THREE:
A PROPHET
IN THE MAKING.
Chapter III

A PROPHET IN THE MAKING

Orwell was a true witness of his age, passionately involved in social, economic and political issues. It shows the genuine honesty of the man who fought for his convictions and yet remained impartial in his assessment of a situation or an issue. In an age dominated by political ideologies he often tried to get inside a situation and he wrote only about those things of which he had a first-hand knowledge, which did not therefore deprive him of his right to think and to criticize. Because of this intuitive understanding of his contemporary world his work has transcended the self-imposed confines of political writing to influence the writers and thinkers of the present time.

Therefore English writing has never been the same since George Orwell. The very clarity of his style is a model of its kind to be contrasted with the general deterioration of contemporary language. After the Great Depression, the rise of fascism and the triumph of Stalin, the question of political commitment became pressing for all writers. The demand for all artistic forms to be politically relevant was more strident than ever. Yet Orwell did not give too much importance to the politicisation of art. He identified it with artistic compromise, and political control. His remarkable gift for
writing was dispersed equally amongst social commentary, memoir, cultural criticism, political journalism and fiction.

But Orwell's political allegiance to democratic socialism gave birth to a unique form of political fear different from the conservative one, a constant emotion which spurred him to literary eloquence. Orwell himself realised the dilemma that where he lacked political purpose, he wrote after the war, he wrote lifeless books. Despite his polemical demands for the complete separation of politics and literature, he found politics indispensable for his own purposes. His best writing came from political hatred of totalitarianism. The remark about 'lifeless book' seems to indicate at best a feeling of disappointment with his earlier non-political fiction but also points to something else. Politics was a key element in his abandonment of the realist tradition. For, paradoxically the combination of Orwell's social awareness and his gift for writing in a wide range of genre, has had an adverse effect upon his literary legacy.

Orwell has a very down-to-earth political approach and has no sentimentality to expand on issues like war, bombing or poverty. He is arrogant at times and felt that a drastic measure was required to prevent the evils in the society from spreading. He viewed a situation objectively and at an ordinary level in order to understand it more fully. According to him human beings themselves were to be held responsible for the existing social
conditions. He therefore lays great emphasis on human freedom and sense of responsibility. In his role as a critic there was a great deal in Orwell which was motivated by aesthetic considerations. He also had a philosophical approach in dealing with some issues which places him within a philosophical tradition - the tradition of the moralists.

His literary work has been overshadowed by the political content of his writings. Orwell’s politics had a more profound effect on his fiction than on his social commentary. It is therefore important to remember the key-point of division between Orwell’s fiction and his documentary work during the thirties. The working classes, the vagrant and the unemployed. But the fiction has its theme of ‘respectable’ poverty. Fear of poverty is the predominant social fear of Orwell’s early heroes. Tragic realism is a literary affront to the rational solution of human problems. They are basically autobiographical in nature because the writer describes in them his firsthand experiences of life in one guise or another. As all questions for him were political questions, he smelt politics in all that he observed and experienced. Although politics was his forte, his shifting affiliations to the different political organizations evince a vacillating spirit. The reasons for Orwell’s mental uncertainty may be sought in his uncompromising temperament and warring nature. He entered politics through poverty and derived the idea of ‘descent’ into poverty from political curiosity.
Orwell's life was short, but it was one of the most sincere mental pilgrimages ever undertaken. His analysis of men's ills led him towards a form of socialism. Orwell's writings reveal a man who was blazingly honest, totally involved and continuously aware that man must, whatever his party be, see that his party serve men, not exact men's blind obedience to party. His is not a straightforward case of a cliche-ridden aristocrat turning into a cliche-ridden socialist, a procedure involving a mere change of one prop for another. Orwell's essential independence was clear in his final position on the left; this was in a sense a firm position. Yet he was often critical of the British Labour Party, derisive of woolly liberalism which did not face facts and utterly opposed to Stalinist Communism. Even more than with Lenin, one feels with Orwell that one is watching, even though the artistic level may sometimes be a lower one, a kind of surgical operation. The truth is continuously revealed; Orwell never rests in the half-truth. Being very intelligent and quite simple, he examined the social and political problems immediately at issue and dealt with a detachment and clarity that is refreshing in an age of word-spinning.

Orwell as a man and writer was prepared to go to any length to preserve the freedom of his individuality. He resigned himself to the poverty and discomfort of Paris and London because they were less uncomfortable to him than accepting the compromises of normal employment in an acquisitive society. His snobbish upbringing and the uneasiness he felt in living with
boys richer than himself gave him a distaste for middle-class values and in relation to the working-classes a sense of guilt which was intensified by the large unemployment of the 1930s. He tried to appease his sense of guilt by living for eighteen months in utmost destitution. He records this experience in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. In this book in accordance with his aesthetics he wanted to comment upon the truth or falsity of the social system.

After his return from Burma, with nine-months pay in his pocket Orwell crossed over to Paris where for a year and a half he wrote novels and short stories which no publisher accepted. It was the time of the Great Slump. Orwell had no training for any job. He struggled to keep alive, serving by terms as a dish-washer, private tutor and teacher in cheap private schools. Thereby he took upon himself the task of serving and encountering the evils of poverty. Defying the mercenary values of the world of plunderers and vampires and kicking his own privileged background, he mingled himself with the down-and-outs.

In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, (1933) his first published book, he described the dish-washing poignantly and also described the kitchens in Paris and the spikes in the Home counties. Both in Paris and London he had worked as a plongeur and had spent nights in common lodging houses and 'spikes' with labourers, beggars and tramps. His first attempt in this book is to expose not only the evils of poverty but the politics
behind it.

What he suffered and what he learnt from his mission of atonement for man's inhumanity to man and expiation for his own and his country's guilt in tyrannizing helpless people in the colonies, can be learned from his semi-autobiographical work, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. The book as he says, is about poverty and its attendants such as hunger and boredom.

The world of his essay *Down and Out in Paris and London* is an economic nightmare to the individual. In other words it is nearly a demonstration of the society's attempt to crush its dissenters. It is a work of autobiography. The somewhat romanticised idea of the Paris of the artist which the young Orwell appears to have cherished in his intellectual solitude in Burma, finds expression in a passage in *Burmese Days*. The idea is grossly caricatured; but this does not necessarily deny its attraction for Orwell at one stage of his life. The speaker is Flory who may be seen as the surrogate of Orwell himself as a young man. He is speaking to Elizabeth Lackersteen who has just come to Burma from Paris where her mother has been 'being an artist'.

Paris! Have you really lived in Paris? ... I've never seen it. But good lord, how I've imagined it! Paris - it's all a kind of studio and villon and Baudelaire and Maupasant all mixed up together. You don't know how the names of those European towns sound to us here. And did you really live in Paris? Sitting in cafes with foreign art students, drinking white wine and talking about Marcel Proust?
Orwell had come forward to strip the false, romantic and sentimental aura off Paris. His first impression itself of the city was damaging and disenchancing. He found it a city of quarrels, of the desolate cries of street hawkers, and the shouts of children chasing orange peel over the Cabbals, and at night loud singing and the sour reek of the refuse-carts, made up the atmosphere of the street. The street of Paris he entered into was a narrow valley of:

... tall, leprous houses lurching towards one another in queer attitudes as though they had all been frozen in the act of collapse. All the houses were hotels and packed to the tiles with lodgers, mostly Poles, Arabs and Italians.

There was nothing romantic about the place. It was on the contrary, a dirty, noisy and rickety place populated with cobblers, rag-pickers, prostitutes, brick-layers, stone-masons and the like. It was virtually a gathering place for eccentric people who had fallen into solitary, half-mad groups of life and given up trying to be normal or decent. The story of Down and Out in Paris and London is the story of social outcasts, the economically wretched, mentally weak and physically decrepit. It is a saga of human suffering narrated by one who had the privilege of experiencing it himself. Poverty was what he wrote about. Poverty is his professed religion. He was born and brought up amid poverty and ultimately was out to observe and share the horrors of it.
One realises the urgent need for finding a job for oneself when one discovers the peculiar lowness of poverty, first the shift that it puts to the complicated meanness - the crust-wiping. The extreme precariousness of cutting down one's expenses as far as possible and yet to keep up appearances.

Then comes the discovery of boredom which is inseparable from poverty, the times when we have nothing to do and being underfed can interest ourselves in nothing. And there is another feeling that is a great consolation in poverty. It is a feeling of relief, almost of pleasure at knowing yourself at last genuinely down and out. It takes a lot of anxiety.

But the worst thing of poverty is that it kept people hungry and in the stark madness of hunger they resorted to unimaginable crimes. Again when a hungry man observes huge quantity of food being wasted, his indignation knows no bounds. Orwell himself experienced the pangs of hunger while living in Paris. Therefore he expresses his indignation when he observes huge quantity of food being wasted:

You discover what it is like to be hungry. With bread and margarine in your belly, you go out and look into the shop windows. Everywhere there is food insulting you in huge, wasteful piles. Whole dead pigs, baskets of hot loaves, great yellow blocks of butter, strings of sausages, mountains of potatoes, Vart Gruyere cheeses like grindstones. A snivelling self-pity comes over you at the sight of so much food. You plan to grab a loaf and run, swallowing it before they catch you, and you refrain, from pure funk.
He tried his luck at many places serving as a night watchman, cellareran, floor-scrubber, dish-washer, porter, lavatory-attendant etc. He had tipped waiters and was tipped by waiters. Whenever he had the opportunity of feeding himself on the leavings of the high-ups, he had the sensations of a new life coursing through him.

The loss of morality and the prevalent corruption in the society is evident from Orwell's experience of the Government Maternity Hospital in Paris, which had virtually turned into a centre of prostitution. He had seen with his own eyes the gruesome scenes of poor women being encouraged to sell their chastity for money. The evils of poverty were more rampant in London than they were in Paris. The tramps, the unemployed and the poor were literally brought to moral degeneration and physical decrepitude.

The cases of rape and homosexuality were characteristic of deprivation, degradation and demoralization that mankind had been reduced to. Orwell was very sensitive to all this. His experience of the public lodging houses was really horrible.

The people leading a life as tramps or living in the spikes and indulging in hop-picking have a language of their own, the verbal sense of the working class. Orwell's style suggests that though he writes to teach the working class, he has himself learned something from it. This is one reason that the didactic element in Orwell's writing never gives the impression of
'talking down'.

Poverty and hunger cramped and crouched not one but many and had made them rivals of street dogs. Orwell's fiend, Boris, whom he met for the first time in the public ward of a hospital, had also suffered the painful pangs of hunger. In his own words:

I hurried downstairs and bought a loaf of bread. Boris threw himself on the bread and ate half of it, after which he felt better, sat up in bed, and told me what was the matter with him. He had failed to get a job after leaving the hospital because he was still very lame, and he had spent all his money and pawned everything and finally starved for several days.

He criticised the system that makes a tramp spend fourteen hours a day in the spike and other ten in walking and dodging the police, implying the wastage of good human labour in aimless wandering leading to physical as well as mental deterioration.

Finally he says that the life of a tramp has taught him a lesson. Now he knows that all tramps are scoundrels nor are they greatful, when charity is shown to them; nor do these men out of work lack energy, nor do they subscribe to the Salvation Army, nor pawn their clothes nor refuse a handbill nor enjoy a meal at a smart restaurant. He feels that he has seen only a fringe of poverty, so he wants to explore this world more thoroughly in order to know them not casually, but intimately and to understand what really goes on in the souls of the tramps and pavement sleepers, to learn from them and to write about them.
Orwell's first published book is one of the best specimens of contemporary novels. Here we can see how poverty with the attendant filth and nastiness affects a sensitive spirit of this age of science. Apart from the non-literary context of the novel *Down and Out in Paris and London*, we can see how Orwell's own stories suddenly stop being stories and start to become essays. In the first place the novel is the least demanding of literary forms having a minimum given structure. Its length allows a formal slackness, impossible in other kinds of literary writings. Secondly, in its insistence on probability and particularity in realistically describing the actions performed by certain individuals, at a certain time in a certain social situation the novel is very close to the newspaper report.

Orwell's description of the kitchens of hotels and restaurants, which is so realistic and picturesque, is born of his experience as a waiter and a dishwasher in several of the hotels in Paris, where he also had the opportunity of reading the reactions of a mixed society of people. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* he dramatizes the theme of class exploitation amidst the luxury and squalor of the grand hotel where the splendid customers sit just a 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 points at a wonderfully ironic economic law -
more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged
to eat with it. Orwell's ability to evoke disgusting sights and
smell suggests his need to root everything in definite time and
space. And yet this man whose novel seems based so solidly in
modern rot is nostalgic for an irrevocable Eden. It is simply an
irony of the situation that Orwell, who had left his own society
with a sense of contempt for the social class-system, fell into a
one more rigid and elaborate. He was bewildered to notice the
hierarchical order that existed in the staff of the hotel which
descended from the patron and the manager, through the 'maître d' 
hotel', head cook, chef du personnel, other cooks and waiters, to
laundresses, apprentice-waiters and finally plongeur, who aspired
to become lavatory-attendants and had only chambermaids and
cafetiers below them. Orwell's indictment rests mainly on the
inhuman hierarchical order of the bourgeoisie which allows the
wiles to exist. The novelist takes us, first to the hotel dining
rooms to mark their splendour, spotless table cloth, bowls of
flowers and mirrors, and then to notice the abominable filth of
the kitchens. Since his prime concern is to eradicate the moral
and physical dirt and filth from the world, the dirt of the
kitchens symbolic of the dirt of the social classes. Despite his
gloomy and sordid pictures of the society, he has a vision for a
better tomorrow.

Orwell's experience of working as a waiter gives him a
new insight into the problems of this class. Waiters, according
to him are temperamentally snobs, not workmen, proud of their
skill in servility. The constant touch with rich people and the silent observation of their prodigality not only make them oblivious of their problems but also enables them to experience the vicarious pleasure of spending money by proxy. Orwell had noticed them spending recklessly whenever they had the chance to have money. And the reasons behind their ministering to the kind of pleasure they thoroughly admired and appreciated were but psychological. Their minds were so obsessed and occupied with the idea of imitating their wealthy customers that they seldom thought of improving their lot. To quote Orwell himself:

And that is why waiters are seldom socialists. They have no effective trade union, and they work twelve hours a day – they work fifteen hours, seven days a week, in many cafes. They are snobs, and they find the servile nature of their work rather congenial.

Orwell's attitude was that an individual should remain indifferent to the society - the society that cannot and will not change. And the idea of an ideal state ending in a vision that can never be translated into reality. The truth being that those who profess the ideals of socialism themselves enjoy capitalism.

In *Down and Out in Paris and London* Orwell categorically says that he knew nothing of politics, but we know that he was under suspicion in Paris. Once he found himself subjected to a considerable harassment while coming out of the office of a communist weekly paper. Such instances led him to a conspiratorial attitude towards politics.
The Russian friend, who had grown more intimate with him by that time, had advised him to write articles for a communist secret society which worked as an agency to encourage exiled Russians to join Bolshevism. He reached the headquarters of the society without knowing the password and carrying the supposed parcel intended to escape the suspicions of the police. On being invited to write about "Le Sport", he discovered the mysterious connection between football and socialism on the continent. A key to Orwell's political views and affiliations can be had in his interview with the agent of the Communist Secret Society where he admits his sympathy for communism:

"Was I a communist?" he asked. By sympathy, I answered, "political situation in England? Oh, Of course, of course". I mentioned the names of various ministers and made some contemptuous remarks about the Labour Party. You have thorough knowledge of conditions in England. Could you undertake to write a series of articles for a Moscow weekly paper? We will give you the particulars. "Certainly".

In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which is more like a piece of reportage than a novel, Orwell maintains complete objectivity.

Like Gordon Comstock the narrator of *Down and Out in Paris and London*, is waiting for a situation that will change his future. His downness and outness are contingent upon his securing a job, but the point is he can obtain one and will: his appearance, education and enunciation, all mark him as a man virtually playing with the idea of poverty. As long as the
narrator retains an escape, the reader transforms his social agonies into the adventures of a picaro. The episodes themselves are full of interest, as were those of the typical eighteenth century traveller who went from inn to road, but they are not compelling for the very reason that they remain almost entirely external experiences, not inner ones. The victim can survive this sort of thing with resignation if he knows that his circumstances can and will change. Orwell's narrator has a friend to whom he can apply for money exactly as Gordon Comstock has the fantastic Ravelston. For both the narrator and Comstock, the future holds dreams, for both, there is an illusion that can be sustained, for both the experience can be changed.

If the 1920s were a decade when a writer tended to turn away from the everyday problems of social living and political choice, the circumstances of the 1930s forced his attention back in that direction. In 1929 there was the great Wall Street slump with its disastrous repercussions everywhere in Europe. Unemployment and distress, as well as militant nationalism helped Hitler to power in Germany in 1933. His policy of rearmament put the Germans back to work but threatened the peace and the liberties of Europe. Later in the decade, the Spanish Civil War and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia forced writers and intellectuals to take definite political sides. Devised their sympathies, aroused their passions as no comparable set of political events in the 1920s had done. On top of all this there
was, as these ten years progressed, a gradually growing and intensifying fear and alas only too well justified fear that the Spanish episode, the Ethiopian adventure, the fighting in Manchuria, were perhaps mere preludes to a second and more disastrous World War. Thus the typical and important literature of the 1930s is a literature of topical urgency, reflecting a feeling of tension and an awareness of crisis.

Since 1917, Russia had been very much isolated from the western world. Her very isolation, the little that was known in any exact reliable detail about the working class and her new system of her government was likely on the principle of 'omne ignotum pro magnifico', to engage and tantalise the imagination particularly of the young. A young man growing up in Great Britain in the 1930s, with no certain prospect of a job in front of him and an all too possible prospect of being caught up in another great war, with many instances of social distress brought sharply home to him by such incidents as the Hunger Marches was likely to have his confidence in the British gift for 'muddling through', in the virtues of compromise and improvisation, generally rather badly dented. He would find himself thinking with interest and curiosity of this large country Russia, in which, in however ruthless a fashion, the problems of preserving full employment and keeping production swinging upwards did seem to have been solved.
Very few English writers in the 1930s actually became members of the Communist Party and those who did remain, usually, members for only a short time. But it could at least be said that just as the Roman Catholic Church in the 1890s provided a kind of focus of attraction for writers who in the end may have never taken the final step towards conversion, so, in the 1930s, did various versions of Marxist doctrine provide this kind of focus for many English intellectuals.

A well-known London publisher, Victor Gollancz, founded the Left Book Club, which besides publishing a magazine for its members sold them every month a book on some aspect of socialist, or at least militant anti-Fascist, politics. If many young men of middle-class, or even upper-middle-class or actually aristocratic upbringing were driven towards the extreme left in these years, the same unsettlement and discontentment was driving others to the extreme right. Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists copied the Black Shirts of the Italian Fascists but propagated, following a rising tide, the ideas rather of German national socialism. A wider reaction than any of these was, as a natural reaction against the Fascist and Nazi glorification of war, a passionate but rather sentimental pacifism. This could be seen in the growth of the Peace Pledge Union, whose members were committed to taking up, in any future war, the position of conscientious objectors, but the same people who joined the Peace Pledge Union were often, misled by the amiable confusion of their enthusiasms, those who called most loudly for the carrying out of
a policy of collective security and the imposition on Italy, in connection with the Ethiopian episode of 'sanction' (given the limiting condition, naturally ineffective sanctions) 'short of war'.

Political meetings in these ten years in Great Britain had a more violent and dramatic flavour than is common in British politics. Brawls between Fascists and Communists, and the beating up of interrupters at Fascist meetings, were common. The outbreak of the war itself, which pulled the British people together into team again, as perhaps nothing else would have done, showed to what an extent all these domestic episodes were mere froth on the surface.

It might be said that two English poets, Roy Campbell and John Cornford, who fought in Spain in these years on opposite sides (Campbell as a Carlist, Cornford as a Communist) represented in their different ways the same response to the troubles and anxieties of the period, the response of a fierce radicalism, whether of the Left or Right, they wanted to be rid for good and all of what seemed old fashioned, inefficient temporising. And of these two, it should be noted, Campbell who had worked all his life with his hands, as a cowboy, fisherman and farmer, was much more genuinely the 'man of the people' and Cornford the son of a famous Greek scholar, much less so. For theoretical Marxism did, on the whole, tend to make its appeal rather to intellectuals themselves. Theoretical Marxism appealed to a sense
of guilt in these upper middle-classes, that sense of guilt sprang from a feeling; among young men like Corshford that they ought not to be able to lead comfortable and satisfying lives while so many of their fellow-countrymen were condemned to poverty and insecurity. Thus those who, in the 1930s accepted the myth of the revolution, had there been one. The English Labour Movement, in so far as it is a genuine working class movement has always been moderate, slow-moving, sure-footed and cautious.

If one brackets the details of Orwell's biodata, a complex and interesting character begins to emerge. He wrote the harde-hitting The Road to Wigan Pier with its revelations of slum conditions in Yorkshire and Lancashire.

Though Orwell's life was short he had mentally grasped the social ills prevailing in the society which ultimately led him towards a form of socialism. As a result Orwell's writings revealed his honesty and his awareness that man must, whatever his party, see that his party serves men, not exactly men's blind obedience to the party.

Orwell's career as an essayist began with the publication of A Farthing Newspaper in 1928 and ended with Reflections on Gandhi almostexactly twenty years later. He began as an unknown writer on the brink of poverty and ended as a literary figure known and respected throughout the English-speaking world and
beyond. These twenty years saw the depression massive unemployment, the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, post-war reconstruction and the dawn of the nuclear age. His themes embraced not only these momentous issues but hop-picking, boys' comics, seaside postcards, English cooking, precise directions of making a cup of tea, murders and the mating habits of the toad. He wrote extensively on political, social and literary topics and was also a prolific book-reviewer. In all he wrote some 100 essays, 70 book reviews and 72 contributions to As I Please in Tribune. In the process his style matured from the diffident (but still recognisably Orwellian) tone of the early essays to the polished, self-assured, incisive manner which has made his name a hallmark for all that is finest in modern English letters.

During his lifetime he published four volumes of essays: Inside the Whale (1940), The Lion and the Unicorn (1941), Critical Essays (1946) and The English People (1947). There are also four posthumously published collections: Shooting an Elephant (1950), England Your England (1953), Such, Such Were the Joys (1953) and The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters (1968). These will now be discussed in turn.

Inside the Whale and Other Essays consists of three extended essays written during 1939-40: Charles Dickens, Boys' Weeklies and Inside the Whale each of which reflects Orwell's fascination with the literary and intellectual background of his
times.

Orwell’s position on the left was final. He never believed in the half-truth. As a socialist he was often critical of the British Labour Party; scorned at vague notions of liberalism which did not face facts and utterly opposed to stalinist communism.

His passionate love for the English common people is shown outside his novels in books like The Road to Wigan Pier published before the last war and The Lion and the Unicorn published during it. What is remarkable about these books is their lack both of sentimentality and snobbery. He writes about the actual culture of the working classes - the culture that reflects itself in boys’ two penny magazines and in vulgar comic postcards, in fish and chip shops, in eel bars and whelk stalls, in miners’ choirs, in street corner oratory - without trying to make it out more grand and important than it is, but without any patronising tones. If the English masses are philistine, so to some extent is Orwell philistine himself. He thinks there are more important things in the world than taste and refinement, loyalty, courage, humour, generosity being among these. He knows how drab and constricting working class life in large industrial cities often is and he does not grudge the working classes the garish or pathetic pleasures that sweeten it though he wants them, too, to take a more responsible attitude towards life. His radicalism was based on a form belief that, if they are let
alone, and not deliberately misled, you can trust the instincts of the people. Though he was a firm supporter of the Labour Party, as the popular party, himself, he hated the type of long-haired, short-sighted 'progressive' who wears odd clothes, eats vegetarian diet, combines his socialism with all sorts of eccentric notions about art, religion or sex and expresses himself in a kind of bleating and superior verbeage. He distrusted doctrinaires of whatever kind; distrusted all evasion of all plain facts and straight feeling, all abstract and wordy and pretentious thinking about politics. He was even something of a jingo, distrusting the foreign influences, from the Left and not only from the Right on British life. Thus he perhaps comes near to making articulate the instinctive prejudices and unformulated principles of the ordinary Englishman in the street, or man in the pub, than any other contemporary writer.

Orwell writes in a direct plain style. This style is an effective vehicle for two other aspects of his thinking - his general sense of Earth's dereliction and his straightforward realism. These are best considered together. If it is true that to see the worst often curse the worst, that to sense life's tragedy is the first step towards rebirth and reconstruction, then Orwell is our author.

By 1936 Orwell was living in Hertfordshire. He had recently married and was now keeping a small village store, while at the same time how persevered with articles and book
reviews. On a commission by Victor Gollanze of the Left Book Club Orwell went to the industrial north of England to find out the real condition of the working population at a time when poverty and unemployment were menacing the land. *The Road to Wigan Pier* published in 1937, is a record of this journey made through one of the depressed areas of England.

The first part of the book containing seven chapters is a straight account, with tables of prices and wages, of the physical and psychological effects of unemployment in an industrial area, as Orwell saw them while staying in squalid lodging-houses and visiting people in their mines. The second part of the book consisting of six chapters gives us a critical analysis of 'class distinction' in England and directs satirical remarks against the practical implication of communism and socialism.

There is a personal commentary of Orwell on 'class distinction' in England and his concept of 'socialism' in the second part of the book. In all the three documentary novels Orwell attacks vehemently the filthy lodging houses of Paris, London and Spain. But Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is an observer, not a sufferer as in *Down and Out in Paris and London* and this makes the difference. The fact that socialism signified different thing to different people, could not be deemed. A person's interpretation of socialism was likely to be a class attitude. The middle-class people view it as an act of
condescension necessary for their self-preservation while for the working-class it means equality and absence of privilege, and as Orwell pointed out, there was no meeting point between these two views.

The abolishing of class-distinctions did not only necessitate economic and social change but it also implied abolishing a part of the individual's personality which was a very difficult thing to do. He acknowledged that the ideal conditions for pure freedom could openly exist in a classless society:

But he saw no possibility of a classless society coming into being through any historic necessity or cataclysmic force. Besides class differences, other factors like racial antagonisms and different stages of industrial development have also to be taken into consideration.

While the problem of economic inequality had global dimensions, working class solidarity was limited by national boundaries:

The first thing that must strike any outside observer is that socialism in its developed form is a theory confined entirely to the middle-class.

The external political point is not what is most important here; 'in its developed form' is an infinitely saving clause. The key point is the persona, the 'outside observer' that is, Orwell. An essential link between the two parts is indeed this character: inside and then 'outside' the experience.
His description of the coalminers toiling at the coalface is vividly pathetic. The coal-miners who go down the coal-pit are known as 'fillers'. One who wishes to see the working conditions of the coal-miners, has to be inside a coal-mine when the 'fillers' are working there. When one goes down the mine, he gets into the cage which is a steel-box as wide as a telephone box, two or three times as long. It holds ten men and a tall man cannot stand upright in it. The steel-doors shut above and someone drops you into the void. It goes down very fast, say sixty miles, out of it, he is at least four hundred yards undergrounds.

The proper time to go into the pit is when the machines are roaring and the air is black with coal-dust and when you can actually see what the miners are doing. A mine appears like hell. Most of the things that we associate with hell are there - heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air and cramped space. Miners work like beasts of burden. The writer is sometimes doubtful if the miners do not belong to this world of the human race. Lack of money kills all the potentialities of human life in them.

The book ends with Orwell's sustained criticism of English socialism and socialists. He exposes the falsity of the communist or socialist party and emphasizes the urgency of a change of character in politics. It is from this place that Orwell starts writing against the socialist parties and enters
directly into the arena of political writing. He strongly feels that class system in England is the greatest hindrance in the way of socialism. In his long discussion on 'Socialism' he sets out to attack the prevailing pattern of socialism in England and recommends a socialistic pattern for the English society. He is dead against a totalitarian form in the socialistic pattern and is very anxious to bring an effective socialist party in existence for saving England from the menace of Fascism.

In the kind of shabby-genteel family Orwell talks more about the consciousness of poverty in any working-class family above the level of the dole. Rent and clothes and school-bills are an unending nightmare, and every luxury, even a glass of beer, is an unwarrantable extravagance. 'Practically the whole family income goes in keeping up appearances. Most clergymen and schoolmasters, for instance, nearly all Anglo-Indian officials, soldiers and sailors and a fair number of professional men and artists, fall into this category. But the real importance of this class is that they are the shock-absorbers of the bourgeoisie. A shabby-genteel family is much in the same position as a family of 'poor whites' living in a street where everyone else is a negro. In such circumstances you have got to cling to your gentility because it is the only thing you have; and meanwhile you are hated for your stuck-upness and for the accent and manners which stamp you as one of the boss class.
I was very young, not much more than six, when I first became aware of class-distinctions. To me in my early boyhood, to nearly all children of families like mine common people seemed almost sub-human. They had coarse faces, hideous accents, gross manners, they hated everyone who was not like themselves, and if they got a chance they would insult you in brutal ways.

This observation of Orwell is similar to that of his contemporary, Stephen Spender who gives his reflections on the common people in his poem, *My Parents Kept Me from Children Who Were Rough*.

Above all, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, which Tom Hopkinson unjustifiably considers 'Orwell's worst book', makes a fervent plea for human dignity and benevolence. By this time Orwell called himself a socialist and by joining their political group of the socialists he ceased to be a half-hearted, formal politician, he had become the conscience of the Left. He was surprised to know that a political theory like Socialism, which aimed at the welfare of the ordinary people, had many enemies among the people themselves. He realised, however, that these people had no objection to Socialism but they objected to the socialists, which was chiefly due to the mistaken methods of propaganda. Orwell justifies their stand in the following lines:

The typical Socialist is not as tremulous as old ladies imagine, a ferocious-looking working man with greasy overalls and a raucous voice. He is either a youthful Snob-Bolshevik who in five years' time will quite probably have made a wealthy marriage and been converted to Roman Catholicism or, still more typically, a prim little man with a white-collar job,
usually a secret teets faller and often with vegetarian leanings, with a history of Nonconformity behind him, and, above all with a social postion which he has no intention of forfeiting. This last type is surprisingly common in Socialist parties of every shade; it had perhaps been taken over on block from the old Liberal Party. In addition to this there is the horrible - the really disquieting - prevalence of cranks wherever Socialists are gathered together. One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit juice drinker, nudist, sandal wearer, sex-maniac, quack pacifist, and feminist in England.'

The reason that the common people are not Socialists is that they are not convinced by the perfection of a plan as the middle-class intelligence. To the former socialism means a little more than getting a decent wage and ample leisure to enjoy private life, whereas to the latter it is a way of life. To an intellectual nationalization is the crux of socialism but to a worker it is useful only if it helps bring immediate and palpable results. To Orwell, a worker is often a better socialist than a marxist for he takes socialism to mean justice and common decency; it is not, however, realized that one section of the society cannot be improved without affecting the rest of it simultaneously. By drawing an analogy between Communism and Roman Catholicism he says that only the educated are completely orthodox. The most immediately striking point about the English Roman Catholics, who are converts and not the real Catholics, is their intense self-consciousness of the fact that they are Roman Catholics. Orwell here is interested in the attitude of mind that can make even food and drink an occasion for religious tolerance. A working class Catholic, he further says, would never be so
absurdly consistent as that, and he is not particularly conscious of being different from non-Catholic neighbours. It is only the 'educated' man, especially the literary man, who knows how to be a bigot. Similar is the case with socialists. They are not working men themselves, but after shedding their bourgeois status they pretend to fight on the side of the proletariat. To many people who called themselves socialists, revolution is not a movement of the masses, but a set of reforms imposed by the clever ones upon the lower orders.

In this connection he also feels tempted to comment on Fascism which was then an international movement. The fascist nations, he observed, were coming together both for the purposes of loot and forming a world system. The vision of the totalitarian state was being substituted by the vision of proletarian world. The objective of Fascism, as Orwell could study, was to acquire all political, military and educational power of the world in the hands of a small caste of rulers and their braves. The slave-state or the slave-world, would, according to Orwell, be a world of scientifically exploited. One could easily conjecture that the slaves would be well-fed and satisfied. Orwell warned the world against that beastly possibility and emphasized the need to unite against that. This combining together, again, would be for the underlying ideal of socialism, justice and liberty, 'the words that have got to sound like bugle across the world'.
In *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Orwell tried to bring about a reconciliation between socialism and communism. The popular idea of socialism, especially, in England, was that it was basically a fight against tyranny. But the orthodox did not accept that definition. Their Mecca, Soviet Russia, according to Orwell, was the most rigid tyranny on earth. But the superiority of Russia, was to be had in the socialization of production.

To Orwell, it would be a sheer waste of time to insist that acceptance of socialism meant acceptance of the philosophic side of Marxism, that is dialectical materialism, plus adulation of Russia. Orwell's is a practical socialism which aims at the overthrow of tyranny both at home and abroad.

The Socialist movement has not time to be a league of dialectical materialists; it has got to be a league of the oppressed against the oppressors. You have got to attract the man who means business, and you have got to drive away the mealy-mouthed liberal who wants foreign Fascism destroyed in order that he may go on drawing his dividends peacefully - the type of humbug who passes resolution 'against Fascism and Communism i.e. against rats and rat-posion. Socialism means the overthrow of tyranny at home as well as abroad.

The whole force of Orwell's contention for 'the ideal of socialism, justice and liberty' rests on his belief to prepare for a better future.

Orwell's criticism of the English class system is also patent and convincing. Branding the old, existing system as useless and confusing, he held that there were only two classes,
the rich and the poor. He was however, not blind to the hierarchy of classes, and the manners and traditions 'learned by each social class' which persisted from birth to death. 'This according to him was the reason of anomalous individuals found in every class of society. Writers like Wells and Bennet, who were economically rich, preserved intact their lower-middle-class non-conformist prejudices. In Orwell's view social stratification should correspond precisely to economic stratification, though it was difficult to escape; culturally, from the class into which one was born and brought up. He saw large sections of the middle class being gradually proletarianized but without adopting a proletarian outlook. He simply pitied the plight of the people who were being robbed off and bullied by the same class system. What he could collect from the talks of Marxists or from reading their books led him to form the impression that -

...the whole socialist movement was no more than a form of frenzied witch-doctors to the beat of tom-toms and the tune of 'Fee, to, fie, fum, I smell the blood of a right-wing deviationist'!

In Orwell's view the panacea for all these social maladies was the formation of a socialist party with genuinely revolutionary intentions, and the two facts needed to be hammered home into the public consciousness were, one, that the interest of all exploited people were the same and, two, that socialism is compatible with common decency. The socialist movement must
capture the exploited middle-class and the office-workers before it was too late. The socialists had a vital part to play in the eradication of tyranny and exploitation. They would, however, attain their goal only if:

... We can only get if we offer an objective which fairly ordinary people will recognize as desirable. Beyond all else, therefore, we need intelligent propaganda. Less about 'class consciousness', 'expropriation of the expropriators', 'bourgeois ideology', and 'proletarian solidarity, not to mention the sacred sisters, antithesis, and synthesis, and more about justice, liberty, and the plight of the unemployed, and less about mechanical progress, tractors, the Dnieper dam, and the latest salmon-canning factory in Moscow, that kind of thing is not a integral part of Socialist doctrine, and it drives away many people whom the Socialist cause needs, including most of those who can hold a pen. One, that the interests of all exploited people are the same; the other, that Socialism is compatible with common decency.

Thus the whole crux of Orwell's contention for 'the ideal of socialism, justice and liberty, rests on his belief to prepare for a better future. There are few finer examples of the artist as in the Burmese Days as the totally involved social and political commentator who yet withdraws, when there is need, to warn and guide, of the artist as capable of a kind of truth unobserved by the men in command of the political machine. To make this point is not to decry the arduous work of government, nor to suggest the superiority of the artist. It is to draw attention to complementary nature of politics and the arts, each ideally in a free, critical partnership with one another. The trend of events in India and elsewhere has been assisted by the
pervasive scepticism about political power among writers and intellectuals. Political subjection was repugnant to those, like George Orwell, in whom it aroused strong feelings of guilt, and like Mr. E. M. Forster, who thought in terms of personal relationships based on equality and a feeling heart.

_Burmese Days_ is a picture of one of the backwaters of the British Empire as Orwell experienced it as a police officer. The grossness and hypocrisy of the British and the whining corruption of the natives are here anatomized in a story of one man's doomed attempt to escape from the pettiness of life in an up-country Burmese town.

The Imperial police, using its strong arm freely and without scruples in dealing with the subject-people of the colonies was an important and essential wing of the administration of the British Empire. By joining this force Orwell came into direct contact with the worst aspects of imperialism. He was most unhappy about the role he was called up to play as a policeman in colonial Burma. He realized that imperialism degraded and dehumanized both the rulers and the ruled.

In _Burmese Days_, Orwell dwells on the undesirability of the British rule, though his references are mainly negative in content. He does not take up any radical position, and does not advocate freedom for the colonies. The general impression being that the British should quit because the working conditions are no
longer congenial. Occasionally he does point out that the subject races are equally human but that is about all. His sympathy for the subject races is at a political not a personal level.

The labelling of men, whether by creed or colour, is a procedure obnoxious to Orwell. In terms of race, once he had abandoned his early colonial outlook, the issue was clear: and a farcical note enters, because the system of dividing men by colour is shown to be inconsistent with division by class.

In an "outpost of the Empire" like Burma the class-question appeared at first sight to have been shelved. There was no obvious class-friction here, because the all-important thing was not whether you have been to one of the right schools but whether your skin was technically white. As a matter of fact most of the white men in Burma were not of the type who in England would be called "gentleman", . . . they were "white men" in contradiction to the other and inferior class, the "natives". But one did not feel towards the "natives" as one felt towards the "lower classes" at home. The essential point was that the "natives" at any rate the Burmese, were not felt to be physically repulsive. One looked down on them as "natives" but one was quite ready to be physically intimate with them; and this, he noticed was the case even with white men who had the most vicious colour prejudice. Orientals say that we smell. The Chinese, I believe, say, that a white man smells like a corpse.
The Burmese say the same.

Thus in *Burmese Days* there are indications of a personal sympathy and admiration for the East. The further he receded from this period, the more political his attitude became. He was able to see a parallel relationship between the classes, back home, which echoed the contempt and the antagonism present in the race-relations.

*Orwell's* anti-imperialist stand was motivated by a patriotic instinct of self-respect. He realised that a great deal of brutality was involved when men were called upon to rule subject-races. The image of themselves which the rulers projected often became a freedom denying one. This he elaborated upon in *Shooting an Elephant*, where the will of the unarmed crowd overpowered the will of the armed police officer. All that imperialism was able to generate was a feeling of mutual hatred. The men who were sent out to the colonies were aliens there and in due process, they also became alienated from the home country. Not being able to belong, living in close society, they developed rigid attitudes.

The Burmese-relationship is examined through the opinion and the reactions of Flory who is an employee of a timber company. After an initial phase of home-sickness and a sense of alienation, in Burma, he avoids, or tries to avoid all the unpleasantness of England, as a 'superior' white among natives he had money to spend and influences to dispense with, even though
he knows that the system is wrong. Thus in exchange for temporarily gained self-respect, he must shamefully know that his type of life in Burma is an escape and an acceptance of a demeaning existence. He is now twice-alienated, both from his countrymen and the natives. Flory’s loneliness is racial as well as emotional. In order to relieve his boredom Flory goes to the club. In any town in India the European club is the spiritual citadel, the real seat of the British power, the Nirvana for which native officials and millionaires pine in vain. It was doubly so in this case, for it was the proud boast of Kyauktada club that, almost alone of clubs in Burma it had never admitted an Oriental to membership.

Flory is ill at ease amongst his compatriots. His views on the imperial issue are different from theirs and he has nothing in common with them. Amongst the other white inhabitants Ellis who hates the natives, positively hates them, and hints of friendliness towards them seems to him a ‘horrible perversity’, since Flory maintains one such friendship, he becomes the main target:

My God, I should have thought in case like this when it’s a question of keeping those black stinking swines out of the only place where we can enjoy ourselves; you’d have the decency to back me up. Even if that pot-bellied, greasy little rod of a nigger doctor is your best pal. I don’t care if you chose to pal up with the scum of the bazaar, if it pleases you to go to Veraswami’s house drink whisky with all his nigger pals, that’s your lookout. Do what you like outside the club. But, by God, it’s a different matter when you talk of bringing niggers in here.
Lackeresteen is addicted to drink and has low moral standards. McGregor has a closed mind and lacks imagination and initiative. And Westfield believes in the use of force. They are all closed, stunted human minds in whom the very values of the code of behaviour advocated and instilled in the public schools have been subverted. On the upper fringe of this assorted group is Verral, who like Flory is also an outcast, though for entirely different reasons. Clustered together they try to uphold what they understand to be the traditions of the British Raj and to hold their own against the onslaught of the natives.

The white community is as much an object of pity as the natives, they are herded together and compelled by their circumstances to go on falsifying all human values, and all human relationships. One really doesn't see in them any remnants of imperial gloth. The system has destroyed them as much as it has destroyed the natives. Therefore beneath the English assumption of superiority is the great fear which underlies all imperialistic action, an anxiety which Orwell prophetically catches. This fear dictates that the conqueror deny completely the natives' intelligence.

Flory is a rebel, and as such he is outside the Establishment. As a gesture of this rebellion he has a Burmese mistress, Ma Hla May, and an Indian friend Veraswamy. Whereas the relationship with Ma Hla May underlines various attitudes,
for instance, the impossibility of such a relationship becoming permanent one as it is based on the assumption of inequality, also the inbuilt limitations of the cultural differences.

As a writer Orwell was primarily an essayist. His novels, as he admitted, are merely vehicles for his ideas. The heroes in his novels are nothing but a spokesman for himself. Caught by what he is, marked by his ugly sign, psychologically weakened by his inadequacy, he has conflict, which can be resolved only by suicide. The tensions in Flory are those he creates by trying to gain a kind of happiness impossible for one of his characters. In reproducing many facets of his own Burmese service, Orwell enables Flory to see the perversion of his motives as well as the rottenness of the English rule in Burma. Committed to allegiances which he cannot possibly accept, Flory is on a rack. His position in the English experience, English misrule, all of which he loathes, the only man with whom he has any kind of intellectual contact is, ironically a Burmese doctor Veraswami, vastly superior in sensitivity an intelligence to his English compatriots. He longs for someone with whom he can share interests and memories and with whom he can escape from the smell of pukkasahibdom. Yet to be friendly with any native is to be ridiculed.

Veraswami presents a case of inverted patriotism. He spells out what are conventionally considered the advantages of
imperialism. He admires the British for their industrial progress, and for their sacrifice for coming so far from their homes in order to improve the lot of the dark races. The natives, he is of the opinion, are ignorant and backward, incapable of any independent political or economic action.

Accordingly the English colony demands that the Burmese be ignored or treated as servants, for the Englishman is aware that the natives are biding their time. Flory who knows the nature of such self-deception, cannot live the lie of his daily existence. His course of loyalty to the English colony demands what only an Ellis with his racial rabble-rousing can offer. Thus Flory is sapped within and without. Too weak to aid this Burmese friend, face himself,

The quality of an Orwell protagonist is his ability to perceive the hypocrisy of the world and to react to it so that his own aims become clouded. An Orwell hero rarely has any hope for the future except perhaps for his next meal. He has few ambitions and his chief emotion, when not hungry is the sexual itch. Thus in Burmese Days, Flory pursues Elizabeth, the sole available white woman in the area, despite the fact that he and she have nothing in common. Thus torn by self-doubt, he sees in Elizabeth, the young foolish girl who has come to Burma looking for a husband much more than she can possibly offer Flory. Fails to see her and this lack of clarity on his part is a measure of his agony. Everything Flory believes in is vitiated
by his feeling for Elizabeth, but nevertheless because of his own weakness he becomes a fool of love. As commonplace as the other members of the English colony, Elizabeth seems to be more than she is because she carries with her the wisps of England: freshness, a white complexion and a youthful vigour - all the things that go dead in Burma. But beyond this, she is nothing; and Flory half recognizes her inadequacies while he wooes her with his agonized plea for 'cultured' companionship, the utter hopelessness of his pursuit.

Consequently when hypocrisy, does appear, its results from a character's need for something that scorches his true feelings. Flory's ordeal - one that he cannot possibly sustain is to discover the depth of his self-deception and to lose Elizabeth in the bargain. An honest man is unable to survive self-deceived and so Flory commits suicide. Like one of Conrad's solitaries Flory cannot exist outside the community of men, although to exist inside would be self-corrupting, for the community itself is rotten.

Orwell takes over from Flory in his comments on imperialism:

In the end the secrecy of your revolt poisons you like a secret disease. Your whole life is a life of lies. Year after year you sit in Kipling-haunted little clubs, whisky to right of you, Pšnk'un to left of you, listening and eagerly agreeing while Colonel Bodger develops his theory that these bloody nationalist should be boiled in oil. You have your Oriental friends called 'greasy little babus', and you admit, dutifully, that
they are greasy little babus. The time comes when you burn with hatred of your own countrymen, when you long for native rising too drown their Empire in blood. And in this there is nothing honourable, hardly even any sincerity. For, au fond, what do you care if the Indian are bullied and exploited? You only care because the right of free speech is denied to you. You are a creature of the despotism, a pukka sahib, tied together than a monk or a savage by an unbreakable system of bonds.

Time passed and each year Flory found himself less at home in the world of the Sahibs. More liable to get into trouble when he talked seriously on any subject whatever, more liable to get into trouble when he talked seriously on any subject whatever. So he learned to live inwardly, secretly in books as secret thoughts that could not be uttered. But it is a corrupting thing to live one's life in secret. Here, in this novel, Orwell makes the hero use a fairly trivial metaphor to express his longing for a world he can accept and will accept him! 'One should live with the stream of life, not against it.'

With the publication of 'Down and Out in Paris and London' Orwell was truly launched as a writer, but it was many years before he could make even a modest living by writing. In order to support himself he worked at many odd jobs, as a tutor, a book shop assistant, he kept a chicken farm, a village store and a public house. Such a life with its varied experiences provided plenty of rich material for literary use and Orwell drew heavily from it to the writing of his two novels 'A Clergyman's Daughter' (1919) and 'Keep the Aspidistra Flying' (1936).

Returning to London for a year or more, Orwell was a
part-time assistant in a London bookshop. He lived in a cheap room above the bookshop. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* he paints a dark picture of bookshop life. Gordon Comstock, who is supposed to be of the common stock, the name Comstock might almost be an anticipation of Newspeak but who is really very much out of the ordinary, a kind of composite figure of the ordinary man as seen by Orwell and of Orwell himself. The 'Gordon' part of it was Scotch, of course. The prevalence of such names nowadays is merely a part of the Scotchification of England that has been going on these last fifty years. *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is the study in loneliness brought about by a rigid 'middle-middle-class' system within the almost equally hopeless life of the very poor. Absence of money in the second, and over concern for money, in the first combine to depress Comstock.

*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* bears a symbolical title which suggests the imaginative significance of the novel. The leaves of aspidistra cause a mental disgust too the hero Gordon. They form a bourgeois symbol standing for the value of money. The novel's central theme is the struggle against money-God. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell attacks the class-ridden society of England and in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* he criticises the vulgar materialistic civilization. The hero of the novel Gordon Comstock sets out as an angry man of the generation with a burning passion and a strong will to eradicate the social and economic evils.
The third chapter of the novel presents the biographical details of Gordon which is similar to the school-life of Orwell. Gordon's life in the lodging house of Wisbeach compares favourably with the life of Orwell in Paris and London lodging houses. The agony Orwell suffered and Gordon suffers in the company of rich boys creates a resentful feeling in both of them against their parents:

He blamed his parents for their poverty as though they had been poor on purpose. Why couldn't they be like other boys' parents? They preferred being poor it seemed to him. That is how a child's mind works.

The aspidistra symbolises this money-respectability from which there are two escapes of being rich or refusing to be rich and Comstock, who has led his life in utter penury, decides to declare a secret war on the money-god, making it his special purpose not to succeed. Thus the novel portrays vividly the plight of the sensitive soul which has to come to terms with money in a civilisation founded on greed and fear.

Gordon Comstock represents the Darwinian struggle in the world of books, which symbolises all struggles. The novels fight the poetry, the poetry fights the histories, the social tracts fight the novels. All are in a battle to stay in a prominent place in the bookstore and all seems futile, if one has no money. Books which one has hitherto taken for granted, now appear shoddy, and useless, as Orwell handles them, untouchable products of a sterile society. Without money he tells us, one cannot
love, without money one cannot even read.

The quality of an Orwell 'hero' Gordon Comstock, among others is measured by his ability to strike through cant, his own and society's. Orwell is not particularly troubled by what his protagonist is or what he tries to do, he is however much concerned with what society prevents him from doing. As in a naturalistic novel of the 19th century in which the 'hero' is caught in a trap of cause and effect, so here the 'hero' is caught by forces which reduce his desires and needs to those of an animal. He is brought to subsistence level, and few elements of civilisation can do him good, for to have enough to eat is the sole luxury in which he can indulge.

Unlike Dickens who often associated moneyed values with success, Orwell associates money with the defeat of the spirit. He faces the familiar paradox that money is essential to be human, while to make money is dehumanising.

That was what is meant to worship the money-god ! To settle down, to make good, to sell your soul for a villa and an aspidistra ! To turn in to the typical little bowler-hatted sneak-Strube's little man' - the little docile cit who slips home by the six-fifteen to a supper of cottage-pie and stewed tinned bears, half an hour's listening into the BBC symphony concert and then perhaps a spot of licit sexual intercourse if his wife 'feels in the mood' ! What a fate ! No, it isn't like that, one was meant to live. One's got to get right out of it, out of the money-stink.

The one area in which Orwell and Dickens meet is their common recognition that poverty destroys the sexual urge. The
poor man feels inferior and loses his potential as a male, for
without money or means he is, as it were, demanned. Gordon
Comstock says in, **Keep the Aspidistra Flying**:

> It isn't that I don't want to make love to you. I
do. But I tell you I can't make love to you when I have
only eight pence in my pocket. At least when you know I
have only eight pence. I just can't do it. It is
physically impossible.

The physical impossibility of the sexual act under these
conditions marks Gordon as a sensitive young man. Similarly in
**Down and Out in Paris and London**, (1933), Orwell's first novel
which paralleled his own experiences some time after he returned
from the Burma Police Service, the narrator perceives in himself
and others the nearly complete loss of a sexual self under the
exhausting conditions imposed by poverty or by inhuman working
conditions. Further more, the worker recognises that he is doing
an essentially meaningless job that in no way fulfils himself,
and thus knowledge of his own uselessness acts as a deterrent
sexually.

Orwell along with Henry Greene and D.H. Lawrence is
virtually alone among the twentieth century novelists. Against
the background of Orwell's description of poverty, Zola's seems
romanticised, his sexual characters retain energy, despite lives
that destroy their will. Orwell's characters appear real with
their exhaustion, their lack of interest in anything but a meal
and a place to sleep, their indifference to the future.
As a social novelist, Orwell is less interested in man than he is in the society that has infected him. Like a good naturalist, Orwell gets at people through the accumulation of social details and external phenomenon. This method defines both his success and failure. As a way of realising a particular milieu, such a method has proven successful, as a way of developing people, the method leaves much to chance. Unfortunately Orwell’s chief characters frequently exist only as social animals. They are indicated in terms of status, race, caste, tradition and their place in this scheme is more important than what they are.

In Orwell’s earlier work, all society was a prison, whether the prison of Flory’s Burma, the prison of London and Paris, the prison of living on a pound a week in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, the prison of working in the coal-mines, in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Orwell’s protagonists are characters who for various reasons cannot swim in the stream as it flows in their societies. *1984* seems a logical outgrowth of these books, the work of a man more interested in analyzing a crushed human being than in placing the individual in conflict with other people. Orwell’s characters are generally in struggle against a system, sometimes against themselves, but rarely against other people. One thinks of Orwell having thrown his characters into a circular machine, then, noting their struggle against the machine, their attempts to escape it or compromise themselves with it. The loss in mature contact is
great. Perhaps the thinness apparent in all of Orwell's fiction is the author's failure to provide dramatic confrontation for his chief characters, so that the latter would seem to move in a world of people as well as events. Since Orwell makes events predominate, people always appear less than what they actually are. The result suggests the same faults contained in the naturalistic novels - the system catches and drains the individual so that his own actions become ultimately meaningless.

Orwell's method is possibly a logical extension of the contemporary trend to eliminate the hero. The first group of major novelists presented protagonists who took central roles but who had nevertheless lost all trace of heroic action. These novelists, never, provided conflict for their characters so as to convey their human stature. As a literary marxist making the outside predominate over the inside, Orwell has reduced his protagonists to isolated elements in an atmosphere that will swallow them. Unlike Orwell, a naturalist like Zola, could compensate for this loss by integrating particular images into universal mosaics and by intensifying concrete details into symbols.

If we look momentarily at an Orwellian novel in which just human relationships were attempted, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, for instance, we see how weak they actually are.

In 1936, Orwell married Eileen O'Shaughnessy. He also
publicly declared himself a socialist. He sincerely believed that socialism was the only hope for building a better world. Just as Orwell was most unfit to succeed as a member of the Imperial Police service he was also quite unsuited to be a loyal member of a political party, engaged in active politics. His strong intellectual integrity and love of justice and fair play would not allow him to make the compromise required for success in either case.

Gordon Comstock has as his chief foil the aristocratic Ravelston, who with his easy air and rich manner is everything that Gordon is not. Ravelston is a socialist through belief, Gordon through necessity. Ravelston can speak against the establishment even though he possesses everything the system has to offer; Gordon, however, must fight the system as one is tempted by what it can offer to those who succumb to it. Ravelston has no great conflicts and finds socialism intellectually necessary while he enjoys capitalism which he knows is wrong but which provides the comforts he desires. Between the two, obvious as the relationship is, there might have been a powerful conflict, for, here the two classes, upper and shabby middle, come together in a common cause but for entirely different reasons and with entirely different points of view. Potentially there is real tension. Orwell however, makes Ravelston into benevolent friend whose manner describes from a story book not from life. A Gordon could possibly exist, a Ravelston never. Orwell is interested in Gordon as a victim, not
as a human being, and the novel proceeds from there. Gordon is running away from a world which demands economic competition to ensure one's survival and Gordon defends himself by this negative response to the world. This kind of literary character as self-defeating, not because he denies the world but because his answer to whatever the world demands is simply the opposite, despite what he is or wants to be. A character who is merely contrary and whose beliefs become the opposite of what others believe, is generally lacking in substance as those he opposes. Gordon, moreover, is a chronic complainer, and his difficulties seem to emanate as much from what he is as from the social ills he suffers. Consequently, Gordon sees himself as much at fault for his misery as society, he resolves problems that exist in himself rather than those that stem from his social milieu even his relationship with the two persons in his life and both are the victims his war against money. One is Ravelston, editor of a socialist periodical who is trying to escape from his own class to become an honorary member of the proletariat. The other is Rosemary whom he can afford to meet only in the streets, who loves him but will not sleep with him. There is the barrier of money between them.

All human relationships must be purchased with money. If you have no money, men won't care for you, women won't love you; won't, that is won't care for you or love you the last little bit that matters. And how right they are, after all! For, moneyless, you are unlovable. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels. But then, if I haven't money, I don't speak with the tongues of men and of angels.
For the woman, a man without a large income is somehow dishonoured, because he has sinned against the aspidistra.

Fear of poverty is the predominant social fear of Orwell's early heroes. Comstock's assessment of his parents, of their petty-bourgeois attitude to money applies also to him:

It was merely the lack of money. It was rather that, having no money, they still lived mentally in the money-world - the world in which money is virtue and poverty is crime. It was not poverty but the down-dragging of respectable poverty that had down for them. They had accepted the money code, and by that code, they were failures. They never had the sense to lash out and just live, money or no money, as the lower classes do.20

This portrayal of lower-middle class, life in London and the Home countries, where many people were on the brink of poverty without actually descending into it, is one in which Orwell displays his many naturalistic talents. With Gordon Comstock, however, he has a hero, who actually goes over the brink and experiences poverty as a form of humiliation.

Comstock learns at first hand the incompatibility between the reality of being poor and the lower-middle class ethic that poverty does not exist for the morally blameless. Try as he might he cannot escape the moral stigma of poverty even through his writing. In fact the opposite happens. The stigma fatally destroys his capacity to write.

Gordon had fought against the money-code, and yet he had clung to his wretched remnant of decency. But now it was
precisely from decency that he wanted to escape. He wanted to go down, deep down, into some world where decency no longer mattered, to cut the strings of his self-respect, to submerge himself - to sink. It was all bound up in his mind with the thought of being underground. He liked to think about the lost people - the underground people, tramps, beggars, criminals and prostitutes. It is a good world that they inhabit, down there in their frowzy kips and spikes. He wished to be down in the ghost- kingdom, below ambition. It comforted him somehow to think of the smoke-dim slums of South London sprawling on and on, a huge graceless wilderness where you could lose yourself forever. But sinking is as difficult as rising. The ambition to fail is as harmful as the ambition to succeed. Gordon's revolt personified against the power of money, against the permeating influence of money in all our social and familial relationships. Almost inadvertently people who have cared more for people than for money slide into the novel. Ravelston, Julia and Rosemary. And the whole basis of Gordon's revolt begins to sink when we see their simplicity and charm. They are the people who can attach proper value to things and so have come nearer to the meaning of life than Gordon has perhaps done. Keep the Aspidistra Flying is the tenderest tribute that Orwell has paid to life - revolt turning into reverence.

However, the novel presents detailed comments on commercialization of human relations a result no doubt of the
forces of capitalism. Also on the futility of a poet's profession. A world of 1935 in which to be a poet, a worshipper and shaper of words had turned into a big joke. From Chaucer's standpoint the scholar (clerk) had to wear a frayed collar, same is the fate even today. A man cannot buy even shoestrings with what he earns on poetry as Wordsworth had once said.

The advocacy of rigid principles become meaningless in the jingle of politics. But in one splendid sequence in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* the hero has to decide whether to leave one of his life's smaller principles, his fight against the commercial rat-race, in favour of the biggest principle of all, the principle of life. Comstock gives up his revolt partly because he realises that people can still be human within the unpleasant system against which he rebels; but the second reason is the more important one, and more urgent, because Rosemary has at last agreed to go to bed with him and is going to have a baby. The baby's future depends on his giving up his fight, conducted on principle, against the business world; taking instead a job in advertising, marrying Rosemary and supporting his child. The baby wins. In a moving sequence Gordon Comstock over a gynaecological textbook under the frigid eye of an assistant in a public library, gazing with strange new feelings at the print of a human foetus. As he gazes at the picture of a new life, a bit of himself, he decides against abortion, and takes the job at last, realising that:
He had blasphemed against money, rebelled against money, tried to live like an anchorite outside the money-world; and it had brought him not only misery, but also a frightful emptiness and an inescapable sense of futility. To abjure money is to abjure life.

Gordon's personality is wrapped by prejudices and an obstinacy not to see reason. He wants to live in a world where obligations, duty, decency and ambition do not exist. With reservations about the last of these ambitions one must say that such a world would be a negation of human civilization and no man has the right to annihilate the values accepted and continued by centuries of civilization.

Our civilization is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmitted into something nobler. The lower-middle-class people in there, behind their lace curtains, with their children and their aspidistras they lived by the money-code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. The money-code as they interpreted it was not merely cynical and hoggish. They had their standards, their inviolable points of honour. They 'kept themselves respectable' kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were alive. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They beget children, which is what the saint and the soul-savers never by any chance do.

With a slight difference the same can be said to be E. M. Forster's view - stay in the world for the best reasons. Put life first stay in the world, and go on fighting for life.

The vision of total grimness and despair 'born amidst the sense of approaching disaster in the thirties and intensified by the greater horrors of the forties' is central to all Orwellian
novels, but Gordon's vision of the deathliness in modern life of London's slaving under capitalistic oppression, to 'keep the aspidistra flying' is of singular importance. Moreover a great deal of what Orwell writes has genuine objective relevance, the springs of his work lie not in disinterested social observation and concern but in unacknowledged feeling, chiefly of self-hate and contempt which find objective expression and justification through their projection on to the external scene. The failure of self-knowledge which this entails results in the degree of confusion between fantasy and reality, feeling and fact. It also implies a loss of control over one's own experience.
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Chapter III


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20. Ibid., p. 49.
22. Ibid., p. 255.