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ANTI-COMMUNIST THOUGHT IN LITERATURE: *ANIMAL FARM AND DOCTOR ZHIVAGO*

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Abstract

No ideology has managed to impact and change world politics the way communism did in the twentieth century. It has brought about crucial changes in international relations. A wonderful idea in spirit, it engendered critics even in its heyday. Anti-communist sentiments have been strong since the middle of the twentieth century and have only grown over time. As opposed to mere non-adherence to communist ideology, anti-communism must be understood as a strong stand or conviction *against* communism. Just as the Soviet regime took to using literature for propaganda, anti-communists with their own oppositional agenda have sought to using literature as a tool. There have been some who neither had institutional backing nor propaganda in mind, yet wrote about communism with sometimes explicit, and at other times implicit, hostility. History did not consult these people, as it consults none. But either through personal experience or through observant learning, these writers sought to express their criticisms of communism in meaningful ways. Though objective truth is an ever-elusive destination and truth itself is a plural entity, one may agree that literature serves truth better than recorded history. It is with such belief that this study seeks to understand anti-communist sentiment through its representation in literature. To accomplish this task this paper focuses on two of the most widely appreciated books of the past century: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

Keywords: anti-communism, Russian revolution, totalitarianism, Orwell, Pasternak

Communism has not been a simplistic ideology for political and economic theorists or historians to understand. It has many schools of thought and has manifested into various forms over time. It has developed from socialism which itself is an umbrella term and has many variations. Communism as is commonly understood today is the one that follows from the teachings of Karl Marx and

Friedrich Engels. However, there are other non-Marxist types of communism. The scope of this study, though, excludes them. Communism, as taken in the course of this paper, originates from Marx's works. Twentieth century implementations of communist thought worldwide have borrowed from Marxism with slight or drastic variations, the ultimate goal across these variations being common

ownership of the means of production in a classless, stateless and moneyless society. The means to achieve this goal has been a turning point of differentiation among these implementations. However, ignoring the intricacies, the commonality among various twentieth century communist practical experimentations has been a revolutionary seizure of State power as a road to the final stage of a stateless society. Interestingly, that has never happened. The State has always remained, and in most instances has manifestly become totalitarian in the guise of welfare. The theory and practice of communist principles have an unfortunate and huge gulf between them. Marx declared, "Philosophers have sought to interpret the world: what matters, however, is to change it." Marxist theory seeks to do that but has evidently failed in function. A major demonstration to this end has been the case of the Soviet Union. The Russian Revolution was historically the first communist revolution that was successful and finally led to the establishment of the USSR. This has in turn led people to associate Marxist practice with Soviet practice, and thus read the failure of communism into the failure of the Soviet Union, alongside that of other communist countries. Thus, coincidentally but significantly, the two books selected for this study also refer to the Soviet experience. While Pasternak details lived reality while giving it a fictional form, Orwell translates his personal experience in the Spanish Civil War into what he perceives as the truth of the Stalinist rule and frames it in animal allegory.

Animal Farm is a biting product of Orwell's disillusionment with Communist politics and practice. It is based on the development of Soviet ideology and focuses on the Soviet experience under Stalin. It is important to note that Orwell himself never visited Russia and his work is based on what he gathered from learning, observation and information about the Stalinist regime. The text is in the form of an animal fable with characters and events whose symbolic representation can easily be decoded by study. It is worthy to note that although Orwell believed strongly in socialist ideals, he felt that the Soviet Union realized these ideals in a terribly perverse form, especially under Stalin. No wonder, in the Eastern Bloc, both *Animal Farm* and

later *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were on the list of forbidden books until the end of communist rule in 1989, and were only available via clandestine Samizdat networks.

The novella begins with a dream that Old Major has and wants to share with the other animals on the farm. Through a moving speech he delineates the injustices and troubles of their lives and the singular cause behind them all: Man. He passes them the idea of the Rebellion and though he does not know when it will come, he "know[s], as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done." After the death of the Old Major, the animals successfully carry out the Rebellion much sooner than they had expected it to happen. But as time progresses, the revolutionary principles are turned on their heads and the pigs consolidate power as the class that rules over the rest of the animals. The corruption of revolutionary ideals is ironic to the absolute and final extent that the pigs can no longer be distinguished from the humans with whom they now readily mingle. Thus, one form of injustice has only been replaced by another as the animals continue to live miserable and unequal lives while being deceived by new oppressors in the guise of 'comrades' – the pigs.

The song that Old Major leaves to the animals as legacy becomes an anthem for the Rebellion. Its words instill optimism clothed in surety and its tune rouses passion and profound emotions of comradeship while at the same time acting as a sure means of providing motivation to work – harder, and towards the fulfillment of the Rebellion. The Rebellion, until it actually happens, is not something that any of the animals can predict in terms of time and place. It may be tomorrow, the next week, the next year or hundred years down the line. All that matters is that all animals must strive to work towards its fulfillment. This is a service not just to themselves but to the future generations who would, in a different scenario, blame them for lack of foresight and failure of requisite dutiful action. "Beasts of England" quickly strikes a chord with the animals and is sung repeatedly at a number of occasions. The uncertainty with respect to the time and place of the Rebellion, but the unwavering faith in its certainty in the minds of Old Major and

subsequently the other animals, is reminiscent of a similar uncertainty and yet surety held by communists in the Proletarian Revolution. Marx himself was not sure of how and when the revolution would occur but he was as certain of it (as a result of his scientific socialism) as he was of the sun rising in the east every morning.

Moses the tame raven represents organized religion and hence the name Moses. He eloquently talks about the existence of Sugarcandy Mountain to which all animals went when they died. Just like the Christian Heaven, Sugarcandy Mountain is a place devoid of suffering or pain and full of luxury and happiness. However, like their human Russian counterparts, the pigs have a tough time counteracting these lies because they feel such a promise as that of Sugarcandy Mountain will act as the opiate of the animals like religion does, and prevent them from working harder to change their earthly conditions. Later when Moses reappears after a long absence, the pigs allow him to stay on the farm and even provide him beer because by now the pigs have turned into exploiters just like Mr Jones. Now it would do good to have Moses pacify the animals by his religious promise so that the animals continue to obediently work hard even under miserable conditions, without rising in revolt, for a better afterlife awaits them.

The complete institutional setup with mandatory props such as the green flag painted with the hoof and horn signifying the future Republic, the general assembly called the Meeting, the resolutions that only the pigs put forward and the various Animal Committees, parallel the institutionalization of the Soviet government. The projects, like the Animal Committees formed by Snowball, however, were a "failure", the reader is informed. The attempt to tame wild creatures and the immediate breakdown of it, for instance, can be interpreted as the communist belief that the nature of man could be changed and that it was in fact going to change, that man was going to be sociologically more responsible. Orwell shrewdly illustrates an instance in which the cat becomes very active in the "Reeducation Committee" and tries to trick the sparrows by saying that since now all animals are comrades, anyone of the birds could come to perch

on her paw without fear. The sparrows, however, turn out to be sensible and cautious. Such a blatant example of misuse of change of rules is deeply symbolic of the many ways by which the cunning man exploits circumstances in all seasons no matter how 'pure' and 'principled' the times are. The descriptions of differences in capabilities and intelligences in being able to learn the alphabet and read the Seven Commandments is particularly insightful commentary. While the pigs could already read and write perfectly, the dogs though learned showed lack of interest in reading anything except the Commandments. Benjamin was capable but never exercised his faculty. Clover was unable to put words together whereas Boxer could not get beyond the letter D. This is a clever illustration of the fact that all individuals are *not* equal in their talents, capabilities, intelligences and interests.

The news of "what had happened on Animal Farm" spread across half the county like news of what had happened in Russia spread. The other farmers though suspicious of the sustainability of the new Animal government were thoroughly frightened and anxious that something similar might happen on their 'capitalist' farms. On the other hand, flights of pigeons exerted to spread the lessons of the Rebellion and teach them 'Beasts of England'. Like Russian Communists the animals too believed in the 'world-scale' of their Rebellion and nurtured hopes of a future when 'bourgeois' Man was altogether done away with and 'proletariat' animals across all farms lived in absolute harmony and equality, bearing the fruits of their own hard labour. The violence that ensued when foreign enemies, the neighbouring farmers, attacked Animal Farm is clearly a parallel of the Russian Civil War in which counter-revolutionary Whites fought the Reds in what was a long and bloody battle. Snowball's little speech exhorting the animals to be "ready to die" for the cause of the Rebellion echoes the fanaticism and passion of communists – both its strength and fatal flaw. The debate on the question of the defence of the farm, and the arguments that on the one hand procuring firearms is the only way, and on the other that if they could successfully stir up rebellions everywhere there would be no need to

defend themselves, is essentially the debate that the Soviet government was faced with.

Sheila Fitzpatrick explains how an elite group – party as well as non-party professionals and Communist officials – was created under the Stalinist regime. This group “was set apart from the masses of the population not only by high salaries but also by privileged access to services and goods and a variety of material and honorific rewards” (108). This is exactly what the pigs enjoy in the book. With time they shift to Mr Jones’ farmhouse and allow themselves exclusive supplies of milk and apples – privileges that they had initially pledged not to be allowed to any animal. They start sleeping in beds and slyly change the commandment to “No animal would sleep in a bed *with sheets*.” All this is based on the explanation that Squealer gives – that the pigs’ sole object in doing these things is to preserve their health, that they the ‘intellectuals’ and thus the ‘saviours’ are working hard, and that if the “brainworkers” were to fail in their duty because of reasons such as ill health Mr Jones was sure to return and this is surely something the animals want least of all. The fear that Squealer and the pigs instill in the minds of the other animals by using Mr Jones possible return is a lesson in fear being the tool of dominance and power. For Soviet apologists, this led to a problem of describing Soviet society without suggesting a class hierarchy with a ruling or exploiting class at the top. Fitzpatrick further writes:

The 1936 Constitution guaranteed equal rights to all citizens of the socialist Soviet state, regardless of class. But even in a society of equals, some may be more equal than others. In official Soviet writings, the ‘more equal’ group seemed to be the working class, since, in deference to its historic achievements, it was still accorded a ‘leading role’ in Soviet society. But in practice, of course, it was the group with higher status and greater privileges that was ‘more equal’ – that is, the intelligentsia stratum or white-collar elite (116).

This privileging of one class over the others manifests itself gradually in the way the animals sit during Meetings in *Animal Farm*. Napoleon, with

Squealer and Minimus, “sat on the front of the raised platform, with the nine young dogs forming a semicircle round them, and the other pigs sitting behind.” On the other hand, “the rest of the animals sat facing them in the main body of the barn.” Clearly, the formation of the oppressive class has manifested in the physical arrangements of the Meetings that were in spirit the embodiment of the class harmony, equality and comradeship among the animals. Before this, the struggle for preeminence between Stalin and Trotsky emerges in the rivalry between Napoleon and Trotsky. The cunning and malicious leader who always thought only about consolidating his power (Napoleon and Stalin) brutally expelled the idealistic but politically less powerful figure (Snowball and Trotsky) from the farm. At one peculiar sidelong glance from Napoleon, the dogs lashed at Snowball and terribly chased him away forever. These creatures were, as the others soon discovered, in fact “the puppies whom Napoleon had taken away from their mothers and reared privately. It was noticed that they wagged their tails to him in the same way as the other dogs had been used to do to Mr Jones.” These dogs represent the secret police and repressive State powers that Stalin emboldened and that were hugely active under his regime. The false confessions of crimes by animals that follows is a dark parallel of “the show trials of 1936, 1937 and 1938, the most dramatic aspects of the Great Purge, in which Old Bolshevik defendants (many of them former oppositionists) confessed to a variety of fantastic crimes and were in most cases sentenced to death” (Fitzpatrick 128).

Though the figure of Napoleon is directly modeled on Stalin, his behavior, activities and rise to dictatorial power can be interpreted as the general code of conduct of tyrants and dictators all across the globe and across eras. In fact, as Orwell had engineered it, his namesake is not any communist leader but the early eighteenth century French general Napoleon, who betrayed the democratic principles on which he rode to power, arguably becoming as great a despot as the aristocrats whom he supplanted. Thus, it is a testament to Orwell’s genius and the universality of his fable that Napoleon and the lying, bullying tactics and the

twisting of rhetoric by his henchmen stand for all such dictators and political schemers in world history. Meanwhile life at Animal Farm was hard. Food supply was short but Squealer always managed to comfort the animals by his blatant lies and “figures” that showed that though there was a readjustment (not a ‘reduction’) of rations, there was enormous improvement from the days of Jones. As Timothy Garton Ash writes, “Orwell taught us that the corruption of language is an essential part of oppressive and exploitative politics.” Gradually and steadily, all of the revolutionary practices had behavior was shed off and in the final scene when Napoleon raises a toast in a gathering of pigs and human beings at the farmhouse, the betrayal of revolution is complete: he gives the same toast of prosperity to their farm, but this is not Animal Farm but Manor Farm. It is as if things come full circle to the point from where they began and nothing has actually changed in terms of the animals’ condition. Their miseries are the same as before, perhaps even worse, and only the face of the oppressors has changed with one tyrant replacing another. Thus when Clover finds it difficult to distinguish between the men and the pigs, it is deeply symbolic of the final and absolute transformation of the pigs to the position of the new oppressors. Much like the Soviet intelligentsia, the pigs establish themselves as the ruling class in the new society. This novella creates its most powerful ironies in the instances when Orwell depicts the corruption of the ideals of Animalism by those in power. For *Animal Farm* serves not so much to condemn tyranny or despotism as to indict the horrifying hypocrisy of tyrannies that base themselves on, and owe their initial power to, ideologies of liberation and equality. The gradual disintegration and perversion of the Seven Commandments illustrates this hypocrisy with vivid force. The ultimate corruption of the original principle of “All animals are equal” to “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others” is tragically ironic. As a writer Orwell captured the essence of totalitarianism, and in this book the essence of Soviet totalitarianism.

Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago* was first published in Italy in 1957. Its publication is called the greatest literary event of postwar Russia but it was

never published in Russia until 1988, more than three decades after its Western release. It was used as Cold War cultural propaganda as the declassified CIA documents revealed: “we have the opportunity to make Soviet citizens wonder what is wrong with their government, when a fine literary work by the man acknowledged to be the greatest living Russian writer is not even available in his own country in his own language for his own people to read” (Flood). It was viewed as having great value not just because of its “intrinsic message” of the upholding of individual rights but also because the Soviet authorities had banned it.

A staunch proponent of the rights of the individual, Pasternak’s narrator shows how while mechanically repeating what others are saying in a communist society, one loses one’s authenticity and humanity. He sharply criticizes the notion of a ‘people’s revolution’ and the idea of ‘welfare of the people’ while asking who are these ‘people’ in whose name an entire civilization and all moral and social order breaks down. The poignant interrogation with respect to the identity of these ‘people’ and the biting conclusion that ‘people’ is not some abstract, homogenous entity but is what *individuals* eventually make up, is a brutal subversion of the dominant Soviet notion. Ignoring actual individuals for an abstract ‘people’ would do no good to society.

Throughout the novel there runs a thread of spirituality and profound belief in a supernatural design. These are the personal beliefs of the protagonist, Yuri, as he describes life as he sees it, while being amazed at “the general flow of life which united and carried [them].” “The atmosphere of this thing,” he wrote in a letter to his cousin, Oida Freidenberg, “will be my own Christianity.” This insistence on a private religious vision, he knew, would be perceived as a direct challenge to the “scientific” atheism of the Stalinist state. The novel follows the journey of Yuri Zhivago as he lives life during the turmoil of the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Civil War. The narrative maps the period that can be called the Russian Terror, as a parallel to the Reign of Terror in France. The book is simultaneously a critique of Marxism, a historical record and the personal journey of a fictional

protagonist. As a work of literature, it works in the gaps and interstices of history. It is a fine blend of the personal, the political and the historical. The personal murmurs through the political as events, both major and minor, impact the general flow of life and the stability and peace of the pre-revolution years is lost forever. There is not just nostalgia and lament for the lost past but also a deep sense of uncertainty and a sense of helplessness with respect to the future. Zhivago sees a world falling apart in front of his eyes and struggles to lead life as he is caught up between his love and differing loyalties for two women, his wife Tonya and his lover, Lara. The novel tracks the progress of history using effective and intelligent symbols. The narrative begins in Tsarist Russia when Yuri is a young boy and has lost his mother. Further the Presnya rising, the revolution of 1905 and other smaller but significant events like the railway workers' strike and the peaceful demonstration after the Manifesto has been declared, further the narrative. Pasternak beautifully details the Russian landscape and it is as if his lived experiences during this time are poured in his narrative in terms of vivid emotions and passionate moments. He writes with the soul of a poet and gives heartfelt insight into events and happenings. At times Pasternak speaks through his protagonist and the novel's most powerful critiques of Bolshevik communism occur at such times.

Perhaps the most intelligent and effective symbol used is that of the new metal stove. When there is a new metal stove in the market, the Zhivagos decide to buy it as it looks amazing and promises to change their cumbersome efforts with the old-style stove. But what looks like a beautifully packaged product and what has been advertised effectively is inefficient in function, and instead of reducing their burden, increases it. This is a powerful comment on communism that though a wonderful idea in spirit and a beautifully packaged one at that, for Pasternak, it fails to deliver in practical terms. The novel goes on to detail scenes from the ongoing world war and the reader is shown how the Moscow hospitals are full of the wounded and desperately overcrowded. The war had left Russia in ruins and the country was not prepared for another upheaval without a period of peace and rest. This is exactly

Zhivago's point as he expresses how foolish and cruel it has been on the part of the revolutionary communists to bring about a revolution at such desperate times. But his debater, Pogorevshikh, calls that a naïve thought as what Yuri calls "disorder is just as normal a state of things as the order you are so keen on." However, for Yuri, this view is criminally theoretical, and this scene serves as a means to the realization of the huge gap between communist theory and practice. In his discussion with Lara, Zhivago expresses frustration at the "incessant whirl of never-ending preparations" that the communists believe in. For them "transitional periods" and "change and turmoil" is a constant. Because of such negligence of the very meaning and purpose of life, they lose on the beauty of the moment. "Man is born to live, not to prepare for life," is Yuri's stinging remark. He also expresses irritation at the "worldscale" of the communist hopes, nothing less than which makes them happy. Using the character of Commissar Gintz and his tragi-comic death, Pasternak attacks the passion, the naivete and the single-mindedness of the Communist officials.

Describing "dumb, dark, hungry Moscow", he shows how the frills of civilization were all torn away at such desperate times as people in the square stood engaging in useless barter, "wordlessly offering what no one needed." The government and the economy had collapsed and there was downright degradation of an entire civilization where even the littered square had not been swept (because the workers were on strike), and bare necessities were a struggle to find. The idea of a revolution was an urban idea and the product of industrial society and left-wing intellectuals but it spread to the villages. However, the most helpless because of the revolution were the urban people. Another profound symbol to this effect is Tonya's exchange of a pretty wooden cabinet for a sack of potatoes that she barter with a peasant, just as the peaceful, restive times of pre-revolution are savagely bartered for a crude system where empty promises are the new normal. This symbol is a very strong social statement against the revolution. While leaving, the peasant pauses to admire the beautiful piano and it is clear he eyes it for a future

exchange. What is significant to note here is that unlike the dominant communist belief and rhetoric, the peasants did not want a simply new, classless, equal society but they in effect wanted to climb up the social hierarchy. And this is something that relates to the Soviet system's Party reality as well. Fitzpatrick notes: "Although it took some time for the Bolshevik leaders to realize it, the regime's commitment to the working class had much less to do with workers *in situ* than with working-class upward mobility" (139). The revolution is being progressed in the name of the peasants and workers, but they themselves do not seem to know what is happening. There is widespread breakdown of social order and just mindless violence, violence for the sake of it. The novel is also a narrative of reversals as Pasternak has very quietly and brilliantly sketched the reversal of fortune. When the Zhivago family shifts to Varykino, they themselves become peasants. This assumes poignant meaning in the light of the earlier times when they bartered potatoes and wood from the peasants. But now in Varykino, they are forced to live secretly, in a hut, on their own ancestral land. Elsewhere in the novel, it is clever on the part of the author when on the day when the Soviet Union is formed, Zhivago steals logs of wood for the first time. It is a metaphor for what is to prevail under the new regime. It is as if all morality, social and ethical, has now gone for a toss and what has instead replaced it is a system of principles on paper, but only on paper, and unprincipled behavior in practice, but also justifications of that practice by twisting the rhetoric as happened under Stalin and what has also been seen in the discussion on *Animal Farm*.

The Civil War saw gross injustices on both sides – the Reds as well as the Whites. This novel is scattered with descriptions of such gruesome occasions. One such being the revenge of the Whites against similar atrocities by a particular Red unit when a crippled man, with one arm and one leg tied on a wooden board, is cruelly put down and ordered to crawl, urged by shots in the air. Such descriptions achieve more importance because they are not of imagination but are what Pasternak saw and heard about in his lifetime. Perhaps one of the most crucial criticisms of Pasternak, and by extension most anti-

communists, is that Marxist view believes in the idea of the end justifying the means. Pasternak was a Tolstoy follower who was close to the Gandhian non-violent view that violent means cannot justify an end howsoever noble. In the descriptions of the ruined villages when Gordon goes to meet Yuri is deep pathos as the peasant women look up at Gordon with eyes that seem to ask when the world will come to its senses. Zhivago criticizes the revolution as a "social evil" that spread like an "epidemic". He understands and acknowledges that Russia is going through an extraordinary time but is brutally critical of it. He shows how an ideology brainwashes an entire community. The "endless repetitions" and the "unending monotony" of the new regulations that the new authorities had put in place made Yuri's "head go round". The exclamations were made ever more lifeless and meaningless and time went by. It is because these people, "Russia's liberators" have forgotten that it is possible to lead a horse to water but not to make it drink that "they've got into the habit of liberating and showering benefits on just those people who haven't asked for it." He criticizes their "blind loyalty" and "readiness to serve at whatever cost". It is the general disintegration and chaos of life that also affected families and broke homes like Yuri's and Lara's.

It is crucial to note, however, that though Yuri is critical of the cheap populism of the Soviet brand of communist politics, he is also critical of the idleness of the landed gentry. In fact, he criticizes the "unhealthy" lives that the rich led. He belongs to that class of bourgeoisie that sympathized and sided with the revolutionary zeal at first. They were willing to give up their privilege in order that a more equal and just society may prevail. However, what caused their disillusionment is the reality of how things turned out in Russia and in Communist practice; thus leading people like Pasternak to strongly oppose communist thought—a promise that disappointed in practice.

The two texts discussed sensitively map the failure of Marxist communist ideology. Pasternak goes further to map its negative and disillusioning impact on its one-time sympathizers. Both novels illustrate how organized indoctrination spreads like an infection. *Animal Farm* and *Doctor Zhivago* are

two instances of a remarkable way in which literature has expressed political sentiments – in this specific case, anti-communist thought.

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