

## **CHAPTER V**

**CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

---

Eric Arthur Blair - George Orwell (1903-1950) is now acknowledged as one of the most significant intellectual and literary figures of the twentieth century. As novelist, essayist and author of a number of outstanding works of reportage he has exercised an influence on modern thought which is increasingly being recognized. The literary career of Orwell coincides almost exactly with the two decades of 'thirties and 'forties which were the years of the most painful phase of economic dislocation following the first World War. These were the years of economic depression and widespread unemployment and were marked by the rise of fascism in Europe. It was this shabby England of depression, war and austerity that provided the setting for Orwell's novels. His early works Down and Out in Paris and London (1933), A Clergyman's Daughter (1935), Keep the Aspidochelone Flying (1936) and The Road to Wigan Pier (1937) were published during the Depression and dealt with poverty. Burmese Days (1934) reflected the decline of British Imperialism Homage to Catalonia (1938) came out during the Spanish Civil War. Coming Up for Air (1939) appeared three months before the outbreak of Second World War which it prophesied. Inside the Whale and the Lion and the Unicorn were published during the Second World War. Animal Farm (1945), the allegorical fable was published a few days

after Hiroshima debacle. Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), the utopia was published at the height of the Cold War. The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters were published during the bitter protest against the war in Vietnam. Thus each of Orwell's works relates to the social, economic, historical and political issues of his time. Hence he was a social critic of 1930's, the essayist and political satirist of 1940's and the austere yet gentle figure. Orwell endeavoured to write a living style and contributed to the growth of literary culture. The works produced during the first phase of Orwell are documentary but at the same time are <sup>of</sup> significant aesthetic design. Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four present the culmination of his political leanings. He was a socialist, still he never adhered to a party line and always criticised the Left as freely as he did the Right. He was influenced by the writers like Zola, George Moore, Dickens and Joyce. He gave importance to honesty and directness which he thought to be the best qualities of a good prose. He developed a forceful and convincing prose style by skillfully arranging facts. His works are closely related to the events of his life. His novels and his concern with the problems of poverty have influenced English writers like John Wain, Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter and John Osborne. He was certainly a virtuous man, hence when he died on 21 January, 1950, Fredric Warburg paid a glowing tribute to him: "The passionate pilgrim had come to the end of the road. One of the great masters of English prose was no more".<sup>1</sup>

As a technical term applied to novel, 'structure' can be

said to connote the principle of organization which binds together the various elements of literary form such as the narrative or the story, the plot, the characters, the point of view, the setting, and dominant themes. The structure of <sup>a</sup> novel means the way the story, the characters that people it, the ideas and the feelings that give rise to and emerge from it, the language that clothes it, the images that give it texture - are all put together and integrated into a whole, 'a piece of artistic creation'.

A novel is made of action, character and idea. Hence the three corresponding elements of the novel are plot, characterization and theme - the three principle facets of novelistic structure.

Hence in this dissertation stress has been given on these three principle factors of novelistic structure viz., plot, characterization and theme in relation with early works of Orwell - Down and Out in Paris and London, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, and the Road to Wigan Pier which are documentary in nature.

Down and Out in Paris and London 1933, has a balanced structure. Paris and London, Boris and Paddy, the good and bad hotels, the castes of plongeurs, and beggars, and the summaries with practical suggestions at the end of each half are contrasted in it. Thus the book comprises two distinct parts. The first deals with Orwell's time in Paris which describes his experiences of poverty and near starvation there and his subsequent jobs as a plongeur or scullion first in the kitchens of a very large hotel and then

in fashionable atmospheric restaurant. The second part of the book treats of his continuing poverty upon his return to England and his experiences living among down and outs and tramps in and around London. The theme of hunger, starvation and poverty is best illustrated in this book. Along with it, the theme of class exploitation is dramatized most vividly in Down and Out amidst the luxury and squalor of the grand hotel where the splendid customers sit just few feet away from the disgusting filth of the kitchen workers. The only connection between these two worlds is the food prepared by one for the other, which often contains the cook's spit and the waiter's hair grease. From this fact Orwell posits a wonderfully ironic economic law: 'The more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged to eat with it'.<sup>2</sup>

In this book Orwell has provided an admirable gallery of portraits - Boris, Charlie, Valenti, Azaya, Paddy, Bozo, etc.. However these characters are not merely types or specimens, but they are round characters who change and develop in the course of the book. They are delightful sketches, almost all of them. They are drawn from their originals in life and they had made an everlasting impression on Orwell to the extent that he wanted to know more and more of them.

Like Down and Out, Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936) has a balanced structure. The same kind of technique is also used in this novel, where it emphasizes the circular pattern of the book

(the return to the advertising office - the New Albion) as well as the two phases of Gordon's life: before and after the drunken spree, Makechnie's and Cheeseman's bookshops; Mrs Wisbeach's and Mrs Maekine's room, the friendship of Flaxman and Ravelston, the love of his sister Julia and his girl Rosemary and the two sexual encounters with Rosemary, are ironically contrasted. For the worse job and the dingier room seem 'better' to Gordon, though he is closer to Ravelston and Rosemary, he finds it easier to accept help from Flaxman and Julia, and the lyrical seduction scene is a failure while the squalid one is all too successful.

Despite Orwell's evident care with the form of the novel, the plot has some serious weaknesses. The chance meeting with Rosemary in the open air market seems too coincidental; and the mystery of how the previously unacquainted Flaxman and Ravelston, Rosemary and Julia ever got to save Gordon is never explained. Ravelston's inability to resist the 'abominable adventure' with the whores seems incredible; and worst of all, <sup>the way</sup> Rosemary becomes pregnant after her first sexual encounter also seems strange.

The deadening effect of serving the money-god is really the chief theme of Keep the Aspidistra Flying. It is a work of unusual intensity which is dominated by the image of the aspidistra as a symbol of respectability and by the notion that money and the possession of money are inherently evil - 'It is in the brain and the soul that lack of money damages you. Mental deadness, spiritual squalor -

R  
and it  
does not  
prove to  
be a  
trained

they seem to descend upon you inescapably when your income drops below a certain point'.<sup>3</sup>

Its central character Gordon Comstock, an angry embittered young man who deliberately abandons a well paid post in an advertising agency in order to opt out of the money-trap' is obsessed by the idea that to lead a life of respectability - marriage and suburban home - is to sell one's soul to 'the money-god' and that the only alternative is to cut oneself loose from conventional society altogether. The novel tells the story of his half-hearted attempts to achieve an alternative way of living, first by writing poetry and then by consciously accepting a post calling for the minimum effort and aspiration. At last, he decides to marry Rosemary as she is already pregnant. However, it may be pointed out that Rosemary Waterloo's pregnancy does not prove his 'Waterloo'. On the contrary, it lends a new colour and dimension to his act. It shows his moral obligation to Rosemary.

The characterization is assured and workman-like. In addition to a diverse range of well-drawn minor characters - Julia Comstock, Gordon's hard-working sister; Mrs Wisbeach, the incurably inquisitive landlady; Flaxman, the fat and well-meaning lodger at Willobed Road, there are three characters that dominate the story: Gordon Comstock, his girl-friend Rosemary and <sup>w</sup> Wealthy editor Ravelston. Gordon seems to have been portrayed as a type figure of the Angry Young Man of the 'thirties. Rosemary Waterloo, <sup>a</sup> ~~is~~ gentle, submissive young

woman who befriends Gordon and ultimately consents to marry him, is a wholly credible female character. Philip Ravelston, <sup>the</sup> editor of the magazine 'Anticrist' and ~~a man~~ who seeks to encourage Gordon's literary ambitions is sympathetically presented. In a sense Ravelston and Comstock are two aspects of Orwell himself: the man of success, easy, assured and generous; and the man of failure, embittered poor and outcast.

The poverty which forms the theme of Keep the Aspidistra Flying is not the poverty of vagrants but the poverty of petit bourgeois - the 'lower-upper-middle class' people.

In form The Road to Wigan Pier (1937) is a collection of disparate essays, divided into two parts almost equal in length. The first part is a series of essays describing social conditions amongst the miners and unemployed of Lancashire and Yorkshire. The second part is a long autobiographical statement of Orwell's approach to socialism, his attitudes to the socialist movement, and his views on the vexed question of class. The opening chapter is written in a very different style from the remainder of the book: in tone it resembles the opening section of a novel describing the Brookers and their dreary lodging-house above the tripe-shop. The tone in the remaining six sections of Part One is much more serious; the chapters are still cast in the first-person but are much more 'documentary' in approach. The second chapter, describing a descent into a coal-mine, has become justly famous in its own right and



was later reprinted as an essay under the title 'Down and Mine'.

It is a remarkable piece of writing, executed with a kind of unemotional honesty which Orwell rarely equalled and which conveys <sup>to the reader around</sup> vividly the reader the physical experience involved:

*You can never forget that spectacle once you have seen it - the line of bowed, kneeling figures, sooty black all over, driving their huge shovels under the coal with stupendous force and speed.<sup>4</sup>*

This, one feels, is what a coal-mine is like. Then there follows a series of chapters concerning housing, malnutrition and social conditions in the depressed areas. Throughout these chapters Orwell is not content merely to describe poverty, mining and the social consequences of an <sup>un</sup>employment and poor housing but seeks at each stage of his exposition to arouse the anger and engage the emotions of his readers.

The second part, a series of highly idiosyncratic essays on socialism and social class is less successful than Part One. These final six chapters lack the intrinsic interest of the descriptive essays and <sup>are</sup> marred moreover by innumerable contentious statements, e.g., 'A generation ago every intelligent person was in some sense a revolutionary', which are advanced without qualification and which suggest that these propositions are beyond argument. It is the polemical nature of Part Two, the hardness of so many of Orwell's statements, his apparent unwillingness to concede the existence of other points of view which has antagonised so many readers of Orwell.

For Orwell, socialism was not an economic creed but a philosophy of life which meant that poverty, injustice and deprivation must be replaced with a fuller and richer way of living. Throughout his exposition of socialism words such as 'justice', 'liberty' and 'decency' abound. His conception of socialism was clearly a deeply humanitarian vision, undogmatic and compassionate. His essential thesis was that socialists were alienating large numbers of potential adherents by their advocacy of machine-civilization, by their remoteness from the world of manual workers and by their failure to present an alternative vision of socialism in practice. Unless the socialist movement could remedy these deficiencies, Orwell argued, the struggle with fascism would be lost and large numbers of the intelligentsia would defect to the totalitarian ideologies. Nowhere in 'The Road to Wigan Pier' is there any definition of socialism, nor any attempt to define how socialism could be achieved. However, what is <sup>the</sup> enduring value of these last chapters is the essential decency and morality of Orwell's conception of socialism and the patent honesty of his attempts to understand its opponent, viz., fascism.

The book has taken its place as one of the most significant social documents of the 1930's and as one of those works of reportage which is destined to outlive the immediate economic conditions - unemployment and poverty - which are its theme.

Orwell exposes the deadening effect of unemployment. The sense of human waste, shame and debasement that he conveys is

overwhelming.

Orwell's approach is documentary, empirical and pragmatic, filled with statistics, essential information and useful suggestions, and his view is, as far as possible, an 'insiders' view'. He has a deep loathing of the ugliness, emptiness and cruelty of what he sees. But he is not merely content to describe it - he wants to make people feel morally responsive so that they will radically change it. By making readers understand the workers, Orwell alleviates their fears and engages their sympathy and pricks their social conscience and awakens their sense of justice.

It can be said that the title of Orwell's book is a variation of Kipling's The Road to Mandalay. The title is suggestive and the road to Wigan is the road back from Mandalay with the full implications of guilt and penitence. This book not only bespeaks the general economic condition of the 1930's, it also brings into focus a moral urgency and seriousness that was rare among Orwell's contemporaries.

Thus these early works of Orwell are as if the de tours - the pilgrimages to the three regions of poverty viz., the world of social outcasts - beggars and tramps, and the plongeurs (Down and Out in Paris and London) full of hunger and starvation, the world of petit bourgeois - lower-upper-middle class people (Keep the Aspidistra Flying) full of obsession with money and the world of manual workers - coal miners (The Road to Wigan Pier) full of

unemployment, malnutrition and the worst conditions of the manual workers. Orwell was interested in the life of social outcasts and manual labourers because he felt that the working class "incarnates some deeply meaningful myth of suffering and that in its emancipation lies the general salvation of mankind".<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Warburg, F.J.: All Authors are Equal, p. 120.
- 2 Orwell, George: Down and Out in Paris and London, p. 72.
- 3 Orwell, George: Keep the Aspidistra Flying, p. 73.
- 4 Orwell, George: The Road to Wigan Pier, p. 21.
- 5 Brombert Victor: The Intellectual Hero, p. 153.