

The Power of Language in Allegorical Novel *Animal Farm*

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Abstract

In order to have a better understanding of the novel itself, allegorical novel, and symbiotic relationship between language and power, especially in the function of language in the social construction, this paper is to take *Animal Farm* as the research object, and to adopt Foucault's perspective of power and discourse to analyze the two main characters of Napoleon and Squealer in the novel. Through analysis, we can know how the totalitarian dictatorship was formed and how it exerts the ruling function of language, and the interaction between discourse and power. Therefore, We can use this study to alert people not to underestimate the power and function of language, because the language which has long been regarded as a tool by people can also turns people into its tools.

Keywords

Animal Farm, Michel Foucault, Power and discourse, Allegorical novel.

1. Introduction

Animal Farm is George Orwell's classic political novel, who is one of Britain's most influential writers of the 20th century. George Orwell had a short and rough life, but he wrote many literary works, which mainly reflected the poverty and political problems of society. Especially, the disaster of World War II gave Orwell a deeper understanding of the evils of totalitarianism. His later works are mostly to refute and criticize totalitarianism, as he once said: "Since 1936, every piece of work I wrote is directly or indirectly opposed to totalitarianism, and supports democratic socialism as I understand." In the novel, Orwell used allegorical expressions, intentionally containing political satire and criticism in the story, formed his unique creative style of allegorical novel. It can be said that in Orwell's view, language is a cover for the reality, a tool for whitewashing reality, or a method for confuse people's minds. The ingenious combination of politics and literature is Orwell's artistic feature, and *Animal Farm* is a model of political allegory. As for the novel itself, it tells an easy-to-understand allegorical story from the perspective of animals, with pigs, horses, donkeys, sheep and other animals as the main characters. A man named "Jones" keeps many animals in the Manor Farm. The animals are engaged in heavy labor every day and their living conditions are very poor. The animals of the Manor Farm obeyed the last words of "Old Major" about rebellion, they could not stand the slavery of the manor owner "Mr. Jones". Therefore, under the leadership of the pigs, they launched an uprising, drove away "Jones" and achieved a decisive victory in the Battle of the Cowshed. After that, they managed the farm themselves and renamed it "Animal Farm". The animals uphold THE SEVEN COMMANDMENTS, pursuing the principle of "all animals are equal". When the revolution succeeded the animals were immersed in the joy of victory and enjoyed the so-called "freedom". They united and worked hard for the collective benefit, bringing unprecedented economic benefits to the farm. However, after the pigs consolidated their leadership through high-pressure methods, as the ruling class pigs pursued more privileged lives, they use a more brutal way than the former manor owner to enslave and oppress other animals. A pig named "Napoleon" began to exclude other leaders for power, announcing its opponent "Snowball" as a traitor. Eventually Napoleon became the leader. Pigs also traded with humans, feasted on drinks, and stood with their hind legs. At the end, there was nothing except a single Commandment. It ran: "All animals are equal,

but some animals are more equal than others.” At this point, the revolutionary leader completely betrayed the original intention of the revolution, betrayed the interests of working masses, and went along with former rulers in their evil deeds. The animals returned to their former condition, and became even worse. Revolution and democracy are just farce, and eventually they return to their old places. This is what Orwell wants to say. The revolution became a tool for the people who want to be in power, and there was no sense of social progress, which completely denied the proletarian revolution and the socialist road of the Soviet Union. Since the novel was published under the background of the confrontation between the two camps of socialism and capitalism, which are led by Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky, people generally recognize the significance of the times of which the novel is specifically directed, and it is acknowledged that the main purpose of the novel is to criticize the reign of totalitarianism. In the novel, Orwell used the allegorical expression form, writing in a concise and ironic narrative manner to show the discourse ecology under totalitarianism.

By looking at the reference materials, I found that, in terms of the novel itself, in recent years, domestic scholars’ research on *Animal Farm* has been based on its anti-totalitarian and anti-imperialist themes, as well as the symbolic methods and meanings used in the novel. As for the analysis of literary and artistic characteristics in the novel, the power of language under totalitarianism is rarely studied from the perspective of language as the starting point. So there is not only a considerable amount of data for reference, but also much room for further research. Out of my affection for the author and the novel itself, as well as for the artistic features of the language in the novel, I hope that this study can provide a preliminary inquiry into allegorical novels, a further understanding of this literary work, and the symbiotic relationship between discourse and power, a particularly deeper understanding of the power of language in a totalitarian society. It is also expected that the research of this topic will have certain reference significance and reference value for future readers. Maybe this study can be used to alert people not to underestimate the power and function of language, because the language which has long been regarded as a tool by people can also turn people into its tools. Besides, perhaps an insight will be given to people who are going to read or study the novel in the future.

2. Foucault’s Perspective of Power and Discourse

Michel Foucault was a French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist and literary critic. Foucault’s theories primarily address the relationship between power and knowledge, and how they are used as a form of social control through social institutions. The influence of his thought was not only confined to philosophy, but also penetrated into the fields of literature, politics, art, psychology, medicine, sociology, etc. He has put efforts into the research of power, knowledge, and discourse, which have great influence on other academic fields.

Regarding the view of power, Foucault disagreed with the traditional view, which simply regarded power as constraining and repressive. He reckoned that people should cease to describe the efforts of power in negative terms, such as “repress”, “exclude”, “mask”, “conceal”, etc. In Foucault’s opinion, the power can produce different types of knowledge and different forms of behavior, and power is productive. He believed that power is an alterable and reversible relation. Power is seen as a fluid field, which is an infinitely complex network of relations and disperses throughout the whole society. This network of relations is “constantly in tension, in activity” ((Foucault, 1977). In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault argues that “power is exercised rather than possessed” (Foucault, 1977) as a privilege of the dominant class. It exists in everyone’s body, and everyone is not only the executor of power, but also the object and tool of exercising power.

Foucault claims that there is no pure, absolutely objective knowledge. Different forms of knowledge are always tied to power. “The formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process.” (Foucault, 1977) Foucault analyzed the relationships between power and discourse from the perspective of knowledge archaeology. According to his research, knowledge and truth are both forms of power, without which power would cease to exist. Foucault holds the view that there is a close and complex relationship between

power and discourse. In his opinion, discourse is the product of power, and power is the basic element that influences and controls the practice of discourse. Power is achieved through discourse, which is a symbol of power. The theory of power and discourse is part of Foucault's academic achievements. Foucault believes that discourse and knowledge are related to power. "Self-evident" and "common-sense" knowledge has the privilege of coordinating power, thus creating controlling mechanics. In other words, power realized the capability of controlling by generating power in a positive stance, thereby achieving the ability to control. From Foucault's perspective, the controlling system determines the world in which everyone lives. For example, the relationship between teachers and students also participates in this control system to some extent, exercising the discourse power in the mode of knowledge and truth production. He once said that "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relation." In addition, the discourse genealogy shows that discourse and discipline have the function of constructing power. Discourse, the "object" and the "subject" in the discipline form a mutual constructing relationship: discourse constructs various objects, which were used for scientific. On the other hand, discourse establishes "subject" to describe "object", and judges its authenticity based on logic, syntax, and so on. If a statement about an "object" meets the correct standard of general recognition, then it will be included into discourse. When it came into discourse, it will promote the spreading of the discourse, expand the scope of the discourse and statement, and thus produce either a right or wrong knowledge. It can be said that the power constructs the knowledge system and producing "truth", which gives value and meaning to all disciplines. All in all, Foucault analyzed power from the perspective of post-modernism. He reckoned that power is a micro-power, which is viewed as a relationship, a network, and a field. Power is productive, instability, decentralization, and multiplicity. Power has a close relationship with knowledge and discourse. It infiltrates into every aspect of social life. There will always be the possibility of resistance in the relation of power. His theory of "micro-power" reflects his concern about people's survival predicament in modern society.

Foucault's theories about knowledge and power relations, discourse and power relations provide a new perspective to analyze *Animal Farm*. His theories are well-reflected in this novel.

3. The Formation of Totalitarian Dictatorship

Animal Farm was published in the context of confrontation between the two camps of socialism and capitalism, which are led by Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. After Lenin's death, a power struggle took place between his successors, Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. The two main characters in the novel, "Napoleon" and "Snowball", reflected both of them. In the novel, "Napoleon was a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way."; "Napoleon was seen strolling in the farmhouse garden with a pipe in his mouth"; "Napoleon himself appeared in a black coat, rat catcher breeches, and leather leggings."(Orwell, 1945)In Orwell's writings, the image of Napoleon in this novel is very similar to that of Stalin.

In *Animal Farm*, after the animals gained power, they did not follow the criteria for distinguishing enemies from their brothers in the "Seven Commandments". Instead of guarding humanity, the animals were involved in the power struggle between Napoleon and Snowball. Compared with Napoleon, Snowball had a political ideal of his own. He is advanced in theory, consistent in words and deeds, and has a solid foothold. But Snowball's outstanding talent and courage were far from Napoleon's cunning and fierce. Snowball's heroic behavior in the Battle of the Cowshed made Napoleon very hostile to him. Snowball came up with the idea of building a windmill and was actively involved in the plan. But Napoleon had "declared himself against the windmill from the start." "As the last day came when Snowball's plans were completed", *Animal Farm* was published in the context of confrontation between the two camps of socialism and capitalism, which are led by Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. After Lenin's death, a power struggle took place between his successors, Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. The two main characters in the novel, "Napoleon" and "Snowball",

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In the novel, in order to cover up own problems, the ruler tries to find ways to divert the public’s attention. The most effective method adopted is to create a public enemy, and then “lead” the people across the country to oppose that enemy. These are lies and phantoms under the ruling totalitarian dictatorship. In *Animal Farm*, under totalitarian dictatorship, Napoleon believed that the

power of stability does not come from the recognition of other animals, but from the manipulation of animals; the most effective method is propaganda. In the novel, propaganda always exists for political needs. Covering up facts, tampering with history, and beautifying privileges are all achieved through the control of the power of discourse. In the novel, Napoleon and his associates’ manipulation of information is the recurring theme in their battles with the humans. These pigs directly refute what readers know about the truth of the Battle of the Cowshed. By distorting the facts, Napoleon gained more honors and successfully drove the Snowball away. The resulting praise helped Napoleon’s governing. “Control of wartime information is crucial to history that Napoleon is writing.” (Roden,1999) In addition, Napoleon changed the history in ways they saw it. In the Battle of the Cowshed, Snowball was one of the heroes of this battle, and he received a newly invented medal “Animal Hero, First Class”. But under Napoleon’s tampering, the leader of this battle became Napoleon, and his greatest achievement in this battle was to defeat Snowball. Napoleon received two medals, while Snowball did not receive either one. The fact that Snowball had received a gunshot wound from the invaders was distorted into the teeth mark left by Napoleon’s heroic attack on Snowball. Although these changes were initially resisted for a short time, the modified history was eventually accepted by a group of animals with poor memory. Napoleon also exercised control by controlling what was read or written. Because of the illiteracy of many animals, Napoleon and Squealer were able to rewrite the Seven Commandments on the barn again and again, adding words

word by word. For instance, animals were killed. Just after one of the seven commandments “No animal shall kill any other animal” has the phrase “without cause” add into the end of it, Boxer was sent to the slaughterhouse. At a word, such propaganda is a one-way, subjective control of public thought through language misleading. By doing so, the public’s ideological discourse power is controlled and no different opinions can be raised. This also enables powerful groups and totalitarian rulers to retain their discourse power.

4. The Ruling Function of Language under Totalitarianism

Foucault once pointed out sharply, “Every rule is ultimately a rule of language.” Language reveals the substantive and symbolic meaning of things through the power of logic and metaphors inherent in it. We know that due to the universality and integrity of political power, all powers are of a certain political nature. Therefore, as a language of power, of course, it cannot be separated from politics. In fact, to a certain extent, the essence of political discourse is the discourse dominated by the ruling class. The ruling class monopolizes the interpretation right of language and switches the substantive and symbolic meaning of language at will. The ruling class uses the encouragement, enforcement, misleading and shaping functions of language to establish a language hegemony that is conducive to themselves. The novel *Animal Farm* subtly shows the relationship between language and power, especially the ruling function of language under totalitarianism.

At the beginning of the success of the revolution, the animals used the “Seven Commandments” to express their longing for equality and freedom. As a leading group, pigs use the encouragement function of language to promise the animals a good life after the revolution. Although facing the difficulties, the animals who have become the owners of the farm are still working hopefully, and the farm has taken on a new look. Pigs infect other animals with affection and reason, not only motivating the animals to unite closely to fight for the revolution, but also establish a positive image of leadership for the pigs. It is this kind of passionate language that makes discourse produce emotionally irrational and non-logical judgment effects on the listener.

The enforcement function of language is reflected in the use of an authoritative language to force the public to obey a certain will, thereby maintaining the power to control the society. On the farm, everything is controlled by Napoleon. As long as Napoleon says so, then that’s right. When confused, the animals walked silently to the barn, looking for the Seven Commandments of Animalism by the wall, but found that many modifiers were added to the commandments: “No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*”, “No animal shall sleep in a bed *with sheets*”, “No animal shall kill any other animal *without cause*”. Even if the animals didn’t have any impression of the words behind these commandments, these changes justified what Napoleon did. In the end, there was only one of the seven commandments left: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” There is no comparison of the word “equality”. More equality means inequality, which is obviously Orwell’s sharp irony. The ultimate goal of any modification to the Seven Commandments is to force animals to think in accordance with the will of the pigs, and to be consistent with the will of the pigs. The novel vividly describes the continuous change of the “enemies” of the animals, and the “command” of the pigs has been changed over and over again, leaving the animals at a loss.

5. Conclusion

Language is a unique communication tool for human beings, and discourse refers to the language spoken or written by people. It is the specific speech behavior of people in a specific social context. According to Foucault, all human knowledge is obtained through discourse, and nothing separate from it exists. Although the power of discourse is expressed in the form of discourse as a carrier, the reason why it can derive power is not only the inherent power of discourse itself, but also the value and ideological factors behind the discourse. Once the ideology as an idea is combined with state power, it will inevitably invade, penetrate and influence other cultural forms by constructing its own discourse system to establish its own ideological discourse power. To fully understand the discourse

power, the role of ideology cannot be ignored. There is a close symbiotic relationship between discourse, power and ideology.

In the novel, the author hopes to expose the interaction between ideology and discourse by analyzing the surface language forms. There is no doubt that the “Seven Commandments” and the revolutionary song “Beasts of England” are the core of far-reaching ideology. Through the “Seven Commandments” and the revolutionary song “Beasts of England”, the animals generated ideology, united and clarified the boundary with the enemies. Once the “Seven Commandments” were proposed, animals scrambled to recite it whether they understood or not. In the novel, it is through the persuasive function of ideology to promote the support of animals, so that the legitimacy and authority of the “Seven Commandments” can be confirmed. Ideology needs to explain its legal status through discourse, that is, it needs to connect the present with the past through imagination and fantasy to further integrate all members. Squealer knows the animals’ reluctance to return to the days when they were oppressed by human beings. Therefore, by comparing the rule of pigs with the rule of humans in the past, forcing animals to accept the present reality and willingly endure the slavery of pigs.

All in all, the ideological discourse power is the product of the ruling class combining its thoughts and power, and it is an important force to achieve rule. It can be said that the ideological discourse power realizes full control over their external behavior activities by manipulating the public's thoughts, consciousness, feelings, memories, hopes and desires.

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