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ANIMAL FARM: AN APPROACH THROUGH FAIRY TALES

Autora

Nataliya Kachan Starusko

Directora

Bárbara Arizti Martín

Estudios Ingleses/ Facultad de Filosofía y Letras / Universidad de Zaragoza

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze *Animal Farm* from the perspective provided by its genre: fairy tales. Traditionally, the book has been regarded as a political satire and the form has been overlooked in favour of its content and the direct relationship established with historical characters of the time when it was written. It is my intention to remove the story from that context and analyze the text by itself. With the critical premises of Roland Barthes and the works of Bruno Bettelheim and Jack Zipes about fairy tales I am going to build a frame in which to do so. This approach is going to be backed up by a close reading of the text that would help to identify certain patterns and characteristics associated to fairy tales. This analysis focuses on how the animals are portrayed in the book. The intention is to show how *Animal Farm* is a book open to interpretations because of the genre in which it is written and how its apparent simplicity is full of meaning.

I. Introduction: A Generic Approach to *Animal Farm*

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* was written between 1943 and 1944 but it was not published until 17 August 1945. Orwell had always found publishing relatively easy. Why, then, did his usual publisher, as well as others, refuse to publish his new novel? The answer lies in the interpretation of the work in its historical context. In 1944, Great Britain and the Soviet Union were allies against Nazi Germany. Thus, criticism against Stalin and his totalitarian regime was silenced. One of the publishers sent a letter to Orwell explaining the reason why publishing it was not appropriate: "the fable does follow so completely the progress of the Russian Soviets and their two dictators that it can only apply to Russia. Another thing: it would be less offensive if the predominant

caste in the fable were not pigs”.ⁱ However, the World War ended and the Cold one started. Soviet Russia was no longer an ally but the enemy, and the book was finally published.

Animal Farm was a success, especially in the USA, as it was read simply as an anticommunist book,ⁱⁱ which came to validate Orwell’s prediction in his posthumously published preface for the book: “by the time this book is published my view of the Soviet regime may be the generally accepted one”.ⁱⁱⁱ Nevertheless, as Brunsdale states, Orwell himself argued that his aim “had always been much broader, not just Soviet Communism, but the general corruption of socialist ideals caused by the lust of power”,^{iv} and also “to unveil the inherent dangers of all totalitarian systems”.^v This has been the main interpretation of the book for many years and it is still studied as such in our days.

Of course, there have been other interpretations of *Animal Farm*, as the book yields to many readings. In 1989 Malcolm Bradbury wrote a preface in which he argued that the timelessness of the book resided in “mythic writing, helped in this by the tradition of the animal fable”.^{vi} The present essay intends precisely to understand the work as a fable, or fairy story, in order to show how the work has manifold interpretations. Nevertheless, it is necessary first of all to take the book out of its context and its classical critical interpretation. To do so I will refer to Roland Barthes’ classical essay “The Death of the Author”.

George Orwell is still a highly influential figure in the contemporary cultural panorama. *Animal Farm* and *1984* have contributed to his popularity and terms like “Orwellian” or “Big Brother” are common nowadays. When a reader opens one of his

books, internally he is overwhelmed by the presence of the author. It is very difficult to read *Animal Farm* and not to imagine Napoleon as Stalin or *1984* and not to be scared by Orwell's ability to imagine the future. This happens because, as Barthes explains, "the author still reigns in histories of literature".^{vii} Orwell's books are now established classics and as such they are "tyrannically centered on the author".^{viii} Curiously enough, Orwell held an opposite view to this. In his essay "Why I Write" he gave biographical information about his early experiences as a writer because he did not "think one can assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development".^{ix} So, Orwell considered essential to know the writer, his motives and the background in which he wrote to understand the text. Barthes argued quite the contrary and wrote that "to give a text an author is to close the writing".^x Once we know everything about Orwell and the story of the publishing of *Animal Farm*, the meaning of the text is fixed and we cannot escape it. Almost seventy years have passed since the publication of the work and the text is still fresh and meaningful. Following Barthes' announcement of the "birth of the reader" it is possible to give different meanings to this book.

So far, we have seen that *Animal Farm* is a book that had a political intention in the moment of writing. Orwell said that it was his aim to "fuse political writing and art".^{xi} He considered art as propaganda and as a political tool in the sense that politics intends to push the world in one or other direction. Art is not useless or innocent in his view. This was how he conceived *Animal Farm*, a political satire in the form of a fairy story, which is, one should not forget, the subtitle of the book. The tradition of fairy stories and animal fables is a very long one that we can trace back to Aesop. It is here that we enter the domain of what Bradbury referred to as "mythic writing". This mode

of writing is what gives the work its timelessness and contributes to its different meanings, because fairy tales use archetypes and symbols that appeal to the reader and that have profound meanings. In these stories it is possible to differentiate between surface meaning and deep meaning. To sum up, the success of the book and its actual validity lies in the fact that Orwell used a genre that has been present in the history of literature since almost its beginnings. As a fairy story, it could have been written five years ago and would not be less meaningful. Therefore, once we have removed the historical context and focused on the form and genre used, we can infer new meanings.

I. 1. *Animal Farm* and the Fairy Tale Tradition

Let's see now why fairy tales convey valid meaning even though they were conceived many years or even centuries ago. Bruno Bettelheim was a psychoanalyst that researched why fairy stories are important and how they convey meaning. He based his works on how fairy tales were useful for children because they were full of hidden meanings that could help them to overcome insecurities and anxieties. He cites Schiller in a revealing passage: "deeper meaning resides in the fairy stories told to me in my childhood".^{xii} Adults generally regard fairy tales as fantastic stories in which the imagination plays the main role and that are written to entertain children before they go to sleep. However, researchers like Mircea Eliade prove that fairy tales can be studied from a psychological and philosophical point of view. To him, "these stories are models for human behavior and by that very fact, give meaning and value to life".^{xiii} Bettelheim argues that fairy tales "convey overt and covert meanings and speak to all levels of the human personality".^{xiv} All in all, it is clear that a fairy tale is not just a tale. It is something more in the sense that it has a meaning that is shared by a culture. Our heritage is carried in some way by literature and in it we can find deeper meanings. Archetypes and symbols are common in fairy stories and while we belong to a certain culture we have in our mental store this same set of symbols and we are therefore able to interpret its meaning. The role of fairy tales, following Bettelheim, is that they refer to our cultural heritage without us noticing and it is at that point where they are full of meaning, meaning that at the same time can be different for each person.

Jack Zipes writes that fairy tales are "universal, ageless, therapeutic, miraculous and beautiful".^{xv} This affirmation is based on the fact that they speak to each person

with a language that is universal because they refer to elements that form part of our experience of the world, no matter whether these are conscious or unconscious. In the case of *Animal Farm* our ability to interpret the symbols in the fable relies on our cultural knowledge. For instance, if for any reason a reader does not know that sheep are meek, docile, slow-witted animals, they would find it hard to grasp essential meaning. Failing to understand the symbols leads to misunderstanding. However, fairy tales are not cryptic and their symbology is universal. This is what Zipes refers to as the symbolic act, which is “intended to transform a specific oral folk tale and to rearrange the motifs, characters, themes, functions and configurations in such a way that they would address the concerns of the educated and ruling classes of late feudal and early capitalist societies”.^{xvi} This passage is revealing for two main reasons: fairy tales are symbolic in a manner that people would be able to understand them and they are designed to educate, or in a different view to manipulate. Orwell would say that this is making politics through literary art, in other words, propaganda. This is the link between the tradition of fairy tales and the concepts hidden in *Animal Farm*. Orwell, through a symbolic act, wrote a fairy story in which he used symbols and motifs that are part of the popular culture and organized them in such a manner that he addressed a concern of his time. Zipes explains that Perrault’s tales “become part and parcel of a general civilizing process in the West”.^{xvii} This implies that they were written with a certain end, which was to educate in what was considered the best way by the dominant elite. Orwell used the same form to transmit his concerns about totalitarianism.

In addition, it is worth noting that among the different types of fairy tales, *Animal Farm* can be included within the animal fable tradition. In the way humankind

experiences the world, meaning and language are modified. Humans have been in contact with animals since time immemorial and from that relationship language has adopted uses that refer to humans as though they were animals. Thus, in the animal fable “each beast represents one aspect of human nature that the author wants to analyze”.^{xviii} Therefore, our language and our cultural heritage are full of symbols related to animals: the lion is strong, so if a person is strong we can refer to him or her as a lion. Animal fables make use of this knowledge to convey meaning and they are successful because they are universal, and any individual, as part of a culture, is able to understand that code. George Orwell used this universal code in his fable and each animal has archetypal characteristics. This is the reason why a modern reader can infer meaning out of the story without being necessarily aware of the context in which it was written. Furthermore, this genre can also be satirical, signaling vices and corruption present in human beings. One example, analyzed by Orwell in his essay “Politics versus Literature”, is *Gulliver’s Travels*. In one of his trips, Gulliver finds himself in a land ruled by intelligent horses that had the ability to use language, where there also lived the yahoos, human-like creatures.^{xix} This allowed Jonathan Swift to make a critique of human vices and their daily miseries. Thus, it is not at all new to use animals to criticize certain aspects of society. It is remarkable that both works are now established classics, a fact that confirms that fairy tales are ageless not because they talk about universal topics like greediness or the desire of power, but because they use “mythical writing”. The genre of the fairy story is what is ageless as it contains our cultural heritage and background. It is in this manner that we can understand the popularity of *Animal Farm*.

Two more aspects need to be addressed before analysing *Animal Farm* as a fable. The first is how Orwell adjusts his writing to the genre. Orwell was not a writer of fairy stories and *Animal Farm* has little in common with the rest of his literary works in terms of genre. In his books, articles and essays there is “one major quality which we experience throughout: the voice of a person”.^{xx} His previous works were not uniform in style because he tended to move from the personal commentary to realistic descriptions or to give different rhythms to each passage, using both metaphorical and plain language.^{xxi} However, Orwell’s voice was always present, so he adapted his style to the genre and made his narrative impersonal and simple.^{xxii} Language is an important aspect of the book and Orwell was very careful in the style he used because at the moment of writing he was concerned about how language could be corrupted by totalitarianism.^{xxiii}

The second aspect to consider is the characterization of the animals. Bettelheim explains that in fairy tales the characters are simple and straightforward.^{xxiv} There is not a scale of grays but rather a polarized characterization. He argues that this helps to understand the deeper meaning of the story because if characters were more realistic the “mythic writing” would be lost. There would be no way to use our cultural heritage to infer meaning and the universal character of the tale would be lost. In *Animal Farm* the animals are characterized following this notion. If they are clever, they are always clever and if they are stupid, they are always stupid. Orwell used this method of characterization, but as he was not a writer of fairy tales, he applied it to all aspects of the farm, a fact not exempted of sense of humour as we will see.

II. An Analysis of the Symbolic Meaning of the Animals

In this section of the dissertation I am going to analyze how the animals are portrayed in the book. The idea is to show how each animal has certain human attributes according to the way we generally think of them. In other words, each animal has a symbolic meaning because of the way they behave and that behavior can be linked to a human attribute, which can be good or bad. The fantastic aspect of the fairy tale is that animals can talk, which is what gives them a human quality because only human beings use language. However, they keep the rest of their animal physical characteristics and are unable, for example, to use tools. Also, the role of the human being has to be taken into account. It is used as the model of corruption and oppression that the animals draw upon to make their revolution. Everything human-like must be avoided, so, by opposition, it contributes to form the principles of *Animalism*. Fowler makes a distinction in the way animals are treated.^{xxv} There are mainly two categories: the pigs and the animals. Among the latter there is another group that differentiates itself from the animals: the dogs. Orwell gave names to some of the characters in order to build the story, while the rest of them keep their animal category. In this section I will analyze the animals as a group and as individual characters. But first I will allude to the humans.

Human beings are the enemy of the animals. One of the mottoes of the Revolution is precisely “death to humanity”. The only good human is the dead one. They are referred to as idle thieves, parasites that consume and do not produce. They are extravagant in their use of clothes and drinking of alcohol. This can be found in the opening of the novel when “Mr. Jones [...] was too drunk to remember to shut the pop

holes” (p. 5.) The farmers are described as envious and greedy people that neglect their animals, mistreat them and send them to the slaughterhouse when they are no longer useful. When Mr. Jones’ neighbors hear what happened in his farm, they wonder “whether they could not somehow turn Jones’ misfortune to their own advantage” (p. 34). This provides the model of oppression that Old Major, the boar whose speech incites the animals to rebel, criticizes, so it becomes everything that animals should never do.

Pigs are a symbol of uncleanness and greed.^{xxvi} They also have a reputation for gluttony. This characteristic appears little by little in the book: first they get the milk, then the apples, then they sleep in beds, have the right to wake up later and drink beer and whisky until they end up behaving like human beings. Ferber in his dictionary mentions the expression “drunk as a pig”,^{xxvii} which fits the pigs in the book and their passion for beer. In one of their parties “there was the sound of uproarious singing, which was followed by what sounded like a violent quarrel and ended [...] with a tremendous crash of glass” (p. 107). They are described as the cleverest of the animals and they supervise and direct the work and adopt all the resolutions. The word clever can also mean in informal British English ^{xxviii} sly or cunning. Indeed, this is what the pigs show to get the control of the farm and it is best exemplified in Squealer. The excuse of the pigs for not doing any physical work is that they do mental work, which is much harder and requires certain privileges. The pigs have a good command of language, while other animals can barely read, and with that they make valid the aphorism that “knowledge is power”.

Among the pigs there are some relevant characters. First is Old Major, a majestic-looking Middle White boar who combines the domesticity of the pig with the ferocity of the boar. Although he is described as wise and benevolent, his speech against human beings is full of rage and hatred, concluding with the idea that “all men are enemies” (p. 11) because the “product of our labor is stolen from us by human beings” (p. 8). Therefore the animals have to be released from “the tyranny of men” (p. 10).

Napoleon is one of the main characters. He becomes the Leader of the farm and exemplifies the gluttony and greediness of the pigs. He is portrayed as a fierce-looking pig and he does not hesitate in doing anything to get power. He is a tyrant and a jealous pig. For instance, when he is alone in the room where Snowball has been drawing the plans for the building of the windmill he “lifted his leg, urinated over the plans, and walked out” (p. 45). In this he is acting like a real pig. Orwell also reminds the reader of Napoleon’s character when a new batch of pigs is born and all of them are very similar to him. Finally it is worth noting an interesting aspect about his name: in the French edition he was called Cesar. Just as for British readers the name of Napoleon would bring memories of the French Emperor, Cesar, the conqueror of the Gaul, would have a similar connotation for French readers. Furthermore, the name Napoleon would probably have hurt national feelings in France.

Snowball is one of the pigs that promotes the rebellion together with Napoleon, but he is eventually accused of treason and forced to leave the farm. He is “a more vivacious pig than Napoleon, quicker in speech and more inventive” (p. 15.) He reads a lot of books from which he learns how to organize the animals for the battle against

humans and how to design the plans for the construction of the windmill. In the assemblies, Snowball always argues with Napoleon, and if he says one thing, Snowball says the contrary and “they were never in agreement” (p. 28). Snowball is forced to leave the farm charged with treason by Napoleon and from that moment he becomes the scapegoat. If everything he is accused of were true, he could indeed be called a pig.

Squealer is Napoleon’s right hand and is in charge of convincing the animals that everything the pigs do is for the benefit of the farm. He has “a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was somehow very persuasive” (p. 16). He is a master of language and knows how to manipulate it in order to achieve his ends and he acquires human-like attributes when he uses his tail to highlight his speech. His argument is always the same: “surely none of you wishes to see Jones back?”

Another group present in the book is the dogs. The term dog has been traditionally used as a term of abuse and still does.^{xxix} Also, dogs are domesticated and used in hunting. In the book the dogs have this pejorative sense. They are smart and can read, however they are only interested in reading the Seven Commandments. The dog is generally regarded as a clever and loyal animal that can be trained. Learning by heart the commandments is their training. Furthermore, Napoleon trains them personally and whenever a pig appears, there they are, with their “blood-curling growls” and their “fierce aspect” (p. 49). They obey the pigs and act as their guards, hunting and killing other animals when they are ordered to do so. They represent a sort of police force that “wag the tail as with Mr. Jones” (p.48), protect the pigs and scare the rest of the animals with their growls and violence. The dogs act as a group and despite the fact that Orwell gives names to some of them they do not appear in

the story as individual characters but as a pack of dogs that gregariously follow the pigs' instructions.

The third group distinguished in the book is "the animals". Orwell refers to "the pigs", "the dogs" and "the animals", the latter group being the sheep, ducks, hens, the donkey, the goat and the horses, which represent the workforce. Even though all the characters in the farm are animals, Orwell makes this distinction. I will later analyze why it is so and what it represents.

For thousands of years sheep have been with human beings and they have become a symbol of docility and gregariousness. They are meek, docile, easily scared and stupid. They also obey their masters, the shepherd, and are usually controlled and guided by dogs. In *Animal Farm* the sheep are stupid and this is represented by their inability to read. They just repeat the maxim they have learnt by heart: "four legs good, two legs bad". Being the stupidest animals, they are manipulated by the pigs. They do not question the decisions taken by the pigs and each time something suspicious occurs they burst out crying their maxim. The clearest example of their simplicity is when they are re-educated to change their *motto* and when the animals see the pigs walking on two legs "all the sheep burst into a tremendous bleating of *four legs good, two legs better*" (p. 114).

A highly symbolic animal is the cock, traditionally the announcer of dawn. This is humorously used by Orwell because Boxer, the hard working horse, asks the cockerel to wake him up an hour earlier than the rest of the animals as if he were an alarm clock. Also, the cock has been considered as a combative animal "noted by his pugnacity and pride".^{xxx} The proof is that cock-fighting is still common in certain

cultures. This sense is also used by Orwell when he chooses a black cockerel as the trumpeter of Napoleon. This is highly symbolic because the cock represents here his combative side and it is, besides, black, a colour that has negative connotations, related to the sinister change that has happened in the farm. In army-like parades organized by the pigs, the cockerel is the first, so it is again related to the meaning of the announcer of dawn. Unfortunately for the animals, it is the dawn of the age of a pig ruled government, not very different from that of men at the beginning of the book.

Pigeons represent love in Greek and Roman tradition.^{xxxii} It is also the symbol of the covenant between God and Noah after the Flood. Pigeons have also been used as carriers of messages. This is the way Orwell uses them in the book, possibly, with a sense of irony. Pigeons are trained by men, whom they obey carrying messages. The pigs, with a human-like feature, use them, too, to spread the ideas of Animalism, that is, as propaganda so that they can teach their revolutionary song “Beasts of England” to other animals.

The distinction that Orwell makes between wild animals and farm animals is very revealing. According to Animalism, wild animals have to be treated as comrades and have the same rights just as Old Mayor explains: “whatever goes upon four legs or has wings, is a friend” (p. 11). Two wild animals are mentioned: sparrows and rats. Both are animals that live independently but close to human settlements from where they can get food. The rat is a parasite in our culture: they transmit diseases and eat our food. This same notion is used by Orwell when there is shortage of food in the farm and the rats are blamed for that. Furthermore, they are accused of being agents

working for Snowball, the traitor pig. Just as rats were to blame for the Black Plague in the Middle Ages, probably sent by Satan himself, the rat is always a good scapegoat.

Probably, the most humorous character in the book is the cat. Cats are known for their independence, selfishness, cunning and opportunism. If a cat wants food, he knows how to purr and be charming, but as soon as he gets what he wants, he might as well just disappear. He is described as selfish and always disappears when there is work to do and comes back for dinner. When the animals vote to decide whether rats are comrades or not, the cat votes in favour and against. The cat always has good excuses to shirk from work and the animals believe him. He even chases sparrows despite the fact that animals should not kill other animals. Finally, he disappears just after the slaughter of the animals. This character is the most animal-like in the book because from his behavior the reader feels that it is a real cat. This gives consistency to the fable and to the idea of animals maintaining their original animal-like attributes, that is, behaving like what they really are.

In his dictionary, Ferber^{xxxii} explains how the raven is an animal that eats carrion and is related to death and ill omens. In the book there is a raven, named Moses which is related to death because he preaches about life after death in a paradise named Sugarcandy Mountain. He was “a tale-bearer, but he was also a clever talker” (p. 17). The name is also symbolic, because Moses also preached to the Hebrews in ancient Egypt and talked to them about the Promised Land. He is described as a tamed raven and leaves the farm with Mr. Jones and the pigs tell the animals he is a spy. However, years after he reappears and the pigs allow him to preach about Sugarcandy Mountain but they tell the animals it is all a lie.

These are what Orwell refers to as “the animals”, but among them there are some characters that are individualized and that play a main role in the story. Two important characters are Boxer and Clover, the horses. They are “faithful disciples” but have “great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves” (p. 17). The horse “was the chief beast of travel, work, hunting and war.”^{xxxiii} Also, horses have been traditionally considered as noble animals. Orwell draws on these two notions to characterize Boxer, who is a hard worker and whose *motto* is “I will work harder”. He is described as a good disciple when understanding the principles of *Animalism* but he is also rather stupid. For instance, no matter how hard he tries he cannot learn the alphabet. Horses are trained and obey their human masters. This is represented in Boxer when he has doubts about the way the pigs behave but he is told that Comrade Napoleon says so. This matches his second *motto*: “Napoleon is always right”. Clover is a stout mare that also works hard with Boxer. She is described as a good disciple and somehow stupid. This is shown when she thinks that something is wrong with the way the pigs act, because it goes against the seven commandments but she cannot put her thoughts into words. Although she can use language she is not as clever as the pigs who manipulate her for their own benefit. For instance, when she sees the pigs sleeping in beds, she remembers there was a Commandment that stated that no animal shall sleep in a bed, which is later modified to “no animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets” (p. 60). Clover cannot understand this kind of manipulation.

Mollie is a white mare but her character has nothing to do with the other horses. She is described as fool and pretty, lazy and worried only about sugar lumps and the colour of the ribbons in her tail. Just before the Revolution she is very worried and asks one of the pigs “Will there still be sugar after the Rebellion?” (p.16). She “became

more and more troublesome” and “on every kind of pretext she would run away from work “(p. 41). She eventually leaves the farm because she cannot get what she likes when the pigs rule. Her behavior is not really horse-like but it is very animal-like in the sense that she is used to be in contact with human beings and she often gets rewards that she enjoys. Sugar and ribbons are symbols of the dominance of men over animals and Mollie likes her status.

The donkey is an animal regarded as stupid and stubborn. Orwell describes Benjamin as bad-tempered and obstinate. He is grumpy and skeptical about the rebellion in the farm and about everything the pigs say. He remained “unchanged since the Rebellion” and “did his work in the same slow obstinate manner” (p. 27). However, he understands what is going on and how the pigs are manipulating the animals. He is a cynic and he always repeats the same: “donkeys live a long time”. This sentence implies that life has always been hard and will always be, so he does not believe anything the pigs promise, but at the same time he does not do anything to change it. He is probably the most human-like character because, in spite of his cynicism and passivity, when Boxer is taken to the slaughterhouse he rebels and tells the other animals the truth. He reads the words in the van that is carrying Boxer and cries “They are taking Boxer to the knacker’s!” (p. 104) Again, the pigs are clever enough to manipulate the animals and make them believe nothing bad is going to happen to Boxer.

Muriel, the goat plays a minor role in the book. Goats are not like sheep and can be independent animals. Muriel is described as clever and what she does is to read to the other animals the commandments written in the barn whenever they have doubts

about something for instance when they see the pigs drinking beer. She merely reads and does not interpret them.

III. *Animal Farm* and the Modern Reader

So far, I have analyzed the characters in the book and the three main categories of animals to reveal the meaning associated with their condition. Now, I am going to study how a modern reader can interpret this and can translate the model of society portrayed in the book to into our own. We have seen how Orwell wrote this book with Soviet Russia and Stalin in mind, but we have also seen that the book is ageless because, as a fairy tale, it is still appealing for the modern reader.

Stephen Greenblatt states that the success of the book lies in the fact that it unfolds “the essential horror of the human condition”.^{xxxiv} The organization of society and the distribution of power are fundamental issues in human history and *Animal Farm* addresses them from a very raw perspective: it is a failed revolution in which the conclusion is that things never change and those who suffer and work hard will always work hard. At the end of the novel the animals look perplexed at the pigs playing cards with other human beings and cannot tell who is who. The old masters were humans that acted like pigs and the new masters are pigs that act like humans. In this, it seems that Orwell moves away from the classic ending of fairy tales — “they lived happily ever after”. However it is not exactly like that. Bettelheim explains that this ending does not imply eternal happiness for the hero and should not be interpreted like that. To him, fairy tales are symbolic and they represent the overcoming of a problem. The hero has to pass a series of tests and if he succeeds he will be happy ever after concerning that

test. Overcoming that particular problem makes the hero more mature but not eternally happy. In *Animal Farm* the animals have tried to organize themselves and have worked hard. There are moments in the book in which they are indeed happy with their condition but at the end they are overwhelmed and enslaved by the pigs. To sum up, a fairy tale yields to a psychological reading in which a particular problem is overcome. In *Animal Farm* a problem is tackled but cannot be overcome because it seems impossible to do so. It seems that mankind will always stumble on the same stones.

Besides the archetypal depiction of the characters, there are three aspects in the novel that particularly resonate in many a contemporary society, even in those that are not apparently dictatorial: the two party politics, social class and the continuation of privilege, and the use of propaganda. In a two party system, people often feel that it does not matter who is in the government because nothing changes for the average citizen. At the beginning of the book the animals are oppressed by men and at the end by the pigs, who had promised them freedom and a better future. In election campaigns the two main parties antagonize, but when they govern they more often than not do the same things. This can be seen when Napoleon strongly opposes Snowball's project, but when he comes to power he immediately starts building the windmill.

It is generally agreed that there have always been social classes and, unless Marx's prediction of a classless society comes true, there will always be. This is very well portrayed in the book thanks to the symbolic use of three categories and, as Fowler^{xxxv} shows, to the use of language. Orwell always differentiates between the animals, the pigs and the dogs. When he uses the word "animals", pigs and dogs are

not included. The category of "animals" is epitomized by sheep. It is easy to imagine a society ruled by pigs, enforced by dogs and in which the sheep obey, work and do not ask questions. In the book the pigs have all the privileges and the piglets are taken to special schools for their education, so that they can rule and govern when they are grownups. In *Animal Farm*, Napoleon trains the dogs to impose his law. The sheep are brain-washed and are there to obey and are sent to the slaughterhouse when they are no longer of utility. Ferber in his dictionary cites Northrop Frye, who affirms that "the use of this particular convention is due to the fact that, being stupid, affectionate, gregarious and easily stampeded, the societies formed by sheep are most like human ones."^{xxxvi} When the general election comes, the pigs whisk their tails and the sheep go to vote, with the dogs supervising everything is right. Although in contemporary societies, thanks especially to social networking, people are more and more critical and form their own opinion, there will always be people that, like Boxer, think that "Napoleon is always right". This is often an effect of propaganda. In the book, every time the animals thought a Commandment had been breached, there appeared Squealer to give an explanation. He represents the role of propaganda and the perversion of language. The animal society required an explanation and the answer was always that it is for the good of the farm and surely they would not like Mr. Jones to come back.

IV. Conclusion

This reading of *Animal Farm* as a fairy tale helps place Orwell's novel within the category of literary works that break the bounds in which they were written and become universal in the sense that readers from different times and places can extract different interpretations. Although *Animal Farm* was written as a political satire against totalitarianism and particularly against Stalin, Orwell used animals for this and subtitled the work "a fairy story". We have seen how fairy stories are a form of "mythic writing" because of their use of stereotypes and symbols drawn from our common cultural heritage. The analysis of the characters has shown how the animals represent certain human traits signaling vices and virtues and how from that the reader can infer meaning. Through greedy pigs, loyal dogs, meek gregarious sheep and noble hard working horses Orwell still makes a point on contemporary society. Other readers of the novel would point to how language is perverted in our society, how politicians say one thing and do the other, to which extent it is true that knowledge is power, the effect of propaganda in uneducated people, etc. These and many other topics can be extracted from the novel and it is so because the genre allows many interpretations. If Orwell had written an essay about Soviet Russia instead, its meaning would definitely be tied to the historical context. Intended as a fairy tale, *Animal Farm* is ageless and always full of meaning.

Notes

- ⁱ Orwell's proposed preface. In *Animal Farm*, p. 104.
- ⁱⁱ Brunsdale, p. 122.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Orwell's proposed preface. In *Animal Farm*, p. 112.
- ^{iv} Brunsdale, p. 122.
- ^v Brunsdale, p. 133.
- ^{vi} Malcolm Bradbury's introduction to *Animal Farm* p. 13.
- ^{vii} Barthes, p. 1466.
- ^{viii} Barthes, p. 1466.
- ^{ix} "Why I write", p556.
- ^x Barthes p1469
- ^{xi} "Why I write", p. 558.
- ^{xii} Bettelheim, p. 4.
- ^{xiii} Bettelheim, p. 35.
- ^{xiv} Bettelheim, p. 5.
- ^{xv} Zipes, p. 1.
- ^{xvi} Zipes, p. 6.
- ^{xvii} Zipes, p. 17.
- ^{xviii} Brunsdale, p. 134.
- ^{xix} Fowler, p. 161.
- ^{xx} Fowler, p. 8.
- ^{xxi} Fowler, p. 9.
- ^{xxii} Fowler, p. 165.
- ^{xxiii} Fowler, p. 164.
- ^{xxiv} Bettelheim, p. 10.
- ^{xxv} Fowler, p. 162.
- ^{xxvi} Ferber, p. 154.
- ^{xxvii} Ferber, p. 154.
- ^{xxviii} *Collins Dictionary*
- ^{xxix} Ferber, p. 58.
- ^{xxx} Ferber, p. 46.
- ^{xxxi} Ferber, p. 61.
- ^{xxxii} Ferber, p.121
- ^{xxxiii} Ferber, p. 94.
- ^{xxxiv} Brunsdale, p. 134.
- ^{xxxv} Fowler, .162
- ^{xxxvi} Cited in Ferber, p. 191.

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