



WORKING-CLASS LIFE IN SILLITOE'S *SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING* AND *THE LONELINESS OF LONG DISTANCE RUNNER*

Josit Mariya

Research Scholar, P.G & Research Department of English, Devamatha college(M.G. University), Kuravilangadu, Kottayam, Kerala. jositmariya@gmail.com, 9446275181

Abstract

In this study seeks to analyze the life of Sillitoe's the working-class works like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and the *Loneliness of Long Distance Runner*. This article will explore the ways in which Sillitoe's portrayals of working class and their attitude towards life and society. Sillitoe through his own working-class background creates an amazing literature that accurately conveys the workers' way of life from a workers point of view.

Key Words: working-class, proletariat, 'they' and 'us', ruling-class

Alan Sillitoe is the spoke person of the English working class of the 1950s and 1960s. At the age of 14, Sillitoe gave up all hopes to continue his education and took up a job in the Raleigh Bicycle Factory; this contact with the impersonal side of industrial society is captured in his works.

Among all the works of Sillitoe *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (SNSM)* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* are the best-known books and both of them are filmed. His political ideologies have remained uncompromising. This two works gave him a tag of Angry Young Man of later 50s and early 60s. Industrial Revolution is the base for the working class literature. Sillitoe's characters in the mid-20th century were first created and defined over one hundred years ago. The impact of the second world war also is undeniable. Much more than the first war it affected all the people. Throughout the history, the working class has been the first victims of violence.

The working class men also need some kind of self-identification, a sense of dignity and a feeling of individuality. In reality, these people are not in a state of reading books. They are severely struggling to make both ends meet. In the early period, those works considered to be the working class fiction were dismantled from the reality. They find that they are not represented in novels, even if they are, the novels read only by the authors of right, who are much in favor of the bourgeois society because they are not familiar with the working man and the real attitude of the proletariat.

Arthur Seaton, the protagonist of the *SNSM*, represent the real working class young man of 1950's Britain. He spends his weeks doing a monotonous 14-pound job at the local factory and in the weekends drinking, fighting and sleeping with other's

wives. With the threat of a new war hanging heavy in the background Arthur's hedonistic approach to life is representative of a man without any hope and future, a man raging blindly against the establishment. It's not until his misdeeds come back on him that Arthur contemplates changing his ways and conforming to the system he rages against.

The novel set on the post-war period witnessed the end of rationing and plenty of jobs and unprecedented levels of prosperity for the working classes, those who see the war imagine an air of ease and contentment. Sillitoe gave a different picture of working-class in Nottingham; Arthur, a representative of his peers. Interestingly Arthur's revolt is a very much an individual affair, feeling no solidarity with the community as a whole, having no discernible target and indeed cuckolding friends and work colleagues who are in the same boat as himself. The conflict in this novel is between Arthur and his environment. Arthur is a typical representative of angry young protagonist of the last decade. One of the main characteristics of the kind of writings in the fifties and an important factor in their anger is their constant battle with society. The ruling class term themselves as 'we' and the working-class will be 'they'.

In a simple way, we can say the theme of the Saturday Night involves an initiation which a youth must undergo to learn a lesson about himself and life. Arthur, who is a representative of those heroes who today frequently called anti-heroes. He is one of a victim of forces beyond his control. He is a kind of prisoner to "bondage, frustration, or absurdity." *SNSM* is considered one of the best known 'Kitchen Sink' novels a term used to describe many post-war social-realist works that focused on the working classes and has gone down as one of the best-known novels of its time.

The Loneliness of Long Distance Runner focusses on Smith, another Nottingham teenager, also from the working class background, who has break prospects in life and a few interests beyond petty crimes. He sends to the borstal; there he turns to a long distance runner. It is for him a method of both an emotional and a physical escape from his situation. He also stands against the authority which gives him a kind of satisfaction. As he understands this relationship between himself and his natural enemy during his long-distance running, Smith decides that the only honest way to fight against this enemy while still, its captive is simply to lose the race. As he says, "I only want a bit of my own back on the In-laws and Potbellies by letting them sit up there on their big posh seats and watch me lose this race"(p* 39). And as he proceeds to lose the race as it is his straightforward rebellion against "they", the ruling class. The book was a critical and financial success. Sillitoe was awarded the Hawthorn den prize for literature in 1959.

Like *SNSM*, the theme of *LLDR* is the protagonist's expanding awareness of his environment. Smith's awareness is somewhat similar to Arthur Seaton's in that both of them come as a result of conditioned attitudes, much thinking, and a bitter initiation into maturity. Just like Arthur, Smith's attitudes are the result of his social-class; his thinking and initiation, however, are results of his long-distance running

while in Borstal. What his thinking and initiation lead Smith to be aware of is the constant existential struggle between "them" and "us."

In the framework of class conflict, Smith comes to stand as a symbol of the entire English workingmen who are at the mercy of their so-called 'society'. If we consider 'borstal', a microcosm of society but it represents the attitude of entire British isle.

Sillitoe's protagonists are most often from his own class. Critic claims that Sillitoe had lack of knowledge about other classes than his own. The characters represent usually factory workers who are unsatisfied with their monotonous lives and seek escape in one fashion or another (sometimes, like Sillitoe, through books).

In spite of the limited nature of some of Sillitoe's works, they may be viewed as episodes in a single immense fiction that gains in intensity and comprehensiveness what it lacks in scope and variety. A constant concern with the problems of the working man diffuses his novels as Sillitoe tries to provide the proletariat with some means of escape from their hopeless hard and monotonous works. And his novels, taken as a whole, is a means of escape.

Conclusion

Sillitoe tried to give a sense of individuality to the workingman through his works. In general, his conflicts are all based on the conflict between the working-class protagonist and the society. In the climax, the struggle reaches its maxim when the protagonist gains a new perspective of his life. Along with Sillitoe always relates the story from the protagonist point of view. Sillitoe, himself from the working-class background, has a constant concern with the problems of workingman. Sillitoe tries to provide the proletariat with some means of escape from their hopeless drudgery. And his novels, taken as a whole, work toward that means of escape. They are concerned with workers who recognize the treadmill on which they are imprisoned and who learn a lesson regarding the need for group affiliation. Many of the protagonists, in fact, may be viewed as the same person.

Consequently, it may be inferred that revolution is Sillitoe's most conclusive answer so far expressed in the body of his proletarian novels for removing the proletariat from their degradation. But it is in the sense of viewing Sillitoe's works as "episodes in a single immense fiction" that he has achieved his goal of providing the British working class with a body of literature which presents them in a realistic manner and allows them a certain individual dignity heretofore withheld from them, while at the same time giving renewed vitality to British fiction.

Work cited

Primary sources:

Sillitoe, Alan. *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, New York, 1959.

---. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, New York, 1958.

Secondary sources:

Hanson, Gillian Mary. *Understanding Alan Sillitoe*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.

Haywood, Ian. *Working-Class Fiction*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997.

Hitchcock, Peter. *Working-Class Fiction in Theory and Practice: A Reading of Alan Sillitoe*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989.