

Historicism and Animalism – Elements of Convergence in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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Abstract

New Historicism is characterised by a parallel reading of a text with its socio-cultural and historical conditions, which forms the co-text. New Historicism, as Louis Montrose suggested, deals with the “Textuality of history and the historicity of texts.” Textuality of history refers to the idea that history is constructed and fictionalised, and the historicity of text refers to its inevitable embedment within the socio-political conditions of its production and interpretation. *Animal farm* in a way, is a template for government revolutions gone wrong. It involves an overwhelming dictating figure and extreme power dynamics between the leader and the citizens. Even after the revolution, in the end the oppressed return to being oppressed. The conditions of life in this fictional society can be reconnected with the reality of the period in which it was written. With New-Historicism, Orwell's novel can identify with the cultural and political movements of the time. One of Orwell's goals in writing *Animal Farm* was to portray the Russian (or Bolshevik) Revolution of 1917 as one that resulted in a government more oppressive, totalitarian, and deadlier than the one it overthrew. Many of the characters and events of Orwell's novel parallel those of the Russian Revolution. Orwell bring in communism through animalism. The similarity between Animalism and Communism: Animalism is when animals rebel against humans and will no longer work for them, till all animals will be treated equally, whereas, Communism is when low class workers will rebel against capitalists and will no longer work for them. All workers should s treated equally. This paper deals with the convergence of communism through animalism in the light of new

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Introduction

George Orwell, a pen name for Eric Arthur Blair, was a British novelist, essayist and critic. He was born in India in the nineteenth century (1903-1950) and grew up in an atmosphere reposed by war and military. His experience joining the Indian Imperial Police from 1922 to 1927 had mutated his character into an insurgent in terms of literature and politics. In 1936, Orwell already knew where he stood when he said that,

“Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism, as I understand it.” (Orwell, 2014, p. 8)

He added that, *“When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, “I am going to produce a work of art; I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention and my initial concern is to get a hearing.”* (p. 9)

One of Orwell’s most notable novels was *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 2014), first in 1944. The Russian Revolution in 1917 had exhilarated the grit in him to write the novel. In this fiction, he implicitly chastises Stalin’s way of governing by analogizing it with the animals’ government in a farm. This paper intends to contemplate the idea of communism and animalism with the ideology of new historicism.

Summary of *Animal Farm*

The plot of *Animal Farm* commences with the depiction of a large farm owned by Mr Jones. It acquaints the agony of every animal living under the totalitarian government of two legs (the human beings). They were propelled to do all jobs in the field. In return, they only got some food enough to stave off starvation. The conflict rises as Old Major, the Price Middle white boar, the oldest and the wisest animal among others, congregates his comrades one night to tell them about his dream of a peaceful life. On that occasion, Old Major begins to persuade his animal friends to keep the spirit of animalism and start a preparation for a rebellion against their owner, Jones, and his men. He says:

“What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: rebellion! I do not know when that Rebellion will come, it might be in a week or in a hundred years, but I know, as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, the sooner or later justice will be done.” (Orwell, 2014, p. 10)

A year later, the uprising happens without any peculiar sketches. It is on a Midsummer’s Eve, when Jones leaves for Willington and returns on another day. He gets so fagged and forgets to feed the animals. Being anorexic all day, the animals attack Jones and his men by kicking and butting him from all sides. Jones and his men flee right away.

The next day, Napoleon and Snowball, two young boars, convoke their comrades. At that time, Manor Farm is painted as *Animal Farm*. Napoleon and Snowball emerge as the leaders of the farm. They order the other animals to go to the hayfield, begin to work and anticipate that they could get in the harvest more hastily than Jones and his men could.

On Sundays, no work is done in the field, else meetings are held to discuss about anything relating to the works in the fields. Every policy taken is based on deliberation. But then, Napoleon and Snowball who are never in agreement change the Sunday meeting into an arena of debate.

“Snowball and Napoleon were by far the most active in the debates. But it was noticed that these two were never in agreement. Whatever suggestion either of

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them made, the other could be counted on to oppose it.” (Orwell, 2014, p. 28).

While proposing to build a windmill to aid the animals work in the field, Snowball is distracted by Napoleon. In this plot, the conflict of the two animals is mounted. The climax is on the voting time. Napoleon displays his dynamism by ordering his nine guard dogs to run after Snowball and bite him. It makes Snowball, the one who proffered the idea of a windmill and who almost won the vote, to run away from the farm.

The following frame of the story begins with Napoleon taking over the farm and divulging that there are no more Sunday meetings. All policies relating to work in the field will be resolved by a special committee of pigs, presided over by Napoleon himself. Under his leadership, Napoleon announces that the windmill will be built. Surprisingly, a brilliant talker, Squealer, indoctrinates the other animals that it is the original idea of Napoleon. After years with human totalitarianism, now the farm is experiencing a new type of tyrant, their own species. Napoleon announces his new guideline, that from this moment, Animal Farm would cooperate with human beings. Not for any commercial purposes, but only to wangle certain materials, the animals need to build the windmill.

On one hard stormy November night, the animals find a severe sight of the windmill having been ravaged. Napoleon adduces that it is done by Snowball. Consequently, the other animals hate Snowball and keep their eyes open in case he comes back. Snowball becomes their enemy. Later, it is found out that there are four pigs in league with Snowball. The nine dogs which always follow Napoleon immediately run over the four pigs, biting and killing them; so did the three hens, a goose and a sheep, all of them are stained on the spot. The other animals who are very shocked to see what just happened in front of their eyes, think that their lives in Jone’s time was better than that day, under their own comrade governance. But there is no animal which dares to speak its mind or to give their argument to the new government.

Some days later, Napoleon sells the timber to Mr Frederick, the one who is always trying to attack *Animal Farm* and destroy the windmill. But three days later, Mr. Whimpers, the mediator between Napoleon and the human beings, says that the bank-notes Mr Frederick gave are found to be faked. Napoleon then pronounces a death sentence upon Mr Frederick. In April, Animal Farm is proclaimed a Republic. Now the animals are asked to Elect a president. There is only one candidate, Napoleon. Then Napoleon is elected unanimously.

Late one evening in summer, Boxer, a creditable cart-horse, gets hurt and is taken away in a car to get some nursing. Then all of them say goodbye to Boxer. But then, Benjamin, an old donkey, cries out the word “fool” to his comrades. He asks them to read the writing on the car. Muriel tries to spell it. It runs like this, “*Alfred Simmons, horse slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willington. Dealer in hides and Bone Meal Kennels Supplied.*” (Orwell, 2014, p. 104)

Hearing this, together the animals shout at Boxer, asking him to get out of the van quickly. But it is too late; the van is already driven away from them. Three

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days later, Squealer publicizes that Boxer had died tranquilly in the hospital. And the rumours say that Boxer had been sent to the slaughterer by a misunderstanding. Squealer says:

“The van had previously been the property of the knocker and had been bought by the veterinary surgeon, who had not yet painted the old name out. That was how the mistake had arisen.” (Orwell, 2014, p. 106)

This explanation was accepted by the animals. Squealer also said that Boxer’s last words were, *“Forward, Comrades! Forward in the name of rebellion. Long live Animal Farm! Long live comrade Napoleon! Napoleon is always right.”* (Orwell, 2014, p. 105)

Years pass but the animals still live in distress. They still toil hard in the field and build another windmill. But there is still no stall with electric light as well as no hot and cold water as promised before. Napoleon argues by stating that, *“The truest happiness lay in working hard and living frugally.”* (Orwell, 2014, p.109) Anyway, it was in contrast with the pig’s way of life; they live in prosperity.

One night, there is a loud singing from the farmhouse. The other animals which are very inquisitive to find out what was happening inside, creep out to peep. They witness half a dozen pigs and half a dozen farmers sitting around a long table. They are playing cards and drinking beer. In the occasion, Napoleon announces that from the moment, the name of “Animal Farm” is reverted back to “Manor Farm”, because it is the real name.

New Historicism and Literature

New Historicist theory according to the Merriam Webster’s dictionary states, *‘a method of literary criticism that emphasizes the historicity of a text by relating it to the configurations of power, society, or ideology in a given time.’* New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times, in turn recognizing that current cultural contexts colour that critic's conclusions.

New Historicism in *Animal Farm*

In 1917, two successive revolutions rocked Russia and the world. The first revolution overthrew the Russian Monarchy (the Tsar) and the second established the USSR, the world’s first Communist state. Over the next thirty years the Soviet government descended into a totalitarian regime that used and manipulated socialist ideas of equality among the working class to oppress its people and maintain power. *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Russian Revolution and the Communist Soviet Union. Many of the animal characters in *Animal Farm* have direct correlations to figures or institutions in the Soviet Union.

Old Major’s vision of a farm where animals ruled, where there were no human oppressors, is a direct match to Marx’s vision of a communist society. In his Communist



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Manifesto, Marx envisions a world where everyone is equal, and where those on the lower rungs of society have as much say as those on the upper rungs.

Although both concepts are nice in theory, *Animal Farm* shows that too much power can corrupt anyone. When Old Major's vision, later called "Animalism," was put into practice, the pigs in charge took over and became selfish and violent, twisting the philosophy until it barely contained an echo of the original intent. The same thing happened with communism, as Stalin left much of the country penniless and helpless, and put people to death if they showed the slightest resistance to his regime.

When Napoleon takes over Animal Farm, he quickly shows his hypocrisy. Although he encourages the animals to work harder than ever, his sole worry when food becomes scarce is about public approval. He therefore fills the food bins with sand so that the outside world will not realize that the animals are starving. Stalin did essentially the same thing when his collectivization of agriculture led to a widespread famine, killing millions of Russians.

When the hens refuse to give the pigs their eggs, Napoleon starves them until several die, and the rest give up. He later sets the dogs on a group of pigs who have expressed discontent, as well as several other possibly innocent animals. This likely parallels Stalin's Great Purge, which happened between 1936 and 1938, in which Stalin killed or exiled anyone who might have possibly defied him.

These are only some examples of how *Animal Farm* matches the Russian Revolution. Orwell's entire novel is essentially an allegory, in which each detail represents a different aspect of this historical event and the episodes surrounding it.

Communalism and Animalism in *Animal Farm*

Animalism is a communist philosophy about all the animals being treated equal and sharing equally in both responsibilities and rewards of the farm. This principle of animalism is based on the principle of communism which proclaims that "communism is a social, political and economic ideology that aims at the establishment of classless, money less, stateless, and revolutionary socialist society upon common ownership of the means of production.

The principles of animalism are espoused by Old Major in his speech to the farm and then modified by the pigs as they see fit. The pigs tell the other animals that "by their studies of the past three months the pigs had succeeded in reducing the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments." These commandments are intended to keep all the animals equal.

The Seven Commandments

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed
5. No animal shall drink alcohol
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal. (ch. 2)

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The pig said that everyone would follow the commandments and “*they would form an unalterable law by which all the animals on Animal Farm must live for ever after.*” (ch. 2) Of course, it does not quite work out this way. Soon the pigs began changing the commandments. For example, commandment 4 was changed to forbid not beds, but beds with sheets. Some animals realize the commandments were being changed.

Clover had not remembered that the Fourth Commandment mentioned sheets; but as it is there on the wall, it must have been so. (ch. 6)

This commandment is changed when the pigs begin to live in the house. It is significant both because they are re-writing history and because they are beginning to set themselves apart from the other animals and act more human.

Another commandment that the animals “remembered wrong”, meaning it was changed was commandment 5. It was changed to say animals cannot drink alcohol “to excess” after the pigs began to like it.

Commandment 6 is changed to add “without cause” so the pigs could kill animals that disagreed with them. Finally, commandment 7 is changed. There was nothing there except a single commandment. It ran:

ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS (ch. 10)

With this change, the pigs cement their power and control over the farm. The pigs became more cruel, beginning to act exactly like humans, because “after that it did not seem strange when next day the pigs who were supervising the work of the farm all carried whips in their trotters.” (ch. 10)

The pigs use the so-called principles to justify anything they have to say. When the pigs want more food, they suggest that “*a too rigid equality in rations ... would have been contrary to the principles of Animalism.*” (ch. 9) Whatever the pigs say, the other animals have to go along with that, because they have the dog security force to back up their will.

Ultimately, the change seems to be physical also as the animals “peek in the window of the farmhouse as this meeting progresses and are stunned to discover that they cannot tell the difference between the men and the pigs at all.” The pigs have become exactly like human.

Conclusion

Reading a prose fiction is not only for enjoyment, but also to understand the intention of the author to present the history and policies of the century through these fictional characters. Understanding the history and historical characters in a novel is essential as they are usually created by the author to depict the real situations and characters in ordinary life. George Orwell only wrote when he needed to expose lies as well as to disclose the hidden facts. His most famous work, *Animal Farm*, is a satirical fable criticizing the USSR Governance System. Although he never went to the Soviet Union, he knew what was going on by that time in the country. He knew that the Soviet Government used the iron policy and

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undercover police operation to keep its people obeying the country's system. All these facts of communism have been beautifully expressed through animalism in *Animal Farm*.

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