

## **The North-South Divide, And Northernness in *Road to Wigan Pier* from George Orwell, A Novelist and Outsider's View**



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*"I liked them and hoped they liked me; but I went among them as a foreigner, and both of us were aware of it. Whichever way you turn this curse of class-difference confronts you like a wall of stone. Or rather it is not so much like a stone wall as the plate-glass of an aquarium; it is so easy to pretend that it isn't there, and so impossible to get through it."*<23>

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

During the time that George Orwell lived, the Britain society was on the edge of development and fluctuation, the north-south divide was an issue discussed by journalists and politics, nationally and regionally. George Orwell, by traveling up and down in the whole English territory, wrote down what exactly he saw and experienced in 1930s. In *Road to Wigan Pier*, he depicted the unemployment and living conditions in North of England, as well as the class division and his potential political views. *Road to Wigan Pier* influences historical and literature scholars and triggers huge amount of debates on the politics, economy and history of England. Most importantly, it is both a mirror of England in 1930s and a future-teller of the modern society that we are living in. As Benjamin Jonson has claimed, "*He was not of an age, but for all time!*". Most scholars consider the novel is in two parts: the first is the people he met and his physical experience in Wigan, Barnsley and Sheffield (the north). The second is his critical view on socialism in England and the middle class. In *Road to Wigan Pier*, and contemplating his personal background, what we can conclude is that George Orwell is a novelist, and he is neither a "north" nor a "south". We have no persuading reasons of his work is not as the same value as those first-hand such as scientific data and photography. However, it is worth analysing his work with the record of the broad social condition in England. As a novelist and an outsider, we can see from the whole novel *Road to Wigan Pier* that he has his own perspectives on "northernness" from the aspects of employment, working-class and class difference. All these comments of George Orwell, since subjective and personal, especially trigger the politics' thinking and the improve the social research orientation.

Therefore, in this paper, there are analysis on how George Orwell depicted the north-south divide in *Road to Wigan Pier* and what kind of position he held on the unemployment, working class and class difference in the "northernness", by comparing to other scientific research and analyzing his personal background, why the description demonstrates his character of a novelist and an outsider in the 1930s Britain society.

### **2. THE NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE IN GEORGE ORWELL'S VIEW**

The north-south divide that George Orwell described is completely detailed to daily life compared to broad scientific research. His tone in indiscriminate and rather "northernness" distinct. The northern and southern people are strikingly dichotomy in *Road to Wigan Pier*. For example, the trait of housing, "*Northern working people do not to take kindly to flats.*"<15> It is indicated that as for residence, a southern people was more likely to welcome the contemporary progress.

*"when you go to the industrial North, you are conscious, quite apart from the unfamiliar scenery, of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but more still because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed in to us for such a long time past. There exists in England a curious cult of*

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*Northernness.*" <27>

When George Orwell was travelling through England, he typically found the North of England was different. He also commented that the compared to the mining communities in the south, the north ones were strange. The way to describe the impoverished miners in the north is more like depicting a colony. He thought Britain was a strange country, but the north was more alien, from the customs to the dialects. It is truth that from a historical and geographical point of view, the north is "other" to the south area and London core. Therefore, in *Road to Wigan Pier*, the north is thoroughly differentiated from the south.

However, in a word to conclude the key difference between the North and South of England is that, from the scientific research, (Russell, 2004) the North of England is poor, the South of England is rich. Poor and rich do not only mean the economic condition but all the social aspects from politics, employment to housing price. The most direct way to minimize the divide is to enable habitants move north and south. People on both the North and South of England are trapped by the huge gap: northern people cannot afford to move to London, people in the southern part are too afraid to move "upper". (Taylor, 1993) It is researched that in the south, people are better-off while in the north people are jobless.

Apart from this there are other social problems in the north: the illegitimacy rates are the highest, the death rates are the second, there are more crime cases and the education facilities are not efficient. People attempt to have drinking habits and the housing stock is also often seen. One of the most dangerous divide is actually in people's mind: stereotype. The south Englanders are considered to be more ambitious, and entrepreneurial, they are more businessman-look and always stressful, wealthy. While the north Englanders' image is ordinary habitants: friendly, more careful with money and countryside charisma. As George Orwell reported, at the same time, the north people were able to create their own cultural community. The characters in *Road to Wigan Pier* are humanized not statistics in a report, the real personal stories were told by the observer, George Orwell.

Therefore, from the comparison of the what George Orwell wrote in *Road to Wigan Pier* and the scientific research report, we can conclude that, at that time, his role was an observer as well as a participant among the people in the North of England, he lived everyday with them, and wrote down how they lived. But he would have to leave those people after his research, this fundamentally sounded that his role was also an outsider, standing aside and watching. But he was conscious of this fact and aware of he was never part of the community he was observing. This benefits the readers to be sure about his limitation on the access of the real north-south divide in Britain and the hugest meaning of *Road to Wigan Pier* would be the "northernness" he depicted.

### 3. GEORGE ORWELL AND THE "NORTHERNNESS" HE DEPICTED

To criticize on the "northernness" that George Orwell depicted. It is crucial to consider the birth background of George Orwell, he was born in Motihari, Bihar, British India, a colony of England, outside the main land of England. He returned to England at the age of 24. He attended school in main land England but travelled back and forth during those years. His worked as a journalist and used to live the street life for four years. to some extent, he was born outside England and it is more likely to criticizing and reporting the social conditions in England in a more objective tone. However, not considering his race, he was an immigrant compared to the locals. He neither belonged to the north nor the south. ( Meyers, 1975)

During the 2 months in 1936, he visited the towns in the North of England, Lancashire and Yorkshire, and observing the living and unemployment condition of the working class, as described in *Road to Wigan Pier*, the "northernness" in George Orwell's view is more about his life in the unemployment and working class's home, what's more, as he described, the more the falling behind of the North, the more grievous the class difference is. So in the part, George Orwell and the "northernness" he depicted from the aspects of unemployment, working class and class difference.

#### 3.1 Position on the unemployment

It is known that the in the first part of *Road to Wigan Pier*, George Orwell mentioned about the comparatively rich group of people, the south, the middle class were becoming more concerned on the social problems in the industrial areas in 1930s. especially in Country Durham towns, a huge amount of people (approximately 75%) were unemployed for up to five years. Sensationalists commented that it was a "hungry England". Other socialists, such as Seebohm Rowntree, published research on the data of the poor condition in England and tried to discuss the possible solutions to creating the potential working opportunities.(Dorling, 2004)

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However, George Orwell's try was on a limited literature meaning. He talked about more on the personal experiences of the people he met during the travel through England. The characters he wrote, might not have been familiar to the middle class in the south. Therefore, it is concluded that, George Orwell did report the unknown and real condition of every single man and woman's family and working condition but *Road to Wigan Pier* has its limitation as a literacy source. *Road to Wigan Pier* is like more like a personal diary revealed to the public. Apart from this, 1930s was an unstable decade as James Vernon has claimed, it was a period before the world war, in the society, children and women were considered the poor and innocent group. But the economic crisis caused that the men in a family had to afford the malignant result as well. The victims were at every field: political issues and economic system.

Another point to mention is that, the unemployment that George Orwell observed in the North was with a historical background of the Great Depression. The employment, should be considered the same time with the rigid class difference in Britain. He presented the readers that the unemployment was fully related to the class. The educated class were more likely to have a job, while the working class were under the risk of unemployment every day. He reported that 1.8 million people were unemployed in the UK at that time, which was about 13.1 percent of the population. George Orwell did give some scientific data, however, as discussed above, different from the scientific report, *Road to Wigan Pier* is still a literature work rather than a research report for the government to solve the problem.

### 3.2 Position on the working class

*"In a working class home – I am not thinking at the moment of the unemployed, but if comparatively prosperous homes – you breathe a warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere which it is not so easy to find elsewhere. I should say that a manual worker, if he is in steady work and drawing good wages – an 'if which gets bigger and bigger' – has a better chance of being happy than an 'educated' man."* <25>

Importantly, as the social class of George Orwell as what he described on the above paragraph in *Road to Wigan Pier*, he supported working class and unconsciously, he wanted to be part of them. But by reading the whole work, and George Orwell's way of describing, he felt sorry for working class, he unconsciously thought the working class were "dangerous strangers" <17>. The same time, he separated "working class" and the so-called "educated man". Compared to the "educated class" – upper capitalism class, the economic status of George Orwell's family was much lower. George Orwell was educated, so in essence, he was departed from the both the working class and the capitalist class. As a socialist, he did not support the local England socialism, as he claimed, they are called "clever we", it was just an exchange of the imposing class: socialists become the new ruler in the imperialism England. (Stowell, 1935) He disagreed with the local socialist organizations and doubting about the practical use of the local socialists' ideas, he thought they were supposed to associate each other and come up with useful solutions to the social problems. Just as how he conducted his literature work *Road to Wigan Pier*, he criticized the divide between north and south, as well as the social activists were not solving problems practically. Himself did not experience the life of unemployment, he was fundamentally an outsider.

In chapter 2, George Orwell also discussed the working class by mentioning the miners. The scene of miners working is a "peaceful" one. However, the work is brutal. He described that the miners were able to do the work that normal people could not even bear physically. And he was fascinated by the blue scars on their forehead because of the mine stain. This is a typical trait of the "northernness", for people especially the working class, the every minute of living is the effort of surviving the next minute.

He also concerned about the welfares on work and family condition of the working class. He said the welfare discouraged people from marrying and broke up families. However, welfare is a mainstream, the worrying to welfare of George Orwell seems not reasonable. As an outsider and novelist, George Orwell's limitation occurred again.

### 3.3 Position on the class difference

As what George Orwell described in *Road to Wigan Pier*, it is an interesting point that he plunged himself in a place, washing dishes in a Parisian hotel, where lower-class living. His encourage and contribution is worth parsing. Here again, he was not part of the lower-class, but he went into their real life as a journalist and a novelist to explore the difference between classes in Britain.

The most empirical way that George Orwell indicated to define class is "income". Another point is "wealth", and most importantly, is "education". The class difference is not only built on the materials but also the un-seen knowledge level of a human being. Along with this, he provided some of the income standards in the North of England.

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*"It is ever possible to be really intimate with the working class?... I do not think it is possible.... I have seen just enough of the working class to avoid idealizing them, but I do know that you can learn a great deal in a working-class home, if only you can get there."* <115>

In George Orwell's view, it is exceedingly impossible and difficult to change one's class for the lifetime and the efforts made by the lower-class seem limited and not useful. Meanwhile, he claimed that, everyone belongs to a certain class, the class difference and prejudice exist and no one is really willing to abolish it. He grew with the growing tension of it: educated to fear and hate the working class, and even had his own prejudice on the working class. For example, saying the working class smell.

What's more, for "solving" the over-differentiation, George Orwell thought that there are effective efforts to help the poor people, however, all these require huge amount of money and time. Sometimes the virtue even matters as there should be energy consumed no matter material or sentimental. The investments and strategies are considered the most key but challenging parts. Just as how George Orwell is an outsider of the class, this differentiation would never be demolished forever, the unfamiliarity always exists and this is how George Orwell sees the "northernness": strange and does not fit.

### 4. CONCLUSION

It has been one of the most efficient and reasonable way to criticize a literature work on society and history by comparing with other materials and analyzing the personal background of the novelist. By studying the background of George Orwell, we can conclude that his social class is vague and individual, which decides that he is an outsider of the working class and capitalist. He was born in the colony of England, which means he is neither a local northern people nor a southern habitant. With this kind of background, he travelled for 2 months in the North of England, observing the "northernness", because he did not belong to any class or the north or the south, in *Road to Wigan Pier*, all the contents were based on he lived with the certain community. With the reference of the updated and same-time reports, we can find that George Orwell conducted a literacy source more than a social report with scientific data. Sometimes it is beneficial to write down as an outsider because of the objective views, however, outsider can only temporarily experience and watch the insiders' life.

In this study, it is argued that how George Orwell sees the north-south divide. He was able to explore the daily details such as how a north people considered living in the flat, to demonstrate that the north-south divide is shown from every social aspect. Just as the social class difference, the north-south divide always exists. However, as argued, there is still essential difference between *Road to Wigan Pier* and the scientific research report to the government to solve the problems. George Orwell and the "northernness" is what *Road to Wigan Pier* main about, for the reason that the description of unemployment, working class and class difference are based on his travel experience in the North of England. So it is argued in this study that how George Orwell sees the "northernness" from a novelist and outsider's view.

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