

EXPOSING INEQUALITY: CLASS IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN THE WORKS OF GEORGE ORWELL

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KEYWORDS

George Orwell, class identity, social criticism, inequality, totalitarianism, Marx, dystopia, satire, oppression, political literature.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the portrayal of class identity and social criticism in George Orwell's major works, focusing on *Animal Farm*, *1984*, and *Down and Out in Paris and London*. It explores how Orwell exposes systemic inequality, power imbalances, and class oppression through satire, allegory, and dystopian narrative. Using Marxist and socio-political literary theory, the research highlights Orwell's critique of totalitarian regimes, capitalist exploitation, and social stratification. The findings demonstrate Orwell's commitment to truth-telling and his enduring relevance in contemporary debates about class and justice.

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Introduction

George Orwell, one of the most politically engaged writers of the 20th century, used literature as a powerful vehicle to critique class-based oppression and socio-political injustices. His works reflect a deep concern for the underprivileged and a persistent distrust of authoritarian power structures. Orwell's life experiences—ranging from serving as a colonial officer in Burma to living among the poor in Paris and London—shaped his sharp awareness of social inequality and class conflict. This thesis investigates how Orwell constructs class identity and critiques social systems through his literary works. *Animal Farm* uses allegory to critique the corruption of revolutionary ideals and the emergence of new elites. *1984* presents a terrifying dystopian world where social hierarchies are rigid and maintained through surveillance and propaganda. Meanwhile, *Down and Out in Paris and London* offers a personal account of economic hardship, revealing the dehumanizing effects of poverty in capitalist societies. The core research question centers on how Orwell represents class distinctions and critiques the systems that sustain inequality. The study draws on Marxist literary theory and Orwell's own essays to provide a framework for understanding

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his ideological positions. By examining Orwell's fiction and nonfiction, this thesis aims to highlight the enduring relevance of his class-conscious critique. As economic inequality and authoritarian tendencies persist in the modern world, Orwell's works remain essential for understanding the mechanisms of social control and class oppression.

Methodology

This research employs a **qualitative literary analysis** method rooted in **Marxist theory** and **critical discourse analysis** to explore Orwell's treatment of class and power. Three key texts are selected: *Animal Farm*, *1984*, and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, each representing a different narrative style—allegory, dystopian fiction, and memoir.

The analytical approach involves:

1. **Close reading** to identify recurring themes related to class, inequality, and social structure.
2. **Application of Marxist literary criticism**, focusing on class struggle, power relations, and ideology as presented in character interactions and narrative developments.
3. **Contextual interpretation**, considering Orwell's historical and political background—his experiences in imperial service, the Spanish Civil War, and socialist movements.

Supporting texts such as Orwell's essays (*The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Politics and the English Language*) are also referenced to better understand his personal and ideological motivations. The methodology further integrates secondary scholarly sources to frame Orwell's work within broader socio-political and literary traditions.

Each text is analyzed for how it:

- Constructs and critiques class hierarchies.
- Portrays resistance or submission to systems of control.
- Reflects Orwell's broader concerns about freedom, justice, and equality.

This method allows for an interdisciplinary examination that merges literature with political thought, providing a comprehensive understanding of how Orwell uses narrative to expose social inequalities and inspire critical reflection.

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that Orwell consistently portrays **class inequality as a systemic and often self-perpetuating force**. In all three works, the structures that support the dominance of the elite are depicted as deeply embedded in society, maintained through manipulation, ideology, and fear. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell illustrates how revolutions can betray their original ideals. The pigs, who lead the rebellion, gradually assume the roles of the oppressors, mirroring the very tyranny they sought to overthrow. This allegory critiques the rise of a new elite class that maintains control through propaganda and revisionist history. *1984* presents a dystopian society where class is rigidly enforced through psychological control and surveillance. The elite Inner Party lives in luxury, while the Proles and Outer Party live in constant deprivation and fear. Orwell shows how authoritarian regimes can preserve class hierarchy not just through force, but through the manipulation of truth and language. In *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Orwell offers a raw, firsthand

account of working-class poverty. His observations reveal the indignity and invisibility of the poor, whose labor sustains society but whose humanity is ignored. Across these works, Orwell emphasizes that **class oppression is often accepted as normal**, and only through awareness and resistance can change occur. His narratives not only describe class injustice but provoke readers to question the systems that allow such inequality to persist.

Discussion

The results highlight Orwell's dual role as a **literary artist and social critic**. Through various literary forms, he examines how class structures are formed, maintained, and challenged. His insights remain profoundly relevant today as societies continue to grapple with inequality, state control, and class mobility. In *Animal Farm*, Orwell shows that revolutions without checks and accountability often lead to new forms of oppression. The transformation of the pigs into human-like tyrants suggests that class identity is not just economic but also behavioral, shaped by access to power and privilege. In 1984, the state's control over truth and memory reflects Orwell's fear of **ideological domination**. Class division is shown as more than economic disparity—it is built into the structure of thought itself. The suppression of independent thinking ensures that the Proles, though the majority, never rise against the system. *Down and Out in Paris and London* adds a personal dimension to Orwell's critique. His immersion in poverty reveals that class is not only about income but about **social invisibility** and humiliation. Orwell dismantles romanticized views of the working class by emphasizing their real struggles and voicelessness. Together, these works show that class identity is not fixed—it can be manipulated, suppressed, or awakened. Orwell's critique is not only of governments or economies, but of the complacency that allows inequality to thrive. His literature urges moral and political engagement, encouraging readers to become aware of the systems that define their lives.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the representation of class identity and social criticism in the works of George Orwell, highlighting his persistent concern with **justice, inequality, and power**. Across fiction and nonfiction, Orwell critiques the mechanisms through which class hierarchies are maintained and legitimized, often with the complicity of those oppressed. *Animal Farm* illustrates how revolutionary ideals can be corrupted by greed and ambition, reinforcing the very class divisions they aimed to destroy. *1984* presents a chilling vision of totalitarianism where class control is psychological, sustained by surveillance and manipulation. *Down and Out in Paris and London* provides a ground-level view of poverty, showing the degradation and marginalization experienced by the lower classes. Orwell's works argue that **class divisions are not natural, but constructed and reinforced by economic systems, political ideologies, and cultural narratives**. His writing serves as a warning against authoritarianism and unchecked power, but also as a call to awareness and resistance. For modern readers, Orwell's critique is as urgent as ever. With growing global inequality, political polarization, and surveillance technologies, his work continues to resonate. The study of class identity in Orwell is not just a literary endeavor, but a way to

better understand our own social realities. Future research could examine Orwell's influence on later political literature or compare his works with contemporary authors exploring similar themes. Ultimately, Orwell's legacy endures because he wrote with clarity, courage, and a deep commitment to exposing the truth.

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