



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Animal Images and Metaphors in *Animal Farm*

Ping Sun¹

ABSTRACT

In literary works animal images are frequently used as the “source domain” of a metaphor to disclose the natures of the “target domain”, human beings. This is called “cross-domain mapping” or “conceptual metaphor” in cognitive linguistics, which is based on the similar qualities between animals and human beings. Thus the apparent descriptions of the animals are really the deep revelations of the human beings. *Animal Farm* is one exemplary product of this special expressing way. Diversified animal images are intelligently used by George Orwell to represent the people, so all the characters are animals in appearance, but humans in nature. Starting from the animal images and then the conceptual metaphors, readers can perceive a fresh understanding of this classical book. In this novel, three conceptual metaphors are identified and the special findings can be illustrated as the following: Firstly, the whole story of the animals represents the history and politics of the Soviet Union. Secondly, the pigs symbolize the authorities of the society. Thirdly, the names of the characters in the novel reveal their identities.

Key words: Animal farm, animal image, metaphor.

Available Online: 13th May, 2015.

This is an open access article under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, 2015.

1.0 Introduction

Researches in sociology evidence an intrinsic rapport between humans and animals, claiming that they share many similar characteristics (Walsh, 2009). Animal studies find that it is even possible for humans to obtain similar goals and satisfactions in interactions with animals (Jerolmack, 2009), and the recent

¹Associate Professor, Teaching Department of Ideological and Political Theory, North China Electric Power University, Beijing 102206, P. R. China, Email: wpsunhd@sina.com.

multidisciplinary animal studies propose to reject the previous views of the distinct hierarchy between humans and animals in interactions (Slater, 2012). All these suggest that humans and animals are closely interrelated. This may be the reason why in the field of literature, animal images are frequently used to refer to human beings. Taking animals as the main characters, most fairytales can vividly reveal the complex relationships between people or the unique emotions harbored by people. Reading animal stories, we can get closer to the natural world so as to understand the deep inside of the human beings. *Animal Farm*, the famous political satire written by George Orwell, successfully used the animal images to delve into humans' natures and disclosed the dark side of the social structure, fusing the author's political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole (Liu & Chen, 2013; Zhou & Xu, 2011).

George Orwell, an English novelist and essayist, has been compared and contrasted with Leo Tolstoy, and for his obvious different attitude towards life, Orwell was regarded as a "this-worldly humanist" (Pearce, 1998). All of Orwell's works are concerned with the sociopolitical conditions of his time, and *Animal Farm* is no exception. As one of the most celebrated writers of the day, *Animal Farm* marked his entry into the halls of literary fame. However, the publication of the novel went through a long tortuous road, with publisher after publisher finding reasons for refusing or delaying publication. It got published finally.

The animals, the events as well as the plots have symbolic meanings, which facilitates the novel with specific aesthetic effects (Chen, 2008). Motivated and propelled by his strong desire to arouse people's awareness of the greed and deception of Stalinism, George Orwell desperately created the animal characters based on the stereotypes of some leaders as well as the common people in the Soviet Union. And knowing this background, every reader tends to match the important animal characters in the novel with the main leaders in the revolution of the Soviet Union. We will just take the following three as examples to illustrate the point. First, Old Major shares many aspects with Karl Marx, the former creates "animalism" in the song *Beasts of England*, sees the suffering of the animals and wants to lead them out of the miserable condition but dies before the revolution because of its old age, while the latter invents "communism", wants to unite the working class to overthrow the government, but dies before the Russian revolution. The second match is between Napoleon and Joseph Stalin, for both of them are aggressive and cruel to kill all those on their way. Finally, Snowball is easily to be taken by readers as the symbol of Leon Trotsky, a pure communist leader, who is influenced a lot by the teachings of Karl Marx, and wants to improve the life for the people in Russia, but is driven away by Stalin's secret police.

It mocks and satires the totalitarianism and the cruelty of human nature from three aspects, non-linear space, language fallacies and rhetoric methods (Zhang & Wang, 2014). The plot of the novel *Animal Farm* forms a circle in some sense. It narrates a story of how a utopia becomes a dystopia. The story starts when Old Major gives a speech on revolution at Manor Farm. Three days later after the speech, Old Major dies, so Snowball and Napoleon emerge as the leaders of the newly named Animal Farm. The 'revolution' begins when Mr. Jones becomes too drunk to feed the animal. Finally he loses the farm though he tries to retake it. However, divergence and conflicts begin to appear between the two leaders. After a dispute over building a windmill, Napoleon has his dogs chase away Snowball from the farm. In the end of the story, all the old animals die off, and Squealer soon takes over the farm from Napoleon and walks on two legs. The name of the farm is changed back to Manor Farm. In the final scene, the pigs invite the human beings for dinner, during which the animals are watching through a window outside and they are horrified to realize that they can no longer tell the human's faces from that of the animals. Everything returns to its starting point. The whole story is concerned with revolution, and the goal of that revolution is to seek equality. To reinforce this point, Orwell cites the passage from the American Declaration of Independence containing the phrase "All men are created equal". The ironic slogan, "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others", has become part of the language.

A classical novel fused with political ideas, *Animal Farm* aroused the interests of various readers. Taking

it just as a fairytale, most readers are impressed by the vivid animal characters in the novel. Knowing the background of the writing, the readers who are interested in politics will get a better and deeper understanding of the historical period of Soviet Union. Literary analysis provides the readers with a special way to appreciate the humorous, sarcastic and ironic descriptions intended by George Orwell, the author (Liu & Chen, 2013; Zhao, 2010), or to see a male-centered society, with the female characters being despised as hollow or silent (Xu, 2015).

All in all, most researches center on the well combination of the author's political purposes and artistic purposes from the perspective of literature analysis (Zhou & Xu, 2011). A cognitive linguistic approach will be proposed in this paper. Starting from the different animal images in the novel, this paper aims to analyze the conceptual metaphors used in it, which will provide readers with a fresh perspective in understanding both the successful characterization and the deep meaning of the book.

2.0 A cognitive approach

The term image refers to an idea in a poem or a book, and animal image is the prototype of an animal's picture in one's mind. In literary works animal images are sometimes used to function as the source of a *metaphor*, that is, the similar qualities between animals and human beings can be highlighted so that apparent descriptions of the animals aim at the deep revelations of the human beings. The various animal images are intelligently used by the author of *Animal Farm* to give vivid descriptions of the diversified people, based on the similarities between humans and animals. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as a 'cross-domain mapping' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003), with some aspects of the similarities between the 'source domain' and the 'target domain' highlighted. A primary tenet of this theory is that metaphors are matter of thought and not merely of language: hence, the term *conceptual metaphor*. In the example "Love is a journey," the *source domain* is "journey", from which we draw metaphorical expressions, and the *target domain* is "love", the one we try to understand.

According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980/2003), conceptual metaphors are seen in language in our everyday lives, which shape not just our communication, but also the way we think and act. An example of one of the commonly used conceptual metaphors is "Argument is War", which shapes our language in the way we view argument as war or as a battle to be won, thus our understanding of the sentence "He won that argument" is "Argument is just like war. He defeated all the others in the argument". A conceptual metaphor uses one idea and links it to another to better understand something which is usually difficult or abstract to explain. In animal stories like *Animal Farm*, the basic conceptual metaphor is "Humans are Animals", in which the *source domain* is the animals and the *target domain* is the humans, and the cross-domain mapping means that some aspects of the similarities between animals and humans can be elaborated by the writer to get at a better and deeper disclosure of the human nature through his apparent light and casual talk about the animals. A lot of covert conceptual metaphors can be found in this book.

In the appreciation of poems, successful understanding of the uses of metaphor, the cross-domain mapping, can help the readers delve deep into both the cognitive and affective meaning (Sopory, 2005). And in reading a novel this special method can also be applied. Understanding the metaphors is a good starting point for the analysis of the novel *Animal Farm*. From the perspective of animal images and the specific conceptual metaphors used in this novel, average readers can perceive a fresh understanding of this famous book. Through analyzing the successful use of animal images and metaphors, this paper aims to provide a new way to understand how George Orwell, the author of *Animal Farm*, spared no effort to tackle a serious political issue by the apparent telling of an animal story.

3.0 Animal images in the novel

As is defined above, animal image is what a picturesque impression the animal leaves in a person's mind, including both the animal's appearance and its special characteristics. Why did George Orwell choose pigs instead of any other animal as the representatives of the main members of human society? It is of course not the result of a random selection. The pigs were chosen here not because of the appearance but because of their "greedy, stupid, dirty and noisy" characteristics which are quite similar to the evil natures of human beings. These aspects are respectively highlighted in the story and various vivid characters are created. Napoleon became the final leader on the farm, the substitute of Mr. Jones, is just because he is the utmost greedy one.

Humans are complicated and varied, so are the pigs in this story. To distinguish between those pigs, the author gave them different depictions for their roles on the farm. For example, Old Major was described as stout, majestic-looking, wise and benevolent. Napoleon was large, rather fierce-looking, not talkative, but aggressive. Snowball was full of life and spirits, quick in speech and inventive, but not deep in character. Squealer, a brilliant talker, was small and fat, with very round cheeks, twinkling eyes, nimble movements, and a shrill voice.

If pigs resemble people in the leading position most, the ordinary people have their matches in other animals. This was based on the animal images in our minds. The horse to us is usually "a large strong four-legged animal with hard feet (hooves), which people ride on and use for pulling heavy things". The Cart horses, Boxer and Clover are the good illustrations of this hard-working image. Clover was a stout motherly mare approaching her middle life, and Boxer was an enormous beast, nearly eighteen hands high, and as strong as any two ordinary horses put together. However, not all horses follow the typical image. The white mare Mollie in this story was described as pretty but foolish. Immediately after she took a place near the front, she "began flirting her white mane, hoping to draw attention to the red ribbon it was plaited with" (Orwell, 2000:6).

What about the image of a cat? It is a small four-legged animal with soft fur and sharp claws. People sometimes say that a cat has nine lives, meaning that it always seems to stay alive and unhurt even in dangerous situations. This specific characteristic can be seen from the cat of this story: The Cat looked round, as usual, for the warmest place, and finally squeezed herself in between Boxer and Clover; there she purred contentedly throughout Major's speech without listening to a word of what he was saying (Orwell, 2000:6). The other minor animals on the farm, like the dogs, the hens, the pigeons, the sheep, and the cows, are not given adequate distinct individual descriptions. The readers can use their common images to understand their positions in this story.

All in all, in this story, no other animals than pigs are more like the humans, especially like the people at the top of the hierarchy of the society. All the other animals are the minor people in the whole society. That the author chooses to use animals to represent people proves to be an ingenious way. Animals have their own complex peculiarities and they can perfectly match the intricacy of human nature. Just like the leaders are the so called intelligent pigs in the novel, the strong laborer named Boxer is a muscular horse and the populaces are the quiet sheep in the story, who always follow the leaders, obey their rules and tolerate the tyrannical leadership. As we can see, the features of animals are properly depicted to disclose the diversified characteristics of human beings and such a kind of cross-domain mapping is really thought-provoking.

4.0 Metaphors used in the novel

By successfully using the animal images, the characters in the animal world have their respective referents in the real human society. Thus we can perceive the vivid characters in the human world. Besides the unforgettable characters, after reading this story, a lot of thoughts are formed in our mind. In the following part we will talk about three conceptual metaphors to understand the profound meanings the author intended and provoked in the readers' mind.

4.01 Humans are animals

The whole story is based on the basic conceptual metaphor “humans are animals” in the sense that the ironic animal story represents the politics of Russia. Every reader knows that Orwell’s sarcasm is towards Stalin and his government but he never blames Stalin outright, otherwise certain readers will be alienated because Stalin proved to be an ally against Adolf Hitler’s Nazi forces. By choosing this kind of style, a fable, he expands his potential audience for a political story. For example, the long-lasting “war” between Napoleon and Snowball just represents the “fighting” between Stalin and Trotsky. The song *Beast of England*, the animal version of Bryon’s work *Men of England* which saluted to revolution and freedom, reveals the ordinary people’s voice for getting out of suffering. Even the flag printed the hoof and horn is the copy of the flag of the Soviet Union, only in a sarcastic and ironical way. There are still some other matches in the story, which make the novel not just a simple animal story, but a meaningful reflection of history. Reading this novel can be easy if we just read the surface, but it can be really hard if we think deep.

4.02 Leaders are Pigs

Among all the animals, in this story, pigs dominate the animal world. This forms another conceptual metaphor in the readers’ mind, that is, “leaders are pigs.” The pigs in this story symbolize the authorities of the society. They are smart to some extent, because they become the pioneer to teach other animals to read and acquire knowledge. However, their total goal is to educate them on reading the Seven Commandments. Education is just their method to enhance their power and rule, which actually may happen in the human world.

What’s more, Napoleon the pig symbolizes the government, who uses many merciless measures to strengthen his status. He uses violence to punish the populace and he creates an imaginary enemy—Snowball—to emphasize his absolute justice, by sending the rumors that Snowball tries hard to ruin their products. This is really a “smart” way because it leads people to believe in him and trust his domination. Violent leadership forces the populace to obey because it threatens their lives. In such situations, most people would like to put up with the reality because their only concerns are their own lives. Only few can stand out to challenge, however, those brave men will eventually become the victims of such a kind of controlling government.

4.03 Names are identities

The names of the animals give them respective labels, so a third conceptual metaphor can be perceived. It is “names are identities”. For instance, the names of the two leaders of the farm, “Snowball” and “Napoleon”, totally reflect their characteristics. Napoleon is named after Napoleon I, one of the greatest military leaders in history and emperor of France, who conquered much of Europe. Napoleon, the well-known aggressive and inspirational leader in history, fought in the French Revolution but then consolidated the power for himself, and left the French empire in a state that, in many ways, looked like the monarchy that they have just overthrown. In this sense Napoleon the pig resembles Napoleon the man. Snowball the pig is not a name of a historical figure. The metaphorical meaning of this word suggests a process that starts from an initial state of small significance and builds upon itself, becoming larger and larger. However it brings us a feeling of softness and fragility. Snowball the pig, becoming larger and stronger gradually, is still easily to be destroyed. So he is beaten by Napoleon’s power in the end.

The raven Moses is named after Moses the man, a religious leader who delivers the people from a terrible situation and leads a great big horde of people out of oppression and into freedom. The ironical effect is Moses the raven does not do anything like Moses the man. There is no necessity to mention the implied meaning of the name Boxer, which refers to a person who appears to be strong in body but hollow in mind. So the name suggests a strong but simple-minded person. This fits Boxer, the strong

but illiterate pig, in the story. As is indicated in squealer the word, Squealer the pig is a big-mouthed talker. He is always eloquent and plausible that all the animals are talked to peace by him, so he becomes Napoleon's mouthpiece. It may represent the propaganda department that works to support Stalin's image.

All in all, based on this conceptual metaphor, we can see that the smart uses of the names make the characters more impressive and typical, so the audience can easily grasp the features of the characters the author wants to show.

5.0 Conclusion

From the perspective of animal images and conceptual metaphors, we can have a fresh understanding of the classical work *Animal Farm*. Firstly, the whole story of the animals just represents the history and politics of the Soviet Union, or more broadly, it can refer to any non-democratic society. Secondly, the pigs, more than any other animal, symbolize the authorities of the society, so the greedy aspect of the leaders is disclosed. Thirdly, the choices of the names are not random and each name of the characters in the novel reveals its special characteristics.

Though it was written as an attack on Soviet Union, a specific government, the novel's general themes on oppression, suffering, and injustice have far broader applications, and modern readers tend to see it as a powerful attack on any political, rhetorical, or military power that seek to control human beings unjustly. Whether Orwell intended to mock at the exact revolutionary leaders in the Soviet Union by creating these vivid animal characters is not that important today, because we find that the stereotypes of those animal characters exist in any dictatorial society. Napoleon can be any dictator in a non-democratic country.

Besides, it also arouses our deep thoughts in a modern society. The thoughts are not only concerned with the cruel leaders but also with the obedient populace. It appeals to people's emotions and also gives us warnings. We may feel scary because we can see the populace's emotions and beliefs are so easy to be made use of. However, have you ever thought about whether our human beings are such stupid? Do we really totally believe in what the government said all the time? Or it is just because we convince ourselves to have the faith that the justice and the bright future are held tightly in our leaders' hand without further thinking? Yes we do. We do care about our own lives much more than our society, our nation and our world's future, so more and more people prefer to be worldly-wise to make them safe. We do believe in the authorities but sometimes we lose our own statements. So the reality happens not only because of the controlling government, but also because of our own weakness.

References

- Chen, S. B. 2008. The Symbolic Meaning in *Animal Farm*. *Journal of Chengdu University*, 22(6): 112-114.
- Jerolmack, C. 2009. Humans, Animals, and Play: Theorizing Interaction When Intersubjectivity is Problematic. *Sociological Theory*, (27): 371-388.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. 1980/2003. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Liu, Y. & Chen, R. 2013. The Collection of Absurdity in *Animal Farm*—"Pig", the leader of revolution. *Journal of Hubei TV University*, 33 (11): 80-81.
- Orwell, G. 1945/2000. *Animal Farm*. China Zhigong Press.
- Pearce, R. 1998. Orwell, Tolstoy, and *Animal Farm*. *The Review of English Studies*, 49 (193): 64-69.
- Slater, M. B. 2012. Rethinking Human-animal Ontological Differences: Derrida's "Animot" and Cixous's "Fips". *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 16 (5): 685-693.
- Sopory, P. 2005. Metaphor and Affect. *Poetics Today*, 26 (3): 433-458.
- Walsh, F. 2009. Human-Animal Bonds I: The Relational Significance of Companion Animals. *Family*

Process, 48 (4): 462-480.

Xu, H. Y. 2015. *Animal Farm* from the Perspective of Feminism. *Xueyuan*, (2): 69-70.

Zhang, J. S. & Wang W. D. 2014. On the Narrative Arts in *Animal Farm*. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 22 (4): 78-81.

Zhao, Y. H. 2010. Black Humor in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. *Journal of Jilin Institute of Architecture and Civil Engineering*, 27 (3): 115-117.

Zhou, X. Y. & Xu, H. Y. 2011. The Studies of *Animal Farm* in China. *Literature Research*, 244-247.