

Contradictory Attitudes: The Manifestation of George Orwell's Political View in his Works

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Abstract: This paper provides an in-depth analysis of George Orwell's literary and political journey, highlighting the contradictions embedded within his ideological outlook. It examines three key aspects of Orwell's work. First, it reviews his early writings, particularly *Burmese Days*, to explore his ambivalent attitude toward capitalism in the early twentieth century. Second, it analyzes characters with opposing personality traits in Orwell's narratives, focusing on the manifestation of humanism and his struggle with self-identity in a rapidly changing world. Third, the paper investigates Orwell's perspectives on totalitarianism and his conflicting attitudes toward political groups such as the proletariat and revolutionary movements. Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to deepen the understanding of Orwell's complex political ideologies and their influence on his literary output.

Keywords: George Orwell; Capitalism; Politics; Humanism; Totalitarianism; Literary analysis.

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1. Introduction

George Orwell, one of the most influential English novelists of the twentieth century, dedicated his career to transforming political writing into art. His works engage with political themes—exposing falsehoods, challenging injustices, and foregrounding neglected facts. Yet Orwell's writing, unlike many of his contemporaries, remains witty, engaging, and provocative [1]. In "Why I Write," he identified four primary motivations for his creative work: (1) sheer egoism, (2) aesthetic enthusiasm, (3) historical impulses, and (4) political purpose [2]. *Burmese Days*, for instance, grew out of the third impulse—a desire to understand and preserve the truth of his colonial experience for future generations. At the time of writing that novel, Orwell's political intentions were not fully mature but were nonetheless marked by wonder, doubt, and a growing moral unease. However, his unique childhood and early adult experiences across both Western and Eastern societies laid a solid foundation for his later anti-totalitarian ideology, which would find its fullest expression in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Throughout his forty-seven years, Orwell used pen and paper to expose what he perceived as the truth of the world.

Indeed, people's thoughts always changed. So did Orwell. Over the course of his career, his political allegiances evolved significantly: from an initial fascination with colonialism to a decisive break with it and a sharp critique of capitalism; from an emerging humanist sensibility to a mature and nuanced understanding of socialism; and finally, to a comprehensive anti-totalitarian stance [3,4]. As with many thinkers, Orwell's childhood worldview shaped his later political commitments. It was precisely his unique developmental environment that gave rise to his deeply contradictory ideas.

While Orwell's political focus shifted over time, his views remained persistently ambivalent. He professed a distaste for politics, yet political analysis occupied his entire adult life and established him as one of the great political critics of the twentieth century. He identified as a pacifist, yet he did not hesitate to join the Spanish Civil War as a frontline combatant. Most notably, he distrusted most socialists of his era, yet he maintained that

only socialism could redeem Britain [5]. It is always difficult to categorize a thinker according to a single standard; human beings are complex and shaped by their environments. Orwell was never a loyal partisan or a committed critic of any specific ideology. These tensions are meticulously rendered in his fiction. His political views were contradictory, and the characters he created mirrored that conflict. Both his ideological tensions and his character constructions reflect his multiple, often conflicting, selves and his ambiguous attitude toward different social classes [6,7].

2. Attitudes Toward Colonialism: Former Officer of Capitalism

Orwell's attitude toward capitalism was persistently ambivalent. The roots of this ambivalence can be traced to two interrelated sources: his family background and his personal experiences within the turbulent historical context of the early twentieth century. These two factors caused him to oscillate between support for and rejection of capitalist ideology. First, his lower-upper-middle-class status positioned him ambiguously between the aristocratic elite and the working classes. Though he did not identify with the lower classes, he exhibited profound sympathy for their plight. Second, his diverse life experiences—in Burma, Paris, London, and Barcelona—profoundly shaped his social and political critique. The tumultuous period of the 1930s and 1940s, marked by the Spanish Civil War and the rise of fascism, was instrumental in forging his political values.

2.1. Orwell's Lower-Upper-Middle-Class Background

Class divisions in 20th century were highly stratified, and the middle class itself was far from monolithic; it was subdivided according to wealth and social standing. The upper-middle class, owing to its accumulated capital, stood closest to the aristocracy, enjoying the leisure to engage in political and cultural pursuits—opportunities that further enhanced their social status. Beneath them lay the “middle-middle class,” those with higher education, stable incomes, and comfortable living conditions, yet unable to ascend into the upper-middle class or descend into the working class. This is where Orwell was ruling and being ruled by the country at the same time.

George Orwell's family is typically middle class. Right before Orwell was born, his family was the victim of industrialization during the Victorian era. They changed from the upper class to the middle class. This caused his family to closely connect with the British Empire. As part of the lower-upper-middle class, Orwell still has a sense of the gentleness of a middle-class man. In *“Why I Write”*, he admitted, “I do not want, completely to abandon the worldview that I acquired in childhood”. This also proved that his growing background had had many effects on Orwell himself and his writings. Because of the childhood experience that his lower-upper-middle-class family brought him, he would never truly become part of the working class. Orwell hated class hierarchy, but he could not ignore the difference among classes. He realized the differences and privileges that his class had. Despite this, Orwell tried to eliminate the family impact on him and the prejudice of classes and immersed himself in different social environments such as Burma, Paris, London, and Barcelona. He wanted to be part of the lower class to live their lives, but he could not do so. This is because of the impacts of his unstable family background and childhood worldview, which led Orwell to have conflicting ideas about different social classes.

2.2. Orwell's Personal Experience and Historical Background

Orwell's contradictions cannot be understood apart from his historical moment. He was active between the 1930s and 1940s, and the whole of Europe was under the shadow of war. Many new political regimes had appeared. This is the time when the Spanish Civil War between the Republicans, supported by the Soviet Union, and the Nationalists, supported by Nazi Germany, took place. After the Spanish Civil War, World War II followed. Fascism rapidly increased and changed people's political points of view. It was the time when Orwell lived, the age of extreme, which was described by Eric Hobsbawm. During

this age of extremes, society changed greatly, and people doubted the former point of view on politics, religion, and society. Orwell never described the same political views in his works. Owing to his personal experience at a certain time, his mind always changed. He also had a chance to be connected to both Eastern and Western cultures because of this special time. Orwell showed empathy for the Burmese when he saw the economic and class oppression of them by capitalism. He also felt ashamed about being part of the capitalist group when he was an officer of the empire. However, the education he had in his childhood told him that Western culture is the centralized thought of the world. Two opposite views distorted him and caused him to have a complex attitude toward colonialism.

2.3. *Orwell's Contradictory Thoughts about Colonialism*

Orwell's early novel *Burmese Days* draws directly on his experiences as a police officer in Burma. The main character in the book, Flory, is a British man who lived in Burma. The protagonist, Flory, is a British man living in the colony. A large, ragged, dark-blue birthmark runs across the left side of his face; it darkens when he experiences strong emotions such as nervousness or embarrassment. After being rejected by Elizabeth, a white woman, Flory commits suicide at the end of the novel. His death illuminates the crisis of self-identity that arises within the peculiar cultural and political environment of colonialism.

Orwell's connection to Burma was longstanding: both his father and grandfather had worked or traded in India, and Orwell himself was born in British India. After graduating from Eton, he served as a police officer in Burma for five years before resigning. The brutality and moral corruption he witnessed there left him permanently disillusioned. He later explained that he quit partly because of the Burmese climate but mainly because he could no longer tolerate serving imperialism. He believed that if he continued working for the colonial apparatus, he would eventually destroy himself, much like Flory. Flory seeks someone who might understand him, imagining Elizabeth as that person. However, he discovers that she is interested only in his European social status in Burma, not in him as an individual. His failed search for belonging culminates in suicide.

Orwell's ambivalence toward capitalism is metaphorically rendered through Flory's birthmark. Flory is perpetually ashamed of his mark, concealing the disfigured side of his face from others. The mark's color shifts in response to his anxiety. He has no genuine sense of belonging in Burma. He feels embarrassed by his identity as a white man, yet he cannot accept the other British officers. He feels empathy for the Burmese, yet he cannot become one of them. As Orwell writes, "He always remembered the birthmark when he had done something to be ashamed of" [8]. Even toward those who loved him, Flory refused to reveal his mark.

The birthmark also stands for Flory's loneliness. Other European officers disdain the Burmese, spending their days drinking and smoking at the club. Flory disapproves but is himself no saint—he drinks and visits prostitutes. He maintains a friendship with Dr. Veraswami, a Burmese physician who admires the British. Yet Flory cannot find common ground with him, because Dr. Veraswami adores European culture and believes colonialism has benefited Burma. Thus, Flory has no authentic friend with whom to share his thoughts. This desolation follows him to the novel's end, when he realizes that the honorable life he dreamed of is forever beyond his reach.

Flory's reflections mirror Orwell's own critique of imperialism. Surveying the workings of colonial capitalism, Flory sees only exploitation and lies. Colonialism has not brought civilization, order, or progress to Burma; it has seized resources and oppressed local populations. Flory's doubts extend to the ideologies he once embraced. Yet despite his fierce opposition to colonialism, Orwell occasionally betrays a lingering sense of "white superiority" in the novel. Even though Flory despises the British colonizers and their treatment of the Burmese, he cannot integrate into the local community either. Like Orwell's class position, Flory is suspended between two worlds. He and Dr. Veraswami

become friends, but never close ones—their ideological differences prevent intimacy. Dr. Veraswami's admiration of the British serves as a foil to Flory's Western identity, reinforcing the privileges Flory enjoys. When Flory tries to help Dr. Veraswami join the European club, he simultaneously signs a petition against his admission. This double gesture captures Orwell's own conflicted position: he despised the colonial whites, yet continued to believe that whiteness conferred certain advantages in Burma.

3. Forming the Idea of Humanism: Equality, Empathy, and Freedom of Human Beings

Orwell's humanism did not emerge overnight; it evolved through a prolonged process of awakening, self-examination, confession, and lived experience. At its core, his humanism affirmed the value and dignity of every individual. He felt genuine empathy for the working class and guilt over the suffering of the Burmese under imperialism. Yet his works reveal a persistent tension: his impulse to care for humanity often clashed with his critical realism. In *Burmese Days*, characters embody opposing traits, reflecting his struggle to define how individuals should live, act, and identify themselves in a time of crisis. In "Reflections on Gandhi," the essay's tone appears detached and neutral, yet beneath its surface lies a profound ideological collision. One area of conflict was religion. Gandhi's ascetic practices derived from his Hindu faith. Though Orwell championed religious freedom as part of human rights, he could not accept Gandhi's worldview. "They God and Man are incompatible," he wrote; "one must choose between God and Man, and all 'radicals' and 'progressives'... have in effect chosen Man" [9]. In Orwell's view, human nature is more reliable than divinity, and divinity ultimately constrains human flourishing. The essence of being human is precisely that one does not seek perfection; people cannot fasten their love upon other individuals and hope to achieve a transcendent standard. Thus Orwell subjected religion to critical scrutiny even as he championed religious freedom.

3.1. The Formation of Orwell's Humanism

Orwell's commitment to humanism originated in his unequal treatment as a boy at Crossgates School. Because of his bed-wetting, the headmaster beat him severely. His father's comparatively modest income exposed him to ridicule from wealthier classmates. This early experience of injustice kindled in him a fierce longing for equality and freedom. The core of Orwell's humanism lay in the belief that people should not be judged by their income—a principle that also informed his hostility to capitalism. Later, in Burma, observing the suffering of the local population, he felt a profound sense of guilt and solidarity. The imperial project—extracting resources, imposing cultural domination—violated his emerging humanist principles.

Orwell's humanism clashed with Gandhi's on fundamental points. First, Orwell believed that individuals should not sacrifice themselves for peace. In "Reflections on Gandhi," he criticized Gandhi's nonviolent resistance movement, arguing that it sought unity and independence at the cost of countless Indian lives. In Gandhi's view, self-sacrifice served the creation of a better world. Orwell dissented: Gandhi did not understand the full horror of totalitarianism, which thrives on compromise and submission. Nonviolence, Orwell feared, would not lead to genuine independence but would simply facilitate another form of colonial control. People, he insisted, must be free to choose their own lives—and not everyone aspired to sainthood. Second, Orwell asserted that religious freedom was a fundamental human right. Gandhi's path—no meat, no sex, no close friendships—demanded a level of renunciation that ordinary people could not and should not be expected to embrace [10]. Orwell defended the ordinary individual's right to live an imperfect, human life. His humanism, grounded in close observation of society, called for the protection of individual choice and dignity.

3.2. Opposing Personalities in Orwell's Works

Orwell's humanism also manifests in his complex characterizations. The term "humanism" is, after all, inseparable from humanity itself. He wanted his characters to discover authentic identities within society. Yet Orwell himself was uncertain of the right identity to adopt. The freedom to live, act, and behave—to choose one's identity—was an essential component of his humanist vision. Flory and Dr. Veraswami in *Burmese Days* exemplify these tensions.

3.2.1. Flory: "Brave" vs. "Coward"

Flory represents one of Orwell's most conflicted characters. Unlike other British colonizers in Burma, Flory does not shun the local population. While his compatriots believe in European superiority and native subordination, Flory criticizes them openly—at least in private conversation with Dr. Veraswami. He condemns the racism and complacency of the European club. In this sense, he is brave: no one else dared to challenge the colonial order so directly. This aspect of Flory mirrors Orwell's humanist belief in racial equality and freedom of association.

Yet Flory is also a coward. After coming to Burma, he endured mockery for his birthmark from other British officers. Although he criticizes the club's racism, he never confronts those who mock him. He hides his face, showing only its undamaged side. Even more damningly, though he considers Dr. Veraswami a friend, he never defends him when other officers insult him. When the club votes on whether to admit Dr. Veraswami, Flory signs the petition against him—fearing isolation from his own community. His ideas are radical, but his actions are timid.

Orwell identifies with Flory's ambivalence. Flory's contradictions reflect Orwell's own uncertainty about how to treat the colonized. Though he wanted to treat them as equals, his European identity—and the privileges it conferred—made him hesitate.

3.2.2. Dr. Veraswami: "Kindness" vs. "Ignorance"

Dr. Veraswami, a Burmese doctor in *Burmese Days*, is skilled, warm-hearted, and generous. Despite being despised by British officers, he never returns their contempt. He treats poor patients free of charge and shows compassion to beggars like Ma Hla May. His kindness—his willingness to treat all people equally regardless of social status, income, or race—embodies Orwell's humanist ideals.

Yet Dr. Veraswami remains blindly devoted to British rule. "Dr. Veraswami had a passionate admiration for the English," Orwell writes, "which a thousand snubs from Englishmen had not shaken" [8]. He believes that colonialism, despite its injustices, has brought law and order to Burma. He never questions the imperial system, even when Flory tries to enlighten him. This ignorance exposes the tragedy of colonialism: no matter how hard the colonized work or how much they achieve, they will never be treated as equals.

3.2.3. Two Characters, One Orwell

Flory and Dr. Veraswami together represent two halves of Orwell's divided self during his Burmese years. As a colonial officer, Orwell belonged to neither the British ruling class nor the Burmese subject class. Sometimes he identified with Dr. Veraswami, believing in the righteousness of imperialism so that he could tolerate his own position. More often, he identified with Flory—a man with a visible flaw, vulnerable and self-conscious, alienated from both communities. He recognized that capitalism left no room for authentic human relationships, only exploitation. What pained him most was his own complicity. Yet both characters, despite their flaws, embody humanist values: they care about human beings.

4. The Road to Anti-Totalitarianism: Development of George Orwell's Socialism

On the basis of the idea of humanism, Orwell's later works develop a consistent anti-totalitarian stance. He opposed any state or totalitarian holding the individual rights of

the masses. Orwell expressed the idea of anti-totalitarianism in his many later works. Most of the time, he tended to take the way of opposing totalitarianism through violent means. However, he was also very conservative about violence because he cared about human beings and did not want people to lose their life. In the past, Orwell participated in the Spanish War to realize his political ideals with violent revolution and establish a society of equality for all. However, the Spanish War made him see the shattering of the socialist dream. After that, he wrote books to reveal and spread the “essence” and “crime” of socialism—the truth would lead to a totalitarian society.

4.1. *The Failure of Socialism: Totalitarian Dictatorship in Animal Farm*

Orwell was, first and foremost, a political writer. But his political views were deeply contradictory. He admired the courage of working-class people, yet he doubted their capacity for self-governance because they were often ignorant and easily manipulated. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he famously observed that the proles—the vast majority of the population—were politically inert, and the Party knew that its rule would never be threatened by them. He felt genuine sorrow at their poverty and degradation, yet he could not trust them to bring about meaningful change. This contradiction permeates his treatment of revolution and social transformation.

4.1.1. Orwell's attitude toward political change

Orwell sought to expose the dangers of totalitarianism, particularly its use of manipulation and propaganda to control thought. He also questioned whether political change could genuinely benefit the working classes—an issue he never definitively resolved. Most chillingly, he recognized that totalitarianism's horror lies not only in open persecution but in the fact that people are persecuted without realizing it, even feeling satisfied with their condition.

Animal Farm, a satirical fable, dramatizes the perversion of a liberatory revolution. A group of animals revolts against their human farmer, seeking equality. The pigs, who are more intelligent than the other animals, become the new leaders. At first, the animals rejoice in their freedom. But by the novel's end, the pigs have become indistinguishable from the humans they overthrew—wearing clothes, walking on two legs, and making deals with human farmers. Even a successful revolt, Orwell suggests, can end in a new tyranny. He repeatedly invokes the word “equality,” but the novel demonstrates that disparities persist under every regime. He exposes the mechanisms of totalitarian control, which operate invisibly and insidiously.

These small lexical changes—almost imperceptible—transform the revolution's principles. Orwell exposes how political language can be weaponized to control thought. Similarly, the pigs create a common enemy, Snowball, to consolidate power. Snowball is blamed for every misfortune. It does not matter whether the accusations are true; the animals believe them, and their belief enables the pigs' rule.

Orwell reveals how revolutionary promises are perverted by those in power. The animals lived free from human tyranny, only to fall into another tyranny. His ambivalence—hoping for change yet fearing its consequences—runs through the novella. He wants people to defend their rights, but he also worries that revolution will lead from one trap to another. His attitude toward political transformation was thus deeply conflicted: he recognized its necessity but feared its outcome.

4.1.2. Benjamin: “Indifference” vs. “Devotion”

Benjamin, the old donkey in *Animal Farm*, embodies another aspect of Orwell's divided self. Benjamin remains aloof from all the animals' political activities. He does not endorse the pigs' slogans; he doubts Snowball's plans; he is wary of Napoleon's maneuvers. While the other animals are swept up by revolutionary fervor, Benjamin remains detached, believing that nothing will change. Yet his inaction itself constitutes a form of

protest. In any regime change, supporters are needed; Benjamin's refusal to participate is his quiet rebellion.

But Benjamin also has a capacity for devotion. He is loyal to his friend Boxer, the loyal, hardworking horse who represents the exploited working class. Benjamin plans to spend his retirement with Boxer; when Boxer is taken away by the horse slaughterer, Benjamin desperately calls the other animals to help. This contradictory mix of indifference toward the regime and deep loyalty toward an individual friend mirrors Orwell's own ambivalence. He was clear-eyed about the failings of revolutionary movements, yet he cared deeply about the working class—even if, like Benjamin, he could not fully join them.

4.2. Orwell's Pessimistic Attitude toward the Future

Orwell's humanism made him deeply concerned about the proletariat. As a member of the middle class who rejected class prejudice, he sympathized with the poor and spoke out for them. But his personal experiences—particularly his time as a dishwasher in Paris—led him to question whether the working class could ever achieve political consciousness. When people are exhausted by grinding labor, they cannot think beyond their immediate survival.

4.2.1. Orwell's contradictory attitude toward proletariat

Orwell doubted whether political organizations formed by the working class could ever succeed. His experiences in Paris and London, living among dishwashers, beggars, and tramps, shaped this skepticism. He spent time with these people, sharing their hardships, and observed that they lacked the leisure or energy to think about anything beyond food and shelter. He wrote *Down and Out in Paris and London* to expose their conditions and demand fairer treatment. He called attention to the prejudice and contempt with which the poor were treated. "The masses of the rich and the poor are differentiated by their incomes and nothing else," he wrote, "and the average millionaire is only the average dishwasher dressed in a new suit" [9]. He wanted the educated classes to see the humanity of the poor.

Yet his experience as a dishwasher made him realize how brutalizing such labor could be. Dishwashing, he observed, was boring and mind-numbing. It left no time for reflection. When a person is hungry, he thinks of food, not Marxism. This recognition sowed doubt in Orwell's mind: could the proletariat ever liberate themselves? He was sometimes disappointed by their apathy.

Yet Orwell also harbored hope. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith writes in his diary: "If there was hope, it must lie in the proles, because only in those swarming disregarded masses, 85 percent of the population of Oceania, could the force to destroy the Party ever be generated" [10]. Here, Winston expresses faith in the proletariat. But O'Brien, a Party insider, contradicts him: "The proles are helpless, like the animals," he says. "Humanity is the Party. The others are outside—irrelevant" [11]. Winston and O'Brien thus articulate two opposite poles of Orwell's own ambivalence. Sometimes Orwell saw himself as Winston—hopeful, moral, and determined. At other times, he saw himself as O'Brien—cynical, pragmatic, and despairing. In *Animal Farm*, too, Boxer represents the working class, but he is utterly exploited—sold to the knacker after his body gives out. The animal's devotion is rewarded with betrayal. Orwell's stance toward the proletariat remained profoundly contradictory.

4.2.2. Orwell's contradictory attitude toward revolutions

Orwell was also deeply ambivalent about war and revolution. When he arrived in Spain, he was moved by the democratic spirit he witnessed. He saw ordinary people—workers, peasants, soldiers—marching to the front to fight for their freedom. In *Homage to Catalonia*, he writes: "It was the face of a man who would commit murder and throw away his life for a friend". The camaraderie and loyalty he observed inspired him to join

the fight. For a time, he believed that democratic socialism might be realized because of such people.

Yet he also witnessed the dark side of revolution. He saw the destruction of churches and the intolerance of radical atheists. He saw that soldiers on the front lines endured unimaginable hardship, while those in the rear enjoyed the spoils of victory. "All the war propaganda, all the screaming and lies, and hatred come invariably from people who are not fighting". When he left the front and returned to the rear, he found a society that had already reverted to inequality — tipping, luxury cars, and indifference. The revolution had been betrayed, and a new totalitarian regime was taking shape.

This experience intensified his contradictory opinions about revolution. In *Animal Farm*, the animals' successful revolt initially promises equality. But the pigs, the new ruling class, soon adopt the habits of their former oppressors. On the one hand, the novella affirms the necessity of resistance; on the other, it warns that revolution often reproduces the structures it seeks to overturn. Orwell's political hopes were grounded in his experiences, but his fears were equally real. He believed that change was necessary, yet he feared that ordinary people were too easily manipulated to bring about lasting freedom.

5. Conclusion

George Orwell was a political writer of profound moral conviction and deep humanist feeling. He was, in some sense, a man born out of his time, bearing witness to the catastrophes of the twentieth century and seeking to understand them through his art. He yearned for social progress, yet he struggled with his own conflicting impulses. He was not a prophet; he did not know the right solution. His greatness lies precisely in his refusal to offer easy answers.

As a young man, he served the British Empire in Burma and came to see its brutality. Like Flory, he could not fully identify with either the colonizers or the colonized. He was ashamed of his complicity, yet he remained conscious of his privilege. His Burmese years left him mentally scarred.

Out of these experiences, he forged his humanist faith. He cared deeply about equality and freedom. But his humanism was critical, not sentimental. He argued with Gandhi about the meaning of sacrifice, about religion, and about the means of liberation. He believed that nonviolence could not defeat totalitarianism — yet he also recoiled from the human cost of war. This ambivalence about violence runs through his work.

Orwell is one of the great writers of the twentieth century, not because he championed a single ideology, but because he exposed the lies of all ideologies. He refused to evade the reality of totalitarianism, even when it was politically inconvenient. Above all, he championed the ordinary human being — flawed, imperfect, struggling — and insisted that no political system had the right to crush that humanity.

Readers should not reduce Orwell to a single label. His works are filled with struggle and contradiction. He never asserted a definitive political program; rather, he implicitly showed his doubts and tensions through his characters and narratives. This openness, this refusal to close the door on complexity, is Orwell's greatest legacy as a writer.

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