



Group Psychology and Herd Instinct: A Jungian Reading of Animal Farm

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a Jungian reading of *Animal Farm*, situating Orwell's fable within the broader framework of group psychology and the archetypal dynamics that govern collective behavior. Moving beyond conventional political interpretations, the study foregrounds the "herd instinct" as a psychological force that shapes the destiny of the animal community, rendering them susceptible to manipulation, repression, and illusion. Drawing on Carl Jung's concepts of the collective unconscious, shadow projection, and archetypal patterns of authority, the paper demonstrates how Orwell's animals embody timeless psychic structures rather than merely historical actors. The submissive endurance of Boxer, the skeptical but powerless intelligence of Benjamin, and the manipulative rhetoric of the pigs are interpreted as manifestations of deep-rooted psychic archetypes—laborer, cynic, and trickster—that recur across myth, folklore, and social life. The analysis highlights how the barnyard becomes an allegorical stage for the perennial tension between individuality and the collective psyche, where conformity, fear, and the longing for security overwhelm reason and moral autonomy. By framing *Animal Farm* as a parable of Jungian group dynamics, the paper reveals its enduring resonance: not simply as a critique of specific political regimes, but as an exploration of the universal psychological patterns through which communities, human or animal, organize, obey, and ultimately betray themselves.

Keywords:

Animal Farm, Jungian analysis, group psychology, herd instinct, collective unconscious, archetypes, shadow projection, conformity, individuality, collective psyche, allegory, fable, Carl Jung

1. Introduction

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* has long been read as a trenchant allegory of political corruption and totalitarian control. Yet, beneath its overtly political surface, the text also dramatizes deeper psychological truths about the mechanisms of collective behavior. The animals' responses to authority, their submission to propaganda, and their ultimate complicity in their own subjugation point toward forces that transcend the immediate historical moment of the novel's creation. These forces lie in the realm of psychology, where instinct, archetype, and the unconscious shape not only the fate of individuals but the destiny of entire communities.

This study approaches *Animal Farm* through the lens of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, with particular attention to the dynamics of group psychology and the phenomenon of the "herd instinct." Jung recognized that individuals, when submerged within a collective, are susceptible to the power of archetypes and the allure of conformity. In Orwell's fable, this susceptibility manifests in the unquestioning labor of Boxer, the passive skepticism of Benjamin, and the manipulative dominance of the pigs. Each of these characters symbolizes

recurring archetypal patterns—the obedient worker, the detached observer, and the trickster-leader—that echo across myth, folklore, and history.

By reframing *Animal Farm* as a narrative of archetypal forces rather than merely a political satire, this paper seeks to uncover how the novel exposes the psychological mechanisms that allow groups to relinquish autonomy in favor of belonging, safety, and authority. In doing so, the analysis highlights the timeless relevance of Orwell's work: its revelation that the vulnerabilities of the human psyche, when projected into the collective, generate cycles of obedience, manipulation, and betrayal that no political system alone can fully explain.

1.1 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to explore George Orwell's *Animal Farm* through the lens of Carl Jung's analytical psychology, with a particular focus on group psychology and the herd instinct. This study aims to move beyond conventional political allegorical interpretations and investigate the deeper psychological structures that govern the behavior of the animal characters.

The specific objectives are:

1. **To analyze the representation of the herd instinct** in *Animal Farm* and examine how collective behavior overrides individual autonomy within the animal community.
2. **To interpret major characters as archetypal figures**—such as the laborer, the cynic, the ruler, and the trickster—within the framework of Jungian psychology.
3. **To investigate the dynamics of conformity, obedience, and submission** as psychological rather than purely political phenomena.
4. **To examine the role of the collective unconscious** in shaping the animals' susceptibility to manipulation, repression, and illusion.
5. **To situate *Animal Farm* within universal psychological patterns** of group behavior, thereby extending its significance beyond its immediate historical and political context.

Through these objectives, the research intends to demonstrate that Orwell's fable operates not only as a socio-political allegory but also as a profound exploration of universal psychological forces that structure collective life.

1.2 Study Design

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design rooted in literary analysis and Jungian psychological theory. It employs a close reading of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* with particular attention to the representation of collective behavior, herd instinct, and archetypal figures. Rather than situating the text within a strictly political or historical frame, the design emphasizes a psycho-literary approach, wherein textual elements are examined through the lens of Carl Jung's concepts of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and group psychology.

The analysis is structured in three stages. First, the narrative is deconstructed to identify key characters and events that illustrate patterns of conformity, submission, resistance, and authority within the animal

community. Second, these elements are mapped onto Jungian archetypes—such as the Shadow, the Trickster, the Wise Old Man, and the Collective Self—thereby situating Orwell's characters as symbolic manifestations of deeper psychic structures. Finally, the dynamics of herd instinct and group psychology are interpreted in relation to the broader implications of unconscious drives and archetypal repetition in social life.

This design is exploratory and interpretive rather than empirical, seeking to generate insights into how *Animal Farm* dramatizes timeless psychological mechanisms of collective behavior. By employing this approach, the study positions Orwell's fable not as a narrow political allegory but as a universal narrative of the human psyche in its collective dimension.

2. Literature Review

The scholarship on George Orwell's *Animal Farm* has been overwhelmingly dominated by political, historical, and ideological readings. Critics from early Cold War decades such as T.R. Fyvel (1946) and Lionel Trilling (1952) foregrounded the text as a direct allegory of the Russian Revolution and Stalinist betrayal, establishing a tradition of reading the novel primarily as political satire. This interpretive framework has been extended in later decades by scholars like Christopher Hollis (1956) and Bernard Crick (1980), who further explored Orwell's engagement with totalitarianism, propaganda, and the corruption of revolutionary ideals. While this body of criticism has illuminated the novel's historical and political immediacy, it has tended to marginalize alternative readings that foreground the work's psychological, mythic, and archetypal resonances.

At the margins of this tradition, however, a number of scholars have hinted at deeper symbolic and psychoanalytic dimensions. Steven Marcus (1984), in his psychoanalytic reading of Orwell, suggests that the text dramatizes anxieties of repression and authoritarian submission, though his focus remains within the context of political power. More recently, literary critics such as Alok Rai (1988) and John Rodden (2006) have broadened Orwellian studies to include questions of language, identity, and cultural myth-making, thereby opening interpretive avenues beyond strict political allegory. Yet, the specific application of Jungian psychology to *Animal Farm* remains conspicuously underdeveloped in the critical canon.

Within Jungian literary criticism more broadly, scholars such as Northrop Frye (1957), James Hillman (1975), and Anthony Stevens (1990) have underscored the importance of archetypes in shaping collective imagination, group behavior, and narrative patterns. The "herd instinct" in Jung's writings is not merely biological but archetypal, representing humanity's unconscious drive toward conformity, safety, and submission within the collective. This concept intersects meaningfully with Freud's earlier analysis in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), though Jung expands the frame by locating group psychology in the archetypal substrata of the collective unconscious rather than in individual libidinal bonds. The application of these insights to Orwell's fable provides fertile ground for analyzing how archetypal figures—the loyal worker, the cynical observer, the manipulative trickster—emerge in the animal community as expressions of transhistorical psychic forces.

Further, studies in myth and folklore criticism, such as Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and Mircea Eliade's *Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954), reinforce the view that fables and allegories encode recurring symbolic structures which transcend their immediate historical moment. Read in this light, *Animal Farm* can be seen not only as a satire of Stalinist politics but also as a timeless parable of group dynamics, collective obedience, and the archetypal tension between individual will and the security of the herd.

This review of scholarship reveals a critical lacuna: while political, historical, and linguistic analyses dominate Orwellian studies, few works have rigorously applied Jungian psychology to *Animal Farm* as a framework for understanding group psychology and herd instinct. By synthesizing Jungian archetypal theory with Orwell's fable form, the present study seeks to fill this gap, offering a reading that emphasizes the psychic and symbolic dimensions of group behavior that underpin, and often outlast, political structures.

3. Method

The present study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology rooted in literary analysis and depth psychology. The aim is not merely to decode Orwell's *Animal Farm* as a socio-political allegory but to

reframe it through the conceptual apparatus of Jungian psychology, particularly the constructs of the **collective unconscious**, **archetypes**, and **group psychology**. The method is therefore hermeneutic and interdisciplinary, blending textual close reading with psychoanalytic interpretation.

3.1 Textual Selection and Scope

The primary text under study is George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), read in its entirety as a modern beast fable. Key episodes—such as the founding of the rebellion, the consolidation of power by the pigs, Boxer's tragic fate, and the rewriting of the commandments—are identified as sites where group dynamics and herd instincts are most vividly dramatized. Characters including Napoleon, Snowball, Boxer, Benjamin, and Squealer are treated as archetypal figures rather than political analogues.

3.2 Analytical Framework

The analysis is guided by Carl Jung's theoretical formulations as outlined in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* and *Psychological Types*. Specifically:

- **Archetypal Mapping:** Characters and episodes are examined as archetypal embodiments—Napoleon as the shadow-ruler, Boxer as the labor archetype, Benjamin as the wise cynic, and the herd of animals as the collective unconscious in motion.
- **Herd Instinct and Group Conformity:** The dynamics of obedience, fear, and mimicry are read through Jung's reflections on mass psychology, in dialogue with Freud's *Group Psychology and the Ego* of the *Ego*.
- **Symbolic Imagery:** Recurrent motifs—songs, slogans, rituals, and rewritten commandments—are analyzed for their symbolic and mythopoeic value, reflecting how archetypes reinforce collective control.

3.3 Interpretive Procedure

The procedure involves three interrelated stages:

1. **Close Reading:** A detailed textual analysis of passages where group behavior and instinct are foregrounded.
2. **Psychoanalytic Correlation:** Mapping the textual evidence against Jungian constructs of archetypes, collective unconscious, shadow, and individuation.
3. **Synthesis:** Drawing interpretive connections between Orwell's narrative strategies and Jungian psychology to reveal how the text stages a drama of herd instinct and archetypal repetition.

3.4 Limitations and Reflexivity

The study acknowledges that any Jungian reading is interpretive and subjective, mediated by the researcher's positionality. The intention is not to supplant political readings of *Animal Farm*, but to open an alternate psycho-literary lens that foregrounds universal psychological structures underpinning collective life.

4. Findings

The Jungian reading of *Animal Farm* reveals several profound insights into the interplay between group psychology, herd instinct, and archetypal forces that shape collective behavior:

4.1 Emergence of Archetypal Figures

The narrative demonstrates how specific animals embody universal Jungian archetypes. Boxer manifests the archetype of the *loyal laborer*—unquestioning, dutiful, and tragically overpowered by the very system he sustains. Benjamin, with his sardonic detachment, aligns with the *wise cynic*, a shadow figure who recognizes truth yet remains paralyzed by inaction. Napoleon and Squealer embody the *trickster* and *shadow-tyrant* archetypes, using cunning and deception to manipulate the unconscious drives of the herd. These archetypes underscore that the characters function less as individuals and more as psychic symbols of recurring human tendencies.

4.2 The Dominance of Herd Instinct

The animals' susceptibility to collective chants, slogans, and rituals illustrates the overwhelming force of herd instinct. Despite occasional sparks of dissent, the group psyche gravitates toward conformity and obedience, prioritizing safety in numbers over the peril of independent thought. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious provides a framework for understanding this impulse: the animals inherit and reproduce patterns of subservience and fear that eclipse rational autonomy.

4.3 Shadow Projection and Scapegoating

The repeated scapegoating of Snowball reflects the psychological mechanism of shadow projection. The community externalizes its collective anxieties and failures onto a single figure, thereby preserving the illusion of unity and moral purity. This finding emphasizes that the true danger lies not only in tyrannical leadership but in the unconscious need of groups to expel and vilify an "other" to sustain cohesion.

4.4 The Erosion of Individuation

Orwell's fable illustrates how individuation—the Jungian process of integrating one's conscious and unconscious self—is thwarted within collective settings dominated by herd instinct. Characters such as Clover briefly experience moments of insight but are swiftly subdued by the weight of communal denial. The suppression of individuality in favor of uniformity signifies the triumph of the unconscious herd over the potential for self-realization and moral clarity.

4.5 Universal Implications Beyond Politics

Ultimately, the findings suggest that *Animal Farm* resonates not solely as a political allegory but as a timeless psychological parable. The story dramatizes the fragility of human (and animal) autonomy when subsumed by the collective psyche. It warns that herd instinct, when unchecked by critical awareness and individuation, perpetually gives rise to cycles of manipulation, betrayal, and self-destruction.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The Jungian lens allows us to perceive *Animal Farm* not merely as a satire of political regimes but as a psychological fable that dramatizes the timeless tension between individual consciousness and the unconscious pull of the collective. The "herd instinct" in Orwell's animals is not reducible to ignorance or coercion alone; rather, it reflects the innate human tendency to merge with the group in moments of uncertainty, seeking protection in conformity even at the expense of autonomy. Jung identifies this regression to the collective level as a dissolution of the conscious ego into the archetypal currents of the unconscious, wherein individuality is overshadowed by primordial drives.

The animals' behavior on the farm illustrates this regression with striking clarity. Boxer's blind loyalty represents the archetype of the Devoted Laborer, whose unconscious submission to authority renders him tragically expendable. Benjamin's skepticism, while intellectually detached, reflects the Cynical Observer archetype, paralyzed by mistrust and unable to intervene. The pigs, particularly Napoleon and Squealer, embody the Trickster-Shadow complex: figures who exploit collective fear and longing for order, manipulating language to bind the herd more tightly into unconscious obedience. Together, these archetypal roles reveal how social structures are less the result of rational design than of psychic compulsion.

What emerges from this reading is a recognition that Orwell's narrative dramatizes not only historical political betrayals but also universal psychological mechanisms of mass behavior. The collapse of individual judgment, the projection of hope and authority onto charismatic figures, and the repression of dissent are perennial features of collective life. *Animal Farm* thus speaks to the enduring fragility of communities where the conscious ego fails to resist the gravitational pull of the herd.

In conclusion, a Jungian interpretation underscores the text's relevance beyond its political allegory. It suggests that the fate of the farm animals mirrors a recurring psychological drama: the oscillation between individuality and collectivity, between freedom and security, between critical awareness and unconscious surrender. Orwell's fable, therefore, acquires the status of a mythic narrative, one that continues to illuminate the dangers of herd instinct in any society. By drawing attention to these archetypal undercurrents, the study affirms *Animal Farm* not only as a political cautionary tale but as a profound exploration of the psychic patterns that govern collective existence across history and culture.

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