

Symbolism in the Absurdity of Animal Farm

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ABSTRACT. As a socialist with multi-layers of backgrounds, George Orwell created *Animal Farm* which gained its fame as a political allegory to showcase his personal belief and political standpoints. Labeled as one of the most thought-provoking novels in the twentieth century, *Animal Farm* exposes the dark side of totalitarian and dictatorship through absurdity. However more than absurdity, it reflects reality with symbolism. This paper tries to explain the symbolism existing in the absurdity of *Animal Farm* through three aspects: characters, plots, and themes respectively.

KEYWORDS: *Animal farm; Symbolism; Absurdity*

1. Symbolism in the Absurdity of Characters

1.1 The Absurdity of Characters

The Characters present in *Animal Farm* are all absurd, both in personalities and behaviors.

In terms of the two aspects mentioned, the protagonists, pigs, demonstrate themselves with wisdom and leadership, which contrasts greatly from our stereotypes in life in which pigs are dumb and indolent; The horses that are spirited and fierce in life become the ones that bear hardship without complains in novel; And the donkey that is silent in life also becomes the one that could lead rebellions.

These all challenged our impressions on these animals, and that's why these characters are absurd. However the symbolism existing in characters makes the absurdity reasonable.

1.2 The Symbolism in Characters

Old Major (Initiator of the first rebellion) symbolizes many revolutionists. He imparted his revolutionary knowledge at all animals in farm and told them the only way to obtain their freedom was through violent rebellion, which paved solid way to their success of getting temporary freedom. Just like Karl Marx and Lenin who fought against repression and imperialism with great hatred, they all made great contribution in guiding and helping people obtain their rights and embark on a branding new life.

Napoleon (the successor of Old Major) symbolizes dictators in history. He assumed his dictatorship in two aspects: culturally and economically. In terms of culture, he created Seven Commandments to brainwash all animals in believing they were living in an equal society and changed these commandments in his own favor. In terms of economy, he initiated a plan of building up a windmill that seemed to be beneficial for the entire farm but deeply contributed to his own sake. 'He has already had a long-term plan for his tyranny at the very beginning' (Liu, 2019:9). These methods are what dictators in reality would use, and that's why Napoleon reflects them.

Boxer (the horse working incessantly) symbolizes ordinary workers. He worked day and night without complains (Even he had, it soon vanished under Napoleon's coercion.) and was sold to humans by Napoleon in exchange for money in the end. This resembles those actual workers who dare not to disobey orders, have nothing to do but live in their imaginary wonderful place and are exploited voluntarily under totalitarians.

Benjamin (the donkey that is always clear-minded) symbolizes civilized intellectuals with independent thinking under totalitarianism. He joined the construction of windmill at first with full passion and dedication, but chose to keep silent after he realized the facts of animal farm. Under the reign of Napoleon, he had no choice but to be avoidant. In addition, these behaviors resemble George Orwell himself as well. Born in a family that used to be the helper of colonists, George Orwell didn't lose his mind. He chose to embark on republic journey that called for actual equality instead of so-called equality. He believed that totalitarianism trampled socialism

and had no difference with imperialism. These are examples of symbolism existing in Benjamin as intellectual with independent thinking.

2. Symbolism in the Absurdity of Plots

2.1 The Absurdity of Plots

The plots in *Animal Farm* are loaded with absurdity. They would sound ridiculous in reality: Animals were under exploitation of their owner, so Old Major (An old pig) inspired animals to revolutionize against human. After the success of their rebellion led by pigs, animals started building up their ideal farm with slogan 'all animals are equal'. But later Napoleon who was in want of power, expelled his opponents, and changed the slogan to 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others', then animal farm returned to a terrible farm. In addition, from 'conceiving an intrigue', 'implementing rebellion' to 'slaughtering dissidents' etc, all these plots can actually be meaningful with symbolism.

2.2 The Symbolism in Plots

(1) General plots

The whole novel symbolizes history of the Soviet Union and many other regimes. 'Pigs initiated rebellion and established a new regime' symbolizes 'imperialism was overthrown by socialism'; 'Pigs treated themselves with milk and slept on bed' symbolizes 'revolutionists do things for their own benefits'; 'Pigs slaughtered animals to reinforce their regime' symbolizes 'dictatorship in real life'... 'The general plots criticize fake socialism and totalitarianism in every aspect' (Wang&Ni,2019).

(2) Detailed plots

Some detailed plots have specific meanings other than general plots.

First of all, in the very beginning, the ending of Animal Farm was reflected in line with Old Major's death. As the role model of all animals, Old major would promote his ideas everyday, and these ideas were later fully shown in 'Seven Commandments'. Moreover, he taught all animals to sing 'Beats of England' which provided them with an imaginary wonderful paradise. However he died very soon in the very beginning, and this symbolized the definite failure of animals' revolution.

Secondly, 'Napoleon (second successor of Old Major) chased Snowball (first successor of Old Major) away with forces and slanders' has counterparts in reality as well. Snowball was dedicated to revolution without self-interest, but Napoleon was devoted to his own interest, just like Trotsky and Stalin in Soviet Union to some extent. In addition to that, George Orwell used to be repressed because his party was deemed as Trotskyism, which might be the reason he used symbolism in this way in the novel.

3. Symbolism in the Absurdity of Themes

3.1 The Absurdity of Themes

'*Animal Farm* demonstrates some absurdist tendencies in its themes. One way is in its repudiation of political orders being synonymous with totality and transcendence. Animalism is depicted as a universal good, something transcendent which unifies all that is disparate' (Kannan,2013). In this novel, Animalism becomes the ignition of desire out of which pigs gain more control over the others. There is little in terms of unifying transcendence that Orwell offers.

Another aspect of absurdism is cruelty through violence. When Napoleon commanded the dogs to rip the throats of those who publicly confessed and the way in which Napoleon orchestrated Boxer's death, the absurdist notion of cruelty through violence became evident.

Finally, the meaning of language becomes absurd by the end of the narrative in which the final commandment causes confusion and thus submission amongst the other animals. Some being 'more equal than others' demonstrates the absurdist notion of the futility of language.

3.2 The Symbolism in Themes

First, Orwell argues that any revolution led by a small, conspiratorial group can only degenerate into oppression and tyranny. The revolution begins with firm principles of equality and justice, and initially, the results are positive, as the animals get to labor for their own direct benefit. However, as Orwell demonstrates, revolutionary leaders can become as corrupt and incompetent as the government they overthrew. It suggests that totalitarianism and hypocrisy are endemic to the human condition. Without education and true empowerment of the lower classes, Orwell argues, society will always default to tyranny.

Secondly, *Animal Farm* explores and symbolizes how propaganda can be used to control people. Orwell depicts the animals being manipulated by common propaganda techniques, including songs, slogans, and ever-changing information. The pigs, who serve as the leaders of the farm, are the only animals with a good command of language. Snowball is an eloquent speaker who composes the philosophy of Animalism and persuades his fellow beasts with the power of his oratory. Napoleon, while not as smart or as eloquent as Snowball, is skilled at imposing his own views on everyone around him, as when he falsely inserts himself into the historical record of the Battle of the Cowshed. Language here stands with power.

Examples like these show how themes are demonstrated.

4. Conclusion

As a metaphorical novel, *Animal Farm* has huge impact on literary world with its absurdity, but behind absurdity, with symbolism, it has depicted an actual world. This paper tried to explain the symbolism existing in the absurdity of *Animal Farm* through characters, plots, and themes respectively.

References

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