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Unmasking Totalitarianism: Political Symbolism in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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Abstract:

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is examined for its political symbolism in this research paper. Using of allegory, metaphor, and other symbolic devices, it examines how Orwell critiqued the political realities of his time using close reading and historical analysis. According to this article, Orwell used symbolic methods to criticize the dangers of totalitarianism and the erosion individual freedoms. It demonstrates how Orwell's nuanced critiques of power, conveyed through key passages and characters, underscore the human costs of political oppression. It argues that Orwell's literary legacy has remained a crucial resource for understanding politics, power, and human agency in complex times.

Keywords: Political symbolism, Political satire, political oppression, Political injustice, nuanced, totalitarianism.

Introduction

Throughout *Animal Farm*, George Orwell emphasizes the dangers of injustice and totalitarianism. In the novel, animals overthrow their human owners and establish their society, illustrating abuse, manipulation, and power concentration. A simple story becomes a complex political allegory through Orwell's masterful manipulation of a simple story to critique the corruption that often follows revolution when ideals are compromised in order to gain power.

The story of the pigs illustrates how leaders can abuse revolution's ideals, suppress dissent, and maintain power through violence and manipulation, using the character of the pigs as an example. Pigs were initially an intellectual leader of the revolution, but they gradually became indistinguishable from oppressive humans. Politicians, even those who promise equality and justice, tend to reproduce the same tyrannical structures they once fought against in the real world.

While some criticize the novel for portraying workers as passive and easily manipulated, its broader message about using critical thinking to resist oppressive leadership remains relevant. A cautionary tale not only for the Soviet era but for any society vulnerable to charismatic leaders or state-controlled narratives, Orwell's critique of naive loyalty and propaganda is relevant today.

It is a timeless warning against totalitarianism, and it illustrates how important it is to preserve democratic institutions and values. For freedom and justice to be protected, political systems require vigilance, transparency, and accountability. The literary legacy and political commentary of this book continue to inspire readers to think critically about injustice and oppression. A

number of its universal themes transcend the specific historical context of the Russian Revolution and remain relevant to discussions about power, inequality, and resistance even today.

A timeless warning against totalitarianism, *Animal Farm* demonstrates the importance of preserving democratic institutions and values. Through its literary legacy and political commentary, this book inspires readers to think critically about injustice and oppression around them.

Historical Context and Real-World Parallels

The historical context in which George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* is crucial to understanding its power. Initially published in 1945, the book serves as a direct allegory for the 1917 Russian Revolution and the rise of the Soviet Union under Stalin. Orwell, who drew inspiration from his love of farm animals to expose the darker truths about Soviet communism and the torment of revolutionary ideals, used the story of farm animals to expose the darker truths about totalitarianism and political oppression.

As the protagonist of Old Major, Karl Marx is a blend of Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx, the father of communism. The philosophical basis for the rebellion is laid in the speech to the animals, just as Marx's writings inspired communism's theoretical basis. It was not long after Major's death that revolutionary leaders began to struggle for power in the wake of Lenin's early death.

Joseph Stalin is evidently represented by Napoleon, the pig who gradually assumes dictatorial control. Stalin also used propaganda, fear, and brute force to consolidate power and silence dissent, symbolized by Napoleon's trained dogs, which represented the secret police or NKVD.

He betrays the very principles of equality and justice that inspired the animals' uprising by altering the principles of the revolution for his purposes.

Napoleon's rival Snowball recalls Leon Trotsky, a leader exiled and discredited by Stalin after leading the revolution. The windmill plan is a testament to Snowball's idealism and innovative thinking, similar to Trotsky's vision for rapid industrial progress, which Stalin adopted later while erasing Snowball's contributions.

In this farm, large numbers of animals represent the working class or proletariat, whose exploitation and manipulation are facilitated by those in power. Symbolizing the loyal and oppressed labour force of the Soviet Union, Boxer represents the blind trust in leadership ("Napoleon is always right") that led to his tragic downfall. He was sacrificed by the regime in the same way as many loyal Soviet workers once they had served their purpose.

From a hopeful society of equals, the farm has transformed into a brutal dictatorship over time, a direct reflection of how the Soviet Union developed from revolutionary ideals into an oppressive state. Throughout Orwell's book, the author describes how power-holders rewrote history and maintained control using language, propaganda, and fear.

It is Tsar Nicholas II who ultimately led to the revolution through incompetence and neglect, even Mr. Jones, the original human owner of the farm. It is only a matter of time before the animal's initial triumph gives way to the reality of the new regime becoming indistinguishable from the old, as seen in the chilling final scene, where pigs and humans dine together, blurring the line between oppressor and oppressed.

By drawing parallels between the two, Orwell constructs a biting critique of totalitarianism and the corrupting effects of power on revolutionary ideals. A historical allegory serves both to

illuminate specific figures and events in Soviet history as well as to warn against allowing political movements to be co-opted and distorted when unchecked.

Historical Context of Political Injustice in Literature

Political injustice has been a theme in literature since ancient times. Many cultures have used literature to critique political leaders, including ancient Greece and Rome.

Political injustice, however, has been an ongoing literary tradition since the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Through satire and allegory, authors like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu criticized the political system for shaping their societal norms.

Throughout the 19th century, writers like Charles Dickens (1812-1870), George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) (1819-1881) and Leo Tolstoy continued to use literature to address political injustices which were concerns of their time, such as poverty, social inequalities and corruption among persons in power.

Since Nazism or Soviet Communism dominated the 20th century, literature served as a medium to expose and question political injustice-beginning with works written under totalitarian oppression like Nazism. Nevertheless, literature has long been used by writers to criticize oppressive political regimes (2) - from George Orwell's *Oceania* (1949) to Franz Kafka's totalitarian trial courts: *Das Schloss* [The Castle] (1926)). The manuscripts explored both the real possibilities of these systems within their societies and how they might affect social interactions.

Political injustice has a long and rich tradition in literature, with writers commenting on the political realities of their time and exploring the complex dynamics of power and oppression using their craft to comment on them.

The Relevance of Orwell's Political Symbolism

As long as we look at the past and present, George Orwell's use of political symbolism in *Animal Farm* remains highly relevant. Allegories, character representations, and narrative structure help readers understand the complexities of politics and how power can be abused.

There is more to *Animal Farm* than a story about animals; it is a symbolic representation of real political events, namely the Russian Revolution and the emergence of Soviet totalitarianism. The novel symbolizes real figures or ideologies through its characters and events. Among other things, Napoleon could be compared to Joseph Stalin, and Snowball was compared to Leon Trotsky. In addition to the sheep, certain other animals represent different classes of society and can be used to manipulate the masses through propaganda and control of information.

The simplicity of Orwell's symbolism enables him to speak without diluting the power of complicated political dynamics. It is alarmingly relevant to today's political climate that animals are incapable of critically questioning authority. Many modern societies are still victimized by misinformation, censorship, and manipulation by the media and politicians. People become vulnerable to exploitation when they give up their right to question authority, as Orwell warns in his work.

It is also pertinent to mention that Orwell's political symbolism continues to resonate in today's global political climate, which authoritarian regimes, populist movements, and state-sponsored propaganda are on the rise. His portrayal of slogans like "Four legs good, two legs bad" or "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" reveals how language can be twisted to serve those in power. Modern doublespeak and misinformation campaigns are reflected in these phrases, which makes *Animal Farm*'s warnings timeless.

As a result of Orwell's symbolic technique, readers are also encouraged to think critically. By presenting power structures as allegories, he invites the audience to reflect on their roles within political systems, ask questions about real-world governments, and interpret more profound meanings. As well as serving as a historical lesson, the book is also a tool for civic education, encouraging vigilance against abuse of power and tyranny.

Ultimately, Orwell's political symbolism has endured because it transcends time and space. Past political failures are connected with present dangers and future possibilities. By transforming complex political ideologies into relatable and powerful allegories, Orwell ensures that *Animal Farm* remains a relevant and essential critique of authoritarianism, manipulation, and the fragility of democratic ideals.

Summary of the Plot and Political Allegory

Political symbolism remains a relevant theme for today's readers because it is a central theme in Orwell's work. Despite the modern world's political oppression, censorship, and propaganda, he explores in *Animal Farm*.

It was first published in 1945; when George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm*. It is an allegory based on animals re-enacting key figures and events in the Russian Revolution and its subsequent Stalinist era in the Soviet Union. An animal society is established on the farm after a group of farmanimals revolt against their human farmer, Mr. Jones. It is not long before their utopia is corrupted by the tyrannical and oppressive pigs who have assumed the role of leaders.

It begins with a group of farm animals, upset with how their human owner, Mr. Jones, treats them. Old Major inspires the animals to stage a successful revolt by advising them. Napoleon,

the intelligent and charismatic pig, quickly establishes himself as the new leader of the farm, with Snowball as their rival.

In the beginning, the animals work together to create a society where all animals are treated equally and share in the work and rewards equally. Through propaganda, lies, and violence, the pigs gradually become more powerful than the other animals as time goes on. Despite of their inferior intelligence and organization, the other animals become increasingly oppressed and exploited.

As the pigs consolidate their power, they begin to adopt many of the same cruel and unjust practices as their human predecessors. The novel ends with the pigs, now indistinguishable from the humans, holding a lavish dinner party with their former enemies while the other animals look on in disgust and despair.

In short, *Animal Farm* is a powerful critique of totalitarianism, propaganda, and the corrupting influence of power. It highlights the dangers of mindlessly following charismatic leaders and maintaining a critical perspective on those in authority.

Depiction of Political Injustice in *Animal Farm*

Political injustice is the central theme in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. It is well depicted through the actions of the pigs who take control of the farm and establish a dictatorship.

Initially, the pigs promise to create a society where all animals are equal and work together for the common good. However, as the pigs gain more power, they become increasingly oppressive and corrupt. They use propaganda, lies, and violence to maintain their power and gradually begin to resemble the humans they overthrew.

The pigs' actions demonstrate several of forms of political injustice, including:

The concentration of power: The pigs take control of the farm and use their intelligence and organizational skills to establish a dictatorship, concentrating power in the hands of a few.

"The pigs did not actually work, but directed and supervised the others. With their superior knowledge it was natural that they should assume the leadership." (Orwell, page 37)

The usage of propaganda: The pigs practice slogans and propaganda to control the other animals and maintain their power. For example, they influence the animals into thinking that any criticism of their leadership is the work of their enemies and that the pigs act in the animals' best interests.

"Four legs good, two legs bad." (Orwell, page 33)

This slogan is practiced to affect the other animals into accepting the pigs' control and suppressing dissent.

The conquest of dissent: The pigs suppress any dissent or criticism of their direction, using violence and intimidation to silence those who speak out against them.

The misuse of the working class: The pigs take advantage of the other animals, forcing them to work hard while the pigs enjoy the fruits of their labour.

"Napoleon had commanded that the hens' rations should be stopped, and that anyone giving so much as a grain of corn to a hen should be punished by death." (Orwell, page 69)

This quote demonstrates the pigs' usage of violence and intimidation to defeat dissent and maintain their power.

The betrayal of the revolution: The pigs, who were once revolutionaries, betray the ideals of the revolution and become just as corrupt and oppressive as the humans they overthrew.

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." (Orwell, page 112)

This quote highlights the pigs' disloyalty to the revolution's ideals and their establishment of a new form of oppression.

"The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was unbearable to say which was which." (Orwell, page 112)

The quote describes the pigs' final change into human-like oppressors, highlighting their complete betrayal of the revolution's ideals.

Through these actions, *Animal Farm* Focuses the dangers of totalitarianism and the importance of maintaining a critical perspective on those in power. It is a powerful critique of political injustice and a warning about the dangers of blindly following charismatic leaders.

Conclusion

Animal Farm has been extensively praised for its powerful depiction of political injustice, and many critics have noted its relevance to a wide range of historical and contemporary contexts. However, some critics have also offered critical comments on the novel's portrayal of politics and power.

Christopher Hitchens stated that "Animal Farm remains our great satire on the darker face of modern history."

Lionel Trillings says "Orwell's animals exist in their own right, and his book is as entertaining as narrative as it is opposite in political commentary."

T.S. Eliot critically writes "It is a fairy story in which animals take over an irresponsible farmer's farm and learn that they are now worse off than they were before."

Harold Bloom analysed that "The value of Animal Farm lies not in any specific analysis of Soviet communism but in its awareness of the universality of totalitarian impulses."

E.M. Forster commented on Animal Farm "I believe that this book is a masterpiece and that it should be as much discussed as the Russian Revolution itself."

Bertrand Russell analysed the writing style and said "The allegory is so constructed that as to weld itself into an artistic unity, and this unity reacts upon the allegory, strengthening it."

These critiques and comments reflect the enduring impact of Animal Farm as an influential and intuitive critique of political injustice and totalitarianism and as a work of literature that continues to echo with readers and critics alike.

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