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## COMING UP FOR AIR: ORWELLIAN VISION OF THE APOCALYPSE IN THE MODERN WORLD

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### Abstract

One of the important functions of a literary text is, no doubt, to serve the purpose of revealing and predicting what to come in the future. In each period, there always appears a literary production that foresees the future and aims to warn its readers against any possible cataclysmic events. As a distinct literary genre, secular apocalyptic literature aims to present its reader the startling revelation of any cataclysmic events in the eyes of an author with his/her vivid fictional depiction

This study aims to analyse George Orwell's novel *Coming up for Air* (1939) as one of the exemplary texts of secular apocalyptic fiction by depicting the socio-cultural and historical context Orwell was influenced. With his bright prophetic vision of the future and his realistic depiction of the imminent World War II, rapid industrialisation that manifested itself especially in the mass production of firearms in the eve of World War II, Orwell achieves to warn humanity against the war and its calamity afterwards. In this regard, *Coming up for Air* still keeps its own with his revelation regarding the war that humanity should take heed of.

**Keywords:** Apocalypse, Modernism, World War II, Apocalyptic revelation.



They were born after 1914 and therefore incapable of happiness'  
Bernard Russel.

Having a life passed through series of crucial wars from Boer Wars to World Wars, Orwell established himself as one of the great political writers of his own with his realist approach to what was going on. George Orwell, Eric Arthur Blair in full, was born on 25 June 1903 in eastern India as a son to a British colonial civil servant, Richard Walmesley Blair who was responsible for the opium department. His educated started in England after leaving from Eton. After his secondary education, he decided to join the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, which would end up in the British colony of Burma that he was completely satirical. It was those years in Burma that influenced Blair to the core and shaped his thinking. During his stay he witnessed how imperialism worked or, more accurately, how it did not work as he himself notes that "[i]mperialism was an evil thing, and the sooner I chucked my job and got out of it the better" (Orwell & Angus, 1969, 236). This idea even would lead him to utter later that "I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man" (Orwell, 2021, 101). In 1927, during a short stay in England, Blair resigned and decided to become a writer. Blair's writing career starts with his several trips first to London then to Paris. His first novel *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) is all about his experiences that he noted during his visits, which was also this book that he used the pseudonym George Orwell for the first time that will continue up until his death (Orwell & Angus, 1969, 131). In the light of historical, social and literary background of Orwell's time, this paper aims to examines Orwell's *Coming up for Air* as a secular apocalyptic novel; in the grip of modern spirit just after World War I in which a British middle-class citizen felt themselves in full despair and solitude with wistful nostalgia for the idyllic past of the lost Edwardian Eden just before the World War II.

Orwell lived at a time when England witnessed the fast-growing industrialisation, the rise of capitalism, rapid social changes, and advances in the science. It was a period that the British witnessed and enjoyed the end of the long reign of Queen Victoria and the stability which the country had so long missed. The British Empire began to disintegrate. The series of wars that England would suffer had started first with the Boer War (1899-1902), which was fought by the British to assume control over the Boer republics in South Africa. It was a turning points in the history of Britain as it "marked the beginning of rebellion against British imperialism" that would be followed by other colonies (Carter & McRae, 2017, 347). This was followed by the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945), both of which resulted in nothing but millions of deaths and those who had physical and emotional wounds. In addition to all these calamities, there also emerged the Great Depression (1929-1939) that influenced the entire world. It influenced British economy adversely and resulted in massive unemployment that reached to such an unprecedented level of 23% (Winkiel, 2017, 116). Of these, the First World War was the most significant event in the history that changed the way each human being perceive the worldview and his/her 'self' within that world. Along with the rapid industrialisation and the technological advancement, it was the most horrifying war that had never been witnessed till then, as is best depicted in the following lines:

It was a war of technological and mechanical firsts; modern machinery accelerated the ease and speed with which men could be killed. Deaths among combatants and civilians alike were unprecedented – more soldiers died in World War I than in all European wars fought during the nineteenth century combined. April 1915: the first poison gas attack. January 1915: the first airship raid on England (East Anglia). September 1916: the first use of tanks in battle. February 1917: the advent of unrestricted submarine warfare. May 1917: the first air raids by planes on London. (Gilles & Mahood, 2007, 7)

Thus, it resulted in full terror previously unimaginable, leaving human beings as merely puppets in the hands of politics they were shackled by. It was such atmosphere that humanity suffered both the wartime and post-war ruins together with traumas to such a greater extent that it left an irreversible impact on the understanding of war and its after-effects. The world drawn by those who were yearning for the war for the Westerners was nothing more than a cage surrounded by flames where everything was exposed to be destroyed. He was, in a way, imprisoned in a society where his way of life and philosophy of being "stemmed from a sense of nothingness - from seeing the whole structure of being in the world as a process of human time culminating in death" (Lehan, 2012, 5).

In accordance with these historical events, the twentieth century man also witnessed changes in such fields of study like philosophy, psychology, sociology, physics, and technology to the core. It was first with Darwin's theory of evolution he illustrates in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) in the field of biology on the latter



half of the nineteenth century. Putting forward his theory of evolution by natural selection, Darwin brought the established religious dogma into question by discussing that human beings cannot be excluded from the laws of nature as one form of the living being develops from another one by the selection. This led to a religious upheaval and all religious beliefs and values be questioned therefore, the Bible was considered no longer a credible source for truth about the world (Surette, 2014, 44). In the field of philosophy, one of the influential philosophers who have great part in the modernist literature was, no doubt, Sigmund Freud. He was the first to analyse the forces that shape the individual's psyche and personality. It was his idea that "the mind is no longer a tidy bundle of thoughts and desires: it was a fascinating new territory to explore with its daydreams, its jumbled-up images and its memories" that inspired Woolf and Joyce to experiment with 'stream of consciousness' technique (Smart, 2008, 22).

The German physicist and philosopher, Ernst Mach was another influential figure in the modern understanding of 'the ego'. In his analysis of ego, Mach asserts that ego or the self is simply " a complex of experimental elements", as Wilson (2014) clarifies that "Perceptions, presentations, short, the whole inner and outer world, of varying evanescence and permanence, generous elements." The self is "not a definite unalterable, sharply bounded unity;" its limits are "very indefinite and arbitrarily and can "be extended so as to embrace the entire world" (as cited in Wilson, 2014, p. 140-141). Albert Einstein's theory of relativity had also much to do with modernist concept with his conclusion that there is nothing as universal time and that perception of time depends on the observer (Smart, 2008, 23). Along with Einstein and Mach, the French philosopher Henry Bergson also influenced the modernist literature with his 'concept of time' by distinguishing concept of time as time which is actually experienced and time which is lived - which he called 'real duration' (*durée réelle*) - and the mechanistic time of science (Bergson, 1980, 20). In his book *Modernism*, Peter Childs defines Bergsonian concept of time in two ways: (1) psychological time that can be measured by duration, and (2) "the different experience of time in the mind from the linear, regular beats of clock-time which measure all experience by the same gradations", both of which added much to Modernist's representation of time (Childs, 2017, 49). Along with him, Nietzsche with his concept of 'Übermensch' and his contribution to development of existentialism, and Karl Marx with his description of how the capitalist system works in *Das Kapital* (1867) influenced the twentieth century writers to a very great extent and they covered class stratification, capitalism and its effects on the individual in their works (Schellinger, 1998, 819).

As the world was changing fast, the literature also underwent a significant change regarding structure and style as a response to the historical, scientific and economic developments of the period and the way people dealt with those issues. Unlike the Victorian writers, a modernist writer focused on the character's perception of life and the representation of inner reality as he/she experiences, not the morality of the actions or motivation, and the depiction of life as it was in an objective and realist way. The simple reason for that was the idea that "modernisation has changed the very nature of reality" and literature "has to change its very nature" to delve into unexcavated layers of the mind of individuals (Matz, 2006, 6). That is why modernists broke the literary conventions, techniques, and styles of Victorians, as Bradbury puts it clearly:

The powerful tradition of Victorian fiction - moral, realistic, popular began to die, and something different and more complex came to emerge: the tradition of what we now name the 'modern' novel. ... The novel was aspiring to become far more complex, various, open and self-conscious form, one which, in a new way, sought to be taken seriously as "art" (Bradbury, 2001, 1-2).

A strong feeling of alienation arose. It was at such an extent that English people could not feel themselves compatible with the Victorian values, morality, optimism, and fixed conventions as before. As this was the case, modernist writers dealt with such themes as alienation, fragmentation, loss of shared values and meanings, and "concomitant search for alternative systems of belief in myth, mysticism, and primitivism - or art itself - seen by many modernists as a privileged sphere of order and of heightened epiphanic revelation" (Poplawski, 2003, 9).

Orwell's writing came into prominence with *Down and Out in Paris and London* in 1933, which marked him as one of the novelists labelled as 'Thirties' and 'Forties'. It was during this time that literature was under the influence of the politics to the core. From 1930 onwards, there was a continuous change: military dominance and political deception were the chief defining characteristics of the period, an economic crisis and the unprecedented rate of unemployment in the West, accordingly, worsened the present grim situation. To crown it all, the rise of Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany influenced the time Orwell witnessed to such an extent that it launched a process of violence that would result in the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. In such a world, the new generation of writers showed themselves as those who were capable of analysing and satirising the politics in such a way that they created a mainstream political and intellectual



mood (Carter & McRae, 2017, 496-467). For Christopher Hitchens, "Imperialism, fascism, and Stalinism" were the three main subjects that the novelists and poets of the time were dealing with (85). For Orwell, the literature of that period was the rise of 'Realism' as "the growth of realism has been the great feature of the intellectual history of our [their] own age" as it was the age all issues were political where there was no escape from "keeping out of politics" (Orwell, 1969, 118; 137). As Orwell notes, Goldman also suggests that although Orwell reflects 'the modern spirit' in his writings through such themes like alienation, a character being trapped in "a dreary, melancholic residual modernism", also noting that he is one of the representatives of "neo-realism" like Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh (Goldman, 2003, 22). From another perspective, Orwell's realism enabled him to produce novels serving as a file of social and historical documents by commenting on the social and political situations of present and prophesising future time by "using traditional forms of the novel and blending documentary facts with artistic invention in original ways (Carter & McRae, 2017, 496-467). Jesse Matz clarifies Orwell's 'realism' fully by focusing on the "social realism" which was at its peak in Victorian novel. However, he wonders if this type of realism with its description, documentation and criticism could reflect and create the same reality as the 'modern novel' achieves (Matz, 2006, 91). He answers these questions being critical to those who support that that this is impossible. He believes that there is no "striking difference between modernism in the novel and the realism that returned with the political climate of the 1930s" and asserts that both can be found in the best fiction:

The best writers knew that their social and political message would most effectively get the attention of the world if they truly opened up new ways of seeing and feeling about things, and if they described things in compelling new ways. To understand how the aesthetic and the political could join together in this way - and to understand why, at this moment, they would have to - we might turn to the work of the writer who best represents the political moment in the middle of twentieth-century fiction: George Orwell. (Matz, 2006, 91)

When these socio-cultural and historical facts are reconsidered, what genre *Coming Up for Air* suits best is no doubt the genre apocalyptic, as is proved by George Bowling's utterance in full despair: "The bad times are coming, and the streamlined men are coming too What's coming afterwards I don't know, it hardly even interests me. I only know that if there's anything you care a curse about, better say good-bye to it now, because everything you've ever known is going down, down, into the muck, with the machine-guns rattling all the time" (Orwell, 1976, pp. 225).

With such glimpse into the novel, one can notice to what extent Orwell was right in his apocalyptic vision that serves as an apocalyptic revelation he was endowed with. It is with apocalyptic glimpse that one can delve into Orwell's apocalyptic vision regarding the coming of the World War II, rapid industrialisation, and, more importantly, such after-effects as loneliness and full desperation all twentieth-century humanity in the West was plunged into.

Throughout the history, humankind has been preoccupied with some predictions as to when the forthcoming end of the world will be. This is best seen in many ancient civilisations, of which Mayan is well known in the recent history. Although its origin is not clearly stated, some characteristic depiction of apocalyptic narratives in religious texts dates back to 1200 BCE that is stored in some Persian poetic books that "discuss the Zoroastrian view of the world in prophetic terms" (Johnson, 2017, 272). Derived from the Greek word 'apocalyptein', the term apocalypse simply means to "uncover or to reveal" referring to a kind of literature that depicts the mysteries that will end up with the end of the world (Frey, 2007, 18). As humanity was into apocalypse for centuries, it was associated with many fields of study such as theology, painting and literature. Began as a religious concept that manifests itself especially in the "Book of Daniel" in the Old Testament and "The Book of Revelation" in the New Testament, Apocalyptic literature as a literary genre evaluates a text as a prophetic writing that delves into cataclysmic events, as is put by apocalyptic literature aims to "foretell of cataclysmic events that in those beliefs will transpire at the end of the world" (Trotta et al., 2020, 6). First originated as a religious term, apocalypse came to be put into two classifications as (1) religious apocalypse, and (2) secular apocalypse - of which the latter is what is apt for the world of fiction.

In the light of all these, *Coming up for Air* serves as an exemplary apocalyptic fiction with Orwellian revelation of apocalypse with his keen analysis of rapid industrialisation and the imminent coming of the World War II, which left the West in full despair behind.

First published on the 28th of June 1939 during a severe depression just before World War II, *Coming up for Air*, is a fictional story that centres itself on the experiences of the protagonist/narrator George Bowling, a middle-aged suburban insurance agent who tries to keep pace with the changes the English society is exposed to just after the First World War. Orwell draws such an atmosphere throughout the novel that one



cannot help visualising the depressive air dominating Britain before the World War II and the nightmarish illustration of Britain after the World War I, along with the ongoing anxiety before the imminent Second World War, all of which as Orwell himself witnessed. Written in the first-person point of view in four parts, the novel addresses itself to such themes as deep regret for the loss of peaceful Edwardian England due to machine-civilisation, and the approaching war with its full destructive capacity looming behind the scenes. Along with these major concerns, the novel also addresses to such concerns as nostalgia, the futility of attempts to go back and grasp the past glories back and the way how the dreams and ambitions of one's youth can be destroyed by the tedious routine of work, marriage and getting old.

The novel opens with a scene where Bowling has a day off work to go to London to collect a new set of false teeth. Throughout the novel, Bowling centres on his life history and focuses on how peaceful and happy he was before the First World War. Bowling wins seventeen pounds on the horses and thinks the possible way to spend this sum of money that he keeps secret from his family. It is in the second part of the novel that George Bowling recalls his excellent memories of childhood in Lower Binfield. He tells his reader how he and his brother used to go fishing, how he discovered a pool full of carps in it at the Binfield House estate. It was the First World War that forced him to leave Lower Binfield to join in the Army, and to go to France later. Now, he remembers that it was when his mother died that he had visited Lower Binfield. He is now married, has two children and works as a insurance agent. In part III, Bowling attends Left Book Club meeting where he listens to a lecture on anti-Fascism. This lecture horrifies him to the utmost by the slogans full of hatred. Under the influence of this meeting, being fed up with his family and entrapped in the highly industrialised England, he decides to visit Lower Binfield where he was born and reared. It was Lower Binfield that Bowling hopes to visit the places of his childhood again to see the old pond teeming with huge fish in it to have a chance to try and catch fish that he could never do when he was a child. However, things are not as he hopes in Lower Binfield, he notices that everything has changed. Part IV covers his encounter with the industrialised Lower Binfield. He is shocked to see the changes the town has undergone: his family home and workplace 'Samuel Bowling, Corn & Seed Merchant' has changed into 'Wendy's Tea-Shop', the carp pool where he hoped to fish a carp has become a rubbish dump, the stocking factory of the past is making bombs now. All his dreams shatter and feel all alone and entrapped in the grips of modernism to such an extent that all his past seem distant. The concept of 'You can't go home again' has become the notion Bowling cannot escape from.

One of the issues Orwell stresses throughout the novel is the change of less industrialised Edwardian England to modern England experiencing rapid industrialisation. Orwell is quite critical to the rapid rise of industrialisation as it involves a technological process of standardisation and mechanisation that puts ultimate limit on one's freedom. In a way, Orwell seems to suggest that this rapid rise of industrialisation is what separates man from his past leaving him isolated from his traditions he used to cherish. First implied by the new false teeth, his vision of modern world he was plunged into is depicted clearly in the scene where he tries 'frankfurter', long reddish smoked sausage, for the first time:

It gave me the feeling that I'd bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. That's the way we're going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else. Celluloid, rubber, chromium-steel everywhere, arc-lamps blazing all night, glass roofs over your head, radios all playing the same tune, no vegetation left, everything cemented over, mock-turtles grazing under the neutral fruit-trees. (Orwell, 1976, 434)

However, the more drastic change that came after rapid industrialisation is reflected through the physical description of Lower Binfield in the scene where he questions what happened to Lower Binfield during his visit. This shocking scene that emphasises the great change is depicted as follows:

Where those houses stood there used to be a little oak plantation and the trees grew too close together, so that they were very tall and thin, and in spring the ground underneath them used to be smothered in anemones. Certainly there were never any houses as far out of the town as this. Where WAS Lower Binfield? ... The chief landmarks were the church tower and the chimney of the brewery. (Orwell, 1976, 177; 536)

After trying to understand what had happened to his Lower Binfield, he suddenly concludes that it is the modern time with its rapid industrialisation that changed everything as Bowling cannot distinguish the place he saw earlier in his life. He supposes that "the High Street was about a quarter of a mile long, and except for a few outlying houses the town was roughly the shape of a cross" and "[t]he chief landmarks were the church tower and the chimney of the brewery", but when he sees the dramatic change, he desperately utters that:



All I could see was an enormous river of brand-new houses which flowed along the valley in both directions and half-way up the hills on either side. Towards the eastern end of the town there were two enormous factories of glass and concrete. That accounts for the growth of the town ... It occurred to me that the population of this place (it used to be about two thousand in the old days) must be a good twenty-five thousand (Orwell, 1976, 536).

Beyond fast-growing industrialisation, what alienates Bowling from his traditions and past is the World War I. The change was felt in the lives of individuals even economically during 1913 and 1914s although it was not reflected in that way as they were made to believe that it would not lead to "future as something to be terrified of" (Orwell, 1976, 106-107). However, it was not so; the life was expensive, the working conditions were in bad condition; workers were forced to work for long hours at low wages. This tragic fact is depicted vividly with an example as follows:

It isn't that life was softer then than now. Actually it was harsher. People on the whole worked harder, lived less comfortably, and died more painfully. The farm hands worked frightful hours for fourteen shillings a week and ended up as worn-out cripples with a five-shilling old-age pension and an occasional half-crown from the parish. ... When little Watson, a small draper at the other end of the High Street, 'failed' after years of struggling, ... he died almost immediately of what was called 'gastric trouble', but the doctor let it out that it was starvation (Orwell, 1976, 492).

In fact, Bowling's alienation from the past begins first with the death of his parents: "They lived at the end of an epoch, when everything was dissolving into a sort of ghastly flux, and they didn't know it. They thought it was eternity. You couldn't blame them. That was what it felt like", and second with his joining the army (CUFA 494). Bowling's join in the army after leaving his job in a grocery store to fight in France during the First World War has a crucial impact on his perception of life after witnessing the destructive and dehumanising power of the mechanisation that looms out of industrialisation, as is depicted:

It was like an enormous machine that had got hold of you. You'd no sense of acting of your own free will, and at the same time no notion of trying to resist. ... The machine had got hold of you and it could do what it liked with you. It lifted you up and dumped you down among places and things you'd never dreamed of, and if it had dumped you down on the surface of the moon it wouldn't have seemed particularly strange. The day I joined the Army the old life was finished. It was as though it didn't concern me any longer. (Orwell, 1976, 496)

In his discussion of war, Orwell reminds his readers of Wilfred Owen's famous War poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" with his sharp criticism of the patriotic feelings behind the war: "Why had I joined the Army? Or the million other idiots who joined up before conscription came in? Partly for a lark and partly because of England my England and Britons never never and all that stuff" (Orwell, 1976, 496). As Owen depicts clearly what war means in reality as 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' meaning "it is a wonderful and great honour to fight and die for your country", Orwell also focuses on the real meaning of war as meaningless but destructive game played in the pretext of patriotism through his narrator as the end of peaceful Edwardian life "[t]he day I joined the Army the old life was finished" (Orwell, 1976, 496).

If the protagonist's/Bowling's life represented in the novel is analysed in detail, it is clearly noticed that Orwell depicts his character in four phases. It can be noted that while the first two chapters deal with Bowling's experiences in the past, the last two chapters focuses on his present time. It is in his last two phases that Bowling finds his life quite meaningless and purposeless as was the case with the modern man/woman in twentieth century. This feeling is the major drive that forces Bowling to feel a wistful nostalgia for his past that he can never find. The present time he witnesses is the reversal of his past time; it is deprived of the peace, happiness, and the harmony he associates with his past during the Edwardian time. What he feels for the world in his present time is the world full of slogans and hatred-centred world. This is depicted in the scene where Bowling attends a lecture on "The Menacing of Fascism" in which such issues were the main concern like "Hitler, Stalin, bombs, machine guns, rubber truncheons, Rome-Berlin axis" with his wife Hilda (Orwell, 1976, 517). During the lecture, he notices a man shouting several slogans that helps nothing but merely stirs up the hatred as follows: "Bestial atrocities", "Hideous outbursts of sadism", "Concentration camps" " Iniquitous persecution of the Jews", "Back to the Dark Ages", "European civilization ...", "Defence of democracy", "Democracy", "Fascism", "Democracy" (Orwell, 1976, 516). It is with this depiction of the hatred-centred slogans and the discussions centred upon the rise of Hitler, the rise of fascism with Hitler, fascism in the pretext of democracy that Bowling first sees the approaching risk and then prophesies that the second war, the World War II with its more destructive power and its aftermath is on its way:



War! I started thinking about it again. It's coming soon, that's certain. But who's afraid of war? ... But it isn't the war that matters, it's the after-war. The world we're going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world. The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day, and the detectives watching you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces, and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really worship him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke. It's all going to happen. (Orwell, 1976, 551)

Orwell is also quite critical to the control mechanism of modernism demanded by the modern society in which marriage and the child/ren are seen simply as bonds between an individual and the society, which would be represented more extremely in Nineteen Eighty-Four with the character Julia. Although Bowling has not a happy marriage with his wife Hilda, he is not allowed to divorce her in case he breaks 'the order of things' in the modern society, as he clarifies:

There've been times when I've thought of separation or divorce, but in our walk of life you don't do those things. ... When you've lived with a woman for fifteen years, it's difficult to imagine life without her. She's part of the order of things. I dare say you might find things to object to in the sun and the moon, but do you really want to change them? Besides, there were the kids. Kids are a 'link', as they say. Or a 'tie'. (Orwell, 1976, 498)

Even more strong criticism directed throughout the novel is the illusion as means of control mechanism that is created by modernism that people believe, or more correctly, they are forced to believe. This control is clarified through Bowling's life on Ellesmere Road, West Bletchley, where a lower class 'experts' create the illusion of freedom. Bowling suggests that "nine-tenths of the people in Ellesmere Road are under the impression that they own their houses Ellesmere Road, and the whole quarter surrounding it, until you get to the High Street, is part of a huge racket called the Hesperides Estate, the property of the Cheerful Credit Building Society" (Orwell, 1976, 436). However, for Bowling, "building societies are probably the cleverest racket of modern times" as "the beauty of the building society swindles is that your victims think you're doing them a kindness" (Orwell, 1976, 436). For him, they do not have their own houses "even when [they]ve finished paying for them as "[t]hey're not freehold, only leasehold" (Orwell, 1976, 422). On the contrary, the fact is that they are not the householders but the objects as money-spinner in the grip of the capitalist system as Bowling states "... we're all in the middle of paying for our houses and eaten up with the ghastly fear that something might happen before we've made the last payment, merely increases the effect. We're all bought, and what's more we're bought with our own money" (Orwell, 1976, 437). As is noticed, Bowling is trapped in the grip of modernism from his private life to public life. No matter how he tries, he cannot get rid of it and its webs woven by industrialism, mechanisation, and the rising capitalism. He can never rebel against it. All he can do is just to detach himself from this modern world to the extent that he is victim of it. This seems to be the feeling a modern man had when Orwell wrote this novel.

Coming up for Air depicts the sharp difference between past and present. To achieve this, Orwell uses two central symbols in his novel: fishing and the bomb. It can be commented that fishing symbolises Bowling's childhood days in Lower Binfield - a nostalgia for his happy and peaceful past, the continuity of a civilisation as Bowling states that "fishing is somehow typical of that civilization. As soon as you think of fishing you think of things that don't belong to the modern world" (Orwell, 1976, 473). In a way, fishing, for Bowling, is a lifeline to survive in the modern age he is in. It also symbolises the ever-lasting peace as Bowling utters that "Fishing is the opposite of war", as he further describes: "[i]t was the thought of escaping, for perhaps a whole day, right out of the atmosphere of war. To be sitting under the poplar trees, fishing for perch, away from the Company, away from the noise and the stink and the uniforms and the officers and the saluting and the sergeant's voice!" (Orwell, 1976, 478). As 'fishing' is the symbol of happiness, peace and continuity - a kind of pure link with his past, 'the bomb' seems to symbolise just the opposite. In this regard, it can be commented that 'the bomb' symbolises the sharp break from his past, happiness and peace, which starts "with the bomber flying over the train" earlier and continues with the scene when the bomb drops nearby marketplace accidentally towards the very end of the novel (Orwell, 1976, 515; 563).

Even more significantly, it represents the ongoing discontinuity and insecurity of the past and present. To confine its meaning only to World War I is not enough as it also refers to approaching war - World War II, that also serves the purpose of apocalyptic revelation by Orwell just before the war. This break is depicted in the scene where the government drops a bomb accidentally, as is mentioned above: "But the peculiar thing is the feeling it gives you of being suddenly shoved up against reality. It's like being woken up by somebody shying a bucket of water over you. You're suddenly dragged out of your dreams by a clang of bursting metal,



and it's terrible, and it's real" (Orwell, 1976, 562). This break between past and present has been clear in the earlier scene where Bowling sees the pool as turned into a rubbish-dump at present: "You mean they've turned the pool into a rubbish-dump?" (Orwell, 1976, 559). As can be noticed, Orwell is quite angry at the discontinuity between past and present as a result of the so-called modern progress to which Orwell is severely critical. Everything from the past has been wiped off the map: the marketplace he was familiar with during his childhood has become a sprawling city of factories and housing projects, his father's seedling store has become 'Wendy's Tea Shop', there is even a factory that shocks Bowling to mass-produce bombs nearby and a big military aerodrome. This is the bitter utterance of Bowling out of desperation and loneliness, which in a way seems to be the utterance of the modern man in the twentieth century surrounded with many apocalypses all around:

Coming up for air! Like the big sea-turtles when they come paddling up to the surface, stick their noses out and fill their lungs with a great gulp before they sink down again among the seaweed and the octopuses. We're all stifling at the bottom of a dustbin, but I'd found the way to the top. Back to Lower Binfield! (Orwell, 1976, 530)

All in all, Orwell depicts a vivid realist picture of his time when England was in the grip of modernism under the influence of rapid industrialisation, the Great Depression, after-effects of World War I and the imminent World War II, each of which served as an apocalypse in its own right for Orwell that the West had never experienced to such an extent before. Drawing his character Bowling as a working-class common citizen as a doomsayer - a mouthpiece of himself in the novel, Orwell delves deep into not only the feelings of a middle-class citizen who is stuck in the effects of social and economic developments but also the after-effects of all socio-cultural and historical developments, each of which reveals itself as an apocalyptic revelation of Orwell. Throughout the paper, it has been stressed that the novel is one of the exemplary texts of apocalyptic fiction that reveals the fact that modernism together with such apocalyptic developments as industrialisation, the Great Depression, the coming of World War II, and the aftereffects of all these that are revealed as loneliness and despair that the twentieth-century man has fallen into. It is all these effects that alienate Bowling/the modern man from the past and control him in the way it requires. It has also been stressed that no matter how the character tries to escape from the modern spirit entrapped with several apocalypses in his life, he cannot "Com[e] up for air" as he witnesses that "there isn't any air" (Orwell, 1976, 560). He is, in a way, trapped within his and its [modernization's] own limits. Last but not least, illustrating his apocalyptic vision of the modern world that was going towards destructive Second World War in his own time, *Coming up for Air* also serves as a factual background for Orwell's later novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which reflects the extreme realities the English society and the world experiences after World War II.

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