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George Orwell's Criticism of the English Left-Wing Intellectuals

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The aim of this essay is to examine George Orwell's criticism of the English left-wing intellectuals, focusing attention on the 1930s. Throughout his writing career, Orwell was consistently concerned with the intellectuals. Lionel Trilling indicates: "He [Orwell] implies that our job is not to be intellectual, certainly not to be intellectual in this fashion or that, but merely to be intelligent according to our light" (158). For Orwell, intelligence exists not to bring or aggravate social divisions, but to be the core of the establishment of equal society. Therefore when, in his eyes, many English intellectuals who were in a position to awaken people, though strictly not in a prescriptive manner, to the critical situation of England during the economic and international crises of the 1930s, were liable to indulge themselves in the prestige of their left-wing politics, specifically Marxist theory, and isolated themselves from the rest of society, Orwell could not but denounce them. He did so in order to defend Socialism, which he espoused. Moreover, as a writer Orwell reacted acutely to the literati's involvement in politics. The relationship between politics and writer became another concern for him.

Before analysing why and how Orwell attacked the left wing of the 1930s, it is important to note that he had an inclination to generalise about them as a whole as well as their "movement", as Alex Zwerdling points out:

> Despite the extraordinary infighting and continuing schisms that characterized the behavior of the various left-wing groups in the thirties and forties, he [Orwell] consistently treated "The Left" as a unifiable, if not unified, body. It is important to keep this assumption in mind . . . since it accounts for Orwell's tendency to generalize on the grand scale. When asserting his critique of socialism specifically,

it helps to understand how he used the word and what he took to be the essential aims of the movement. (16)

This tendency of Orwell to generalise about the 1930s, both its politics and literature, certainly played an integral part in interpreting Orwell's Socialism, which was based not upon any particular political theory but upon his respect for "justice and common decency" (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 154), but at the same time, with the benefit of the hindsight, it might have presented a factor in building "the persistent aftermyth of the 1930s as homogeneous anti-modernist decade" (Williams 1).

To begin with, as "*advocatus diaboli*," what did Orwell condemn the English left-wing intellectuals for? (151) In the second part of *The Road to Wigan Pier* (*RWP*) published in 1936, he referred to Socialism that was supported by many intellectuals, and he judged that it was middle-class Socialists, the English left-wing intelligentsia, that had debased this movement. To Orwell, their belief in Socialism seemed superficial and transient, and he described rather harshly, if not irrationally, such a person as:

> [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 teetotaller and often with vegetarian leanings, with a history of Nonconformity behind him, and above all, with a social position which he has no intention of forfeiting. (*RWP* 152).

The left-wing fervour among the intellectuals seemed to Orwell a fashion, which was also the case with "'the movement'" in English literature, apparently, led by such young poets as W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender at that time. While recognising differences in their talents, he paid attention to the similarity of their political bent and literary technique and mentioned: "For the middle and late thirties, Auden, Spender & Co. *are* 'the moverment', just as Joyce, Eliot & Co. were for the twenties. And the movement is in the direction of some rather ill-defined thing called Communism" ("Inside the Whale" 31-32). The point of the above

quoted censure of the left-wing intelligentsia lay in their relation to politics. Orwell took it for granted that the times would affect the individual as well as politics, and yet, simultaneously, he understood that political belief was not a thing to be transformed by a trend or the times but represented the more profound level of human activities. In Orwell's view, the left-wing intelligentsia were twisted round by the external conditions of the period, such as Soviet politics, forgetting to put their personal belief into politics.

To understand why Orwell was so suspicious of the political commitment of the intellectuals of the 1930s, it is necessary to glance at the reaction against the political stagnation of the 1920s and the response to the domestic and international crises of the 1930s. Orwell looked back and wrote: "As for the twenties, they were the golden age of the *rentier*-intellectual, a period of irresponsibility such as the world had never before seen. . . . 'Disillusion' was all the fashion" (29). While the intellectuals of the 1930s attempted to get away from the futility of the 1920s by means of activism and Marxist science, action was then "the criterion of politics as well as the standard of truth and beauty" (Wood 110). On the other hand, Britain was beset with difficulties: the Great Depression, which since 1929 had been causing huge unemployment which also affected the middle classes; the economic chaos, following the inability of both Labour and Conservative governments to find a breakthrough; and the threat of Fascism in Europe. These situations more or less involved the middle-class intellectuals and became factors motivating them to break down the status quo. It is also significant to bear in mind that the intellectuals of the 1930s who were attracted to Communism were, compared to those of the 1920s, larger in number and contained many literati and scientists with little previous interest in politics. Many of them generally came from wealthier bourgeois families than those of the 1920s and had received the most prestigious education in the country (79-84).

It is true that Orwell sometimes oversimplified or exaggerated the appearance of the English intellectuals of the Left, for there should be influential differences in degree and kind on the individual level. There were a variety of left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s, who could

by no means easily form a united front (as time went on, the Popular Front). Nevertheless, it is also true that a certain leftward movement leaped into prominence at that time. In order to explore the substance of this movement, it seems quite appropriate to look at such a monthly magazine as *Left Review,* first published in October 1934 mainly by the members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), as the indicator of "the decade's literary and political imperatives" because:

> Periodicals allowed for rapid debate on crucial matters of the moment, matters which might develop in ways unforeseen by critics and writers. Free from revisions of hindsight, positions put forward in periodicals offer valuable contemporary records with which to consider important, though often short-lived, disputes. (Marks 23)

Moreover, from the perspective of Orwell's critique of the Left, *Left Review* is suited to the present discussion, for Orwell and the magazine wrote about each other in his book and in its pages: Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Left Review* in a review of it in the April 1937 issue. While the book received a fairly favourable review from Derek Kahn, assistant editor of *Left Review*, despite Orwell's criticism of the magazine itself, he attacked the magazine for "the 'proletarian' cant" spreading in it:

> Everyone knows, or ought to know by this time, how it runs: the bourgeoisie are 'dead' (a favourite word of abuse nowadays and very effective because meaningless), bourgeois culture is bankrupt, bourgeois 'values' are despicable, and so on and so forth: if you want examples, see any number of the *Left Review* or any or the younger Communist writers such as Alec Brown, Philip Henderson, etc. (*RWP* 146)

Here we must recognise that Alec Brown was a polemical figure in *Left Review* and his coarse, emotional advocacy of Communism and mechanical treatment of Marxism aroused fierce opposition among other contributors of the magazine. In one of the most notorious contributions he made to it, Brown, on the assumption that "the vast jellyfish of all the petty

middle-class is a lesser problem" than the problems the working class had to face, among other suggestions, proposed that: "Our task in regard to this middle class is to organize our destructive criticism of their morals, their religion and their rachitic ethics" (*Left Review*, 1, 3: 77). Brown, who claimed not only "the proletarianisation of our outlook (of those of us who have bourgeois origin in our work)" but also "the proletarianisation of our actual language," hardly left any room for the middle class in the future development of English literature, and such a fanatic clamour must have sounded to Orwell "the 'proletarian' cant." Among not a few contributors who expressed objections, Montagu Slater, one of the editors of *Left Review*, and Douglas Garman, an influential contributor of the magazine, quickly reacted against Brown's article and showed their counterview that there was the role played by the middle class: that they should utilise the past to cultivate a new ground in literature. This case could be seen as one of the typical ones to show that there was the heterogeneity of both political and literary views even in a Marxist journal like *Left Review*.

Orwell must have recognised various opinions expressed in the magazine, but he was more interested in the inner meaning of the phenomenon than its outward form, and so he was concerned with the incentive and motivation of the left-wing intellectuals. The radicalisation of many intellectuals seemed to Orwell a fashion or a different pattern of their desire for power; so did their sympathy for the working class, hence his remark: "Unfortunately it is nowadays the fashion to pretend that the glass [between different classes] is penetrable" (*RWP* 137). Left-wing literary circles were also willing to fight on the side of and for the working class. According to Valentine Cunningham, "*Going Over*", that is, "the sense of being in transit or transition", is the key metaphor of 1930s writers (211). In Orwell's case, a guilt complex over having been a part of the ruling class in Burma, then his experience of staying with the working class in Wigan and researching the problem of mass unemployment and real life in coal-mining towns, made him acutely class-conscious, motivating him primarily to approach Socialism. To little avail, though, he even attempted to be a part of the working class by experiencing casual labour and vagrancy before he went

to Wigan, as depicted in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, his first book, published in 1933. As to imperialism, he mentioned: "In order to hate imperialism you have got to be part of it" (*RWP* 126). The fact that he aided imperialism even for a short period consequently gave Orwell a motive to understand the conditions of the English working class.

> I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man. I wanted to submerge myself, to get right down among the oppressed, to be one of them and on their side against their tyrants. . . . It was in this way that my thoughts turned towards the English working class. It was the first time that I had ever been really aware of the working class, and to begin with it was only because they supplied an analogy. They were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma. (130)

In addition, he knew the "hidden bitterness" (127) of those who directly or indirectly worked for the British Empire through his career at the Indian Imperial Police; therefore he could not tolerate the left-wing intelligentsia's aloof attitude towards people who worked in the colonial service.

> [T]he high standard of life we enjoy in England depends upon our keeping a tight hold on the Empire, particularly the tropical portions of it such as India and Africa. Under the capitalist system, in order that England may live in comparative comfort, a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation—an evil state of affairs, but you acquiesce in it every time you step into a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream. The alternative is to throw the Empire overboard and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should all have to work hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes. That is the very last thing that any left-winger wants. Yet the left-winger continues to feel that he has no moral responsibility for imperialism. He is perfectly ready to accept the products of Empire and to save his soul by sneering at the people who hold the Empire

together. (139-40)

Then, in coal mines in Wigan, Orwell came to recognise another side of people who worked under harsh circumstances and underpinned the prosperity of England:

> Watching coal-miners at work, you realize momentarily what different universes different people inhabit. Down there where coal is dug it is a sort of world apart which one can quite easily go through life without ever hearing about. Probably a majority of people would even prefer not to hear about it. Yet it is the absolutely necessary counterpart of our world above. (29)

The visit to Wigan was a "necessary" step for Orwell to determine his political attitude; in other words, his "approach to Socialism" (106). Thus the formation of his Socialism depended upon his own first-hand experience of imperialism in Burma and extreme poverty in London, Paris and Wigan, which, by implication, shows Orwell's empirical attitude towards politics.

On the other hand, for many literary intellectuals, it was the political radicalisation that awakened their sense of guilt in being privileged, not *vice versa* (Wood 98-99). With regard to the middle-class intellectuals' sense of guilt towards the working class, Trilling states: "So far as this was nothing more than a moral fashion, it was a moral anomaly" (161). Orwell too judged that there was little substance in the intellectuals' "love of the working class" (*RWP* 156).

It appeared to Orwell that most of the middle-class Socialists theoretically sought for a classless society; in reality, they were yet to abandon their present social privileges (153). If so, what was the essence of their compassion for the working class? Orwell presumed "a hypertrophied sense of order" to be its underlying motive. Inherent in the intellectuals' kind of relationship with the working class, the condescension betrayed by the former that Orwell observed is worth considering:

> The truth is that, to many people calling themselves Socialists, revolution does not mean a movement of the masses with which they hope to associate themselves; it

means a set of reforms which 'we', the clever ones, are going to impose upon 'them', the Lower Orders. (157)

Orwell detested such a "*de haut en bas* strain" among the middle-class Socialists. It did not mean that he disapproved middle-class support for the left-wing movement, but he stood firmly against the middle-class's domineering guidance and control (Zwerdling 34). Too much emphasis on the administration of society was not only incompatible with Orwell's libertarian sense of Socialism, but it was possible to run counter to the purpose of the movement.

In Orwell's view, the middle-class Socialists were urged into action, and yet the action was not accompanied by what it originally meant. This contradiction was induced by one of the characteristics of the left-wing intelligentsia. In his essay "England Your England," Orwell described it as: "the emotional shallowness of people who live in a world of ideas and have little contact with physical reality". In 1941, Orwell commented on their political behaviour in the 1930s as follows:

> Many intellectuals of the Left were flabbily pacifist up to 1935, shrieked for war against Germany in the years 1935-9, and then promptly cooled off when the war started. It is broadly though not precisely true that the people who were most 'Anti-Fascist' during the Spanish civil war are most defeatist now. And underlying this is the really important fact about so many of the English intelligentsia—their severance from the common culture of the country. (85)

What Orwell denounced here was the political irresponsibility of the left-wing intellectuals, which was brought upon their inclination to "abstractness and absoluteness" (Trilling 163). For example, although *Left Review* placed a great emphasis on the promotion of the working class writing in its early stage, the first priority was gradually and definitely given to the advance of Marxist theory and its experimental application to literary criticism as time went by, which, with hindsight, might have been a literary gain but could not be regarded as successful in obtaining popular support at that time. To Orwell, no matter how plausible

their ideas and/or theory seemed, without any personal belief and physical involvement, nothing could be implemented. Without them, these intellectuals would be led to exclusiveness or self-complacency, which would do no good and much harm to the left-wing movement as a whole.

Orwell hated an easy conscience and easy solution. Spender comments on Orwell: "If you were a socialist, for instance, he wanted you to live like a socialist" (263). What, then, should a Socialist be, by Orwell's yardstick? For Orwell "the real Socialist is one who wishes—not merely conceives as desirable, but actively wishes—to see tyranny overthrown" (*RWP* 194). This definition of Socialist seems abstract and is confined to the emotional realm, yet it also connotes Orwell's tendency towards the spiritual side of politics, with which, he suspected, theoretical Marxists would disagree. The ultimate goals of Socialism which Orwell believed were traditional, humanistic and simple—that is, "justice and liberty" (188). Standing against the fact that "Socialism in its developed form is a theory confined to the middle class" (152), Orwell mentioned:

> [S]o far as my experience goes, no genuine working man grasps the deeper implications of Socialism. Often, in my opinion, he is a truer Socialist than the orthodox Marxist, because he does remember, what the other so often forgets, that Socialism means justice and common decency. (154)

Orwell objected to Marxists who clustered round the economic analysis of politics, giving little attention to its spiritual dimension. Since Marxists generally made their judgement according to the seemingly omnipotent "technique", they were little aware that many of the masses as well as some intellectuals objected to Socialism for spiritual reasons. Orwell denied a materialistic Utopia, which Marxists had formulated, bearing in mind that Fascism was spreading by its appeal to certain sentiments in the depth of people's psychology—the Christian faith, patriotism and militarism, for example. In order to oppose the menace of Fascism in Europe, and in Britain to some extent, he even maintained that:

> The only possible course is to examine the Fascist case, grasp that there is

> something to be said for it, and then make it clear to the world that whatever good Fascism contains is also implicit in Socialism. (188)

The application of conservative values feasible for Socialism would help to "humanize" itself and eventually rid the prejudice against it (193). Orwell urged upon the Socialist camp the importance of reading the public's mind, not simply of exchanging their ideas inside their coteries. It was essential because in reality the left-wing intellectuals were politically alienated from the rest of the country in the 1930s, since, as Orwell was well aware, the general public was not interested in political radicalisation (Wood 68). Besides, it was the Conservatives who had actually been in power in Britain in most of the 1930s.

Not solely for the understanding of the inherent value of the adversary, Fascism, but for the moral values underlying the aims of Orwell's Socialism, tradition and patriotism deserved consideration. It was especially important because these values were underestimated by the left-wing intellectuals. As to patriotism in particular, it seemed to be in an inverse relationship with the devotion to Soviet politics among the left-wing intellectuals in the 1930s. In Orwell's eyes, the English intelligentsia were "Europeanized", hence his ironical remark: "England is perhaps the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationality ("England Your England" 85). In "Notes on Nationalism," Orwell made a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism and explained the former as follows:

> By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. (156)

Patriotism was one of the moral principles by which people had long lived, but had already decayed together with other Victorian values, namely religion, the Empire, discipline, duty and honour. With a respect for the past, Orwell presumed that nothing could be achieved without such basics of life as patriotism and religion ("Inside the Whale" 35).

On the other hand, it seemed to Orwell that the English intellectuals had found a substitute

for the traditional values in Communism, which he called "the patriotism of the deracinated".

> It was simply something to believe in. Here was a Church, an army, an orthodoxy, a discipline. Here was a Fatherland and—at any rate since 1935 or thereabouts—a Fuehrer. All the loyalties and superstitions that the intellect had seemingly banished could come rushing back under the thinnest of disguises. (35-36)

Orwell later recalled that he had felt repelled by Communism since 1935 at the latest, the year before the publication of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. Although in his early writings he often mentioned Communists in connection with Socialists, he began to draw a clear distinction between the two in experiencing the political turmoil of the 1930s both at home and abroad. It was Orwell's own experience of the Spanish Civil War that determined his deeply ingrained mistrust of Communism and his opposition to the Soviet Union.

In Spain, Orwell saw the Soviet Union intervene in the war and the Communist Party rise to power. What was most frightening about Communist politics was heresy-hunting and manipulation of journalism as a means to an end, which also existed among the left wing in England, although to a lesser degree and in different ways. Orwell assumed that the subservient attitude of the English intelligentsia to Soviet Russia allowed such evil deeds. First, the suppression of dissidents often originated from the changes of policy of the Soviet Union. Orwell depicted the Communist surroundings thus:

> Every time Stalin swaps partners, 'Marxism' has to be hammered into a new shape. This entails sudden and violent changes of 'line', purges, denunciations, systematic destruction of party literature, etc., etc. ("Inside the Whale" 33)

So long as one belonged to the Communist Party, it seemed to Orwell almost impossible to hold their primal convictions. If they failed to follow the party line, they were sure to be branded a heretic, be severely attacked, or even worse, be neglected completely, the very process of which is described in his two later novels, *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Secondly, manipulation of the press, which was also applied to the elimination of the dissidents, was crucial in a sense that it brought about control of free

speech and truth. Soon after Orwell returned to England from Spain in 1937, he discovered:

> There has been a quite deliberate conspiracy . . . to prevent the Spanish situation from being understood. People who ought to know better have lent themselves to the deception on the ground that if you tell the truth about Spain it will be used as Fascist propaganda. (*Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* 1: 308-09)

Orwell found out that it was almost impossible to publish in England a truthful account of the real part played by the Communist Party in Spain. He understood that it was because of the pro-Communist censorship by the intellectuals rather than the possible damage such publication might cause to the Spanish Government. To be sure, there was no report to condemn the Communists' control or antagonism among the dissident left-wing parties in Spain in *Left Review*, although it was an enthusiastic supporter of the Republicans from the beginning of the war and followed the developments in Spain in each issue.

However, it is wrong to assume that Communism predominated over the whole left-wing movement in the 1930s. As Orwell recognised, the CPGB had always been in the minority and the Communist influence itself was not too immense (Wood 69). In addition, not all the left-wing intelligentsia were Communist or pro-Soviet. Nevertheless, the fact remains that intellectual pro-Sovietism existed in the movement, specifically in *Left Review*, and not a few intellectuals found an inspiration and hope in Communism. On the one hand, the underlying factor of their cooperation with the Soviet Union depended on the formation of the Popular Front Movement against Nazi Germany; but, on the other, Communism meant for some intellectuals the solution to overthrow the present Capitalism in England, for whom anti-Fascism became a measure of or even an excuse for their support of the Soviet Union. What Orwell considered destructive about the pro-Soviet intellectuals was their lack of objective assessment of Soviet politics, making every allowance for Stalin's dictatorship, which was the core of Orwell's criticism of them.

From his conviction of the Soviet Union as evil, Orwell was from the start sceptical about,

if not opposed to, the Popular Front, which "had narrowed down" the Socialist thought to anti-Fascism ("Inside the Whale" 38). He realised the importance of cooperation among the Socialist camp but not in the manner of the Popular Front led by the CPGB; to be more precise, the Comintern. He did not see or foresee any cultural potential inherent in the Popular Front, which appeared to lend *Left Review* an enormous impetus to promote a new literary-cum-political movement.

> We are at a moment when it is desperately necessary for left-wingers of all complexions to drop their differences and hang together. Indeed this is already happening to a small extent. Obviously, then, the more intransigent kind of Socialist has now got to ally himself with people who are not in perfect agreement with him. . . . At the moment, for instance, there is great danger that the Popular Front which Fascism will presumably bring into existence will not be genuinely Socialist in character, but will simply be a manoeuvre against Germany and Italian (not English) Fascism. Thus the need to unite against Fascism might draw the Socialist alliance with his very worst enemies. (*RWP* 194)

Certainly the Popular Front reflected the tactical shift of the Comintern, which, via the CPGB, more or less influenced the process in which *Left Review* manifested its identification with it. However, what underlay the magazine's support for it was not only the change of the party line, but also its eager expectations that the Popular Front, which was to mobilise every support against Fascism beyond the framework of socialism, would offer a perspective for cultural development in the future and enable the magazine to attain as wide an audience as possible to which to demonstrate a Marxist approach to literature. By evaluating literary criticism put forward in *Left Review* David Margolies points out:

> The literary and artistic theory they [*Left Review*] made was not abstract; it came out of their own experience of literature and of politics. Marxism, because it could make a unified, understandable pattern out of the separate pieces of experience, was immediately relevant to criticism as well as politics. It was exciting and it was

new. (5)

This evaluation seems somewhat too optimistic because in reality Marxist criticism was, in the Popular Front context, not successful in appealing to the broader reading public. Besides, it would be misleading to regard *Left Review*'s political position as "surprisingly undogmatic" (18); rather, the magazine was dogmatically incoherent for the most part. What seems to be appropriate to say about *Left Review*'s contribution to the Popular Front is that it illuminated both opportunities and limitations of the Communists' challenge to grapple with the question of how politics could be compatible with literature.

Nonetheless, Orwell did not find so-called Marxist criticism of considerable merit as he took the example of Edward Upward's "A Marxist Interpretation of Literature' in *The Mind in Chains*, edited by C. Day Lewis in 1937, and mentioned:

> Much of the literature that comes to us out of the past is permeated by and in fact founded on beliefs (the belief in the immortality of the soul, for example) which now seem to us false and in some cases contemptibly silly. Yet it is 'good' literature, if survival is any test. Mr Upward would no doubt answer that a belief which was appropriate several centuries ago might be inappropriate and therefore stultifying now. But this does not get one much farther, because it assumes that in any age there will be *one* body of belief which is the current approximation to truth, and that the best literature of the time will be more or less in harmony with it. Actually no such uniformity has ever existed. ("Inside the Whale 44)

Judging from the above quotation, Marxist literary criticism would have appeared to Orwell another Marxist syndrome in the 1930s, for in illustration of the Communist influence over the English intelligentsia, Orwell commented on the literary world that was not immune from Communism as follows:

> As early as 1934 or 1935 it was considered eccentric in literary circles not to be more or less 'left'. Between 1935 and 1939 the Communist Party had an almost irresistible fascination for any writer under forty. . . . For about three years, in fact,

> the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under Communist control. (32)

Orwell may have exaggerated the dominance of Communism over the literary world here. There were new authors such as Auden, Spender and Day Lewis who were inclined to Communism for a certain period, but the English literature of the 1930s was not represented only by them; there were leading literary figures from the previous decade—T. S. Eliot, for example (Crick 56). Even more the cultural aspect of the 1930s was not monolithic:

> [T]he idea that cultural history is a mosaic is especially applicable to the culture of the thirties. There were many overlapping, competing and contradictory theoretical tendency and practical alignments in the decade. (Williams 1)

Even Marxist writers did not neglect the influence and the significance of Eliot, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence as they examined their literary merits or, in large part, demerits in *Left Review.* Moreover, even for those writers who were associated with the Communist Party, apart from some young literati like Christopher Caudwell and John Cornford, who attacked Spender's "confusion between the 'impartiality' of the bourgeois writer and the objectivity of the revolutionary writer" (58-59), not all were party liners.

As for Orwell's survey of the English literary world of the 1930s, he may have exaggerated because for him writing was a matter of particular issue. A writer himself, Orwell questioned: "Why should *writers* be attracted by a form of socialism that makes mental honesty impossible?" ("Inside the Whale" 34). For him, the problem was a matter of the relationship between politics and literature. Orwell perceived that Communism demanded writers to serve a doctrine first; but he valued "mental honesty", independence of the mind, as essential for writers. Political censorship and "mental honesty" were irreconcilable. The following quotation articulates his fundamental attitude towards literature:

> Any Marxist can demonstrate with the greatest of ease that 'bourgeois' liberty of thought is an illusion. But when he has finished his demonstration there remains

> the psychological *fact* that without this 'bourgeois' liberty the creative powers wither away. . . . Literature as we know it is an individual thing, demanding mental honesty and a minimum of censorship. (39)

That Orwell tried to keep what he called "'bourgeois' liberty" out of politics was to make a contrast between his concept of Socialism and Marxian socialism (Crick 204). Orwell realised that the prophetic vision of Marxism technically contributed to the development of a new dimension of poetry by widening the perspective of poets, but that it would also simultaneously restrict their freedom ("Inside the Whale" 31). Therefore, to the fact that Auden and Spender began to leave Communism, although with cynicism, Orwell showed some understanding regarding their action as an expression of their literary sincerity.

In conclusion, what was most remarkable about Orwell was his approach to Socialism. As a Socialist, the approach he adopted was to attack Socialists in order to defend Socialism. First, Orwell accused the English left-wing intelligentsia over their political posture, for in his view, many of them seemed to join the left-wing movement only because it was fashionable. He criticised their book-trained guilty conscience as having little substance, proven by their disposition to take a condescending attitude towards the working class. Since the intellectuals tended to deal with Socialism only as ideas, they were incapable of associating themselves with physical reality. Secondly, Orwell indicated the lack of spiritual dimension in their thinking. He sought to find factors missing in the Left and considered which were psychological elements. Then he urged the importance of patriotism as a moral value for the left-wing intelligentsia who had slighted it. Finally, from his own experience of the Spanish Civil War, Orwell was keenly aware of the inherent evils in Communism, in Soviet politics, which would destroy the original aims of Socialism. The pro-Soviet intellectuals' subservience to the Soviet Union then became the very target of Orwell's criticism. As a writer himself, Orwell had to resist a form of politics that would restrict a writer's freedom because politics meant, for him, the writer's medium of freedom. His tendency to generalise the variations and/or complexity of 1930s literature as well as left-wing politics might have

overlooked some significant part played by the target of his critique in the period; for instance, the cultural assimilation of the Popular Front in *Left Review* and Marxist literary criticism as the product of the movement. Yet, this tendency itself reinforced the truth of Orwell's argument and made what he aimed for in Socialism more explicit and convincing.

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