



The Political Symbolism in Animal Farm

Qusay Mahdi Mutar

University of Baghdad, Iraq

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Abstract

Orwell opposed dictatorship and similar attentions of power because he assumed that they abolish, or at least corrupt, those values, love, friendship, and meaningful work, which he most esteemed. His belief that this was in essence an age of politics underlies his conviction that political selection embodied the central ethical act of his time. The abuse of power and the demoralizing effects of poverty caused major moral evil in the lives of his generations, and since the single man in his private capacity cannot cope with these evils. The political act became the most effective method of ethical action for responsible men. Politics, then, for Orwell, is the moral imagination recognizing itself in an effective deed. He was keenly aware of the failure of politics in his time. This awareness gave rise to the prominent elements of satire and criticism in his writing. What he opposes is always clear, but the shortage of much published criticism on Orwell is that it repeats what he opposes and fails to attract attention to the positive values underlying his criticisms.

Keywords: *Political Symbolism; Animal Farm; Satire*

Introduction

Chapter One

George Orwell

On June 25, 1903, Eric Blair was born in India to parents Richard Blair and Ida Mabel Blair. His experiences as a "lower-upper-middle class" English boy during the final years of British Colonialism greatly influenced his political ideals and became the subject matter of his writing (Hadley, 2011). All of his works dealt with political issues and discussed the problems George Orwell saw in society. According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics, "Most of his novels, memoirs, and essays had a political content and contained sharply expressed prejudices against imperialism, capitalism, middle-class arrow-mindedness, and euphemistic and inelegant English." His essays can be divided into five categories: "autobiographical, literary, political, sociological, and cultural" (Orwell, 2001).

Moreover, Orwell's published a set of books include: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), non-fiction, *Burmese Days* (1934), fiction, *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), fiction, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), fiction, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), non-fiction, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), non-

fiction, *Coming Up For Air* (1939), fiction, *Inside the Whale, and Other Essays* (1940), fiction, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941), non-fiction, *Animal Farm* (1945), fiction, *Critical Essays* (1946), non-fiction, and 1984 (1949), fiction ("Orwell"). George Orwell did not live to see the success of his most influential novel "Animal Farm".

The novella is set on a farm in England that is run by a lazy, dismissive farmer. The animals eventually revolt to make their lives better; they live under the maxim "All animals are equal". Animal farm works at several levels, as a charming story about 'humanized' animals, as an allegory about the human condition, and most importantly, as a thinly disguised and biting political satire about Soviet totalitarianism" (Orwell, 2001).

During Orwell's short life, he was able to see a preview of the popularity of his novella, *Animal Farm*. The book was written in a short, four-month span while he served as the literary editor for the *Tribune*. He believed the book would be difficult to publish, and he was correct. Orwell described *Animal Farm* as "not ok politically that I don't feel certain in advance that anyone will publish it". His statement was close to the truth; the work was rejected for over a year before Seeker and Warburg published *Animal Farm* in August of 1945. The book was an immediate success, and it quickly sold out. When it was published in the United States a year later, it was adopted by the Book-of-the-Month Club. Because of *Animal Farm*'s large following and vast popularity, it soon became a text in the literary canon for secondary education (Hadley, 2011).

Animal Farm became a vehicle for democracy, a political side Orwell never intended to take. He constantly criticized all political parties and did not mean for his work to become an instrument in any partisan movement. He saw his narrative as a piece of advice for the masses; revolution is not terrible, but people should be wary of the actions of their leaders. If *Animal Farm* had appeared in 1944, published at George Orwell's own expense, the book would have been prefaced with this phrase: "If liberty means anything at all it means the right to tell people what they do not wish to hear". Orwell believed in the importance of justice and spent his writing career describing the inhumanity he saw around him. Yet what made George Orwell's writing, especially his later works, so appealing was their ability to be viewed using the reader response critical approach (Hadley, 2011).

Chapter Two

Animal farm

**"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."
George Orwell, "Preface to Animal Farm"**

The fable exists quite clearly and coherently on two beautifully matched levels, and in this clarity and system lies the secret of its success. It is a story about the fabulous human-like deeds of farm animals, their triumphs and their ultimate betrayal and failure: this is the level at which the story's charm has been enjoyed by generations of young readers. Orwell's principal source was surely the section of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) in which Gulliver travels to the land of the Houyhnhnms, a race of benevolent horses who rule their own society with the humans or Yahoos in a role of servitude. But the beast fable is in fact much older, a classical genre dating at least from the Greek fables of 'Aesop' of the fifth century in which the sayings and deeds of animals represent human moral dilemmas (Grofman, 1990).

Orwell's animal 'fairy story' (as he subtitled it) encompasses the whole range of farm animals. Some are individualized, others treated en masse. Characterization is slight, but focused and consistent, and draws more on our existing stereotypes of types of beast than on elaborate portrayal in the book. For example, rightly or wrongly, pigs have a bad name for selfishness and gluttony, and that is their image in this text; similarly, the dogs are vicious but fawning, the cat self-centred and crafty, the donkey bad-

tempered; the two carthorses Boxer and Clover are slow-witted, strong, gentle and loyal; the sheep are brainless and behave as a flock without any individual initiative. Although the farm animals think and talk, do the work of humans and to some extent use tools, nothing really outrageous or fantastic, nothing out of the nature of their species, is attributed to them (Grofman, 1990).

The narrator is at pains to describe the difficulties encountered by the animals in farming and building: they cannot use any tool which requires standing on two legs, and therefore have to break up the stone for the windmill by dropping it; a pig climbs a ladder with difficulty; a brush or chalk is held between the knuckles of the trotters, cows are milked in the same way, and so on. That which is natural or easy for the animals is also mentioned, e.g. weeding is much more efficient under their regime than when done by humans, because the animals are naturally equipped to browse; grains of corn and scraps of hay are collected without waste by the hens and ducks with their sharp eyes and well adapted beaks. At the animal-story level of reading, the reader will be curious about how such practicalities are accomplished, and the text encourages and gratifies this curiosity. What is more, the text secures the reader's empathy with the animals by techniques of focalization which stick close to their interests and expectations (Jackson, 1965).

Animal Farm is one of the first to use animal characters to portray actual people. He utilizes the satirical technique of a beast fable to disguise the genius of his work in sheer plainness. Yet everything in Orwell's novel has a distinct parallel: the characters, the events, and even the principles upon which the animals build their independent nation. "The beast-fable form not only allowed Orwell to convey a complex message in simple terms, but was also admirably suited to his habits as a writer. The structure of Animal Farm provides opportunity for people about allegories, beast fables, fairy tales, satires, and have conversations about why Orwell employed these mechanisms (Jackson, 1965).

Animal Farm is an artistically integrated work; the complicated intellectual problems are reduced in this fable to simplified—but not over-simplified—arguments. The idiom used incorporates convincingly facts from animal life. This approach made it possible to sustain a gay and light-hearted tone in the fable without any loss of seriousness in its message. The story is skillfully constructed so that it can be taken at its face value and read as an imaginative animal story. But under its outward gaiety there is a "stark satire like a skull behind an innocent smiling face" (Jackson, 1965).

Structurally, the fable is a compact well-rounded story, but with many implications attached to its main and subordinate themes and its various levels of satire, which rest on understatement and which range from compassionately mild good humor to mordant irony. The story is told in a simple language befitting the mentality of its animal protagonists; the vividly descriptive prose in places assumes a lyrical and compassionate quality. The story is narrated from the point of view of the sympathetic omniscient observer who however keeps his objective distance and speaks, for the most part, in terms in which the story would be told by the animals themselves if they were able to speak (White, 2008).

The emphasis in the story is on the growing mood of helplessness in the animal's situation. The ideas in the story are fused with the fable and arise out of the situations. As regards the characterization, each animal possesses a dual set of traits, which mark him as an individual and, at the same time, make him stand for a certain type of toiler (or a social parasite) in the given communal society. Seen against the background of Orwell's whole work, the Animal Farm stands out because of its good humor and detachment, by which Orwell avoided an overemphasis of the gloomy aspects of his subject matter (Jackson, 1965).

As for language, all the critics agree on the simplicity of the language in Animal Farm, and that it is unique in the canon of Orwell's writing. If we take George Woodcock (Orwell's friend, and author of a fine critical study) as representative, we find him speaking of 'this crystalline little book', 'conciseness of form and simplicity of language', 'a bare English, uncluttered by metaphor,' a style 'direct, exact and sharply concrete,' 'a series of lively visual images held together by a membrane of almost transparent

prose'.⁹ Woodcock and other critics also stress how different the spare, neutral prose is from the styles achieved in Orwell's other fiction (White, 2008).

Orwell had developed a 'demotic' idiolect which, while vernacular in vocabulary, is hardly cool or neutral, rising often to heights of rhetoric and stridency. And as far as fictional narration is concerned, the narrator's voice is strongly foregrounded in the other books, so much so that one compositional problem which Orwell had to solve in the 1930s was the toning-down of the Orwellian narrative persona and its replacement by a character's focalization. *Animal Farm* represents the ultimate reduction in the status of the narrative voice, which is extremely impersonal, but in this book it is not displaced by the viewpoint of a single character, as with John Flory, Gordon Comstock or George Bowling; in *Animal Farm* Orwell creates a sort of collective focalization (Grofman, 1990).

The beast-fable form not only allowed Orwell to convey a complex message in simple terms, but was also admirably suited to his habits as a writer: his tendency to reduce characters to type, to see society as groups of competing economic interests; his narrator's detachment from the characters; his preference for grammatically simple sentences and unpretentious vocabulary. The prose succeeds brilliantly at balancing entertainment and argument because Orwell blends homely, even clichéd, language with sophisticated diction (White, 2008).

Chapter Three

The Political Symbolism

The two main influences on the development of George Orwell's thought were the Great Depression and the Spanish Civil War. The economic crisis that closed the 1920's and determined the life and work of the mass of men in the western world during the decade before World War Two made many thoughtful men acutely aware of society's failure to solve its economic problems. This crisis also forced many men to realize that changes had to be made in the social structure of modern liberal society (White, 2008). Orwell shared in this awareness and his experiences among the lower classes in Paris, London, and Wigan gave him an intensely personal view of the degradation of unemployment and of the deep psychological need of man to do meaningful work. The second main influence on Orwell, his experience in Spain, caused him to see this century as primarily a political age and to discover what was to him the central threat of his time, the totalitarian state that can emerge from either the Left or the Right. Orwell opposed totalitarianism and similar concentrations of power because he believed that they destroy, or at least corrupt, those values, love, friendship, and meaningful work, which Orwell most esteemed. His conviction that his was essentially an age of politics underlies his conviction that political choice embodied the central ethical action of his time (Rossi, 1981).

Since the abuse of power and the demoralizing effects of poverty caused the major moral evil in the lives of his contemporaries, and since the single man in his private capacity cannot cope with these evils, political action becomes the most effective form of ethical action for responsible men. Politics, then, for Orwell, is the moral imagination realizing itself in effective action. Yet, he was keenly aware of the failure of politics in his time. This awareness gave rise to the prominent elements of satire and criticism in his writing. What he opposes is always clear. But the inadequacy of much published criticism on Orwell is that it repeats what he opposes and fails to call attention to the positive values underlying his criticisms (Rossi, 1981).

In 1945, *'Animal Farm'* was written. Borges, (1996) claimed that *Animal Farm* is an allegorical and dystopian novella by George Orwell, which was published in England on 17 August 1945. According to Orwell, the book deals with events related to the Russian Revolution (1917) as well as to the Stalin Orwell, a democratic socialist, was a critic of Joseph Stalin and hostile to Moscow-directed Stalinism, an attitude that was critically shaped by his experiences during the Spanish Civil War (White, 2008). The

Soviet Union, he believed, had become a brutal dictatorship, Orwell described *Animal Farm* as a satirical tale against Stalin, and in his essay "Why I Write" (1946), he wrote that *Animal Farm* was the first book in which he had tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, "to combine political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole (Rossi, 1981).

Orwell also openly criticized communism during the 1930s. He stood in resistance to the Stalin regime at a time when the United States and Britain wanted Eastern political allies. Additionally, prior to *Animal Farm*, Orwell wrote nothing that politically interested the American people, the people who would later become the majority of his readership (Rossi, 1981). George Orwell was an extremely perceptive man who wrote about the world he saw around him. He did write his works to become popular, but also attempted to inform people of their own ignorance. Despite the controversy that surrounded him, Orwell's works became extremely well-liked (Rossi, 1981).

Orwell's *Animal Farm* played a role in influencing anti-Soviet sentiment throughout the 20th century, and that legacy remains. Shots to the head of a weakening foe are a lot more efficient than body shots that cause limited damage. *Animal Farm* has long been an American punch to the gut of the Soviets. It had been a story that the American culture experienced as propaganda in spite of the fact that Orwell did not write the book as a propaganda literature for capitalists to use as an argument against communism. Orwell knew it was a possibility though; friends had warned him that conservatives could use the book as ammunition against communism. None of this was lost on the Soviets, who did not allow for its publication in 1988 (Rossi, 1981). Even then the Soviets refused to acknowledge *Animal Farm* for what it is—a critique of their history. In a March 1988 review of *Animal Farm*, *Rodnik*, a magazine published by the Latvian Communist Party, claimed the story was not based on Russian history but rather historical events involving Nazi Germany and the killings of anarchists during the Spanish Civil War. This preposterous claim flies in the face of Orwell's own preface to *Animal Farm* written for his Ukrainian audience. There he states he had been thinking of *Animal Farm* in terms of "exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages." Orwell's story will always be tied to the history of the Soviet Union (Rossi, 1981).

George Orwell later described his creation thus: "Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole". Thus, his name and words not only used in connection with intense political issues like government control and foreign policy, but he is also noted as a popular author to read (Grofman, 1990).

George Orwell was always working to point out the injustices in society through language. Peter Clark's article makes an interesting comparison of Orwell to the political comedic figure of Stephen Colbert. The article demonstrated the germaneness of George Orwell to modern society. He was a man who wanted all people to see the realities of the world around them and not live life unconscious to the ills of society. Even though Orwell's words caused people discomfort, he was respected for his brutal honesty. The comparison of Colbert and Orwell showed the significance of men who choose to be straightforward in a culture filled with dishonesty (Grofman, 1990).

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