

George Orwell and Religion: A Marxist Perspective

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the representation of religion in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* through a Marxist critical framework. Drawing on Karl Marx's conception of religion as an ideological apparatus that alienates individuals from their material conditions, the paper analyzes how religious belief functions as a mechanism of social control within the narrative. The character of Moses the raven is interpreted as an allegorical figure representing institutional religion, particularly its role in discouraging revolutionary consciousness among the oppressed. By promising spiritual rewards in the afterlife, Moses diverts the animals' attention from material exploitation and socio-political injustice. The study argues that Orwell's portrayal of religion aligns closely with Marxist critiques, demonstrating how religious ideology can be manipulated by ruling powers to maintain dominance and suppress resistance. Through close textual analysis, the paper highlights Orwell's broader concern with ideological manipulation and the intersection of religion, power, and class struggle.

KEYWORDS: materialistic needs, spiritual needs, bourgeois, common people, etc.

1. INTRODUCTION

In literary criticism, the critique of religion is considered a precondition for critics and philosophers. Karl Marx, a major philosopher, criticized religion, regarding it as a drug that anesthetized the minds of people. In other words, according to Marx's thoughts on religion, individuals pay much attention to the spiritual world, neglecting the secular world. Marx highlights the materialistic world because it is associated closely with their daily lives. In this regard, achieving the materialistic needs is prior to that of the spiritual needs according to the Marxist perspective. George Orwell, in his selected works, specifically *Animal Farm*, adopted the attitudes of Marxism toward religion in general and his personal attitudes in particular, to some extent.

In this context, Orwell, in his book *Animal Farm*, included the issue of religion represented by his character, the raven (Moses), who played a religious role as a priest throughout the book. During the era of the Russian empire, according to the story incidents, Moses' religious ideology had been employed to play the role of straying people against protesting to improve their material life. That is not to think about revolution. Moses managed to a large extent to incite the population never to think about their materialism, promising them to receive all types of rest in the afterlife in paradise as their long living. Therefore, this ideology serves the ruling authority to practice oppression, alienation, exploitation, and injustice against their subjects. Orwell criticized the employment of religious ideology by authorities. In light of the book course incidents, even animals, after their success in their revolution against Mr Jones, the previous owner of the farm animals used religion to control their citizens; however, they fought and hated religion before their revolution. Thus, based on the Marxist allegations against religion and Orwell's adoption of the issue of religion, he illustrates his support for Marxist attitudes in some of his literary works. The current research paper focuses largely on the exploitation of religious ideology in the light of Marxist views. A proper investigation was conducted to explore the reasons, concerns, reactions, challenges, and thoughts embodied in Orwell's literary works through the critical allegations adopted by the Great philosopher and critic Karl Marx.

2. MARX'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS RELIGION: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Religion is an essential aspect of the life of human beings. It is one of the basic domains that contribute to achieving psychological and social stability in the individual's character. It is historically known from the early genesis of the human being for ages that religion is counted as the main norm and tradition that helps people to manage and arrange their lives. From the birth of the Father and Mother of mankind, Adam and Eve, as the first creatures, fell on the earth. They have been created by God, and their story is religious concerning the principles of their creation and the narration of their obedience and disobedience to the religious rules established by God. So religion is the second fundamental part of the human personality after the intellectual one. Religion is the source of inspiration for ethical, moral, and aesthetic values. As it is explicit that the human environment consists of

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three basic worlds namely the materialistic (secular) world (objects and needs for human being life such as money, products, clothes, wealth, furniture, and shelter), the theological (spiritual) world (this world includes intellectual and emotional needs such as knowledge, science, religion, love, hate, revenge, intimacy, friendship, faith, ethics and so on.), and the unknown or unseen world (it embraces supernatural powers, metaphysics, miracles, and mysteries). In this regard, the spiritual needs of people are necessary for their survival and subsistence. To satisfy the emotional instinct is one of the central purposes of individuals in their lives.

Historically, any political or social system employs religious ideology as a means to dominate people. Theology can be defined as a methodological study of the divine nature that focuses on religious dogmas and doctrines. It highlights the sources of sacred religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Daoism, and so on. The authorities employ the religious ideology to control the people, intended to lead them astray and remove them from thinking about their materialistic needs. It is the cornerstone of any political regime. Religion, according to Marx, makes people think only about the satisfaction of their spiritual needs and excludes thinking about their material needs. People, according to the religious norms, are seeking permanent life and paradise after their death. This is a significant thing from a religious perspective. In religion, eternal life must be given more interest than that of the present life. Hence, no need for a human being to live in luxury because he or she has been promised to achieve the idealistic status of heaven, that is, the place where Adam and Eve lived comfortably. Consequently, these religious doctrines had been exploited by the power as a means to dominate their subjects' lives. In this respect, it is important to shed light on the relationship between religion and science. It can be said that religion is unlike science, which investigates the world of facts, where religion investigates the world of meaning. As well as religion also differs from religion in that, as religion explains the world of meaning, it performs it as a logical and rational activity, while religion's reasoning is founded on the thought that is beyond reason.

Furthermore, the criticism of religion according to German philosophy is regarded as the pre-condition and fundamental premise. The eminent German philosopher, Feuerbach, intends in his arguments to warn and liberate people from the illusion of God, to reconstruct their minds and perceptions towards full freedom, and reality. For Hegel, religion and philosophy shared many characteristics. They shared the same content, but they differ in the way of expression. In religion, it includes the shape of perceptual and historical aspects and circumstances, whereas in philosophy, it takes the form of rational and logical interpretations. Marx argued that "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people" (Niebuhr, p. 42). He adds that the criticism of religion "is the premise of all criticism" (Aijaz, p. 39). In the same context, Lenin asserts that religion serves as an opiate that can anesthetize individuals (qtd. in Yue 2002). Lenin added the word anesthetize to Marx's definition of religion. He intends that the ruling class (bourgeois) employ the religious ideology to tempt the ordinary people to think about the improvement of their material needs that are necessary for their lives. Nietzsche has some arguments about religion; for instance, he declares that "Religion is a part of a slave rebellion on a substitute for the unsuccessful slave rebellion on reality" (Andrew, 2014, p. 82). While for Durkheim, "Religion is in a very real sense simply the worship of society" (Skorupski, 1976, p. 34).

3. ORWELL AND RELIGION: AN INTRODUCTION

Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell) is a figure who was born into a religious environment for an Anglican Christian family, but lived with hatred of religion as an atheist for the rest of his life. He is known as an agnostic socialist or atheist humanist. Orwell presented himself as an atheist throughout his literary articulations. He commented on the idea of religion in *The Manifesto of Common Man*, that "it was invariably wise never to mention religion" (Orwell, p. 139). Orwell emphasizes that any writer who gives much concern on political and religious issues will always be influenced by his creative and literary accomplishments, and that it was for analysts and critics to identify their relationships. Above all, Orwell enjoyed the portrayal of the religious architecture, atmosphere, building, nature, ceremonies, occasions, and religious rituals of the church as a symbol of Christianity. He was brought up since early infancy hating church and disliking worship. Based on his brief summary with his experiences, attitudes, and relations with some of religious close friends during childhood, adulthood, and even maturity time, not influence his religious belief or his personal attitudes towards religion as a practiced ritual. Throughout his literary journey as a well-known English writer, he included the idea of religion with a kind of irony, sarcasm, satire, or critique in one way or the other. Major works of his articulations embody the theme of religion represented by characters, places, or symbols. Orwell's writings are full of in-depth and sporadic commentary on a variety of subjects, including Islam, Hinduism, Burmese Christian sects, Christianity, Catholicism, and non-conformist British sects. As well as discussing the fears, interests, and dangers that the widespread antipathy of the 20th-century political movements, such as fascism, communism, and Nazism, towards organized religions related to social structures and individual spirituality.

In this respect, Orwell placed great importance on the spiritual aspect of life and how the current social and political issues interacted with religious matters. This indicates that the personal circumstances, belongings, experiences, and reactions were heavily influenced by Orwell's literary career. According to this background, critics, scholars, philosophers, readers, and literary students can reread Orwell's literary works from various angles, particularly from a religious perspective. As a socialist writer, Orwell sheds much light on the materialistic world rather than the spiritual or religious world. In other words, his main concern was paid to the secular world during his life. However, he included many aesthetic, moral values, idealism, integrity, honorism, honesty, and ethics in most of his writings directly or indirectly. It can be seen that,

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His long-time friend Christopher Holis noted with admiration his ‘unique courage’ in expressing in his writings both his own and modern humanity’s spiritual loneliness and proposed that many of Orwell’s moral perspectives could be explained by the acute sense of sin by which he was haunted. Another close friend, Anthony Powell, felt that Orwell was in his way a sort of saint, even if not one in sparkling raiment bright (Orwell, Preface, p. xii).

It is similar to Orwell, Hitchens believed that the idea of an all-powerful God was fundamentally dictatorial and incompatible with the idea of individual freedom of thought and speech, as outlined in his agnostic dialectics. Orwell had complicated and occasionally contradictory ideas about religious belief and institutions, as Brennan’s in-depth work demonstrates. Orwell and religion do a good job of illustrating how his anti-Catholicism is an anomaly to his ability to analyze and reflect moderately. Brennan demonstrates how readers of Orwell’s writing should not ignore the dissonant themes in his writing.

Obviously, a clear, sustainable, and unique distinction of Orwell’s nature, represented by his real attitudes or fictional identities, seems different from his ideals, thoughts, and reactions throughout his literary articulation, both fictional and non-fictional, about religion. As a born dissident, Orwell always rejected the idea of a spiritual afterlife throughout his writing career and positioned himself as neither conformist nor drawn to any particular organized religion. He has been granted many titles before and after his death, The Prophet, The Saint, The Rebel, and so on, by the followed critics, pioneers, or philosophers.

They are radically contingent, partly believe and always make shift and made over-being variously created, fashioned, built, manufactured, suppressed, and distorted – in a constant interaction of images and information in and through social relations (Orwell, p. xiv).

Upon close examination of Orwell’s words, one can observe a pattern connecting Judaism, anti-Semitism, Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Communism. This pattern highlights Orwell’s strange anti-nominal thinking and how his religious philosophy could be politicized and schematized. He regularly contradicted and compared various “isms” based on standards such as doctrinal orthodoxy’s importance, belonging, political strength, and intellectual appeal. Even though he disliked being compelled to go to church when he was a child. Later on, he stated that:

As long as supernatural beliefs persist, men can be exploited by cunning priests and oligarchs, and the technical progress that is the prerequisite of a just society cannot be achieved (Orwell, p. 439).

4. ORWELL’S INCORPORATION OF RELIGION IN HIS LITERARY WORKS

Orwell appeared to be growing less and less accepting of religion when he got older. It is observed in the book 1984 that religion is mostly absent, especially at the part when the story ends with the remark. “We are the priests of power”, declares O’Brien. Power is God” (Orwell, p. 276). In this situation, O’Brien draws comparisons between the party and God and religion because the party aspires to total control over the thoughts, emotions, bodies, and spirits of its constituents. Throughout the selected novels of George Orwell, particularly *Burmese Days* and *Animal Farm*, much focus was given to the exploration of the issue of religion in *Animal Farm*. It seems another criticism of proletariat culture in Stalinist Russian can be found in *Animal Farm*. It may not seem to make any direct references to Christianity, particularly or religion in general. Though not mentioned directly, religion played a significant role in the lives of the proletariat that Orwell is addressing, and the characters in *Animal Farm* have a complex, ambiguous, and masked connection with it. The prominent and wise character of the book, Old Major, addresses the animals and incites them to liberate themselves from human domination. The animals of Manor Farm, which is ruled by Mr. Jones, are first organized by Old Major, a boar who stands for Karl Marx, in an effort to highlight the virtues of socialism. The concept of an independent farm managed by the animals for the animals’ own benefit is sown by Old Major. Fundamentally, Christianity extols the virtues of compassion and integrity, which are attributes of Christ. But it has repeatedly been tarnished by individuals who lust for power and believe they are better than the average pensioner. The ongoing modification of *Animal Farm*’s morals to suit the interests of the powerful serves as a metaphor for this. It makes sense that a group of downtrodden individuals would look to metaphysical realism for solace. The specific point to be concentrated much when life gets too unbearable unpleasant is the hereafter. This statement can be seen in Karl Marx’s “On Religion”,

Religion suffering is, at on and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of heartless world, and the soul of soulless condition... It is the opium of the people (Karl Marx, p.72).

Orwell concentrated on the class of proletariat represented by Boxer. Right up until the point when he was being hauled away to die in a glue factory, Boxer told himself lies about the circumstances he and the other animals were living. He was too feeble to fight back by then. Orwell is making a statement about the lower classes' remarkable capacity to accept their lot in life and focus all their energy on laborious physical work, leaving them powerless to resist their oppressors should chance present itself. It would be incorrect to talk about the importance of religion in Orwell’s *Animal Farm* without taking into consideration Mr. Jones’ appropriately name Moses. Moses is unique to Mr. Jones, and he has no desire for Manor Farm to undergo an animal revolution. Moses, who resembles a saint who tries to persuade the other animals to accept their lot in life, as they will get to see “Sugar Candy Mountain” in the afterlife, which obviously is a symbol referring to Heaven. Moses goes with Mr. Jones after the animals take over the farm. Once again, the same thing occurred with the authority of Stalin that represented by the *Animal Farm* who employed

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Moses again to astray the animals of thinking about improving of their material life. Religion was used as a political ideology to alienate the people and simplify controlling them. Given that Moses acted as something of an adversary during their first revolution, it is interesting that the pigs let him back onto the property. But because he resembles a priest and stands in for the Russian Orthodox Church, the pigs value his efforts because they would rather that the enslaved animals accept his faith and any prospective rewards in the afterlife rather than rebel against their appalling living conditions. Moses's friendship with Mr. Jones and his subsequent relationship with the pig government both evince this.

Further, in the animals' revolution, Moses remained neutral, and this can be shown, "All animals were now present except Moses, the tame raven, who slept on a perch behind the back door" (Orwell, p.3). Religion can be used as an instrument to manipulate the citizens according to Marxism. To alienate people, the clergymen are being told by their rulers to remind their subjects of the permanent life after death. And this taken place when Moses reminded them to the Sugar Candy Mountain, the sacred place they will face after their death. That is to say, do not focus on your current material life and think about the afterlife. Similar to Mr. Jones' government, the Soviet government, after the decisive victory of the revolution, reused religion as a tool to suppress their subjects' anger, risks, and opposition. To deceive them into thinking about their materialistic future is the purpose of using religion as a weapon. Hence, the religious or clergy man is rarely working as it is with the raven, who has been called the special pet of Mr. Jones, who is the only does not work at all. As well as his refusal to the revolutionary addresses because he is the only animal that does not listen to Old Major's addresses. According to Orwell, "The pigs had an even harder struggle to counter the lies put about by Moses. Moses was not only a storyteller and sly spy but also a gifted orator. He asserted that he was aware of the existence of the miracle of Sugar Candy Mountain, a mysterious nation where all animals are said to have gone after they died. Moses' main job was to confuse the minds of animals by his false incitements and not to think about rebellion. In this case, he exploits their minds in order to serve the ruler.

The pigs has to put up a fierce fight to convince animals that sugar Candy Mountain is imagined and does not really existed even though they detested Moses for telling stories and doing no labor. Based on this, Moses embodies Orwell's perspective on the church that matches Marx's arguments about religion. According to Orwell, the church serves as a tool utilized by dictatorships to maintain the optimism and productivity of the working class. Orwell challenges Marx's notion that the church will simply vanish following the uprising by using Moses as an example. Prior to the uprising, Jones was smart and successful in many aspects and exploited Moses's efforts initially to keep the animals working. The falsehoods about Heaven that the pigs believed would only drive the animals away from the equality of socialism caused them great difficulty in getting rid of Moses. However, Moses rediscovers his position as the Napoleon-led pigs start to resemble Mr Jones more and more. Several years after leaving, he reappears out of nowhere and resumes where he left off. In this case, the animals have already come to understand that equality of uprising is a charade; therefore, the pigs do not mind. Finally, the whole circle is completed when Napoleon gives Moses some beer. Orwell seems to present a very severe and pessimistic picture of the church. This demonstrates that Animal Farm is more than just a work of anti-communism meant to convert readers to capitalism and Christianity. In this regard, Orwell actually discovered several inconsistencies and hypocrisies in both systems. It is fascinating that Russia's leadership has just started to permit religion once more. The Kremlin leaders of today seem to be striving, like the pigs, to keep their people stimulated by the old-fashioned hope of an afterlife rather than the doctrine of communism.

On the other hand, there is another aspect of religion called religious alienation, where at first Mr Jones of the Manor Farm used religion to drugize his subjects and tempted them to not think about their materialistic needs and to think about life after death. This role has been performed by Moses, the clever raven who managed to distract the animals' attention about the changes of people's lives into the better. According to the Marxist arguments, religion alienates citizens from thinking to improve their current life styles. But finally, the revolutionary leaders who is repressed by their leader Napoleon deviated deliberately and used the religious ideology again for their own interests. They used religious tactics in order to exploit people and urge them to make many efforts without thinking about their own personal interests. To tempt their supporters, Napoleon gradually replaced the revolutionary principles of the group or general (ownership) with private ownership. It can be said that the system shifted from communism to capitalism or from feudalism to dictatorship. Workers made their great efforts in order to increase the state income, but the state leaders did not appreciate these ordinary people and improve their standard of life. This, therefore, indicates clearly to exploitation.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the deep exploration of the course incidents of the book Animal Farm as an instance, regarding the role played by the clergy character Moses, Orwell intended to point out the significance of the religious ideology. He illustrated that religion always stands against any materialistic improvement that can occur in the life of ordinary people. He reveals that religion is against any socio-political changes to a better life. Religion in the light of Marxism stands as an obstacle against any claims for a revolution for the sake of improving their lives. According to the Marxist thoughts, religion alienates people and prevents them from thinking about their materialistic needs are very necessary for individuals' survival and subsistence, whereas religion considers these needs as secondary needs. In short, Orwell to some extent adopted the Marxist attitudes that criticize religion regarding the neglect of the materialistic needs that can improve the daily lives of the common people.

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