

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Themes of The Struggle for Freedom and Rebellion Against Social Injustice in My Universities by Miga Gorky

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Abstract

This article explores the key motifs of M. Gorky's autobiographical novella "My Universities"—the quest for inner freedom and the development of the protagonist's protest consciousness against the backdrop of social injustice in Russia at the end of the 19th century. The author analyzes how the clash of Alyosha Peshkov's youthful ideals with the harsh reality of the lower classes of society transforms into a conscious rebellion and a search for ways to rebuild the world. Particular attention is given to the characters of folk avengers, self-taught philosophers, and revolutionary intelligentsia encountered along the protagonist's journey.

KEY WORDS

M. Gorky, "My Universities," social injustice, freedom, rebellion, personal development, popular milieu, revolutionary consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

The third part of Maxim Gorky's autobiographical trilogy, "My Universities," occupies a unique place in Russian literature. While "Childhood" and "Among People" are chronicles of survival and the accumulation of life's experiences, "My Universities" is a story of intellectual and moral maturation. Freedom here is understood not simply as the absence of shackles, but as the right to personal development, and rebellion becomes the only worthy response to the "leaden abominations of life." [1]

Alyosha Peshkov's arrival in Kazan in 1884 was motivated by a romantic dream of education. However, instead of the classrooms of the Imperial University, he finds himself in "universities" of slums, flophouses, and hard physical labor. [3]

Social injustice in the work is presented not as an abstract

category, but as a tangible, stifling reality. There's the filth and poverty of the flophouses, where human dignity is erased by the need to earn a crust of bread. Or the toil in Semyonov's bakery, one of the most striking episodes, where labor turns into a soul-sucking drudgery. It is here that Peshkov realizes that injustice is systemic: "We worked in dull, heavy irritation... In this chaos, we lived from six in the morning until eight in the evening... we lived like dying horses." [2]

This is direct evidence that social injustice is not only a lack of money, but also the deprivation of humanity.

Gorky masterfully depicts the evolution of protest. At the beginning, it is a spontaneous unwillingness to accept rudeness and violence. But, encountering characters like Mikhail Romas or Stepan Radlov, the hero begins to

understand the political nature of oppression. "I came into the world to disagree"—this unspoken attitude of the hero runs like a red thread throughout the narrative. In his work, Gorky examines rebellion in many aspects: it is an intellectual rebellion, as a striving for knowledge despite the environment.[5] A book becomes a tool for the hero to liberate consciousness; social rebellion is participation in populist circles, attempts to "enlighten" the masses; it is an existential rebellion, like Peshkov's suicide attempt as the extreme point of despair and unwillingness to accept the world in its current ugliness. For Peshkov, a book was the only window into another world: "A book was something like a miracle for me... it gave me the opportunity to escape from this hard life into another world." [6]

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The Struggle for Freedom

Freedom in *My Universities* is not merely a political concept but a deeply personal and existential pursuit. The protagonist seeks freedom from:

- ignorance
- poverty
- social constraints
- intellectual limitations

Unlike traditional narratives of education, Gorky emphasizes self-education and independent thinking as key elements of freedom. The protagonist's journey reflects his desire to break away from imposed social roles and discover his own identity.

Freedom is closely linked to knowledge. Books, discussions, and interactions with intellectual figures become tools of liberation. The protagonist realizes that true freedom begins with the ability to think critically and question existing norms.

Rebellion Against Social Injustice

Gorky's work is deeply rooted in the social realities of late 19th-century Russia. The novel portrays a society marked by:

- class inequality
- exploitation of the poor
- lack of educational opportunities
- rigid social hierarchies

The protagonist's rebellion is both internal and external. Internally, he rejects the passive acceptance of injustice. Externally, he expresses dissatisfaction with the social system and aligns himself with progressive and revolutionary ideas.

This rebellion is not always overt or organized; rather, it

develops gradually through observation and reflection. Gorky shows that awareness is the first step toward resistance.

The Role of Experience in Shaping Consciousness

Unlike formal education, which the protagonist finds disappointing, life experience becomes his true source of learning. His interactions with workers, intellectuals, and ordinary people expose him to different perspectives.

These experiences contribute to the development of:

- social consciousness
- empathy for the oppressed
- critical thinking

The harsh realities of life serve as a catalyst for rebellion. The protagonist begins to understand that injustice is not an isolated phenomenon but a systemic issue that requires change.

Intellectual Awakening and Ideological Development

A significant aspect of the novel is the protagonist's intellectual growth. He becomes increasingly interested in philosophical and social ideas, particularly those related to justice and equality.

Books and discussions introduce him to new ways of thinking, encouraging him to question authority and tradition. This intellectual awakening strengthens his desire for freedom and reinforces his opposition to injustice.

Gorky presents knowledge as a powerful force that can challenge oppression and inspire change.

Symbolism of "Universities"

The title *My Universities* symbolizes the idea that true education comes from life itself. These "universities" include:

- hardship and struggle
- human relationships
- social observation

Through these experiences, the protagonist learns lessons that cannot be taught in formal institutions. This unconventional education shapes his worldview and prepares him for future ideological and social engagement.

Cultural and Social Implications

Gorky's depiction of struggle and rebellion reflects broader

cultural and historical processes. The novel captures the spirit of a society on the brink of transformation, where traditional values are being questioned.

The protagonist's journey mirrors the awakening of a new social consciousness among the lower classes. His rebellion represents a shift toward:

- social awareness
- demand for justice
- aspiration for equality

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