Repression to Rehabilitation: Breaking-free of the Prison-house of Language in 1984 and Animal Farm

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Abstract:

_Nineteen Eighty-Four_ and _Animal Farm_ by George Orwell are texts that draw attention to breakdown of communication and disruption of normal social interactions. The narrative reflects on the use of language by the state to impose norms and conventions that cater to a particular hegemonic group that is reigning in the State. An artificial language like ‘Newspeak’ in 1984 and a narrative that is undercut by ironies operating on the level of language and action in _Animal Farm_, alerts the reader to the discursive charge that any language may be made to carry. George Orwell’s 1984, set in the fictitious state of Oceania, presumably reveal the scary vision of future by exposing the state apparatus which was shifting to the totalitarian form. Similarly, he tried to alert his readers to the psychological and social wreckage that would be consequential to an adoption of socialist ideology in England or America. To critique the propaganda employed by communists or an English nation preparing to embrace socialism, Orwell shows how it is overtly bowdlerized and how it is systematically constructed to stall free thinking. At the same time, although Orwell is critical of communist discourse and hegemony, he systematically and deliberately fails to critique imperial and capitalist practices. So though quite ironically inspired by BBC media glossary, Newspeak is assumed to be a reflection on communist propaganda rather than capitalist out of which it actually originated and therefore, the present authors find Marxist critical theory quite useful in decoding Orwell’s texts though his narratives are primarily read as critique of communist discourse. This strategy is corroborated by Orwell’s background and affinities as also his proclaimed political leanings away from communist system which was proper for an intellectual belonging to his particular geographical and temporal coordinates- imperial discourse was not so pernicious to him as communist excesses. In fact, at times these narratives abet and support the imperialist regimes’ assertions of their supremacy. Hence, this paper refers to essays by Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and also Fredric Jameson.
However, the value of Orwellian narratives lie in their ultimate success in identifying the disruptive patterns of artificial ideology-driven systems and their attendant disabilities that limit the ability to use language and thereby affirming the need for language rehabilitation and overhauling the system.

**Keywords:** language, communist, critique, discourse, state, rehabilitation

**Introduction**

The present study draws upon a close-reading of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* carried out with a conscious reference to the socio-economic principles and conditions invoked directly or indirectly, covertly or overtly through the narratives.

The methodology of discursive analysis as well as ‘deconstruction’ along with a regular ‘close-reading’ may sometimes result in reading the narratives ‘against the grain’ or against the authorial dictates or intentions.

‘Authorial intention’ and ‘constructed’ nature are two ideas to consider while undertaking a reading of any text. While New Criticism finds authorial intention as superfluous, Marxist critics are cautious about it. Marxist approach highlights the ‘constructed’ and material nature of the text which to them should be read in tandem with its historical context (which in turn would include the author’s inclinations). Thus, even deconstructive readings are to be limited by the conditions in which the text was produced. Torsten Pettersson suggests that some readings have more relevance than others, thus limiting the interpretations to which a narrative can be subjected.

Definitely, in keeping with ‘relevance theory’, the reader shall make readings that deviate least from the intended meaning of the author. In his article “Fictionality and the Empirical Study of Literature” Torsten Pettersson conceptualizes the basic paradoxical phenomenon that made up stories can influence readers’ perceptions of the real world. He states that “Fictionality is a central element of literature which deserves more clearly focused attention in empirical studies than it has received hitherto. An ambitious general statement in this field is captured in Raymond Mar's and Keith Oatley's article titles "The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience." The authors emphasize the beneficial effects of reading "narrative fiction" (173) by observing, among other things, that "literary
fiction describes narratives that are carefully crafted" (174). Here there is a link to fictionality since the careful crafting is predicated on the ability of authors to suit the made-up events to the effects which they wish to achieve” (1).

Therefore, the narrative makes most sense when it is read as a scathing critique of a Soviet state only while wittingly keeping out the other forms of totalitarianism out of the scanner. The attempt to hail Animal Farm as an all-embracing, altruistic satire is part of politics of propaganda where capitalist values were considered as almost universal, natural and most just.

The resources on Britannica explains that “If we study the Enlightenment discourse then we can see that although the ideas of Enlightenment played a major role in inspiring the French Revolution and eventually inspired the struggle for rights of people of color, women, or the working masses, most enlightenment thinkers did not advocate equality for all, regardless of race, gender, or class, but rather insisted that rights and freedoms were not hereditary. This perspective directly attacked the traditionally exclusive position of the European aristocracy, but was still largely limited to expanding the political and individual rights of white males of particular social standing.” (2)

By the end of the narrative, we obviously learn or observe that equality is an impossible ideal and conclude (the author seems to want us to conclude) that it is better to choose the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie or the capitalists to rule us or we will ‘go to the dogs’ if we turn pigs into Kings. Hence, it is vain and fruitless for workers and farmers to demand their rights because if they do so, someone from amongst them (of low blood) will grab power which shall be the worst scenario. Thus, communists (comprising of farmers and workers) as a category is a conglomerate of different subhuman species, all inferior to the human species. It is ironic that the same farmer who at one level would have been clubbed with the sheep and cow of the barnyard is also antithetically a representative or symbol of capitalist regime in the text. The narrative feat lies in using the real and actual suffering farmer as the face of capitalism. Thus, the sympathy for the suffering farmer is quite uncannily usurped and pre-empted by the very exploiters of the farming community. Besides, this makes the hawkish capitalists look quite harmless and vulnerable to the reader.
Discussion

Animal Farm and the Limits of Satire exposed by Marxian theoretical analysis

Ostensibly, Animal Farm is a story about barnyard animals who want to accomplish the impossible feat of overthrowing the human regime and usher in an animal utopia. The author has subtitled it as a ‘fairy story’, and if you go by the paratext, it should be a story meant for children.

However, writing political fiction for adults in the guise of harmless tales for children has had a long history in Britain and one of the most fascinating prior examples would be Gulliver’s Tales by Jonathan Swift.

Needless to say, that the narrative has been interpreted as an allegory or a satire that lashes at all totalitarian states as a general approach and more specifically as a critique of the Soviet State. The Soviet state becomes the representative totalitarian state.

Of course, other totalitarian regimes identified with Nazism, autocracy, racist, capitalist governments and colonialism are spared.

If questioned, then their particular flaws are brought up in a distributed and unfocussed manner such that the Soviet state bears the brunt or malice directed towards all forms of exploitation.

The text is, however, situated and analyzed in the larger context of relationships between the Soviet State and capitalist regimes in the particular era as its ideological and cultural contestants. That Orwell’s Animal Farm is not a neutral critique of all totalitarian states but that it takes sides with those against the soviets. This novel seems to endorse capitalism and its façade of meritocracy to fundamentally challenge even the propositions of not just equality but equity.

Orwell seems to be offering a psychological therapy to his readers who are under the sway of communist ideology by making them see the absurdity of the communist system through his long-drawn allegory of farmyard animals.

Animal Farm: Narrative as a Carrier of Discourse
The communist discourse usually creates a dichotomy between capitalist and workers. In such a case, the first genuine narrative space to serve in the background or foreground should have been the factory or a mill. Similarly, the first genuine antagonist should have belonged to the industry or mill- an owner of a mill or a big capitalist rather than a farmer. In fact the farmer was on the same side as the worker when it came to exploitation by the capitalist regime. The farmer was the workers ‘comrade’ or support rather than his antagonist in the Marxist discourse or in life, in the past or at the present and yet Orwell in an artistic masterstroke cunningly conflates a farmer with capitalists and portrays farmers as Soviet enemy. Orwell uses many logical fallacies to construct the narrative landscape for his reader to explore. Indeed, it is a limited arena that is offered to us to take a perspective of.

In any narrative where humanity is pitted against other forms of life, we tend to choose humanity. George Orwell does not even offer us an enemy worth saving but pigs that like to roll in the muck. In such a context, the question of equality does not seem just superfluous but laughable. One major strategy apart from stereotyping that Orwell uses is to bank upon the instinctive anthropocentrism of humans. The self-preservation instinct makes us the centre of universe despite our greater awareness that we are just one of several species and that we are ‘consumers’ and not the ‘producers’- a fact mentioned by Orwell quite overtly in the text.

The coup de’ etat and the finishing stroke are built into the very foundations of the narrative as the humanity is pitted against the communists. It shall be uncanny to exclude ourselves, that is, humans from power. It shall be in fact ridiculous to consider the barnyard animals as our equals (whether we are blacks, whites, browns, yellows, women, men, androgynos or hermaphrodites, upper class or any class) because considering the appetites and food preferences of Occidental Europe on one hand, and the abomination in which the same animal is held in Eastern religion, the pigs can in no way be serious candidates for equality, let alone leadership roles. Our natural relationship with the beasts, the argument for ‘equality’ cannot hold since so obviously the animals are our inferiors. Here, at this precise point both Biblical creationism and Darwinian evolutionary theory would agree. Orwell’ deliberate choice of the farm animals as a metaphor itself is suggestive of its propounding equality as a pretense. “Unlike men, the majority of the beasts are limited naturally
by their brief lifespan and shortness of memory. Moreover, their differentiated physical types deny the versatility of the humans.”(3). The employment of animals as chief characters in serving the missionary task of exposing the Soviet myth seems to be unjustified and bequeaths both the races with more puzzling questions.

In its attempt to expose hypocrisy of Soviet leaders and hence Soviet states, the novel *Animal Farm* attacks the very principles of Soviet state which are egalitarian. The text makes use of old stereotypes to make mockery of Soviet ideals by conflating Communist leaders with ‘pigs’ and dismissing all of them in a swoop-fell. This is grave injustice to the farmers and workers of Russia and the USSR who stood by and sacrificed their lives for a utopian dream. Their right to dignity and liberty is mocked at and laughed at and at the most we sympathize with the poor set of barnyard animals as they clinch at a hope of getting rid of the human exploitation. Orwell’s novel deprives the animals and thus Soviet stakeholders of empathy and genuine concern once they are dubbed as lower animals. While championing his cause for ‘equality’ Orwell seems to bring in more inequalities by depicting varied species and swapping their roles.

“In his preface to the Ukranian editon of *Animal Farm* (1947) Orwell explained his purpose: I would not interfere with Soviet domestic affairs…..But on the other hand it was of the utmost importance to me that people in Western Europe should see the Soviet regime for what it really was. And so for the past ten years I have been concerned that the destruction of Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement.”(4)

Orwell seems to be particularly interested in enlightening the people of Western Europe about the Soviet domestic affairs thus again pointing towards the Western supremacy and surely making the westerners more equal than others.

Idioms related to the pigs are popular in West: ‘It is no use casting pearls before the swine’ or ‘you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear’. These are deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness despite varied ideologies that people may subscribe to. Even in East, in India, amongst Hindus pigs are connected to pollution. In Islam too pigs are again considered to be a taboo. Once the Soviet front guard is written off as pigs and their mothers as ‘sows’, their reputations cannot be salvaged as a community. Orwell was familiar with India and hence, may have known the
expression of revulsion invoked by pigs in particular- the whole of Indian mutiny of 1857 stemming from the British ignorance of Indian apathy for the particular animals- the Muslims and Hindus united against the ‘greased cartridges’ made out of pork.

It is a cunning device to populate the narrative with farm animals rather than more magnificent wild animals that have freedom in the forest or are trapped in zoos. It is another clever manoeuvre to then choose no other animal but pigs to lead this set of sheep, hen, cats, and dogs and at best horses.

1984: Language as a tool of Discourse

Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison in their lucid discussion on Fredric Jameson’s exposition of the limits of language’s ability to express the material world assert that the ‘world’ is represented by words that originate in human subjectivity. Thus, objectivity of language and its ability to represent the world in an objective manner is illusory. Therefore, language in being limited acts as a ‘prison-house’ that imposes restrictions on an individual’s ability to articulate events happening in the real world. A reader is thus confined not only by the universe created in the text by the author but also by his own linguistic scenario.

In 1984, the human trait of naturally remembering the passed over events or incidents is crushed by refashioning all the events in a more controlled manner by the apex authority of Big Brother. The death of the consciousness leads to the death of the individual.

The hijack of the memory and feeding the minds with the Big Brother anthem serves as the defeat of the individual. The party workers feared to think and abide by whatever is laid down as the guidelines. Newspeak which was the official language of the party was also the language of discourse. The party workers were supposed to think even in the new language so that they come up with nothing else but Newspeak only.

In Newspeak of 1984, words that point to freedom are associated with crime and punishment rather than images of liberty.
The text goes, ‘You haven’t a real appreciation of Newspeak, Winston,’ he said almost sadly. ‘Even when you write it you’re still thinking in Oldspeak. I’ve read some of those pieces that you write in The Times occasionally. They’re good enough, but they are translations. In your heart you’d prefer to stick to Oldspeak, with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning. You don’t grasp the beauty of destruction of words. Do you know that Newspeak is the only language in the world whose vocabulary gets smaller every year? ‘Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? ………………The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak.’ (pg 53)

The control of thought by shrinking down the vocabulary is a direct attack on the creative mind of the individual. An individual concretes his ideas with the help of lexicon varieties which is limited by the totalitarian discursive ideology and signaling towards the emergence of a dystopian world with scarcity of diverse ideas and the origin of dummy ideas parroting the same notions. The essence of the language is thus lost. Orwell shows communication breakdown and therefore, disruption of normative social interaction.

Newspeak being inspired by actual ideological discourse that overtly aim to direct people’s lives and deprive them of independence of thought draws our attention to realities of real media discourse, especially rampant in post-truth world politics. In its exaggeration it makes us review our positions in real world. It is not considered undesirable but mandatory by the state that will threaten your survival if you do not limit your ability to use language or question the limits of discourse that this language hosts.

Newspeak is instrument or vehicle of a communist or dictatorial discourse; if you question it your survival will be threatened. Logical fallacies intrinsic to newspeak aim to replicate certain required responses. But those who can excavate the falsity of this logic are enemies of the state.

According to David Peetz in “Visions of the Future”, “We see the relevance of Newspeak in how some corporations seek to exclude particular messages from entering employee consciousness. In Walmart, if ‘associates’ (their newspeak term for employees) are ‘using union terms such as arbitration, grievance and seniority’, managers are under instruction to ring the ‘Union Hotline’. Language is therefore
important in all this. Euphemisms like ‘associate,’ ‘member’ and ‘partner’ in place of ‘employee’ help ensure, as Syme (the newspeak documenter in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) would say that the range of consciousness (becomes) always a little smaller.”

The artificial language and euphemism is symptomatic of a deeper abnormality affecting the hegemonic group that determines the discourse, narrative, language and communication.

In the Orwellian dystopia, the organic intellectual or civil society uphold the state discourse as Gramsci would point out.

In his essay ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation), Louis Althusser (1918-1990) supporting Marx’s claim that any new social order can sustain itself only by reproducing the conditions of its existence (Prakash, 159) broadly differentiates between institutions that are instrumental in replicating such conditions. These can be categorized as Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). While ISA works with soft power, the RSA works by force.

“Schools, churches, media are institutions to uphold authoritarian ideologies by persuasion, much as RSA comprised of police and military also does the same but through repression. Another dimension of hegemony is its ability to legitimize concepts like culture, knowledge and truth.”

Foucault observes this same when he highlights the related concept of episteme. The indigenous or local demands are undermined much as the native knowledge is devalued in comparison to the Western Eurocentric demands of science and development.

**Conclusion: Possibilities of Restoration and Rehabilitation**

The first step towards social rehabilitation and psychological succor is to identify, accept and articulate the problem. This can be done by identifying the disruptive patterns and how exactly the artificial system operates with the ideology driving it.

To restore communication and social life that is outside the surveillance of the dictatorial state and to over resistance to it and ultimately, to turn the tables on this
system-conscious rehabilitation of language through parallel media is a pre-
requisite.

Agitprop writing, drama and novels that are dystopian help us take the first steps
towards this long process of social rehabilitation by helping us critically analyze the
politics of language.

In “Politics and English Language” George Orwell himself states the significance of
guarded reading or else the reader falls into the trap of author’s play of language.
Orwell observes, “But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt
thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation, even among people who
should and do know better. The debased language that I have been discussing is in
some ways very convenient. Phrases like a not unjustifiable assumption, leaves
much to be desired, would serve no good purpose, a consideration which we should
do well to bear in mind, are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at
one's elbow. [...] This invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases (lay the
foundations, achieve a radical transformation) can only be prevented if one is
constantly on guard against them, and every such phrase anesthetizes a portion of
one's brain”.

It is noteworthy that whatever be the limitations inherited by Orwell due to his
affiliations, he is conscious of being subject to those limitations. He is not outside
the prison-house of language and thus, ideological discourses that trap an individual.

Orwell’s clever satire tends to exclude European colonialism, English imperialism,
American neo-imperialism, Nazi concentration camps and rampant capitalism
everywhere as the reader’s focus is never allowed to wander away from the Soviet
head ‘Napolean’ (Adolf Hitler was also an autocrat hailing from the socialist party
with affiliations for the workers).

However, the hatred is directed not to the communist who pretend to stand by the
ideals of communism (while practising capitalism) but against communism per se
rather than capitalism per se. Capitalism turns out to be a more desirable form of
system and communism is dismissed as impossible or pretentious. Newspeak and
Doublethink thus become the tools in communicating the discursive ideology.

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