
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Analysis of Political Implications in *Animal Farm* from the Perspective of New Historicism

Shilin Xiao

College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

Corresponding Author: Shilin Xiao, E-mail: xiaosl1002@163.com

| ABSTRACT

George Orwell is a famous writer in the 20th century in England, especially known for his humanitarian spirit. Among his sharply written works, *Animal Farm* is of significant value to focus our attention on. This political allegory successfully creates a set of animal images, with some certain hidden meaning of political life. New Historicism offers readers another perspective to reorient into the context behind the text itself and reconsider the intertextuality between history and texts. Montrose proposes two concepts, "textuality of history" and "historicity of texts." In the light of the two key concepts, this paper aims to take a descriptive approach to the political implications in *Animal Farm* with a focus on the close relationship between history and texts.

| KEYWORDS

Animal Farm; New Historicism; political implications; textually of history; historicity of texts

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1. Introduction

George Orwell is deemed to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. As a thought-provoking writer, a journalist, and a social critic as well, he has created an array of great works for readers to appreciate and draw insights from, which are closely related to social conflicts and historical contexts. *1984* and *Animal Farm* are the most famous representative works in which he writes with his acute observation and pointed pen so as to record and reflect the era. His works not only gain popularity among readers but also call attention from critics. For example, V.S. Prichett, an English social critic, has once reputed him as the "wintry conscience of a generation." Because his attention and heart always go with the exploited and suffering people. What's more, his pen always directly points to the cruelty and hypocrisy of colonialism and imperialism.

George Orwell was born in 1903 in India. His original name was Eric Arthur Blair. Both his parents can date back to a tradition of colonialism, his father a colonial official and his maternal family owning a business in Myanmar. In his adolescence, he studied at Eton College, where his independent thinking and courage of morality were cultivated. In 1922, he began to serve as a policeman in Myanmar, where he witnessed the filthiness and injustice of the dirty and violent world, and his values began to deconstruct and hence reconstruct. Only after five years of working he resigned from it for the sake of conscience. In the 1930s, he joined the army in Spanish during the Civil War but was marginalized for his stance. And when he returned home, he was lumped in with the left-wing and went to exile in France. In Second World War, he had a job in BBC against Fascism. Unfortunately, he died of stubborn lung disease with only forty years of life or so. All his experiences held together to cultivate his wintry conscience as a source of his creative works.

New Historicists hold that history is an extension of text, and texts are condensed versions of history. Texts are the products of historical contexts. However, they go beyond just reflecting history passively. They can interpret history and exert influence on history. *Animal Farm* is a political fable that reflects many social and historical contexts of the contemporary period. George Orwell applies his harsh humour and pointed description, based on his own experience and knowledge, to produce a representation of reality. Since *Animal Farm* came out, it has greatly attracted social attention and has been translated into many countries. This

paper, from the two concepts "textuality of history" and "historicity of texts", aims to make a tentative New Historicist analysis of *Animal Farm*.

2. Studies of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Animal Farm is written by English author George Orwell. It is acknowledged as a political allegory that takes the form of a beast fable. By political allegory, it is symbolic in that it implies something political behind the text itself. And by beast fable, it means that the behavior of animals points to that of humans. So George Orwell takes the literary form of political fable and treats it as a simple animal story, which renders readers' interpretation some color of politics and history on the prototype of beasts. Whereas it has a much more political and historical connection with the Soviet Union. As Anthony Burgess said, if one more person reads Orwell, there will be one more guarantee of freedom.

Since *Animal Farm* was published in 1945, the diversified themes implanted in *Animal Farm* have been penetrated. Issues of humanist spirits, colonialism, totalitarianism, and the like continue to be studied and relate to each other. As a political fable dealing with attacks on Stalinism and socialism, the study of *Animal Farm* is not as abundant as that of 1984. However, they are still worth mentioning. For a birds' view, it is written in a fable way and develops in a witty but ironical tone so as to offer us a broken dream of blueprint (liu 2020). Zhang Jiasheng and Wang Weidong (2014) also explore its narrative arts from the three aspects, non-linear space, language fallacies, and rhetoric methods, offering readers aesthetic pleasure and in-depth vision to appreciate it. To take a further step, Jiang Yanhua and Jia Mengshan (2013) focus on the wording style of the story. They find the language concise with rhyme and impressive with its witty sayings.

Quite many scholars have also conducted an array of analyses from a political viewpoint. To name just a few, Lin Hui (2007) explores the ironic art used in *Animal Farm* so as to have a more in-depth and broader understanding of totalitarianism. Wang Yu and Ni Jincheng (2019) systematically discuss three dimensions of language control, personal cult, and fooling strategies from Benjamin's fable theory, a new way for readers to objectively learn about the history and so-called heroes. What's more, Gu Mingmin (2019) attempts to reveal the anti-utopia in this predictive fable, along with totalitarianism. With regard to power relations, Yang Min (2011) interprets the relationships between language and power in *Animal Farm* and analyzes the functions of different kinds of language in detail in order to find out how language serves for the execution of power. Du Ning (2015) applies Eagleton's ideology theories to analyze the political irony in *Animal Farm*.

From the current studies, it is easy to find that most scholars focus on the themes, techniques, and styles of *Animal Farm*. Admittedly speaking, these works offer us many insights to further interpret it. In this fable, the power relation, anti-utopian spirits, appealing to equality and peace, and especially the fighting against totalitarianism all together enlighten an increasing number of writers. However, there is no study that directly combines New Historicism and this story. This would shed some light on the understanding of Orwell's political views.

3. New Historicism

New Historicism reveals its veil at the beginning of the 1980s. Stephen Greenblatt utters the leading voice of New Historicism and also firstly establishes the theory in *The Form of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance*. What's more, Louis Montrose, Hayden White, and Aram Veesser are also important figures who have contributed a lot to the theory. Seen from a literary perspective, New Historicism emerges mainly as a resistance in the Resistance to the textualism and formalism of New Criticism and deconstruction and also as an attempt to re-contextualize literary texts without recourse to traditional background criticism. And it responds to the failure of the left-wing politics of student radicalism in the 60s and 70s to instigate social and political change.

Compared with Old Historicism which overtly considers history as primary and literature as secondary, New Historicism is concerned with historical and cultural conditions of production, focusing on how work is historically interpreted, evaluated, and re-evaluated instead of simply trying to account for a text through history. In other words, it breaks the boundaries between literature and history. It objects to the point of view that history provides the background of literature. From where New Historicists stand, the relation between literature and history is interactive, and to put it further, New Historicism entails reading literary and non-literary texts as constitutes of historical discourses that are both inside and outside of texts and that its practitioners generally posit no fixed hierarchy of cause and effect as that trace the connections among texts, discourse, power, and the constitution of subjectivity (Veesser 37). This explanation echoes the two famous concepts proposed by Montrose, the historicity of texts and the textuality of history, which enlarge the theory of New Historicism and provides methods to generalize the relationship between texts and history. Hence, our interpretative task must be to grasp more sensitively the consequences of this fact by investigating both the social presence of the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text (Greeblatt 5). Every criticism has its own axial concept. For New Historicism, that is, power relation usually referred to the controlling and resistance

relation infiltrated in social, political, and cultural aspects. And it reveals the meaning of literature by studying literary texts and power.

The core concepts of New Historicism are historicity of texts and the textuality of history (Montrose 8). The former has three layers of meaning. From the very beginning, it assumes that all literary texts, as the products of special history, culture, society, politics, system, and class, have the historicity of society. So it requires interpreters a dual exploration into both the social presence of the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text. The second is every single interpretation of literary texts can not be said objective, for it is inevitably colored by some social factors. In this way, the negotiation between the text and the interpreter is an ongoing dynamic process that will never be finalized. And the reconstruction and rewrite of history is a necessity based on the very internal nature of literary texts. Lastly, every text can go beyond an expression or a reflection of history. The text itself is a historical event that can actively shape history and constitutes the whole history.

With regards to the textuality of history, there are two aspects. On the one hand, the only literary text enables us to learn about the past. Literary texts do not passively reflect historical reality; instead, they reconstruct literary texts by preserving and selecting, which is constrained by power relations. On the other hand, when historical texts act as documents and turn into the basis that people study history, they will become a medium of text interpretation again. And the narrators' subjectivity will inevitably infiltrate the texts. From the perspective of New Historicists, history can be rewritten and reinterpreted by readers with different experiences and understandings.

History and texts share a relation of intertextuality in that history can be seen as extended texts and texts condensed history. The historicity of texts provides texts with social and historical contexts, while the textuality of history makes history go beyond time and space limit and extend in the forms of texts. Therefore, the interpretation is historical and social oriented. Interpreters find ways through texts to interpret history. But this process is not passive or arbitrary. It will be influenced by history and social factors of that time.

4. Analysis of Textuality of History in *Animal Farm*

There are two aspects of the textuality of history. In the first place, the literary text enables us to learn about the past. And historical texts can become a medium of text interpretation again. In this fable, items of degeneration, betrayal, and tyranny of totalitarianism can be read between the lines in the disguise of animal allegory in which almost every detail has politically signified.

4.1 Rebellion in *Animal Farm*

The Russian October Revolution is a socialist revolution under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. It was the second and also the final important stage of the Russian Revolution of 1917. On October 25, the Bolshevik armed forces led by Lenin launched a whole attack against the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg, where the bourgeois provisional government locates. They win, and with full consideration of the encounter of people, Lenin issues New economy policy, which is applauded by all the stratification of society.

As is reflected in *Animal Farm*, on a Midsummer evening, all the animals could stand the extreme hunger no longer so that all of them helps themselves out of the bins and starts to but and kick Jones and his men, leaving all five of them in full flight down the cart-track. This Rebellion led by the pigs take the place of the human, and the animals begin to gain their so-called freedom. Following that, Napoleon and Snowball changed MANOR FARM into Animal Farm and reduced the principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments, although quite many animals cannot read at all. Then to make these seven commandments more effectively implanted, Snowball again reduces it into a single maxim, namely: "Four legs good, two legs bad." Anyway, they feel they are the owner of the farm, which inspires them to work much harder.

4.2 The Great Purge

In *Animal Farm*, when Squealer announced that the hens, who had just come in to lay again, must surrender their eggs; Napoleon had accepted the contract for four hundred eggs a week. However, When the hens heard this, they raised a terrible outcry, and they protested that to take the eggs away now was murder. It was the first time since the expulsion of Jones that there was something resembling a rebellion. The hens made a determined effort to thwart Napoleon's wishes. Their method was to fly up to the rafters and there lay their eggs, which smashed to pieces on the floor. Napoleon acted swiftly and ruthlessly. He ordered the hens' rations to be stopped and decreed that any animal giving so much as a grain of corn to a hen should be punished by death; what's more, later, the four pigs which had protested when Napoleon abolished the Sunday Meetings. Then a goose came forward to confess to having secreted six ears of corn during the last year's harvest and eaten them in the night. And then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool. They were all slain on the spot.

This death punishment allegorically reflects the Great Purge in the Stalin period. This Purge has brought about a tremendous change in the composition and objectives of the Soviet Union. The purpose of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union is to serve the country instead of anything else. From 1936 to 1939, the backbone of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the army, and

the government experienced a major change of blood. This was a cruel and comprehensive purge in terms of means and extent. This is essentially in line with Stalin's purposes. He took over the entire leadership with a group of men and women who only devoted absolute loyalty to the Soviet Union. Stalin thus eliminated the old Bolsheviks, just as Hitler purged the conservatives in the Nazi storm troopers in 1934. To some extent, Hitler exerted some certain influence on Stalin. Both of them explicitly shared the same political goal. That's the establishment of the dictatorship of the national leader as the leader of the ruling party and the army at the same time.

4.3 Diplomacy with Germany

Although the resolutions- Never to have any dealings with human beings, never to engage in trade, never to make use of money, had shaped since that first triumphant meeting when Jones was expelled, Napoleon announced that he had decided upon a new policy. He demands that *Animal Farm* would engage in trade with the neighbouring farms: not, of course, for any commercial purpose, but simply in order to obtain certain materials which were urgently necessary. However, where human beings stand, they do not hate *Animal Farm* any less now that it is prospering; indeed, they hate it more than ever.

As is the diplomacy of Stalin toward Germany, On March 10, 1939, Stalin stated that the foremost goal of Soviet foreign policy was to maintain a cautious attitude and prevent war instigators who are accustomed to profiting from it from getting us into conflicts. Hitler called Stalin and made an agreement on the contract. Therefore, the two countries formally signed the "Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty." On September 1, 1939, Germany attacked Poland. On September 3, Britain and France declared war on Germany, and World War II broke out. During the intrigue diplomacy with Germany, the Soviet Union started with the purpose of harming others and ended at the price of harming itself.

4.4 Industrialization and Collectivism in Animal Farm

The construction of the windmill almost runs through the whole story. From the very beginning, Snowball puts forward the idea of it. It is no doubt that Napoleon objects to it. Later, this project was carried out quite successfully and laid down a solid foundation for Snowball to gain the majority of votes. But just at this critical point, Napoleon plays a trick on him, and so Snowball is expelled. After that, Napoleon announced the windmill was still to be built. Similarly, in history, Stalin plagiarized Trotsky and became the chairman. Following that, the process of industrialization began under Stalin's command.

Then the animals worked really hard on it for which they could devote all they had. Unfortunately, it was ruined. Later, Napoleon announced the rebuilding of it. The animals worked even harder than ever before to make sure it was thick enough. With their tremendous and exhausting effort, it was accomplished. But despite all the laborious work of animals, the windmill was named Napoleon Mill. As is signified, Stalin claims all the achievements of industrialization to himself.

To sum up, the story opens a window for us to gain some idea of that history although we do not experience it. In others words, this animal story works in shortening the distance between readers and history. The perspective textuality of history enhances readers in ample knowledge of the past. As mentioned above, this story is largely created according to Orwell's authentic experiences. Sometimes to experience is to believe. The past may be the history we are looking for.

5. Analysis of Historicity of Texts in Animal Farm

The former has three layers of meaning. From the very beginning, it assumes that all literary texts, as the products of special history, culture, society, politics, system, and class, have the historicity of society. The second is every single interpretation of literary texts cannot be said objective, for it is inevitably colored by some social factors. Lastly, the text itself is a historical event that can actively shape history and constitutes the whole history. This part will mainly focus on protagonists and their contexts.

5.1 Old Major

From the very beginning, Old Major had a strange dream and wished to communicate it to the other animals. He was so highly regarded on the farm that everyone would spare some time hearing what he had to say. On the other hand, in spite of his old age, he was still a majestic-looking pig with a wise and benevolent appearance. He was quite critical in thinking, just like the sun guiding all the other animals. He had a sense of responsibility and passed on some wisdom to others. For example, he pointed out that rebellion would sooner or later happen. He told them to consider the nature of life, the meaning of happiness, and to have stance and resolutions. Unfortunately, Old Major still died peacefully in his sleep while his teachings were elaborated by his followers as a complete system of thought called Animalism.

Historically speaking, Lenin is also a great thinker. He is quick and deep in thought, especially on issues such as Marxism, Communism, and Socialism. Under his guidance, the first socialist country in the world was established. Similarly, after his death, his teachings still exerted some influence on the development of history.

5.2 Napoleon and Snowball

When it comes to talking about the leadership of the new farm, disagreement and disputes always exist between Snowball and Napoleon, the former quicker for speech and more inventive while the latter with a reputation for getting his own way. However, none of those disputes is bitter than the Windmill event and the question of the defense of the farm. Snowball comes up with the idea of the setup of the windmill and concentrates on completing it. But Napoleon does not share the same idea. At a meeting, after the passionate appeal by Snowball, Napoleon felt his advantage has gone, and he is terribly instigated to signal to his nine enormous dogs to launch an attack against Snowball. Snowball slips away. Hence, Napoleon gains complete control over *Animal Farm*. After Napoleon comes to power, the special committee of pigs has the extreme power to settle the working of the farm. And when the windmill is ruined by the wind, he blames it on Snowball. To put it further, he attributes every wrong-doing to Snowball and kills other animals for their investigation into Snowball's expulsion. Following that, the commandment is revised accordingly.

With time going on, Napoleon continues to carry out his dictatorship, which is severer and severer. *Animal Farm* is later claimed to be a Republic with Napoleon as the president. He lives like an empire with his guard and servants. No disagreement can be uttered, if any, then see what happens to Snowball. Besides, he makes plans for his personal enjoyment instead of the living of all other animals. So life for pigs is happier and happier. It is not strange to see them dressed like humans, use apparatus, read a newspaper, and even have meetings with humans. However, life for other animals is even harsher than in Jones's time. They are exploited suffer hunger and cold. Napoleon even takes advantage of the death of Boxer by selling him for whisky. Because "ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL, BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS" (*Animal Farm* 80).

The chasing of Napoleon and Snowball signifies that of Stalin and Trotsky. Trotsky played a leading role in the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in 1917, conquering most of Petrograd before Lenin's triumphant return in November. Appointed Lenin's secretary of foreign affairs, he negotiated with the Germans for an end to Russian involvement in World War I. In 1918, he became war commissioner and set about building up the Red Army, which succeeded in defeating anti-Communist opposition in the Russian Civil War. In the early 1920s, Trotsky seemed the apparent heir of Lenin, but he lost out in the struggle of succession after Lenin fell ill in 1922. In 1924, Lenin died, and Joseph Stalin emerged as the leader of the USSR. Against Stalin's stated policies, Trotsky called for a continuing world revolution that would inevitably result in the dismantling of the Soviet state. He also criticized the new regime for suppressing democracy in the Communist Party and for failing to develop adequate economic planning. In response, however, Stalin and his men launched a propaganda counterattack against Trotsky. In 1925, he was removed from his post in the war commissariat. One year later, he was expelled from the Politburo and in 1927 from the Communist Party. Finally, he was assassinated.

Stalin served as the chairman of the Soviet People's Committee. During his tenure, he put forward the proposition of "establishing socialism in a country first," abandoned Lenin's new economic policy, and made every effort to carry out socialist industrialization and collectivization of agriculture, making the Soviet Union a heavy industrial and military power. But it also led to the great famine in Ukraine. Even during that special time, he still established a cult of personality, launched the "Purge" campaign, massacred and suppressed those who were against him.

5.3 Boxer and Clover

Boxer and Clover in *Animal Farm* work very hard. Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together. A white stripe down his nose gave him a somewhat stupid appearance, and in fact, he was not of first-rate intelligence, but he was universally respected for his steadiness of character and tremendous powers of work. Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching middle life who had never quite got her figure back after her fourth foal (George Orwell 5). Generally speaking, they are just this kind of people strong in body but relatively weak in thinking. In the following story, he did everything as Napoleon orders without a second thought and never asked any question or puzzled. He devoted much more than he should so that his lung went seriously wrong. Later, he was sent to Horse Slaughter alive by Napoleon for taking advantage of the rest value of his life.

In the Stalinist era, although the whole Soviet Union seemed to be unified, people in it did not feel the same way. There is no doubt that the Ukrainian famine and Gulag event happened. Besides these, under the pressure of agricultural centralization, the working class suffered under the absolute reign of Stalin, although it seems that they were bodily free. As Acton says, all power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The ruling class does not listen to what the lower class wants and thinks, so they tend to corrupt to satisfy personal needs. This would absolutely result in people's grievance, resentment, and finally even rebellion.

To sum up, every animal image and plots in *Animal Farm* have their counterpart prototype in historical and political life. Protagonists in history are in the disguise of animals and behave like so-called animals. Actually, animals do not corrupt. They do

not have a personal cult either. It is self-called historical heroes who do. George Orwell sets an animal context to reflect satirize them. Undoubtedly, this would also exert great influence on freeing the mind of the exploited and even the course of history.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the book *Animal Farm* is analyzed from the perspective of New Historicism. From the very beginning, it is an allegory largely full of a strong touch of political implications, either a whole array of historical events or a bunch of people living in it. George Orwell writes in a forceful style, touching sincerity and witty wit to unveil these implications of every detail before us. We perceive literary texts within a social and historical context since they are intertwined and intertextual. To obtain a further understanding of political implications in *Animal Farm*, the two concepts- textuality of history and historicity of texts are interpreted in detail. By textuality of history, the text offers readers some hints to approach history. So it is discovered that many manipulations and policies such as rebellion, the great purge, diplomacy policy, and so on. By historicity of texts, literary texts are products of a particular history, and they can exert influence on the development of history. So it is reflected that historical protagonists are closely related to the contexts at that time. No matter they are ruling class or working class, they are inevitably touched by some flavor of the time. And some of them can influence the course of history and politics.

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