
BOOK REVIEW OF ANIMAL FARM BY GEORGE ORWELL

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ABSTRACT

This book review critically examines George Orwell's *Animal Farm* as a political allegory that explores the dynamics of power, revolution, and the corruption of ideals. Through a detailed analysis of the novel's characters, narrative structure, and symbolic elements, the review demonstrates how Orwell uses animal fable to reflect the historical trajectory of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinist dictatorship. The discussion highlights the mechanisms of propaganda, the manipulation of language, and the psychological processes that enable authoritarian regimes to consolidate control. By drawing connections between the novel's themes and broader political theories such as Marxism, Gramsci's cultural hegemony, and Foucault's relationship between knowledge and power, the review situates *Animal Farm* within the context of both historical and contemporary political discourse. The analysis further underscores the enduring relevance of Orwell's work, illustrating how the patterns of power, obedience, and ideological distortion depicted in the novel continue to resonate in modern societies. Ultimately, the review argues that *Animal Farm* serves as a cautionary tale about the fragility of democratic ideals and the persistent dangers of unchecked authority, offering profound insights into the complexities of human nature and collective action.

I. Introduction

“All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

Published in 1945, *Animal Farm* is a political allegory that reflects the rise of communism in Russia and how its revolutionary ideals of equality and justice were gradually replaced by dictatorship and inequality. Orwell tells this story through a simple fable where animals on a farm overthrow their human master in pursuit of freedom, only to end up under the rule of the pigs, who become as oppressive as the humans they replaced. The use of animals allows Orwell to present political events and figures in a symbolic yet accessible way, stripping complex history down to its essential patterns of power and corruption. His style is clear and direct but he relies on satire, irony, and symbolism to deepen the impact of the narrative. Through these devices, Orwell shows how propaganda manipulates truth, how ideals are distorted, and how absolute power inevitably leads to abuse.

II. Character Analysis

Mr. Jones: The negligent owner of Manor Farm, whose drunkenness and incompetence allow the animals to rebel. He represents Tsar Nicholas II, who failed to hold Russia together during World War I.

Old Major: The prize boar whose vision of a revolution inspires the animals. Modelled on Lenin (and partly Marx), he is respected, ideological, and persuasive, but dies before the rebellion occurs.

Snowball: Intelligent, innovative, and committed to the collective good, Snowball drafts the Seven Commandments and proposes the windmill. Representing Trotsky, he is eventually ousted by Napoleon and scapegoated as a traitor.

Napoleon: Ambitious and ruthless, Napoleon seizes power by force, training dogs as his secret police. He symbolizes Stalin, and Napoleon, consolidating authority and ruling through fear.

Squealer: Napoleon's propagandist, skilled in manipulating language and twisting truth. He embodies the propaganda machinery that sustains authoritarian regimes.

Boxer: The hardworking cart horse with mottos “I will work harder” and “Napoleon is always

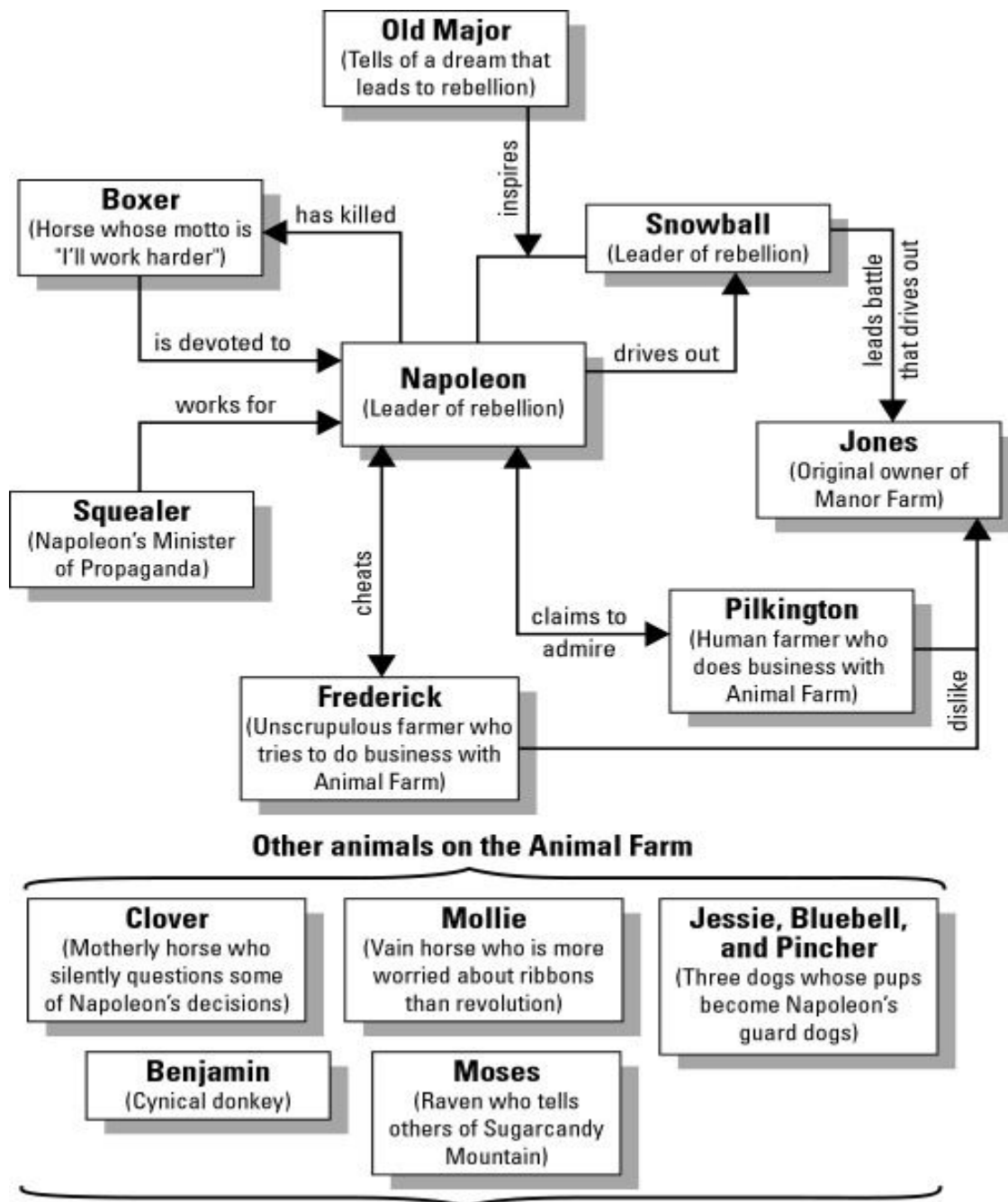
right.” Loyal but naïve, he represents the exploited working class, ultimately betrayed when sent to the glue factory.

Clover: A maternal horse, faithful to the regime but lacking critical awareness. Alongside Boxer, she symbolizes the strengths and weaknesses of the proletariat.

Benjamin: A cynical donkey, sceptical of propaganda yet passive until Boxer’s fate. He represents the intellectual minority that perceives corruption but chooses silence.

Mollie: A mare, attached to luxury items like ribbons and sugar, who abandons the farm. She represents the bourgeoisie unwilling to sacrifice comfort for revolution.

Moses: The raven who preaches about “Sugarcandy Mountain,” symbolizing institutional religion that offers hope of an afterlife while distracting from present oppression.



Mr. Pilkington: A neighbouring farmer who trades with Animal Farm. He represents the Western powers who alternately opposed and accommodated the Soviet Union.

Mr. Frederick: The farmer who tricks the animals with forged banknotes. He represents Hitler, reflecting the brief Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and its eventual betrayal.

III. Themes & Allegorical meanings

The story begins on **Manor Farm**, where **Old Major**, an elderly boar, inspires the animals

with his dream of a society free from human oppression. His vision sets the groundwork for the principles of *Animalism*, like Lenin's revolutionary ideas provided the ideological basis for the Russian Revolution. Shortly after his death, the animals rise against **Mr. Jones**, whose neglect and drunkenness represent Tsar Nicholas II's incompetence. The successful rebellion mirrors the **Russian Revolution of 1917**, where the monarchy was overthrown. Once the humans are expelled, the animals rename the farm **Animal Farm** and establish their own rules, symbolizing the Bolsheviks' establishment of a socialist state. The **Battle of the Cowshed**, where the animals defend the farm from Jones's attempt to retake it, corresponds to the **October Revolution** and the civil war that followed, as the Bolsheviks fought to secure their new government against counter-revolutionary forces. In the aftermath, a power struggle begins between **Snowball** and **Napoleon**. Snowball, with his innovative ideas such as the windmill, reflects Trotsky's vision of rapid industrial progress, while Napoleon, more focused on consolidating authority, represents Stalin. Their rivalry escalates until Napoleon uses trained dogs to drive Snowball out, paralleling Stalin's expulsion of Trotsky in 1927. From this point onward, propaganda becomes essential. **Squealer** begins rewriting history and justifying Napoleon's actions, much like Stalin's regime relied on misinformation to control public opinion.

At the same time, smaller acts of resistance, such as the hens refusing to surrender their eggs, illustrate how peasants in the Soviet Union resisted forced collectivization. Their eventual starvation reflects the devastating famine under Stalin's policies. By the end of the first half, Napoleon has established himself as the uncontested leader, replacing the idealism of Old Major's vision with a dictatorship. The **shift from collective revolution to authoritarian rule** mirrors the transformation of the Soviet Union under Stalin.

In the second half of the story, Napoleon's control over Animal Farm becomes absolute. He begins holding public "confessions," where animals accused of treachery are executed by the dogs. This directly mirrors Stalin's Great Purges of the 1930s, where supposed enemies of the state, often loyal party members were forced into false confessions and eliminated through show trials and executions. The windmill, initially Snowball's idea, becomes a central symbol. Although it is rebuilt multiple times after being destroyed, it represents Stalin's push for rapid industrialization, with the burden falling on the workers. The animals work tirelessly, especially Boxer, whose blind loyalty reflects the exploited working class. His tragic end, being sold to the glue factory under the pretence of medical care shows how Stalinist policies

discarded even the most loyal citizens once they were no longer useful. International relations are also included. Napoleon negotiates with Mr. Frederick and Mr. Pilkington, symbolizing the Soviet Union's dealings with foreign powers. The timber trade with Frederick, who pays with forged notes, represents Hitler's betrayal of the Nazi-Soviet Pact when Germany invaded Russia in 1941. The subsequent attack on Animal Farm parallels this invasion, leaving the animals devastated despite their eventual "victory."

Meanwhile, Moses the raven returns, once again preaching about "Sugarcandy Mountain," a clear allegory for the role of the Church in offering hope of an afterlife to distract from present suffering. His reappearance shows how even religion was tolerated by Stalin when it served political needs.

As time passes, the farm's original principles are eroded. The Seven Commandments are secretly altered to justify the pigs' privileges, culminating in the chilling final revision: "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.*" This reflects how the Soviet regime twisted socialist ideals to maintain power. Finally, the pigs begin walking on two legs and openly socializing with humans, symbolizing the betrayal of the revolution and the emergence of a ruling elite indistinguishable from the oppressors they replaced.

By the novel's end, the animals can no longer tell the difference between pigs and humans. Orwell thus illustrates the central message of his allegory: revolutions that begin with ideals of equality often collapse into systems of exploitation when power is concentrated in the hands of a few.

Year	Animal Farm	Historical equivalent
1917	The Rebellion	Russian Revolution
	Expel/Death of Mr. Jones (and also the expel of his people)	Abdication/Murder of Nicholas Tsar II
	Battle of the Cowshed	October Revolution
	Trotsky organizes the animals into "Animal Committees"	Labor camps
1923	Vicious and frequent disagreements between Napoleon and Snowball	The power struggle (between Stalin and Trotsky)
1924	The death of Old Major (supposedly before the Rebellion, at the very beginning of the novel)	The death of Vladimir Lenin
1927	Napoleon uses his dogs to force Snowball to flee	Stalin expels Trotsky from the party
1929	The animals start to construct the windmill	Start of industrialization
1932	The hens smash their eggs instead of surrendering them to Napoleon	The Kulaks burn their farms instead of handing them over to Stalin
	The hens' rations are cut, and are starved to death	The Kulaks are starved to death
1933	Mr. Pilkington (owner of Foxwood) and Mr. Frederick (owner of Pinchfield) recognizes Animal Farm	The USA recognizes the Soviet Union
1936	Napoleon executes four pigs, three hens, a goose and a sheep	Stalin holds a court show-trial (and executes) of his major opponents that affect his power
1939	The timber deal between Napoleon and Mr. Frederick	Non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia (the Nazi-Soviet Pact)
1941	It was discovered that Mr. Frederick payed with forged notes	Germany invades Russia (thereby breaking the Pact)

IV. Modern Relevance

Although George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* as a response to the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin, the book continues to feel very relevant in modern times. The themes of authoritarianism, propaganda, and corruption of ideals are not locked in history, they recur in different forms across the world today. Many governments, political movements, and even corporations use the same tactics shown on the farm like rewriting history, appealing to emotions rather than facts, and using fear to maintain control. For example, the way **Squealer constantly changes the animals' memory of events** resembles how misinformation spreads on social media and other platforms openly today. False narratives, once repeated enough, often replace the truth in people's minds, a phenomenon that psychologists describe as the **illusory truth effect**, we start believing something simply because we hear it very often. The story also connects closely with psychology of obedience and authority. Napoleon's rise to power and the animals' unquestioning loyalty to him can be understood through **Milgram's obedience experiments** (1961), which showed that ordinary people will follow orders from authority figures, even when those orders harm others. Similarly, Boxer's tragic motto "Napoleon is always right" shows how blind faith in leaders can override moral judgment. The animals are

not inherently foolish, they simply respond in ways that mirror human tendencies toward conformity and obedience. Another relevant psychological idea is the “**bystander effect.**” Benjamin the donkey sees through the lies but stays silent until it is too late. This reflects how individuals, even when aware of injustice, often avoid acting out of fear or a sense that “someone else will do something.” In real life, this can be seen in how societies tolerate corruption or human rights abuses until the consequences become unavoidable. The book also speaks to **group psychology**. The animals collectively accept Napoleon’s leadership because they fear chaos if they resist. This relates to theories of **social identity**, where belonging to a group (in this case, “the animals” united against humans) can make individuals overlook flaws in their leaders. Orwell shows how group loyalty, when manipulated, can suppress critical thinking and allow authoritarian systems to flourish. In today’s political climate, *Animal Farm* feels like a warning about the fragility of democracy and freedom. Whether it is authoritarian governments rewriting history textbooks, leaders discrediting the press to maintain control, or online echo chambers amplifying propaganda, the same dynamics Orwell highlighted remain alive. For instance, the selective presentation of “truth” in politics can be compared to Squealer’s twisting of facts, and the way authoritarian regimes often blame “enemies of the state” mirrors how Snowball became the scapegoat for every failure.

On a personal level, the novel forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about human nature. It suggests that the problem is not only with leaders but also with ordinary individuals, their willingness to obey, their desire for comfort, or their fear of standing out. This is why the book endures, it shows that revolutions can begin with noble ideals but collapse into oppression when people fail to question authority. As a piece of literature, its power lies in its simplicity. Orwell does not rely on complex language or technical arguments, he uses a fable to strip politics and psychology to their core. The conclusion, where pigs are indistinguishable from humans, is not just about Stalin’s Russia; it is about any system where power becomes unchecked. The book teaches that without vigilance, history repeats itself, and freedom can quickly give way to tyranny.