

## Author Study: George Orwell

Eric Arthur Blair, also popularly known as George Orwell, has been highly regarded for his writings that wittily criticized the prevailing social injustice in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was often metaphorical with his messages in novels such as Animal Farm and 1984, but also provided unsentimental journals in Down and out in Paris and London. Starting from Down and out in Paris and London, being his first full-length work, Orwell continued to publish writings that dealt with social issues. What was noticeable was the correlation between his changing style of writing and political viewpoints. Certainly, through an evolving style that shifts from factual based to metaphoric, Orwell reveals his altering reflections on society and the government.

George Orwell was born in Motihari, India in 1903. Although he was not born in a wealthy family, he received education starting at the age of five. He showed talent in writing since then. In 1924, Orwell joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. However, in 1928, he quit soon after realizing the brutality of imperialism. His experience in Burma definitely gave him a negative outlook on imperialism. When he returned to England, he intentionally lived several years in poverty, without a place to live. He later joined the militia in Spain and appreciated its social structure where there was no class system. The fact that everyone fairly living under the same conditions bedazzled him because the class structure in India is so strict. In 1949, Orwell helped out his friend Celia Kirwan to publish anti-communist propaganda, revealing his anti-stalinism. Then soon at an early age of 46, he passed away ("A Biography of George Orwell").

In one of the first novels written by Orwell, Down and Out in Paris and London, he presents his experience in London and Paris in a factual based structure - "Poverty is what I'm writing about" (*Down and Out in Paris and London* 34). George Orwell narrates a selective account of his actual experiences in the two cities. Not only does he explore the miserable lives of its underclass, he also presents a socialistic formula for the reform of society's institution. Orwell tries to write as an honest observer and a critique with a passion for social reform as he wrote "He was an embittered atheist (the sort of atheist who does not so much disbelieve in God as personally dislike Him), and took a sort of pleasure in thinking that human affairs would never improve" (*Down and Out in Paris and London* 128). To emphasize the surrounding environment of the "Down and Out-ers", he uses a character who is candid, clever, however, not too self-analytical (Meyers). Also, Orwell never explains the psychology of his protagonist, because the readers are urged to consider the narrator's message instead of the character's motivation. He describes his experience in Paris with prison-like terms - Paris's working poor seem geographically chained, repeating the cycle of moving from their rented rooms to their jobs to their favorite bistros. Furthermore, Paddy, who is Orwell's guide to the environs of London, explains the conditions of life among the truly uncomfortable, and urge a solution of practical reform that will end the tramp's cycle of sickness, and collapse from maladies. In one of his accounts, he states "Roughly speaking, the more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged to eat with it. ... Dirtiness is inherent in hotels and restaurants, because sound food is sacrificed to punctuality and

smartness... The only food at the Hotel X which was ever prepared cleanly was the staff's" (*Down and Out in Paris and London* 254).

Orwell's message in Down and Out in Paris and London is clear: poverty is degrading to both body and soul that the authorities of Paris and London have no concern for the poor. The lives of the poor are pathetic - there is no love, no desire, no ambition. However, the factual representation of the lives of the poor is used more to illustrate the harsh working conditions than to criticize the government.

Nonetheless, in Orwell's next major work, Animal Farm, he criticized Stalin and his government through his use of metaphors. His view towards government systems shifts from one of nonchalance to disapproval. Orwell's hostility towards Joseph Stalin grew when he saw how the Communist policy caused societal chaos during the Spanish War ("A Biography of George Orwell"). Considering that Orwell wrote Down and Out in Paris and London before the war broke out, it is evident that Spanish War altered Orwell's attitude. As a strong opponent of Stalinism, Orwell provided an allegory in Animal Farm to depict the evil nature of dictators who held absolute power. Although the animals, in union, rebelled against the humans, the apparent class segregation after the revolution brings the animal farm into its own demise: "But the luxuries of which Snowball had once taught the animals to dream, the stalls with electric light and hot and cold water, and the three-day week, were no longer talked about. Napoleon had denounced such ideas as contrary to the spirit of Animalism. The truest happiness, he said, lay in working hard and living frugally" (*Animal Farm* 82). In his novel, Orwell

effectively portrays citizens who are unaware that they are being used by the government officials - "All that year the animals worked like slaves. But they were happy in their work; they grudged no effort or sacrifice, well aware that everything they did was for the benefit of themselves and those of their kind who would come after them, and not for a pack of idle, thieving human beings" (*Animal Farm* 132). The quote adequately explains the conditions of the innocent citizens.

In contrast to the factual based work, Down and Out in Paris and London, Orwell's writing style develops as he weaves in more of metaphorical concepts into his next renowned novel. In Animal Farm, the metaphor serves its purpose as it makes the novel a perfect satire of the Stalin government.

1984 is an interesting novel. It brings the transformation of Orwell's writing style and his point of view to an end. If Orwell was illustrating the harsh working condition in Down and Out in Paris and London, and criticizing the Stalin government in Animal Farm, he warns the current government of how it can possibly affect the future if they don't call for a reform.

A dystopian novel, 1984 embraces ideas that Orwell thought might occur in the future if absolutism and corrupt government system continued. Under Ingsoc, the new constitution, Oceanian people live under strict surveillance. Life under the principles of Ingsoc is certainly miserable that even family members have to spy on each other to check if the others are violating the rules. English is transformed into a non-

recognizable language that somehow prevents people from thinking. As Winston puts it, “Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten” (1984 121). Although some exaggeration is included, the situation is very much like North Korea where the impostor does not want his people to rebel against him, but obey him till death; war is induced not because of world peace but mainly because of the economy (Berman 290). The Party claims that “The essential act of war is destruction, not necessarily of human lives, but of the products of human labour. War is a way of shattering to pieces, or pouring into the stratosphere, or sinking in the depths of the sea, materials which might otherwise be used to make the masses too comfortable, and hence, in the long run, too intelligent” (1984 275). Deception is a common method to indoctrinate its citizens, but also citizens use it to procure what they want. It is a world where no one can trust each other nor tell the truth. Love is long forgotten and people move like robots (Wemyss 316).

George Orwell used Oceania as a metaphor to warn the people back in 1949 of what could happen if no reform takes place to end political corruption and social injustice. The development of Orwell's writing style is recognizable even from Animal Farm to 1984. If he was about criticizing the event from the past in Animal Farm, he used the future in 1984 to warn the government of its wrongdoings.

Seeing the development of Orwell's style of writing, it is evident that he was not an inborn social activist. It was more likely his experiences in his life that brought changes to his thoughts and opinions about the society and the government. It was not until he fought in Spanish War that he realized the brutality of communism and Stalinism. That was when he started to write satires about the government system in his novels Animal Farm, and 1984. As seen in Down and Out in Paris and London, he did not have much thought about criticizing the government as much as he did after the war. Though he became more metaphorical, George Orwell wrote in a more acerbic manner.

Knowing the correlation between Orwell's life history and his writing style will now certainly add depth to our understanding of his works.

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