

The Hero's Journey toward Class Consciousness in Emile Zola's "Germinal", John Steinbeck's "In Dubious Battle" and Peter Abrahams' "Mine Boy"

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Date of submission: 02-07-2023

Date of acceptance: 27-06-2024

Abstract:

Germinal by the French Emile Zola, *In Dubious Battle* by the American John Steinbeck and *Mine Boy* by the South African Peter Abrahams are novels that are mainly concerned with strikes. This article reads these three novels from the perspective of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in order to show that for Zola and Steinbeck, true consciousness is the workers' awareness that the best way to obtain their demand within the capitalist law avoiding any form of violence while Abrahams' understanding of true consciousness corroborates with the Marxist call for a union of workers regardless of their race to overthrow capitalism waded with apartheid and to establish a nonracist socialism.

Keywords: Capitalism, Communism, Consciousness, Journey, Strike.

Introduction:

Strike has been one of the common actions used by workers in their struggle to reduce exploitation. Since the Industrial Revolution, strike has attracted the attention of authors from different countries writing in a different contexts. Accordingly, this labour action has been the main subject of many novels. This is the case with *Germinal* by the French Emile Zola, *In Dubious Battle* by the American John Steinbeck and *Mine Boy* by the South African Peter Abrahams. Among the striking similarities between these novels is the tragic outcome of the strike: food, shortages health, imprisonment and even death. However, an analysis of the transformation of Etienne, Jim and Xuma, the three protagonists of these novels respectively, *Germinal*, *In Dubious Battle* and *Mine Boy* through Joseph Campbell's "hero's journey" framework reveals that the strike is not definitely tragic considering the growth of true

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consciousness among the workers. However, what is meant by true consciousness differs from one author to another depending on the authors' ideologies and the context in which they wrote their novels.

1. The Authors and their Context

Zola's *Germinal* is set during the Industrial Revolution which took place in France from 1830 to 1870. This revolution brought about tremendous changes in all fields as the nation moved further from its agricultural roots into a new existence as a large factory nation. This transformation was caused mainly by the invention of the steam engine whose mechanism fundamentally worked by coal which became the dominant source of power in the late 19th century. Accordingly, many big mining companies like Anzin Mining Company came into existence to produce tons of coal every day. Since new workers were needed in the coal mining industry, many people left the rural life in search of work in mine fields and factories. Even women and children were employed to be sent down into dark dangerous mines to work twelve hours a day to bring up the coal that was the source of all other wealth in the new manufacturing economy.

The Industrial Revolution also brought about an enormous acceleration of paradoxical social change. The middle class became powerful and had dominance on economic, political and social life. They grew in power and importance during the industrial revolution, which shattered the power of nobility that previously dominated French society. The industrial revolution increased their wealth which enabled them to cast their influence over political life. While the middle class was accumulating money on unprecedented scale, the working class continued to live in poverty. As a result, strikes took place in great centres of industry in France. The number of strikes as well as the number of participants increased greatly throughout the century. Shorter and Tilly register fifty-five strikes in 1833 and 634 in 1893 (qtd. in Borch 25).

In *Germinal*, Zola drew his inspiration directly from these strikes to expose the inhuman living conditions of workers. In early 1884, Zola visited the mines of Denain and Anzin, where 12,000 miners had gone on strike a few days before to document himself for *Germinal* (Nelson 86). The main reason for the Anzin strike of 1884 was

“the creation of new working conditions which would necessitate the dismissal of 144 employees and greatly increase the responsibility of the average coal miner” (Zakarian 18). If this measure passed a lot of workers would find themselves without job and thus without revenue and would increase the work for the remaining workers.

The Great depression in 1929 forms the background for Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*. It was a crisis that caused a catastrophic damage to the economy and led to huge social dissensions. In the early 1930s, a drought which hit the Great Plains and lasted for several years and dust called the Dust Bowl which damaged farms forced families from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico to leave to California in search of works in farming since industry could provide work for the huge overflowing numbers of family (MacDonald 54). Since the number of job seekers increased and exceeded the number of jobs available in farms, workers did not earn enough many to support their needs. Consequently, a series of strikes and violent protests erupted in in the fields and packing sheds. According to Benson, between 1930 and 1932, there were some forty - four agricultural strikes (293). Most of these strikes were quickly crashed by law enforcement authorities.

Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* is loosely based on historical events from peach and cotton strikes in California in 1933 most of which were led by Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union. Steinbeck knew many people close to this union. One of them was Francis Whitaker, a leader in the John Reed Club who organized several meetings between Steinbeck and leftist personalities like James Hakin who provided Steinbeck with information about strike leaders and their speeches (Bloom 61). It is this union that played a prominent role in the disputes at the Tagus Ranch to ask for higher wages. The landowners refused to meet the workers' demand for higher wages due to the fluctuating prices of cotton. Consequently, CAWIU organized a strike on October 4, and twelve thousand employees had walked off their jobs. Armed men aligned with landowners organized patrols to intimidate those who refused either to leave the area or to work under existing conditions. On October 10, growers opened fire on a peaceful demonstration, killing two people, Dolores Hernandez and Delfino D'Avila, in addition to wounding seven more (Bernstein 158).

Like *Germinal* and *In Dubious Battle*, Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* deals with the plight of the working class yet under a different system called apartheid which is a policy of rigid racial segregation enforced by the white government from the late 1940's to the early 1990's. Under apartheid, the government denied voting rights and other rights to the black majority. Many South Africans and people throughout the world opposed apartheid. Protests against it often led to violence.

Built on earlier South African laws and customs, apartheid classified every South African by race as either black, white, Coloured (mixed race), or Asian. The Population Registration Act classified people into categories according to these races. It segregated almost all whites from non-whites. The movement of Black Africans were restricted by the Pass Laws Act of 1952 which prevented freedom of movement of non-whites. The law did not require black children to go to school, and many received little education. Most students attended racially separate public schools where far more money was spent to educate white children than black children. Thus, Black African workers were generally less educated than whites and received far lower wages. South Africa's apartheid government owned many businesses and appointed white South Africans to run them. It also passed laws that reserved the best positions in both industry and government for white employees.

In Mine Boy, Abrahams depicts the brutality of the apartheid system which imposes restrictions and inhumanity upon the Black workers. Abrahams believes that if there are individuals who, regardless of their class position and race fight side by side, the whole system will be destroyed. During his self-exile in Britain, where he got involved with the Communist party and true to his communist commitment, Abrahams offers communism as an alternative that would release the people from the clutches of apartheid and capitalism.

2. The Exploitation of Workers as the Heroes' Point of Departure

The hero is the one who is willing to experience three "basic stages" of the journey which are separation, initiation and return to restore the balance in a world suffering from a "symbolical deficiency" (Campbell 36-37). Deficiency in the three novels is the exploitation of

workers. In *Germinal*, people start working very young until they are no longer able to work which means that the mine-owner continues to exploit them until nothing left in them: “I was not eight when when I went down into the Voreux and I am now fifty eight” (Zola 12) , confesses Bonnemort to Etienne. Exploitation is intensified by employing women and children because the wage the head of the family earns are very low. The Mahieu and his children collaborate in order to satisfy his family’s needs. In *Dubious Battle*, the entire region of California where workers are economically oppressed by landlords suffers symbolic deficiencies. These workers are farmers who migrate to California to landowners to survive because they are so poor to have their own land. In *Mine Boy* symbolic deficiencies is the exploitation of nonwhite workers by white capitalist under apartheid. The miners are forced to live in the compound. Since the pass laws were implemented first and foremost to regulate black movement, the nonwhite workers are required to have the pass to show that they are “not escaping from the mine” (Abrahams154) .Workers are treated as machine performing routine tasks, so “whistles blowing” (Abrahams 154) signals the beginning and the end of the work period.

3. The Exploited as the Announcer of the Heroes’ Adventure

In the three novels “herald or the announcer of the adventure,” (Campbell 48) activates the protagonists’ “call to adventure” (Campbell 47), witnesses his awakening and “mark[s] a new period, a new stage, in the biography” (Campbell 50). In *Germinal*, Vincent Bonnemort may be perceived as the Herald or announcer of the adventure who awakens Étienne’s desire for the struggle for better living and working conditions in in the Montsou mines. Vincent Bonnemort is the veteran of the mines, the eldest member of the Maheu family who has been working in the mines for over fifty years. He has earned the name Bonnemort by escaping death three times during mine accidents: “they have pulled me three times out of that, torn to pieces, once with all my hair scorched, once with my gizzard full of earth, and another time with my belly swollen with water, like a frog. And then, when they saw that nothing would kill me, they called me Bonnemort for a joke” (Zola 10). He is the first person Étienne Lantier meets when he arrives in the mining district of Montsau in search of work after he has been fired for insubordination

in Lille. He warns Etienne of the exploitation of workers in the mine by imparting to him his personal history that represents the collective tragedy of the Montsou miners:

I have been everything down there; at first trammer, then putter, when I had the strength to wheel, then pikeman for eighteen years. Then, because of my cursed legs, they put me into the earth cutting, to bank up and patch, until they had to bring me up, because the doctor said I should stay there for good. Then, after five years of that, they made me carman. Eh? that's fine--fifty years at the mine, forty-five down below (Zola 11).

In *In Dubious Battle*, Harry Nilson is the announcer of the adventure. He is an agent of change for the Jim. When Jim first meets Harry, he is like a living dead. Harry tells him nervously: "Drink your coffee and have some more. You act half asleep. You don't take anything, do you?" (Steinbeck 29). He has just experienced the most dehumanizing period of his life. He has spent 30 days in jail after having lost all the members of his family. His father was fired on the chest during an arson attempt and his sister vanished when a boy. He has thus lost all sense of life. He confidently complains to Harry: "I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again" (Steinbeck 30). Harry Nilson contributes to his awakening by recruiting him into the Communist Party. He also warns him of many difficulties which must be overcome during his journey: "You're waking up Jim. . . . But you don't know what you're getting into. I can tell you about it, but it won't mean anything until you go through it (Steinbeck 32).

In *Mine Boy*, it is Leah who sets Xuma on the path of adventure. It is she who takes care of Xuma when he leaves his family farm in the economically depressed north to work in a Johannesburg gold mine. From his first night in the township, Leah takes Xuma under her protection and teaches him how to survive. Since Xuma comes to Johannesburg from the countryside in search of work, without knowledge of the city, Leah finds herself obliged to teach him how black people survive in the city. She warns him of the danger of working in a mine: "The mines are no good, Xuma, later on you cough and then you spit blood and you become weak and die. I have seen it many times. Today you are young and you are strong, and tomorrow you are thin and ready to die" (Abrahams 16).

4. Workers' Unconsciousness as Belly of the Whale

After having accepted the call, the three heroes have to start a journey into the unknown or “the belly of the Whale” (Campbell 83) which is the point where the hero is “swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (Campbell 83). It is where the hero’s initiation takes place and often faces all kinds of trials and dangers. The working area whether Montsou mines, Torgas Valley or Johannesburg Malay Camp are the places where the protagonists have to overcome obstacles before they reach true consciousness. These obstacles are the unconsciousness that workers are exploited under capitalism, and false consciousness or the strike leaders’ egotism and their overrating of ideology to the detriment of their well-being and even the security of workers.

In *Germinal*, workers are unaware that they are exploited because for them capitalism is the only system that may exist. They are submissive to the working conditions set by the capitalists as they believe that their survival depends on the owners. When Etienne is recruited, he is thankful to have a work in the Voreux despite the low wages. He tells Bonnemort, “As long as one has bread to eat one can live” (Zola 13). Catherine displays compliance to the capitalist system. She is “stupefied, overwhelmed, with her . . . ideas of subordination and passive obedience” (Zola 48) hearing that Etienne was fired from his first job because he struck his chief.

In *Dubious Battle*, apple pickers are not aware that they are under exploitation and cannot question the legitimacy of capitalism. Dan who has worked all his life in orchard and who owns nothing has no grudge for capitalism. On the contrary, he prides himself for his commitment for his employees and refuses to racket regarding his age: “I’ve had punks like you damn near die of heart failure just watchin’ me work; and here I’m climbin’ a lousy apple tree. Me take charity! I done work in my life that took guts. I been ninety foot up a pole and had the butt split and snap my safety-belt” (Steinbeck 67). He thus cannot realize that the workers’ suffering is caused by a system in which the surplus profit is reserved for dominant wealthy class without the workers. He instead blames the young generation as lazy and clueless: “You punks got something to learn yet. There’s more to work than you ever knew. Like a bunch of

horses—you want more hay! Whining around for more hay. Want all the hay there is! You make a good man sick, that's what you do, whining around" (Steinbeck 90).

Workers in *Mine Boy*, like their counterparts in *Germinal* and *In Dubious Battle*, are also submissive. Though they work in hard dangerous conditions, they still accept the work as "a man's work" (Abrahams 16). Xuma's consciousness which may arise in him the willingness to the legitimacy of the exploitation of the non-white minors by the white owners is shattered by his illusions and false perceptions. He thinks he is an equal to the whites because he is undergrounds where he is called "boss boy" and because the white men respects him: "There he did not even fear his white man, for his white man depended on him. He was the boss boy. He gave the orders to the other mine boys. They would do for him what they would not do for his white man or any other white man. . . . And underground his white man respected him and asked him for his opinion before they did anything" (Abrahams 93). These false perceptions make him forget the misery from which he and his non-white fellows receive on the surface. Instead of questioning the law that forces the other non-white miners to live in the compounds, he takes much pride as he is the black man who does not live the compound. He considers this as a privilege.

5. Mentors and the Heroes' False Consciousness

In addition to the workers' unconsciousness, Etienne, Jim and Xuma have to overcome their weaknesses in order to find the way to true consciousness. Despite their will to struggle to improve workers' conditions, their struggle is mainly driven by egoistic motivations. Etienne and Jim are caught up in personal blind allegiance to ideology while Xuma is captivated by his false acceptance of the natural differences between the whites and the blacks. This ambivalence is partly due to the fact that the three protagonists have two different mentors. While the role of the mentor is to help the hero discover the missing quality that is needed to overcome challenges and obstacles on the journey, in the three novels, the mentors come in positive and negative aspects related to different traits and depend on their ideological orientations. One mentor serves to

perpetuate the protagonists' flaws while the other awakens them to the struggle to true consciousness.

Etienne's political penchants oscillate between the evolutionist view of the pacifists represented by Rasseneur and the violent anarchic tenets of Souvarine. Rasseneur is the owner of Tavern L'Avantage who advocates for a more moderate negotiation and approach to the strike because he thinks that the strike will not bring the miners any better life. Rasseneur arguing with Etienne, says, "What I want is for the miner to be better treated. I have worked down below for twenty years, I've sweated down there with fatigue and misery, and I've sworn to make it easier for the poor beggars who are there still; and I know well enough you'll never get anything with all your ideas, you'll only make the men's fate more miserable still" (Zola 239). After defeating Rasseneur, his competitor who votes against the strike, Etienne starts to hold the crowd under his guide.

Souvarine, in contrast, represents a total questioning of the existing capitalism. He comes to France after an unsuccessful attempt "against the tsar's life" (Zola 143) in Moscow. Montsou Company accepts to employ him when dying of starvation. His socioeconomic beliefs call for egalitarianism and the welfare of the lower classes, yet he is an outcast living at the margin because he has never been accepted by the Voreux society though he has renounced "his rank and his fortune; he had gone among workmen, only in the hope of seeing at last the foundation of a new society of labour in common. . . . he remained a stranger, with his contempt of all bonds, his desire to keep himself free of all petty vanities and enjoyments" (Zola 401). He blindly works for the cause of spreading anarchism and is willing to employ violence: "By fire, by poison, by the dagger. The brigand is the true hero, the popular avenger, the revolutionary in action, with no phrases drawn out of books. We need a series of tremendous outrages to frighten the powerful and to arouse the people" (Zola 401). Though he advocates random acts of violence to bring about social change, he never explains what a better society should be: "All reasoning about the future is criminal, because it prevents pure destruction, and interferes with the progress of revolution" (Zola 245). He is an inhuman militant who refuses bonds even with Etienne. For him, "nothing, neither parents, nor wife, nor friend! Nothing to make my hand tremble on the day when I must take others' lives or give up my own"

(Zola 451). Etienne rejects the violence advocated by Souvarine: "Murder and fire, never! It is monstrous, unjust, all the mates would rise and strangle the guilty one!" (Zola 245).

Jim's struggling behaviour fluctuates between the views of two kinds of mentors: the Machiavellian opportunist Mac and the wise Doc Burton. Mac manipulates and dehumanizes the workers. He helps the daughter-in-law of London to deliver her child though he has no right to do so because he has no medical training. He explains to Nolan the reasons for his action: "it was nice to help the girl, but hell, even if it killed her—we've got to use anything. . . . With one night's work we've got the confidence of the men and the confidence of London. And more than that, we made the men work for themselves, in their own defense as a group" (Steinbeck 64). He makes use of any situation with no regard for decency or honesty to raise a riot in the apple field. When Old Dan, falls from a tree because of a broken ladder and suffers grievous injury, he ceases the occasion of the accident to ignite the workers to start a rebellion by exposing Dan's body: "The old buzzard was worth something after all ... We can use him now," and Mac puts old to enrage the strikers" (Steinbeck 92). Even the body of the dead is not spared. When a sniper guns down Joy Mac welcomes the death with excitement because it will strengthen the striker's determination. Mac remarks that Joy has "done the first real, useful thing in his life" (Steinbeck 134).

Doc Burton stands in direct contrast with Mac to whom the end justifies the means. Doc Burton is sympathetic to the strikers and in charge of health and sanitation at the strikers' camp, but he refuses to embrace the ideological commitments. He believes that the strikers are manipulated by leaders expressing ideological faith and urging action outside the strikers' self-interest. Doc Burton sees Mac as "an actor" (Steinbeck 120) who plays different roles and use people's condition to manipulate them: "[Y]ou're the craziest mess of cruelty and hausfrau sentimentality, of clear vision and rose-colored glasses I ever saw. I don't know how you manage to be all of them at once" (Steinbeck 164). With no political or ideological commitments, his view of life remains objective: "I want to see the whole picture —as nearly as I can. I don't want to put on the blinders of 'good' and 'bad,' and limit my vision. If I used the term 'good' on a thing I'd lose my license to inspect it, because there might be bad in it. Don't you see? I want to be able to look at the

whole thing” (Steinbeck 121). He uses a biological example to refute Mac’s argument that he can organize and control the crowd thanks to the wise guidance because for him “These guys’ll go nuts if we don’t take charge” (Steinbeck 92). Burton argues that men in a mob are not the same as individual men; they may slip out of control and turn violent: “A man in a group isn’t himself at all; he’s a cell in an organism that isn’t like him any more than the cells in your body are like you” (Steinbeck 121). He teaches Jim that in a war there are two sides and warns him that the miners’ side may be probably defeated because the landowners are stronger: “The other side is made of men, Jim, men like you. Man hates himself. Psychologists say a man’s self-love is balanced neatly with self-hate. Mankind must be the same. We fight ourselves and we can only win by killing every man. I’m lonely, Jim. I have nothing to hate” (197). Thus, Jim must not be driven by this ideological impulse if he wants to survive.

Like Etienne and Jim, Xuma needs mentors to lead him to the right way toward true consciousness. Xuma is a sympathetic person who displays readiness for struggle that makes him a true leader to his people toward better life, yet he has to get rid of his belief of racial differences imposed on him by apartheid. He has always shown great affection toward his people. After having left Leah dwelling, “he longed for the warmth of Leah’s place and for the brightness in Leah’s eyes and for the drunken nonsense of Daddy and the wise, watching eyes of old Ma Plank, who saw everything and said nothing” (Abrahams 90). However, Xuma fails to show the same sympathy for the whites. During Xuma’s first meeting with Chris Johannes’s white boss, Chris punches him in the chest to figure his reaction in order “see if [he is] a man” (Abrahams 59). Still not used to the subtleties of the accepted rules of racial interaction, Xuma “instinctively . . . stepped back and raised his arms, both hands bunched into great fists” (Abrahams 59) as if he was ready to strike back.

Doctor Mini and Paddy can be considered as mentors for Xuma. At first, these two characters seem to be untrustworthy and unreliable to Xuma because the first is an alienated black who lives like white men and the later because he is the white boss. Yet both Doctor Mini and Paddy contribute to transform Xuma into a working-class militant. Doctor Mini teaches Xuma that life with dignity and decency are not restricted to white people and that even black people have as much right

to live such lives. At the doctor's home, he finds black people living like whites. He is disturbed and the doctor then explains the situation to him, and Xuma is forced to rethink that question. The doctor says, "Just a comfortable place. You are not copying the white man when you live in a place like this. This is the sort of place a man should live in because it is good for him. Whether he is white or black does not matter" (Abraham 109).

Like Doctor Mini, Paddy plays a crucial role in liberating Xuma from his racial confinement and in making him think of people independently of their colour. Paddy is Xuma's white direct boss at the gold mine, where he is nicknamed "The Red One" for his red hair. Xuma's visit to his Boss' apartment has a deep impact on Xuma's conscious. Xuma is perplexed by the beauty of Paddy's home. He is impressed with "Carpets on the floor, books, radio. Beautiful things everywhere" (Abraham 95). Since the visit, he starts to think of "about the beautiful world where man would be without colour" (Abraham 243).

6. Goddesses as Awakener of True Consciousness

Another stage of the initiation journey is the "meeting with the goddess" who is the epitome of beauty and who represents the feminine ideal in all its aspects. She is the ultimate hope for the hero, assuring him that he will be returned to the blissful world he knew before the journey. Etienne meets the Maheus' eldest daughter Catherine the oppressed suffering working class woman who gives Etienne the strength to face further trials. The presence of Catherine in the Crowd animates his discourse with the motivation of being "applauded in her presence" (Zola 289), and the idea that Catherine must be there "had roused a new ardour within him" (Zola 289). However, Chaval who is a stupid greedy brute becomes her lover. He is a traitor who cooperates with the company during the strike. Etienne's quest for leadership is associated with Catherine as an object of love, and his desire to rescue her and his jalousie of Chaval force him to follow her into the mine. Étienne is entrapped in the lowest mine's level with Chaval and Étienne kills Chaval while Catherine dies of starvation before the rescuers' arrival.

In The Dubious Battle, the life principle or the goddess who gives Jim the strength is Lisa London, the daughter of the camp leader. Yet Lisa's struggle has nothing to do with ideology. When Doc asks Lisa

what she wants to make, she tells him: "I like to have a cow . . . I like to have butter and cheese like you can make" (Steinbeck 196). In contrast to Mac who in his struggle follows blindly his ideological impulse to "wipe out social injustice with communism" (Steinbeck 122), Lisa dreams for elemental concerns. Though Mac successfully helps Lisa deliver her baby to establish rapport with London and other workers, to further his cause of spreading communism, she is the first to reveal that Mac is inhuman and indifferent to the safety of others and that he uses people to further his ambition of spreading his ideology. Unlike Mac, she is sympathetic to others: She nurses her baby, the wounded Jim and the old Dan. She is a form of conscience and morality associated with peace and non-violence. She is sent away whenever there are scenes of violence such as Mac's beating of the high school boy. She warns Jim that strike in the field is more difficult than expected: "'They got their mouths full,' said the girl. 'Always talkin', except their mouths' full. Always talkin'. If they got to fight, why don' they fight an' get it over, 'stead o' talkin'?" (Steinbeck 206). After recovering from injuries, his affection for her increases which makes it possible for her to bring him back to humanity from his ideological confinement. Now he is ready to embrace the feminine values that Lisa represents when he tells her: "I like to be near you" (Steinbeck 273).

In *Mine Boy*, Eliza, the middle class schoolteacher, becomes the Magna Mater that gives Xuma the strength to move forward in the journey toward consciousness. Leah warns Xuma of Eliza's attraction to western culture: "That one likes you but she's a fool. It is going to school. She likes you but wants one who read books and dresses like the white folks and speaks the language of the whites and wears the little bit of cloth they call a tie. Take her by force or you will be a fool" (Abrahams 51). In one of their meetings, Eliza reads to Xuma a story the Zulu wars, where the Zulu warriors fought for but lost their land to the white man. Xuma reflects that it is a good story, but sad because they lost. He bids her goodnight and goes to the room beyond the yard, where he undresses and gets into bed. The story does not increase Xuma's grudge against the white and mildly says: "'It is good,' he said, 'but it is sad that we lost'" (Abrahams 123).

Eliza expresses to him her deep feeling of the injustice of a system which denies the right to appreciate things like carpets and books, music

and wine because she is black (Abrahams 95). She expresses her plight to Xuma saying: "I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person. I want to be like they are, you understand" (Abrahams 89). Eliza, with her penchant for the white culture, instils in Xuma the idea that a black man equals the white man and the right to have "the white man's things" (Abrahams 95).

7. Strike as the Supreme Ordeal

Strike is the most difficult challenge that Etienne, Jim and Xuma confront and where they experiences death. It represents what Campbell calls "The Supreme Ordeal" (Campbell 227) which is a deep inner crisis that the Hero must face in order to survive. It is when their journey teeters on the brink of failure. The three authors use the unfair lower wages and insecurity at work as the two catalysts for the strike. *In Germinal*, the strike begins when the company asks the miners to board the tunnels up with woods and decides to pay workers for only coal extraction. The miners ask the employers to pay them for timbering as well. However, the company refuses because it would not benefit the mine owners. Etienne urges workers to begin a general strike and the miners agree with him though his explanations of terms are unclear and remain "obscure phrases [that] had escaped them, they could not properly understand this technical and abstract reasoning; but the very obscurity and abstraction still further enlarged the field of promises and lifted them into a dazzling region. (Zola 287).

Etienne is unaware of the forces that control men and turn them into unthinking creatures. As he is confident that he can lead and master the crowd, he further pushes workers to strike. However, because of the emptied fund and the company's decision to recruit workers from Belgium to replace them, the workers lose their rationality and engage in destruction such as destroying the machines of the mine: "And in this growing ferocity, in this old need of revenge which was turning every head with madness, the choked cries went on, death to traitors, hatred against ill-paid work, the roaring of bellies after bread. They began to cut the cables, but the file would not bite, and the task was too long now that

the fever was on them for moving onward, for ever onward” (Zola 232)

In Dubious Battle, disagreements between landowners and pickers on wages is the main cause of the strike. The Growers’ Association announces a pay cut from 30 cents an hour to 25 cents an hour. This wage cut would affect severely the pickers as Mac Complains: ““we never had a chance to own anything,” Mac said. ‘We’d like to own something and plant trees”” (Steinbeck 250). Yet the direct and immediate cause of the strike is when Old Dan falls from the ladder and breaks his back. The strike shows that when individuals organize themselves they act irrationally as animals. The Torgas Valley Growers’ Association are a very strong spiteful bunch. They line up the authorities behind them, including the banks, the courts, and the police and use different means to stop the strike. The farm superintendent first offers to give London a job if he convinces the pickers to go back to work and warns that if the strikers refuse they will be thrown off the farm and driven out of the valley. As London turns down the offer, the Association does not hesitate to use violent means to stop the strike. Their vigilantes shoot Joy and set fire to Andersons’ father’s barn, which contains his entire crop of apples, simply because they show sympathy to the strikers.

Many violent scenes in the novel show that Doc Burton is right when he argues that “A man in a group isn’t himself at all; he’s a cell in an organism that isn’t like him any more than the cells in your body are like you” (Steinbeck 121). What is striking is that the strikers who are poorly equipped to face the association direct their violence against their fellow farmers. When Burke, one of the group leaders, accuses London of stockpiling supplies in his tent, London breaks the man’s jaw and leaves him unconscious. Another scene that illustrates that the strikers are cold-hearted fanatics who use ruthless violence against other farmers is in the fields where the picketers brutally beat a group of scabs brought in to replace the striking workers. The strikers even show no sympathy toward children.

In *Mine Boy*, the main reason for the strike is wage inequality between white and nonwhite workers. While white workers earn good salaries to have good living conditions, the blacks cannot even afford to pay for necessary medication. However, it is paddy who takes the injured black miner to the hospital for medication and later pays the debt: “Now

we [Paddy] will go and get the money and then you can go home" (Abrahams 153). An accident caused by a collapse of one part of the mine killing Chris and Johannes that ignites a strike. The blacks are told to go back into the mine because panic is unnecessary; however, Xuma demands that repairs should be made first. Paddy and Xuma stand up to protest the rest of the black miners scream for a strike against the bosses and the managers of the mines. When Paddy supports the blacks saying: "Xuma is right! They pay you a little! They don't care if you risk your lives: Why is it so? Is not the blood of a black man red like that of a white man? Does not a black man feel too? Does not a black man love life too? I am with you: Let them fix up the place first!" (Abrahams 247). Paddy is the first to go to jail and Xuma feels that he has to join him because Paddy, the white man has sacrificed himself for the sake of the blacks: "The Red One is there. He is not a black man but he is going to jail for our people, how can I not go?" (Abrahams 250).

8. The End of the Strike as Resurrection of the Heroes into True Consciousness

The end of the strike marks the beginning of the last stage of the hero's journey which is return. In this stage, the hero returns to his society with the charismatic energy and moral vision to reform it. In Campbell's words it is a "back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (Campbell 179). The consequences of the strike on the protagonist of the three novels are dramatic. Étienne is injured, Jim is killed and Xuma is jailed, yet the strike is not a total failure because it leads the strikers to reach true consciousness as they grow up more mature in their struggle for their rights. It is worth noting however that consciousness is understood differently by the three authors

In *Germinal*, the strike has negative impacts on both bourgeoisie and minors. Bourgeoisie suffer from the destruction of the mine sabotaged by Souvarine and violence engaged by workers against them. One of them is Cecile Gregoire, the daughter of a wealthy investor and an owner of the Voreux, who is strangled by Bonnemort as part of the violence unleashed by the strike and the reaction of the owners. The miners and their families have endured months of hardship. During the strike, they almost starve and are left to cold and several strikers are

killed. In the end, they go back to work, regretting the trust they have placed on Etienne.

However, the strike has yielded positive results. It reveals to Etienne that the crowd is uncontrollable and the pride of his authority wanes after seeing the strikers engage in destructive act which he never envisages. Etienne is now convinced that he has to avoid violence and start advocate social change only within the law: “to organize quietly, to know one another, to unite in associations when the laws would permit it” (Zola 226). The novel ends with reconciliation between Négrel, representing the bourgeois forces and Etienne after having barely survived a mining accident: “these two men [Négrel and Etienne] , with their contempt for each other- the rebellious workman and the sceptical master- threw themselves on each other’s necks, sobbing loudly in the deep upheaval of all the humanity within them” (Zola 514). However, Etienne leaves the mine behind him to go to Paris to join the international which is a threatening organization that attempts to overthrow the authority of the bourgeoisie. So the revolution is still prevalent as the last sentence of the novel indicates this: “Men were springing forth, a black avenging army, germinating slowly in the furrows, growing towards the harvests of the next century, and their germination would soon overturn the earth” (Zola 514). Accordingly, he authorities have to introduce social reforms since they are now warned of the dangers posed by angry crowds and of the specter of a revolt.

If the negative effects of the strike in Zola’s novel are felt on both the contending parties, in *In Dubious Battle*, the consequences of the strike are not disastrous to the employers against whom it is aimed but on fellow-workers. Doc Burton is right to predict the failure of the strike and to think that the crowd cannot be controlled due to Jim and Mac’s stringent obedience to a closed system of a party. Without a worthy leader and failing to face the landowners, their true enemy, the strikers turn their violence against scabs who, not unlike them, are poor pickers desperate for work. The strike also increases the suffering of apple pickers who are cut off from the aid of the sympathizers when they are ordered to leave Anderson’s camp. They starve during the strike due to the lack of food and medical aid.

However, there are many reasons why the strike is not a total failure. Due to the hardships the strikers experience during the strike and

the ability of the landowners to maintain their power and control over the land, the strikers come to recognize that it is not possible to overthrow entrenched authorities who are ready to use their men and weapons to crush any rebellion. One of casualties of the strike is Jim who dies in an ambush after having been shot in the face. Ironically Jim's death becomes his "return" to the community. His faceless head transcends his ego and restores him to society, for no face could mean any face. Jim's death is not the end of the struggle, but it provides Mac an occasion to deliver a speech at his funeral to persuade others to join the Communist Party: "This guy didn't want nothing for himself. . . . He didn't want nothing for himself" (Steinbeck 259). Mac's words suggest that he is transformed into a more conscious leader who has to place the interest of the workers ahead of that of an ambitious individual or a closed party system so that "[o]ut of all this struggle a good thing is going to grow" (Steinbeck 197).

Like in *Germinal* and *In Dubious Battle*, the strike in *Mine Boy* has many positive effects, but from another standpoint. In Abrahams' novel, the attitude of the boss who considers the death of Johannes and Chris in an accident as minor shows how apartheid and capitalism are inhumane. The accident contributes to raise awareness of the dangers to which both black and white workers are exposed in the mines. This accident helps trigger the strike that leads Paddy and Xuma develop a nonracial proletarian class consciousness. The strikes increases Xuma's rising consciousness from innocence to awareness which enables him to find it necessary to achieve freedom through class solidarity regardless of the color of his skin. Since black and white workers share almost the same kind of exploitation, they should act together to defeat the racist system of Apartheid wedded with capitalism. Xuma is thus transformed from a naive and displaced rural laborer to a proletarian militant indifferent to racial differences. After fleeing, Xuma decides to join Paddy in jail as gesture of solidarity with the white boss, who urges the blacks to revolt, and commits himself to a politics of proletarian struggle. Through the solidarity developed between Xuma and Paddy, Abrahams advocates a Marxist approach to national liberation from apartheid and capitalism that focuses on transcending racial differences and focusing on common struggle by the white and black workers instead of promoting a solution that is limited to African solidarity. The death of a black miner and a white

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boss (Johannes and Chris) in the accident and the risk of death that a black man and white boss (Xuma and Paddy) going down to fetch the bodies emphasize racial solidarity. It corresponds to the Marxist insistence that members of the working class throughout the world should cooperate to defeat capitalism and achieve victory in the class conflict.

Conclusion

Reading Emile Zola's *Germinal*, John Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* from the perspective of Joseph's Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* proves that strike is not a total failure as it leads to the rise of consciousness. Zola and Steinbeck portray strike as a threat to national stability and suggest that true conscious workers would organize strike under the capitalist law to avoid violence. Such peaceful method would maintain the capitalist system which would probably satisfy the workers demand. The true consciousness that results from the strike in Abrahams' novel consists of the union between workers regardless of their race to replace apartheid system welded with capitalism with a nonracist socialist system.

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