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### The Misused Idealism: The Tragedy of *Animal Farm*

Published in 1945, *Animal Farm* is an allegorical and dystopian novel written by the English novelist, George Orwell. As the book title indicates, the story revolves around the animals in the farm. The animals' revolution aims to create an "Animal Utopia," but ironically, it turns out to be a greater misery to them. By analyzing two important elements—idealism and manipulation—in the novel, we can more thoroughly understand the meaning the novel conveys.

George Orwell—the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair—was an English writer of novels, essays, and critical reviews. His best-known works are the novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—one a spot-on allegory about the dangers of totalitarian government, the other a creepy prophecy of complete government control. But Orwell also wrote dozens of essays in which he aimed his sharp wit at everything from British imperialism, social inequality, and nuclear war to the ways that language is used to keep people under control. "What I have most wanted to do," he once wrote, "is to make political writing into an art." The rules he laid out for this art form still apply today. (Shmoop Editorial Team)

First, if we have a general picture of the time background, we will understand

this is not just a fable, but a story that presents deeper meanings. The time when *Animal Farm* was first published was during the period of World War II, and Joseph Stalin was the leader of Soviet Union. In order to take the ruling power, Stalin launched political conflicts many times. Moreover, the later Great Purge in Soviet Union also showed the world the corruption in the inner core of Soviet Union. These real historical events all became George Orwell's plot in *Animal farm*. Orwell himself was a socialist, which means he actually supported Socialism, and the rights that working class deserved. However, Totalitarianism under the guise of Socialism that Stalin manipulated was wrong and intolerable.

It is true that *Animal Farm* satirizes Stalin and the Russian regime, but it also criticizes the political situation in the Western world. The descriptions and dialogues in the novel show readers how the pigs, the rulers, get corrupted, and how other animals become the sacrifice under the cruel ruling.

At the beginning of the novel, the pig, Old Major, declares his ideal world—a farm without human. “Is it not crystal clear, then comrades, that all the evils of this life of our spring from tyranny of human beings? Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight we can become rich and free.” (ch.1) Old Major's dream just reflects Marxism proposed by Karl Marx and Terry Engel—the dream to create a world where it would be classless. “All animals

are equal.” Old Major’s dream provokes animals, making them expect to see the bright future once they can be free from the exploitation of human beings. In the book, animals regard Old Major’s words as “Animalism,” and this again shows that the idealism in this book actually represents Marxism.

The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. (Barry 150)

However, Old Major only gives those animals a general idea, he does not teach them how to conduct and make the idealism come true. Soon, the animals start the revolution, driving human away from the farm. While they are celebrating the victory, a new situation happens—that is, the pigs become the new leader. This implies that the revolution only changes the ruler but not the system, and it means that what awaits those animals is actually doom.

They have some peaceful time in the farm at first, but things are getting worse after Napoleon, a pig, and Snowball, another pig, have conflicts. Scholar and critics found that the conflicts between these two characters reflect the conflict between Stalin and Leo Trotsky. They have discrepancy in running the farm, and that makes Snowball an eyesore for Napoleon. Compared to Napoleon, Snowball is good at speeches and coming up with great plans such as building the windmill; however,

these do not make him survive in the conflict with Napoleon.

After Snowball is expelled, the animals in the farm receive more and more unfair treatment. Why none of them questions about the new rules set by Napoleon?

Manipulation is what Napoleon excels in, and thanks to his loyal follower, Squealer, animals in the farm are fooled. How Squealer uses mind-manipulating? He threatens the farm animals more than once, saying, “Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?”(ch.5) That is the greatest fear for the animals because they do not want the old ruler back. Once when their mind is full of fear, they will not question and doubt the reason why the pigs make decisions for them.

If we apply Louis Althusser’s concept, we may see why these animals are manipulated and fooled by those pigs, the ruler.

State Apparatus (SA) contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what Althusser calls the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question ‘function by violence’—at least ultimately(since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms). (Althusser 1341)

Althusser also mentions Ideological State Apparatus, including media, schools, and churches, that the rulers will use to achieve manipulation. In the novel, we will find Napoleon also manipulates innocent animals by these two types of State

Apparatuses. The guard dogs are the image of army or police, and the animal trial in chapter 7 is the image of court or oppression. Re-writing the Seven Commandments is the control of media, and Squealer himself is also the one who helps Napoleon control the public speech. Not to mention, they even set a statue of Napoleon and ask animals to worship. By controlling all the power, the pigs demand other animals to do more laborious jobs and have less food. To pigs, animal farm is a utopia, but to other animals, it is doom under the guise of utopia.

Honestly, some animals express their doubts and question the unfairness, but they end up losing lives, and the chickens are the example. When Squealer sentence those chickens to death and cruelly kill them, Clover, a horse, and Boxer, a horse, are wavered. "I would not have believed that such things could happen on our farm. It must be due to some fault in us. The solution, as I see it, is to work harder."(ch.7)

Boxer is too loyal to doubt, or we can say, he is the one who truly embodies the spirit of their ideal. As to Clover, she always finds out the Commandments seem different, but she is illiterate, so she is not confident and daring enough to express her observation. Boxer and Clover are the representation of proletariat. Their fate is decided by the ruler. Poor Boxer at the end of the story is sent to the slaughter house; even though he has faith in the Animalism, he is still dead.

Benjamin is an old donkey and he seems like an outsider on the farm. He does

not believe in the ruling of the pigs, but he does not stand against them either. Even when he witnesses the Commandment—All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others, he is still silent. Maybe Benjamin serves as an observer in the whole story, but not an actor.

“Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.” (ch.10) At the end of the story, it reveals that pigs are now human, the fear of the farm animals, and pigs betrays Animalism. To some degree, they are even worse than human beings. They deceive their own fellows, make profits for their own interests, and control the power in the name of idealism.

People see *Animal Farm* a story that mocks Stalin and the Soviet Union, and George Orwell himself admitted that was part of the reason in his personal letter. However, the bigger reason is to warn people that if we cannot grasp the true meaning of an ideal, and use the idealism properly, we will bring our own destruction.

According to Orwell's letter, the problem examined by *Animal Farm* concerns the nature of revolution itself. Unless everyone makes the revolution for him or herself without surrendering power to elite, there will be little hope for freedom or equality. (Letemendia 24)

Examining *Animal Farm* in the idealism and manipulation it embodies, we can have a more complete view to understand Orwell's intention of writing this novel. Just like what he said in the letter, we must realize what we are facing and always have a skeptic mind, otherwise, we may not be able to be the master of our own fate.

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