

A Multidimensional Approach to Animal Farm

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Abstract

Animal Farm, George Orwell's novella, which reads like a fable or a fairy tale and fits on the rack in children's literature section, can be considered as a very serious, satiric as well as allegorical work that invites several schools of criticism. This paper has placed *Animal Farm* at a crossroad of three critical approaches, namely psychoanalytic literary criticism, Marxist literary criticism and Reader-response literary criticism with an objective to investigate critically into the work and add some new insights into the realm of criticism of the novella.

Keywords: Multidimensional approach, Psychoanalytic literary criticism, Marxist literary criticism, Reader-response literary criticism, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Allegory.

1. Introduction

A multidimensional approach is an approach of a situation from several angles of viewpoints.¹⁶ George Orwell's novella *Animal Farm* reads like a fable or fairy tale on the surface but a critical reading discovers rich elements that invite several schools of criticism to approach the work from various angles. Layers of meaning of the novella affix unique significance. A superb fable, a story for animals is also a serious satiric attack on the 1917 Russian revolution, communism and the Stalin government if it is seen from allegorical point of view. And, the story and characters of *Animal Farm* fit perfectly into the historical context of 1917 Bolshevik Revolution of Russia and its performers. Marxist literary critics have discovered strong Marxist framework that demands a Marxist reading of the novella and proves the efforts of the animals to establish an animal kingdom by demolishing class discrimination and setting economic equality among all animals. Moreover, psychoanalytic literary critics delve deep into the minds and thoughts of the animals and unmask their suppressed thoughts at unconscious as well as subconscious levels and relate them to their activities. Furthermore, a reader response literary criticism runs through *Animal Farm* and shows how author's intensions are buried deep into the plot of the novella.

2. Literature review

2.1 Psychoanalytic theory

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory of personality organization and the dynamics of personality development. Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist, introduced the term in the late 19th century. While treating patients, he focused on the mind and the related psychological attributes making up the mind. Moreover, he emphasized the recognition of childhood events that could influence the mental functioning of adults. His examination of the genetic and then the developmental aspects gave the psychoanalytic theory its characteristics.⁷ He believed that the mind is responsible for both conscious and unconscious decisions based on drives and forces. Unconscious desires motivate people to act accordingly. Freud believes that people are "simply actors in the drama of [their] own minds, pushed by desire and pulled by coincidence. Underneath the surface, our personalities represent the power struggle going on deep within us."² Because the content of the unconscious may be extremely disturbing or harmful, Freud believes that the unconscious expresses itself in a symbolic language.

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He categorizes aspects of the mind into three parts: Id, ego and superego. Id is the oldest part of the brain and gives the life and death instinct (*eros* and *thanatos*). It works with the satisfaction principle and seeks fulfillment. The ego is 'the reality principle'. It is conscious, rational, moral and self-aware part of the mind. It takes in the balance of the world and environment and keeps the id balanced. The superego involves the 'value and standards of an individual personality'. It acts as the judge to the ego and disciplines it with guilt or threat which sustains self-esteem. When we are awake, the superego suppresses impulses and desires of the id, but in dreams we get a glimpse into our unconscious or the id because our protectors are inactive during the dream state. As a result, our unconscious has the opportunity to become dominant and thus it expresses the hidden desires of the id. However, the desires of the id can, at times, be so disturbing and even psychologically harmful that a 'censor' intervenes and translates the id's disturbing content into a more acceptable symbolic form which helps to preserve sleep and prevents us from waking up shocked at the images. As a result, confusing and cryptic dream images occur. According to Freud⁹, the reason we struggle to remember our dreams is because the superego is at work. It protects the conscious mind from the disturbing images and desires conjured by the unconscious.

2.2 *The Interpretation of Dreams*

The Interpretation of Dreams is one of Sigmund Freud's best known published works which set his approach to the unconscious with regard to the explanation of dreams. In therapy sessions with patients, Freud would ask his patients to discuss what was on their mind; frequently, the responses were related to dreams. So, he started analyzing dreams which gave him access to one's deepest thoughts. Moreover, he discovered links between one's current hysterical behaviors and past traumatic experiences. From these experiences, he wrote the book to help others understand dreams. Freud believes that dreams were messages from the unconscious masked as wishes controlled by internal stimuli. The unconscious mind plays the most imperative role in dream. In order to remain in a state of sleep, the unconscious mind has to detain negative thoughts and represent them in an edited version. Therefore, when one dreams, the unconscious makes an effort to deal with conflict. It enables one to begin to act on them.

2.3 Psychoanalytic theory in literature

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is literary criticism which, in method, concept, or form, is influenced by the tradition of psychoanalysis initiated by Sigmund Freud. As Celine Surprenant, a professor of University of Sussex, writes, "Psychoanalytic literary criticism does not constitute a unified field. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that literature... is fundamentally entwined with the psyche..."⁶ French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's Freudian reading primarily involves the realization that the unconscious is to be understood as intimately tied to the functions and dynamics of language. The punch line of Lacan's psychoanalytic theory is "the unconscious is structured like a language", which he substantiates in his essay "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious".⁹ In *Poems in Persons: An Introduction to the Psychoanalysis of Literature* (1973), Norman Holland, an American literary critic, developed psychoanalytic theory further and related it to literature. He proposed a very different model of literary processing based on a psychoanalytic theory of identity. The central argument of the text is that writers create texts as expressions of their personal identities and readers re-create their own identities when they respond. These identities can be understood as a central theme or themes and behavioral variations on them, much like a theme-and-variations in music.⁷ He emphasized the reader-text psychology and showed how readers identify themselves with fictional characters in order to satisfy the unconscious wishes and desires. Freud argued that the literary text is the symptom of the author; the work of literature reveals unconscious desires and repressed wishes that can be found in many forms in a text, characters, symbols as well as offensive and defensive writings and can be even in the sort of conflict in the story and the choice of the subject matter.

A literary text is a reflection of suppressed desire and wishes. Freud suggests three levels of consciousness—'unconscious', the part of the mind that we are not aware of and which may possess the suppressed wishes, desires and trauma or shock; the pre-conscious mind that reserves all the information that we are not aware of but that can be recalled; and, 'conscious' which reveals the current state of awareness¹⁰. Freud believes that human beings are guided by their 'unconscious' i.e. their desires, fears, needs, trauma that they experienced during their childhood onward and of which they are unaware. Zeyneb (2014) assumes that literary texts endeavor to depict those desires, fears and wishes. Jacques Lacan called 'the unconscious' a reservoir of our experiences that affect our lives indirectly.¹¹ Moreover, Freud argues that the prime motif of human society is his unconscious energy which is formed of the suppressed wishes and desires i.e. the unconscious energy is re-transformed into positive energy which helps us to produce and create.

In order to survive, we re-direct this negative energy and this is how we undergo what Freud labeled as 'reality principle'. Authors inculcate their internal energy or Unconscious energy into texts i.e. the author 'Sublimates' the desire that they cannot fulfill into more acceptable social activities.¹⁰ Freud distinguished those normal suppressed desires that lead to human motivation from the excessive repression that leads to what he has called neurosis.¹² The core belief of the psychoanalytic theory is that civilization and the creation of history are built as a result of this sublimation to higher goals; not only in literature but also in architecture such as building cathedrals and bridges. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory considers literature as fantasy e.g a dream. As dream is linked to unconscious, literature works in the same way because both of them are motivated by censored materials made by the conscious and stored in the unconscious, like dreams, literary ideas, symbols, suppressed memories and feelings. These disguised thoughts manifest themselves in the text. The mind disguises its wishes into two forms in a dream: the first one is *condensation*—several thoughts or persons may be condensed into a single image; the second one is *displacement*, trauma or wish—a person may be displaced onto the image of another. The same technique will work for the text, for instance, psychoanalytic critic will treat metaphors as they were dream condensation and will treat metonyms as if they were dream displacements.¹⁰

2.4 Marxist literary criticism

Marxist literary criticism describes a sort of literary criticism that is based on socialist and dialectic theories. Marxist criticism considers literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate. Marxist literary critics believe that literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological function, based on the background and ideology of the author.¹⁴ Terry Eagleton, English literary critic and cultural theorist, defines Marxist criticism this way:

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and, meanings. But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history. (Eagleton 1976) Marxist literary criticism may include an assessment of the political 'tendency' of a literary work, determining whether its social content or their literary forms are 'progressive'. It also includes analyzing the class constructs demonstrated in the literature.

2.5 Reader-response criticism

Reader-response criticism is a school of literary theory that focuses on the reader and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that focus attention primarily on the author or the content and form of the work. Modern reader-response criticism began in the 1960s and '70s, particularly in the US and Germany, in the works by Norman Holland, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Roland Barthes, and others. The theory recognizes the reader as an active agent who imparts 'real existence' to the work and completes its meaning through interpretation. Reader-response criticism argues that literature should be viewed as a performing art in which each reader creates their own, possibly unique, text-related performance. It stands in total opposition to the theories of formalism and the New Criticism, in which the reader's role in re-creating literary works is ignored.¹⁵

5. Analysis

5.1 Psychoanalytic study of *Animal Farm*

To study *Animal Farm* from psychoanalytic point of view, we need to analyze external as well as internal characteristics, motives and even thoughts of major characters of the novella because "The object of psychoanalytic literary criticism, at its very simplest, can be the psychoanalysis of the author or of a particularly interesting character in a given work."¹⁶ Old Major's dream creates the plot of *Animal Farm* and works as a principal framework of the story. The old boar expressed his long suppressed desire for freedom from the human shackles. To hook attention of the animals, he delivered an emotional speech by narrating the sufferings and agony animals have been going through for centuries only for 'man'. He said: "No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth (Orwell, p.1). Moreover, he defined 'man' as their only enemy and source of all troubles.

Ultimately, the animal leader put forward his thesis: “Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever (Orwell, p. 1)”. When he was sure he had got total attention of the animals, the boar placed direction at the followers: “Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labor would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free (Orwell, p. 3).” When ‘man’ was established as ‘the only enemy’ to animals, hearts of the animals hung with the leader, the old boar placed his dream with an emotional anecdote relating his mother and siblings. He also sang a song ‘Beasts of England’ that his mother used to sing. Immediately, the song turned into the anthem for animals as tune of spirit for unity and it “threw the animals into the wildest excitement (Orwell, p. 5).”

The presence of Id, ego and superego among the characters of *Animal Farm* is evident. Id is the layer of the mind that contains suppressed desires and is driven by natural instinct; while, ego is formed of reality and the surrounding environment. The Ego controls the primal urges of Id and processes external reality. Finally, superego represents authority and demonstrates restraint as well as prohibition in order to control id. In *Animal Farm*, id is represented by suppressed desire of Old Major and the rest of the animals to drive out humans and establish a land owned and governed only by animals. Squealer, the intelligent pig who works as a mouthpiece for Napoleon and defends his activities by wit and eloquence, stands for ego. He controls the urges of id, works with the external reality like his psychological counterpart by spreading propaganda to the others and twists reality in order to allow Napoleon to persist his authority over the farm. Finally, Napoleon works as the superego. He is the supreme authority in the farm. He displays the prohibition concept, which is the ability of the Super-Ego to repress urges of the libido until the appropriate time to act. Napoleon follows the same theory. When he gripped the authority of the farm, he set aside the puppies to train them as a shield for him. Ultimately, the puppies grew up completely in the ideology of Napoleon, served as secret police and drove Snowball out of the farm. Furthermore, Napoleon’s actions are managed in reality by Squealer, just as the Super ego is managed by the ego.

5.2 Marxist literary criticism of *Animal Farm*

Critics have located elements of Marxist literary criticism in *Animal Farm* in the form of allegory. Old Major stands for Lenin (1870-1924), the leader of the Bolshevik Party that seized control in the 1917 Revolution. As Lenin was inspired by Karl Marx's theory of Communism, which urges the “workers of the world” to unite against their economic oppressors, Old Major presented Animalism to unite all animals of the world against man. Communism urges for a ‘communal’ way of life which will allow all people to live lives of economic equality; Animalism imagines a world where all animals share in the prosperity of the farm. Like Lenin, Old Major was totally hateful of man. Lenin changed Russia into the U.S.S.R.; while, old Major was responsible for transforming Manor Farm into Animal Farm. The U.S.S.R.’s flag depicted a hammer and sickle the tools of the rebelling workers so the flag of Animal Farm features a horn and hoof. One of Lenin's allies was Leon Trotsky (1879-1940), his associate Marxist thinker whose counterpart in *Animal Farm* is Snowball, who, like Trotsky, felt that a worldwide series of rebellions was necessary to achieve the revolution's ultimate aims. Snowball’s plans for the windmill and economic development programs reflect Trotsky's intellectual character and ideas that follow Marx’s theories into practice. Eventually, Trotsky was exiled from the U.S.S.R. and killed by the agents of Joseph Stalin (1979-1953), as Snowball is chased off of the farm by Napoleon Orwell’s stand-in for Stalin. Like Napoleon, Stalin was unconcerned with debates and ideas. Instead, he valued power for its own sake and by 1927 had assumed complete control of the Communist Party through acts of terror and brutality. Napoleon’s dogs represent Stalin's KGB, his secret police that he used to eliminate all opposition. As Napoleon gained control under the guise of improving the animals' lives, Stalin used a great deal of propaganda symbolized by Squealer in the novel to present himself as an idealist working for change. His plan to build the windmill reflects Stalin's Five Year Plan for revitalizing the nation's industry and agriculture. Stalin’s ordering Lenin's body to be placed in the shrine-like Lenin's Tomb parallels Napoleon's unearthing of old Major's skull, and his creation of the Order of the Green Banner parallels Stalin's creation of the Order of Lenin. Thanks, in part, to animals like Boxer (who swallow whole all of their leader's lies), Stalin became one of the world's most feared and brutal dictators. The Battle of the Cowshed parallels the Civil War that occurred after the 1917 Revolution. Jones; Frederick represents Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), who forged an alliance with Stalin in 1939 but who then found himself fighting Stalin's army in 1941. Frederick seems like an ally of Napoleon's, but his forged banknotes reveal his true character. The confessions and executions of the animals reflect the various purges and “show trials” that Stalin conducted to rid himself of any possible threat of dissention. In 1921, the sailors at the Kronshdadt military base unsuccessfully rebelled against Communist rule, as the hens attempt to rebel against Napoleon.

The Battle of the Windmill reflects the U.S.S.R.'s involvement in World War II — specifically the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943, when Stalin's forces defeated Hitler's (as Napoleon's defeat Frederick). Finally, the card game at the novel's end parallels the Tehran Conference (November 28-December 1, 1943), where Stalin, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt met to discuss the ways to forge a lasting peace after the war — a peace that Orwell mocks by having Napoleon and Pilkington flatter each other and then betray their duplicitous natures by cheating in the card game.

5.3 Reader-response criticism

George Orwell was a social democrat. He was against the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Stalinist government. Around 1940s, England was in alliance with USSR ruled by Stalin which infuriated Orwell. His allegorical novella *Animal Farm* is an attack on the Stalin government and the Russian revolution that Orwell thought had failed to fulfill the goals they had envisioned before overthrowing the Tsar dynasty. “One of Orwell's goals in writing *Animal Farm* was to portray the Russian (or Bolshevik) Revolution of 1917 as one that resulted in a government more oppressive, totalitarian, and deadly than the one it overthrew.”¹³ In his essay “Why I Write” (1946), he wrote that *Animal Farm* was the first book in which he tried, with full consciousness of what he was doing, “to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole”.⁵ What Freud labeled as ‘reality principle’ that authors sublimate the desire that they cannot fulfill into the characters, Orwell applied here. He felt the frustration of the common Russians, realized futility of communism and instilled that spirit into Old Major in the form of a dream, so the old boar could spread the same spirit as propaganda for staging a revolution to oust human authority and establish a land “for the animals, of the animals, by the animals”.

6. Conclusion:

The multidimensional approach to *Animal Farm* attests that the novella is so rich with deep thoughts and layers of meaning that three critical approaches used in this paper were set in perfectly; at the same time, all the three approaches combindly established a new point of view to look at the allegorical work.

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