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THE ANIMAL TALE AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY IN THE NOVEL RABBITS AND BOA CONSTRICTORS BY FAZIL ISKANDER

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My research has centered on discovering the tradition and innovation in the development of the genre of an animal tale in Russian literature as a form for the criticism of society.

In Russia, the animal tale has deep roots. Starting in medieval times, wandering clowns (skomoroxs) performed animal tales to show their criticism of the regimes by using the form of the folklore animal tale. The well known form of the folklore animal tale was enriched by animal fables that were introduced to the Russian reader from France and Germany in the 18th and 19th centuries that led to the development of the genre of the Russian animal fable combining the features of the Russian folklore and the achievements of foreign literature. Ivan Krylov was one of the first Russian writers to use the new form of the animal fable as a satirical form of the criticism of the society.

Using the Russian tradition of the animal tale and the animal fable as a form of social criticism, Fazil Iskander in the book Rabbits and Boa Constrictors introduces the reader to the real Soviet society through two animal groups--the Rabbits and the Boa Constrictors. The animals create examples of two societies that function similarly, with one being weaker (the Rabbits) the other being stronger (the Boa Constrictors). But Iskander also shows society is typological in tyrannical situations. The Rabbits and the Boa Constrictors both have dictators as rulers in their societies that use fear to keep the animals from rebelling. Iskander demonstrates that fear is the leading factor that keeps dictators in power.

Every oppressed society suggests different forms of rebellion. Ponderer and Sharpie are the two main characters, both of which are Rabbits. Ponderer seeks to change the system so that the individual is not destroyed. Sharpie, who also starts as a rebel of the system, is later corrupted by the system and then used as a tool of the government to undermine Ponderer's efforts.

The novel is full of parallels with contemporary Soviet system. Metaphorical images are very transparent and can be easily deciphered.