

## Imagery in Action: G. Orwell's *Animal Farm*

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### Abstract

The present paper is a literary stylistic analysis that highlights the imagery, the allegorical significance, linguistic manipulation or abuse of language in the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Orwell's sophisticated exposure of political abuse of language is one of the most typical characteristics of *Animal Farm* and an indispensable part of his imagery. Seemingly a plain story of animals, inwardly this novel is an allegory that refers to power struggle, usurpation, intimidation, exploitation, hypocrisy, corruption, political racket and terror of the ruling classes in whatever form they may appear (human or animal). However serious the theme is, Orwell has made it fictitious and amusing through his vivid imagery and artful use of literary devices. With its clear, deceptively simple, but creatively honed prose style and expressive language, the novel is a source of great aesthetic and intellectual pleasure and political insight.

**Key words:** Orwell, imagery as a literary device, allegory, linguistic manipulation, political insight.

### Introduction

Imagery, in a literary text, is the author's use of vivid and descriptive language to add depth to the work (Imagery 2016), the use of figurative language to represent ideas, actions, events, objects, characters in such a way that it appeals to human senses and deepens the reader's understanding of the work. Hence, the function of imagery in literature is to generate a visual presentation and to aid the reader's imagination to envision scenes, events, characters described in written discourse.

Highly didactic intentions of the author are realized through effective use of imagery and different literary tools. For G. Orwell the powerful forms of imagery used in his dystopian science fiction novel *Animal Farm* (first published in 1945, reprinted 57 times) are allegory (political allegory to be

exact), symbolism, irony, satire, personification, farce, grotesque, caricature. In other words, Orwell's imagery is a device itself which combines all the mentioned literary forms of expression. In their turn, symbolism, satire, irony, personification, etc. are presented within an allegorical framework, thus making allegory the most important imagery means to present animals as symbols of historical figures (K. Marx, V. Lenin, J. Stalin and others); groups and classes (the working class, mass media people, the military/police, etc.); leaders of countries (England, Germany, Turkey, etc.) (The Newspeak Dictionary 1984; Rodden 1999), and to pass to the readers the general message that all violent revolutions which initially succeed in overthrowing totalitarian regimes, in time deteriorate into repressive regimes themselves and use linguistic manipulation as a means of propagating their false ideology.

Orwell's "finely honed prose style works to near perfection and is superbly adapted to dealing with the central artistic difficulty involved in the *Animal Farm* project, that of making his characters believable as both animals and humans, or rather as animals with human characteristics" (Molyneux 1989:2). Orwell imagines animals and people alike and considers swinish nature a basis of corruption, a root of all evils. His imagery refers to power struggle, usurpation, intimidation, political racket and terror, manipulation, exploitation. All these are signs of tyranny and dictatorship, loss of liberty and security for common people. However serious the theme is, Orwell has made it fictitious and amusing through his vivid imagery and artful use of literary devices.

Orwell (1968:7) once wrote of *Animal Farm*, "I tried with full consciousness of what I was doing to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole." Hence, we will not be mistaken if we say that when in action, Orwell's artistic imagery serves the aim of criticizing certain socio-political purposes and realities.

### **Orwell's Imagery in Discourse**

The plot of the *Animal Farm* is based on a series of images which gave expression to the experience of totalitarianism. The plot is an extended allegory in which animals play the roles of the 1917 Russian Bolshevik revolutionaries. They overthrow and oust the human owners of the farm and set up a community in which all animals are at first equal but soon disparities start to emerge between the different species or classes and political corruption reigns supreme. The community's ideology changes too, manipulated by individuals in positions

of power (pig Napoleon and his clan). The farm as a whole is devoured by propaganda “for reconciling the animals, for safeguarding the position of the pigs, and for winning privileges for the pigs’ clan” (EA Fonseca 1998-1999:11).

The plot opens with the grotesque image of the human Mr. Jones (decoded as the Russian Tsar Nicholas II), the master of Manor Farm, whose dictatorship and tyranny provide an ideal situation for the animal revolution. No less imaginative is Orwell’s ironical portrayal of the philosophically minded, swinish theorist Old Major who symbolizes a representative of Marxist and Leninist ideology and who initiated the revolution.

*He was twelve years old and had lately grown rather stout, but he was still a majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance in spite of the fact that his tushes had never been cut.*

(p. 2)

Major’s image of violence is concealed under pretentious kindness which appears in the antithesis made up of *a wise and benevolent appearance* and *tushes which had never been cut*. The younger pigs Napoleon (Lenin and Stalin merged in one character), Snowball (Trotsky) and Squealer (a propagandist representing mass media at large) formulate Major’s principles into the ideology of *Animalism*, defeat farmer Jones in a battle, and set to building their *Animal Farm*. The image of the working-class or the common masses is depicted in the stupid cart-horse Boxer who devotes himself to the cause with great zeal, committing his strength to the prosperity of the farm and adopting the maxims of hard work and the rightness of the ruler pig Napoleon and his clan. Finally, Napoleon sells this loyal worker in order to buy more whiskey for himself. What enables Napoleon to usurp power is essentially the low intellectual development of the working class represented by Boxer. J. Molineux (1989:11), considering Orwell’s picture of the working class too “horrible and slanderous,” argues that of course “the intellectual development of workers is damaged by social conditions, by poverty, abysmal education and alienated labour” but “these characteristics are neither innate, nor unchangeable” and even “when the confidence to resist openly has been smashed, they are never as stupid, brainwashed and supine as Orwell suggests here.”

The degeneration of the revolution leads to the conflict between the utopian goals of equality, freedom and democracy and inner animal/human

characteristics – greed and lust for power. False notions about superior intelligence, experience and leadership abilities of pigs are put forward to conceal the mentioned characteristics. The irony expressed in the linguistic units *the more intelligent animals*, *it was their duty*, *generally recognised as being the cleverest of the animals* and *teaching and organising the others fell naturally upon the pigs* in the context below suggest that pigs are not smart – they just use the power of seeming smart:

*Major's speech had given to **the more intelligent animals** on the farm a completely new outlook on life. They did not know when the Rebellion predicted by Major would take place, they had no reason for thinking that it would be within their own lifetime, but they saw clearly that **it was their duty** to prepare for it. The work of **teaching and organising the others fell naturally upon the pigs**, who were **generally recognised as being the cleverest of the animals**.*

(p. 7)

To ensure a tiny minority's material gain and control over wealth while keeping the vast majority oppressed, a strong political rhetoric is essential. To justify the pigs' monopolization of resources – false statistics about the farm's success is spread. When Napoleon begins to act more like a human being – walking upright, sleeping in a bed, wearing clothes, carrying whips, tying ribbons on the tails of his offsprings to distinguish them from the rest of the pigs, draping his favourite sow with Mrs. Jones' clothes, drinking whisky, playing cards and getting involved in other activities that are against the original *Animalist* principles, Squealer uses powerful propaganda (an inevitable instrument of any politics) to justify the mentioned actions to other animals, to convince them that Napoleon is a great leader, that they are cold, hungry and overworked due to the cruel schemes of external and internal enemies. Napoleon's wish to lead a materialistic pattern of life is an allusion to human politicians. The extravagant *Crown Derby* dinner shows the lifestyle of a corrupt politician "blind with class consciousness" (EA Fonseca 1998-1999:12). Capital punishment on those rising against government are also features of a cruel dictatorship. The retrogression of the farm to its original state (in an even

worse form) is the result of political deterioration. Today, this is the reality behind the politics of many states.

The abuse, the manipulation of language as an instrument of power and control is one of Orwell's central concerns. Speaking about the importance of precise and clear language Orwell believes that there is a close association between insincere, inaccurate, euphemistic, meaningless, manipulative, vague prose and oppressive ideology, that such a prose is a powerful tool of political manipulation "designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable" (Orwell 2006), intended to hide the truth rather than to express it (Shelden 1991:393). Orwell's sophisticated exposure of political abuse of language is one of the most typical characteristics of the *Animal Farm* and an indispensable part of his imagery. Orwell's imagery is particularly active when he explores the ways in which those in power often use rhetoric and language to twist the truth aiming at gaining political and economic control. Hence, the author's imagery is vividly expressed in his linguistic formulations referring to the *seven Commandments of Animalism* and their later distortions which aim at justifying the behaviour of the rulers. The original *Commandments*, set up after the animals' victory and *written on the tarred wall in great white letters that could be read thirty yards away* were supposed to keep order within the *Animal Farm* and prevent animals from following the human evil habits.

*The Commandments were written on the tarred wall in great white letters that could be read thirty yards away. They ran thus: THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS*

1. *Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.*
2. *Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.*
3. *No animal shall wear clothes.*
4. *No animal shall sleep in a bed.*
5. *No animal shall drink alcohol.*
6. *No animal shall kill any other animal.*
7. *All animals are equal.*

(p. 11)

For a while the rules are unviolated but as the story progresses, an ironic twist occurs in the original purpose of *The Seven Commandments*; each rule

falls off the wall twisted and mangled and is secretly replaced with revised maxims. Such conversion is symbolic of the mass media under a smug dictatorship benefiting the privileged few. The first two *Commandments* (*Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy; Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend*) change into **Four legs good: two legs better**. Both this version and the simplified form of the original two slogans (*Four legs good, two legs bad*) are presented as meaningless sounds bleated by the sheep and serving the purpose of drowning out dissenting opinion.

*The birds did not understand Snowball's long words, but they accepted his explanation, and all the humbler animals set to work to learn the new maxim by heart. **FOUR LEGS GOOD, TWO LEGS BAD**, was inscribed on the end wall of the barn, above the Seven Commandments and in bigger letters. When they had once got it by heart, the sheep developed a great liking for this maxim, and often as they lay in the field they would all start bleating "**Four legs good, two legs bad! Four legs good, two legs bad!**" and keep it up for hours on end, never growing tired of it.*

(p. 15)

*And finally there was a tremendous baying of dogs and a shrill crowing from the black cockerel, and out came Napoleon himself, majestically upright, casting haughty glances from side to side, and with his dogs gambolling round him. He carried a whip in his trotter. There was a deadly silence. Amazed, terrified, huddling together, the animals watched the long line of pigs march slowly round the yard. It was as though the world had turned upside-down. Then there came a moment when the first shock had worn off and when, in spite of everything – in spite of their terror of the dogs, and of the habit, developed through long years, of never complaining, never criticising, no matter what happened – they might have uttered some word of protest. But just at that moment, as though at a signal, all the sheep burst out into a tremendous bleating of – "**Four legs good, two legs better! Four legs good, two legs better! Four legs good, two legs better!**"*

(p. 56)

The other distorted slogans also present a most typical characteristic of the *Animal Farm* and are perfect examples of Orwell's sophisticated exposure of political abuse of language. *Commandment 4 (No animal shall sleep in a bed)* becomes *No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets*.

*“Muriel,” she said, “read me the Fourth Commandment. Does it not say something about never sleeping in a bed?” With some difficulty, Muriel spelt it out. “It says, ‘No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets,’” she announced finally. [...] The rule was against sheets, which are a human invention. We have removed the sheets from the farmhouse beds, and sleep between blankets.*

(p. 29)

When the animals find *Commandment 5 (No animal shall drink alcohol)* changed into *No animal shall drink alcohol to excess*, they once again blame their memories for being faulty.

*But a few days later Muriel, reading over the Seven Commandments to herself, noticed that there was yet another of them which the animals had remembered wrong. They had thought the Fifth Commandment was “No animal shall drink alcohol,” but there were two words that they had forgotten. Actually the Commandment read: “No animal shall drink alcohol to excess.”*

(p. 46)

*Commandment 6 (No animal shall kill any other animal)* is replaced by *No animal shall kill any other animal without cause*.

*A FEW days later, when the terror caused by the executions had died down, some of the animals remembered – or thought they remembered – that the Sixth Commandment decreed “No animal shall kill any other animal.” And though no one cared to mention it in the hearing of the pigs or the dogs, it was felt that the killings which had taken place did not square with this. Clover asked Benjamin to read her the Sixth Commandment, and when Benjamin, as usual, said that he refused to meddle in such matters,*

*she fetched Muriel. Muriel read the Commandment for her. It ran: “No animal shall kill any other animal without cause.” Somehow or other, the last two words had slipped out George ORWELL Animal Farm – 39 – of the animals’ memory. But they saw now that the Commandment had not been violated; for clearly there was good reason for killing the traitors who had leagued themselves with Snowball.*

(p. 38)

*Commandment 7 (All animals are equal) – the only Commandment that eventually remains on the wall – in its revised version reads: **All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.***

*For once Benjamin consented to break his rule, and he read out to her what was written on the wall. There was nothing there now except a single Commandment. It ran: **ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS.***

(p. 57)

This final reduction of the *Seven Commandments* into *All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others*, is the ultimate example of the pigs’ systematic abuse of logic and language, a phrase presenting a senseless content in a seemingly plausible linguistic form, a manipulative idiom meaning that there can be different degrees of equality (*some* will be differentiated from *all*), therefore directly alluding to the hypocrisy of governments that pretend to adhere to the principle of absolute equality of their citizens but give power and privilege only to a small group. Thus, by the end of the novel, after Squealer repeatedly configures the *Commandments* to decriminalize the pigs, the ideal of equality underwent an outrageous abuse serving only the interests of a bunch of corrupt rulers.

The entire plot of the *Animal Farm* is most creatively summarized in the final man-pig feasting picture of the novel. On the one hand this picture presents “with superb irony the betrayal of revolutionary hopes” (Molineux 1989:2) but on the other it is “a moment of gained consciousness, a potentially liberating



discovery” (Williams 1971:74) for animals/men who are gaping at the scene. And hopefully, for people who are living under totalitarian regimes too.

*Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. 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.***

(p. 60)

### Conclusion

George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is a strong criticism of the oppressive policy of a specific government. However, it has far broader application – it is a powerful artistic and imaginative attack on any political, military and rhetorical power that unjustly controls societies. Orwell’s vivid imagery is tied to a rather rigidly structured animal allegory that discloses human experience of great historical and political value. The literary stylistic analyses of the novel’s general notions and the linguistic manipulations of the *Seven Commandments of Animalism*, support the statement in the introduction that the author’s goal to fuse political and artistic purposes into one whole, is perfectly accomplished. Thus, however serious the theme of *Animal Farm*, Orwell has made it fictitious and amusing through his vivid imagery and artful use of literary devices. With its clear, deceptively simple, but creatively honed prose style and expressive language, the novel is a source of great aesthetic and intellectual pleasure and political insight.

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### Պատկերավորությունը շարժման մեջ.

#### Ջ. Օրուելի *Անասնաֆերմա* վեպը

Հոդվածը գրական-ոճական վերլուծություն է, որը կարևորում է պատկերային համակարգի, այլաբանության և լեզվական շահարկման դերն ու նշանակությունը Ջ. Օրուելի *Անասնաֆերմա* վեպում: Սույն ստեղծագործությունն առերևույթ մի պարզ պատմություն է կենդանիների մասին, բայց ըստ էության այն իշխանության յուրացում, քաղաքական ահաբեկում, մարդու կողմից մարդու շահագործում, կեղծավորություն ու կոռուպցիա պատկերող գրական այլաբանություն է: Հեղինակի վառ երևակայության և գրական հնարների տեղին կիրառման շնորհիվ սույն լուրջ թեմատիկան ներկայանում է որպես գեղարվեստական մեծ ներուժով օժտված ստեղծագործություն: Իր պարզ, հստակ, բայց պատկերավոր ոճով աչքի ընկնող վեպն ունի գեղագիտական և քաղաքական մեծ նշանակություն: