

Animals as Political Carriers: Class, Humanization, and Control in *Animal Farm*

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Animal allegory has long functioned as powerful literary strategy for examining political authority, hierarchy, and ideological control. By displacing human institutions onto nonhuman figures, authors are able to render complex power structures both visible and accessible. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* exemplifies this tradition by using animals to model the emergence, consolidation, and corruption of authoritarian power. This article argues that animals in *Animal Farm* act as political carriers whose species differences establish class hierarchy, whose gradual anthropomorphism marks the concentration of authority, and whose unequal access to language enables ideological domination. Through an analysis of species symbolism, humanization, and literacy control, this paper demonstrates how Orwell visualizes political mechanisms that might otherwise remain abstract. While the allegorical form inevitably simplifies social complexity, it also sharpens the critique of how power naturalizes inequality, rewrites principles, and secures obedience. Ultimately, Orwell's use of animals transcends historical context, offering enduring insight into modern systems of governance, propaganda, and control.

Keywords: animal allegory, political power, Anthropomorphism, *Animal Farm*, ideological control

Introduction

Animal allegory has long served as a strategic literary form for examining political power. By displacing human institutions onto animal figures, writers are able to render systems of authority, hierarchy, and ideological control both visible and accessible, while maintaining a critical distance from their human counterparts. From *Aesop's Fables* to modern works, such as *Zootopia*, animals repeatedly function as symbolic stand-ins through which political behavior is simplified, exaggerated, and made legible. This recurring literary practice invites a persistent question: Why are animals so frequently favored as vehicles for political storytelling? George Orwell's 1945 allegorical novel *Animal Farm* offers one of the most influential responses to this question.

Orwell's political imagination was shaped by his direct and sustained encounters with power and ideological conflict. His service in the Indian Imperial Police exposed him to the central mechanisms of colonial authority and imperial control, while his later involvement with the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War deepened his awareness of how revolutionary ideals could be distorted by internal authoritarianism and embellished through propaganda. These experiences informed *Animal Farm*, an allegorical reworking of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent rise of Stalinism. Set on the fictional "Manor Farm," the narrative traces an animal rebellion that begins with the aspirations of equality, freedom and collective well-being, only to

culminate in a regime more oppressive than the one it replaces, led by the ostensibly “more equal” pigs. Through the symbolic distribution of roles among species (pigs as leaders, horses as the loyal laboring class, dogs as the instrument of violence, sheep as the agents of propaganda, and etc.), Orwell (1945) constructs a simplified yet revealing model of political power.

This review revisits *Animal Farm* as a political allegory that visualizes authoritarian mechanisms through animal figures. Rather than advancing a new theoretical framework, it evaluates how the novel’s use of species difference, gradual anthropomorphism, and control over language enables Orwell to depict the emergence, consolidation, and ideological naturalization of power. In doing so, the novel demonstrates how authority becomes increasingly entrenched as its rulers grow more “human,” offering a critique that remains strikingly resonant for readers confronting modern forms of political domination.

Species Difference and the Construction of Class Hierarchy

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell (1945) employs species difference to construct an immediate and intuitively graspable class hierarchy. Even before the rebellion takes place, the animals’ biological traits already signal their social roles, allowing hierarchy to appear natural rather than overtly imposed. The pigs are introduced as “the cleverest of the animals” (p. 10), a description that renders their assumption of leadership almost expected; The horses, particularly Boxer, are portrayed as “enormous beasts, nearly eighteen hands high” (p. 2), a physicality that aligns them with relentless manual labor. Other animals are similarly defined through simplified traits: The sheep repeat chants without reflection, while the donkey senses underlying contradictions yet remains silent.

Rather than relying on extended explanation or elaborate political context, the novel allows these familiar animal characteristics to speak for themselves. Species identity thus becomes a shorthand for social position, quietly organizing the farm’s hierarchy and communicating each group’s function within it. As Xie (2021) observes, the assignment of political roles through recognizable animal traits enables Orwell (1945) to simplify and clarify the power structure of the farm as well as the novel (pp. 223-224). Burton similarly notes that animal figures in fables create a form of psychological distance that encourages readers to engage with human political issues without immediate defensiveness.

From a critical perspective, this strategy is one of the novel’s most effective allegorical devices. By translating biological difference into social order, *Animal Farm* demonstrates how authoritarian systems often ground inequality in what appears “natural” or self-evident, long before language and ideology are mobilized to justify it. In this sense, the novel’s use of species difference not only establishes hierarchy within the narrative but also invites readers to reflect on the subtle processes through which power first becomes normalized.

Anthropomorphism and the Concentration of Authority

As *Animal Farm* progresses, the pigs’ gradual acquisition of human behaviors becomes one the novel’s most visible indicators of political consolidation. Their increasing anthropomorphism parallels the narrative shift from collective leadership to authoritarian rule, a process that unfolds slowly but decisively. As Xie (2021) observes, the allegorical force of the fable lies in the close correspondence between the pigs’ humanization and the concentration of political authority (Orwell, 1945, pp. 221-224). Rather than presenting power as an abstract concept, Orwell (1945) renders it legible through a series of observable transformations in the pigs’ conduct and self-presentation.

In the early stages of the rebellion, particularly following Old Major’s speech, the pigs present themselves

as merely more capable organizers who guide the other animals in the name of collective progress. At this point, their authority appears provisional and functional. As the narrative develops, however, the pigs increasingly assume roles associated not with animals but with human political actors, including drafting laws, managing resources, and eventually altering the written commandments under the cover of night. This progression translates an abstract shift in power into a concrete and visible process, allowing readers to witness authority taking shape through everyday practices. In this sense, the pigs function as political mirrors, reflecting recognizable patterns of human governance. Although John Berger (2009) does not address animal fables directly, his discussion of animal representation helps illustrate this mechanism: Because “animals are born, are sentient and are mortal,” they readily reflect human behavior and psychological tendencies when placed within political structures (pp. 2-3).

The novel further reinforces this connection by depicting how imitation of human rulers gradually gives way to the internalization of domination and entitlement. The pigs’ quiet appropriation of the milk, “[mixing it] every day into [their] mash” (Orwell, 1945, p. 23), marks an early moment in which privilege is justified through familiar political rhetoric of necessity and sacrifice. As the pigs become increasingly human-like, the emotional and moral distance between them and the other animals deepens alongside the unequal distribution of resources. By chapter six, they cease physical labor altogether, move into the farm house, and sleep in beds; by chapter eight, they drink alcohol and negotiate with humans; and by the novel’s conclusion, Napoleon’s ability to walk on two legs signals a complete symbolic break from the principles of equality once proclaimed. At this point, they have already strayed away from their original aspiration of acting for the common good and see themselves as fundamentally separate and superior while the other animals barely recognize them as the same companions who once spoke of equality either. Through this gradual transformation from self-appointed caretakers to unquestioned rulers, Orwell (1945) turns the anthropomorphism into a visual map of how power escalates, corrupts, and ultimately rewrites the very ideals it initially claimed to defend.

Language, Literacy, and Ideological Control

In *Animal Farm*, control over language and education emerges as the central mechanism through which the pigs consolidate their authority. Literacy enables them not only to write and interpret the farm’s rules but also to revise them, transforming political leadership into ideological control. Shortly after the animals expel Jones, the pigs distinguish themselves by “[teaching] themselves to read and write [in the past three months]” (Orwell, 1945, p. 15). This early acquisition of literacy grants them exclusive control over the Seven Commandments, signaling a subtle yet decisive shift from revolutionary leadership to rule-making authority.

The novel repeatedly emphasizes the uneven distribution of linguistic competence among the animals. In chapter three, “Clover learnt the whole alphabet, but could not put words together. Boxer could not get beyond the letter D” (Orwell, 1945, p. 21), not mentioning other stupider animals, such as the sheep reducing complex ideas to the chant “Four legs good, two legs bad” (Orwell, 1945, p. 22). By foregrounding these disparities, Orwell depicts a farm in which only the pigs possess the ability to draft resolutions, interpret policies, and mediate meaning. As Xie (2021) observes, within an allegorical system, control over interpretation inevitably translates into control over power (Orwell, 1945, p. 221). As a result, once the pigs secure their monopoly over language, the remaining animals lose the capacity to distinguish truth from propaganda, leaving them vulnerable to increasingly systematic manipulation that comes along.

Critical commentary has frequently highlighted this linguistic asymmetry as a foundation element of the

novel's authoritarian logic. Khan and his colleagues argue that the pigs' exclusive access to literacy establishes the first structural imbalance on the farm, enabling them to reinterpret rules and distort information long before the other animals recognize their subordination (Khan et al., 2017, pp. 638-644). The narrative repeatedly confirms this dynamic. No animal can independently verify the commandments or recall them with certainty, allowing the pigs to alter the rules without meaningful resistance. When Squealer insists that no changes have been made, his claims cannot be challenged, as verification itself has become impossible.

This control over discourse reaches a decisive moment in chapter five, when the debate between Snowball and Napoleon over the windmill ends in the excursion of Snowball, not through collective agreement but through Napoleon's manipulation of the discursive space. By silencing Snowball and redefining the terms of debate, the pigs demonstrate that power on the farm no longer depends on persuasion or consensus, but on control over language and memory. In the later chapters, this process intensifies as the Seven Commandments are gradually distorted, and the revolutionary song of freedom "Beasts of England" is replaced by the celebratory hymn of leader "Comrade Napoleon." By this stage, linguistic and educational asymmetry, combined with physical coercion, has produced a fully developed authoritarian system, one in which history is continually rewritten, and the pigs simply occupy the position once held by Jones.

Limits of Animal Allegory

While animal allegory can clarify political mechanisms with striking efficiency, it also carries the risk of oversimplifying social realities. Species-based symbolism may flatten internal diversity of political communities, suggesting a degree of coherence and uniformity that rarely exists in historical or contemporary contexts. In *Animal Farm*, this tendency emerges in the alignment of specific animal species with fixed political roles. Real authoritarian regimes do not divide neatly along such natural or biological lines, nor do individuals consistently conform to the traits assigned to them with allegorical systems.

From a critical perspective, this symbolic rigidity may inadvertently reinforce the very logic of class consolidation that the novel seeks to expose. By associating political function so closely with species identity, the allegory risks naturalizing hierarchy rather than fully interrogating its social construction. Such limitations have been widely acknowledged in discussions of allegorical literature, where simplification can operate simultaneously as both a strength and a constraint.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the critical force of Orwell's work. As Burton (2024) observes, the simplification of moral and political landscapes through animal figures enables complex ideas to become more accessible, memorable, and transmissible across cultures and generations. Read in this light, *Animal Farm*'s reliance on species-based allegory should be understood not as a failure of nuance, but as a deliberate narrative strategy. The novel's enduring influence lies precisely in this balance between reduction and revelation, which continues to invite critical engagement rather than offering a definitive political blueprint.

Conclusion

By employing animals as political carriers, Orwell (1945) offers a compelling visualization of how power emerges, legitimizes itself, and ultimately betrays its founding ideals. *Animal Farm* does not merely depict a historical moment, but constructs a narrative framework through which the dynamics of authority, obedience, and ideological manipulation become readily observable. The novel's enduring significance lies in its ability to

translate complex political processes into a form that is both accessible and critically suggestive.

As a work of political allegory, *Animal Farm* continues to resonate not because it provides a direct commentary on contemporary institutions, but because it illuminates recurring patterns in the exercise of power, particularly the control of language, memory, and social hierarchy. Orwell's use of animal figures allows these mechanisms to be examined with clarity while maintaining the critical distance necessary for reflection. In this respect, the novel functions less as a historical artifact than as a lasting point of reference within discussions of political authority and literary representation.

Ultimately, this review suggests that the strength of *Animal Farm* lies in its balance between simplification and critique. By reducing political conflict to an allegorical framework, Orwell (1945) sacrifices nuance in favor of legibility, yet it is precisely this reduction that enables the novel to remain influential across cultural and historical contexts. Read today, *Animal Farm* continues to invite readers to reflect on how power is constructed, justified, and sustained, an invitation that secures its place as one of the most enduring works of modern political allegory.

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