

# An Analysis of Totalitarianism in *Animal Farm* from an Allegorical Perspective

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*Animal Farm* is a classic novel based on history, whose author Orwell reveals the totalitarianism under the dark rule of the farm and its potential trend of destruction with his fable art form and extraordinary vision. From the perspective of Benjamin's fable theory, this paper systematically analyzes the totalitarian rule in the language, the totalitarian rule in worship, and the totalitarian rule in strategy, so as to help people understand historical figures and events objectively.

**Keywords:** *Animal Farm*, totalitarianism, fable theory

## Introduction

Orwell was born in England and is one of the classical writers of the 20th century. As a champion of human responsibility and a leader in the study of human destiny, Orwell and his works have received worldwide attention, even more than 50 years after his death. Orwell's writing mainly went through three stages: the first included the novel *Burma Day* (1934) and the essay *Coming Up For Air* (1939); The second phase was devoted to culture-related criticism, including *Inside the Whale* (1940) and *The Lion and The Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941). In the third stage, two of the hundred outstanding English novels of the 20th century, *Animal Farm* (1944) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), were published successively, and Orwell's writing career reached its peak.

*Animal Farm* is an original fable novel written by Orwell. In Orwell's novel artistic perspective, the abuses of totalitarian rule in animal farms and the ugliness of human nature are exposed one by one. In the novel, Orwell elaborately depicts the animal image, recounting the whole process of the farm from revolution to betrayal and finally to decline. The animals could not bear the cruel oppression of the farmers. Under the leadership of two pigs, they launched a revolution against the farmers, and then built their new home on the basis of insisting on the equality of all animals. However, the two pigs are constantly in conflict, often seizing power. One side gains power by setting up the other side as a traitor. But the winning party has become a new privileged class by seizing the animals' achievements. As a classic of Orwell's brilliant period, *Animal Farm* has attracted the attention of a large number of scholars at home and abroad. Relevant researches are also mature, but they mainly focus on the harm brought by totalitarianism. Therefore, from the perspective of Benjamin's fable theory, the author explores

and systematically summarizes several typical features of totalitarian rule in the novel, hoping to arouse human's reflection and attention, so as to view historical events more objectively

### **Benjamin's Fable Theory**

Allegory is an ancient literary form, which appeared as early as pre-qin and ancient Greece. According to *The Glossary of Terms of Western Literary Criticism*, it holds that fable refers to short stories in the form of prose or verse, with the purpose of moral admonition. The characters in the stories are often animals, sometimes humans and inanimate beings. Fables must have something to do with supernatural or extraordinary events. Their original materials originated from folklore. Animal centered fables are popular in all periods of literary history, which mainly express the stupidity of human beings. A concept related to allegory is Fabliau, which is a popular humorous story in France in the middle ages. It is often labeled with moral label and Chaucer left an example about it. Another concept is allegory, which refers to an extended form of metaphor. In this kind of story narrated in prose or poetry, things, characters and plots all have another meaning beyond the surface meaning of the story. Therefore, it compares one thing with another, and uses specific images to express abstract philosophical and moral meanings. The role of fable is usually the image expression of abstract things. Sometimes it can be seen from its name. The plot and background in the story represent the relationship between the abstract objects. Fables try to arouse a kind of double interest, one is the events, the characters and the background provided by the works, the other is the ideas they intentionally convey. The former gives entertainment while the latter gives education. It can be historical, fictional or legendary. The key is that these materials can be used to express the deep meaning independent of the surface story. It can be religious, moral, political, personal and ironic. It can be divided into preaching fables, animal fables, moral fables, religious fables, animal poems, etc. Fable is not only a form of literary creation, but also a method of analysis and criticism, which has been widely used in recent years.

Benjamin's theory originated from German drama in Baroque period. The complicated social environment and artistic atmosphere at that time gave birth to Baroque, a typical and novel artistic style. On the basis of his predecessors' creation, Benjamin began to devote himself to the exploration of Baroque drama and opened a new chapter in the study of Baroque drama. His new and different views added new elements to the fable. In his opinion, "the split of allegory and meaning" is the basic feature, on the basis of which the analysis of allegory and even the whole literature is the scientific allegory, rather than the simplified one as the object of criticism. In addition, the relationship between text and philosophy of history is another area of Benjamin's concern. From his point of view, fable is a kind of ideological form with the significance of the times. Therefore, compared with the traditional fable, Benjamin's fable is a new theory based on the philosophical analysis and historical investigation of the mourning drama. After the middle of the 19th century, Benjamin believes that the gloom in Europe was a kind of disgust to life and death that inflated the human heart. This profound thought can only be fully presented under the carrier of fables. Only by the way of fragmentation and the grief of despair can we make people feel the same and resonate with each other, and at the same time stimulate human desire and consciousness of changing the world. Although it was crowded out by image art, even forgotten and neglected for a time, in Benjamin's constant reflection and investigation, the theme of fable still occupies a place in the 20th century.

### **Totalitarianism in *Animal Farm***

The main reason for Orwell's fame as a writer is that his works are not only political, but also prophetic. Orwell, with his sharp political vision in the 1940s, when totalitarianism was still in its infancy and development stage, saw the social situation when totalitarianism reached its peak and the consequences.

In the story of *Animal Farm*, totalitarian politics believes that a stable right does not come from the restriction of right itself, but from the unrestricted expansion of right; it does not come from the recognition of people as the object of power, but from the overall control of people (Bao Dongmei, 2008). Therefore, Orwell made full use of fable, the special way of expression, created a series of distinct animal images. He also endowed animals with human characteristics, and vividly constructed a series of negative scenes, such as the oppression of farmers, the uprising of animals, the betrayal of Napoleon, the death of Boxer, the decline of farms and so on. The use of these materials and the negative factors reveal the fact that in order to achieve the purpose, the rulers use abnormal means to control the situation.

#### **Totalitarian Rule in Language**

Totalitarianism destroys the past civilization through the transformation of language, which is an extreme and barbaric way. It splits the relationship between people and the past civilization and maintains its own rule. Orwell believes that everything, including language, is political. Besides the power of expression, language has the ability to construct facts. In the totalitarian world constructed by Orwell, the contribution of language to the ruling class is even more unimaginable. Totalitarians use all means of language to maintain their rule.

In *Animal Farm*, pigs abuse language to achieve the purpose of power. Pigs' overuse of language is mainly the simplification of language and the concept of stealing. At the beginning of the novel, the animals work together to drive farmer Jones out, and the pigs become the leaders of the animals. They write the so-called "seven commandments". But, gradually, they simplified "seven commandments" into one commandment, which is "four legs good, two legs better." Slowly, the animals gradually forgot the specific regulations of "seven commandments". Pigs began to violate the commandments they had made in those days and occupy the fruits of other animals' labor. They ate apples, drank milk, whiskey, and even lived in the house of farmer Jones. But the animals could not resist. They could not remember what the former "seven commandments" said. In the end, there is only one rule left that is "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." In the totalitarian society of farm, other animals don't understand what the concept of "equality" is. In this way, pigs stole all the fruits of the revolution, replacing farmer Jones as the new owner of those animals.

In fact, language itself has no control, but it has become an ideological thing because it carries the story of the characters in the works. If the seven commandments are the result of collective rational thinking, then the simplified seven commandments are the abuse of language. This distorted form is like the ugly historical face of Benjamin's Baroque fables, which conveys us a historical picture in the sense of irony.

#### **Totalitarian Rule in Worship**

Totalitarianism has a certain mass basis. Rulers regard what they know and advocate as truth. They directly represent the nature and direction of historical development and deliberately create crazy personal worship. Their real intention is to make all the people lose their right to doubt and think in the case of madness, and ultimately become a tool of obedience attached to the individual rulers.

In the novel, after the animals overthrew the oppression of the farmer, the pig with the most wisdom was chosen as the interpreter of animal thought and democratic spirit. The animals respected him as the spiritual leader, wrote praises for him, and believed his words. He has awarded himself the titles of “class Animal Hero” and “class II Animal Hero”, and he often wears medals to show off his success and good fortune. It has become a common practice for him (Chen Siben, 2008). For example, it is often heard that a hen says to her partner, “under the guidance of our leader comrade Napoleon, I laid five eggs in six days”; or the cow drinking water cries, “thanks to Comrade Napoleon’s leadership, the water here tastes so sweet!” (Orwell, 2000). With their own hype and the unrestrained pursuit of animals, the words of pigs have become a new criterion. In this abnormal social form, there is no doubt that the animals obey the pig’s words unconditionally, so the pig naturally becomes a real farmer. Secular language can’t express this extreme form of artistic expression.

So the existence of fables makes the interpretation of works logical. The allegorical aesthetic salvation fully understands why Orwell’s depiction of Napoleon is so close to reality. The naked expression of human nature is to destroy the false shell, touch the fallen heart, and then achieve the purpose of salvation.

### **Totalitarian Rule in Strategy**

Totalitarianism needs constant conflict. Only conflict can keep the vitality of totalitarianism. In the totalitarian society, in order to maintain the rule and cover up some things that are not good for themselves, the rulers always try to divert the attention of the masses. The most effective way to succeed in this is to create a public enemy, stimulate the masses’ struggle and let the whole nation oppose the reformer.

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell fully revealed the totalitarian tactics of using “public enemy” struggle to shift the public’s attention. In order to maintain their power and prevent other animals from perceiving they are enslaved, pigs cunningly set up a new “public enemy”—the pig that failed to compete with Napoleon in power. It was defeated in the party struggle and then escaped from the farm. After he left, Napoleon listed a series of crimes, blaming snowball for all the bad things happened in the farm. For example, when the first built windmill collapsed due to technical reasons, the animals were very frightened. After checking it, they broke into the warehouse and shouted, “it’s snowball! It’s snowball that did this! The traitor, purely out of sinister intentions, tried to reverse our plan and retaliate for his shameful deportation, so he sneaked into this place under the cover of darkness to destroy our labor” (Orwell, 2011, p. 198). It blamed snowball for all the setbacks and failures in the construction of the farm, and the animals did not know where snowball went or whether it still lived in the world. Even so, at the instigation of the pigs, they regard snowballs as traitors and enemies without any doubt.

### **Conclusion**

Benjamin’s fable theory is a new way of world cognition. Orwell uses animal manor to analyze problems from the perspective of fable theory and reveal the dark side of human nature. This method of deliberately revealing the dark side of human nature is just the highest baptism to redeem human nature. Totalitarianism is rooted in human nature. It enslaves human beings by using the inherent darkness and the pursuit of light. Although the language of the novel is humorous and shows a pleasant feeling, its satire is full of expression. This is not only a vivid representation of the social reality at that time, but also a history of reporting honesty, so as to avoid the destruction and persecution of Totalitarianism to all aspects of social politics, economy, culture and life.

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