



The application of humor theories in George Orwell's "Animal Farm" and William Golding's "Lord of the Flies"

Iroda ABDULLAYEVA¹

Webster University in Tashkent

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received September 2024

Received in revised form

10 October 2024

Accepted 25 October 2024

Available online

25 November 2024

Keywords:

humor,
humor theories,
power,
irony,
satire.

ABSTRACT

The main goal of this paper is to examine three theories of humor through the lens of two famous English novels, Animal Farm and The Lord of the Flies, offering a deeper understanding of humor's role in literature. To achieve this, we define humor while considering all three theories. The novelty of this paper lies in its in-depth analysis of these theories as applied to the selected novels. The study focuses on key aspects: first, an analysis of some of the main characters in each novel; and second, a comparative exploration of the satirical tone used to depict the collapse of power in both works. These aspects will be analyzed through the lens of the three primary humor theories: Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory, and Relief Theory.

2181-3701/© 2024 in Science LLC.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47689/2181-3701-vol2-iss5/S-pp131-137>

This is an open-access article under the Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.ru>)

Жорж Оруэллнинг “Молхона” ва Уилям Голдингнинг “Пашшалар ҳукмдори” асарларида юмор назарияларининг қўлланилиши

АННОТАЦИЯ

Калит сўзлар:

юмор,
юмор назариялари,
хокимият,
ирония,
сатира.

Ушбу мақоланинг асосий мақсади юмор назарияларининг икки танланган инглиз романи, яъни Молхона ва Пашшалар Хукмдори асарлари нуқтаи назаридан адабиётда кулгу ролини чуқурроқ таҳлил қилиш. Юмор ва юмор назарияларини таърифи атрофлича берилди. Ушбу мақоланинг янгилиги шундаки, у танланган романлар мисолида юмор учта асосий назариясини чуқур таҳлил қилади. Эътибор қаратилган баъзи асосий жиҳатлар қуйидагилардан иборат: биринчидан, ҳар бир романда тасвирланган асосий қаҳрамонларнинг таҳлили.

¹ Master's Graduate, Webster University in Tashkent. E-mail: irodaabdullayeva079@gmail.com

Иккинчидан, ҳар икки асарда ҳокимиятнинг қулашининг сатирик тонини таҳлили ва таққослаш. Ушбу жиҳатлар учта асосий юмор назарияси – Устунлик назарияси, Уйғунсизлик назарияси ва Енгиллик назарияси орқали таҳлил қилинади.

Применение теорий юмора в произведениях Джорджа Оруэлла «Скотный двор» и Уильяма Голдинга «Повелитель мух»

АННОТАЦИЯ

Ключевые слова:

юмор,
теории юмора,
власть,
ирония,
сатира.

Цель данной работы – представить три основные теории юмора через призму двух известных английских романов: «Повелитель мух» Уильяма Голдинга и «Скотный двор» Джорджа Оруэлла, а также раскрыть роль юмора в литературе. Для этого было дано определение юмора с учетом всех трех теорий. Уникальность данного исследования заключается в углубленном анализе трех ключевых теорий юмора на примере выбранных произведений. Основное внимание сосредоточено на следующих аспектах: во-первых, анализ главных персонажей каждого романа; во-вторых, сравнение сатирического тона, с которым изображается крах власти в обоих произведениях. Эти аспекты будут рассмотрены через призму трех основных теорий юмора: теории превосходства, теории несоответствия и теории облегчения.

INTRODUCTION

English is a leading international language; however, learning a language is not only about vocabulary or grammar but also about understanding its humor and unique characteristics. Humor can be the focus of teaching and studying as a complicated phenomenon. It can be investigated as a vital component of literary discourse and an effective means of exploring people's personalities. Though both writers, Orwell and Golding, share one language, their use of satire is different by several factors resulting from their moral and sociocultural development, and there are similarities in terms of allegory and symbolism usage in describing the collapse of power. *Animal Farm* and *Lord of the Flies* may not make us laugh in a conventional sense. However, their satirical tone encourages us to think critically about human fragility and social order. While *Animal Farm* uses satire to explore the power corruption and threats of totalitarianism, *Lord of the Flies* narrates the downfall of civilization and the comedown into savagery. *Animal Farm* and *The Lord of the Flies*, both satirical works that explore the unclear parts of human nature, will be analyzed through three leading humor theories – incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory – to examine how humor reflects power dynamics, societal collapse, and the characters' struggles. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of both novels through three widely known humor theories in literature.

Related works. Several scholars have studied both novels and the field of humor. Gning, M. (2024) compared two novels through the lens of novels' characters, power dynamics, and final degradation of ideals. The very outstanding

point in the study is how the author describes the adoption of human behavior by animals in *Animal Farm* and animal behavior by children in *Lord of the Flies*. Singh, R. K. (2012) presents definitions and examples from various texts to explain the difference between satire, sarcasm, and humor. The following foreign scholars also carried out research in the field of humor: Morreall, J. (1987), Cihla, A. (2012), Spencer, H. (1860), Classen, A. (2017) and others. The research is based on texts from the abovementioned novels and presented in their original form.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study uses qualitative research based on literary analysis to explore humor theories. It uses examples from two famous English novels: *Animal Farm* and *The Lord of the Flies*. The primary objective is to examine how humor theories can be applied to crucial moments in both books.

The primary materials for this study are George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, precisely some dialogues and texts of the novels. In addition to the primary text, secondary materials contain scholarly articles that provide definitions and explanations of humor and humor theories. We chose secondary materials based on their relevance to the themes of humor and humor theories.

This study applies a close reading method, allowing a detailed examination of the text to apply humor theories. We made the following analysis:

Textual Analysis: A close reading of critical scenes involving the main characters, such as the insult of Piggy's weaknesses by Jack in *Lord of the Flies* and Pig's dominance over other animals in *Animal Farm*, will be reviewed to establish the connections with humor theories.

Comparative Analysis: Some scenes with main characters from both novels are illustrated to highlight the associations with humor theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Animal Farm by George Orwell is a well-known figurative novel that satirizes the Revolution in Russia and the rise of chaos in Soviet totalitarianism. The narrative is about a group of farm animals who defeat their human owner, Mr. Jones, desiring to create an egalitarian society. Believing in pigs Napoleon and Snowball, the poor animals initially work toward an imaginary life where all are equal. However, as Napoleon gets mighty, the pigs adopt the same dictatorial behaviors as the former Mr. Jones, ruining all the animals' hopes. Overall, the novel highlights themes of power and the collapse of expectations.

The Lord of the Flies by William Golding is a satirical novel that examines the fragility of society, the breakdown of civilization, human nature, and the descent into savagery. It tells about a group of stranded boys on an uninhabited island who attempt to create their own civilized society. As their attempts to establish orders and maintain humanity fail, power corrupts, and fear leads to violence and chaos. The novel explores human fragility, the loss of purity, and the inherent darkness within people when societal rules no longer apply. However, both novels do not make us laugh in a traditional sense but urge us to think about social problems in depth.

Humor is an umbrella term encompassing satire, jokes, sarcasm, wit, irony, and anything else that might be 'amusing.' Humor always needs language and word mastery. Knowledge of humor functions as a stimulus for social interaction, fostering interpersonal engagement and enhancing the effectiveness of communication (Lefcourt, 2001). Many theories attempt to explain what humor is. However, in contemporary literature, three

theories are most commonly observed: Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory, and Relief Theory.

The Superiority Theory posits that humor arises from ridicule, wherein the target of amusement is perceived as inferior, while we view ourselves as superior. More specifically, the ridiculous is encountered in the self-ignorance of individuals who mistakenly believe they possess wisdom. In other words, pleasure generates laughter from the pleasure derived from witnessing others experience the misfortune of being deceived about their wisdom (Morreall, 1987). Bergson's view is classified under the Superiority Theory, as he argues that laughter and amusement are primarily mocking and often directed at individuals displaying some form of inferiority. However, his view of the appreciation of the comic is more optimistic, as he contends that laughter and derision serve a constructive function within society.

Piggy, one of the critical characters in *Lord of the Flies*, is portrayed as a physically weak and socially awkward boy who is also thoughtful and intelligent. He is the one who suggests using the conch to establish a form of order and tries to maintain a sense of civilization and hope for survival. However, the other boys on the island often ridiculed him, mainly due to his nickname, asthma, obesity, and glasses: "Can't catch my breath. I was the only boy in our school who had asthma [...]. "And I've been wearing specs since I was three" (9). Boys frequently called him "Fat Boy," a nickname that mocks his physical appearance. This attitude reflects the ruthlessness of society, where people are judged based on their physical traits and weaknesses. The fact that Piggy's real name is never revealed in the novel also highlights his separation from the group and being an outsider: "The fat boy waited to be asked his name in turn but this proffer of acquaintance was not made" (9). The dialogue below illustrates how social hierarchies begin to form among the boys, with Jack's mockery in calling Piggy 'Fatty' setting the tone for the rejection he will face throughout the novel.

"You're talking too much," said Jack.

"Shut up, Fatty." Laughter arose.

"He's not Fatty," cried Ralph, "his real name's Piggy!"

"Piggy!" (Golding, 1954, p. 24).

According to the **superiority theory**, the other boys' laughter and teasing are based on their feeling superior to him due to his vulnerabilities. Piggy's self-worth is eroded as the boys use his weaknesses to proclaim their dominance. Jack and others may laugh at Piggy's misfortunes or weaknesses because it reinforces their dominance and power over him. Here, Jack calls Piggy "Fatty," and Ralph's reluctant correction by calling him "Piggy" highlights how the boys view him as an outsider. Their laughter at his expense reflects their belief that they are more potent than Piggy because boys perceive him as weak and different.

In *Animal Farm*, the pigs, particularly Napoleon and Snowball, quickly rise to power after the animals overthrow Mr. Jones. "As for the pigs, they could already read and write perfectly. [...]. None of the other animals on the farm could get further than the letter A" (27,28). Over time, Napoleon, in particular, starts using his intelligence and manipulation to dominate the farm and make the other animals feel inferior: "Comrades!" he cried. "You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. [...]. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for YOUR sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples" (29). The pigs'

sense of superiority grows as they assume leadership positions, claiming special privileges over Boxer, the sheep, and all other animals. The pigs' exploitation of Boxer reflects how those in power can find amusement or superiority in the suffering or hard work of the lower class, just as the dominant boys in *Lord of the Flies* find pleasure in mocking Piggy. The pigs view Boxer as an inferior, subservient animal, reinforcing their dominance by making him work until he collapses. Moreover, the pigs' ability to control the sheep highlights the use of superiority as a means of asserting power and dominance over the uneducated and easily manipulated animals: "[...], the sheep developed a great liking for this maxim, and often as they lay in the field they would all start bleating "Four legs good, two legs bad! Four legs good, two legs bad!" and keep it up for hours on end, never growing tired of it" (29).

By the novel's end, the pigs' sense of superiority has grown, so they are no longer just superior to the other animals – they have become the new tyrants, being worse than their previous human oppressors. The animals are now seen as inferior and dominated by pigs' impulses. The pigs' complete transformation into human-like figures reinforces the idea that superiority can be a corrupting force, making those in power more detached and indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Through this, we can perceive how the pigs mock the other animals, believing themselves superior.

Incongruity (juxtaposition) theory posits that humor and laughter stem from the presence of incongruity, which refers to something that contradicts expectations based on a particular norm. According to Hutcheson in *Thoughts on Laughter* (1725), amusement arises from the intellectual recognition of incongruity: "The cause of laughter is the juxtaposition of images with opposing additional ideas, yet some similarity in the main idea." Kant also added (*Critique of Judgement*) that we laugh at absurdities because the mind's effort to resolve contradictory ideas triggers a pleasurable physical reaction, not because the intellect enjoys frustration (1994). He believed that humor requires an element of surprise, generating a sense of cognitive dissonance, which is then freed through laughter.

In *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy holds the conch, symbolizing authority and the right to speak within the group. However, despite this symbol of power, he is repeatedly ignored, particularly by Jack and the others who have descended into savagery. The **incongruity** here is that the conch, meant to represent democracy and order, no longer holds any real power in the face of Jack's emerging authoritarian rule. The expected outcome – respect for the conch and equality for those who hold it – is contradicted by the reality that Piggy's voice is ignored because Jack and the others choose to disregard him:

"I got the conch," said Piggy indignantly. "You let me speak!"

"The conch doesn't count on top of the mountain," said Jack, "so you shut up" (51). This contradiction between the expected and the actual is unsettling, as it shows the collapse of expectation.

In *Animal Farm*, Squealer manipulates the farm's commandments to justify the pigs' increasing authority and privileges. The commandments, originally meant to provide equality among the animals, are subtly modified by Squealer to fit the pigs' boosting power. The **incongruity** in this case arises when the animals, who initially believed in the idea of equality, see the commandments change but are manipulated into believing that everything is in the interest of the farm. Pigs that claim to cherish equality and justice but abide by or foster lying and injustice are ironic. The animals hope that the commandments

will always remain fixed. However, the fact is that the rules are being constantly altered to benefit the pigs, exposing the duplicity of the leadership. One example is:

"They had thought the Fifth Commandment was "No animal shall drink alcohol," but there were two words that they had forgotten. At first, the Commandment read: "No animal shall drink alcohol TO EXCESS" (84).

The animals expect the commandments to be steadfast and reflect their equivalency, but the truth is that they are exploited and distorted to benefit the pigs.

Both situations build a feeling of irony and expose the darker realities of power structures. "Irony can explore the differences between what a society or person says or does and how they actually live" (Singh, 2012).

Also, according to **The Relief Theory**, laughter is a way to release negative emotions and nervousness. The relief theory suggests that humor acts as a mechanism for releasing accumulated emotions or tension through emotional release. Laughter and joy, according to the relief theory, are the result of the release of excess negative energy. This theory primarily used humor to overcome sociocultural inhibitions and to reveal suppressed desires. Spencer states that intense pain often triggers involuntary movements, such as the affected limb reacting, facial contortions, and vocal expressions of distress. Similarly, emotions like joy and fear also have physical manifestations. He also states that laughter, in the same way, serves as a physical expression of the release of pent-up energy (Spencer, 1860).

In *Lord of the Flies*, there comes a moment when the boys take part in leisure activities or 'moments of fun' depicted by their first chants praising or wishing to kill the beast or the act of swinging sticks while pretending to hunt. Such activities allow them to escape from the horror and the anxiety that results from the struggle to survive and to dominate. The boys relieve their strain through play and violence, which gives a momentary escape from the pressures: "They seemed to share one wide, ecstatic grin. Jack had too many things to tell Ralph at once. Instead, he danced a step or two, then remembered his dignity and stood still, grinning" (82). Another example of laughter rising is the dialogue that occurs just after the tension between Jack and Ralph. This laughter probably arose to release the negative feelings they had experienced:

"Now I only got one eye. Just you wait—"

Jack mimicked the whine and scramble.

"Jus' you wait—yah!"

"Piggy and the parody were so funny that the hunters began to laugh. Jack felt encouraged. He went on scrambling and the laughter rose to a gale of hysteria" (86).

Their joy after hunting creates an ironic "relief" as their brief escape from the order follows tragic consequences. The relief they experience through cruelty makes almost all boys laugh. Even Golding himself also states: "With some positive action before them, a little of the tension died" (87).

In *Animal Farm*, confusion and false hope arise when the animals briefly believe in their freedom, the pigs' justifications for their actions, and Squealer's manipulation provide them with a fleeting sense of relief from the heavy psychological burden. "All the animals capered with joy when they saw the whips going up in flames. [...]. Yes, it was theirs – everything that they could see was theirs! In the ecstasy of that thought they gamboled round and round, they hurled themselves into the air in great leaps of excitement" (19). This relief is temporary, as the animals soon realize that the pigs' rule has become indistinguishable from the tyranny of the humans they initially overthrew.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has explored three main theories of humor in literature, comparing their role within the seminal novels. Through analyzing two British novels, the study highlights the distinct ways in which humor and its theories are used by William Golding and George Orwell. This comparison reveals humor's varied concepts and sociocultural functions and underscores its significance as a comic device in literary expression. Finally, the article categorizes humor theories that use some elements of irony, satire, and sarcasm in these texts, offering insights into their role in shaping the tone and critique of society within literature. Humor and laughing are the best feelings. However, when humor enters literature, its purpose should not limit itself to entertainment. Literature and humor together have to shed light on the darkest corners of reality, allowing readers to understand the world better.

REFERENCES:

1. Cihla, A. (2012). Linguistic theories of humor and their applicability to puns. Linguistics Program, Lawrence University.
2. Classen, A. (2017). The bitter and biting humor of sarcasm in medieval and early modern literature. *Neophilologus*, 101(3), 417–437. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11061-017-9526-8>
3. Gning, M. (2024). Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*: A Comparative Study. *Revue Traduction et Langues* 23(1), 385-402.
4. Golding, W. (1954). *Lord of the flies* [PDF]. Retrieved from [LordoftheFlies 57(2).pdf]
5. Kant, I. (1994). Critique of judgment (pp. 211–228). <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18254632.20>
6. Lee, C. J., & Katz, A. N. (1998). The differential role of ridicule in sarcasm and irony. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 13(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/xxxxxx>
7. Lefcourt, H. M. (2001). *Humor: The psychology of living buoyantly*. Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers.
8. Morreall, J. (1987). *The philosophy of laughter and humor*. State University of New York Press.
9. Orwell, G. (1944). *Animal farm* [eBook]. eBooks@Adelaide, The University of Adelaide Library. <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/o/orwell/george/o79a/index.html>
10. Spencer, H. (1860). The physiology of laughter. In *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative* (Vol. 1, pp. 107–126). Williams & Norgate.