



“The lower classes smell”: An Olfactory Reading of George Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier*

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Abstract

The Road to Wigan Pier (1937), set in twentieth-century Northern England, serves as an olfactory text, overlooking class conditions, suspended between the two world wars. Orwell confronts class division, authoritarianism and communism in his novel and talks about socialism leading to its utopian alternative. This paper will argue how, by applying politics and aesthetics to smell, one could analyse class distinctions and class consciousness in *The Road to Wigan Pier* and whether this envisioned utopia is achieved in modern times. Orwell is haunted by a ‘stench’ from the very first day of his journey, and he writes about it so tactfully that one starts to smell the poverty, unemployment, and lodging-house issues the ‘lower classes’ were facing back in that era. This paper, divided into three sections will begin by tracing Orwellian critics, reviewers, and intellectuals who targeted middle-class aversions to industrial ‘stench’, by referring to contemporary responses to the text. It will be followed by Orwell’s obsession with the disempowered class of England through a close reading of the literalisation and deconstruction of smell in this text and his other subsequent texts. It will then discuss how Orwell uses the politics of smell to ideas of alienation, exoticisation, and eroticisation – leading to class division, not only between the English ‘upper class’ and ‘lower class’, but the whole English class as superior to the East (especially Burma and India). To conclude, the paper will argue in a broader aspect how smell is not merely an antithesis between good or bad smell but a parameter of *somatic synaesthesia* and how it stands in *as* an unconscious tool for the judgement of both ethical and unethical categories of smell.

Keywords: Olfactory ethics, Socialism, Class division, Somatic synaesthesia, Imperialistic industrialisation.