

# Beneath the World of Money: Working-Class Issues in Orwell

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DIPLOMSKI RAD

Beneath the World of Money: Working-Class Issues in Orwell

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## 1. Introduction

In order to see the poor, we need to “stop for a moment”. That is, we need to cease following the routine of everyday life, a routine that usually isolates us from those unlike ourselves, those, like the poor, who generally travel different routes. We also need to overcome our “disgust,” forget our clean clothes, and enter into a furtive and typically inaccessible world. (Marsh 609)

This passage from John Marsh’s article sums up George Orwell’s philosophy he had while writing his early work. In this thesis, three of his early works are thoroughly analyzed – *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). These three works are taken because of their topics and the period they were written in. All three fall under the “early Orwell’s work” category and all contain poverty as the main subject.

Moreover, Alok Rai writes that Orwell’s work “demands that we reach out, as it does, beyond the confines of personality and even of literature, into history and politics“ and that “[i]t would require little effort, for instance, to start out discussing Orwell and slip almost instantly, imperceptibly, into discussing post-war European politics” (4, 5). This is true not just for Orwell, but for poverty and class studies in general. It is important to notice that the post-war period, the novels mentioned in this thesis were written in, was known to be a very turbulent one due to unstable economies in the West. One major event that happened in 1929 was the Wall Street crash. This was the trigger for the onset of The Great Depression which lasted for almost a decade and “resulted in massive loss of income, record unemployment rates, and output loss, especially in industrialized nations” such as Great Britain (Bondarenko).

Gaps between the classes became wider and that was especially felt by the working class as they were the ones on the losing side in “the money war”. This thesis is fixated on poverty issues to “fill what sociologists have described as significant ‘absence of a historical context in the analysis and dialogue about poverty [...]’” (Jones 2). Orwell was one of the modernist writers that offered access to “groups of people who [...] leave no statistics, no record, obituary or remembrance” (2). Eric Schocket wrote that “[i]t is important to insist on class as a process that is indelibly intertwined with the text’s diachronic movement” (19). This statement echoes Rai’s view given before. Thus, all three texts analyzed in this thesis are

taken from the 1930s and when social class is talked about, the period they come from is always taken into consideration. Even the author used half of his novel *The Road to Wigan Pier* to talk about contemporary political and economic issues. There he laid his socialist thoughts which are worth mentioning so one could understand the author's ideological background, and thus have more understanding of his works and motifs.

Stephen Ingle, when commenting on Orwell and socialism, says that “[i]n seeking to articulate socialism as a way of life, a value system, rather than an ideology, Orwell was undertaking an immensely difficult and destructive enterprise, but not an obscure one” (63). This undertaking Ingle talks about are his novels. As seen in his comment, one of the major things Orwell wanted to achieve is articulating socialism as a way of life. Arguing against capitalism and all the problems that arise with it is one of the ways to do that. Namely, Orwell's idea mentioned in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* also embodies the whole novel – “life under a decaying capitalism is deathly and meaningless” (90, 91). Orwell is strongly but covertly suggesting things he will say fully and freely in his next novel, *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

So, what interests us is how Orwell sees socialism and how it is connected to the issues of poverty. The important thing to point out at the very beginning is that “Orwell's professed goal is not to theorize socialism but to humanize it by appealing to the most basic and self-evident values, and he found these values among the working poor” (White 79). There was enough theory on socialism written before Orwell and he knew that to change something and to popularize socialism it needed not be theorized anymore – he knew that his choice was humanization.

Orwell said he was “born into what you might describe as the lower-upper-middle class” (106). Linked to this, some critics firmly believe that Orwell was “intensely against his social and educational background, was much of the time trying to cast off his [upper] class” (Hoggart 73). This could, among other things, explain why he chose to get extremely close to the working class – that might be the only way to get to know them. He said, “Words are such feeble things” (*Wigan Pier* 50). This means that real-life experience is the only thing that matters if one wants to get familiar with a lifestyle so much different from theirs. Being the adversary of the philosophy of action, “[h]is plain-spoken style may result from the fact that he was no drawing room theorist; he did not hesitate to act in the name of his beliefs” (Sulica 364).

He did not have great predictions for the future of the working class. He said that “[t]he very best the English working class can hope for is an occasional temporary decrease in unemployment” (149). However, despite this, he called for change and wrote material that screamed in favor of removing class distinctions. Orwell's work is, according to White, “informed by liberty, equality, and fraternity, or the basic values of socialism” (73). These values are explored throughout the thesis by mentioning both Orwell's thoughts and his characters' ideologies and opinions. The issues are in a great part represented and examined using Barbara Korte's tri-partite method of poverty analysis in literature, as well as Birte Christ's methodology which is explained further below.

When treating working-class issues in literature, one should focus on more than one concept due to their “multi-faceted nature” (Korte 78). Korte calls those approaches “figuration approaches”, and explains that “[a] figuration approach to poverty literature [has] to address analytical dimensions that concern individual texts as well as their extratextual communication” (79). In other words, factors outside the text, as well as those that the text contains need to be taken into consideration when analyzing poverty in literature. Korte suggests three approaches, all of which are used in this thesis: the configuration of lifeworlds; the configuration through textual form and style, and configuring agencies of articulation.

What is more, Christ's methodology and suggestions on poverty studies are used on top of figuration approaches. Christ states that poverty studies are still “a field in the making” and this thesis attempts to contribute to the field by applying known methodologies to early Orwell's novels (31). By doing this, the thesis will show Orwell in a way he has not been looked at before. Issues such as cross-class representation (an idea taken from Schocket) are important for poverty studies in general. Thus, this thesis will enrich “exciting and dynamic” studies by bringing the analysis of Orwell's most important early works to a modern level of literary criticism (31).

Gavin Jones agrees with Christ that poverty has been overlooked in literary criticism (3). Also, apart from the aforementioned methodologies, Jones' idea that “[t]here is a strong need for a critical language that can recognize the links between *and* the separation of poverty and class – it is cross-class in nature” is applied to the appropriate parts of the thesis (17). Therefore, the different methodologies will give a clearer picture and provide better arguments for the analysis of poverty representation in Orwell's early work.

## 2. Poverty Studies

At the beginning of her paper, Christ establishes the fact that “[t]he only access to poverty that we, as well as our middle-class peers, have is mediated through representations – and these range from government statistics and journalistic writing to literature and pop music” (31). The important question that Christ indirectly leads us to is the question of agency; who is the creator of the source that leads us to have insights into the world of poverty? Christ continues by saying that “[p]overty is something that most of us who enjoy the privilege of writing and reading this very book have never encountered and will never encounter first hand” (32). On this matter, Orwell’s early works are especially interesting because Orwell thrived to understand poverty first-hand whilst knowing he can get out of it at any given time. He managed to briefly experience life in poverty while having an intellectual background and being able to create literature afterward. Christ notices that the poor man’s “material conditions deprive him of something seemingly immaterial: the production of good literature” (40).

A great example for this is a character from *Wigan Pier* in which Orwell gives an example of an unnamed retired (due to injury at work) Scotch miner: “He was a big handsome man of forty, with grizzled hair and a clipped moustache, more like a sergeant-major than a miner, and he would lie in bed till late in the day, smoking a short pipe” (6). As we can see here, an apparent issue for these people is the possible (and perhaps likely) injury that can leave them unable to work. In that case, people would get a one-time compensation and later would be left alone to wander about until they have money to spend. The life of this particular man has been brought to spending too much time reading newspapers and boring his roommates with astrology and the discourse of the conflict between religion and science (8). This shows us that these people have intellectual potential, but because of social organization, were never able to fulfill it unlike Orwell, who agrees with Christ’s idea in the next passage:

[...] to write books you need not only comfort and solitude – and solitude is never easy to attain in a working-class home – you also need peace of mind. You can’t settle to anything, you can’t command the spirit of *hope* in which anything has got to be created, with that dull evil cloud of unemployment hanging over you. (73)

The crucial phrase here is the “dull evil cloud of unemployment”. The only thing worse than working in tough conditions is not being able to work at all because there are simply no jobs

offered. Understandably, one cannot be at ease with themselves as poverty influences the mind as well as the body. Christ's suggestion is connected to the body-mind influence that poverty has: "one should analyze representations of poverty with regard to the ways in which they thematize, problematize, mask, expose, and complicate the relationship between material and non-material aspects of poverty" (36). Examples of this are given throughout this thesis, such as the contrast of physical and physiological states of beggars from *Down and Out* or lodging houses in *Wigan Pier* and the unfulfilled lives of those who abide in them.

Moreover, when speaking of close-reading representation of poverty, there are two main study ideas given by Christ; cross-class representations and non-systemic explanations (and Othering<sup>1</sup> forms). First, cross-class representations are explained.

Christ gives a very important idea connected to cross-class representations: it is "rarely the poor themselves, but rather a member of the middle-class" who creates images of poverty (36). We have to keep this in mind when speaking about Orwell's works because the author himself is cross-class representing poverty even though he sometimes suggests that he is their "equal member". However, *Down and Out* is not purely a cross-class representation example in literature because those who produce and consume are not completely opposed to those who are represented. After all, the author himself is represented in first-person. Jones also mentions cross-class representation being closely tied to the downplaying of class within critical debates (8).

The other thing that Christ mentions is the notion of "pleasurable horror". She says that "poverty can be turned into a spectacle staged for the middle-class, serve voyeuristic desires, and thus perpetuate the exploitation of the poor" (39). However, one can argue that it is nearly impossible to classify a certain work as a "staged spectacle" because it is on the receiving side to determine the way they want to see it.

Even though it cannot be said that Orwell purposefully exploited the poor to gain recognition among his peers, the idea is not easy to discredit either. Christ writes:

The pain and suffering of poverty can even be used to further the material gain of the non-poor: the author describing these scenes of suffering, or the photographer taking

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<sup>1</sup> Christ speaks of the notion of "Othering" written with the capital "O", thus the same form is used in this thesis



photos of poor people may both earn their livelihood by selling these representations, and by virtue of these works may even become rich and famous. (39)

Unfortunately, apart from giving (voyeuristic to some) insight into working-class lives, Orwell did not manage to influence society on a larger scale. He “had no programme or even clear suggestions of how to solve society’s ills” (Rodden and Rossi 3). On the other hand, it is hard to find any popular poverty representations in literature which led to no material gain for the author. Because of this, Orwell cannot be discredited for writing popular poverty literature.

The following notion that Christ gives is a class-discovery text. The authors “assume that poverty is something this reader is innocent of and that needs to be revealed to her gaze” (42). This type of cross-class representation can be seen in Orwell as his target audience was the middle class. It is seen because of the over-dramatized way he often talks when describing the poor. For example, he uses the adjective “dreadful” eighteen times in the first part of *Wigan Pier*. Schocket argues that “[w]e like to like the poor. It allows us to experience our economic fragility, our position within relations of exploitation, in a manner that is not endangering. This is why we like to look [at the poor] (10)”. This can be one of the explanations for the popularity of the poverty literature (or labor literature as Schocket calls it) or even the popularity of Orwell’s early works in general.

Next, non-systemic explanations and Othering are talked about. These two notions are closely tied to each other because “the poor can be shown as belonging to another time and place, thus removing societal responsibility for their conditions” (Christ 43). There are multiple examples of Othering that are mentioned in this thesis. Different forms of Othering include; placing the poor into another time or place, showing the poor as dirty and careless people “thus being guilty of being poor”, giving them animalistic traits, and finally, showing the poor as extremely virtuous (43-45). This cannot be good because “[p]overty can appear almost as a desirable state while the reality of socio-economic suffering is downplayed” (45).

A form of Othering where the poor are shown as dirty and careless is also argued by Jones in the following paragraph:

To say that the poor possess a self-perpetuating culture is to imply that poverty is not fundamentally a product of economic and political forces, thus making the poor seem morally culpable for their financial status. (16)

The two critics agree on this form even though Jones does not call it “Othering” – he warns that a critic should be able to detect it when analyzing poverty in literature. This form of Othering is very easy to accidentally dwell into and Orwell is no stranger to it – he seems to be using it fairly often in his early works as it will be seen in this thesis.

Finally, Schocket’s idea that articulating class as a source of struggle is important for it to have force is a great example for systematic reasoning within the text (19). Notions given in this section are explored more in the following sections, along with Korte’s figurations of poverty mentioned in the Introduction.

### **3. The Configuration of Lifeworlds**

In this section aspects such as stereotypes, generalization and differentiation are talked about. Also, different personalities and circumstances are explored. Finally, attitudes toward poverty are analyzed.

To begin with, an aspect of generalization in *Down and Out in Paris and London* is examined. Orwell explained the origin of the described characters in his preface to one of the editions of the book: “All the characters that I have described in the two parts of this book represent types of their class in Paris and London, and not individuals” (Meyers, “Critical Editions” 40). This means that the poor are heavily generalized throughout the novel as they are being “grouped up” by the author into a few metonymical characters.

Additionally, concerning both generalization and stereotypes, there is an issue of lodging, shown in *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

I have noticed that people who let lodgings nearly always hate their lodgers. They want their money but they look at them as intruders and have a curiously watchful, jealous attitude which at the bottom is a determination not to let the lodger make himself too much at home. It is an inevitable result of the bad system by which the lodger has to live in somebody else’s house without being one of the family. (13)

Apart from showing how much of an issue was to be a subtenant, Orwell, by using the phrase ‘nearly always’ not only generalizes but also uses a stereotypical description of landlords. This kind of description is useful to show a reader a general situation through one specific example. This is also a great example of a systemic explanation and examples like this tell us that Orwell does not want to support the status quo when talking about societal causes of poverty.

Another example of generalization can also be found in *Wigan Pier* as Orwell depicts coalmine workers:

Most of them are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere.  
(21)

However, even these “noble bodies” do not cover the fact that these people are inflicted with serious long-term health damages due to the dangerous working environment. This is a symbolically metaphorical illustration of which perhaps not even Orwell was aware of – externally noble, internally damaged. Apart from that, this is an example of Othering by virtue – having the noblest bodies is an exaggeration through language.

There is a particularly ludicrous example of generalization in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. It is voiced by a character called Hermione Slater, a snobbish rich woman. She said: “Don’t talk to me about the lower classes [...] I hate them. They smell” (100). Sadly, this is not shocking at all since it is often expected of the rich to look down on the lower classes. Orwell had to introduce this character to show how generalization and Othering can hurt because the dominating voice of Gordon Comstock would never be able to utter or think something like this. Othering here is speaking of the lower classes as if they were animals in a barn.

Next, a great example of differentiation can be found in the first part of *Wigan Pier*. A young Cockney man, a traveler for a cigarette firm, has stayed for one night in Orwell’s lodging home. He commented that “this was his first glimpse of really low-class lodgings, the kind of place in which the poor tribe of touts and canvassers have to shelter upon their endless journeys” (15). The only comment this young man had on that place was “The filthy bloody

bastards” (15). So, someone’s blessing which is represented by having a roof over their head, even if it is a poor and dirty lodging home, is someone else’s filthy nightmare. It is a clear contradiction between the working classes and the rest and can be seen from the example given above even though it was not explicitly stated.

Differentiation between poorer North and richer South is described through language:

All the Northern accents, for instance, persist strongly, while the Southern ones are collapsing before the movies and the B.B.C. [...] and this is an immense advantage, for it makes it much easier to get into contact with the working class. (*Wigan Pier* 102)

Orwell uses the word “collapsing” to describe the merging of accents which means that he negatively sees this. There is no doubt that he enjoyed spending time with Northerners and that he deems their accent worthy of preserving, maybe even more worthy than a B.B.C. accent just because he slightly idealizes the working classes. Richard Hoggart agrees with this and he states that “Orwell sometimes sentimentalizes working-class life. His famous description of a working-class interior is slightly idealized and ‘poetic’. His account of the working-class attitude to education is oversimplified and given a touch of the noble savage” (77). As seen before, what Orwell does, in this case, is Othering of the working class by presenting them in an idealized manner and as being extremely virtuous.

The milieus and personality traits are examined next, as well as the social relationships and the circumstances of the poor’s lives. In *Down and Out*, the author introduces Charlie, a young chap he meets in Paris:

Charlie was a youth of family and education who had run away from home and lived on occasional remittances. Picture him very pink and young, with the fresh cheeks and soft brown hair of a nice little boy, and lips excessively red and wet, like cherries. His feet are tiny, his arms abnormally short, his hands dimpled like a baby’s. He has a way of dancing and capering while he talks, as though he were too happy and too full of life to keep still for an instant. (15)

It is interesting to see how Orwell describes youth in Paris at the time. From the description, it is possible to see that the main things he brings our attention to are his rawness and innocence. He names the reason for his current situation to be “running away from home”. It means that Charlie has a proactive personality, but also that he is partially guilty for the

situation he is in. This is an example of what Schocket and Christ call the non-systematic explanation. By saying he ran away from family and education, the reader can only assume that he refused everything he had and decided to live a life in poverty but examples like these certainly do not raise awareness of societal issues.

Bozo and Boris are both interesting characters from *Down and Out* and one can even look at them as the complete opposites; Boris is an ex-soldier, a destroyer, and Bozo is a scribbler, the artist, and the creator. However, their personalities are similar; both of them are fighters who do not get easily down-and-out by life's strikes.

Bozo's art is not ordinary. Every piece he paints gets erased the same day, and this shows us the pointless aspect of art and human lives in general. The peculiar thing is that the character who has the most pointless job of all depicted in the book is the happiest one. So, just like Charlie, Bozo's condition is hard, but he stands unbroken. Through the character of Bozo, we see that knowing and accepting the pointlessness as a human condition can make one truly happy. Of course, people accept pointlessness through jokes and a phlegmatic attitude toward life. This means that Bozo has a unique attitude toward poverty that is almost grateful because, as the author describes in one of the passages given in this thesis, poverty frees him from the normal way of behavior. He said: "If you set yourself to it, you can live the same life, rich or poor. You can still keep on with your books and your ideas. You just got to say to yourself, "I'm a free man in here"— he tapped his forehead – "and you're all right." (273). After all, Bozo, unlike Orwell, did not *choose* to live the way he does, and his art is not meant to stay nor to make him famous.

Boris' story is different, mostly since his background is given: "He was a big, soldierly man of about thirty five, and had been good looking, but since his illness he had grown immensely fat from lying in bed. Like most Russian refugees, he had had an adventurous life" (37). Again, the author provides us with a non-systematic reason for bringing a person into the world of poverty. It does seem, at this point that Orwell's main idea when writing the novel was not showing how society fails in certain aspects, but more to give a gaze into the worlds of the poor. The "voyeuristic" idea of Schocket and Christ can certainly be applied to *Down and Out*.

Furthermore, Furex is a character whose name is barely mentioned in the first chapter of the novel but is partly explored later in the book. Orwell describes him as "a strange

creature, a Limousin stonemason who worked steadily all the week and drank himself into a kind of paroxysm on Saturdays” (153). He is an example of a man who “cures” his unhappiness by drinking. Unlike Bozo, he does not try to grasp his difficult life and chooses to run away instead. The emphasis here is on the word “chooses” – Orwell yet again grossly misrepresents poverty and unhappiness as a choice. Just like in other descriptions, we see a non-systematic explanation of the cross-class representation.

The next character is Jules who was described as a lazy Magyar waiter. He has been a medical student who dropped out due to a lack of money. He is another character who is shown as being careless, thus bearing guilt for his poverty. This form of Othering is mentioned by both Christ and Schocket – society can “wash its hands” because this person is guilty of being poor – he most likely deserved what he got.

Valenti is a waiter, just like Jules, but does not share his laziness: “Valenti, the waiter, was a decent sort, and treated me almost as an equal when we were alone, though he had to speak roughly when there was anyone else present, for it does not do for a waiter to be friendly with *plongeurs*” (109). One can catch a glimpse of a cruel hotel service system in this description. Valenti is one of the Parisian youth who felt the cruelty of the system. He was a hard-working man, also a decent type, but fairly unlucky in the distribution of power and wealth – a great example of a stereotypical unsuccessful young man.

All these characters are mentioned to show how Orwell burdened his milieu by Othering and how he “hurled” non-systematic explanations at them. Also, even though Orwell was one of them, at least temporarily we speak of a general cross-class representation of them, and “it would be difficult to extract any political meaning other than a general bias in favour of the poor and downtrodden” (Rodden and Rossi 3).

What is more, the novel brought working-class issues very close to the readers at the time because of its autobiographical characteristics which are confirmed in Meyer’s *Life and Art*. Being in Paris and London personally, Orwell managed to bring these issues to the contemporary realism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the author did nothing revolutionary when dealing with the representation of the poor in *Down and Out* because “during the 1930s [...] when the labor novel reached its apotheosis, class was still largely apprehended through a moment of surprise, shock, or rupture” (Schocket 3).

Just like in *Down and Out*, Orwell focuses on the working-class milieu in the first part of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. He starts the novel with a description of their dwelling place. When speaking of Korte's configuration of lifeworlds, more precisely, of the issues of the working-class milieu, a place where they dwell is of paramount importance because it wonderfully paints the picture of their micro-worlds. At the beginning of *Wigan Pier*, Orwell speaks of the old lodging-house which became an ordinary dwelling-house. He decided to describe this place in as many details as possible:

We were therefore sleeping in what was still recognizably a drawing-room. Hanging from the ceiling there was a heavy glass chandelier on which the dust was so thick that it was like fur. And covering most of one wall there was a huge hideous piece of junk, something between a sideboard and a hall-stand, with lots of carving and little drawers and strips of looking-glass, and there was a once-gaudy carpet ringed by the slop-pails of years, and two gilt chairs with burst seats, and one of those old fashioned horse hair armchairs which you slide off when you try to sit on them. (5)

This detailed portrayal of the workers' residence shows us that Orwell deemed worthy estimations of social status according to the place of habitation. However, at times his choice of words seems oddly emotionally colored – words such as “hideous” and “old-fashioned” have negative connotations. This is a great case of a cross-class representation of the working-class abode, as well as a piece of text which falls into the class-discovery category. Orwell is, as Hoggart astutely notices, exposed as a middle-class man narrator who gazes into the poverty through his choice of words such as “disgusting”, which he also used to describe chewing tobacco remains found in the mine (74).

Some critics, such as Robert Pearce, think that the first part of *Wigan Pier* is not as worthy as it may seem in the first place because some information given there is inaccurate. He says that “[m]uch of the value of *Wigan Pier* seems to lie in the details Orwell provides of miners' wages and stoppages [...]” (421). Be that as it may, Pearce is splitting hairs, perhaps forgetting that he is not talking about a scientific journal entry, but about a piece of literature that always has to have, to a certain degree, an “enchanted” touch provided by the author. We should keep in mind that “selectivity of facts and their manner of expression invariably make [...] writing a creative, imaginative process as well” (Amundsen 16).

Orwell gets creative surges and is emotional many times throughout the book. For example, this is his lengthy description of coal mines:

Most of the things one imagines in hell are there – heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air, and, above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there except the feeble beams of Davy lamps and electric torches which scarcely penetrate the clouds of coal dust. (19)

Of course that many people who experienced coal mines would not agree with this description, they would even call it too dark, but Orwell sees it through the eyes of a middle-class, somewhat privileged man, and that alone brings the passage to the cross-class representation – it is not only raw and disturbing but also provides a reader with a gaze into the workers' private worlds while being safe and warm at their homes. *Wigan Pier* is full of class-discovery examples like these. These tough working conditions that brave men have to endure daily provide people with a real staged spectacle. However, this passage is a critique of society at the same time because many things that were (and still are) wrong with it can be read from this small passage from *Wigan Pier*. In the following example, Orwell makes this idea clear:

The machines that keep us alive, and the machines that make the machines, are all directly or indirectly dependent upon coal. In the metabolism of the Western world the coal-miner is second in importance only to the man who ploughs the soil. (19)

Orwell substantiates this later in the novel with a witty remark: “For all the arts of peace coal is needed; if war breaks out it is needed all the more” (29). If the metabolism of Western society depends on coal miners then they must not be underprivileged and underpaid. But the world does not function in that way.

Regarding coal miners' working conditions, a few examples from *Wigan Pier* are mentioned. When talking about their earnings, Orwell declares that they are sometimes robbed of their earnings due to factors they cannot affect, such as the quality of the coal or breakdowns in the machinery (35). Furthermore, the workers are very prone to accidents at work due to its unsafe nature. Orwell suggests that gas explosions are the most common causes for accidents, however, he also says that “a miner's safety underground depends largely on his own care and skill” (41). Their working conditions are unsafe which is not a



logical match to their earnings and as one might imagine, their living conditions correlate to the ones they experience at work. There are a lot of issues with housing as in the following example:

At the back there is the yard, or part of a yard shared by a number of houses, just big enough for the dustbin and the WC. Not a single one has hot water laid on. [...] the majority of these houses are old, fifty or sixty years old at least, and great numbers of them are by any ordinary standard not fit for human habitation. (45)

Their living conditions are atrocious and inadequate. This material poverty demonstrates the sheer will and power of the workers – both mental and physical. Ingle notices a great point concerning housing conditions in *Wigan Pier*. Even though houses Orwell described were “simply not fit to live in”, people who found themselves living in them were lucky since there was a shortage of homes (54). Finally, this problem of housing stems from the fact that “the workers and their families are not free of charge of their own lives, but are, instead, completely and immediately subject to the laws of economic necessity” (White 87).

An example where poverty impacts both the material and non-material is an unfulfilled intelligent man from *Wigan Pier* called Old Jack. He was a retired miner aged 78 but he was “alert and intelligent” (8). He is also a great example of an honorable man – in a mildly funny example, Orwell says that the thing he most admired about him was he never smoked anyone else’s tobacco, even though he would be without it at the end of every week (9). One can argue that this is one of the rare systematic representations of the poor where Orwell indirectly blames society for not providing workers with deserving pensions.

Through the analysis of Mr. Brooker, the landlord, Orwell introduces more issues:

I don’t think I’ve ever once seen his hands clean [...] and like all people with permanently dirty hands he had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things. If he gave you a slice of bread-and-butter there was always a black thumb-print on it (7-8)

Dirt connected to the landlord that is connected to the food – that forms a vicious circle of dirt which is all but typical of this specific residence. It is also using shock as a method of gazing into the poor’s world; Orwell shows them as being permanently dirty and it is felt that they almost belong to some other world. It is the way the author describes these people and places

that clearly shows how he wanted to emphasize certain things for his middle-class audience to provide them with a pleasurable shock of the gaze into the world of poverty.

On the other hand, Gordon Comstock, the main character of *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, despite having his place to stay, had other issues – some of which were bizarre. Since his introduction, a reader can feel that this young twenty-eight-year-old is a money zealot. For example, at the very beginning of the novel, we can see that this obsession creates his small, segregated, and unusual world. He had worries about running out of tobacco and paying with petty cash and we see that the poor are experiencing a different kind of reality just because of their financial instability. His mind was very occupied with (the lack of) money. Orwell writes that he was unable to finish his poem because he “couldn’t cope with rhymes and adjectives” because it is hard “with only twopence halfpenny in your pocket” (10). Ingle also argues that money is the issue that brings one to the alienated state: “It is lack of money that alienates man, possession of money that allows a person to be whole” (51). Not only it allows a person to be whole, it befouls one’s mind which ultimately leads to spiritual collapse.

Orwell later introduces a famous metaphor of the money-god. In the exemplary paragraph from the novel, Comstock declares war on the money-god: “Already, at sixteen, he knew which side he was on. He was *against* the money-god and all his swinish priesthood. He had declared war on money; but secretly, of course” (50). However, Comstock is unable to win this battle, he “holds out for as long as he can against the money system, but in a spite of his self-chosen poverty – and this is Orwell’s iconic point – all of his attitudes and his dealings with others are infected by the money god he is trying to resist” (White 88). Comstock ends up tragically, similar to Winston Smith from *1984*. They both succumb to their master, almost willingly, which makes it even worse.

The whole story of Gordon Comstock can be seen as a systematic explanation of poverty. The main message that the author sends is that the society is built in a way where class distinctions exist because of money and if one does not embrace the system, falling through the cracks of thin layers that separate classes will occur. Jones says that “[w]hen class arrives with a degree of political agency, it can be (and indeed has been) affirmed as a category of identity (10). On the topic of identity and class, Jones also says: “Just as gender can overwhelm class and entirely displace poverty in a feminist analysis [...] so too does class consciousness become a function of racial ideology rather than of economic forces” (15). Interestingly, Comstock, a man who certainly does not belong to the classic definition of a

working-class man, identifies himself as one, and through most of *The Aspidistra* acts like one. It is an example of class consciousness that works as an identity and which can sometimes overshadow even identities of gender and race – it certainly did for Gordon – the whole novel is his contemplation on a subject of class identity.

Next, in this thesis, a short discussion about the poor and their inability to do work connected with culture and intellect was already mentioned. Orwell presents this subject differently through Gordon's thoughts: "Money and culture! In a country like England you can no more be cultured without money than you can join the Cavalry Club" (13). Being a person of high intellect is, of course, never enough. Unfortunately, without money one is simply unable to reach the resources and free time to learn things which would make them a person of culture. This motif of poverty as a thought-killer recurs throughout the novel and finally culminates when Gordon manages to get a grasp on money – "Money greasing the wheels – wheels of thought as well as wheels of taxis" (172). It is not just that with money you can buy things and relationships, you can also buy the most valuable thing of all – quality thought. This means that both aspects that Christ mentions are covered by Gordon's feels – material and non-material.

The thought about the non-material aspect of poverty is reoccurring throughout the novel: "Money, once again; all is money. All human relationships must be purchased with money. If you have no money, men won't care for you, women won't love you; won't that is, care for you or love you the last little bit that matters" (19). This heartbreaking attitude is backed up by Ingle who says: "Women needed financial security and man's liberty was the price that had to be paid" (51). Thus, because of needing money to ensure that they are not alone, the poor had to give up their liberty, and with liberty down go amour-propre, pride in oneself, and morale. Ingle continues on the topic:

It was not so much poverty that ruined the unemployed but the resultant loss of self-esteem. They could no longer provide for their families or contribute to their communities: they were in fact no longer men. (54)

Ironically, if one thinks about the working class, one would imagine workers from *Wigan Pier* – muscular and strong. It is a frequent preconception about men. However, despite being physical "men", Ingle argues that there is more to a man than meets the eye and conclusively concludes that, sadly, they are "no longer men", and as Orwell would put it – "they are

unlovable” (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* 19). This is a reoccurring issue throughout the novel. Gordon, when speaking of women says at one point that even talking to them makes no sense if you are penniless (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* 78). Gordon is so obsessed with money and women that he starts blaming them because he believes they are guilty of the situation he is in. Rosemary puts Gordon into place. She tells him that she hates the way he talks about women as if they were all the same (123). She further denies Gordon’s theories about money and women by accepting him even though he does not dispose of too much money.

To add to the list of non-material issues presented from Gordon’s view, there is the following: “Lack of money means discomfort, means squalid worries, means a shortage of tobacco, means ever-present consciousness of failure – above all, it means loneliness” (37). This means that apart from the fact it is hard for them to establish romantic relationships, they cannot keep friendships as they would like them either.

When the problem of poverty is extended to children in Orwell's novels, they are not as struck by poverty as their parents, but their parents' wrong choices might influence them in a very negative way. Gordon's attitude towards parents' mistake of sending their children to the wrong school is powerful:

Probably the greatest cruelty one can inflict on a child is to send it to school among children richer than itself. A child conscious of poverty will suffer snobbish agonies such as a grown-up person can scarcely even imagine. (46)

This is a very painful experience for an emotionally fragile child. When they start grasping the fact that their families are poor, they start blaming their parents “as though they had been poor on purpose” (46).

The best example of the horrible attitude toward the working class is the character of Hermione. She calls herself a socialist and Orwell used her to show what he dislikes about contemporary socialists. She says: “I don’t see why you have to give all your money away and make friends with the lower classes” (*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* 106). The refusal of calling those people ‘the working classes’, but instead patronizing them with the expression ‘the lower classes’ speaks volumes about Hermione’s attitude towards them.

#### 4. Configuration through Textual Form and Style

This section is divided into literary modes and perspectives (voices). We will first deal with the literary mode and how it impacts the readers. In his introduction to *The Critical Heritage*, Meyers notices that

Orwell's contrast between the luxury of the grand hotel and the exploitation of the workers, his analysis of the psychology of poverty, and his direct experience and personal involvement in human degradation met the demand for social realism in the 1930s and his book was well received. (6)

Speaking about *Down and Out*, the author concludes that the novel's literary mode is social realism. Orwell appealed to the readers by being among the poor and his genuine first-hand experiences and descriptions were all very well received. Korte wrote that the choice of mode hugely impacts the readers (80). In the case of *Down and Out*, readers' attitudes are bound to be strong because poverty is not exoticized. The plot happens in Paris and London – the same places where many of the readers abided and that were socially close to them.

However, even though the author managed to somewhat experience poverty, the whole novel is a cross-class experience that even turns into a staged spectacle for the middle-class audience. The author cannot escape from the fact that he would not be able to write anything about the subject, let alone the whole novel if not for his quality education. This is something that a genuinely poor person could never experience at the time and which casts a shadow of doubt over the authenticity of the author's experiences.

On the other hand, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is a partly biographical novel that portrays Orwell's period in life while he worked in a bookshop in London (Ingle 51). He is not the only critic that deems Gordon to be Orwell's alter-ego; "The novel is perhaps more a confession of the inner turmoil and obsessive fears of the author struggling to become a successful writer than a fictionalized study of poverty" (Beadle 195).

Meyers was not too wordy when talking about the literary mode of *The Aspidistra Flying* but instead said that "Orwell was aware of the weak plot, style and characterization" of the novel (*The Critical Heritage* 10). Orwell's thoughts about working-class issues make this novel a historical piece about the author himself. Unlike *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier*, this

work does not show much imagery of poverty and thus cannot be analyzed thoroughly using conventional poverty studies' methods.

Finally, Meyers writes about *The Road to Wigan Pier*: "In January 1936 Orwell was commissioned [...] to write a personal report about economic and social conditions in the depressed industrial areas of northern England" (*The Critical Heritage* 12). A personal report is a mode that fits this work the best, especially part one where he describes workers and mines. Part two can be labeled as a personal tractate on socialism instead. Perspectives are dealt with next.

Anecdotes are the main tool Orwell used in *Down and Out* for the cross-class representation. Beadle sees this as the following: "Significantly, much [...] space is devoted to humanizing the poor, destroying the myth of the tramp monster, and demonstrating that most vagrants are no more responsible for their condition than cripples or invalids" (192). "Destroying the myth of the tramp-monster" actually is one of Orwell's main points on the last pages of the book when he writes: "I shall never again think that all tramps are drunken scoundrels (...)" (352). Also, destroying the tramp monster means giving a metaphorical rebirth to the tramp-human. Orwell tries to battle against Othering while at the same time he "Others" at many places in the book.

Korte gives a reason why it is important to study voices in poverty literature: "voice is (...) the aspect of a literary text's aesthetic that is most intimately entangled with the ethics of poverty representation because it intertwines with issues of agency" (80). Issues of the agency are extremely important for the ethics of poverty representation because it is possible to see how marginalized certain characters are and how much power and importance they are given through textual form and style.

It is also meaningful to notice Orwell's attitudes toward novel-writing and language. He believed that novels should somewhere contain disguised authors, either as a hero, a martyr, or a saint (Crompton 153). Orwell disguised himself in the marginalized voices, either by manipulating them or by altering them. Wolf says that Orwell couldn't "free himself from a set of attitudes about language that complicates if it doesn't negate the claims for transparency" (25). In other words, Orwell felt the need to alter the realities he witnessed by using language. In the terms of working-class and poverty, Orwell put the author's 'I' in every description and opinion in the novel and made them overtly personalized. "Driven by the

necessity to bear witness where others would choose silence or distortion, the persona, if not the person, of George Orwell, speaks in the first person about “his” experiences” (Wolf 24). Again, this does not change the fact that everything written by him about the poor is cross-class.

Closely tied to this topic, Ingle speaks of the purpose of the experiences in *Down and Out*:

These experiences were consciously manipulated not so much to win our sympathy for the characters, who appear only as insubstantial thumb-nail sketches for the most part, but to provide us with an understanding of their social predicament. (48)

To understand working-class issues one does have to dwell into their lives and the novel serves as a gaze-giving portal. There is no doubt that these, somewhat terrifying, but certainly realistic experiences portray different thought-provoking affairs of the working class and make the reader imagine what it means to live in poverty. This labels the whole text as a class discovery; this is a text written by a middle-class author who is trying to discover what it feels to be a part of the working class and at the same time he tries to write about it so that middle-class readers would feel the same.

This does not change the fact that Orwell included many marginalized people and gave them a literary voice to speak. Beadle gave his opinion on why Orwell included marginalized voices and presented them as individuals:

The reader is presented with a kind of sociological proof, based on personal investigation, that a sizable portion of the physically repulsive, seemingly dangerous poor are really decent, courageous people who have fallen victim to the exploitation or indifference of an inhuman socioeconomic system. (192)

This is sociological proof that strange people are not bad and that there is no reason to fear the physically repulsive as they are not different from the rest at all. Unfortunately, these banalities needed to be pointed out as people seem to judge based on appearance and socioeconomic status. Jones said that literature should acknowledge poverty as “socioeconomic suffering”, and this is what Orwell did in *Down and Out* (3).

It is interesting that in *Down and Out* both subjective and objective account is used to speak about the poor. Also, as it could be seen from the example above, the poor both speak and are spoken about. This wide variety of perspectives and methods used by Orwell to describe poverty makes this novel a great source for studying literary poverty narrative. Even though the author creates queer and monster-like creatures from an objective point of view, from the subjective point of view they are no different from non-marginalized people. As Marsh said, “[w]e may try to understand the poor, or poverty, but what matters, finally, is our critical thinking about them”, and this novel surely influences it” (614).

In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, everything is seen through the eyes of Gordon Comstock. There are not many characters that get their chance of getting a voice of their own. One of the characters who manage to “say something” in the novel is Flaxman, the first-floor lodger. However, there is nothing of major significance that he says. His main purpose is to keep the flow of Gordon’s inner voice which dominates the novel. This means that unlike the different voices described in *Down and Out*, readers get to see the world from only one perspective in this novel. There is no doubt, however, that this is done with a good reason. The author uses a voice of a character whose perspective he shares. It is logical then that he gets all the time in the world to say and think whatever he deems necessary because the author has a lot to say on the subject.

Certain characters in the novel are given a voice but they do not belong to the working class and they are in majority. This is symbolic because it shows us that the oppressed are silent, unlike the ‘pesky’ socialists who make the narrator sick with anger and helplessness. A good example of this type of character is Ravelston. Orwell ironically teases upper-classes by describing some of his traits:

He made a point of going everywhere, even to fashionable houses and expensive restaurants, in these clothes, just to show his contempt for upper-class conventions; he did not fully realize that it is only the upper classes who can do these things. (87)

The upper classes are not fully aware of their privilege. Ravelston is a great example of this because he brainlessly mocks his kin without slightly being aware of the fact that he is mocking himself and his pompous conventions.



Moreover, it is interesting how Pearce compared *The Aspidistra* to *Wigan Pier* by saying that Orwell, being a novelist in the first place, decided to check the facts about working-class life stated in *The Aspidistra*, by going to the mines with the workers and noting the specifics of their lifestyle (414). This explains how Orwell completely changed the dominating voice of the novel in *Wigan Pier*. To be more precise, he changed the voice in the first part of the novel and brought it closer to *Down and Out*. However, it is the author's descriptive voice that only looks at the working class, leaving them voiceless for that matter. This did not happen so that Orwell could degrade them; on the contrary, he attributed them with numerous idealistic descriptions. Yet, several critics suggested that Orwell was deluding himself by attributing any special moral virtues to the working class (Ingle 59).

### 5. Configuring Agencies of Articulation

Questions of the agency are important when analyzing poverty as the agents are mirrors of the whole text's ideological configuration. Knowledge about the author's personal opinions of poverty matter very much here and that is the issue raised very often in the criticism of poverty literature (Korte 80). Another thing essential for the agencies of articulation is the question of who listens to and understands what is being said (Korte 81). Thus, this section is divided into the author's involvement in working-class issues and the audience.

The author's involvement in working-class issues is explored first:

Orwell had intervened in his own life by inventing 'George Orwell' and because he had seen the role of literature and language in shaping his own destiny, so he could imagine a future in which the means of producing and distributing language (and symbols) might be used to create a new man and make a new history (Wolf 29)

Inventing "George Orwell" means that he changed everything about his life just to be able to write properly about the issues of the working class. He left his comfortable middle-class life and joined the working class. It is clear then that Orwell was deeply involved in these issues. This gives his early works great significance in the history of literature.

Wolf comments on Orwell's first-hand involvement in the affairs of the poor: "Driven by the necessity to bear witness where others would choose silence or distortion, the persona, if not the person, of George Orwell, speaks in the first person about 'his' experiences" (24). This is felt throughout *Down and Out*.

The author's direct motives that influenced him and made him very involved in working-class struggles are laid out by Hoggart:

He had to associate himself with the oppressed half of England rather than with his own kind by birth and training. He had to feel for himself the pressures the poor felt and suffer them; he had to get to know the victims of injustice, had to 'become one of them'. He had to try to root out the class-sense within himself. He did not have a romantic idea of what that last duty meant; he knew it always means trying to root out a part of yourself. (75)

However, Orwell is not merely a novelist and autobiographer, he is also an ethnographer. Michael Amundsen brings up the notion of Orwell as an ethnographer, or more precisely, as an auto-ethnographer. He says that

To know the world, he needed to know other people, often in his case the people at the bottom rung of society or those that had fallen through the cracks altogether. His method frequently was to live or work with his study group and to understand as much as possible their worldview, as any proper ethnographer would. (10)

When one looks at Orwell's novels as works of an ethnographer/novelist the parts where he speaks of someone else's experience or even lets other voices tell the story gain in importance. Amundsen has noticed that to know the people "fallen through the cracks" Orwell needed to launch himself among them – to live, eat, breath, and starve with them. The author's "starving" narrative voice is the main agent throughout the novels *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier*, which both fall into the same category according to Amundsen. The following passage from *Down and Out* is a confirmation of the statement that the author's narrative voice experiences poverty first-hand: "I was absolutely at the end of my money, and my rent was several days overdue. We loafed about the dismal empty restaurant, too hungry even to get on with the work that remained" (170).

Also, one should not ignore the importance of the text itself. "It can be argued, however, that those are texts rather than author personalities that shape the social imaginary, and that an author's possibly 'authentic' experience of poverty will not *per se* ensure a text's quality, credibility or impact" (Korte 80-81). Even though it is true that the text's quality, credibility, or impact will not be ensured, those categories still impact the readers and alter

their opinions both on the novels and on the subject of poverty. However, the relation also works vice-versa. “The relationship between a writer and his society moves on two obvious levels: society both influences and is influenced by its writers” (O’Flinn 604). This is especially clear in both *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier* as the poor milieu directly influenced the writer the same way that he later influenced the readers (some of which might have belonged to the same poor milieu that the author belonged to).

Furthermore, an insight into a few reviews that have the purpose of generalizing the opinions of the readers and time and depicting a public reaction to the novels is given next.

The American novelist James Farrell wrote that Orwell’s “account is genuine, unexaggerated and intelligent” and that he “adorns his narrative with portraits and vignettes that give the book interest and concreteness” (qtd. in Meyer, “The Critical Heritage” 47). Farrell is focused on Orwell’s brilliance, while Cecil Day Lewis, English Poet Laureate (1968-1972) writes that “if the discovery of facts made any real impression on the individual conscience, the body of active informers in this country would be inevitably increased by the number of readers of this book” (42). Lewis noticed the importance of the novel on the general public and its proactive properties which can change the world by changing individuals, one by one.

William Plomer notices that *The Aspidistra Flying* is all about money. Unlike many critics, he does not criticize any features of the novel but instead focuses on its plot. Seemingly touched by the novel, he writes that Orwell “spares us none of the horrors of sordid loneliness and a hypertrophied inferiority complex expressing itself in physical grubbiness and stupid debauchery” (65). Furthermore, Cyril Connolly agrees that the novel’s tone is dark. He describes it as “a completely harrowing and stark account of poverty, and poverty as a squalid and all-pervading influence” (67).

Just like everyone else writing about *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Walter Greenwood mentions its two-fold nature. He is genuinely impressed with Orwell’s narrative talent and calls him “a keen observer” (100). He is also pretty fair when talking about the second part of the novel which left him ‘infuriating’, but that is not the reason to discredit its value. He says that the readers are to decide for themselves whether they like it or not. Arthur Calder-Marshall is also very pleased with the book. Orwell’s beautiful narrative style is contrasted with the “appalling” picture that he paints in the first part of the novel. In the second part of

the novel, on which he focuses more in his review, Calder-Marshall comments that he “takes it to heart” because he is socialist himself, and Orwell heavily criticizes contemporary socialists in there (103). This is the exact reason why left-wing sympathizers considered this novel to be very much controversial.

## 6. Conclusion

In this thesis working-class issues that can be seen in three early Orwell’s novels (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and *The Road to Wigan Pier*) are talked about. After the introduction of the poverty studies from theorists such as Barbara Korte, Birte Christ, and Gavin Jones, the three works are close-read and analyzed.

The main goal of the thesis was to apply modern poverty studies methodologies and theories to Orwell’s works. Poverty studies are a field that still has many places for growth and this thesis tried to contribute to it by bringing criticism of Orwell to the modern standards of poverty studies. Issues mentioned concerning poverty studies are cross-class representation, systemic and non-systemic poverty explanations, as well as Christ’s notion of Othering, the contrast between material and non-material aspects of poverty, poverty in literature as a staged spectacle, and a literary text in the function of a class-discovery.

The configuration of lifeworlds is analyzed first using Korte’s method and the issues mentioned above. Methods of generalization, differentiation, and stereotypes are mentioned and the examples are drawn from the novels with short explanations. Orwell uses all these methods differently to ensure that the reader is aware these things hurt the oppressed in general. Then a thorough look is taken at the characters of *Down and Out* because that novel presents the most interesting characters with all kinds of personal issues and struggles. The character of Gordon Comstock was also given a detailed analysis in this subsection. On the contrary, when speaking of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the focus was more on the living issues rather than on the characters’ struggles. The nature of that novel is different and thus required a different approach. What is common to all three novels is that cross-class representation is present in them because the author is a middle-class man who writes about poverty and working-class experiences. *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier* also included a lot of examples of Othering, unlike *The Aspidistra* which does not contain that many examples of poverty representation.

Then, textual form and styles are explored where literary modes and perspectives are evaluated. *Down and Out* uses various anecdotes and first-hand poverty experienced by the author, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* uses a fictive reliable narrator and his thoughts. Unlike *Down and Out*, it has upper-class perspectives that influence the main narrator. Last but not least, *The Road to Wigan Pier* uses two different modes – in part one a descriptive social realism is presented, while part two is the author's essay on socialism. White nicely put it down that Orwell shall not only be remembered for his dystopian literature but also his untiring promotion of socialism as an ideal ethical basis for the world of the future (92). Also, the three novels share the contrast of material and non-material aspects. In *Down and Out* and *Wigan Pier* it is shown through representations of poverty and in *The Aspidistra* it is shown through Gordon's thoughts.

Finally, agencies of articulation are inspected through the author's involvement and critical audience. As stated in the thesis, Orwell made sure that he is personally involved in working-class lives and issues by either living like a member of them or by directly inspecting their working conditions. Representatives for the audience are contemporary critics whose opinions are mentioned in this section. There is no doubt that their reviews give insight into how the novels were received at the time even by a wider audience.

Thus, using these various methods and methodologies, issues concerning the working class are mentioned. Of course, poverty is the main issue, along with tough working conditions. Out of this, all other issues stem. Some of the most common are not being able to intellectually develop, not managing relationships with other humans properly, and abysmal living conditions. Reading about these issues, the reader should be more aware of the class differences, but the awareness itself is never enough. Marsh nicely put it that “[t]he lessons about poverty do not always or even often translate into deeds, let alone the right deeds” (623).

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## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes three early works of George Orwell – *Down and Out in Paris and London*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, and *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The main focus of the thesis is the working-class issues that Orwell presented and introduced. The insight into poverty studies is given before the analysis of the working-class personalities and living conditions as seen in the novels. Birte Christ's methodology and theory are mostly mentioned due to their detailed and applicable nature. Apart from that methodology, using figurations of poverty, the novels are interpreted through different aspects. These aspects are different types of configurations: Lifeworlds, textual form, and styles and agencies of articulation. Issues such as cross-class representation, non-systemic explanations, and class-discovery text are explained and applied to the texts. All three novels have their unique styles, for example, *Down and Out in Paris and London* is showing the author experience poverty almost first-hand, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*'s main narrator is the author's alter-ego who struggles with accepting the fact that money drives everything important in life, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* is given in two parts: part one is very similar to *Down and Out* as the author travels so he could spend time with the working classes and note facts about their lives. However, in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, the author is not experiencing poverty first-hand but rather describing what he sees. Many of the characters mentioned in the novels are analyzed in the thesis, most of them being from *Down and Out* as this novel contains much more examples of working-class people than the other two. *Wigan Pier* is mostly about the working conditions of the working class and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is a fictional story about a man who contemplates the issues of money and poverty. That is why the latter provides mostly the main character's insights on the money problem and different attitudes towards the working class.

## **Key Words**

Orwell's Early Novels, Poverty in Literature, Figurations of Poverty, Cross-Class Representation, Attitudes towards the Working Class