

Emotional Propaganda and Linguistic Manipulation in *Animal Farm*: A Parody of the Russian Revolution

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Abstract

This paper offers a rhetorical and historical analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, examining how emotional propaganda and linguistic manipulation function as essential mechanisms of totalitarian control within the novel's allegorical parody of the Russian Revolution. Through close readings and discourse-oriented analysis, the study investigates the pigs' strategic use of fear appeal, rhetorical questions, linguistic simplification and complication, and the bandwagon effect to influence perception and suppress rebellion. These narrative strategies are implemented in *Animal Farm* in parallel with documented machinations during the Russian Revolution, including biased political slogans, visual media, and political discourse. The comparison reveals how Orwell mirrors historical techniques of persuasion to illustrate the erosion of memory, critical thinking abilities, and interpretive freedom under authoritarian rule. At the same time, the novel's satirical and ironic form strengthens this warning by making political manipulation seem both absurd and dangerous. Attention is given to the cumulative power of repetition, emotional charge in media, and ritualized language in slogans, chants, and collective practices, demonstrating the construction and normalization of a distorted reality for the public. By analyzing these mechanisms both individually and in combination, this study argues that *Animal Farm* serves as a cautionary literary tale of societal vulnerability preceding communicative domination, exposing how sustained rhetorical manipulation across various forms can gradually replace truth with illusory reality.

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Political Allegory, Parody, Rhetoric, Emotional Propaganda, Linguistic Manipulation

1. Introduction

One of the most powerful weapons in human history is not a knife, a gun, or a sword, but humanity's ability to manipulate ideas through the misuse of propaganda and language, which shapes how people think, remember, interpret, and even how they act. In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell's parody of the Russian Revolution, the pigs' strategic use of emotional propaganda and language abuse becomes the primary mechanism through which they gain and maintain totalitarian control. Because the novel is also a satire and political allegory, Orwell does not simply retell history; he uses irony to expose how revolutionary language can become a tool of domination. Their strategies mirror real-world political events, where psychological persuasion often overrides rational thought and distorts a population's understanding of the truth. Orwell employs these tactics in his book to illustrate the ease with which people can be manipulated through emotionally persuasive tactics or deliberate wordplay, leading them to live under a false understanding of fairness and equality. The novel's depiction of political manipulation not only reflects the Russian Revolution but also illustrates a broader issue that extends well beyond those times; the consequences of deliberate

misinformation and the fragility of public understanding are issues present in global politics today. While *Animal Farm* has been widely studied as a political allegory, fewer analyses examine how emotional propaganda and linguistic manipulation operate together as coordinated mechanisms of ideological control. By analyzing emotional propaganda, linguistic manipulation, and the powerful combination of the two, it becomes clear that Orwell's message speaks directly to the consequences of relinquishing one's ability to independently construe the world around them.

2. Emotional Propaganda in *Animal Farm*

Propaganda manipulates people through various facets of their personalities, yet the most common type of propaganda is that which controls the emotions of individuals. Many techniques are often employed in propaganda with the intent of changing the way an audience feels about certain news, altering the way the truth is presented to the public, without physically changing the words being said or distributed. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell portrays how emotional propaganda becomes an effective tool used by the pigs – especially Squealer, the main propagandist of the story – to control other animals. Methods of emotional propaganda employed during the Russian Revolution to deceive the public, as parodied in *Animal Farm* by Squealer, include fear appeals, rhetorical questions, and many other techniques (Hussein, 2021). Squealer's use of these strategies, including saying things like "Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?" (Orwell, 1945) as an example of using rhetorical questions and "One false step, and our enemies would be upon us" (Orwell, 1945) as an example of fear appeal both work to create illusions of what an exploitative society for the lower classes really is.

Squealer's emotional propaganda is effective because it destabilizes the animals' memories, causing them to doubt their own understanding of the world and rely on the pigs for more accurate information (Saoudi, 2022). The use of fear appeals prompts the animals to reflect on their terrible lives under Farmer Jones's care – often recalling times of hunger, thirst, and lack of freedom due to his mismanagement of the farm. Rhetorical questions, on a different note, have no direct answer – they simply prompt the animals to think in circles and not get anywhere, often associated with fear appeals or other techniques to evoke emotion or memories of past lifestyles. Appealing to the animals' naivety – especially by taking advantage of their sense of fear with the risk of Farmer Jones returning – Squealer ensures that emotion drives the loyalty of the animals to such a society, rather than logic. This is also ironic because the animals believe they are protecting the revolution while being emotionally guided into accepting a new form of domination. Orwell uses examples of emotional manipulation to demonstrate how easily populations can be swayed when leaders frame obedience as the only path to survival, effectively causing emotional havoc for the masses over the quality of their lives.

3. Emotional Propaganda in the Russian Revolution

3.1. Rhetorical Questions

The consequences of these forms of emotional manipulation over a mass audience mirror the real-world social issue of psychological manipulation under totalitarian regimes. During the Russian Revolution, emotional propaganda was employed to override factual evidence and critical thinking, as the audience's perception was influenced by the propagandist's use of extreme tone, urgency, and threat. In George Orwell's writing, fear appeals and rhetorical questions appear more frequently in dialogue than in any other form of communication; in the Russian Revolution, however, most of the emotional propaganda is present in a source that many do not think of first: posters. In one poster, the Bolshevik party presented rhetorical questions to the Cossacks, a group of semi-independent warriors, asking them to support their cause and help defeat the Mensheviks (Figure 1). The poster, which asked, "Cossacks, Who Are You With?" in Russian, conveyed this message (Ehrman, 2024).



Figure 1. Cossack, Who Are You With? (Moor, 1920). Source: RISD Digital Commons (public domain). This poster uses a direct rhetorical question to pressure Cossacks into choosing a political side, framing neutrality as disloyalty.

3.2. *Fear Appeal* In addition to rhetorical questions that targeted specific groups of people or the public, other propaganda posters employed the concept of fear appeal, symbolizing the war between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. In a specific poster, the Menshevik party was depicted as a white knight, and the Bolshevik party was represented as a red dragon, serving as an anti-Bolshevik propaganda tool and implying the Bolsheviks as "enemies" with the negative, scary connotation of a dragon (Figure 2). The text on the poster implied that Russia would fall to the "snake-like" control of the Bolsheviks if it did not save itself (Ehrman, 2024). These examples of emotional propaganda manipulate audiences through pressure and fear.



Figure 2. For a United Russia L'Exposition (NYPL, 1919). Source: NYPL Digital Collections (public domain). This poster promotes national unity during the Russian Civil War, using symbols with positive and negative connotations to influence public opinion into supporting one side over the other.

3.3. Analysis and Comparison

The Cossack poster's rhetorical question pressures individuals to choose sides, framing neutrality as betrayal and creating a sense of anxiety that discourages independent thought or analysis. The poster depicting the Mensheviks as a white knight almost portrays them as holy and a savior. At the same time, the threat posed by a fierce-looking red dragon, representing the Bolsheviks, uses fear appeal to dramatize the apparent danger at hand and evoke urgency, prompting viewers to align with the idea that the Bolsheviks must be stopped. Both techniques bypass rational evaluation, relying on emotional responses to unanswerable questions and symbolic, connotative images to influence behavior. Like Squealer's tactics, these posters illustrate how fear and social pressure were employed to manipulate perception and consolidate authority during the Russian Revolution. Because *Animal Farm* is an allegory rather than direct historical evidence, this comparison shows how Orwell satirizes these political techniques by transforming them into simplified but recognizable scenes of manipulation on the farm.

4. Linguistic Manipulation in *Animal Farm*

Unlike emotional propaganda, which affects individuals through their feelings, linguistic manipulation limits the ambiguity of the information interpreted. Through simplifying complicated ideas into vague yet positive, glittering generalities, and complicating simple ideas to appear more knowledgeable about a matter and gain trust or using bandwagon to reinforce the desire not to be excluded, the pigs force every animal to adopt the same, biased understanding of the world around them through their strategic wordplay. Linguistic manipulation narrows the range of perceptions for an audience to understand an idea through altering the order of words and definitions of terms themselves. Snowball simplified complicated ideas in the Commandments into "four legs good, two legs bad," taking advantage of the ignorance of the "stupider" animals, an example of a glittering generality (Orwell, 1945). This slogan is also satirical because its simplicity appears childish, yet it becomes politically powerful within the farm's society. Conversely, Squealer used more difficult language for the animals to understand to seem more knowledgeable when he discussed the value of only pigs eating the milk and apples, stating, "Milk and apples (this has been proven by Science, comrades) contain substances necessary to the well-being of a pig" (Orwell, 1945). Finally, the use of bandwagon is implied when Napoleon introduces the idea of "voluntary" labor on Sundays, where an animal that did not volunteer ended up getting cut rations, implying that no animal should feel as if they can get out of such a commitment (Orwell, 1945).

These strategies, which exploit the varying intellect of the animals, cause them to be under the same illusion of the world around them. The oversimplification of language into positive phrases leads the animals to trust these ideas solely because of their sound. The overcomplication of ideas causes animals to believe that the speaker is knowledgeable about the matter at hand, and bandwagon forces them to participate or believe in a concept because others are doing so. As Yan and Liu (2021) argue, "totalitarianism destroys the past civilization through the transformation of language" and "besides the power of expression, language can construct facts," demonstrating how language can recreate society's understanding for the masses. Similarly, Sharma and Bhatt (2023) explain that in *Animal Farm*, "the language was used to distort the facts and control the animals continually," showing how altered phrases and rewritten rules, as well as other phrasing-related incidents, become tools of domination for selfish leaders. Because the animals were unable to read, think critically, or remember their past, they accept the pigs' words as fact. In this way, manipulated language becomes the second half of totalitarian control, fully determining what animals can understand.

5. Linguistic Manipulation in the Russian Revolution

5.1. The Deliberate Simplification of Language

All three aspects of linguistic manipulation discussed were present in the Russian Revolution, parodied in *Animal Farm*. Although Orwell's *Animal Farm* contains incidents such as the simplification of the Commandments into "four legs good, two legs bad," it is difficult to confirm whether there were specific, documented incidents of simplifying policies or announcements into vague, positive terms for manipulative use during the Russian Revolution. However, it can be inferred as a broader rhetorical parallel rather than a direct one-to-one historical claim that this happened because glittering generalities, or the use of broad, positive phrases to convince an audience, are a real phenomenon that happens in other politics with common words such as "freedom," "prosperity," "change," and "security" (Nordquist, 2025).

5.2. The Deliberate Complication of Language

There are, however, documented incidents of overcomplication in language that made the propagandist appear more knowledgeable about the topic they were discussing. Towards the end of the Russian Revolution, peasants were interviewed for a study by Yakov Shafir. In the interview, the peasants, when asked questions about the language used in politics at the time,

stated things like, "Darned if you do not need a translation!" and "Ekh, all those different words. Our soul aches on account of them. You got to have a dictionary. You chew them over and over and still do not get it" (Gorham, 2000). These comments, as made by locals at the time, represent the genuine dismay ordinary people felt towards the confusing, unclear language purposefully used by higher officials, who took advantage of the limited access to political vocabulary among lower classes.

5.3. The Bandwagon Effect

The bandwagon effect was also documented; it was a common technique used to psychologically pressure people into participating in new practices or obeying unfair laws. Like Napoleon, in the novel, described the work on Sundays as "voluntary" but with the punishment of cut rations if one did not show up to work, the concept of "subbotnik" in the Russian Revolution and time after that describes the voluntary initiative to participate in "free collective work on a Saturday or other non-working days" (Golechkova & Chagadaeva, 2021). Although there were no defined punishments, such as the literal cutting of rations for not volunteering in *Animal Farm*, people who did not volunteer for their subbotnik labor were often looked down upon in society and had a worse reputation than others, showing the bandwagon aspect of this manipulation. This social consequence essentially made the "volunteer work" mandatory for the public, but not in a way that higher classes forced lower classes to comply; therefore, the lower classes did the work willingly. This comparison also reinforces the irony of voluntary labor in *Animal Farm*: the language of choice remains present even when real choice has been removed.

6. The Fusion between Both Techniques in *Animal Farm*: Slogans

When emotional propaganda and linguistic manipulation merge, propaganda assumes its most effective form, with the ability to not only transform what individuals feel or understand but also to shape what they believe to be fundamentally true. An example of how Orwell illustrates this fusion is through the strategic use of slogans by the pigs and the poems Minimus writes, which show linguistic manipulation as previously discussed, but also change the way an individual thinks or feels about the matter, as emotion is put into the chanting and singing of these written pieces. Because *Animal Farm* is satire, the simplicity of these slogans becomes ironic: phrases that appear childish or harmless become serious tools for controlling thought. Sheep, for example, are taught to repeat rehearsed phrases so as not to draw objections and discourage new, independent thought; their never-ending chanting distracts and prevents other animals from questioning societal policies and rules or remembering past iterations of the Seven Commandments (Orwell, 1945). The chants were also bellowed loudly and with energy, making them a constant presence in the lives of the other animals. Another example was the required singing of a song called "Comrade Napoleon" by the animals, which praised Napoleon as a revolutionary leader. The poem was full of propaganda that framed Napoleon as a god yet also evoked emotion through the depth of the words and the requirement to sing of the animals with full heart (Orwell, 1945).

As Sharma and Bhatt (2023) note, linguistic manipulation in *Animal Farm* "continually distorts the facts and controls the animals" but becomes magnified when those distortions are delivered in a strategic tone or pitch to target emotion, such as in chants, mottoes, or public celebrations and rituals. These events do more than just manipulate feelings or understanding through emotion or language individually; they, together, create a political environment where loyalty becomes inherent to the animals, and no one dares object. Saoudi (2022) observes that under such totalitarian systems, citizens end up having to "rely on the leader's language to define reality," revealing how repeated exposure to language that is spoken by a specific person labeled as a higher rank shapes collective perception in a crowd by being emotionally charged and strategically phrased. Through these displays of orchestrated "unity," Orwell in his book demonstrates that propaganda achieves its fullest strength through the dual manipulation of strategic phrasing of words and the targeting of the emotions of individuals. The irony of these scenes is that the animals experience chants and songs as unity, while the reader recognizes them as mechanisms of control. Once the animals internalize and genuinely believe these messages, due to the high degree of exposure to them, they no longer misunderstand the truth but become incapable of recognizing that they never knew the truth in the first place.

7. The Use of Slogans in the Russian Revolution

During the Russian Revolution, slogans were also used as effective propaganda techniques that incorporated both linguistic and emotional manipulation. An example of this can be seen when the Bolsheviks tried to gain fame and support for their authority after the October Revolution, where historian Sheila Fitzpatrick explains the party being "popularly associated with the slogan of 'All power to the Soviets'" (Fitzpatrick, 2017), amongst other short phrases. Other slogans, including "Peace, Land, Bread!", which the party used to gain mass support, had a similar emotional appeal. "All power to the Soviets" meant to represent the concept of transferring government authority from the Provisional Government to the "soviets," as in the Bolsheviks. "Peace, Land, Bread!" was meant to represent the three main promises the Bolsheviks made to the people if they were given an authoritative position: they would give the lower classes more peace from war, more land to live and work on, and more food to eat. The saying itself was simplified into an easy-to-understand slogan that spread like wildfire and caught on due to its catchy delivery. However, its meaning remained vague - questions such as "How much peace would there be?",

“How much land?”, “How much food?”, and “When would conditions change?” were purposefully left unanswered by the Bolsheviks and meant little to people who were simply desperate for a better life. This historical use of slogans also strengthens the allegorical reading of *Animal Farm*, where Orwell turns broad revolutionary promises into repeated phrases that sound clear but hide uncertainty.

Short phrases like these were particularly effective because they evoked strong emotional responses, appealing to hope and fear, while also being broad and causing misunderstanding and blind faith. The slogans seemed to convey a promise of better living conditions, more resources, and a higher quality of life overall, as many citizens were weary of war, hungry, and lived and worked in unstable environments. However, they never truly described what these better conditions of life would entail. The citizens of Russia were quick to adopt and value these phrases, demonstrating how the Bolshevik party exploited their destitute state to gain authority and power for itself. This also demonstrates how emotional propaganda, combined with linguistic manipulation, effectively persuaded the masses by simplifying complex ideas into vague phrases and delivering them with an energetic, emotionally appealing tone.

8. Conclusion

In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell demonstrates that the most dangerous instruments of oppression are not physical weapons but carefully engineered emotional propaganda, linguistic manipulation, and a combination of the two. Through Squealer's emotional appeals in his announcements, Napoleon's linguistic distortions in his speeches, and the fusion of both emotional appeal and strategic phrasing in slogans, songs, and rituals throughout *Animal Farm*, Orwell reveals how totalitarian leaders have the power to reshape not only the masses' reaction to announcements and their understanding of new information, but also their perception of the truth as a whole. His use of satire, irony, and allegory strengthens this warning by making the manipulation appear simple on the surface while revealing its serious political consequences. Emotional propaganda destabilizes memory and overwhelms rational thought, while language manipulation limits ambiguity in interpretation by a population. Combined, these strategies create a system where citizens heavily rely on messages from higher-ranking individuals who value obedience to gain an understanding of reality. When compared to the Russian Revolution, the book illustrates how propaganda and linguistic manipulation distort public opinion in real-world politics. This problem remains highly relevant today, as modern societies struggle with misinformation, emotional persuasion, and the rephrasing and reshaping of truth for personal gain. Ultimately, *Animal Farm* is a literary work that warns of the consequences of a population surrendering its abilities to question, remember, or interpret freely, where it becomes vulnerable not through brute force but through the gradual, invisible erosion of truth itself.

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