He was witness to and sometimes victim of frequent canings, bad food, snobbery, sexual immorality, and poor methods of education. One beating he received for wetting his bed marked the start of an educational process which was to install in the young Eric

Blair an awful conviction of worthlessness, guilt and weakness, which by his own account; he was not able to overcome for years. He wrote in, *Such, Such Were the Joys*, that this incident was, “the great abiding lesson of my boyhood: that I was in a world where it was not possible for me to be good. Orwell at thirteen gained not only one but two scholarships. In 1917, when Orwell was fourteen years old, he matriculated and graduated at Eton. When the time came to leave Eton, the natural course for Orwell would have been to go to Cambridge, where he could certainly won a scholarship. He did not do so. Orwell has created a similar kind of situation in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, where the hero, Gordon Comstock, has a manuscript rejected and ruminates, “the editor regrets! Why be so bloody mealy-mouthed about it? Why not say outright, ‘we were at Cambridge with; your proletarian keep your distance?’”

Instead, Orwell was advised by one of his tutor to break from the way of life he found so painful, that of a poor boy among those richer than himself, and take a job abroad. A Post in the Indian Imperial police was an offer. Orwell looks it, and spent the five years 1922-1927 in Burma. He was apparently a good officer, for he did have the habit of command. But he become increasingly disillusioned with his job and ceased to believe in the beneficial effects of imperialism, even British Imperialism. His experience in Burma is perhaps best illustrated in the famous essay *Shooting an Elephant*, written a number of years after the fact, in which his performance of his duty as a police officer in Moulmein, lower Burma becomes the occasion for a graphic comment on what he saw as the essential self-imprisonment of all who served the cause of the British government its imperial domains. Feeling stifled by his job, Orwell came home in 1927, and never returned to Burma instead resigning from the service. The Burmese experience was valuable to him in his formation as an artist and a thinker, but torture to him as a man because of his sensitivity to what he thought of as the shortcomings of imperialism. Out of his Burmese experience was to come his first novel; *Burmese Days*, first published in Newyork in 1934. As in the case in every Orwellian novel, there is one character in *Burmese Days*, who has many of the qualities of Orwell himself, and with whom Orwell consciously or unconsciously identified. That character is named Flory-also a civil servant in the British Raj in Burma who deteriorates under the influence of the system. George Orwell holds a unique place in comtompory English literature. He used facts and his own observation and when there was no actual reporting to be done, invention took over, as in *Animal Farm and 1984*, and his clear vision, realistic deduction and profound understanding of human behavior enabled him to reach the inner recesses of the readers mind and startle him to reflect and self-examination.

II. JUSTIFICATION:

George Orwell’s career demonstrates in an unmatched way a significant phenomenon of our literature: the impact of the politics on the artistic imagination. This occurrence is visible in writers like Malraux and Koester; Dos Passos and Richard Wright: Norman Mailer and Ezra Pound etc. The assumption is common: politics is seldom fit subject for the novel. At worst, the novel a vehicle of Propaganda: at best, the assimilation of political action of ideas into fictive world is difficult, if not possible and even Orwell wanted to share this political vision through the assimilation of political action of ideas into fictive world. He believed that the communists, the Fascists, and the Nazis had achieved power in their respective countries because of the spirit of sacrifice which they installed among masses. George Orwell had himself stated in his essay *Why I Write*, “What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art” and “every live of serious work that I have written since 1963, has been written directly or indirectly against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism as I understand it”.

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