

Martin Anderson Nexo's Novel "Pelle" the Conqueror"

A Marxist Perspective:

By

¹Javed Akhter, ²Dr Najia Asrar Zaidi, ³Shahida Sher Muhammad

Abstract:

Martin Andersen Nexo was the most eminent Danish Marxist proletarian fiction writer of the twentieth century. He came from the working-class family background and wrote short stories, novels and essays about the plights and sufferings of the proletariat class. His novel "Pelle, the Conqueror" (1906) is one of the greatest proletarian novels in world literature. Pelle, the protagonist of the novel emerged as the self-realised and class-conscious proletarian leader from the obscurity, drudgery and poverty of his rural peasant and shepherd background. He was a common labouring lad, who served as a herd, shoemaker's apprentice and qualified shoemaker. The novel enjoyed enormous success and popularity that conquered the hearts of the proletarians and peasants of the world. The novel is also neglected in academia, criticism, literature and the world of research. The purpose of this research paper is to conduct a textual analysis of this novel, as a research method on the bedrock of Marxist literary hermeneutics in an innovative and new way, tracing the all-round development of Pelle's personality who succeeded to organise his fellow-proletarians on the platform of the Corporative movement, trade union and socialist revolutionary movement. He founded the garden-city for the betterment of his fellow-proletarian comrades.

Keywords: Self-realised and class-conscious proletarian leader, Autobiographical notes, Social realism, Marxism, Reformist Socialism

¹M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English Literature, University of Baluchistan Quetta Pakistan

sangatjavedakhtar@gmail.com

²Associate Professor, Department of English Literature, University of Balochistan Quetta Pakistan

³Lecturer, Department of English Literature, University of Balochistan Quetta Pakistan

Introduction:

The personality of Nexø is multidimensional and the short description provided here draws on details furnished by numerous sources (including Bras-Barret, J. L., 1969; Yde, H., 1994; Korst, S., 1998; Jespersen, O., 2007 and Ipsen, K. E., 2008) which are not different in terms of the basic information they provide about the life and works of Nexø. Born into a large wretched and impoverished family in the area of the slums and squalors of the district Christianshavn in Copenhagen, on June 26, 1869, he was the fourth child of eleven children of an impoverished hardworking stonecutter. When he was eight years old, his family accepted the pauper's repatriation offer and shifted to Nexø, a town on the Island of Bornholm in Baltic of whom he adopted as his last name. He spent his early childhood in the town Nexø on his beloved Island of Bornholm in the Baltic, where he served as the herd boy, shoemaker's apprentice, stonecutter and bricklayer. After six years of doing these jobs, he helped his father with his stone cutting work. He attended a folk high school in Nexø with the help of a patron. In this school, he made his first acquaintance with literature and journalism. Actually, he was a passionate writer from an early age, making notes on any scrap of paper that he could find anywhere. After completing his school, he served as a teacher in a Grundtvigian folk school until he got tuberculosis. The donors of the school managed to send him to Spain and Italy for medical cure. His first book of stories was published when he returned to Denmark. Afterwards, he won his bread exclusively by his writing after 1901.

Nexø set out for travelling in Southern Europe during the mid-1890s. He got the wind of the economic plights and sufferings of the proletarians which prevailing everywhere. These feelings actually crushed and compelled him to write for class-rights of the peasants and proletarians. He discovered the proletarians' sufferings, extreme economic exploitation and deprivation. Thereafter, his attention directly attracted towards the very issue, concerning to the proletarians which he put in his writings. While staying in Spain, he wrote his book "Days in the Sun" (1903) which was mostly based on his trips of Southern Europe. He was a highly introverted pessimist author in his early writings like his contemporary writer, Johannes Vilhelm Jensen. His early novels were based upon pessimism and themes of decadence in manner, which were mostly common trends in art and literature of Europe and America in the turn of the century. Afterwards, his world-view was gradually transformed from pessimism into optimism. He actively participated in the Social Democratic labour Party and later he joined the Danish Communist Party after the First World War. As F. Ingwersen and N. Ingwersen state that, "*Martin Anderson Nexø had joined the Danish Social Democratic Party in 1910, but was dismayed by the craven response of European Social Democracy to the First*

World War in 1918; quit the party out of disgust with its right-wing leadership. From then on he was a committed and quite uncritical supporter of the USSR; he played a role in the formation of the Danish Communist Party in 1923 and was at one stage on its central committee” (Ingwersen, F and N. Ingwersen, 1984, Pp. 11-13). After signing the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO), he left Denmark in 1949, and settled forever in Eastern Germany as an honorary citizen, where he lived until his death. Nexø became a staunch supporter of the Soviet Union after World War I. Despite his hard political struggle for the proletariat cause, he remained a controversial author in Denmark between the first and second world wars, due to his communist political ideas and activities. During this time, he spent seven years in Germany and visited the Soviet Union a number of times. He spent many years in Denmark, the Soviet Union and East Germany after World War II.

Nexø’s novel “A Fighter” (1896) is about the miserable living and working ethos of hired labour and tenant peasants in Denmark of the era. It had far-reaching and profound influences through a large reading public in the Folk high schools. His outstanding novel “Life Drips Away” (1902) is based upon remarkably sensitive accounts of his sojourn among the poor people in the Mediterranean, where he had gone to discover from tuberculosis. His most famous novel “Pelle, the Conqueror” (1906-1910) was one of his best-known and the most translated works based upon the themes of the films DDR-FS “Pelle der Eroberer” (1986) and “Pelle Erobreren” film (1987). A four-volume English translation of “Pelle, the Conqueror” published in 1913–1916. In 1989 and 1991, a revised version of an English translation of parts, one and two was published. Bille August filmed the first part of the novel in 1989, which received the Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language Movie. Although the Academy Award-winning version was filmed in 1987 on Nexø’s novel bearing the same title, it alters the focus of story considerably. Today “Pelle, the Conqueror” forms a part of the Danish literary canon for teaching in Danish lower and upper secondary schools and the film adaptation of 1987 is now included in the Canon of Danish Art and Culture. Recently in 2013 the Danish National Open Air Museum used “Pelle, the Conqueror” in the production of educational materials for schools, focusing on rural life for children in Denmark at the end of the nineteenth-century. A musical adaptation of “Pelle, the Conqueror” aims at all ages, is also performed throughout the summer of 2013, set in the museum grounds. As part of the publicity for this production it is stated that despite the story being from the 1870s, it still addresses the problematic issues that young people face today as they form their identities and try to make the best out of life. The possibility of

producing a film version of the last volumes of the novel is thus illustrating the interest in “Pelle, the Conqueror” that means the novel is still very much alive.

Nexo’s novel “The Living Land” (1916-20) is a trilogy about the wretched Danish rural workers and peasantry before the First World War. Nexo is massive naturalist and at his best particularly in “Ditte, Daughter of Mankind” in five volumes (1917–21), he approaches the most eminent American naturalist novelist Theodor Dreiser. It delineates the life of a wretched, impoverished but valiant and loving proletariat girl, Ditte for whom there is no escape from exploitation, oppression and deprivation. She has undergone an acute economic exploitation and oppression, representing what is best in the proletarian class. Her only weakness is a lack of hate and protest against those who rule her life. She is in fact the female counterpart of Pelle, who personifies the objective socio-economic and political ethos of the proletarian women of the time. While this novel gives a gloomy portrayal of the proletarians than “Pelle, the Conqueror”. Nexo’s optimistic views are observed in Ditte’s self-sacrifice and love, which she and many other characters of the novel reflect in their behaviours in spite of their appallingly impoverished living and working conditions. Nikolai Stepanovich Chernykh, the most eminent Soviet astronomer discovered a minor planet in 1979 and named it Ditte. A Danish film entitled “Ditte, Daughter of Mankind” was based on the version of the first part of the novel that was released in 1946.

Nexo’s collected short fiction appeared under the title of “From the Soil” in three volumes. (1922-1926). His book “Toward the Dawn” (1923) provides the enormous material about his pleasant personal experiences and his nostalgic Reminiscences of ante-bellum years in the Soviet Union. Its English translation was published by the title of “Reminiscences” two volumes. (1932–39). Selections from these volumes appeared in the form of English translation entitled “Days in the Sun” or “Under the Open Sky” (1932-39) that is two volumes of memoirs about the years of Nexo’s youth in Denmark of the 1890s. It sheds light on his political commitment and dedication to the Corporative movement and Social Democratic movement until the First World War and his later conversion to the leftist Marxist politics. These books and his “Memoirs” (1932) give a fascinating account of his early life and conversion from social democracy to socialism. “In God’s Land” (1929), is his much-debated novel. It is a harsh critique of the complacency of wealthy Danish feudal lord during the period of agricultural inflation brought about by the First World War. It deals with the cabal of a majority of Danish farmers who has enriched themselves by profiteering during the First World War and in the years

of hunger in Europe. These rich farmers believe that they are chosen by God. Nexo wrote a novel "The Sea King" (1930) in which combination of social realism and revolutionary romanticism about the miserable living and working conditions of Danish seamen prior, during and post the First World War, may be seen. His novel "Idealists" (1945) is a satire on the host of escapist theories and philosophies, such as World Federalism and psycho-analysis, which bemused factions of the European middle classes in general and those of Denmark in particular in the aftermath of the Second World War. Nexo's novel "Frydenholm" (1962) is about the different responses and reactions to Nazi occupation of Denmark during the Second World War.

Nexo's two-volume sequel to "Pelle, the Conqueror", "Morten, the Red" (1945) is in fact a continuation of "Pelle, the Conqueror". It is a story of the political upheavals of the late 1930s. The figure of Morten is one of the minor characters in "Pelle, the Conqueror" as an old comrade of Pelle. In this novel, he is a Copenhagen proletariat who develops as the protagonist of the novel and Marxist militant. He is antidote of the donothingism of the established trade unionists and Social Democratic leaders, as embodied in the person of the elder Pelle, on whom Morten occasionally comments. Nexo's later novels reflect his political support to the Soviet Union. He wrote a trilogy "Morten, the Red", "The Lost Generation" and "Jeanette in his later years from 1944 to 1956, which ostensibly followed "Pelle, the Conqueror" as its next part that unfortunately remained incomplete. It is considered Nexo's masked autobiography. Nexo was arrested by Danish police in 1941 during the Nazi's occupation of Denmark for his firm Marxist conviction. After releasing, he set out for Sweden and later for the Soviet Union where he began broadcasting to Norway and Denmark. Finally, he shifted to Dresden in East Germany after the Second World War. A Gymnasium High School in Dresden was dedicated to his name as Martin Andersen Nexo Gymnasium High School. He died in Dresden on June 1, 1954, where he had been living since 1951. He was entombed in the Assistens Soren Kierkegaard in the Norrebro beside Copenhagen.

Literature Review:

The proletarian novel took a new turn in 1906 with the appearance of the most famous proletarian Danish novel of Nexo "Pelle, the Conqueror" (1906-10). He was one of the most eminent earliest Marxist proletarian novelists. He wrote for the landless agricultural peasantry and industrial proletarians, which had been signally non-existent in Danish literature. "Pelle, the Conqueror" is a remarkable novel by a remarkable man. The novel set Nexo in the first

rank of Denmark's men of letters and internationally prominent novelists. The European Social Democratic critics highly appraised the novel everywhere for its interesting story of the marginalised, wretched and impoverished Swede immigrant-labouring lad, from his poverty, obscurity and drudgery to the proletarian leader in the urbanised and modern Marxist revolutionary proletariat movement (Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.121-122). Moreover, George Lukacs also hailed the novel with unrestrained enthusiasm in 1947 (Houmann, B., 1975, Pp. 290-294). "Pelle the, Conqueror" inspired Vladimir Lenin who met Nexo and received a copy of the first volume of the novel from him in 1922 with his signature (Shcherbina, V., 1974, p. 16).

"Pelle, the Conqueror" possesses autobiographical notes because Pelle shares many striking similarities with Nexo's story of life. Otto Jespersen refers it as an autobiographical novel in the "Note" on "Pelle, the Conqueror" (Jespersen, O., 2007, p. 1). The reviews of The New York Times, 1913 and The Literary Digest, 1918 regarded the novel as an autobiographical (The New York Times, 1913, p. 1). The reviews of "Pelle, the Conqueror" published in the early 1900s in newspaper articles from a variety of countries, highlighted many parallels between the author and the hero of the novel. Furthermore, Nexo was able to draw on his own, early writings from his time on Bornholm. In 1893, Martin Andersen (later Martin Anderson Nexo) had written his first article entitled "St. Hansaften paa Bornholm" published in Fyens Tidende. It is a detailed and lively account of the Midsummer's Eve's festivities on Bornholm. Later, he reproduced much of this article in chapter XVIII of "Pelle, the Conqueror" whereby, he describes the Farm Workers' Midsummer's Eve Outing. Nexo wrote to Waldo Browne, referring to his personal experiences from his childhood (Nexo, M.A., cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.377).

Borge Houmann incorporated several critiques and reviews of "Pelle, the Conqueror" in "Omkring Pelle Erobreren" (1975), written for various newspapers of Denmark between 1906 and 1910. Knud Gjesing describes Nexo as one of the four international eminent Danish writers (alongwith H.C. Andersen, Johannes Jorgensen and Soren Kierkegaard)" (Gjesing, K., 1994, cited in Nilsson, Sophie-Anne C., 2014, p. 15). Much of criticism of "Pelle, the Conqueror" revolves around Nexo's realistic style. Ingerborg Peterson wrote to Nexo soon after the publication of "Pelle, the Conqueror", that, "Your book is a realistic idyll without equal" (Peterson, I., cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.26). The novel received some extremely positive reviews in America with praise being made with The New York Times, describing the novel excellent (The New York Times, 1913, p. 1). A review of The Literary Digest of 1918 calls attention to the realist portrayals of the novel (The Literary Digest, 1918, p. 40). Nexo became popular for his

realism in America. The reviewer of The New York Times wrote about the popularity of Nexo that, "*No reader with any sympathy for human nature can escape the charm of Pelle's boyhood. Martin Anderson Nexo is not destined long to remain, so far the American reading public is concerned, an unknown author*" (New York Times, p. 1). Bojer particularly appraised him for his realism (Bojer, 1921, p. 52). Joel Johanson regarded "Pelle, the Conqueror" in The Sewanee Review Quarterly, as "*...the true epic of labour*" (Johanson, J., 1919, p.225). In his review for The Bookman, Rupert Scott first bemoans the general lack of Scandinavian literature available in English and the haphazard way in which it comes, before continuing to praise the 1913 translation of "Pelle, the Conqueror". "*A word of sincere thanks is due the publishers for the production, in a translation of remarkable excellence, of a work so big in actual physical scope, so big also in the portrayal of an existence, which is typical of thousands of other existences. The book is written with that care, that completeness of workmanship is a characteristic of modern Danish prose. There is an apparent jumping over important events to linger on details, a style which has been peculiarly Danish ever since J.P. Jacobsen ... Yet when we have finished the book we realise that nothing essential has been missed, that the mass of detail has only served to fill in the picture, more completely to add richness to its vivid colouring*" (Scott, R., 1916, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.133).

These reviews describe that, on its publication in 1913, English translation of "Pelle the, Conqueror" was extremely well received in the USA with a strong focus on the way in which Nexo portrays life of the proletarians and the humble life from within instead of viewing it from afar. Praise is also given to Nexo's willingness to show life in all its 'sordid' and unpleasant details that are at times fascinating while at others repulsive. Knut Hamsun, the Nobel Prize winner Norwegian author in Literature, wrote in the oldest continuously published magazine in the English-speaking world, "The Spectator", that it prides itself on being non-partisan and not afraid of controversy (The Spectator, August 9, 1913, p. 22). The review mentions that the novel is "*something out of the common*". The review also draws attention to the realism in the book, stating that, "*There is no plot, but the detailed realism of the life at the farm is presented firmly and vividly*" (The Spectator August 9, 1913, p. 22). Other reviews also draw attention to Nexo's realist portrayal of life among the proletarians with the insight of one who knows what it is really like. The reviews further comment on the starkness of the life, Nexo portrays and on his sympathy with the working classes. "*Here in a stern and faithful book you have presented that life in contact with the earth, removed from ideas except as they are implicit in any work, and almost savage in its astonishing lack of idealism. It is not an attractive picture. One can feel that this*

existence is real and full-blooded, and yet lament its extraordinary coarseness, its cruelty, and its contempt for anything that is old and feeble. Pelle, the boy is beautifully drawn, and the gradual growth of his independence, as he realises that his old father is despised by the rest of the farmhands, even by the women, is rendered carefully and sympathetically. We hope that this initial volume will meet with a reception that will justify the translation of the others” (The Daily News and Leader, 1913, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.122).

“Pelle, the Conqueror” also received very favourable reviews and the book was considered as a success, rating it as one of Fjord Press’ top three “bestsellers” with two printings selling 6,000 copies. Among the reviews, The New York Times drew particular attention to the fact of it being the only novel that has not been censored, highlighting its restoration of aspects of the author’s writing. Again, there is praise for the humour and social passion of the novel, although this is attributed to Nexo. *“After nearly a century, a classic novel about the rise of the proletariat, widely translated and read (especially in the Soviet Union) is finally being published in a fine unexpurgated and unabridged English translation”* (The New York Times, 1913, p. 1). A further review in the New Republic states that, *“To Nexo, there is nothing clean or unclean...he brings to our sympathy that rich, earthly, immemorial strain of sex and hunger and primitive necessities, gives it a modern embodiment that is...sincere feeling”* (Experience Plus, 2010). The effect of realism in Nexo’s text highlights the political content and ideology of the time with little emphasis on the style of writing and more on the content, themes and how these connect with his own political views and strongly voiced opinions. As Henrik Yde states that, *“All of the major works on Martin Anderson Nexo either have a political or politically cultural approach, or they follow a political or politically cultural discussion in their conclusions”* (Yde, H., 1994, p.22). Furthermore, Yde recommends that a comprehensive analysis of Nexo’s works are to be undertaken, investigating the author’s *“...poetical universe and its internal development over 60 years”* (Yde, H., 1994, p.23).

Nexo uses popular realism to produce the real socio-economic and political conditions to force the reader to enter the world and believe fully in it. It is important for the book that the reader does enter this world wholeheartedly and with full sympathy for the main character Pelle, as this builds the foundation for the following three books in the novel. Nexo received appreciations from many of his contemporary authors, regarding the realism in “Pelle, the Conqueror”. Otto Rung (although referring to the second volume of “Pelle, the

Conqueror” wrote to Nexo in 1907, regarding his ability to gain his readers’ sympathy for his characters: “*You have an ability, for which I envy you greatly, that is to win the readers over to your characters*” (Rung, 1907, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.362). Some authors highly appraised Nexo for his realist description of the events in “Pelle, the Conqueror”. In “The Modern Breakthrough: The Rural Rebellion”. In: S.H. Rossel, ed., *A History of Danish Literature*” (London: 1992), Niels Ingwersen appreciates the novel as a masterpiece (Ingwersen, 1992, p.312). Niels and Faith Ingwersen write that, “*Nexo’s writing is most compelling when he utilizes the heritage-folklore and the Bible-of his proletarian origin and fuses social realism with myth*” (Ingwersen and Ingwersen 1984, Pp. vii-viii). Nexo’s critical use of almue culture and the folkloric situates him in the vanguard of the folk realists whose work had a profound influence on the contours of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Danish Literary landscape.

In the first volume, Pelle does not conquer much more than the readers’ sincere sympathy. “*It will then be the author’s job to justify his title as conqueror over the next three volumes, as everyone with a good sense of literature awaits with yearning*” (A.T., 1906, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.69). The most beautiful protest against everyone is one-sided and therefore superficial vision of the proletarians’ life can be found in this book. Nexo has striven to give the whole truth – not just one side that turns against the dark but also the side that faces daylight ... “*The book is so rich and complex, that even the holy have found a little place for them*” (Bjerre, A. 1906, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.71–72). The readers know perfectly well about farm life, the same sounds of nature, the same animal-like eroticism and the same vulgarity. Only there are more kinds of these unappealing pictures, and they are captured with greater sharpness than by the other authors. Interestingly, Nexo’s reliance on folklore departs radically from earlier nineteenth century uses of folklore as part of a Romantic nationalist project of the bourgeois nostalgia such as that found in Rasmus Srensen, B. S. Ingemann and later, Holger Drachmann. Like members of the almue, Nexo relied on oral narrative, folk belief and other forms of folklore as part of a sustained critique of class-division, exploitation and wretchedness of the rural poor peasants by land-owning feudal lords and de facto structural impediments both to community progress and individual development.

Nexo’s almost revolutionary message of social responsibility and the need for a Marxist egalitarian socialist social formation filtered through to the Danish polity in diluted form and likely contributed early on the socio-political debates that ultimately led to the modern social welfare state. Despite this far reaching impact, over the earlier

decades of the twentieth century, his predominantly Socialist “Pelle, the Conqueror” along with many of his other works, disappeared from the Danish cultural landscape. Aakjer resents the brutality, Skjoldborg savours it, and Nexo presents it coldly and without passion. He exudes coldness. *“There are shattered lives in the book that are regarded with great sympathy. Nonetheless, we freeze in Mr Andersen Nexo’s company. ... In addition, the day when the people receive this book with open arms, they will be just as finished as are the Bourgeoisie, where faith is laughable and children a burden”* (Jepsen, M. 1906, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.70–71). Sophie-Anne Cobby Nilsson wrote a master thesis entitled “Lifting the Veil of Illusion: Transparency and Invisibility in English Language Translations of Pelle Erobreren” submitted to Department of Culture & Identity, Roskilde University Denmark on June 30, 2014. In this dissertation, she discussed variety of English translations of Nexo’s master text “Pelle, the Conqueror” and far-reaching and profound textual influences of it on film, art and literature. In this survey of literature previously written on the subject from various theoretical lenses, the researcher finds that no researcher still attempted to conduct textual analysis of Nexo’s “Pelle, the Conqueror” from Marxist perspective so that the on-going research article focuses on this area of research on the bedrock of Marxist literary hermeneutics.

Martin Andersen Nexo established himself with the series “Pelle Erobreren” (1906-10; “Pelle, the Conqueror”). The first volume of the novel describes the boyhood of a proletarian child named Pelle cursed with a feckless father Lasse. Later Pelle rises above the degradation, humiliations and impoverishment of his childhood to become a successful class-conscious revolutionary socialist labour organiser. In this sense, this is the second mature revolutionary proletarian novel in world literature, which followed “The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists” that was published in 1906. When the first part of “Pelle Erobreren” (Pelle, the Conqueror) appeared in 1906, the name and fame of its author, was hardly known even in his own native country. His name was known only to a few literary people who knew that he had written some volumes of stories and a book full of sunshiny reminiscences from Spain. The rise and fall of Martin Anderson Nexo’s popularity were in tune with his revolutionary socialist ideas, leading to his books being burned in Finland and banned during the German occupation of Denmark. He and his family were forced to flee Dresden, where he died at the age of 85 in 1954. He was famous for his compassion to help all in need whether they were refugees from Germany or Russian orphans, which turned him a controversial personality. The both extremes of people’s love and hatred for him can

be illustrated by the story that on his last visit to Denmark, the waiter refused to serve him coffee on the simple grounds that he was Martin Andersen Nexø! (Korst, S., 1998, p. 22). On the contrary, his 80th birthday was celebrated in great style in Copenhagen by around 50,000 people (Korst, S., 1998, Pp.20-21). In fact, “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” is a mature revolutionary proletarian novel. In Martin Anderson Nexø’s opinion, “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” is intended to be a book about the proletarian that is to say about man himself, who naked and with only his health and appetite. He reported for duty in the service of life, about the broad march of the worker on earth, on his endless, semi-consciousness journey towards the light” (Nexø, M. A., 1906, Forward).

The novel is also an autobiographical novel because there are many parallels between the lives of Martin Anderson Nexø and the hero of the novel Pelle, which are also referred to in the Forward to “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” written by Otto Jespersen, where it is mentioned that the novel is “*largely autobiographical*”. In this manner, Pelle’s world begins to form almost before one starts to read the novel. “Both author and character”, for example, “grew up in poverty and were eight years old, even sharing the same birthday of June 26 (Houmann, B., 1975, p. 26), when they arrived on Bornholm to seek for work with themselves and their families. In the same way, Lasse built expectations up of Bornholm in “*Pelle, the Conqueror*”, a place where nobody were hungry and life was good, so did Martin Andersen Nexø’s father told the stories to his family about Bornholm, where: everyone has his own house, there is work for all, nobody has to go hungry or suffer from hardship. Martin Anderson Nexø and Pelle were both employed as herd boys, taking cattle out to pasture in the summer. In a letter to an American author Waldo Browne, Anderson Martin Nexø himself refers to these aspects and experiences from his childhood that, “...*wonderfully rich for my later task*” and providing some sort of autobiographical content to “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” (Nexø, M. A., cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.377).

In the same way, memoirs and autobiographies can also be regarded as works of art and not as a pure representation of events and experiences as there will always be some form of either alteration made by the author, unconsciously or consciously (Stern, 1973, Pp.60–90). Although the novel, in great extent, is autobiographical, but its story is told with such scrupulous art that it conveys the impression of objectivity in a much greater degree than that work to which it has been justly compared, Romain Rolland’s “*Jean Christophe*”. Martin Anderson Nexø knows the life of the labourer from within. He has firm belief in its future, but he can regard it also with that tranquillity in

which alone passion is transmuted into art (Jones, L., 1917, cited in Houmann, 1975, Pp.134–137). The novel is considered by some reviewers of *The New York Times*, 1913 and *The Literary Digest*, 1918 to be mainly autobiographical. A fact attributed in part to the foreword written by Otto Jespersen, but also to the style, as the reviewer in *The New York Times* puts it: “...for it reads, not like fiction, but like an exceptionally vivid record of actual events; events commonplace enough—as commonplace as life itself” (*The New York Times*, 1913). Describing Pelle’s childhood, the same article states that, “That childhood is here presented neither in rosy nor in very dark colours... but a genuine realism which shows the mingling of pleasure and sorrow...” (*The New York Times*, 1913).

Martin Andersen Nexø’s greatest power lies in the perfect frankness and naturalness with which he records the most homely, sordid and even bestial facts of human experience. No novelist, unless it is Hamsun, is so wholly unforced and undramatic in the depiction of facts in themselves disagreeable but which in his large scene are no more than details. These Scandinavian realists accept life more wholly and more sanely, one feels that do we, with our taboos and our obliquities. Martin Anderson Nexø portrays life unflinchingly but with casualness, a freedom from false emphasis, which is wholly disarming. He is no more coarse or prurient than a text-book on physiology (Grabo, C., 1928, cited in Houmann, 1975, Pp.221–224). Waldo Browne highlights the depth and passion with which Martin Anderson Nexø portrays his characters in the following words:

“To me it is a masterpiece: with M. Rolland’s “Jean-Christophe” one of the two greatest creative works of our generation. You have put the surging pageant and infinite complexity of modern life within the covers of a book as no one else has ever done...Best of all, you have revealed the workings of the universal human heart with such compassionate insight as only a very few writers have ever attained to” (Browne, 1918, cited in Houmann, 1975, p.376). Furthermore, comparing with the Nobel Prize -winning Romain Rolland’s novel *Jean-Christophe* Martin Anderson Nexø’s another friend Ivy Livinof says that, “...it seems to me Rolland has written from the outside, you from the inside, there is a strong smell of humanity exuding from your book which fascinates me. “... and the tremendous variety, colour and even smell of human life can be felt once more” (Litvinof, 1919, cited in Houmann, 1975, pp.378–379). Niels Ingwersen refers “Pelle, the Conqueror” in *A History of Danish Literature* as a masterpiece, producing vivid narratives through the use of “...stark realism, an underlying symbolism, a sense of detail reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen, and a rollicking sense of

humour – all paired with sympathy and compassion for the protagonists...” (Ingwersen, N., 1992, p.312).

In his publication “Omkring Pelle Erobreren” (1975) Borge Houmann presents several reviews and critiques of “Pelle, the Conqueror” written for a variety of Danish newspapers (Fyns Social-Demokrat; Politiken; Berlingske Tidende; Kristeligt Dagblad, etc.) between 1906 and 1910. In these reviews, the author of “Pelle, the Conqueror” is considered as being one of at least four internationally famous Danish authors (alongside H.C. Andersen, Johannes Jorgensen and Soren Kierkegaard) (Gjesing cited in Nilsson, Sophie-Anne C., 2014, p. 15). Martin Anderson Nexø was in good and friendly terms with these authors and being recognised, among other things, for their realism. As a reviewer writes that, he was particularly admired for his ability “*to go beyond what is described as the surface realism of the day with his use of ‘real’ figures that are actually symbols of something more*” (New York Times, 1921).

Much of the positive critique of “Pelle, the Conqueror” centres on Martin Anderson Nexø’s realistic style: through highlighting his ability to draw the reader into ‘Pelle’s world’; by the way this world and the people in it appear so real that the reader is almost able to smell the life portrayed in the pages of the book. How the humour and compassion further add ‘living’ detail. These aspects correlate with the features of realism in literature and an idea of the illusionary effect of realism created by Martin Anderson Nexø with “Pelle, the Conqueror”. Shortly after the publication of “Pelle, the Conqueror”, Ingerborg Peterson wrote to Martin Anderson Nexø that, “*Your book is a realistic idyll without equal*” (Peterson, cited in Houmann., 1975, p.26). Houmann expands this statement that, “The portrayal of life at Stengården was so realistic that it permanently took the wind out of the sails of those, who wished to present Denmark as a model among to Matthiasen. In this way, the proletarians took the novel to their hearts. “That was a dizzying amount of copies of “Pelle, the Conqueror that, “*you spread across the country, I have come across only very few labourers’ homes that do not possess a copy of the novel*” (Nexø, M. A., 1919, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.41–2).

A later review of The Literary Digest, 1918 draws attention to the realism of the novel by highlighting aspects that it considers less savoury but nonetheless important in providing a realistic image: “*...and portrays the open-air life of a provincial district with startling realism, by turns fascinating and repulsive,...*” (The Literary Digest, 1918). In The Sewanee Review Quarterly, Joel Johanson refers to “Pelle the Conqueror” as being “*...the true epic of labour*” and praises the book for taking a ‘labourer’s view on life and allowing the world to

be constructed and interpreted according to the labourer's principles and philosophy" (Johanson, 1919, p.225). In Johnson's opinion, "Pelle, the Conqueror" is the first book to look at the life of labourers and 'humble' people in society, not from a distance but from within (Johanson, 1919, p.225). Sophie-Anne Cobby Nilsson wrote a master thesis entitled "Lifting the Veil of Illusion: Transparency and Invisibility in English Language Translations of Pelle Erobreren" submitted to Department of Culture & Identity, Roskilde University Denmark on June 30th, 2014, in which she analysed various English translations of Martin Anderson Nexø's "Pelle, the Conqueror" and its effects on literature.

The German Social Democrat critics highly appraised the novel for its complex narrative of the impoverished and wretched Swedish immigrant peasants Pelle and his father Lasse. They appreciated the novel for the all-round development of Pelle's personality from the peasant and common labouring background to a leading class-conscious and self-realised Socialist proletarian leader in the urban Marxist proletariat movement. They hailed the novel and its author for a major step in extending the proletarian hero in depicting the sufferings and plights of the proletariat class (Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.121-122). From 1923 to 1929, Martin Andersen Nexø resided in Germany (Le Bras-Barret, J., 1969, Pp. 224-227). He was thus, an inescapable reference point for a Marxist critic, considering the prospects of the proletarian literature in the mid-1920s (Bewes, T and Timothy H., 2011, p. 168). Anderson Martin Nexø had joined the Danish Social Democratic Party in 1910, but was dismayed by the craven response of European Social Democracy to the First World War in 1918; quit the party out of disgust with its right-wing leadership. Then, he became a committed Marxist and quite uncritical supporter of the USSR. He performed a significant role in founding the Danish Communist Party in 1923 and "was at one stage on its central committee" (Ingwersen, F and N. Ingwersen, 1984, Pp. 11-13). However, George Lukacs hailed "Pelle, the Conqueror" with great enthusiasm in his brief paper published in Berlin in 1947, but Martin Andersen Nexø did not figure as an exemplar in his 1930s criticism in the way, "Maxim Gorky, Thomas Mann and Roman Roland did" (Lukacs, Georg, 1975, reprinted in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp. 290-294).

In short, "Pelle the Conqueror" also succeeded to attract the attention of Vladimir Lenin who never missed to read the world socialist literature as Vladimir Shcherbina states in his book "Lenin and Problems of Literature" that, "Lenin missed none of the major events in the socialist literature of other countries. In 1922, he met the well-known Danish revolutionary writer Martin Anderson-Nexø who

gave Vladimir Illyich and Nadezhda Konstantinovna a copy of his novel “Pelle, the Conqueror” with the following inscription:

“To the Comrades Krupskaya and Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin with thanks and good wishes,

Their-in love,

Martin Anderson Nexo”

(Shcherbina, V., 1974, p. 16).

Debate and Discussion:

Nexo was the champion of socialist revolution. His novels helped to raise class-consciousness in the proletarians and landless peasantry of Denmark in particular and throughout the world in general. He is as one of most eminent realist modern storytellers of Denmark, possessing a prominent place in world literature. Such valuable position was still unnoticed in Danish literature. He concentrated attention on living and working ethos of crushing impoverishment and wretchedness in Denmark in “Pelle, the Conqueror” and “Ditte, Daughter of Mankind”. “Pelle, the Conqueror” published in 1906 but seven years ago, was already a classic. Nexo has been loved and respected by generations. His authorship turned mature with the four-volumes of “Pelle, the Conqueror”. It is one of the most popular bildungsroman (proletarian novel), which traces Pelle’s political transformation from a poor peasant’s son to the class-conscious revolutionary socialist proletariat intellectual and activist. Many realistic portraits of the objective Danish socio-economic and political ethos emerge that reflect a rural estate life and in the urban slums and squalors of Copenhagen. It is in fact, a novelised socio-economic and political history of the proletariat class of Denmark from the last quarter of the nineteenth-century to circa 1910. The story of the novel is illuminated with Nexo’s firm belief in the proletariat class, told with a certain tongue-in-cheek humour. The scene is laid on the Danish Stone Farm where the early boyhood of a cursed Pelle with an impoverished, feckless and wretched father Lasse is spent.

As was the case with many other novels across the world (for example Chernyshevsky’s “What is to Be Done?” in Russia, Charles Dickens’ “The Pickwick Papers” in England, Alexandre Dumas’ “The Three Musketeers” in France, Mrs Beecher Stove’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” and Upton Sinclair’s “The Jungle” in America), it was the

serialisation of “Pelle, the Conqueror”. The serialisation of the novel gave it access to a larger and vast readership throughout Europe. Houmann describes how this serialisation (first published in Social-Demokraten in Denmark, the daily newspaper of the Labour Democratic Movement) was enthusiastically received by readers. An article written by Aksel Sandemose in 1940 for “Arbejderbladet” glowingly describes the way in which, prior to his reading of “Pelle, the Conqueror”, Sandemose did not realise that it was possible to write about ordinary people and still be as exciting as a “Nat Pinkerton’s Adventure” (Sandemose, 1940, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.280). Continuing from the success of the serialisation, and following a very marketing campaign by the publisher Kunstforlaget Danmark under Heinrich Matthiasen, “Pelle, and The Conqueror” had a major breakthrough in the bourgeois Danish book market. The horrifying depictions of economic plights, sufferings and boundless social injustice are strong images of the bourgeois Danish social formation around 1900. Nexø’s novel is driven by a deep indignation on behalf of the disadvantaged proletarians and landless peasantry. However, his social criticism is accompanied by an irrepressible optimism and a firm belief that the revolutionary class-conscious proletarians will ultimately change the capitalist system and establish a socialist social formation. Both anarchist Alfonso from “Sunny Days” and the “Knight Don Quixote” are the basis for Nexø’s novel “Pelle, the Conqueror”. Martin Anderson Nexø wrote his novel “Pelle, the Conqueror” in the era of imperialism after the completion of Industrial Revolution in Europe prior to the World War 1, which is considered second proletarian novel in Danish as well as in world literature. He followed Robert Tressell to write this novel, which was published in 1906. Similarly, he focused on his beloved Bornholm in the Baltic in which he lived, observed and experienced the wretched socio-economic conditions and abject poverty from his childhood. In “Pelle, the Conqueror” the depiction of Swedish immigration workers in Denmark also refers to an actual social phenomenon set in the distinctive geographical environment of more specifically in the Island of Bornholm in the Baltic. The novel is not a simplistic good poor portrayal of the people but is a realist depiction of multiple layers of conflicts that are illustrated both within personalities but also between individual characters between and within each layer of the existing social formation. It not only closely describes Pelle and Lasse in their daily lives but also the lives of those around them. The novel is indeed very much concerned with ordinary people at the lower end of social formation and their interactions and struggles. *“There are such interesting realist portrayals as of that of the great love of the work-worn father, Lasse and his brother Kalle with his thirteen children and enduring humour. It is, however, far from being picture-perfect. On the contrary, they live, and they rise in*

clear and pure colour above the background of filth and low morality.....Here presentations of life are expressed with blunt brutality alongside a naïve and childlike lust for life” (Gnudtzmann, A.,1906, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.64–65).

The first volume of “Pelle, the Conqueror” (“Boyhood”) begins on the first of May 1877, when a Swedish farmhand Lasse Karlsson from Tornmelilla in Ystad District, who grows older before time, takes his eight years old child, Pelle to escape from an abject impoverishment in Sweden after his mother dies. In this way, these impoverished Swedish people immigrated to Bornholm at the end of the nineteenth-century in order to find work on a farm. They arrive at the Island of Bornholm in the Baltic, from their native country Sweden. In fact, Lasse thinks of Bornholm, a land of peasants, sailors, fishermen and storekeepers to be a cornucopia of great opportunities. Lasse and Pelle were taken on at a large farm with a philandering and promiscuous owner Kongstrup Koller and his depressed alcoholic wife. The Koller family, the owner of the farm, resides in a highly splendid white house, which is as beautiful and comfortable as the white Palace. The family economically exploits the poor neighbouring peasants, proletarians and farmers, taking great advantages of their misfortunes. The debauchery of the Koller family is notorious in the whole area, but it is not measured by the same standard used for toiling poor people. Kongstrup Koller leaves the place under the management of a Zealander bailiff, who is drunkard and debauch. Lasse is hired by the bailiff in Stone Farm, where he mends the cattle expects to pay for his board by running errand and later serving as shepherd. In this way, Lasse and Pelle are reduced to sell their labour power for poor wages in order to win their bread in Stone Farm that is one of the largest stone farms on Bornholm Stone Farm. There they are often shovelling manure and tending the cattle from 4:00 a.m. in freezing conditions in fetid cow stables for six years.

The farm manager openly ridiculed one of the farm hands who attempted to regain his dignity farted loudly. The farm has an oppressive atmosphere and is a source of local superstitions and supernatural fears. *“Lasse and Pelle were quickly aware of the oppressive atmosphere, and began to see with the half-frightened eyes of the others, even before they themselves had heard very much. Lasse especially thought he could never be quite happy here, because of the heaviness that always seemed to surround them”* (Nexo, M.A., 2007, Volume 1, p. 20). Lasse thinks that his son shall learn to read and write and he may become anything, even a clerk or a schoolmaster. When Pelle becomes nine years old, he begins to go to school where he is the only Swedish boy among more than twenty Danish children.

Martin Anderson Nexo illustrated the attitude of the Danish people towards the Swedish workers on Bornholm, both implicitly as a general tone where “Swede” is added as an extra layer to another insult. A sailor exclaims to a man in the way that, “*Look out you Swedish devil!*” (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume 1, p. 57). When Pelle explicitly, ponders on why the Swedes are talked about and treated so badly? “*And why did the men call one another “Swede”- as a term of abuse*” (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume 1, p. 57). Pelle receives a bare education in school, where the mediocre teacher Mr Niels teaches him the real lessons of life. The atmosphere of the farm is a tiresome, dreary and boring one. For Lasse Karlsson, life is very problematic because he is old and weak. The labourers on the farm taunt him, laughing and making the butt of jokes. “*Their laughter crushed him, and he withdrew into his old-man’s world, and despondently adapted himself to it*” (Nexo, M.A., 2007, Vol. 1, p. 99). However, he with his son halts at Stone Farm for many years. When their life becomes difficult, they determine to try their luck in another town.

“Pelle, the Conqueror” takes its starting point in the huge Swedish migration from Sweden to the Danish Island of Bornholm in the Baltic in Denmark, seeking job for their families that took place between 1861 and 1910. Pelle was much excited over his first journey. The reader sees through Pelle’s vision all the happenings upon Stone Farm. The consistent toil, the quarrels, love-making, sickness, holiday joys, birth and death, the reader shares with Pelle. There are rough, illiterate, rustic and primitive people in Stone Farm, among them Pelle’s lot falls. However, they are not brutal people. Many of them are kindly, there is unconscious readiness for self-sacrifice in Kalle, his Danish wife, and the old grandmother, who despite, privation and grief, finds life very pleasant. Nexo’s concentrates on the Swedish proletarians and accurately describes the role that Bornholm played in the Swedish-Danish immigration phenomena whereby 81,000 people emigrated from Sweden to Denmark with approximately 2,900 Swedish-born immigrants making up 7.5% of the population of Bornholm in 1880. In addition, his realist description of the types of workers, their problems, reception and treatment on Bornholm fits with historical information. The modern reader is unaware of the phenomenon that, despite its historical impact, is now referred to as the forgotten immigration. There is no ‘real world’ to draw a direct parallel.

The novel started on May Day of 1877, when a Swedish labourer Lasse Kalsson immigrated from his hometown Tornmelilla of Ystad District to Bornholm in order to seek livelihood. He accompanied his eight years old lad, Pelle Kalsson. They started labouring on Stone Form, which was one of the big farms of Bornholm. The owner of this

farm is a promiscuous and philandering, Konstrap Koller family lived comfortably in a highly magnificent white house, which was not unlike a comfortable splendid white palace. The family economically exploited the labour of the impoverished and wretched landless agricultural peasantry, artisans and proletarians. The management of the farm was in the hands of a Zealander bailiff, who was drunkard, debauch and cruel person. Lasse and Pelle started mending cattle in Stone Form. There is neither the fast sentiment which gushes over the delights of penury, nor that other, equally false, which makes no allowance for habit or temperament, but a genuine realism, which describes the mingling of sorrows and pleasures, the joys of play that brook during Summer, the hardships of the long dark Northern Winter. The reader finds the barns and outhouses, the broad fields, with sand dunes beyond, and beyond them again the sea. The homely folk, dairy maids and labourers, the headman upon whom there fell so terrible a calamity, the young fisherman, who escalated his sin with his life, we know everyone. There is no straining after effect that is natural seemingly spontaneous. "There are also various ways in which verisimilitude is used to describe places and events to the effect that the reader is persuaded that what he or she is experiencing in the world of the novel, may just as easily actually take place or have taken place in the 'real' world" (Kennedy, C. D., 2002, p.84).

Lasse and Pelle underwent the oppressed environment of the farm because the bailiff cruelly treated the workers of the farm. Lasse wanted his son to learn the art of reading and writing. He wished his son to be a clerk or a schoolteacher. Therefore, Pelle started going to school at the age of nine. He was only Swede among more than twenty Dane children in school where Danes humiliated and insulted Swedes. Pelle got bare education from a mediocre type of schoolmaster Niels in school. This schoolmaster taught Pelle the vicissitudes of life. When the life of Lasse and Pelle became more miserable, they decided to try their fortune in another place. However, Pelle left Stone Form for a small town, which was the main city of the island. He bore a sack on his back early in the morning and saw Klaus Hermann, a farmer on the way. The peasant offered him a ride on his carriage into the town and took him to Master Jeppe Kofod, a shoemaker who accepted Pelle as an apprentice in his shoe-making workshop. One day, the skipper of Iceland boat tells Master Jeppe, Blom, Drejer, Klaussen, Pelle, the leather-dealers and merchants that he has most of their boots and shoes with him. No more boots and shoes can be sold out in Iceland because, "*There are machines which make boots, and they make them cheaper than you, too*" (Nexo, M.A., 2012, Volume II, Pp. 240-241). Master Jeppe and other shoemakers do not believe in what the skipper says. Afterwards, he brings a pair of boots made in Great Britain to show

Master Jeppe. Pelle thought that his future was dark because as his apprenticeship completed, machine-made shoes replaced the hand-made boots and shoes. As a result, many shoemakers were rapidly becoming out of job. Master Andres died in the last year of Pelle's apprenticeship. He left the town for Copenhagen in order to seek job. He met the president of the struggling Shoemakers' Union and requested him to be a member of the Shoemakers' Union. The president accepted his application (Nexo, M.A., 2012, Volume III, and IV, P. 13). Then, Pelle became the trade unionist, member of the Social Democratic party (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume III and IV, Pp.33-47) and class-conscious leader in the broader world of Marxist revolutionary proletariat movement in one of the bitter strikes of the late 1890s. He is imprisoned and after release, becomes a Social Democrat stalwart, pushing for assorted social reforms.

“Pelle, the Conqueror” is peopled with a panoramic gallery of various characters and the realistic portrayal of the objective socio-economic conditions of Bornholm and the Ark, a huge ramshackle tenement. Nexo carefully portrayed the diversity of characters with their joys and sorrows in such a detailed and open way that the reader becomes willing to ‘suspend disbelief’ and enter into the world of Pelle that Nexo offers. It is through this myriad of experiences and interactions with many characters that Pelle's character can be seen as developing throughout the novel. “There are many methods and variations on this aspect through referring to, and including, historical figures, actual events and places or things identifiable to the reader, the author can ground his fiction in the reader's own experience, emotions and knowledge” (Hough, G., 1986, p.57; Kennedy, C. D., 2002, p.74), making the world being offered easier to accept as being plausible. The figure of Lasse is more appealing and a more pathetic than that of Pelle, the son of his old age. His bravado, whose futility he knows so well, his pitiful attempts at self-assertion, which end in nothing. His desire to keep his role of Providence to Pelle who believes in him is appearing utterly in his thoughts and actions. He feels that his frustrated endeavours to clutch at the manhood are fast slipping off from him. The trick fate plays him at the end, when peace and comfort seem almost within his grasp. His devotion to Pelle makes of him a memorable figure. He does nothing spectacular. During the thrilling scene of the shipwreck, he is a more looker –on .Yet one remember him after the hero of that dramatic episode is forgotten. Lasse is identical to Pere Goriot, the memorable character of Balzac's novel “Pere Goriot” who reaps love instead of ingratitude.

Likewise, “Pelle, the Conqueror” is also an autobiographical novel. The life-story of Pelle, the hero of the novel shares many

striking affinities with Nexo's life-story. Nexo writes about Pelle as being like his own child, nurtured through his childhood sorrows and joys and now ready to venture out into the world. Otto Jespersen states in the "Note" on the first volume of "Pelle, the Conqueror", that, it "...resembles many great novels in being largely autobiographical" (Jespersen, O., 2007, p. 1). Pelle also migrated from his homeland to Spain like his author when he was only eight years old. Nexo had the same labouring experiences in his life who worked as a herd boy, apprentice in shoe making workshop, bricklayer and stone cutter. Pelle was employed as herd boy taking cattle out to pastures in the summer on Bornholm, worked as an apprentice in shoe making workshop and laboured as a qualified shoemaker in Copenhagen. Nexo became a shoemaker's apprentice as we find Pelle in the second Volume of the novel "Apprenticeship". Pelle grows out of a strong social indignation and a firm belief in the poor proletariat class, sharing many things in common with Nexo. In a letter to an American author Waldo Browne, Anderson Martin Nexo himself referred to these aspects and experiences from his childhood in Nexo, a town on Bornholm, from which his second name is derived. He states that, "...wonderfully rich for my later task and providing some sort of autobiographical content to "Pelle, the Conqueror" (Nexo, M. A., 1919, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.377).

Although it is recognised that autobiography is by no means an unbiased and unabridged view of events, it is also true that in writing "Pelle, the Conqueror" Nexo was able to draw on his personal experiences as a boy growing up in poverty on Bornholm. As Houmann wrote that, "*Both author and character grew up in poverty and were eight years old, even sharing the same birthday of June 26*" (Houmann, B., 1975, p. 26). There are many striking affinities between the author and Pelle that can be drawn in terms of immigration to Denmark as described that Lasse is waxing lyrical about the many wonderful aspects of life on Bornholm. "*And why, if you liked you could drink gin like water, it was so cheap; but it was so strong that it knocked you down at the third pull*" (Nexo, M.A., 2007, Volume 1, p. 11). In the same way, Lasse built expectations up of Bornholm, a place where nobody was hungry and life was good, so did Martin Andersen Nexo's father told the stories to his family about Bornholm, "*where: everyone has his own house, there is work for all, nobody has to go hungry or suffer from hardship*" (Harilid, 1994, p. 38). In the same way, memoirs and autobiographies can also be regarded as works of art and not as a pure representation of events and experiences as there will always be some form of either alteration made by the author, unconsciously or consciously (Stern, 1973, Pp.60–90). At the same time, however, Martin Anderson Nexo states firmly that "Pelle, the

Conqueror” is not an autobiographical work, despite being considered as such by many; this perception is something that he says makes him happy as, for him; it is “*proof that the book appears alive*” (Nexo, M.A.,1919, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p.49).

“Pelle, the Conqueror” is also an epic novel, which covers the poorest life of proletarians. Joel Johanson refers to “Pelle, the Conqueror” as being “...*the true epic of labour*” (Johanson, J., 1919, p.225). Each volume of “Pelle, the Conqueror” is a complete novel in itself except perhaps the last volume. The first two volumes of the novel consist of one of the finest stories of childhood in European literature, describing the events of the early childhood of a common labouring boy who lives in neighbouring country of Bornholm. The tale goes on with the lad’s apprenticeship shoe making workshop in a little and poor provincial town where the modern bourgeois Industrial Revolution yet not occurred and was still innocent of socialist revolution. The novel is based mainly on the interactions between the many different groups of ordinary people on Bornholm, from servants to fishermen, schoolteachers to manual labourers, and Danes to Swedish immigrants. Nexo also lays out the plan for the following three volumes, explaining that the next books follow Pelle throughout his struggles and victories during his life as a class-conscious revolutionary proletarian, fighting for fundamental rights and social justice. The style of Martin Anderson Nexo is pleasantly straightforward, narrative and unpretentious. “*A hint of a mixture of Bornholmsk and Smaalandsk in the dialogue has – precisely as it is only a hint – an excellent effect*” (Clausen, J., 1906, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.67–68, 69). The beginning of Pelle’s time as dogsbody at the Bornholm farming estate has precisely the touch of compassion and co-existence. U Sweedler also wrote that, “*Nexo, Gorky’s equal, writes with social passion, robust humour, and with great mastery of the epic narrative*” (Sweedler, U., 1989, p.110). Finally, Pelle achieves a special place for himself and even becomes the best of his schoolmates. In short, the first volume of the novel tells a story of Pelle and Lasse’s daily life during the year at Stone Farm and ends when Pelle have been confirmed by the person who “*had seen enough of hardship and misfortune, but had come well out of everything; nothing had harmed him. With a child’s voracity, he had found nourishment in it all; and now he stood here, healthy and strong-equipped with the Prophets, the Judges, the Apostles, the Ten Commandments and one hundred and twenty Hymns! And turned an open, perspiring, victor’s brow toward the world*” (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume 1, p. 237).

Nexo mostly focuses on the depiction of the place besides Bornholm is none other than the “Ark” in the third volume of his

novel, where Pelle observes the crushing poverty and miserable conditions. In this way, Martin Andersen Nexø has a special sense of capturing the child's world, and the strength lies primarily in his ability to evoke the contrast between the child open mind and the adult disillusionment. The hopeless and humiliating poor living conditions will not break Pelle, as they have broken so many people around him. The most horrifying descriptions of poverty, especially the description of the rental barracks in "Ark" of Christian's haven make an everlasting impression on the readers. The novel as a whole is peopled by many memorable characters, such as Pelle, Lasse, and the residents of the fabulous slum tenement appropriately called the "Ark." "The inmates of the "Ark" followed his fate with painful interest. He had grown up beneath their eyes. He had never done anything wrong there; he had always respected the "Ark" and its inhabitants ;....(Nexø, M. A., 2007, Volume III and IV, p. 83). In this way, "Pelle, the Conqueror" teems with variety of characters' panoramic gallery, and the realistic description of the socio-economic conditions, prevailing in the "Ark", a huge ramshackle tenement. As Birger Holm states that, "*Life and working conditions were described in a socially realistic way...*" (Holm, B., 2000, p.19). The abysmal slums and squalors in the "Ark" arouse class-consciousness in Pelle and get him to throw his forces into the proletarian movement's struggle for justice and better living and working conditions. Master Andres dies when the last year of Pelle's apprenticeship is left. The business of shoemaking is sold out and his time properly finishes with a new master. He feels on the contrary, that he has produced his living for something great. This great thing occurs to him when he was young, freshly qualified and well-trained shoemaker. He determines to try his fortune in Copenhagen where, he begins to work as a qualified and trained shoemaker. One day he goes to Kobmager Street in the Coal Market, passing through Hauser Street in which the president of the struggling Shoemakers' Union resides. "*Good day, comrade! said Pelle. Can I become a member of the Union?*" (Nexø, M.A., 2012, Volume III, and IV, P. 13). The president gives him membership in the union.

Nexø like Jeppe Aakjær was a product of the milieu of Grundtvigian folk high schools but he did not typify regionalism. For that reason, his novel "Pelle, the Conqueror" is different from Jeppe Aakjær's novel "Children of Wrath" which describes the abject working conditions of farm labourers and servants, representing the new amalgamation of regionalism and social criticism. On the contrary, Nexø did not confine himself to regional literature but he attempted to counter the bourgeois individualism of the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, expressing his commitment, solidarity and dedication to the cause of the proletarians. Therefore, "Pelle, the

Conqueror” is the best proletarian novel in the context in which Martin Anderson Nexo successfully draws the readers into Pelle’s world, in a suspension of disbelief, by producing sympathy for the boy and his father. There is also wide recognition of the way in which this has been done through detailed descriptions, humour and the presentation of all aspects of life through a wide variety of characters. Niels Ingwersen referred the novel as a masterpiece, producing vivid narratives through the use of “...*stark realism, an underlying symbolism, a sense of detail reminiscent of Hans Christian Andersen, and a rollicking sense of humour – all paired with sympathy and compassion for the protagonists...*” (Ingwersen, N., 1992, p.312). These are all aspects of realism, which the reader finds in the novel. There are many hints at high expectations for the political developments in the next three volumes (Martin Anderson Nexo outlined his plan for the entire novel from the beginning) and the opinion is expressed that Pelle has become a hero whom it will be well worth following as he travels through life. The realist portrayal of the socio-economic and political life brings the novel closer to Post-modern era. It is therefore, relevant to look at the position held by both the book and the author in times that are more recent. In Johnson’s opinion, “Pelle, the Conqueror” is the first book to look at the life of labourers and ‘humble’ people in society, not from a distance but from within (Johanson, J., 1919, p.225).

Then Pelle leaves the Ark and rented a new quarter in which “*Pelle seemed to breathe more freely and deeply in this home, where the air was as though steeped in Socialism*” (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume III and IV, p. 105). Pelle engages himself in the struggle of the trade-unionism and then becomes a Social Democrat. He hears the name of Social Democrat from Master Jeppe first time then from Peter. One day he is acquainted with a Social Democrat journeyman, while he is working as an apprentice in shoemaking workshop. Finally, he has changed to attend the big meeting of the Social Democrats in Schleswig Stone in Copenhagen. “*Pelle had never yet attended any big meeting at which he could hear agitators speaking, but he had obtained his ideas of the new movements at second hand. They were in tune with the blind instinct within him. But he had never experienced anything really electrifying-only that confused, monotonous surging such as he heard in his childhood when he listened with his ear to the hollow of the wooden shoe*” (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume III and IV, p.33). In this way, Pelle involves in the Social Democratic movement and obtained political consciousness in the Schleswig Stone and engages himself wholeheartedly in labour politics. “*Pelle had been captured by the new doctrines out by the Schleswig Stone, and had thrown himself, glowing and energetic, into the heart of the movement. He attended meetings and discussions, his ears on the alert to absorb*

anything really essential; for his practical nature called for something palpable whereupon his mind could get to work" (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume III and IV., p.47).

Pelle starts reading books of the most exiting authors and enhanced his previous knowledge based upon the Bible, "Flying Dutchman" and the other books. Morten, his old chum also helps him in reading books. He is lover of books, engrossing in them and tells Pelle about the contents of the books he reads. One day he shows him a book on Socialism. Then he reads Victor Hugo's novel "Les Miserable", Charles Darwin's book "Origin of Species" and many works of Karl Marx on Socialism that fire his imagination and arouse in him the sense of the proletarian self-realisation and class-consciousness which enable him to say that, "We come from the darkness, and we go toward the light, and no one can hold us back! Behind us lie hunger and poverty, ignorance and slavery, and before us lies a happy existence, radiant with the rising sun of Freedom! From this day onward, a new age begins; we are its youthful might, and we demand power for ten thousand families! The few have long enough prevailed!" (Nexo, M. A., 2007, Volume III, and IV, p. 350). As a trade unionist and Social Democrat, Pelle struggles hard for the cause of the proletarians, attending meetings, making speeches and plans for the organisation, campaigns, strikes, and lock-outs. Finally, he succeeds "*in laying the foundation of a garden-city for the benefits of his fellow-workers*" (Jespersen, O., 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, Martin Anderson Nexo is known for his passionate engagement with the international proletarian movement and with the socio-political issues of his time in which Pelle becomes equally passionately involved with in the later volumes of the novel.

Finally, Pelle grows up in the crushing conditions of an appallingly acute poverty, becomes aware of the miseries, injustices and oppressions of the proletariat class to which he belongs. In this way, he develops into a class-conscious revolutionary proletariat socialist activist in the proletarians' class-struggle and political struggle. He struggles as a trade unionist leader against the bourgeoisie in Copenhagen. He is transformed from compassionate spectator to actively fighting socialist, upholding the torch of socialism. There is the rapid development of the international proletarian movement everywhere in the background of the novel. In this way, the novel reflect socio-economic and political ethos of the time and the story is embellished with purely human verisimilitude, vividness and typification of characterization. The author's sympathies with the impoverished proletarians are obviously evident in every page of the novel, making the readers realise human comedies behind the human

tragedies and human tragedies behind the human comedies, and, of the seemingly wretched, impoverished and sordid living conditions of the proletarians and landless peasantry. The revolt of the proletariat class, against the inhumanity of alienation, is the product of capitalism, which also imprints its impact on literature and changes the form of it. As George Lukacs states that, “*When this revolt is represented in literature the still lives of descriptive mannerism vanish, and the necessity for plot and narration arises of its own, as in such novels as Gorki’s masterpiece The Mother and Martin Anderson Nexo’s Pelle, the Conqueror, novels which break with descriptive mannerism. (Naturally this new use of narrative method is an outgrowth of author’s commitment to the class struggle)*” (Lukacs, G., 1970, p.145).

Then Pelle determines to leave the farm for a little town, which is the main city of the island. Therefore, he leaves the Stone Farm to try his fortune in the town, which he has never visited before. He sets out for the town, bearing a sack on his back after facing much hardship on Stone Farm early one morning and he meets a peasant Klaus Hermann on the way. The farmer has recognised and provided him a ride on his carriage into the town. When he tells him that he is seeking for the job, the farmer takes him to a shoemaker named Master Jeppe Kofod who recruits him in the list of his apprentices in his workshop. He is kind and lenient master but the six-year apprenticeship is by no means easy for Pelle. Andres was also his master in the workshop. Pelle works under the journeyman who is a grouchy man. He demolishes Pelle for his poor type of rural upbringing. One day, Pelle, Master Jeppe, Drejer, Klaussen, Blom and the merchants and leather-dealers hill are waiting for Iceland boat on the harbour. They expect that their good business has been done and they will be having money. The skipper of Iceland boat tells them that he has most of their shoes and boots with him because no more shoes and boots can be disposed of in Iceland. He further tells them that, “*There are machines which make boots, and they make them cheaper than you, too*” (Nexo, M.A., 2012, Volume II, Pp. 240-241). Jeppe and other shoe makers do not believe in the skipper. One day the skipper shows Jeppe a pair of boots made in England. Pelle wonders what he will do when his apprenticeship is complete because a large majority of shoemakers is rapidly dwindling and being out of job and factory-made shoes are gradually replacing the variety of handmade shoes.

“Pelle, the Conqueror” may be compared with Emile Zola’s novel “Germinal” which is also about the workers. Its hero Etienne Lantier is an uneducated young man and unemployed railway worker, possessing a dangerous temper. He is forced to do a backbreaking and nerve-jangling job at Le Voreux coal mine when he fails to seek other

work. He realises that his fellow-miners are sick, starve and in debt, fail to feed and clothe their children and families. Emile Zola reflects Etienne Lantier's impressions of the mining district and the colliery itself, which are given us in the lieu of the straightforward and depersonalised description of a locality. When the socio-economic conditions of the miners deteriorate even further, he leads a strike of miners. The novel presents the 1860s, when the capitalism was at its zenith and the sufferings and plights of the proletarians were intensified, embodying the inhuman ferocity of capitalism, swallowing down and devouring the miners, its ration of wage-slaves, in mouthfuls of twenty, thirty men at a time, with such easy gulps that it did not seem to feel them pass. In this way, the novel outrages at the inhuman exploitation of the majority of proletarians by the handful bourgeoisie.

Emile Zola calls into question the justice of an industrial bourgeois system on the unrestricted exploitation of human labour. The novel lacks Emile Zola's robust, firm and optimistic belief in life and the future of humankind. He does not believe in transformation of the existing bourgeois social formation into the socialist one that would be brought by the extensions of scientific inquiry and the applications of scientific discoveries. In this regard, Emile Zola unfaithfully drifts into the mood of sardonic pessimism and Darwinian determinism, which he voices at the end of the novel. Similarly, "Pelle, the Conqueror" is also a socialist proletarian novel, which highlights the struggle of the proletarians for Socialism. As Nexo writes that, the most eloquent "*a book about the proletarian-that the man himself. "Pelle, the Conqueror" is a grand attempt to reconcile the themes from the oeuvre first year and transform them into concrete political commitment*" (Nexo, M. A., 1919, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.41–42). Joel Johanson praises it for taking a "*labourer's view on life and allowing the world to be constructed and interpreted according to the labourer's principles and philosophy*" (Johanson, J., 1919, p.225). Unlike "Germinal", it reflects the robust, optimistic and firm faith of its author and hero in the socialist transformation of the bourgeois social formation and in the bright socialist future of humankind, as declared at the end of the novel. Similarly, "Pelle, the Conqueror" may also be compared with "Jean Christophe" on similar lines. Motrin Andersen Nexo says that he has cared for his hero for twelve years and that he knows him inside out. L. Jones states that, "*Although his story, in great part, is autobiographical, it is told with such scrupulous art that it conveys the impression of objectivity in a much greater degree than that work to which it has been justly compared, Jean Christophe, Nexo knows the life of the labourer from within; he has faith in its future, but he can regard it also with that tranquillity in which alone*

passion is transmuted into art” (Jones, L., 1917, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.134–137).

Martin Anderson Nexo portrays the humble life of the proletarians from within instead of viewing it from a far. P. Willcocks notes that, “*It is written with the simplicity of truth itself where Jean Christophe gives the life of culture from the inside, Pelle, the Conqueror shows the life of poverty as one who knows how it tastes.... When it is a matter of faithfully setting down, yet with no coarseness, the incidents of daily life as seen through a boy’s eyes, through a poor man’s eyes, then Andersen Nexo is unsurpassed*” (Willcocks, P., 1913, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.125– 127). Waldo Browne wrote a letter to Nexo in which he stated that, “*To me it is a masterpiece: with M. Romain Rolland’s Jean-Christophe, one of the two greatest creative works of our generation. You have put the surging pageant and infinite complexity of modern life within the covers of a book as no one else has ever done...Best of all, you have revealed the workings of the universal human heart with such compassionate insight as only a very few writers have ever attained to*” (Browne, W., 1918, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, p. 376). Furthermore, Ivy Livinof also conducted a comparative and contrastive study between “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” and “*Jean-Christophe*” on these grounds, remarking that, “*...it seems to me Rolland has written from the outside, you from the inside. There is a strong smell of humanity exuding from your book which fascinates me ... and the tremendous variety, colour and even smell of human life can be felt once more*” (Litvinof., 1919, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp.378–379). George Lukacs wrote about “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” in 1947, comparing Nexo with Maxim Gorky, Thomas Mann and Roman Roland that, “*... Nexo did not figure as an exemplar in his 1930s criticism in the way, Maxim Gorky, Thomas Mann and Roman Roland did*” (Lukacs, G., 1975, cited in Houmann, B., 1975, Pp. 290-294).

Conclusion:

The on-going research article concludes that Nexo’s novel “*Pelle, the Conqueror*” is the best proletarian novel written from a Marxist perspective, highlighting the Danish Corporative Movement, trade unionism and reformist socialism in 1910 or thereabouts. We come across Pelle’s early childhood on Stone Farm, his apprenticeship in shoemaking workshop in the town, his struggle for labour organisation and establishing a cooperative group in Copenhagen. Pelle's vision is reformist Socialism and the peaceful revolution. He wants a paradise for the proletarians, centred on common ownership and cooperative joint production. However, Pelle’s concept of reformist Socialism is characterised by the Social Democratic and trade-unionist brand of the Second International. Nexo was Social

Democrat and yet not became Marxist until in 1906-1910. When he became Communist, he wrote a novel entitled "Morten, the Red" in 1945 in which the old comrade of Pelle, Morten emerged as a Marxist revolutionary proletariat leader. On the contrary, Pelle became the bourgeois like the trade unionist Social Democratic leaders of the Second International in Europe. The paper also calls attention to the most problematic issue of the novel's relevance to the contemporary International proletarian movement. The novel is still fascinates us for it seems our own story.

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