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GEORGE ORWELL'S *ANIMAL FARM*: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

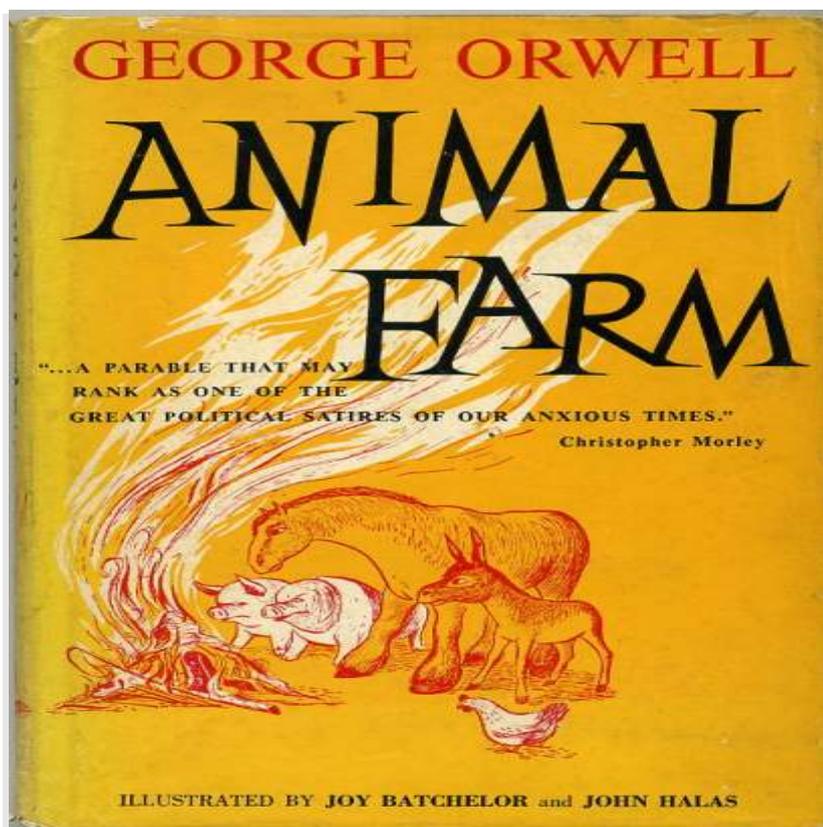


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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Marxist perspectives draw our attention to the issue of political and economic interests in the literary work and highlight social inequalities in literary representations. Marxism helps to situate literary texts within the larger social formation. Its focus on the nature of ideology helps us to deconstruct taken-for-granted values. Based on the theories of Karl Marx, Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions out of which they are born. According to Marxists, even literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological function, based on the background and ideology of the author. In essence, Marxists believe that a work of literature is not a result of divine inspiration or pure artistic endeavour, but that it arises out of the economic and ideological circumstances surrounding its creation and the creator's own place in society.

Marxist criticism interprets texts in relation to their relevance regarding issues of class struggle as depicted in a work of fiction. This paper attempts to explore the Marxist viewpoint existed in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

KEYWORDS

Base, Superstructure, Ideology, Political Economy, False-consciousness, Alienation, Commodity and Commodification

1. INTRODUCTION

Marxist literary theories tend to focus on the representation of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class distinctions through the medium of literature. Marxist theorists use traditional techniques of literary analysis but subordinate aesthetic concerns to the final social and political meanings of literature. Marx investigated the role of ideology and how we as humans make false-conscious decisions. For example, Marxists believe that cultural, religious, and ethical decisions are all products of false-consciousness and influenced by ideological 'pressures'. Marx believed that ideologies explain the distribution of wealth and power in society and lead people to accept the status quo and the subordinate people end up believing in their subordination.

Karl Marx probably had more influence on the political course of the last century than any other social thinker. There are many different kinds of Marxism, and the twentieth century saw two huge Marxist states in total opposition to one another. In the West, Marxism has never presented a revolutionary threat to the established order, though it has taken root as the major theoretical critique of capitalist society in intellectual circles, and new interpretations of Marx's thought appear each year.

Marx basically divided base and *superstructure*; the two terms draw the structure of the society. He defines *base* as a socio-economic condition of the person and *superstructure* which designates the *ideology* which concentrates on perpetuated and legitimized ideas, values and beliefs of dominant social class. He basically says it is base that determines the ideology of the person in the realm of society. The dominant social class often manipulate directly and indirectly on the working or downtrodden class. The political strength of dominant social class is determined by his material acquaintance.

Karl Marx has probably affected the course of twentieth-century history more than any other single thinker. Because of this, his ideas have generated a vast output of writings, ranging from texts written by revolutionaries aimed at telling people how to do revolution—how to carry on Marx's work of demolishing capitalism and creating a new socialist society—to the many hundreds of volumes dedicated to proving that Marx was wrong about practically everything.

George Orwell explores the idea of Marxism in the novel 'Animal Farm' in many different ways. Firstly, Marxists claim that laws are created by a superior ruling class as a way to keep themselves from getting in trouble with the law. Similarly, in 'Animal Farm' there is a clear power divide amongst the animals the pigs being the ruling class. All laws on the farm were not only created by the pigs but they were also changed by the pigs to fit their likings to avoid conflict with the other animals which is a clear injustice. For example it is repeated throughout the book that all animals are equal, then in the final chapter of the book "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others," is written on the wall of the barn. This is a major point in the novel because the pigs have finally established to the other animals that they believe themselves to be of a superior race after making it obvious to the reader that there is a disproportionate spread of power over the farm.

Another element of Marxism that '*Animal Farm*' conveys is the false sense of freedom given to the lower class. Marxists believe that although people are told they are free to do what they want; most people never get the opportunities or the money to do as they wish entirely. The animals in 'Animal Farm' that are not lucky enough to be pigs are constantly reminded (by the pigs) of the freedom they have been granted upon driving the humans away. They are told that because no one is controlling them they are free to eat to do a lot more than they could before, for instance, eating what they like and having Sundays free from farm work. However in actual fact the pigs give the animals a smaller ration than they got while the farm was run by humans and the work they are assigned is far more laborious. The animals are unaware of the injustice upon them and have been manipulated into thinking they have been granted freedom.

Marxism is a method of societal analysis based on attention to class-relations and societal conflict, on a materialist interpretation of historical development, and on a dialectical view of social transformation. Marxist methodology informs economic and sociopolitical enquiry applying to the analysis and critique of the development of capitalism and the role of class struggle in systemic economic change. In the mid-to-late 19th century, the two German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were inspired the intellectual tenets of Marxism. Marxist methodologies have influenced multiple political ideologies and social movements throughout history. It encompasses an economic theory, a sociological theory, a philosophical method, and a revolutionary view of social change.

Marxist Criticism is stranded in the economic and cultural theories of Karl Marx. Marxist critics examine a work as the product of an ideology particular to a specific historical period, rather than viewing a text as the product of an individual consciousness. They judge a text on the basis of its portrayal of social actions and institutions and on its representation of class struggle. The Marxist approach to literature is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. His major argument was that whoever controlled the means of production in society controlled the society—whoever owned the factories “owned” the culture. This idea is called “dialectical materialism,” and Marx felt that the history of the world was leading toward a communist society. Marxist point of view, the means of production would be placed in the hands of the masses, who actually operated the means of production, not in the hands of those few who owned it. It was a changed version of this philosophy that was at the heart of the Soviet Union. Marxism was also the rallying cry of the poor and oppressed all over the world. To read a work from a Marxist perspective, one must understand that Marxism asserts that literature is a reflection of culture, and that culture can be affected by literature. Marxism is linked to Freudian theory by its concentration on the subconscious—Freud dealt with the individual subconscious, while Marx dealt with the political subconscious. Marx believed that oppression exists in the political subconscious of a society—social pecking orders are inherent to any group of people.

Orwell's 'Animal Farm' is based on the indictment of the communist betrayal of the ideals the Soviet Union was founded on. He tells the story in the form of a fairy tale, clearly depicting the different animal's positions and power over one another. '*Animal Farm*' is based on a social movement and Marx's view on consciousness and political consciousness can be used to help describe this. For example we can look at Marx's classless society theory and how the working classes through a revolution would unite and share in the 'wealth of labour.' Class consciousness is strong in Orwell's story and much of Marxism is based on that, but mainly it's necessary to discuss political consciousness, ideology and social class - all important factors to Marxists.

Animal Farm completely fails to reflect these key causes of the revolution's degeneration. In the story, the rebellion of the animals leaves them with a material abundance of food: there is milk galore and a generous harvest of windfall apples, both of which are simply purloined by the cunning and selfish pigs, led by Napoleon (Joseph Stalin) and the soon-to-be-ousted Snowball (Leon Trotsky). In addition, only one animal — a sheep — dies as a result of the “civil war”, an attempt by the deposed farmer Mr Jones and his human friends to retake the farm.

Thus, in Orwell's story the Rebellion degenerates despite conditions of material abundance and an “animal class” left largely intact by human aggression. Orwell seems to be saying that unless ruled by humans, the mass of animals will inevitably succumb to the tyrannical rule of the cunning and selfish among themselves. Transposed to the human domain, the moral of Orwell's story is clear: without the capitalist class to govern them, the mass of workers will inevitably find themselves subject to the tyranny of the “brainworkers” among them. The dictators in *Animal Farm* makes commodification of

people is their ability to influence them very cold-bloodedly to get what he wants, for commodification is the treatment of objects and people as commodities. The novel is representatives of the working class. Some animals try to improve their lot the only way they know how. They are victim of capitalism because the only way to succeed in a capitalist economy is to succeed in a market. Their characterizations are so negative that it is easy to overlook the socioeconomic realities that control their lives. The appeal to readers to belong to the magical world of the wealthy is also a memorial to the power of the commodity. From Marxist perspective, thus another flaw in the novel is the way in which the commodity's appeal is powerfully reinforced for the reader by the flourishing language used to describe this world of leisure and luxury.

Of course, the animals in the tale are far from the high level of political, cultural and technical development required for the success of a socialist revolution. But there's the rub: Orwell's animals, with the exception of the pigs, are, though hard working, loyal and trustworthy, devoid of all intelligence and completely unable to learn anything from experience. This extremely low estimate of the potentialities of the working class is part of Orwell's conception of the possibilities open to socialists. The options are exhausted by Stalinist totalitarianism and the "social democratic" struggle for reforms within the confines of "western parliamentary democracy".

The flipside of Orwell's elitist and patronizing attitude towards working people is his highly distorted picture of the nature of British capitalism. In the first preface to *Animal Farm*, he writes of "the intellectual liberty which without a doubt has been one of the distinguishing marks of western civilisation" and states that "tolerance and decency are deeply rooted in England". That would be the "intellectual liberty" afforded — not so long before Orwell's time — to the Tolpuddle Martyrs and other ordinary workers, imprisoned, banished or simply murdered by the British state for daring to organise trade unions, or the "tolerance and decency" that callously sent millions of young people to the slaughterhouse of World War I — not to mention the horrors of imperial rule within the British Isles and overseas.

The intellectual liberty, tolerance and decency of British imperialism are the real Orwellian fantasy: insofar as those qualities have roots in Britain, they are the product of generations of struggle by the working people that Orwell snobbishly portrays as bovine dunces. It's not hard to see why Orwell is the darling of the ruling-class newspapers mentioned above. He may genuinely have attempted to provide a critique of Stalin's USSR "from the left", but all that he actually produced — in *Animal Farm* at least — was a banal piece of ruling-class propaganda.

Orwell and Marx differed in their views on Socialism and its effects on religion and nationalism as well as Socialism's effects on society and its leaders. Orwell shared many of Marx's viewpoints, but he did not share with Marx the same vision of a utopian future, only the prospects of a worldwide revolution.

In conclusion, the general aim of *Animal Farm* as a satire is to offer itself as an example of temperate, responsible criticism. It is a generally sympathetic criticism of Marxism that offers to ease many of Marx's statements about man, revolution, religion and society. It is a moderate Marxism whose definitive ideas are not really stated, but whose ideology surely exists throughout the novel. The novel offers a significant assessment of capitalist ideology; it also repackages and markets that ideology anew. The novel does not celebrate the thrilling capitalist culture it portrays but, as a Marxist interpretation of the novel makes especially clear, reveals its dark underbelly instead. One of the most effective ways *Animal Farm* criticizes capitalist culture is by showing the devastating effects of capitalist ideology even on those who are its most successful products, and it does so through its representation of commodification.

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