



# George Orwell's Animal Farm and Criticism of Totalitarianism: Understanding the Relevance of Political Satire through Literature

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**Abstract**

*George Orwell's work of fiction Animal Farm was written as a political satire to expose the totalitarian regime in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era. The appropriation of power is the central theme of the allegorical fable. This article dwells into various dimensions discussed by the writer in his novel and uses a post-modernist approach to unearth the hidden meanings and patterns, flaws in the system, and the power of people's strength in uprooting the dictatorship. This is more relevant to the fact that the Russian revolution claimed its successes in the united strength of proletariats, and in a short span of the regime's history, the power was concentrated in the single leadership. The world in the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of populism at one hand and new forms of authoritarian leadership, in essence, Orwell's novel stands significant to date. The objective of this article is to present a link between literary criticism and the discussion of politics through fiction.*

This article examines George Orwell's *Animal Farm* as a political satire that was created to criticize authoritarian governments, particularly Stalin's policies in Russia. It tries to demonstrate the satirical themes in *Animal Farm* and to draw comparisons between the characters, incidents, and various aspects of *Animal Farm* and The Russian Revolution. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell makes it abundantly obvious that his primary goal was to satirize the Russian Revolution (Shelden, 1991, p.399). Orwell criticizes Stalin's methods in Russia through animal satire, as well as totalitarian governments in general.

## **Political Satire in *Animal Farm***

Animal Farm demonstrates Orwell's talent as a satirist. Additionally, an allegorical parody, Animal Farm. However, when compared to Gulliver's Travels, Animal Farm's scope is incredibly constrained. Swift's book criticizes every human being, whereas Orwell's book is a political satire that picks on particular political figures, institutions, and events. In addition, Orwell's novel is written as an animal story. Orwell wanted to change the way people thought about certain political ideologies and figures in politics, and he accomplished this goal by publishing this book.

### **The Russian Revolution: A Satirical Understanding**

A satire on the path taken by revolutions generally, and the Russian Revolution of October 1917 in particular, is Animal Farm. It is a satire on the methods used to start a revolution and then use them to betray it. This work makes specific and direct references to Stalin's Communist regime in Russia, which took office immediately after Lenin's death in 1924. Orwell had been deeply repulsed by Stalin's arbitrary and harsh ways of consolidating his authority as well as by the way he had abandoned the principles of the Russian Revolution to erect a totalitarian government in the nation. Orwell wrote Animal Farm to make fun of Stalin and his methods and to lower Stalin in our views. Stalin used cunning, deceit, fraud, and force to accomplish his goals. His goal was to educate his audience about the reality of Stalin and revolutions in general.

### **Animal Fable in *Animal Farm***

As already pointed out, the satire here takes the form of an animal fable. The animals themselves serve as the major protagonists, with pigs being the most significant. Three leaders stand out from the pigs' class. Napoleon, Snowball, and Squealer are these leaders. Napoleon, who stands in for Stalin, and Squealer, who stands in for the Communist propaganda apparatus, particularly the subservient Soviet Press, are the main targets of ridicule. Moses the raven, who stands in for organizations like the Roman Catholic Church, is another subject of mockery.

### **Stalin Through Satirical Lens**

The main subject of satire in *Animal Farm* is Napoleon. This pig is known for carrying out his own wishes and getting things done. Snowball, in comparison, is direct and forthright in his approach, whilst Napoleon employs cunning techniques. Snowball has the ability to influence the animals' opinions through his persuasive words. However, Napoleon operates covertly and is able to solicit support for himself in a covert manner. Napoleon is especially successful with the sheep who are trained to bleat the slogan "Four legs good, two legs bad" and who interrupt the animals' meetings by their loud bleating whenever Snowball is about to score a point against Napoleon. Napoleon has also raised a number of dogs in secrecy and trained them to follow his commands. Napoleon is able to force Snowball from the property and take over as the only leader of the animals thanks to his cunning and usage of the intimidating-looking dogs. All of this is Orwell's humorous way of telling us that Stalin had ordered the expulsion of his adversary, Trotsky using trickery and the might of his secret police. After Trotsky was exiled, Stalin seized control

of Russia on his own. As a result, the power dynamics that were prevalent in Russia at the time are also parodied here.

### **Portrayal of the Emergence of Napoleon and the Privileged Class in *Animal Farm***

The rest of the story shows how Napoleon establishes his dominance on the farm and becomes an autocrat after defeating his rival Snowball. By ejecting Mr. Jones, the real owner, from the property, the animals had liberated themselves from human rule and taken over. The farm's democratic, Seven Commandments-based operation had just been established after Mr. Jones was expelled, excited the animals at this point. The Ten Commandments, however, as well as the objectives and doctrines of the animals' victorious rebellion against Mr. Jones, are now being actively rejected by Napoleon.

Napoleon first decided that milk and apples would only be utilised for the pigs when Snowball was still a respected leader on the farm. The premise that all beings are equal was clearly broken by this decision. Napoleon had received agreement from Snowball on this issue. The pigs became favoured because they disobeyed one of the Ten Commandments and gained favour. Napoleon took over as the sole figurehead, and as a result of his new announcements, the pigs' privileges kept expanding. With time, Napoleon himself becomes more and more powerful. He stops the practise of the animals congregating to discuss and decide on the affairs of the farm. A committee of pigs is now established, with Napoleon as its president, to make all decisions, which are then only revealed to the other animals. As a result, egalitarian and democratic principles have both been disregarded. Napoleon eventually decides that the pigs will take over Mr. Jones' farmhouse and begin using the beds that were previously designed for people.

This is yet another blatant transgression of the Seven Commandments. Napoleon then de-equips the farm. On Napoleon's orders, his vicious dogs execute all the animals he believes to be his enemies after forcing them to confess to crimes they did not commit at all. Here is grossly violated yet another Commandment which originally was: "No animal shall kill any other animal," but which now reads: "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause." Subsequently, the pigs, led by Napoleon, begin to drink whisky and brew beer at the farm.

This has given the pigs more privileges. When that time comes, Napoleon decides that the pigs will walk on their hind legs and carry whips in their trotters to supervise the labour of the other animals. This is the height of absurdity, of course, and we think Napoleon's selection to be incredibly funny. Napoleon himself is now sporting a cap, a pipe in his lips, and a typical person's outfit. Maybe this is where the satire reaches its zenith. Napoleon and all the swine that followed him abandoned the majority of the goals of the insurgent cause. But there's more to come. The Seventh Commandment which promised equality to the animals is now altered to read as follows: "All Animals Are Equal But Some Animals Are More Equal." Irony abounds in Napoleon's transgressions of the Seven Commandments. The irony stems from the disparity between what Napoleon really did on the farm and what the animals had anticipated. We all know that one of satire's main tools is irony.

## The Russian Revolution and Stalin's Betrayal: An Analysis of Satirical Perspectives

Orwell wanted to satirise Stalin's rejection of the principles of the Russian Revolution with Napoleon's departures from and transgressions of the Seven Commandments. The Russian Revolution promised its people freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and freedom of action, as well as equality, camaraderie, social justice, and economic fairness. Stalin, however, restricted all freedoms once he came into power and quickly put an end to them altogether. Similar to Hitler, Stalin disregarded the ideas of equality and economic justice, allowing a privileged class to flourish and govern the nation on his watch. The bureaucracy was the obvious beneficiary of these privileges in Russia, while the general populace frequently experienced food and other resource shortages. Stalin also executed a large number of people who had been compelled to confess to crimes they had not committed before receiving a death sentence, eradicating his purported opponents in this manner. Stalin took this bold action between 1936 and 1938. The Moscow Trials of these years spread fear throughout the nation. The "Great Purges" were known as a result of the widespread executions of those who were found guilty during this time.

Stalin's attempts at self-aggrandizement are likewise analogous to Napoleon's ridiculous strategy for enhancing his dignity. In other words, despite the fact that the mass executions undoubtedly have a horrifying element, all of Napoleon's policies, decisions, and behaviours that make us smile and laugh are founded on those of Stalin. Stalin's betrayal of the Revolution and ascension to the position of undisputed and unchallenged dictator of Russia is depicted throughout *Animal Farm's* portrayal of Napoleon and his rise to power through mocking and ridicule. Within a short period of time—roughly 20 years—following the overthrow of the authoritarianism that Nicholas, the Russian Czar, represented, Stalin restored it to the nation. Orwell also makes the implication that most revolutions take the same path as the Russian Revolution did. Orwell's thesis, therefore, holds true for both the French Revolution and the Spanish Civil War.

### Russian Propaganda

We find Squealer's defence and justification of Napoleon's actions and choices to be very amusing. For instance, he amuses us enormously when he informs the animals that particular ingredients in milk and apples are crucial for the health of the farm's brainiest pigs. He amuses us by telling the animals that Napoleon has added more work to himself by doing away with the democratic process and by adding that Napoleon still believes in the equality of all animals. We find it amusing when Squealer informs the animals that Napoleon's initial objection to the windmill was only a matter of "tactics" to get rid of Snowball, who was a potentially harmful individual. Squealer, in his customary skipping and tail-whipping motion, repeats the word "tactics" multiple times. Every time Squealer blatantly lies to promote and defend Napoleon, he degrades us.

Squealer claims that rigorous ration equality is against the principles of animalism when the animals' rations are cut due to food scarcity while the rations of the pigs and dogs are maintained. One of the main sources of humour in this novel comes from Squealer's warped reasoning and sophisms. He continues spreading false information about Snowball in the most flagrant way possible. One of his funniest lies was that the van that had been used to transport

the sick Boxer had once belonged to a horse-slaughterer but was now owned by a veterinarian who had not yet requested that the name of the horse-slaughterer be removed from the van and replaced with his own name in place of it. The portrayal of Squealer is supposed to ridicule the Russian Press, which is symbolised by the news outlet "Tass," which consistently backs official statements and judgments. In Russia, the media is subservient to the tyrant, just like Squealer in *Animal Farm* is subservient to Napoleon.

### **The Use of Religion in *Animal Farm***

Moses is portrayed in a way that parodies both religion and the politicization of religion. Moses, a spy, and storyteller talks about Sugarcandy Mountain, a haven for animals. Moses' description of Sugarcandy Mountain makes us laugh out loud because we are aware of how all religious leaders deceive their followers by extolling the virtues of an imaginary heavenly life. Orwell meant to mock Stalin's indulgent treatment of a Roman Catholic priest through whom Stalin sought to install a kind Pope in Rome by using Napoleon's tolerance of Moses on the farm.

Every community has both workers and shirkers. The honest and diligent employees in this fable are represented by Boxer and Clover, while the shirkers are represented by Mollie. The way Mollie is portrayed is meant to be sarcastic. Mollie stays away from all farm work. She enjoys munching a lump of sugar and sporting crimson ribbons in her white mane. She is extremely self-centred when it comes to her beauty and frequently stands on the edge of a pool to gaze at her own reflection. She is also a coward because, when it comes time to engage Mr. Jones and his soldiers in combat, she flees into the stable and buries her head in the hay. Boxer's adopting the motto "Napoleon is right", and his meeting a sad fate when he has become useless from Napoleon's point of view, are a satire on the treatment which the common people receive in Russia when they can serve the nation no longer. Boxer's fate symbolically conveys to us the callousness of a dictator like Stalin.

### **Political Satire in *Animal Farm*: An Analysis**

The author can communicate his opinions through books, whether they be about social injustices, current events, or, in Orwell's case, politics. Writers have incorporated their opinions into their work for decades, giving the reader the exact message they meant. "Orwell saw himself as a violent unmasker of published pretentiousness, hypocrisy and self-deceit, telling people what they did not want to hear...." (Crick 1996, pp 244). By employing rhetorical techniques to communicate his ideas to the reader, Orwell is able to expose these facades. George Orwell has discovered a platform to voice his thoughts through his novels and articles, blending his political convictions with a uniquely satiric tone.

*Animal Farm* is a work of literature that demonstrates his capacity to achieve this with unsurpassed skill and relentless mockery. In this fable about a barnyard rebellion, Orwell developed a satire that especially attacked the effects of the Russian Revolution while speculating the causes for the fallacy of the majority of revolutionary aspirations, according to Jeffrey Meyers, who reviewed Orwell's book. The reader has presented a scenario in the book where the animals are tired of the obnoxious, unappreciative humans who govern their farm. They decide that starting a rebellion will help them, so they start one. They quickly learn, though, that the revolt was the simple part. They must now set up a



government with officials and their own laws. Because they are the most intelligent and cunning of all the animals, the pigs are the self-appointed leaders. Napoleon and Snowball are the two pigs who possess the most influence and persuasiveness. All the animals are content and the farm starts to operate like a democracy up until Napoleon chases Snowball away from the property with a group of wild hounds. Following Snowball's exile, the farm animals are subjected to increased oppression, and Napoleon gradually assumes the traits of a despot.

His biting humour serves as Orwell's primary tool throughout *Animal Farm*. In actuality, the entire book can be seen as a 100-page satirical examination of politics and daily life. Not only do we witness pigs and chickens overthrowing people, but all of the animals have the ability to read and write. Naming one of the pigs Napoleon is also significant because as Meyers puts it, "The carefully chosen names are both realistic and highly suggestive of their owners' personalities and roles in the fable" (Orwell 1947, pp 353). Later in the story, after Napoleon takes over, we see him declaring days of celebration on his birthday and not allowing the other animals to call him Napoleon but rather "our Leader, comrade Napoleon" (*Animal Farm*, pp 66). By comparing the pig commander's attitude to the well-known arrogance of the French leader Napoleon, Orwell employs satire in this passage.

Orwell also makes fun of how drinking affects individuals. The pigs are shocked to discover that Napoleon, their adored leader, is actually passing away in the morning following a night of inebriated insanity. Napoleon decides that any animal who consumes alcohol would be put to death as a result of this catastrophe, even going so far as to establish a new commandment. After realizing that he was merely having a hangover, Napoleon celebrates with more drinking, orders a field to be planted with barley, and changes the commandment from "No animal shall drink alcohol" to "No animal shall drink alcohol to excess" (*Animal Farm*, pp77).

Not only does Orwell use satire in *Animal Farm*, but he also uses this technique in the majority of his works. In the incredibly well-written and vividly described article "Shooting an Elephant," Orwell mocks the British police. The only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me was at Moulmein, in southern Burma, where Orwell claims that "In Moulmein, in lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me" (Orwell 1947, pp 1). To lighten up a piece of literature and expose the inequalities and paradoxes of society and politics in a less-than-flattering way, Orwell employs satire.

The reader understands Orwell's intense loathing of the Communist regime through Napoleon's ascent and subsequent downfall. Most likely, Orwell's intense contempt for the Communist party stemmed from his disapproval of the British siding with the Russians and his belief that the Communist administration was ineffective. Napoleon's laws and reforms seemed wonderful in theory, but like Communism, they really served to further divide humans from animals than they had under the cruel Mr. Jones, the farm's human owner. The animals that weren't pigs weren't given enough food by Napoleon, just like in a communist country where the affluent keep becoming richer and the poor keep getting poorer. By the end of the novel, the pigs have started to walk on their hind legs and exhibit other traits that are typically associated with humans—the very traits that the animals had resisted and vowed never to resemble.

Orwell uses the rise to power of Napoleon to demonstrate the theme that “once in power, the revolutionary becomes as tyrannical as his oppressor” (Meyers, 353).

The gradual but unmistakable persecution of animals is evident from the outset of Napoleon's authority, but only the reader is aware of it. The animals don't realize this until the single commandment Napoleon chooses to rule by is “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others” (Animal Farm, pp 10). The last scene in the book in which Orwell's political preferences and disgusts are the most distinctive is when the oppressed animals look upon the pigs and humans saying, “The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which” (Animal Farm, pp101).

Orwell uses rhetorical techniques throughout Animal Farm to help the reader understand the political allusions he has subtly and skilfully woven into the story. Orwell uses subliminal cues and allusions to hint at forthcoming events. Orwell clues the reader into the possible Communist-like future of the farm by saying, “All that year the animals worked like slaves. But they were happy in their work; they grudged no effort or sacrifice, well aware that everything they did was for the benefit of themselves and those of the kind who would come after them, and not for a pack of idle, thieving human beings” (Animal Farm, pp 44). Orwell uses this excerpt to portray to the audience the thoughts of the animals who were “...accepting the fact that no matter what the pigs may do, no animal wants to be ruled again by Farmer Jones or his kind” (Woodcock, 1977). One can conclude through Orwell's use of foreshadowing that the oppression and unfair treatment of the animals was a foreseeable consequence after reading this section and then witnessing the slave-like conditions the animals are in by the end of the book. By giving the creatures human characteristics, Orwell also employs characterization to create the idea that we are hardly ever aware of being in an animal world.

Napoleon is used by Orwell to symbolise the dictator, Boxer is used to symbolise the overworked lower classes, and Benjamin the old goat is used to symbolise the always skeptic few. Because he employs them to represent character types with instantly recognizable character qualities, Orwell does not fully develop these characters. Orwell achieves his meager recreation of the Russian Revolution in the early 20th century through the employment of these techniques. Whether positive or negative, experiences throughout one's life shape and mould the person one is. For Orwell, the same is true. His skepticism of political systems and governments dates back to his time serving as an Indian Imperial Police officer in Burma. He came face to face with the harsh realities of colonial control and the unfair treatment of the underclasses there. Orwell quit the police department out of disgust for that lifestyle, but he never forgot what he had seen. Orwell hated repressive governments because of the abuses he had seen during those previous encounters, which led him to volunteer in the British Army and fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. The mistreatment that Orwell witnessed in Burma and Spain and even personally experienced is a theme in several of his books.

Through a straightforward writing style that is powerful, to the point, and leaves the reader with just the impression he desired, George Orwell successfully communicates what he intended. When one opens the pages of a book like Animal Farm and starts the path Orwell has chosen for them, his use of satire paired with a strong political opinion leaves the reader with thoughts and questions that they did not have before. Orwell is a writer who aims to make the

reader think and feel like the characters who are being oppressed, in addition to providing them with amusement and delight. He wants the reader to consider the inequities in society and the political systems that govern our nations and the rest of the world.

George Orwell did not intend for his writings to favourably depict everyone, even autocrats. He set out to write books and other works of fiction that, while they may have initially surprised some readers, unquestionably told the truth. Orwell once said, "Possession of the 'truth' is less important than emotional sincerity." Orwell's dedication to educating the public about injustices, victimizations, and crooked politics is unshakable. The only and most effective tool a writer has are his words, and Orwell carefully selects them. They can be bitter or sweet, but they always communicate truths about the world that many people choose to ignore but that Orwell saw and wrote about. Eric Arthur Blair creates a persona through George Orwell, and throughout his thesis, he painstakingly applies a paradoxical set of literary tricks that have undoubtedly made him one of the greatest social analysts in contemporary history.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrated how Orwell addresses and interprets the topic of politics in his respective work. The literary work is truly a political satire. The study purposefully chose a European author who, according to the works they have written that are the subject of this essay, are political satirists. *Animal Farm* has used vastly different settings, diction, structures, and other literary elements, and it strongly takes political satire as the core plot. For more than 50 years, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* has received a lot of harsh criticism. Some of this criticism has been unfavourable, claiming that the book is very simplistic, deviates from reality, and is too general in its analyses of the Russian Soviet Revolution. However, a lot of critics believe *Animal Farm* has literary worth. They contend that its clarity serves as a clever tool for making his satire simpler to comprehend, that deviations from the truth are few, and that its criticisms are pertinent. The book's literary quality will ultimately be determined by its ability to endure and stay current despite having achieved its initial goal of helping to topple Soviet communism. *Animal Farm*'s eternal qualities will unavoidably be evaluated in the years to come. To transform the political climate in any country, the general public must be educated. Being responsible in a developing nation, according to Fanon (1967), means realizing that everything ultimately depends on raising the masses' intellectual standards and on what is too often considered to be political education. Political education entails widening, waking, and exposing the mind to the outside world. Orwell critiques the political climate in Russia from 1917 to 1945 in a very realistic manner. Stalin snatches away freedom and pushes his authority over others, and when someone succeeds, he develops a craving for more power and self-aggrandizement. His need for power feeds his desire for more power, and this feeding desire develops corruption. Through the cruelty that befalls the Russian people, Orwell allegorically exposes the socialist principles. When a ruler wields power, whether it be a Pharaoh, a Nimrod, or a Stalin, the goal is the same, and he satirises the entire community for straying from its ideals as well as the desire for power and authority. The dream of a classless society serves as a mockery on the ruler who opposes its realization.



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