

Alienation and Moral Crisis in Pre-Revolutionary Russia: A Study of Bourgeois Identity in *Foma Gordeyev*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the representation of the merchant class by Maxim Gorky in *Foma Gordeyev*. The novel illustrates that this social class, even if it has proved its economic power and thus material basis for stability, is a perilous construction of morality. Neither riches nor higher social positions can provide genuine satisfaction. Instead, which creates confusion and darkness. Foma is limited because he cannot hold to the ideals of his own class. He is a tragic figure who understands the truth yet has lost his agency to act. Gorky demonstrates the outward strength of action and agency in his merchant class but the crippling moral weakness just below the surface across much of his life. It serves as a psychological portrait of one man and, at the same time, a barometric reading of an aristocracy in creeping demise.

Keywords: Maxim Gorky, *Foma Gordeyev*, social class, economic power, material basis, morality, merchant class, moral weakness.

Introduction

Foma Gordeyev is Gorky's most forthright indictment of the merchant class in Russia before the revolution. The narration depicts Foma, the son of a rich trader; he is miserable with the world in which he has been raised. The novel argues that financial success does not equal moral superiority or inner peace. The idea that animates this paper is that the bourgeois identity signalled in the novel constitutes a tenuous, or unstable, state. Rich in material but poor in values and purpose. Foma's personal crisis, which is his problem. It is emblematic of the class to which he belongs, a reflection of deeper problems.

Historical Background

The novel is set in a host of major Russian socio-economic transformations. While the merchant class owned significant amounts of power and influence, it was also often riddled with serious moral failings. It was an essential part of society but unethical and brutal in its way of operating. The Volga River in the background gives it an added poignancy. The nature seems peaceful and meaningful, while humanity looks empty and artificial, especially business life. This contrast brings out the aspect of a merchant class that has lost sight of the deeper truths.

Bourgeois Identity

In the book, bourgeois identity is defined by commercial enterprise, profit, and a certain standing in society. A person is only as good as his fame and accomplishments. Yet, this mode of living frequently necessitates a lack of selflessness and ethics. One kind of merchant is represented by Foma's father, Ignat. High-powered and successful yet harsh and emotionally unavailable. His prosperity does not make him happy. Mayakin represents another type. He is

grounded and practical, very disciplined in his routine, yet to him, people are business deciders. It is a strictly rational understanding according to him.

Foma doesn't fit either box. He is born into wealth, and instead of embracing the mindset that wealth brings you, he discards it. He is uncomfortably aware of his own guilt regarding that life. But he's not powerful enough to forge his own way. That makes him tragic.

Alienation and Inner Conflict

The disconnection of form is central to the book. He does not feel part of the merchant world but also has no place in any other form of life. It has a social and an internal sequence as well. He recognises there is nothing to his class but cannot move away from it. He pays the price when speaking against how hypocritical society usually is.

The way he was locked away illustrates the lengths society goes to in order to keep us within the limits it wills. Foma also deifies the working class. He sees it as representing frankness and simplicity. Yet he can never quite enter it. He is found in neither of the two worlds; he remains frozen between them.

Moral Crisis

Foma is not the only place where the moral crisis develops in the novel. It is universal in its effect over the merchant class. They are more respectable to the world and live for themselves and show it. Ignat's existence proves that money does not cure inner issues. His success leads to isolation. Mayakin's rational life may seem quite controlled, but it has neither an emotional nor a moral dimension. The dimension of Foma's crisis is far worse because what he wants is truth. He shuns things as they seem. The world he moves in has no moral compass, however. This leads to his breakdown.

Social Meaning

The book draws the link between personal suffering and public transformation. The merchant class is no longer morally dominant, although it continues to exercise power. Gorky

takes capitalism to task as a form of social life that destroys human bonds. It generates capital but annihilates purpose and relationships. Foma's battle exemplifies a larger issue for the culture at large.

Conclusion

The image of the merchant class is tall and stiff but rotten at its core in *Foma Gordeyev*. Gorky illustrates a void in which even wealth and stability are illusory through the life of Foma. Foma is tragic precisely because he knows it. He is aware of the shortcomings of his class, but he cannot escape them. His downfall is further proof of the great passage of the bourgeois order. For this reason, the novel serves a dual function; it is a personal story, and it is one that comments on society as well.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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