
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deceptive Dreams in *Animal Farm* and *Kalila wa-Dimna*

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| ABSTRACT

This paper examines the deceptive dream as a political instrument in Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Kalila wa-Dimna* (8th century) and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). Despite their temporal and cultural distance, both texts deploy dreams not as innocent visions but as structures of manipulation that promise freedom while delivering oppression. The dream becomes a kind of sacred authority, so revered that questioning it feels almost forbidden, and this status grants enormous power to those who position themselves as its interpreters. Hope, once bound up in a compelling vision, can be quietly redirected and emptied of its original meaning without ever being openly discarded. The true danger of the dream, then, lies not in any outright lie, but in its openness to interpretation. The very quality that makes it inspiring, its capacity to mean different things to different people, is precisely what makes it so vulnerable to being captured and turned against those who believed in it most deeply.

| KEYWORDS

Deceptive dream, political manipulation, *Kalila wa-Dimna*, *Animal Farm*, dream interpretation, revolutionary betrayal

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Few literary traditions have proven as enduring or as politically charged as the animal fable. Across centuries and cultures, writers have turned to the natural world as a mirror in which human political life could be examined with a clarity that direct representation rarely permits. Two famous works stand as particularly powerful examples of this tradition: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and the ancient Arabic-Persian collection *Kalila wa-Dimna*. Both works use animal characters to expose power, betrayal, and the illusions that sustain them.

The story line in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* of 1945 transforms a traditional English farmhouse setting into an arena for playing out revolution and the rise from Utopia to totalitarianism via the actions of pigs, horses, and sheep. In stark opposition to Orwell's novel, *Kalila wa-Dimna* a collection of stories written originally in Pahlavi language by the eighth century scholar Ibn al Muqaffa, features animals as its protagonists in rich narrative structures, combining humor with pragmatism. This study examines how opportunistic figures utopian ideals to hide their corruption, and how blind faith in those ideals ultimately destroys both individual integrity and collective freedom.

In both works, animals play the role of governance, reflecting and critiquing human behavior through their activities. The style of writing is biting and highly personal for Orwell in its attack on communism. Regardless of time difference and other factors, however, these two books are similar in that both use animals in an allegorical representation of politics based on the understanding that the truth is better told indirectly, through creatures unburdened by accountability. That shared urgency is what makes their dialogue feel timeless.

2. Unquiet Visions of Power

Separated by over a millennium, *Kalila wa-Dimna* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* arrive at the same unsettling conclusion which power is restless, corruptible, and rarely what it promises to be. Both works conceal their political anxieties within animal allegory, utilizing beasts to express ideas that would be perilous or excessively blunt to articulate about humans.

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Composed in the 18th century through Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic translation, *Kalila wa-Dimna* emerged as a direct product of profound political upheaval. Ibn al-Muqaffa's rendition was substantially shaped by his firsthand witness of the transition from Umayyad to Abbasid rule. Consequently, two of the work's most central preoccupations are the mechanisms by which power is preserved and sustained, and the complex nature of political obedience. This is no mere exercise in abstract philosophical inquiry; rather it constitutes the practical wisdom of a seasoned courtier who recognized that power functions through manipulation, unwavering loyalty, and the strategic deployment of fear. At the heart of the work is a conception of power that is fundamentally characterized by anxiety and insecurity. The jackal Dimna, consumed by dissatisfaction with his subordinate position, arranged a calculated scheme to elevate himself by fomenting distrust between the lion-king and his trusted companion the ox, and eventually succeeds in killing it. The fables demonstrate a profound awareness of the perils inherent in treachery and slander, particularly within the realm of public life, regardless of whether the parties involved are acting in good faith or pursuing deliberate deception in service of their own interests.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* inherits the same atmosphere of instability, although it was done more sarcastically and desperately. The animals of Manor Farm succeed in overthrowing their human oppressor through a revolution animated by the aspiration for equality, only to witness the pigs under the leadership of Napoleon appropriating all the privileges and brutalities of the very regime they had displaced. The notorious distortion of the Seven Commandments into the declaration that "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell 97) represents the novel's most unambiguous assertion, that power not only corrupts those who wield it, but also actively distorts and reconstructs reality itself. Whereas *Kalila wa-Dimna* counsel's rulers to exercise governance with wisdom and cautions them against the machinations of those who surround them, Orwell offers no such hope. His pigs don't need an external villain; the ambition is inherent in the revolution from the beginning.

3. The Orchard and the Barn

In both novels, the role of the physical settings is significant as it goes beyond mere scenery, serving a broader symbolic purpose that correlates with the ambitions and betrayals within the narrative. In the case of *Animal Farm*, the barn represents a symbol of hope, as it reflects attempts at collective action and a governing process through collaboration among animals. Conversely, the jungle and garden in *Kalila wa Dimna* represent a form of courtly political wisdom that emerges from the political reality already established. The natural environment in *Kalila wa Dimna* is not used to represent a political rebellion; instead, it is viewed as a setting for political and moral advice.

Unlike the barn in *Animal Farm*, which represents a beginning point, in *Kalila wa Dimna* the jungle functions as a space of political wisdom. In *Kalila wa Dimna*, Ibn al-Muqaffa makes use of a dual expression technique through the utilization of animal fables on the surface and philosophical politics below. As mentioned by Yavari, the natural setting acts as an outer veil, concealing deeper moral instruction like a buried treasure waiting to be uncovered by the attentive reader (Yavari 57).

The barn in Orwell's novel symbolizes the space of political legitimacy since it is the location where Old Major shares his inspiring vision, where the Seven Commandments are inscribed onto the wall and where the animals convene to form the community. Simply, this is the beating heart of struggle for the animals where meaningful work take place, where the revolution begins and develops. By displaying the laws of *Animal Farm* on the barn's walls, Orwell creates a political space that transforms this agricultural building into a symbolic center of the revolution and a brand-new political order.

Yet this same space eventually becomes the setting for the revolution's collapse., the pigs begin utilizing the barn for manipulating decisions, for wiping out the animals' memory and for quietly rewriting the very laws that were once inscribed there. According to Althagafy's interpretation of Bakhtin's ideas, such a utopian space is inevitably doomed to transformation into a dystopian one because of its temporary nature (Althagafy198). The ideals the barn once represented, fair assembly and communal labor, are ultimately destroyed not by outside forces but from within.

4. Prophecy and False Awakening

Old Major's dream functions as the founding prophecy of animal liberation in *Animal Farm*. His vision of a world without human masters provides the revolutionary blueprint that inspires the rebellion. From a Marxist standpoint, this dream represents the awakening of class consciousness the moment when the oppressed recognize their exploitation and imagine an alternative. He gives a classic Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation: the humans own the means of production while the animals slave away and only receives in return just enough to keep working. Old Major dies shortly after delivering this vision, leaving behind not a revolution but an ideology Animalism which the pigs proceed to hollow out and weaponize.

The tragedy of *Animal Farm* lies precisely in what follows. The prophecy becomes subject to interpretation and manipulation. The Seven Commandments derived from Major's vision are gradually altered until their original meaning is entirely inverted. The animals experience what might be called a false awakening: they believe they have achieved liberation, but in truth they have merely exchanged one form of domination for another.

In *Kalila wa-Dimna*, prophecy operates differently. The animal fables function as political counsel for rulers, not as calls to popular revolution. The dream of the king requires interpretation by wise counselors who guide the ruler toward just governance. This represents a pre-revolutionary political imaginary change comes from above, through the education of elites, not from below through collective action.

Nevertheless, both texts share a critical insight about political prophecy that dreams of a better world are always vulnerable to appropriation. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs become indistinguishable from the humans they overthrew. In *Kalia wa-Dimna*, the fables' hidden meaning is accessible only to those with interpretive power. In both cases, the dream's meaning is mediated by an elite that claims special access to truth. Marx's false consciousness finds form in Boxer's blind loyalty to Napoleon and Shanzaba's fatal trust in *Kalia wa-Dimna*. Both texts embed political critique beneath surface narrative; Orwell through satirical allegory, Ibn al-Muqaffa through layered fable, where veiled speech simultaneously exercises and challenges power.

5.Ephemeral Kingdoms

The kingdoms built upon dreams in both *Animal Farm* and *Kalia wa-Dimna* are fundamentally ephemeral not merely because they fail, but because they are transformed into their opposites by the very forces that create them. Orwell's novella and Ibn al-Muqaffa's animal fables share a profound insight: the dream of justice, once seized by power, becomes the nightmare of tyranny. The lion king Bankala's fatal flaw is established early in *Kalia wa-Dimna*, his proud overreliance on his own judgment. This single weakness is all Dimna needs to bring the kingdom to ruin. What appears on the surface to be a stable, hierarchical court is in reality a world of whispers, rivalries, and carefully engineered conflicts. As the text warns, drawing close to rulers is like scaling a mountain abundant with fruit but crawling with predators, the ascent may be difficult, but staying there is harder.

Power in these fables is never truly secure, its greatest threats come not from outside enemies but from the ambitious figures standing closest to the throne. Dimna's scheming against the loyal ox Shanzabeh illustrates this perfectly. He rises, briefly wins the king's inner circle, and is ultimately imprisoned and destroyed, but the damage is irreversible. The lion's most trusted companion is dead, and the king is left isolated, suspicious, and diminished. The court survives, but it has been hollowed out from within.

Animal Farm inherits this vision of fragile power and pushes it toward an even darker conclusion. Where *Kalia wa-Dimna* at least holds open the possibility of just and wise rulership, Orwell offers no such hope. The animals overthrow Mr. Jones only to find themselves, by the novel's end, living under a tyranny no different from the one they escaped. Napoleon's regime becomes a mirror image of everything the revolution set out to destroy, reflecting Orwell's deeply held conviction that power corrupts those who seize it, regardless of their original intentions. The animal republic of Manor Farm may be the most short-lived in literary history, lasting barely the length of the novella before collapsing back into oppression. The story ends where it began, with the powerless suffering under the powerful, suggesting that without a genuine transformation in how authority is understood and exercised, revolution is little more than a change of masters.

In this, Orwell arrives at the same sobering conclusion that runs through *Kalia wa-Dimna*: that kingdoms are never permanent achievements but fragile and temporary arrangements, forever vulnerable to the vanity of rulers, the scheming of those closest to power, and the enduring tendency, whether human or animal, to choose power over wisdom.

6.Conclusion

The animal fable possesses a remarkable ability to endure beyond its immediate historical moment while retaining its political impact. *Animal Farm* and *Kalila wa Dimna*, separated by thirteen centuries and vastly different cultural origins, converge on one unsettling truth that the dream of justice is most vulnerable not to its enemies, but to its interpreters.

What emerges from this comparison is a shared dissection of betrayal. In both texts, the opportunistic characters do not destroy utopian ideals, but rather invoke them. Old Major's dream of animal liberation, like the wise counsel embedded in the interwoven tales of *Kalila wa Dimna*, is never truly rejected. Instead, it is recited, memorized, and gradually hollowed out. The pigs sing "Beasts of England" until they rewrite it. The ministers in *Kalila wa Dimna* speak of justice while maneuvering for personal gain. The deception in both cases lies not in abandoning the dream, but in pretending that the dream is still alive. What ultimately unites these texts is the shared conviction that political truth is best conveyed indirectly. Animal fables are not a convincing genre for children; it is a survival strategy. It allows the writer to name the unnameable, to warn where warning is dangerous, and to maintain hope even in the act of exposing his own treachery. *Kalila wa Dimna* teaches its reader how to navigate the perilous orbit of power. *Animal Farm* warns that authority, once consolidated, will rewrite every dream to serve its own survival. Together, they suggest that the dream of justice will never be safe and that to tell its story, one must sometimes let the beasts speak in the tongues of the night.

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