

Purpose Of George Orwell's Writings

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Abstract

George Orwell wanted to make political writing into an art. He wanted to write about partisanship and against injustice. He apparently gives us the impression that his motives in writings a book were public-spirited. This impression should not be taken as final. He says that all writers are haughty, selfish and idle and behind their motive there is some mystery. It is a horrible thing to write a book; it calls for struggle. It is some instinct that forces the writer to write. We can neither resist nor understand it. This is true that one cannot produce a great work unless one fully destroys one's own personality. He is not sure as to which of his motives are the strongest but he knows which of them have to be followed. Wherever he lacked a political purpose, he wrote lifeless books though he wrote beautiful passages, adorned them with adjectives, yet everything was meaningless.

Keywords: injustice, exploitation, selfishness, narrow-national prejudices and irrationalism.

George Orwell has got to be accepted as a thoughtful and purposeful writer as he expressed his ideas with a sense of commitment. Like H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, E.M. Forster etc. he wanted to make the world better than before so that the people might not become the victims of isolation, desperation, despair and nervousness. As a writer Orwell is one of the most individual writers that the 20th century has produced. He was both highly admired and strongly criticized for his views in his life-time and after his death his views are widely shared. His books have been translated in all the major languages of the world. His phrases such as 'Thought crime,' 'Doublethink', 'Newspeak' and 'Big Brother is watching you' have become popular in the democratic world today. Since his childhood he felt restless and uneasy and his sense of isolation troubled him with the passage of time. Since he had a minute sense of observation, he hated traditional education system, traditional school culture, class-consciousness, growing materialism, moral degeneration and affectation. As his experienced were mostly bitter, he expressed them in his essay, novels and pamphlets. Once he remarked:

...the pamphlet ought to be the literary form of an age like our own. We live in a time when political passions run high, channels of free expression are dwindling and

organized lying exists on a scale never before known. For plugging the holes in history the pamphlet is the ideal form. (CEJL, II, 326)

As he had been to Paris and had joined the literary circle there, he decided not to be a part of 'the lost generation'. Ernest Hemingway had bitter experiences in the theatre of War and George Orwell had a keen desire to expose the cruel policies of British imperialism through his essays. As a writer he followed the theory of G.B. Shaw and never wrote a line for art's sake alone. When he resigned his job as Imperial Police Officer (1927), he remarked:

I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically and secretly, of course, I was always for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. (GO 2)

In Burma he asked himself – What is humanism? What is the definition of justice? What is the duty of British authorities towards the people? He said:

I felt 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 (GO 2-3)

The above statement of George Orwell confirms that he was a champion of Havewost. He felt no hesitation in exposing brutality and tyranny and, like Charles Dickens, admitted:

My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. (GO 3)

He found no sense in serving as a police officer of British empire as the disparity between the conditions of the rulers and the ruled shattered his nerves.

As a writer he could not control his natural anger against injustice, exploitation, selfishness, narrow-national prejudices and irrationalism. Due to his serious bent of mind, he realized that there was no sense in following the pattern of burlesque literature. He accepts that he enjoyed writing tales of thrilling adventures for sometime and even imagined himself to be a Robin Hood.

Although I had to search, and did search, for the right words, I seemed to be making this descriptive effort almost against my will, under a kind of compulsion from outside. The "story" must, I suppose, have reflected the styles of the various writers. I admired at different ages, but so far as I remember it always had the same meticulous descriptive quality. (GO 11)

Orwell knew his powers as a journalist. That is why the bulk of his writings consists not of novels but non-fictional writings. He knew it very well that the novel had become the most dominant literary medium of his times and if he wanted to convey his message to the mass of humanity which he indeed wanted to, he had to shift to this genre. No writer with a strong mission wanted to reach out to a large readership and could do without fictional writing. So far as novel is concerned it had its own discipline, something which was out of the imagination of Orwell and understandably he could not write ideal novels. Polemics and propaganda were out of the limits of the novel and it was beyond his powers to create great and memorable characters. On the whole his essays and journalistic writings are much better than his novels. Alok Rai remarks:

Orwell' is obviously more than a mere pseudonym-it is also Orwell's aesthetic opportunity, a formal device, a strategy. It enables Orwell to dramatize the act of observation by embodying it in a creation which partakes of both the authority of fact and the license of fiction, and at once remove, in the creations of that creation. Did Orwell really witness a hanging, or shoot an elephant? Orwell certainly did. Orwell's work raises delicate questions of factuality because of the manner of assent it appears to demand, but it can also evade those questions with an equally delicate dexterity by invoking its aesthetic defense. (OPD 43)

George Orwell analysed various kinds of pamphlets minutely as a lot of pamphleteering was common after First World War. He had studied *A Soldier's New World*, *World Order or World Ruin*, *Bomber Command Continues*, *The Case of Austria*, *Clear Our Hitler's Agentgs*, *The Kronstadt Revolt*, *What's Wrong With The Army?* *A Letter To A Country Clergyman*, *Fighters Ever*, *Britain's Triumphant Destiny*, *When Russia Invades Palestine*, *Hitler's Story And Programme to Conquer England*. He listed the above pamphlets in different categories such as Fascist, Conservative, Democratic, Communist, Anarchist, Non party radical, Religious, Lunatic etc. and advised the readers to draw safe conclusions from the ocean of pamphlet literature. Many pamphlets of Orwell had huge sales and inspite of all oddities he continued to express his views against rubbish pamphlets. It does not mean that he condemned all pamphlets as he remarked:

We live in a time when political passions run high, channels of free expression are dwindling, and organized lying exists on a scale never before known. For plugging the holes in history the pamphlet is the ideal form. Yet lively pamphlets are very few, and the only explanation I can offer-a rather lame one-is that the publishing trade and the literary papers have never gone to the trouble of making the reading public pamphlet conscious. One difficulty of collecting pamphlets is that they are not issued in any regular manner, cannot always be procured even in the libraries of museums, and are seldom advertised and still more seldom reviewed. (CEJL, II, 326)

He knew that a few good pamphleteers were regarded lunatics as they attack the policies of political parties. On the contrary, a political party generally publishes its own pamphlet. Orwell admired Pornography and Obscenity written by D.H. Lawrence. He was quite hopeful about the bright future of non-political pamphlets as he asserted:

At present the most hopeful symptom is the appearance of the non-party leftwing pamphlet, such as the Hurricane Books. I productions of this type were as sure of being noticed in the press as are novels of verse, something would have been done towards bringing the pamphlet back to the attention of its proper public, and the level of the whole genre might rise. When one considers how flexible a form the pamphlet is, and how badly some of the events of our time need documenting, this is a thing to be desired. (CEJL, II, 327)

Like Shakespeare's Polonius, George Orwell decided at an early age to be true to himself. Like Jonathan Swift and Pope, he boldly criticized human follies, frivolities and frailties through his pen. Trilling admired the directness of his method and the presentation of political facts. Due to the moral force of his writings he had successfully stood the test of time and his essays and journals are read with interest even today. Having rejected the existing social code he found virtue in a conscious assertion of individual independence. He remarks:

We live in an age in which the autonomous individual is ceasing to exist-or perhaps one ought to say, in which the individual is ceasing to have the illusion of being autonomous. (CEJL, II, 161)

As a journalist, Orwell is not prepared to make any kind of compromise and never bothers for the cost that he had to pay. His 'individual self' is always important to him as he never allowed it to be murdered. Like Hemingway's' Santiago, he tried his level best to show 'grace under pressure'. This identify and dignity of individual self is the subject of his writings and he tries to save it in a world of ready compromise. Though he became popular after the publication of Animal Farm even decade before this, knowledgeable and discriminating readers had started paying attention to him for his candid and fresh statements. He had established himself on the literary scene of England with a certain kind of sincerity and authenticity through his journals and essays. With Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four he conveyed to the world his anxieties and fears in the most appropriate genre.

George Orwell explained the readers that it is not easy to understand the relation of ethics with art and society cannot ignore both of them. The sincerity of the writer is important as he himself was always conscious about it. He warned his readers against bad literature and unhealthy political propaganda which was made even after second world War. Bernard Crick aptly remarks.

..he (George Orwell) was defending, in a truculent way, an essentially centrist or moderate position in the Art and Society debate of the 1930s. The importance of the subject-matter or the sincerity of the writer can never excuse bad writing, but equally good writing is unlikely to come from someone with nothing to say about morality and society or who cultivates a delicate morality. (GO 362)

A person is a scholar in the real sense when he discovers the power of words and their sounds and how the association of particular word changes the meaning of the whole sentence. Just at the age of sixteen George Orwell felt extreme joy after reading the following two lines from Paradise Lost-

So he with difficulty and labour bard

Moved on : with difficulty and labour bee,

Here the spelling 'hee' for 'he' made him think and throughout his life he followed this theory of Milton and many sentences from Animal Farm can be quoted to confirm this fact. Regarding the purpose of his. profession he confesses:

I wanted to write enormous naturalistic novels with unhappy endings, full of detailed and arresting similes, and also full of purple passages in which words were used partly for the sake of their sound.... (GO 11)

In the essay Why I Write, he asserts that the readers can assess the motives of a writer only when they know the details of his early development. At the same time it is essential for them to know the tendencies of his age he lives in so that they may relate are same with his subject-matter. Here George Orwell's approach is mystified as Shakespeare had got to be studied in the background of Elizabethan age and twentieth century writers in the light of various revolutions and we World Wars. Secondly, every writer has his own emotions and feelings though he has to discipline his temperament. It means that the artist should be a matured person and be conscious of his commitment to society. Orwell remarks:

His subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in—at least this is true in tumultuous, revolutionary like our own—but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape. It is his job, no doubt, to discipline his temperament and avoid getting stuck at some immature stage, or in some perverse stood : but if he escapes from his early influences altogether , he will have killed his impulse to write. (GO 11-12)

Many writers earn their living with books and hence must be conscious of their motives every time. According to Orwell, there are four general motives for writing—Sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose. Many writers, like Milton are remembered after their death for their books. Many writers like other professionals write books to prove that their theories are superior to their grown-ups who snubbed them in their childhood. Admiring the original approach of writers, Orwell remarks:

But there is also the minority of gifted swifful people who are determined to live their own lives to the end, and writers belong in this class. Serious writers, I should say, are on the whole more vain and self-centred than journalists, though less interested in money. (GO 12)

There is no denying the fact that he followed the above mentioned approach as a novelist as well as a journalist. Secondly, many writers feel pleasure in the impact of various sounds and that makes them write. They have their own reception of beauty in the external world and hence have a desire to share their experienced with the readers. Unfortunately this aesthetic motive is weak in a lot of writers. As a journalist, however, George Orwell was conscious of the firmness of his purpose and rhythm of sentences. Thirdly, many writers have a keen desire to see things as they are and at the same time present them truly for the benefit of future generations. He himself

followed this theory and the historical and political facts about world affairs from nineteen fifteen to nineteen fifty can be gathered from his works. Fourthly, he was highly conscious about the political purpose of a work of art and advised the writers to remain detached in their approach to political matters. Unfortunately most of the books have been written with a political bias as he remarks:

Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after. Once again, no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude. (GO 12)

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