

# The Significance of the Effects of Sound and Hearing in *Animal Farm*

Shota TOZAWA

In a letter to Gleb Struve on 17 February 1944, Orwell characterised his ongoing *Animal Farm* as “a little squib which might amuse you when it comes out” (*A life in Letters* 226). The word “squib” has two different meanings, as a small firework that burns with a fizz before exploding and as a satirical writing. One can assume that he chose the word to indicate the latter in a modest manner. However, it can also be interpreted as something with which Orwell combines sound effects and political issues. For him, the work is an auditory medium with which he aims to attract people’s attention. He connotes the fizz, as a warning against the explosion to come. As he states in the preface to the Ukrainian edition of the novella, his commitment to the Spanish War allowed him to realise that Russia had been turning into nothing but “a hierarchical society, in which the rulers have no more reason to give up their power than any other ruling class” (*Animal Farm* 117). However, Orwell observed that some intellectuals admired Russia as an ideal Socialist country, and “being accustomed to comparative freedom and moderation in public life” had made the danger of totalitarianism “completely incomprehensible” to English people (117). This made him think that he needed to produce a simple didactic writing that warns them of the danger of the totalitarian nature of the Soviet regime before it is too late to prevent the totalitarian ideology from taking over England. His political intention of *Animal Farm* is evident as he writes in his essay “Why I Write” (1946), “*Animal Farm* was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole” (*George Orwell: Essays* 6).

This paper will focus on the workings of sound and hearing in *Animal Farm*. It will analyse the ways in which sound and hearing play a significant role in the totalitarian control in the work. It will argue that as a parody of the deceptiveness embedded in the Russian Revolution which led to a totalitarian domination under the power of Stalin, *Animal Farm* shows sound as a media which insidiously works to distort the perception of reality and detaches the animals from the world.

After successfully expelling the human owner, Jones and his men, the farm suddenly becomes the animals’ own world, and they strongly feel and taste the sense of possession through their body:

Yes, it was theirs – everything that they could see was theirs! In the ecstasy of that thought they gambolled round and round, they hurled themselves into the air in great leaps of excitement. They rolled in the dew, they cropped mouthfuls of the sweet summer grass, they kicked up clods of the black earth and snuffed its rich scent.” (AF 15)

The reiteration of the subject, “they”, here emphasises the freedom and subjectivity the animals have gained to choose their own sensory experience. In addition to the sight which provides them with assurance, they feel the material world through their own senses of touch and taste. “Touch is”, Schafer argues, “the most personal of the senses” (11). Within the sensation made by touch, there is no physical distance between the subject and the object, and the animals can directly feel the sense of being part of the physical world.

However, propaganda used by the pigs controls the way the animals perceive the reality. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, “propaganda” is defined as “[t]he systematic dissemination of information, esp. in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view” (OED propaganda). Propaganda spreads out a distorted view towards reality. In *Animal Farm*, it presents the abuse of the pig leadership as something justifiable and necessary for the collective good. For instance, when the animals “murmur” against the pigs’ monopolising the apples and milk, Squealer explains that their ingredients are essential for the good health of the pigs on whom the effective management of the farm depends, and therefore; “It is for *your* sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples” and if they fail in their work, “Jones would come back!” (AF 25). This explanation leads the imbecile animals to a reversed view of the unfair treatment as fair. Lee contrasts the way the pigs exploit the animals and that of Jones: “the pigs control language; Mr. Jones controlled only action – not thought” (123). Orwell presents language as a far more effective medium of control than physical oppression as the former makes the animals fail to realise that they are actually being exploited and thus allows little potential of uprising. Propaganda makes proper recognition of reality impossible.

The powerful impact of auditory propaganda can be seen in the tone of voice. As “Napoleon’s mouthpiece” (Sun 6), Squealer takes responsibility to spread propaganda across the farm. From the early part of the novella, Orwell calls the reader’s attention to the tone of Squealer’s voice: “a shrill voice” (AF 10). In addition, his name also contains a sharp tone: “a more or less prolonged loud sharp cry” by *Oxford English Dictionary* for ‘squeal’. The harshness of his voice seems to imply the overwhelming power of his auditory propaganda. It affects not only the hearing but also the workings of the mind. His elocution distorts the perception of reality from within.

Repetition is another important element of Squealer’s auditory propaganda. Kris and

Speier note that propagandists of the Nazi party believed that “repetition can make words all powerful over the mind, can make man a set of reactions to stimuli” (23). As Orwell describes, Squealer is “never tired of explaining” (*AF* 93), and his constant explanation affects the mind of the animals. This transforms them into a set of obedient reactions to his words. For example, frequent reference to the possible return of Jones conditions them to swallow his elocution without questioning. In justifying the pigs’ privilege of sleeping in bed, he again mentions Jones, and the other animals “reassured him on this point immediately, and no more was said about the pigs sleeping in the farmhouse bed” (50).

Sound distorts the real character of Napoleon and Snowball. While Snowball is described as a charismatic leader who takes the initiative in bettering the society, Napoleon is described to be a figure who acts behind scenes: “At the meetings Snowball often won over the majority by his brilliant speeches, but Napoleon was better at canvassing support for himself in between times” (35). However, their images change after Snowball’s expulsion as Napoleon disguises himself as the strong leader and Snowball as the enemy who is secretly acting to cause harm to the farm. Sound is used to increase the effect of such disguises. While the animals are deeply shocked at seeing the collapsed windmill, Napoleon “roared in a voice of thunder” that “Do you know the enemy who has come in the night and overthrown our windmill? SNOWBALL” (52). Also, he frightens the animals “in a terrible voice”, saying that Snowball has intruded into the farm secretly, and his dogs “let out blood-curdling growls and showed their side teeth” (58). These terrifying sounds cause the animals fear of Snowball as “some kind of invisible influence, pervading the air about them and menacing them with all kinds of dangers” (58). As for Napoleon, he is rarely seen in public after the first breakdown of the windmill. When he does appear, he shows himself with “an escort of six dogs who closely surrounded him and growled if anyone came to near” (56) and “a black cockerel who marched in front of him and acted as a trumpeter, letting out a loud ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’ before Napoleon spoke” (67). The growling generates an intimidating authority of Napoleon. Symbolically, the cockerel and the trumpet represent “self-confidence” (Vries 104) and “fame” (Vries 476), respectively. Making the animals feel awe for Napoleon, these sounds disguise him as their strong leader. As Raymond Williams argues, *Animal Farm* is “one of those permanent statements about the gap between pretence and actuality” (74). Indeed, it is the effect of sound that creates such a gap. The binary opposition between the enemy and the leader is an essential element of Napoleon’s power politics: fear of invisible Snowball breeds emotional attachment to Napoleon as a dependable protector. The animals become unable to see into the real character of the two figures.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt characterises modern masses as

follows:

They [modern masses] do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part. (460)

For Arendt, they no longer believe in reality except what they perceive through their own senses. The coherent narrative into which they are involved overshadows such perception. This tendency of the mass phenomena can also be seen in Orwell's ignorant animals. After the Battle of the Windmill, despite the windmill completely blown away and a large number of casualties, with the set of "the solemn booming of the gun" fired "seven times", Squealer's elocution and Napoleon's speech persuade the animals into viewing the consequence of the battle as positive (*AF* 76-77). Sound and language distract the animals from the apparent painfulness of reality. They simply accept the interpretation of the Battle that "they had won a great victory" (77), an interpretation which is fabricated by the pigs.

Letemendia argues that the stupidity of the animals is Orwell's calling for "education and self-confidence in any working-class movement if it is to remain democratic in character" (17). However, Orwell also seems to suggest the risk which is caused when those in power use education for conditioning the crowd in order to sustain the power structure. For example, Napoleon takes the puppies away from their parents and raise them into his loyal servants who blare "a terrible baying sound" (*AF* 38). With "a high-pitched whimper of a kind no one had ever heard him before" (38), he orders them to chase Snowball out of the farm. This allows Napoleon to gain overall power. While the other animals are "silent and terrified", he "announced that from now on the Sunday-morning Meetings would come to an end" (39). This is the first appearance of the word, "announce" (including its noun-forms and derivations such as pronounce and denounce) in the text, which implies that Napoleon's words become official announcement, something that must be accepted without question.

Napoleon employs various sounds in order to silence the voices of dissents. With "deep, menacing growls", his loyal dogs intimidate the young pokers who raise "shrill squeals of disapproval" against the abolition of debates (40). Additionally, the mindless sheep's "tremendous bleating of 'Four legs good, two legs bad!'" lasting "for nearly a quarter of an hour" effectively blocks "any chance of discussion" (40). Having developed "a great liking for this maxim" (24), the sheep merely blare it as a pleasing sound without thinking about the meaning: the maxim loses its linguistic function and works as a mere

suppressing noise to the others. Moreover, Squealer is “sent around the farm” to consolidate Napoleon’s dictatorship: “Do not imagine, comrades, that leadership is a pleasure! On the contrary, it is a deep and heavy responsibility” (40). Permeating among the other animals, his message takes effect in order to shape the legitimacy of Napoleon’s dictatorial acts and smother possible complaints. This contributes to the gradual formation of Animal Farm full of sounds that work for the benefit of Napoleon’s reign.

The animals internalise the power of sound and come to self-discipline their own behaviours. When Napoleon decides to negotiate with human beings, the young pokers raise their voices of dissent, but they can only do so “timidly” (47). They lack courage because they know that they will be silenced by the growling dogs promptly. The anticipation of the overwhelming growls keeps them always terrified and powerless, forcing them to behave obediently.

The removal of political noise makes the soundscape of Animal Farm even darker. According to Schafer, noise is most satisfactorily defined as “unwanted sound”, which allows us to understand it as “a subjective term” (273). What is euphonious music to one person can be annoying noise to another. Also, Rath argues that noise can be defined “socially, culturally, and historically” (73). The definition of noise in a particular society can be a useful measure to secure its social condition. Once Napoleon has risen to power, noise is politically defined as something that contains distrust of or protest against his regime. The public executions in Chapter 7 are a kind of noise abatement by Napoleon. For totalitarian governments, as Attali puts it, “it is necessary to ban subversive noise because it betokens demands for cultural autonomy, support for differences or marginality” (7). The executed members include the four young pokers who raised “shrill squeals of disapproval” (*AF* 40) against the abolition of the Sunday Meetings, and the hens who uttered “a terrible outcry” (56) against the order to submit their eggs for trading. ‘Beasts of England’, a song of revolution, becomes noise as it may create a new rebellious mood among the animals. After the execution, Clover sings the song as “a substitute for the words she was unable to find” (64), as a speaker of her unease about the oppressed condition of their life. The song is soon replaced by a new one composed by the poet Minimus whose words and tune by no means resemble the old one. By removing these voices of dissent, Napoleon achieves absolute social order in which, as Clover laments it, “no one dared to speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn into pieces after confessing shocking crimes” (64).

Animal Farm becomes an increasingly noisy place in contrast to the animals who are tamed into silence. Napoleon creates the Spontaneous Demonstration “to celebrate

the struggles and triumphs of Animal Farm” (83), a weekly public event replete with overwhelming auditory experiences. During the event, all the animals are required to join in military-like processions, read aloud poems “composed in Napoleon’s honour”, listen to Squealer’s explanations of increase in food production and hear the firing of the gun (83). The overstimulation of the ear deludes them into something resembling, what Kris and Speier call, “a vicarious political reality consisting of parades, meetings, anniversary celebrations, and be-flagged medieval towns” into which the masses in Nazi Germany were driven (11). They describe the illusory view of reality created by sensory experience as follows:

In this world, which is packed with opportunities for overwhelming sensory experience, success is made visible and audible, righteousness becomes extraordinarily exciting, and strength a crushing immediate experience of organised crowds. Like a carnival, it is a world of physical imagery containing no trace of everyday life with its compromises and worries, but offering instead a miraculous purified reality of elation and triumph (11).

Not language but overwhelming sensory experience creates a fictional world in which the masses are kept happy and proud of their lives. They are distanced from the real world. Similarly, in *Animal Farm*, the Spontaneous Demonstration keeps the animals proud of their illusory independence and liberalism that “they were truly their own masters and that the work they did was for their own benefit” (*AF* 84), a feeling which blurs the actual oppressive reality. In this state, they are distracted even from the undeniable fact that “their bellies were empty” as they hear “the songs, the processions, Squealer’s lists of figures, the thunder of the gun, the crowing of the cockerel” (84).

While the animals become detached from the real world, they become attached to imaginary Animal Farm. Animal Farm forms their general identity as they always feel “their sense of honour and privilege in being members of Animal Farm” (94-95). In her critical analysis of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), Moichi points out that in the dystopian society, certain smells work to maintain, what she calls, “we-feeling”, a sense of community and common identity essential for taming people and preserving social stability (63). Here, the sense of smell is a medium of conditioning by which the state aims to maintain people’s friendly sense of identity. Orwell uses the auditory sense in *Animal Farm* to represent the same effect. Puwar notes that “the rituals, commemorations, stories, images and monuments are key to the narration and imagination of the nation [...] Through habitual performances memory is constituted and sustained” (262). The animals’ imaginary belief of Animal Farm as their gregarious community is sustained by the repetition of certain sound: “when they heard the gun booming and saw the green

flag fluttering at the masthead, their hearts swelled with imperishable pride” (*AF* 94-95 underline mine). This forges a hierarchical relationship between *Animal Farm* as the whole and the animals as its parts, encouraging devotion from them. Moreover, it is a community based on bitter hostility towards mankind. The past battles are now referred to as “the great battles in which the human invaders had been defeated” (95), and this suggests that the animals view human beings as an imminent threat from outside. With this deviant misanthropy, they fail to recognise the pigs as the actual oppressors.

Throughout the analysis of *Animal Farm*, one can see the process of how the animals come to be detached from reality in the process when the ruling pigs consolidate their power, and the effects of sound and hearing have a noticeable impact in such a process. Auditory propaganda makes the animals unable to see the real nature of the pigs’ selfish acts. Napoleon dominates the soundscape of the farm with the power of noise. Individual voices come to be silenced, and the animals become part of a general sound which deludes them into praising their lives despite the harsh treatment they receive physically.

George Orwell is a writer who takes it seriously to see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears, smell with his own nose and feel with his own heart (Hirano iii). The representations of the physical senses in his writing vividly reveal the issues of power which he actually experienced in person. In *Animal Farm*, the representations of sound and the auditory sense can be seen as a bridge between political and physical elements. As the novella with a specific focus on the audible shows, it becomes apparent that Orwell tries to warn us that totalitarian politics of manipulation is not only based on ideological control but also on control over our physical senses. In Orwell’s view, the totalitarian state strictly regulates our sensory experiences and totalise our physical perceptions. In order to produce docile subjects, it threatens individual freedom in terms not only of what we think but also of how we feel through physical perceptions. Although it may well be said that Orwell values “privacy, decency and the human spirit” (Hynes 19), it is also important to be reminded that these abstract properties constitute our physical life as well as mental one. Orwell asserts that we need to protect ‘the human body’ from totalitarian control before we try to protect “the human spirit” from it.

### [Bibliography]

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Penguin Classics, 2017.

Attali, Jacques. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. 1977. Translated by Brian

- Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
- Hirano, Keiichi. "Preface." Preface. *Eibungaku: Handobukku Sakka to Sakuhin No. 23: Orwell (British Literature Handbook: Authors and their Works No. 23: Orwell)*, Tom Hopkinson, translated by Keiichi Hirano, Kenkyusha, 1974, pp. iii-v.
- Hynes, Samuel. "Introduction." *Twentieth Century Interpretation of 1984*, edited by Samuel Hynes, Prentice-Hall, 1971, pp. 1-19.
- Kris, Ernst and Hans Speier. *German Radio Propaganda: Report on Home Broadcasts During the War*. Oxford University Press, 1944.
- Lee, Robert, A. *Orwell's Fiction*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1970.
- Letemendia, V. C. "Revolution on *Animal Farm*: Orwell's Neglected Commentary." *New Casebooks: George Orwell*, edited by Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey and Nahem Yousaf, Macmillan Press, 1998, pp. 15-30.
- Moichi, Yoriko. "The Politics of Odors in the 1930s: Olfaction and Social Imagination in *Brave New World* and *The New Pleasure*." *Virginia Woolf Kenkyu*, Vol. 25, 2008, pp. 55-71.
- Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*. Penguin Classics, 2000.
- . *George Orwell: Essays*. Penguin Books, 2000.
- . *A Life in Letters*. Penguin Classics, 2011.
- "propaganda, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/152605](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152605). Accessed 26 August 2019.
- Puwar, Nirmal. "Noise of the Past: Spatial Interruptions of War, Nation and Memory." *The Auditory Culture Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, edited by Michael Bull and Les Back, Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 261-75.
- Rath, Richard, Cullen. "Silence and Noise." *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, edited by Michael Bull, Routledge, 2019, pp. 73-80.
- Schafer, R. Murray. *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Destiny Books, 1994.
- "squeal, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2019, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/188297](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/188297). Accessed 1 October 2019.
- Sun, Ping. "Animal Images and Metaphors in *Animal Farm*." *Journal of Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 4, No. 5, 2015, pp. 1-7.
- Vries, Ad, de. *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*. North-Holland Publishing Company, 1974.
- Williams, Raymond. *Orwell*. Flamingo, 1984.