Nostalgia in George Orwell’s
*Coming Up For Air*

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The early 20th century has been seen as the modernist era. In fact, modernism made a revolution in human life. Simplicity, tradition, and stability of life have been replaced by technology and quick progress. Although the progressive side of life has given some comfort in people's lives, it also has caused sad consequences. For instance, during World War I, many people lost their lives. The war ruined many people's dreams. Some people lost their motivations and even handed everything over to fate. However, some still felt hopeful for the future. They thought that they might be able to achieve a delightful, safe and even an ideal future in other countries. Therefore, they decided to leave their home behind.

In fact, the wars at the beginning of modern time changed the meaning of life and caused some insoluble emotional sufferings. In other words, some people who were involved with the World Wars experienced a kind of paradoxical feeling. Actually, they dealt with the sense of losing their home and desires in the present while they still had a sense of belonging to the past life. It is better to say that these people recognised strongly their attachment to their peaceful life in the past, which was lost in those days.

It seems that they live in the present time while they have daydreams of their past. Nostalgically, these people's feelings and thoughts are shaped based on their pre-war reminiscences. In fact, their reminiscences are about to resurrect the sense of security and peace in life, which is lost. From the psychological point of view, reminding of their peaceful life applies ointment to their broken hearts. In other words, thinking about the lost pleasant past heals their spiritual wounds.

Writers and poets try to translate this new sentiment into their literary works. In fact, the sense of depression and nostalgia gradually rises in prevalent literary works. Most of the writers reflect a sense of depression and hopelessness in their writings. George Orwell takes part in this development in the 1930s. This study takes a closer look at the most nostalgic of Orwell’s fictional novels, *Coming Up For Air* (1939), which is written before the occurrence of World War Two. This essay attempts to investigate nostalgia in *Coming Up For Air* and the influence of modern life on having grief for the lost past. At the same time, this study
attempts to show the role of nostalgia in the life of the protagonist as a man of the 20th century.

**George Orwell’s background and a brief look at his works**

Relying on George Orwell’s biography written by Edward Quin, Eric Arthur Blair with the pen name George Orwell (1903-1950) was born in Motihari located in Bengal belonging to the British colony in India, where his father used to work for the opium department. His mother brought him to England at the age of one where he grew up in poverty. After finishing his study at Eton in 1920, Orwell thought that he had no chance to get a university scholarship, while his family did not have enough money to pay his tuition. He joined the Indian imperial police in Burma in 1922 but eventually his dislike of imperial rules led to his resignation. Later on, he published *Burmese Days* (1934) and two essays based on his experiences in the imperial police. In 1927, he returned to England with the hope of being a writer. England has influence on his life as far as he chose his pen name as George Orwell in 1933. George is the patron saint of England and Orwell is the name of a river in Suffolk, which was one of his most beloved English sites.

In 1927, Orwell started an expedition in the poorer areas of London and Paris to collect social materials for his writings. During his life, Orwell wrote two non-fictional books and many fictional books based on his own personal experiences.

Orwell’s reputation as a writer is based not only on his novels but also for his reviews, essays, columns in newspapers, magazines, and journals. Some of his essays and writings were collected after his death. He is a realistic writer who is aware of the situation of the lower level of society. He is a social democrat who directs his criticisms against war, totalitarian governments, and imperialism. In fact, Orwell had a better understanding of the society than his contemporaries did while he belonged to the left. Accordingly, his works are influenced by his political ideology.

Orwell became a member of the Independent Labour Party in 1938 and fought against Fascism. He published *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) after his return from Spain as a non-fictional book based on his condition and observations in the war. In fact, in this novel Orwell portrays the Spanish Civil War as a war to maintain historical significance and importance. In
Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949), he shows the ways of holding on to power which has touched the past significantly. But in Coming Up For Air, Orwell pays less attention to political complexities in the relation between past and present. He focuses more on the effect of the past on the present time. Orwell lived at the time of the two wars and consequently, depression and disappointment have become two principle themes of Orwell’s writings. Brooker claims that Orwell is aware of the effect and power of the past on the present (281).

Coming Up For Air, which was first published on the 28th of June 1939, during a severe depression just before World War II, is a fictional story about the protagonist’s nostalgic recollections. In fact, the protagonist, George Bowling, recalls his past before the beginning of the War with a deep desire. Orwell fills the novel with the depressive air dominating Britain before the War and the nightmare illustration of Britain after the War.

Material

After Orwell’s death, a collection of his letters and essays titled The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell (CEIL), was published in four volumes in 1968 for the first time. This is the closest approach ever made to get Orwell’s non-fiction in print. In fact, this publication reveals the truth about Orwell’s life and his ideology, which helps the audience interpret his works in a better way. In this regard, I have used the volumes 1 and 4 to have a better understanding of his works.

In this study, I will take a brief look at Orwell’s two other writings beside the fictional novel, Coming Up For Air to get a better understanding of the concept of nostalgia in his works. One of these writings is an autobiography titled Homage to Catalonia (1938) which has been published one year before the main novel, Coming Up For Air for the first time. He reflects on the absence of hope and optimism in a human life in Homage to Catalonia. In fact, he was impressed by the atmosphere of the time when he has been writing his works. Orwell’s experimentations in Catalonia and the depressive atmosphere of Spain during Civil War had influence on him (Galvin87). Galvin believes that Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia reflects his pessimistic view of life. He also claims that Orwell represents his experiences in Spain and his political ideology (the powerlessness of man and accordingly the powerlessness of politics) (88-89).
Another of Orwell’s writing is a poem named “On a Ruined Farm near the His Master’s Voice Gramophone Factory” (1934). This poem is one of Orwell’s early poems that reveals his nostalgic characteristic and his belonging to the lost past.

**Previous research**

The common view in previous research on *Coming Up For Air* is that Orwell writes about having grief for the past by entering the modern time. This critique is a testimony to Orwell’s “Backward-looking character” (Brooker 282). Fredric Warburg expresses that “He [Orwell] didn’t like progress, he preferred the old ways, the traditional ways” (194). Joseph Brooker also argues that *Coming Up For Air* is “a staging of nostalgia in modern English fiction” (281). I agree with this point of view, because the modernity has opened a new season in people’s lives and has made them leave their simple past life behind and step into a more complex world.

Indeed, *Coming Up For Air* is a fictional novel that highlights the power of the past on the present clearly. Samuel Hynes expresses that novels written by the novelists born in the first decade of the 20th century reflect their authors’ problematic relationship to the past (26). Indeed, Orwell is not exempted from those novelists, mentioned by Hynes. *Coming Up For Air* is not an autobiography, however, it represents Orwell’s passions and experiences to some extent. According to Federico, “The idea of using fiction to disguise a desire to write about fishing [...] shows how much Orwell cared about recording and so celebrating and dignifying the pleasures of commonplace activities” (50). Federico also claims that beside political and social points of views, Orwell “took great satisfaction in the reflection of those certain kinds of private pleasures” (50). Orwell confesses it, “Important persons [...] would stop me from enjoying this if they could. But luckily they can’t” (Orwell, *CEJL* 4 144).

In addition, among the previous research, some commentators call *Coming Up For Air* just a lament for old England. For instance, D. J. Taylor entitles this novel “nothing less than an elegy for a bygone England” (Taylor, *The Life* 260). Geoffrey Wheatcroft calls the novel a “locus classicus for Orwell’s yearning over a lost England” (38). However, in my opinion, these articles fail to recognise nostalgia as not only a lament for past times, as suggested, but an addition to this also provides a mental space where the protagonist can take a pause and
recover his will to return to the present. In fact, I believe that by the sense of nostalgia, George Bowling makes a mental room for himself. When entering it, he can escape from suffering of his monotonous modern life and feed a positive feeling of memories then return to the present with more energy.

Aim of the study

Nostalgia and its influence in George Bowling’s life is rarely discussed in academic discourse because most of the works so far deal with political affairs and the place of George Bowling in the modern life. As a result, I found nostalgia as an explicable issue in this novel based on some events, which have taken place in the early 20th century. Since Bowling suffers from his monotonous modern life style and concerns about hard living conditions in Britain after the War, so, he takes refuge in his unattainable sweet dream of the past. He denies his present and even takes the risk of breaking his marriage to make his dreams real. In fact, from a psychological point of view, only with passing through nostalgia and remembering memories, Bowling can mitigate the bad effects of hard times on his psyche and save himself from drowning in despair.

However, obviously nostalgia does not only appear in hard times but people may remember what they used to have (real objects or feelings) at any time and experience nostalgia. In fact, nostalgia has various psychological aspects, but in this study, I will focus on how it occurs in modernity set at the time of war.

The aim of this study is to analyse the sense of nostalgia by close reading of *Coming Up For Air*. By relying on a definition of nostalgia suggested by Janelle Wilson and the historical background of the 1930s, this study investigates the protagonist’s reluctance to his present time through nostalgic reflections. In this essay, I will investigate the recurrence of sorrow for the lost past in some of Orwell’s writings and will reveal the role of nostalgia as a mental place where the protagonist can take a break from the present in his life. In fact, I will argue that the sense of nostalgia is much more than what previous research have argued. I will demonstrate that nostalgia is not just a sorrowful emotion for the past but it creates a mental pause that gives a chance to Bowling to make himself ready to face the harsh living condition after the war.
In addition, in this study, I will apply the notion of Place Attachment suggested by Ben Dowler and Abraham Maslow’s Motivation Theory about human basic needs to analyse the reasons for which Bowling returned to his childhood town. In fact, by using the notion of Place Attachment, I will explain the sense of attachment to a place and reveal why Bowling feels attachment to his home in the past. Also, by relying on the Motivation Theory, I will make clear why Bowling is looking for his home in the past as one of his basic needs.

Furthermore, by the help of Sigmund Freud’s theory of Mental Structure which describes three layers of the human mind, this study explains how three layers of the human brain lead Bowling to react to his need of returning home and how finally he lets go of the dreams of the past.

Theoretical Approaches

I will follow two theoretical approaches in my analysis on Coming Up For Air,

**Historical approach:** According to A. Bennett and N. Royle, the historical approach is an approach that concentrates on a society’s events, its people’s believes and their thoughts. In fact, this approach helps the reader to understand a literary work by investigating the cultural and social settings (including an author’s biography and milieu) that produced the text (Bennet and Royle 113-15). Therefore, by investigating Orwell’s ideologies, events taking place at the time of the novel and their influences on Orwell and the society, I will reveal the concepts that lie beneath the text and will analyse the novel closer to what Orwell has tried to tell.

**Psychological approach:** Sigmund Freud’s theory of Mental Structure is one of Freud’s psychoanalytic theories. This model argues that the brain consists of three layers; id, ego and superego which appear consciously or unconsciously. These layers form during the very first years of life. Depending on how these layers have been formed and how far they have been developed, one can react differently in different situations, make decisions and behave in accordance with how these layers interact (Freud 67-72). This theory will help me to investigate the reasons of Bowling’s need to return to his home, his decision to revisit it and quitting his nostalgic imaginations based on arousing his different layers of mind. In chapter three, I will explain each layer of mind (id, ego and superego) and their functionality in
detail. Then, based on each layer’s function, I will explain how differently Bowling gives an answer to his need for returning and how finally he overcomes nostalgia.

In addition, in order to analyse nostalgia in Bowling’s personality, I need to have a close understanding of nostalgia and its features. Therefore, this study applies a definition of nostalgia suggested by Janelle Wilson.

According to J. Wilson, nostalgia refers to pleading for images of good life in the past. Nostalgia originates from nostos, a Greek word, which means, “returning home” and algia which means “longing or pain”. Therefore, nostalgia literally means “homesickness” (21). Wilson claims that the term of nostalgia is coined by Johannes Hoffer in the late seventeenth century (21). He introduces Hoffer as a Swiss physician who found symptoms of severe homesickness among Swiss soldiers that have been removed from their native country (Wilson 21).

Hofer refers to nostalgia as a medical condition of the brain, a condition in which fibres of nerve that store a person’s impressions of his/her native land steadily are in motion. Therefore, the patients always have images of their homes and live in their imaginations (qtd. in Wilson 22). In fact, nostalgia is a kind of disordering in the imagination, which does not leave any space in the patients’ mind to have any thoughts about their present. Furthermore, Wilson claims that nostalgia is an emotion of longing for the good times in the past. In fact, people who have lost their chances of a peaceful or comfortable life, experience sadness and a sense of loss (22). He also claims that homesickness is a yearning not only for a particular place in the past but also for a particular time (Wilson 22).

Beverly Butler expresses that nostalgia is folded up at the Romantic period of the nineteenth century when people’s knowledge about the nature affected by massive growing urban constructions was increasing. Accordingly, people or nations could indentify previous individuals or nations by means of remnants (467).

It is true to say that nostalgia is an emotional longing for the past that we comprehend is lost. The point is that when a place or time of our previous life no longer exists, we can no more make imaginations based on that. Accordingly, the memory gradually is forgotten, and seems lost, and nostalgia might develop. It is important to know that nostalgia is the emotional experience that derives from a recollection. For instance, visiting a traditional
building in modern time can provoke the remembrance of a childhood home and a friendly way of life.

Nostalgia can be evoked by an instant incentive such as a smell or an object. *Swann’s Way*, the first volume of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), written by Marcel Proust, is a clear example of evoking nostalgia. The story is about the protagonist’s memory of life evoked by the recollection of the past. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains how the taste of madeleine cake evokes the nostalgic remembrance of his childhood life,

> An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, [...] at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, [...] I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake. (*Swann’s Way* 31)

Hence, a simple incident can unconsciously provoke the memory of a person, time or place from which nostalgia and emotional recollection of that specific object can derive. In fact, nostalgia acts as a part of consciousness and presumes existence of an event or a place

In short, according to definitions of nostalgia, a nostalgic person has a chain of continuous memories of the lost pleasant past time especially when people conceive hardships of life. Nostalgic ones want to return to the past, although they know that it is impossible. Indeed, they experience joy and a positive feeling whenever they recall their remembrances.

**Outline of the study**

This paper is structured into four chapters. This chapter continues with three other chapters. Chapter 2 will discuss Bowling’s nostalgia and put his nostalgic features in relation to two important events of the 1930s, the Great War and the Great Depression, which reveal the spirit age of that time dominating in Britain. Some quotes from other related writings support my points. Then, based on the definition of nostalgia and the spirit of that age, this chapter proves that depression, hopelessness emerged by events of the 1930s and modernity which make a distance between Bowling and his past, have been considered as casual factors of provoking nostalgia in Bowling. In the following, some quotes from the novel support my claims.
This chapter will also take into consideration two other writings of Orwell simultaneously with *Coming Up For Air*. Comparing Orwell’s writings in this essay will show a sense of sorrow for the lost past in his writings. This chapter also illustrates my argument about Bowling’s mental space, discussed under aim of the study, by investigating the role of nostalgia in Bowling’s life.

In chapter three, three psychological theories will be discussed. By relying on each, I will analyse Bowwing’s performances and decisions. At first, I explain theories of *Place Attachment* and human needs, and by relying to each theory, I investigate the reasons behind Bowling’s returning home in detail. I will support my reasoning by referring to and quoting from the novel. Then, I will explain Freud’s theory of different mind layers and will investigate Bowling’s confrontation with the need of returning home based on each layer. Some quotes from the novel will support my arguments. Finally, in chapter four, I will sum up my analysis of the novel.
Chapter Two

Analysis of Nostalgia in *Coming Up For Air*

Before beginning the analysis, a brief summary of the novel is called for. However, for reading the complete summary more in detail, refer to this study’s appendix.

George Bowling is a married insurance salesman and the first person narrator. He finds no love in his marital life and is annoyed by his two children. He wants to go back to his childhood village, Lower Binfield, using the money he has won in a horseracing bet without his family knowing anything about it. By that, he tries to revive the simple life and happy memories of youth, remembered all the time in his mind. The story happens in 1938 just before a probable approaching war, which makes him remember the memories before WWI. He will soon get disappointed in what he is trying to reach for since the village is not how it used to be.

**Nostalgia in Bowling’s personality**

*Coming Up For Air* has many flashbacks to the past time and pleasures of George Bowling’s childhood. These flashbacks and remembrances reveal nostalgia in Bowling. After leaving the bar on his way back home, suddenly Bowling finds himself in the past days of Lower Binfield. He nostalgically remembers nature and pleasant days of his childhood by smelling the scent of tress,

> I chucked away my cigar and walked on slowly. I could smell the corpse-smell. In a manner of speaking, I can smell it now. I’m back in Lower Binfield, and the year’s 1900. Beside the horse- trough in the market-place the carrier’s horse is having its nose- bag.... (Orwell, *CUFA* 40)

Bowling as a nostalgic person successively recalls his past repeatedly with a tone filled with objections to the current time. In fact, his descriptive tone is indicating his unsatisfaction from the present time. On the other hand, the repetitions reinforce the power of the past on Bowling’s present time. Indeed, Bowling emotionally reminisces his past with a deep desire and eagerness. He says,
Sugar mice and sugar pigs were eight a penny, and so were liquorice pistols, popcorn was a halfpenny for a large bag, and a prize packet which contained several different kinds of sweets, [...], was a penny. (Orwell, *CUFA* 49)

Part 2 is the most nostalgic part of the novel. We hear Bowling’s remembrances of the past life. In fact, he remembers his childhood as an ideal life in comparison with the present time. Jeffrey Meyers expresses that an “ideal childhood [...] existed only in Orwell’s imagination” (qtd. in Brooker 282). In this part, Bowling shows satisfaction as he recalls his pleasant memories from the past. He remembers,

The white dusty roads, the host sweaty feeling of one’s clothes, the smell of fennel and wild peppermint, [...] the taste of fizzy lemonade and the gas that made one belch, the stamping on the young birds, the feel of fish straining on the line.... (Orwell, *CUFA* 80)

As we understand from the above quotation, the novel addresses some part of Bowling’s previous life in detail. In my opinion, such a way of explaining events in detail reveals to what extent Bowling is impressed by his past. He recalls all things in detail such as “the white dusty roads” and “the smell of fennel” (Orwell, *CUFA* 80). In fact, he looks like a person who still lives in his past and the time has not passed for him. Obviously, his past life has a strong influence on him and he is drowned in imaginations of the past.

**The negative events provoking nostalgia in the protagonist’s life**

In the first part, on Bowling’s way to London, planes in flight lead him to remember wars in the past. In fact, Bowling has witnessed the Boer war (1899-1902) and the Great War (1914-1918) which took place during the 1930s because he was born in 1893. He even joined the British army at the time of the Great War and participated in it.

In his first memories of war, he remembers the Boer war in which Britain was planning to found the Great British Empire and defeated the Dutch farmers,

In my case the never-never land that people are thinking of when they say ‘before the war’ might almost be before the Boer War. I was born in ‘93, and I can actually remember the outbreak of the Boer War.... (Orwell, *CUFA* 45)
When we go farther in the novel, Bowling also describes his experience of the Great War and as we read, he tries to dissuade the boy eager to combat from taking part in the predicted war. He says, “In 1914, we thought it was going to be a glorious business. Well it wasn’t. It was just a bloody mess. You keep out of it” (Orwell, *CUFA* 184).

He recalls the time when the Great War begun and people were all thin because of food shortage (Orwell, *CUFA* 35). In fact, we perceive Bowling’s concern about the life condition in Britain if the predicted war is going to happen. He thinks of what the world would be like if war occurs. Bowling reveals his fear of war consciously,

> War! I started thinking about it again. It's coming soon, that's certain. But who's afraid of war? That's to say, who's afraid of the bombs and the machine guns? "You are," you say. Yes I am, and so's anybody who's ever seen them. (Orwell, *CUFA* 182)

Truly, George Bowling shows the loneliness and depression of the early 20th century’s generation. They are the generation who lived during World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression. In fact, the 19th century man was convinced that there is a straight and unfailing path towards the future. In fact, many battles and wars had occurred before World War I but this generation believed that the reason for those wars was the immaturity of humankind. However, the First World War was different from previous ones. It was great with modern machineries, artillery and many soldiers. They fought in the Great War, which happened in the early modern time in which progress and technological advances like bombs and machine-guns raised the number of deaths. It was the first battle in which the artillery was used against human beings. In fact, many new modern types of machinery destroyed people’s will and ability to defend themselves.

This generation experienced horrors and always lived in fear of their last moment of life. Some of these people lost their faith, religion and beliefs when they found the human being powerless in confrontation with progress. In *Coming Up For Air*, Bowling describes the war as “an unspeakable idiotic mess” that creates “a wave of disbelief” in authority (Orwell, *CUFA* 150).

It seems that the World War has destroyed the idea that if you acted virtuously, good things would happen. Many good, young people went to war and died, or returned home either physically or mentally wounded (for most, both), and their faith in the moral
guideposts that had earlier given them hope, were no longer valid. Undoubtedly, during the 1920s, this generation found themselves lost in the world. In fact, their inherited values became invalid after the war. Not very long after The Great War, the Great Depression occurred.

Actually, *Coming Up For Air* was first published at the time of the Great Depression, which began from 1929 and lasted about until the early 1940s. The Great Depression refers to a severe worldwide economic depression caused by World War I and had damaging influence on all nations in the decade before World War II. It started in the U.S. for the first time when stocks’ prizes decreased. The Great Depression effected many nations. William Burns claims that the United States was the major financier of Europe after World War I but it became weak because of the war itself and debts were allocated to countries for reconstructions (187). Britain also suffered from the greatest economic crisis. The working class of the country was the victim of that economical challenge rather than middle class people. At the worse time of the early 1930s, only 3 million were unemployed in Britain and those employed benefited from falling prices (Burns 187).

Burns expresses that the Great Depression is considered as the longest and most widespread crisis of the 20th century. Although many countries started to reconstruct their economics by the middle of the 1930s, the negative effects of the Great Depression lasted until the beginning of World War II in 1939 (Burns 187).

In *Coming Up For Air*, Bowling illustrates the poverty of his past life. He recalls from the past time that many people lived and worked hard but had insufficient incomes. He says,

> The farms hands worked frightful hours for fourteen shillings a week and ended up as worn-out cripples with a five shilling old-age pension [...] and what was called respectable poverty was even worse. (Orwell, *CUFA* 130)

Furthermore, he remembers that many businesses gradually turned into “broken down bankrupts” and a small draper man who was named Watson died because of starvation while he had little assets at the moment of his death (Orwell, *CUFA* 130).

In fact, the generation of that time conceived their past gone and they imagined a dark and uncertain future for their life. The world seemed absurd to them. They had fought in the Great War and had experienced an oppressive economical crisis caused by the War. Most of them found the world meaningless. They found themselves in a hostile world, which does not care
about their needs and their future. They must have thought that their past is gone and they did not imagine a future for themselves while World War II was occurring.

George Bowling has experienced the spirit of war so he fills up with fear once again when he visualises another war, which is going to happen. In fact, he predicts bad political and economical situations ahead in London if the war takes place.

The bad times are coming, [...]. What’s coming afterwards I don’t know [...]. I only know that if there is anything you care a curse about, better say goodbye 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, *CUFA* 278)

On the other side, it is a fact that passing time and progress have destroyed nature and traditional places. Therefore, people leave their past behind unwillingly and assume it is lost. In other words, modernity ruins and destroys the natural world because of developing in urbanism, industrialism and advanced technology in construction. Bowling who loves nature describes his living area as a prison because he used to live in the rural system in which there were nature, houses, a pond, etc. Now, he lives in a town in which houses are built side by side like cells and there is no space for nature. He thinks, “what IS a road like Ellesmere Road? Just a prison with the cells all in a row” (Orwell, *CUFA* 15).

Bowling criticizes the modern world that leaves no trace of the rural system of the past. In fact, his false teeth symbolize artificiality in the modern world. The following example illustrates this issue. When Bowling was in the train on his way to London, he looks at the landscape and describes it in this way,

I looked at the great sea of roofs stretching on and on. Miles and miles of streets, fried fish shops, tin chapels, picture houses, little printing shops up back alleys, factories, blocks of flats, whelk stalls, dairies, power stations on and on and on. Enormous! And the peacefulness of it! Like a great wilderness with no wild beasts. (Orwell, *CUFA* 28)

In fact, George Bowling left his childhood and his home behind about thirty-eight years earlier. He has experienced the feeling of a secure, pleasant time and peace in his rural hometown. But, now he is a forty five years old man of the 20th century while another war is predicted. Therefore, because of the two mentioned factors (war and modernity) George Bowling gets involved with nostalgia and remembers his past time when he was playing
around the lake, biking and fishing. Truly, he had not any mental picture of the future and just flew into his childish thoughts and joys. Indeed, Bowling imagines himself in dreams of the past life. David Wykes claims, “the difference between the mental, moral atmosphere of the present and that of the not very distant past’ is one of Orwell’s obsessive themes” (qtd. in Brooker 10).

**Grief for the lost past in Orwell’s writings and the place of nostalgia in** *Coming Up For Air*

*Homage to Catalonia* is an autobiography by George Orwell which was written one year before the Second World War and shows that in comparing with *Coming Up For Air* Orwell looks at war as an incident which destroys what was inherited from the past.

In the closing paragraph of *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell reveals his concern about a widespread neglect across all of England which brings them into a war that will ruin the old England. Orwell remembers his childhood in the past peaceful England while he describes his return from the Spanish Civil War to England in 1937, He thinks,

> Then England – southern England, probably the sleekest landscape in the world. […] Down here it was still the England I had known in my childhood: the railway-cuttings smothered in wild flowers, the deep meadows where the great shining horses browse and meditate, […] the familiar streets, the posters telling of cricket matches and Royal weddings, the men in bowler hats, the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, the red buses, the blue policemen – all sleeping the deep, deep sleep of England, from which I sometimes fear that we shall never wake till we are jerked out of it by the roar of bombs. (Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Ch.14)

In other words, Orwell shows his fear of an upcoming war which could ruin the England he used to know, an England with all its archaism untouched through the time as in *Coming Up For Air*, Bowling expresses that the war has ruined his past life. He thinks, “The war had jerked me out of the old life I’d known” (Orwell, *CUFA* 151).

In the novel, Orwell clearly represents his anxiety about the future life in Britain threatened by Fascism because it was becoming powerful more and more through all of Europe, He thinks, “If I was Hitler, I would send my bombers across in the middle of a
disarmament conference. Some quite morning, when the clerks are streaming across London Bridge” (Orwell, *CUFA* 28).

Orwell also finds modernity as one of the reasons for losing the past in one of his early poems, “On a Ruined Farm near the His Master’s Voice Gramophone Factory”, before the Second World War, as he does in *Coming Up For Air*. In this poem, Orwell illustrates the modern world against the old desolated rural world and shows the narrator’s grief for the lost rural world.

In the first and second stanzas of this poem, Orwell illustrates a narrator at “the lichened gate” who is describing two worlds in contrast (Collected in *CEJL I* 158). One side of the gate is a farm with a rural system and desolated nature,

To left the black and budless trees  
The empty sties, the barn that stand  
Like stumbling skeletons (Collected in *CEJL I* 158)

On the other side of the gate, where he is standing, there is a modern city,

And to right,  
The factory-towers, white and clear  
Like distant, glittering cities seen  
from a ship’s rail-as I stand here (Collected in *CEJL I* 158)

In fact, the narrator is describing where he lives as “white and clear factory-towers”, “tapering cranes sweep around”, “great wheels turn and trains roar” made by steel, and “dizzy geometric towers” (Collected in *CEJL I* 158). The narrator depicts towers that are geographically located in apposite of the farm. This illustration is a symbol to demonstrate that the modern world is in contrast with the rural environment.

The narrator of the poem entitles the modernity and urbanism as cruel phenomenon that ruin and change places. The narrator believes that the rural system is demolished and is replaced by the modern world, “The acid smoke has soured the fields, / And browned the few and windworn flowers” (Collected in *CEJL I* 158)

If we look back to *Coming Up For Air*, we find out that Orwell shares the same view of modern life. Bowling in his trip to Binfield, describes the town as an unknown place that is
replaced by new buildings and materials because of the war. No trace was left of old places and nature. The most significant example of confrontation of modernity with nature is illustrated by Bowling’s visit from the old lake where he used to go fishing. There were no traces of the lake he used to know. It was dried and full of trashcans, used as a rubbish dump of new factories (Orwell, *CUFA* 266).

In fact, *Coming Up For Air* reveals Bowling’s hate of modern times as he entitles the modern world, “The world we’re going down into, the kind of hate-world, slogan-world” (Orwell, *CUFA* 182). As a result, Bowling rejects the present life through nostalgic reflections as Bergonzi expresses it,

> George Bowling is very much a vehicle for Orwell’s vision of English life, and his responses suggest that the troubled ambivalence expressed in Orwell’s poem of 1934, ‘On a ruined farm near the his Master’s Voice gramophone factory’ has now been resolved into outright rejection of the new architecture of the factory and the way of life associated with it. (60)

If we go farther through the poem, we find a complexity in the narrator’s thoughts. In one sense, the narrator claims that he belongs to the modern world, although immediately, in the next stanza, declares that the modern world looks strange to him. He reveals that he is hesitating between these two worlds. He is not able to live in the modern world while he is aware that he cannot turn to the past,

> But there, where steel and concrete soar
> In dizzy, geometric towers […]
> There is my world, my home; yet why

> So alien still? For I can neither
> Dwell in that world, nor turn again
> […] But none to me as I stand here
> Between two countries, both-ways torn, (Collected in *CEJL* I 159)

It seems that the narrator still has a sense of attachment to the past and does not like to quit it. Similarly, *Coming Up For Air* represents Orwell’s sense of attachment to the past as Joseph Brooker claims that George Orwell illustrates his attachment to the past. He remembers the countryside, trees, horses, birds etc. He is averse to detach from his memorable past (285-6).
This comparison among mentioned Orwell’s writings shows that Orwell is worried about losing the legacy of the past. Because he cares about the past and pictures it nicely, thus it is not far from mind that he has experienced a very good childhood and has reflected it in his writing as Orwell confesses to Julian Symons about *Coming Up For Air*.

One difficulty I have never solved is that one has masses of experiences which one passionately wants to write about, e.g., the part about fishing in the book, and no way of using them up except by distinguishing them as a novel. (Orwell, *CEJL* 1: 422)

This comparison also demonstrates that after expressing fear of losing the legacy of the past mentioned in the closing paragraph of *Homage to Catalonia*, Orwell reveals the same fear once more in *Coming Up For Air*. He as a man of World War I is worried that the same thing could happen once again to England after World War I and somehow predicts another war. In *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell illustrates what sort of feeling will be experienced in case of losing the legacy of the past. In fact, he pictures this type of fear as a grief inside Bowling as an imaginary character living after the incident, who has lost what he used to love and live for after World War I. Bowling as a man who has lost all he used to live for, recalls remnants of the past and tries to relieve in an imaginary life. In fact, in *Coming Up For Air*, Orwell pictures the grief for the lost past through nostalgia and Bowling’s attempts to make his dreams of the past real. The nostalgic atmosphere of the novel is created by both the character’s ambivalence and Orwell’s own emotion. It seems that Orwell might have had nostalgic thoughts as Joseph Booker claims that Orwell was a “backward-looking character” (288).

Indeed, there is a relation between history and Bowling’s reminiscences. Bowling believes that the life has declined in the early 20th century. Bowling illustrates the past by considering most of what he remembers from the past as “enormous”. He says, “All I could see was an enormous river....” (Orwell, *CUFA* 219), “there was a pond with enormous fish in it” (Orwell, *CUFA* 79), “that was quite straight and fringed with enormous horse....” (Orwell, *CUFA* 127). Historically, Bowling’s recollections of enormous things in the past make this idea clear that the glorious past, which had been real and meaningful before the Great War, is lost or becomes meaningless.
In fact, this part of the novel confirms George Orwell’s ideology regarding the past of England in present time. It testifies to the idea that in the 1930s, the past had an important place in human’s life and it is not only Bowling’s dream or fancy. He thinks,

I am sentimental about my childhood – not my own particular childhood, but the civilisation which I grew up in and which is now, I suppose, just about at its last kick. [...] As soon as you think of fishing you think of things that don’t belong to the modern world. (Orwell, *CUFA* 91)

Therefore, undoubtedly Bowling does not only feel sorrow for his own lost childhood but in addition, he is also scared about the destruction of his childhood England by occurrence of the impending war.

**The role of nostalgia in the protagonist’s life**

Having discussed nostalgia as a grief for the lost past, I will now turn to examining how nostalgia also has a healing function in Bowling’s life. Bowling’s inclination to stay in his past should not be disregarded in *Coming Up For Air*. In fact, Bowling has an ambivalent character. He thinks about his pleasant past as a lost opportunity, although he knows that the past is an unattainable dream. Bowling thinks,

Before the war, and especially before the Boer War, it was summer all the year around. I’m quite aware that that’s a delusion. I’m merely trying to tell you how things come back to me. (Orwell, *CUFA* 48)

Put differently, Bowling knows that his imaginations are unreal but when we read thoughts of him, we find him as a nostalgic person, who has drowned in his dreams as if his imaginations are realities. He thinks,

but this time it was the other way about, it was as though it was back in 1900 that I’d been breathing real air. Even now, with my eyes open, so to speak, all those bloody fools hustling to and fro, and the posters and the petrol-stink and the roar of the engines, seemed to me less real than Sunday morning in Lower Binfield thirty-eight years ago. (Orwell, *CUFA* 40)
In fact, the above quotation reveals Bowling’s thinking cap about the past. He believes that 1900 was the time that he could live in. He recognizes those days as an ideal time when life was in peace and was meaningful. In fact, he prefers to live in the past when modernity had not changed the world and everything still remained untouched and noble.

It is clear that Bowling has a sense of belonging to the past and it seems that he is reluctant to quit it. He thinks, “How it came back to me?” (Orwell, *CUFA* 39).

Indeed, we hear the voice of Bowling as an early 20th century man who is depressed. He has lost his motivation to continue his life. He even can live without his family. Indeed, his reluctance to modern life reveals his sense of unwillingness to live in the present time, “we are all stifling at the bottom of a dustbin” (Orwell, *CUFA* 205). In fact, he rejects his monotonous modern life style. When he eats a revolting fish sausage, we hear his thought,

> I remember reading that THEY were making sausages out of fish, and fish, no doubt, out of something different. It gave me the feeling that I’d just bitten into the modern world and discovered what it was really made of. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else […] Rotten fish in a rubber skin. (Orwell, *CUFA* 32)

From this point of view, “Rotten fish” in the last sentence of the above-mentioned quotation can be considered as a symbol of the modern world while fishing and fish have important and central roles in Bowling’s past life. This sentence demonstrates the modern world as dead things with shiny surface decorations.

Accordingly, it is true to say that Bowling seeks a place in his imaginations of the past to take refuge in from the present. In other words, he seeks to escape from his present time to the past when he was happy and time was good as nostalgic reflections. He remembers,

> 1913! My God! 1913! The stillness, the green water, the rushing of the weir! […] I mean the feeling inside you, the feeling of not being in a hurry and not being frightened, the feeling you’ve either had and don’t need to be told about, or haven’t had and won’t ever have the chance to learn. (Orwell, *CUFA* 127)

George Orwell expresses that “by retaining one’s childhood love of such things as trees, fishes, butterflies, and […] toads, one makes a peaceful and decent future a little more probable” (Orwell, *CEJL* 4: 144). Therefore, unlike some commentators’ arguments, *Coming
Up For Air is not only a sense of sorrow for the lost past or old England. In fact, it represents nostalgia as an emotional reaction that creates a mental hatch towards the imaginary past life away from wars, anxieties and modernity. By entering this mental space, Bowling can get rest and live in peace for a short time, although he knows it is an illusion. Similarly, Wilson expresses that nostalgia is between heart and head (23). He claims that although the brains of nostalgic people know that their dreams about the past are unreal, their hearts will mitigate their emotional wounds by longing for the past and the home (Wilson 23). Hence, nostalgia is a space in which nostalgic persons take a break from their unpleasant present time.

Bowling has experienced the spirit of wars and the Great Depression. By the end of the 1930s, he expects a harsh time for Britain while another war is predicted ahead. He remembers the sense of hopelessness and loneliness emerged by the Great War. Subsequently, he seeks for a place to flee from his sorrowful present time unconsciously. From a nostalgic point of view, Bowling’s mind is filled with imaginations of his glorious past, although paradoxically he is aware that he just makes dreams about lost days. However, he finds the peaceful imagination of the past as a place to get air in even for a moment. We read,

That was the world I went back to when I saw the poster about King Zog. For a moment I didn’t merely remember it, I was IN it. Of course such impressions don’t last more than a few seconds. A moment later it was as though I’d opened my eyes again, and I was forty-five and there was a traffic jam in the Strand. But it had left a kind of after-effect behind. Sometimes when you come out of a train of thought you feel as if you were coming up from deep water. (Orwell, CUFA 40)

Summary of the chapter

In summary, George Orwell has reflected the time of his living in Coming Up For Air and has illustrated his hating of the modern life. He demonstrates the 20th century English man who experienced the hard times of the 1930s while being involved with the modern life and tries to reject it.

In the comparison of Orwell’s three different works- Homage to Catalonia as an autobiography, “On a Ruined Farm near the His Master’s Voice Gramophone Factory” as a poem and Coming Up For Air as a fictional novel- we can find the same sorrowful feeling for
the past so obviously. However, Orwell, in his last novel before World War II, illustrates nostalgia as an emerged feeling from grief for the lost past inside an imaginary character.

Very close to my point of view, Annette Federico expresses that Orwell criticises the modern life and political systems, which change the world into rubbish and make distance between humans and their innocent ideal past life (50). Bowling cannot escape from his environment, so he tries to achieve peace and satisfaction with nostalgia and his daydreams (Federico 50). Indeed, nostalgia makes a sweet mental room of the past that Bowling as a man of the early 20th century resorts to from his hardships of life. In fact, he closes his eyes to the present time for a while and enters in his imaginary room where he can have all he used to have once again.
Chapter Three

Home and Returning

As we read *Coming Up For Air*, we perceive Binfield and returning home as the major concepts of the novel’s part three. In fact, Orwell represents Bowling as a nostalgic person who drowns in sweet dreams of the hometown.

Indeed, Orwell has taken a deep look at the notion of home and has given it an important role in Bowling’s life because in early modern times the war had blurred the concept of home and left houses totally ruined.

**Bowling’s reasons of Returning Home**

In the third chapter of the novel, Bowling tries to make his dreams of home real. In fact, it seems that he is left no options but revisiting his hometown. The question that rises here is why Bowling remembers his home in the past and wants to return to it constantly.

To answer this question, I need to call on Abraham Maslow’s theory of human basic needs and the concept of home suggested by Ben Dowler. However, the approach to the concept of home is done through describing the concept of place. Therefore, before unfolding the concept of home, I will describe the concept of place.

**The Concept of Place and the Sense of Place Attachment**

Ben Dowler expresses that “place is often seen as a position or location usually defined within space that relates to the personal meaning and emotion someone associates with it” (30). Dowler states that place is an abstract concept and has a meaning based on one’s mind. In other words, places make different conceptual meanings from person to person based on one’s objective connection that one used to have with that particular geographical location (30). For instance, someone who used to be in connection with a place through the sense of fear has a different definition of it in comparison with someone who is related to that place.
through intimacy and love (Dowler 30). Therefore, people can always make places in their minds apart from the actual physical locations.

The Sense of Belonging

According to Dowler, elements of place (concepts perceived like love or fear or even with socio-cultural meanings) create a sense of belonging (31). Someone who associates and interacts positively with the place, feels more sense of connection to it (Dowler 31). B. Haggerty and R. Williams suggest that the environment has a direct influence on one’s mind, spirit, and soul, although social and mental health of the person should be considered as well (qtd. in Dowler 32). They argue that the sense of belonging often relates to positive aspects of a place and a person. In other words, a person’s sense of attachment and bonding to a particular place is considered as a result of a positive feeling that he/she has perceived and experienced in that place. The sense of belonging gradually makes sense of ownership of the place in person (Haggerty and Williams as cited in Dowler 32).

As we perceived in *Coming Up For Air*, George Bowling recalls his pleasant feeling and the joys he used to have in Binfield. Hull. et al. claims that place features become symbols and icons in people’s minds (qtd. in Dowler 34). In fact, Bowling feels belonging to his childhood town because he has experienced peace and the taste of the nature there. Accordingly, he does not have the sense of belonging to his modern life because of not being able to experience the same feeling he used to in Binfield. He thinks,

The very idea of sitting all day under a willow tree beside a quiet pool - and being able to find a quiet pool to sit beside- belongs to the time before the war, before the radio, before airplanes, before Hitler. (Orwell, *CUFA* 91)

Put differently, Bowling does not feel belonging to the world of battles and technological advances in which there is no trace of peace.

**Home Place and Meaning of Home**

In fact, as a general definition, home refers to a place of residence and a shelter in which an individual or a family can rest and keep their properties. However, Tuan claims that we easily find our home as a place to reside but we should try to understand the meanings beneath the
constructed home (qtd. in Dowler 34). In fact, the meaning of home cannot be described explicitly.

The approach of attachment to home is the same as the place attachment and is caused by one’s connection to home as a place (Tuan as qtd. in Dowler 34). Therefore, home as a place is an abstract and conceptual meaning, which reveals human identity, thoughts, and beliefs and can be perceived differently from person to person. For example, if a person who has spent a pleasant time at home conceives it as a peaceful and joyful place. Hence, he/she has a sense of belonging to it because of the positive sense of safety and happiness that connected him/her to that place, a sense that George Bowling feels in his life.

In *Coming Up For Air*, Bowling has experienced a gracious and joyful time in his childhood town. He has enjoyed playing, biking and fishing over there. Obviously, he was connected with his hometown through the senses of happiness and safety, which he does not feel in his modern life. He thinks, “Up till that time fishing-rods, bicycles, fizzy lemonade, and so forth had seemed to me a good deal more real than anything that happened in the grown up world” (Orwell, *CUFA* 114).

In fact, he feels a strong connection between his soul and his hometown where he has experienced a pleasant time. Thus, he feels a sense of belonging to his lost hometown in the past where he used to be happy and safe, although it does not exist anymore except its memory, he narrates, “Is it gone forever? I’m not certain. But I tell you it was a good world to live in. I belong to it....” (Orwell, *CUFA* 41). The relationship of a mother and her child is a clear example to make this sense of belonging more tangible. A child has a sense of bonds and belonging to his mother either in her presence or not.

However, Bowling feels attachment to his hometown where he spent his boyhood and connected emotionally with as Dowler argues that place attachment happens through time and people continuously feel it (37). He also expresses that it takes place through the body’s and the mind’s association and affection with the place (Dowler 37). In other words, Bowling’s recollections of the past reveal that he feels belonging to his hometown where he grew up in connection with a sense of safety and happiness. In this regard, Susan Thompson explains that carrying the memories of a place for a lifetime, shows the human sense of attachment to that place (qtd. in Dowler 25).
As a result of place attachment, Bowling tries to revisit his hometown where he feels, like an innate need, he belongs as Dowler claims that the sense of belonging to a place can be considered as an innate need of a person (36).

**The need for security as a human basic need**

As mentioned in chapter one, we should not forget that the generation of the wars found themselves powerless, hopeless and unsecure in confrontation with modernity. In this situation, a need for safety rises in the human’s soul as an instinctive need. In fact, according to Abraham Maslow’s *Motivation Theory*, human basic needs are formed as a pyramid, which demonstrates the hierarchy of human needs (16). This pyramid ranges from individual needs such as biological, safety, and belongingness to needs for respect, fame, glory and self-esteem (Maslow 16). Maslow also claims that when a basic need has not been answered, it develops a specific appetite for that missing need until it is answered (16). Maslow argues that persons can reach proper psychological health if they meet all their needs. For that reason, human basic needs are also called psychological needs (4).

If we look to the novel from Maslow’s perspective, we perceive Bowling as a man of wars who feels insecurity in the present time because of another war predicted ahead. Put differently, he has experienced fear and the sense of losing safety during war times. Hence, he feels insecure when he thinks of the war. He thinks,

> Is it going to happen? No knowing. Some days it’s impossible to believe it. Some days I say to myself that it’s just a scare got up by the newspapers. Some days I know in my bones there’s no escaping it. (Orwell, *CUFA* 36)

According to Maslow’s theory, Bowling’s need for safety should be answered. Therefore, Bowling who has experienced pleasant time away from the fear and horror of war in his childhood town, distinguishes Binfield as a safe place. As a result, he finds returning to Binfield as the only way to feel safe again and to make his nostalgic remembrances real.

Although, times and eras affect the meaning of home. After the World Wars, modernity was seen even as a tool for reconstruction of ruined houses all over the world. However, the concept of home as a peaceful place has not been changed over time because people were in connection with home by the sense of security and peace before war times. In fact, the
concept of home has been considered as a safe place at all times as Moore expresses that home is a safe place in the world (qtd. in Dowler 27). Dowler also argues that this sense of home emerges from closeness between one and the home place (27).

In addition, Claire Langhamer claims that a pioneering social investigative organization (Mass-Observation) has questioned some men and women of the middle class about the meaning of home (343). In fact, Mass Observation collects socially observed evidence in Britain (343). Langhamer claims that according to statistics provided by this organization, men and women have different perceptions of the notion of home (343). However, the majority of people equally consider the home as a great importance and some other regard it as the centre of their life. They considered the home as a place of comfort, relaxation, and freedom while all of them regarded home as a warm place for peace and security (Langhamer 343-4).

Hence, from a social and psychological point of view, a sense of attachment to home and a need for safety as one of the human’s basic needs make Bowling return to his hometown, Binfield.

**Bowling’s psychological responses to his need for returning based on Freud’s theory**

Having explained the sense of *Place Attachment* and the need for security as Bowling’s reasons for returning home, now I will discuss how Bowling gives different responses to his need for returning based on different layers of mind, suggested by Freud. Sigmund Freud, a psychoanalyst, has defined a structural model of the human’s psyche for the first time in 1932. His theory of *Mental Structure* suggests that the human brain is formed by three theoretical constructs and all human activities and interactions in life is interpreted and described in terms of these three parts.

Freud has divided the human brain into three parts: Id, Ego, and Superego (67). In fact, this distribution ranges from the illogical part of the mind to the mature one. Id is responsible for human instinctive and primitive needs even desires that have been inherited at birth (Freud 67). In other words, id is a part of the brain that contains basic unorganised drives. Actually, id seeks pleasures and avoids pain or any displeasure caused by growing instinctual tension (Freud 67).
Freud expresses that id occurs unconsciously as he describes it in this way,

> It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the dream-work [...] and most of that is of a negative character [...] We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations [...] It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle. (67)

Id has no sense of judgment to distinguish what is wrong or right (Freud 68). Freud expresses that “[id] knows no judgements of value: no good and evil, no morality [...] Instinctual cathexes seeking discharge - that, in our view, is all there is in the id” (68). Therefore, it is true to say that id seeks basic instincts, which form the basis of human pleasure in life even with no attention to morality.

**Id and Bowling**

In *Coming Up For Air*, as mentioned in chapter two, George Bowling represents features of an early 20th century English man who has lived in war times. He has experienced The Great War while the modern life gets him away from his ideal past. He concerns himself about the future of Britain and feels insecurity when he imagines the new war predicted ahead. Based on Freud’s theory, in this intensive situation of life, Bowling’s instinctual need for safety and happiness is aroused in his soul. It seems that a scared creature starts to cry for security in his soul and Bowling just feels it. Hence, he unconsciously seeks the sense of security as an instinctive need.

At this point, nothing can stop him except returning to his hometown where he has experienced such feelings. In fact, he feels an inner need and tension towards his hometown and tries to make his dream of returning to Lower Binfield real by revisiting there.

However, according to Freud’s distribution of mind, people’s mind does not limit itself to the instinctive needs. Ego is that part of id that is influenced by the outside world, which leads the human to think and make decisions more logically by considering the reality (Freud 70). In fact, ego acts as a mediator between id and the principles of the real world as Freud argues,
in it’s [ego] attempts to mediate between id and reality, it is often obliged to cloak the unconscious commands of the id with its own preconscious rationalizations, to conceal the id's conflicts with reality, to profess...to be taking notice of reality even when the id has remained rigid and unyielding. (70)

In fact, the outside world makes barriers for humans that do not let one decide only based on one’s instinctive needs. Therefore, ego makes balance between instinctual drives and reality principles and seeks to satisfy the id’s drive in realistic ways that will benefit in the long term (Freud 70).

**Ego and Bowling**

As mentioned, Bowling feels a refractory instinctive need for security that leads him to think of returning to his hometown where he has experienced peace, tranquillity, and merrymaking. Therefore, he finds returning as the only solution to attain peace again. Nevertheless, he does not feel completely free from the present time and his real world. In fact, he feels some barriers that do not let him leave London and his present life totally behind to make his dream of home real.

Bowling reveals his reluctance to Hilda and the children because he is sick of his monotonous present life. As a clear example, Bowling’s monologue reveals his tedium of having roles (father and husband) when he decides to save his money for himself, he thinks,

> A good husband and father would have spent it on a dress for Hilda (that’s my wife) and boots for the kids. But I’d been a good husband and father for fifteen years and I was beginning to get fed up with it (Orwell, *CUFA* 10).

Nevertheless, Bowling finds his family and his roles as barriers that do not let him leave them behind and start a new life in Binfield, as he narrates in part 3 of the novel, when he decides to revisit his home town,

> Don’t imagine that I had any ideas of going back to LIVE in Lower Binfield. I wasn’t planning to desert Hilda and the kids and start life under a different name. That kind of thing only happens in books. (Orwell, *CUFA* 203)
In fact, based on Freud’s theory, Bowling’s ego leads him to decide to revisit his hometown to give answer to his need for returning while his family is still part of his concern. Therefore, he decides to revisit his hometown for a short time spending the amount of money he had concealed from his wife and return to West Bletchley soon.

**Superego and Bowling: Nostalgia overcoming achieved by Superego**

When Bowling arrives to his hometown, he finds his dream of home as an illusion broken down into dust. The town was changed and the only thing he could recognize was the enormous river. In fact, Bowling finds the town and his desire to make his dreams of the past as a bunch of sand as if he stands in a vacuum. He cannot find any known place in his hometown because his beloved old town has been replaced by modernity and urbanism. He finds his past gone while he does not foresee a good future because of the impending war. Bowling ridicules the way of thinking about his desires and future, he narrates,

> In the car coming home, thinking a lot of prophetic baloney about the future. The future! What’s the future got to do with chaps like you and me? Holding down our jobs- that’s our future. (Orwell, *CUFA* 279)

Actually, Bowling had made a vision of utopia in his mind about his past life. He thought that he would find his town unchanged and ideal as it used to be when he will revisit there. He thought that he will attain peace and quiet, unspoiled nature, and will experience fishing like he used to do, again. However, when he arrives there, he finds his town as a ruined place where everything has been changed. He did not even believe that one day he lived there, he asks, “Where was the town I used to know? It might have been anywhere. All I knew was that it was buried somewhere in the middle of that sea of bricks...” (Orwell, *CUFA* 219).

In fact, when George Bowling arrives to his town, he finds his past desire as a dream broken down into dust and nothing remained except traces of passing time and change. In other words, his vision of utopia breaks into the bitter reality at the moment of his arrival to the town. Indeed, *Coming Up For Air* illustrates how desires break down as D. J. Taylor expresses it, “each of Orwell’s novels turns out to be study in regression, a matter of life not sustaining its early promise, dreams cast down into dust” (Taylor, “Defeat into Victory” 48). In my opinion, Orwell successfully has illustrated the concept of destruction and breaking
down of desires when Bowling hears the voice of bombs landing in Lower Binfield. He thinks,

I’d acted so quickly that in the split second while the bomb was whistling down I even had time to be afraid that it was all a mistake and I’d made a fool of myself for nothing. (Orwell, *CUFA* 271)

At this moment, Bowling gets back to London, when he hears the SOS message on the radio stating that a Hilda is sick. It seems that he let his dreams go and recalls his family as a part of his belongings.

Freud’s theory suggests that the superego is the conscious part of the mind and acts based on people’s beliefs and faith that includes morality. It has been formed during human growth under the care of parents and other role models. The superego punishes the human for doing something wrong based on what we have learned and considered as a value (Freud 72).

Hence, according to the superego, Bowling as a “a good husband and father for fifteen years” is a person who believes that he is still responsible for his family but just needs to be for himself for a short time (Orwell, *CUFA* 10). He even does not decide to leave his family behind. In fact, he is aware that his family may need him and he should be with them. In fact, the superego does not let Bowling drown in his past desire while his family may be in danger, he thinks,

So I’m fond of Hilda after all. [...] but you can’t imagine yourself without it [fond]. It’s part of you. Well that’s how I felt about Hilda. When things are going well I can’t stick the sight of her, but the thought that she might be dead or even in pain sent the shiver through me. (Orwell, *CUFA* 280)

Indeed, the superego can be considered as a part of Bowling’s maturity. In his way back to London, he perceives his imaginations of the ideal past as lost illusions. Put differently, he overcomes nostalgia and stops fantasising. At this point, he lets go of his imaginations of the past. However, he feels like he has created a mental atmosphere in which he can take a pause from his monotonous present life, as George Orwell expresses it,

There is now a widespread idea that nostalgic feelings about the past are inherently vicious. One ought apparently to live in a continuous present, a minute-to-minute cancellation of memory, and if one thinks of the past at all it should merely be in order to thank God that we are so much
better than we used to be. This seems to me a sort of intellectual face-lifting, the motive behind which is a snobbish terror of growing old. One ought to realize that a human being cannot continue developing indefinitely, and that a writer in particular is throwing away his heritage if he repudiates the experience of his early life. In many ways it is a grave handicap to remember that lost paradise ‘before the War’ — that is, before the other war. In other ways it is an advantage [...] One is likelier to make a good book by sticking to one’s early-acquired vision than by a futile effort to “keep up.” (Orwell, *CEJL 1*: 445-6)

At the end of the novel, Bowling finds the mental atmosphere unconceivable for Hilda. He is sure that Hilda never can perceive how Bowling’s nostalgic recollections of the past made him calm down and go to Lower Binfield. Thus, he chooses the easiest way and lets Hilda think that he has been with another woman. In fact, although he could also tell her the truth, his choice shows that he is reluctant to encounter new unpleasant life affairs, which he has tried to escape from, through nostalgia.

Actually, Bowling confesses that by nostalgia, he enters his imaginary past life and revitalizes himself to make himself ready for confronting the predicted frightening future,

It wasn’t that I wanted to watch my navel. I only wanted to get my nerve back before the bad times begin [...] Wherever we’re going, we’re going downwards. Into the grave, into the cesspool, no knowing and you can’t face that kind of thing unless you’ve got the right feeling inside you. Something is gone out of us in twenty years since the war. It’s a kind of vital juice that we’ve squirted away until there is nothing left. All this rushing to and fro! [...] Nerves worn all to bits, empty places in our bones where the marrow ought to be. I shoved my foot down on the accelerator. The very thought of going back to Lower Benfield had done me good already. You know the feeling I had. Coming up for air! (Orwell, *CUFA 205*)

**Summary of the chapter**

As mentioned in this chapter, according to Ben Dowler’s notion of *Place Attachment*, Bowling feels a sense of belonging to his childhood town where he was connected to a positive sense of peace and has experienced happiness. Dowler argues that one always makes places in one’s mind. He claims that the concept of a place is defined based on how people have experienced and have perceived that particular place. In fact, home has a conceptual meaning that people perceive based on their emotional connection with the home place. He
suggests that a positive emotional connection between a person and a place makes the sense of belonging to that particular place as something in one’s heart or brain that leads him/her to go home.

In fact, the sense of belonging becomes a part of people’s desires and memories that will never be deleted as in *Coming Up For Air*, Bolwing feels attachment to his hometown where he used to be happy and safe. Bowling’s sense of belonging leads him to decide to revisit his hometown.

In addition, based on Maslow’s *Motivation Theory*, Bowling feels a need for safety when he feels insecurity because of the war predicted ahead. According to Maslow, human basic needs should be answered as Bowling finds no other option rather than revisiting his hometown where he has experienced senses of safety and security.

However, nostalgic Bowling who was drowned in imaginations of his past life, overcomes to nostalgia based on different layers of mind suggested by Freud. From a psychological point of view, Bowling’s need for returning home is an instinctive need that the first layer of mind (id) seeks to give answer to it. Bowling has been stuck in his recollections of the past but the preconscious layer of his mind (ego) prevents him from drowning into his dreams. Ego lets him be aware that he belongs to the present and he should consider the real world and his family. Consequently, he decides to revisit his hometown and return soon. Finally, Bowling’s nostalgic shell cracks when he finds his hometown changed. In fact, his mind’s rational layer (superego) leads him to recognize his past as a lost dream and overcome his imaginations of the past.

Indeed, nostalgia is not only Bowling’s grief for his lost past, if so, the sense of sorrow would never allow him to experience a positive feeling by recalling the past. To the contrary, nostalgia makes a sweet mental atmosphere of the past that nostalgic Bowling can recover himself in.
Chapter Four

Conclusion

In *Coming Up For Air*, George Orwell has predicted a war in the early 20th century and has condemned it as he has done in his previous writings. In fact, Orwell has expressed his hate of totalitarianism and imperialism by representing the protagonist’s concern about Hitler’s rise to power after the predicted war.

Orwell also complains of the modernity and technological advances, which effect human lives and change age-old places of the world. The novel represents the nostalgic protagonist who is greatly impressed by his past at the beginning of the modern era, when many nations have experienced hard times like The Great War and the Great Depression. In fact, the novel’s protagonist represents the image of a typical English nostalgic man who rejects his modern lifestyle through nostalgic reflections.

Actually, it is easy not to consider Bowling’s experience of good emotional feeling by recalling his reminiscences of the past. However, *Coming Up For Air* represents nostalgia as Bowling’s mental space that he can take refuge in from the present.

In my opinion, Bowling as a man of the 20th century is thrown into the modern life without having time to make decisions whether he is ready to leave his past life behind and deal with the modern life or not. Truly, Bowling finds himself in the present all at once. At this point, the nostalgic memories of the simple and peaceful life of the past create a pleasant imaginary place in mind which Bowling takes refuge in.

Indeed, sweet reminiscences and nostalgia lead Bowling to feel happy although ego lets him consider the real world as well. Thus, nostalgic Bowling never drown in his delusions of the past forever. However, in the modern time, nostalgia opens a mental hatch to a simple and a peaceful life Bowling used to have before the onset of modernity in which his soul can take rest. By nostalgia, Bowling gains a temporary good feeling through which he takes a break from the hardships of the present time. In fact, nostalgia lets him as a man of modern time come up for air and makes him able to continue to live.
In fact, the time is passing and nothing is capable to prevent the effects of the past on the present. In *Coming Up For Air*, nostalgia appears as a bridge to the past in the protagonist’s life. However, despite of commentators like D. J. Taylor and Wheatcroft who consider nostalgia as a grief in Bolwing’s life, I believe that nostalgia is not only a grief but is something more. The grief has negative connotations whereas nostalgia to Bowling often is connected with positive connotations such as, memories of a pleasant past, which actually gives him energy and makes him more motivated in the present. In other words, nostalgia does not only bring sorrow to Bowling’s life but works as relieving pills healing the wounds of modernity on his soul.
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Appendix

Summary of Coming Up For Air

The novel is narrated in four parts. The first part is set in 1938 and George Bowling narrates his present life. He is a successful forty-five years old, fat, lower-middle class insurance salesman who lives in a London suburb, West Bletchley. He hates modernity that leaves no space for traditional places. He is also tired of his humdrum life style, his wife, Hilda, and his children and he could leave happily without them.

Bowling likes natural areas. He had a memorable childhood in a rural town of Britain named Lower Binfield. Fishing, biking, playing in the countryside, and reading were his pleasures. He left that place before the beginning of World War I by joining the army. He was lucky enough to find a job after the Great War when the economical situation of Britain declined thanks to the help of his connection to his commander. Then he became familiar with Hilda and her family and married her.

At the time of narration, in 1939, another war is about to begin. Bowling is worried and cannot find a place to make him calm. He even spends time with prostitutes but he still has nothing to make him calm. He also has won seventeen pounds in a horse race and he keeps it secret to decide how to spend it.

He had one day off work to collect his new set of false teeth from his dentist office in London. On his way, posters of political faces and the sound of planes makes him remember the time of the war. In the night on his way back home, he stops at a bar and when he leaves the bar, suddenly the smell of trees leads him to remember Lower Binfield, the town where he has spent his childhood.

The second part of the novel takes the reader back to Bowling’s reminiscences of his childhood life in Lower Benfield when he was happy. He remembers his pleasant childhood memories, like his first experience of fishing in a pond near their house, playing in the town nearby with his brother and his grammar school days when he was eight to 15 years old. He also recalls his fishing in a pond of the French countryside when he was a soldier in World War I, his finding a job and his marriage with Hilda. Whenever he remembers his past, he is full of a pleasant feeling.
Part three describes that Bowling stops in the countryside when he was driving to a business appointment. He admires flowers growing in the countryside. At that moment, he finds himself happy in the beautiful nature. He wonders that people do not take time to look at natural sights. He picks some flowers but later throws them away when a car full of young boys arrived because he thought that the boys might probably sneer him. Back in his car, he thinks about revisiting Lower Binfield with the seventeen pounds, before hard times begin. Bowling recalls the pond near Binfield in which he tried to take fish about thirty years ago. Suddenly, he decides to return to his childhood town.

After lots of inner conflicts, finally in part four, Bowling decides to make his dreams of the past real and takes a trip to Lower Binfield by telling lies to Hilda. Bowling tells her that he has to travel to Birmingham and he will stay there for his job. He thinks now is the time to spend the seventeen pounds for a secret trip.

On his way to Binfield, he imagines Lower Binfield and its hill, pond, church and other places as they used to be. But when he arrives there, he finds it completely changed. The town became very crowded and all the people were getting ready for war. Old areas replaced with new buildings everywhere. He could not recognize anything except the central church and the river. The pond he used to play around was changed to a rubbish dump. At this time, he finds himself too far from his childhood and the past life. His disappointing trip ends up with the falling of a bomb of the German military air force in Lower Binfield while he hears on the radio that a Hilda Bowling is seriously ill. He feels a surge of concern for Hilda. He drives back to West Bletchley. On his way back home, he feels a sense of sorrow for the lost past and finds it unpleasant to face London again with its streets, squares and flats. When he arrives at home, he finds out that he had heard of another Hilda. He also realizes that Hilda knows that he has not been in Birmingham and that he has lied to her.

Bowling finds out that Hilda thinks he has been with another woman. He finds three choices. (a) He could tell the whole story to Hilda and try to make her believe him, (b) he could tell another lie about losing his memory or (c) he could let her think she was right that he had been with another woman. However, Bowling knows that Hilda can never understand how his nostalgic remembrances led him to revisit his hometown. Therefore, he chooses the last choice.