

# Satire in animal farm, a modest proposal and a political cartoon essay



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The ability of composers of satire to expose human faults and follies reflects their talents to mirror the way society acts, causing their respective audiences to reflect, judge and recognize the need for reform. Animal Farm, Orwell's allegorical critique of the Russian Revolution, reveals the innate malevolence of mankind through the corruption and perversion of Marxist ideals. Jonathan Swift's sharp wit and biting sarcasm in his ironically named "A Modest Proposal" calls to attention the atrocious treatment of the Catholic peasants by the English Protestants. In a cartoon published in the Sydney Morning Herald on August 11 2012, John Spooner seeks to criticize and reveal the flaws of Julia Gillard's recent Carbon Tax Scheme.

As such, each text acts as a sobering revelation that inspires change by challenging the audience's perspective of what is right and wrong. "Under capitalism, man exploits man. Under communism, it's just the opposite." This pithy statement by economist John Kenneth Galbraith sums up the moral of George Orwell's Animal Farm, a satire of the Russian Revolution that inspires change by exposing the vices of human nature.

Initially, the animals' dissatisfaction with Farmer Jones' incompetence as "Man... the only creature that consumes without producing" incites rebellion. In the Revolution, Orwell explicates an idealist doctrine through the manifestation of Marxist theory in Old Major's "Animalism", "let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades", with the effective use of rhetoric in a sincere and uplifting tone forming the foundations of their utopian society. However, Orwell's use of irony in "in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices"

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foreshadows the breakdown of their utopian ideals and the rise to power of Napoleon, the main antagonist.

As Animal Farm progresses, the irony in the aforementioned warning becomes all the more apparent as the inherent human vices of greed and lust for power begin to pervert the original doctrines of Animalism. Despite Major's inspiring rhetoric, "no animal must ever tyrannize over his own kind. All animals are equal", the higher echelons of the Russian hegemony (the pigs) soon begin to reserve privilege and power for themselves, as shown through an allusion to Russian propaganda in Squealer, "Comrades! You do not imagine that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. Through the use of this highly ironic rhetorical question cast with manipulative overtones, Orwell further exposes the iniquities of human nature through the exploitation of the common animals. This is complemented with the use of macabre imagery in "before Napoleon's feet... the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones", which denotes a clear inversion of Major's ideals to an oppression and domination that is just as bad, if not worse, than the previous leadership.

Ultimately, the resulting depravity is echoed in Orwell's final observation, "the creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig... but already it was impossible to say which was which", in which the circuitous and cyclical nature of mankind is revealed, showcasing Orwell's ability to incite social and political reform in not only his condemnation of

communism, but exposing of the tendency of mankind to return to greed,  
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death and depravity. Unlike Orwell's animal fable, Swift's "A Modest Proposal" adopts a completely different medium to mirror the flaws of society, using an economist's pamphlet to ridicule the oppression and exploitation of the Catholic Irish peasants by the English Protestants. Swift initially gains credibility through objectively describing the status quo, "roads and streets... crowded with beggars of the female sex". However, when the true nature of his "modest" proposal is revealed in his outrageous expedient to sell Irish babies at "exactly 1 year old" to "contribute to the feeding of thousands", it becomes indubitably clear that this cannibalistic commercial venture is anything but "modest", introducing an understatement of epic proportions. In a fashion similar to the exploitation of the common animals by the unscrupulous leaders of Animal Farm, Swift alludes to the victimization of the Irish proletariat by the English landowners through absurdist logic and black humour in "this food will be very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to children."

As such, through the effective use of sarcastic comparisons and ironic exaggerations in his shocking proposal where he ultimately professes, "I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny", Swift asserts his ability to expose the flaws of society in order to evoke change. Like Swift, who condemned the English ruling power, John Spooner highlights the inadequacies of the Australian Government in regard to Labor Party's new 'Carbon Tax' policy. This is reflected in his caricatures of both Julia Gillard and Wayne Swan who are seated in couches and appear extremely cold due to "rising power costs on our carbon pricing" which render them unable to afford

heating. Through use of rhetorical question cast with farcical overtones in Julia's speech, " That's the whole bloody idea, remember? Putting fossil fuel out of business", Spooner accentuates the foolishness of Gillard's scheme to oust a power source that accounts for over 90% of Australia's energy.

The impracticality of Gillard's policy is conveyed through her impossible request, " Now go and rig up a windmill or something. I'm freezing," hence showcasing Spooner's ability to use absurdity in a cartoon medium to expose the faults of the carbon tax to cause the audience to recognize a need for change. Thus, in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and John Spooner's political cartoon, the shortcomings of mankind are reflected in an distorted mirror of society, one that is later polished clean to reveal a much more offensive reality. Ultimately, each author conveys the ability of satire to inspire and evoke change, or as Samuel Johnson expresses, each " showed that wit, confederated with truth, had such force as authority was unable to resist. "