

SATIRE AND SOCIETY: A MARXIST CRITICISM ON GEORGE ORWELL'S "ANIMAL FARM"

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Abstract

Through his allegorical novel "Animal Farm", George Orwell delivers a sharp critique of the distortion of socialist ideology under totalitarian regimes, particularly during the era of Stalinism. This study aims to analyze how Orwell employs satire as a tool to expose social inequality, the manipulation of power, and the betrayal of Marxist principles. Using a Marxist literary criticism approach and a descriptive-qualitative analysis method, the author examines the representation of social classes, the roles of symbolic characters, and the narrative that reflects the struggle between the proletariat and the ruling class. The analysis reveals that Animal Farm effectively unveils the process by which a revolution intended to create equality ends up giving rise to a new form of oppression. Orwell's satire not only critiques the political realities of the past but also serves as a reflection on the potential abuse of power in modern society.

Keywords: Animal Farm, satire, Marxist criticism, class struggle, totalitarianism, George Orwell

Article History

Received: June 2025

Reviewed: June 2025

Published: June 2025

Plagiarism Checker No 234

Prefix DOI : Prefix DOI :
10.8734/argopuro.v1i2.365

Copyright : Author

Publish by : Argopuro



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1. INTRODUCTION

Literature does not merely serve as a medium of entertainment, but also as a mirror and a form of social critique reflecting the realities faced by human beings in everyday life. One of the most powerful forms of social criticism in literature is satire—a literary style that uses humor, irony, and hyperbole to expose falsehoods and inequalities within society (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). George Orwell, a British writer and journalist, is known for being a vocal critic of social injustice through his works. One of his most influential pieces is *Animal Farm* (1945), an allegorical novel that illustrates how power can deviate from its original purpose and give rise to a new form of oppression.

Through the story of animals on a farm who revolt to establish an egalitarian society, Orwell delivers a sharp satire of the abuse of socialist ideology under the leadership of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union. Many characters in the novel symbolize real-life figures and groups in history—such as Napoleon, who represents Stalin, and Boxer, who symbolizes the working class (Meyers, 2000). At first, the animals' revolution appears to promise meaningful change, but it ultimately leads to a new system of oppression that is just as brutal as the one it replaced. In this context, Orwell satirizes how the idealism of the proletarian revolution envisioned by Karl Marx is betrayed by power-hungry elites.

Marxist theory highlights class struggle as the primary driving force in human history. According to this theory, society is divided into two main classes: the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (working class), who are constantly in conflict due to their opposing interests (Eagleton, 2002). Orwell sharply illustrates how power, which is supposed to liberate the proletariat, instead becomes a new tool of oppression. This

phenomenon demonstrates that without class consciousness and proper control, a revolution may only give birth to a new form of domination that is equally repressive.

This study aims to analyze how Orwell employs satire to express his critique of the class system and the distortion of Marxist ideology. By using a Marxist literary criticism approach and a descriptive-qualitative analysis method, this research examines the social representations, character symbolism, and irony within the narrative of *Animal Farm*. It also seeks to understand how Orwell's message in *Animal Farm* remains relevant in observing the tendencies of corrupt power in contemporary society.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Marxist Literary Criticism

Marxist literary criticism originates from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who viewed history as a struggle between opposing social classes (Marx & Engels, 2002). In the context of literature, this approach focuses on how literary works reflect, question, or critique the social structures and power relations within a society (Eagleton, 2002).

According to Marxist theory, society is composed of two main elements: the economic base (infrastructure), which determines the production and distribution of wealth, and the superstructure (ideology, law, religion, and art), which supports the dominance of the ruling class (Tyson, 2006). In *Animal Farm*, the pigs' dominance over the other animals illustrates how a ruling class constructs ideological narratives and structures to maintain its control, despite the fact that all animals initially fought for equality.

Key concepts such as alienation, false consciousness, and class struggle lie at the core of Marxist criticism. Alienation occurs when workers become estranged from the products of their labor. In *Animal Farm*, this is clearly depicted in the character of Boxer, who tirelessly works for the revolution but is ultimately betrayed by the very system he helped to build.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1970). This legendary sentence serves as the foundation for understanding how Orwell portrays the betrayal of the principle of equality.

2. Satire in Literature

Satire is a form of social criticism in literature that uses irony, humor, sarcasm, and hyperbole to attack social and political folly or evil (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Its purpose is not merely to mock, but to expose the absurdities within systems or human behavior, thereby provoking awareness or change.

In *Animal Farm*, satire appears in the form of allegory: the animals represent real historical figures or political groups. Orwell ironically reveals that although revolutions aim to eliminate inequality, the end result is often the rise of a new, even more oppressive class. The famous line, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," is a striking example of Orwell's sharp satire toward the hypocrisy of totalitarian regimes.

According to Griffin (1994), satire is inherently subversive because it contains an implicit critique of existing power structures. In this context, Orwell is not only criticizing Stalin, but also warning readers about a universal tendency in politics: absolute power tends to become corrupt.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at analyzing the symbolic and ideological meanings within a literary work. This approach is chosen because it aligns with the objective of the research, which is to reveal the connection between literary texts and the socio-political realities they reflect (Creswell, 2014). The research is conducted using literary text analysis based on Marxist literary criticism, allowing the researcher to read the text not merely as fiction, but as a reflection of ideology, class conflict, and power structures in society.

a. Type and Approach of the Research

This study is categorized as library research, focusing on the analysis of a literary text (*Animal Farm* by George Orwell) and theoretical references from books, academic journals, and relevant articles. The approach used is a theoretical-interpretative one, which involves interpreting the meaning within the text using Marxist theory and the concept of satire.

b. Data Sources

- *Primary data* are derived from the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (1945).
- *Secondary data* consist of literary theory books, studies in Marxist literary criticism, scholarly journals, and articles that discuss *Animal Farm*, satire, and ideological analysis.

c. Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Data were collected through a close reading technique—an in-depth reading of key sections in the text that contain social criticism, character symbolism, and power structures. This technique enables the researcher to identify forms of satire and class conflict within the narrative.

The steps of analysis include:

1. Identifying quotations that represent class conflict and ideological deviation.
2. Connecting these quotations to Marxist concepts such as social class, alienation, and ideology.
3. Interpreting the forms of satire used by Orwell to convey socio-political criticism.

The results of the analysis will be presented in the discussion section to reveal how Orwell, through *Animal Farm*, illustrates a critique of a corrupt social system using sharp and ideologically charged satire.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A. Representation of Social Class in *Animal Farm*

George Orwell, in *Animal Farm*, presents a social structure that closely mirrors the class system found in real-world societies. This concept lies at the heart of Marxist theory, which views history as the outcome of class struggle between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the working class). In the novel, the pigs—especially Napoleon and Squealer—represent the ruling class, while the other animals symbolize the oppressed working class.

The pigs gradually seize power after overthrowing Mr. Jones, who represents the old capitalist regime. However, the power they assume is not used for the collective good; instead, they construct a new class hierarchy in which the pigs occupy the dominant position. This reflects how revolutions that aim to liberate the masses can become tools of oppression when power is not equally distributed.

For example, from the outset, Napoleon and Snowball are seen dominating decision-making processes. After Napoleon exiles Snowball through military force—using his loyal attack dogs—he becomes the absolute leader. This scenario illustrates how, in a class-based system,

one group will always strive to preserve its hegemony through repressive means, including violence.

Characters like Boxer and Clover embody the loyal and obedient proletariat, unaware of the manipulation they are subjected to. Boxer's repeated mottos, such as "*I will work harder*" and "*Napoleon is always right*", are powerful indications of what Marx termed *false consciousness*—a condition in which the working class accepts their oppression as normal and inevitable. In this context, Orwell not only portrays the existence of a class system, but also illustrates how it is maintained through psychological manipulation and deeply rooted ideology. Class oppression is not always physical; it can also be mental and ideological.

Orwell uses strong symbolism, especially in the transformation of the Seven Commandments. The original maxim, "*All animals are equal*," is ultimately revised to "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others*." This change represents the social reality in which principles of justice often become hollow slogans, and true equality is never achieved.

Overall, the representation of social class in *Animal Farm* serves as Orwell's critique of how power can corrupt and create a new oppressive class, even after the old system has been dismantled. A revolution, if not accompanied by political awareness and fair distribution of power, will merely give rise to a new form of domination with a different face.

Thus, through his use of satire, Orwell reminds us that class structures are a recurring force in human history—and that they can only be dismantled through conscious, collective struggle, not through symbolic revolutions or revolutionary slogans alone.

B. Alienation and Exploitation in the Context of Labor

One of the central aspects of Marxist theory is the concept of **alienation**—the estrangement of workers from the products of their labor, from the labor process itself, from their fellow workers, and ultimately from their own human potential. In *Animal Farm*, the character of Boxer serves as a powerful illustration of a laborer suffering from alienation.

Boxer, the hardworking and loyal cart-horse, represents the proletariat who toils without control over his life or labor. He dedicates himself entirely to the success of the farm, which, after the rebellion, is secretly dominated by a new ruling class—the pigs. Whenever problems arise, Boxer responds only with the phrase, "*I will work harder*," reflecting his inability to comprehend the true source of his suffering.

When Boxer is injured and can no longer work, the pigs—who had promised to care for all animals in their old age—betray him by selling him to the knacker (a horse slaughterer). This act exemplifies the most brutal form of **exploitation**: the worker is valued solely for his productivity, and once he becomes unproductive, he is discarded. As Marx and Engels (1848) asserted, under capitalism, human beings are reduced to mere instruments in the cycle of production, rather than being valued as individuals.

Boxer's alienation is especially tragic because he never becomes aware of the exploitation he endures. This is a clear example of **false consciousness**, in which workers accept and rationalize the very structures that oppress them. Boxer never questions Napoleon's authority or the system he serves, even when it ultimately leads to his downfall.

By portraying Boxer as a symbol of the unaware laborer, Orwell offers a sharp satire of a social system that promises justice but treats people as expendable tools. It serves as a warning that hard work, when devoid of critical awareness, only serves to sustain oppressive systems rather than liberate individuals.

In Marxist terms, the antidote to alienation is **class consciousness**—a collective awareness among workers of their shared exploitation and a willingness to resist the structures of oppression. However, in *Animal Farm*, this awareness never materializes. The animals remain fragmented, confused, and passive, allowing the pigs to solidify their dominance.

This lack of class consciousness underscores the failure of the animals' revolution. Despite the promise of a new society based on equality, the structures of production and power remain unchanged. Orwell suggests that without systemic transformation and a critical understanding of exploitation, any revolution is doomed to repeat the cycles of alienation and inequality it sought to dismantle.

C. Ideological Hegemony and Propaganda through Squealer

One of the most powerful tools for maintaining control in a capitalist or authoritarian system, according to Antonio Gramsci (1971), is ideological hegemony—the dominance of a ruling class not through force alone, but through the internalization of its values and worldview by the subordinate classes. In *Animal Farm*, this concept is embodied in the character of Squealer, who acts as the regime's chief propagandist and ideological mouthpiece for Napoleon.

Squealer uses persuasive language, distortion of facts, euphemisms, and emotional appeals to convince the other animals that every decision made by Napoleon is in their best interest—even when it clearly serves only the pigs. For instance, when harvests fail and living conditions deteriorate, Squealer insists that life is still better than it was under Mr. Jones. He often presents fake statistics and abstract numbers that confuse the animals, a strategy reminiscent of how real-world regimes manipulate data to maintain their legitimacy and suppress dissent (Chomsky, 1989).

The effectiveness of Squealer's propaganda lies in the animals' lack of access to alternative sources of information. This reflects Karl Marx's assertion that the ruling class not only controls the means of material production but also the means of ideological production—schools, media, literature, and religion. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs monopolize language, information, and interpretation of events, leaving the other animals helplessly dependent on their version of the truth.

Squealer's rhetorical strategies include:

- **Gaslighting:** Making the animals doubt their own memories and perceptions (“You must have imagined it”).
- **Appeals to fear:** Constantly invoking the threat of Mr. Jones' return if they disobey.
- **Emotional manipulation:** Claiming sacrifices are necessary for the greater good of Animalism.

Through these techniques, Orwell demonstrates that control over language is control over thought. The animals are not only physically subjugated but mentally entrapped. Orwell thus critiques how propaganda operates not only through censorship but through *selective truth, repetition, and emotional coercion*.

The novel warns that political revolution is not enough. Without a cultural and educational revolution—where citizens are equipped to think critically, question authority, and access reliable information—society remains vulnerable to ideological manipulation. This is particularly evident when the animals, unable to read or analyze independently, blindly trust Squealer's ever-changing explanations and statistics.

In conclusion, Orwell's portrayal of Squealer underscores the role of hegemonic discourse in sustaining unequal power structures. The satirical power of *Animal Farm* lies in its exposure of how language, when weaponized by those in power, becomes more potent than physical force. It is not the barking of dogs alone, but the eloquence of Squealer, that cements Napoleon's tyranny.

D. Comparison of Characters and Historical Figures in the Russian Revolution

Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* as an allegory of the 1917 Russian Revolution and its impact on Soviet society. Each major character in the novel represents a real-life figure or a significant element in the history of the revolution. This comparison highlights Orwell's critique of the betrayal of revolutionary idealism by totalitarian leaders.

The following table illustrates the comparison between the characters in *Animal Farm* and actual historical figures:

Character in Animal Farm	Historical Figure	Explanation of Role and Allegorical Meaning
Napoleon	Joseph Stalin	Seizes power, rules with an iron fist, eliminates political rivals.
Snowball	Leon Trotsky	Intelligent revolutionary leader, exiled and removed by Stalin.
Old Major	Karl Marx / Vladimir Lenin	Revolutionary thinker; his ideas inspire the rebellion.
Squealer	Soviet Propaganda (Pravda)	Controls public opinion through manipulation and lies.
Boxer	Soviet working class	Loyal and hardworking, but exploited and discarded.
Mr. Jones	Tsar Nicholas II	The old ruler overthrown by the revolution.
Napoleon's dogs	Secret Police (KGB/NKVD)	Instruments of repression and terror to maintain power.

Orwell clearly illustrates that although the revolution was carried out in the name of justice and equality, the end result revealed the emergence of a new tyranny. After expelling Mr. Jones, the animals hoped for freedom, but instead, they suffered even more under Napoleon's rule. This affirms Marx's statement that history often repeats itself: first as tragedy, then as farce.

Through allegory, Orwell delivers a sharp critique of the betrayal of socialist ideals by the Soviet bureaucracy, especially under Stalin's regime. The novel not only reflects historical events but also highlights recurring patterns of power across different parts of the world.

E. Symbolism and Irony in *Animal Farm*

Symbolism is one of the main strengths of *Animal Farm*. Orwell employs simple yet powerful symbols to convey profound messages about power, oppression, and ideological deception.

1. **Manor Farm (Animal Farm):** This represents the state or society. After the revolution, the renaming from "Manor Farm" to "Animal Farm" symbolizes the hope for a new order. However, the name is eventually changed back, illustrating that no essential transformation in the power structure has occurred.
2. **The Seven Commandments:** Originally written to distinguish animals from humans, these commandments symbolize revolutionary laws. However, their gradual and secretive alterations show how laws can be manipulated to serve the interests of those in power.
3. **The Pigs:** They symbolize the ruling elite or totalitarian leaders. Ironically, the pigs—who once fought against humans—eventually become indistinguishable from them. They walk on two legs, wear clothes, and socialize with humans, signifying the betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

4. **Boxer:** He symbolizes the loyal yet unaware proletarian worker. The irony lies in the fact that the most dedicated and hardworking character is betrayed and discarded once he is no longer productive.
5. **Squealer:** A symbol of media and propaganda. He justifies all of Napoleon's actions, no matter how brutal, using twisted logic. This reflects how language can be the most dangerous tool of power.
6. **The Windmill:** It symbolizes industrialization and the promise of progress. In reality, the project repeatedly fails and is used solely as a means to exploit the animals, not to benefit them collectively.

The irony in *Animal Farm* becomes most evident at the conclusion of the story, when the animals realize that there is no longer any distinction between the pigs and the humans. Orwell, with biting cynicism, illustrates that a change in regime does not necessarily guarantee a change in system. A revolution can fail when it is driven without critical awareness and unwavering principles.

This use of symbolism and irony reinforces that *Animal Farm* is not merely an allegorical tale, but a profound reflection on the recurring cycles of power. Orwell warns that revolutionary ideals are easily corrupted, and that only through vigilance and political consciousness can social justice be preserved.

F. Language as a Tool of Power in *Animal Farm*

In *Animal Farm*, language plays a crucial role as a means of maintaining power and controlling the minds of the animals. Orwell carefully illustrates how the manipulation of language becomes one of the primary weapons in a totalitarian regime.

1. Distortion of Word Meaning

Squealer, as the representative of propaganda, frequently uses convoluted language to justify Napoleon's policies. For instance, when food rations are reduced, he claims that "it's not a reduction, but a readjustment of rations." This is an example of *double speak*—language that is deliberately ambiguous or misleading in order to obscure harsh realities.

2. Use of Slogans and Repetition

The animals are taught to repeat slogans such as "Napoleon is always right" and "I will work harder." This repetition forms a collective consciousness and conditions the animals into obedience to the regime's decisions. In Marxist theory, this is part of the creation of *false consciousness*, as explained by Lukács (1971), where the working class remains unaware of their oppression because they have been infiltrated by the ruling class's ideology.

3. Revision of Historical Facts

Orwell illustrates how history is manipulated. Squealer consistently alters the narrative of key events, such as battles or Snowball's contributions. This mirrors Stalin's practice of rewriting Soviet history, including erasing Trotsky from official photographs and public records.

Below is a table that highlights examples of linguistic manipulation in the novel:

Form of Language Manipulation	Example in <i>Animal Farm</i>	Ideological Purpose
Euphemism	“Readjustment of rations” instead of “food reduction”	To obscure harsh realities and make them more palatable
Historical Erasure	Snowball is portrayed as a traitor after previously being a hero	To alter public perception of political opposition
Political Slogans	“Napoleon is always right”	To enforce obedience and suppress critical thinking
Simplification of Language	“Four legs good, two legs bad” → “Four legs good, two legs better”	To distort meaning and undermine revolutionary principles

By illustrating the role of language as a tool of oppression, Orwell conveys the message that control over public discourse is the most effective and dangerous form of power. Within the framework of Marxist criticism, control over the means of production also extends to the control over the production of ideas and meanings.

Orwell implicitly criticizes how totalitarian regimes use education, media, and information to maintain power and manipulate society. Language, which should serve as a means of communication and freedom, is instead transformed into a weapon for sustaining the dominance of the ruling class.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the lens of Marxist criticism, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell emerges as a powerful political allegory that critiques class inequality, the corruption of power, and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Orwell does not merely present a satirical tale of rebellious animals but exposes how authoritarian systems can arise even from the aspirations of equality.

The novel highlights how the working class—embodied by characters such as Boxer—can be exploited by the ruling elite, represented by the pigs, particularly Napoleon. It also demonstrates how ideology and language are manipulated to control collective consciousness. In Marxist terms, the text reflects how control over the means of production and ideology can lead to the emergence of repressive and unjust regimes.

Orwell offers a universal warning: that revolution without critical political awareness and without mechanisms to check power will only result in new forms of tyranny. The symbolism, irony, and characterizations in *Animal Farm* reinforce the notion that class struggle is a structural issue that cannot be resolved merely by replacing one leader with another.

Overall, *Animal Farm* remains a relevant subject of study in literature and the social sciences, as it delivers enduring messages about the dangers of totalitarianism, the importance of political education, and the necessity of class consciousness.

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