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## Book Review: Orwellian Allegory - A Review of Animal Farm

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### INTRODUCTION

The novel is a story of a group of farm animals, who make an attempt to take over the farm in which they are made to work. This farm is owned by one Jones and is named Manor Farm. There are various types of livestock in Manor Farm, ranging from boars, horses, and mares to hens, dogs, and pigs. The story begins with a saddening picture of the gruesome living conditions of the farm animals. In order to overcome the pitiable circumstances in which the animals find themselves, they decide to start a revolution. The mastermind of this revolution is a boar named “Old Major”. However, he could not live to see the revolution, which was carried forward by three other boars named Napoleon, Snowball, and Squealer. They formulate seven principles, based on the philosophy of Old Major. These are the ‘Seven Commandments of Animalism’. The revolution eventually does take place and Mr. Jones is forced off the farm. With this, the animals become their own masters. The farm is renamed ‘Animal Farm’ and all animals display great zeal and dedication towards the ‘greater good of animals’. In the beginning, the farm displayed great success. There was more food, lesser working hours for everyone, and all animals living with the pride that they worked for themselves. Napoleon and Snowball become the leaders of the group. When Mr. Jones

attacked the farm, with the goal of reoccupying the farm, all animals displayed great valor and fearlessness. As a result, they were victorious as they repelled the attack by Mr. Jones, which was christened the 'The Battle of Cowshed'. After the Battle of Cowshed, Napoleon and Snowball showcase their plan to build a windmill, which was supposed to make the lives of all the animals working in the field, easier and more convenient. However, after this declaration, Napoleon directs nine attack dogs to charge at Snowball.

These dogs were secretly being trained by Napoleon to fulfill his selfish goals. Snowball is then chased out of the farm. This marks the start of Napoleon assuming sole control of the leadership, he makes drastic changes such as rules for all animals were to be drawn upon by him. This marks the start of Napoleon's machinations to fulfill his self-interests. Over time, Snowball is painted as a villain and Napoleon starts making amendments to the 'Commandments of Animalism' to expand his powers. All these activities were being done at the cost of the welfare of the other animals on the farm. They were underfed, overworked, and exploited but continued to work for the 'greater good. Eventually, by the end of the story, totalitarianism and its tendencies take over. Napoleon and those close to him become 'elite', thereby making the other animals second-class citizens. The rebellion began with overthrowing man and his cruelty, and by the end of the tale, everything came full circle. It was impossible to tell who was a man and who was an animal.

## **POLITICAL ALLEGORY**

George Orwell is often associated with the haunting picture of totalitarianism that he painted in the novel 1984. In *Animal Farm*, however, Orwell took a different route. The specialty behind this novella is the allegorical references to the socio-political scenarios prevalent in the 20th century. It is in this sense that a review of the book must be contextualized. As already mentioned, the plot fundamentally revolves around a revolution. After the revolution, as time passes it is apparent to the reader that things are not all hunky-dory as envisioned by the 'revolutionaries'. This revolution is allegorically meant to signify the Bolshevik Revolution that took place in present-day Russia. Just like the Bolsheviks staged an armed insurrection against the monarchy, the animals too revolted against their human owner. The character 'Old Major'

is meant to be a reference to Communist ideologue Karl Marx. This can be substantiated by the fact just like Marx was responsible for popularizing Marxist ideology and died before he could actually see the 'revolution, just like Old Major. Old Major also propounded the philosophy of 'Animalism', a sly reference to Marx and his communist ideas. Later on in the story, this political theme becomes quite apparent as terms such as Comrades are introduced, which are to be used as prefixes before names.

## **THE GREATER GOOD**

A supervening theme throughout the story is the 'greater good of all the animals. The revolution began with the goal of seeking freedom from Mr. Jones' cruelty and brutality. This was meant to ensure that the general welfare of all animals is taken care of, by the animals themselves. As the story progresses, it is evident that no matter how poor the living conditions of the animals become, their zeal to work for the 'greater good' never ceases. The 'greater good' is almost an unattainable pedestal, the top of which can never be reached. This is important as it shows how convincing the animals that they are part of a project, which is bigger than them, gives them a sense of belongingness and pride. An excerpt from the novella aptly describes this theme - "And yet the animals never gave up hope... they never lost, even for an instant, their sense of honor and privilege in being members of the Animal Farm."<sup>1</sup> It is almost as if this honor and privilege of being recognised as the only farm in England controlled by animals meant more for the animals than their actual welfare. This theme of a pursuit of a 'greater good for all is symbolized by the windmill which was built at the farm.

## **THE WINDMILL**

The idea of building a windmill was first proposed by Snowball. The purpose was to further the interests of all the animals, by making their lives easier. The windmill is supposed to be a symbol of technology and scientific developments. This symbolism was used by Orwell to criticize backhandedly the focus on science and tech in the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the windmill for the first time, Napoleon used his prowess of twisting facts and manipulation

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (first published 1945, Hermes Inc) 97

to convince all the animals that the fall of the mill was due to sabotage. The real reason perceptibly was inadequate and incompetent construction on the part of the animals. The windmill soon transforms into an object, central to the animals of the farm. It becomes the sole objective of some animals like the old workhorse - Boxer. Even when Boxer was in his senescence, he worked towards the completion of the windmill. His statements ' I will work harder' showcase how all the animals have been manipulated into working, in what they think is their benefit. When the windmill does become fully functional and complete. It proves to have no tangible benefit for the animals. Everything that they worked for and suffered because of, amounted to nothing. The windmill was originally being developed to make the lives of the animals easier. However, in the end, it ends up being nothing more than a monument of lies put forth by Napoleon. The construction of the mill began with idealistic statements of the luxuries it will provide and ended with Napoleon stating that "The truest happiness lay in working hard and living frugally."<sup>2</sup>

### **BOXER - THE HORSE**

Boxer was used by Orwell to act as a critique of the condition of workers in totalitarian regimes. Boxer symbolized the normal worker who was expected to do two simple things - Work hard and never question anything. This can be substantiated from two of Boxer's maxims which were " I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right." Sticking to his work, Boxer continued to work blindly through thick and thin. He was guided and inspired by a utopian future wherein he would rest peacefully and all the other animals would live easily with all luxuries and amenities. It is this pursuit of the unachievable, that the novella tries to critique. Boxer had worked his entire life to achieve this unattainable goal, even in his old age when he barely had any strength left. "It seemed nothing kept him on his feet except the will to continue."<sup>3</sup> Working tirelessly and aimlessly eventually took a toll on Boxer's health and he succumbed to his ailing health. It is after his death that the real character of the farm leadership is truly displayed. Napoleon in a devious attempt, sends the ailing and sick Boxer to the slaughterers, just so that he can milk more money from his 'comrade'. But he proclaims

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<sup>2</sup> George Orwell (n 1) 109

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell (n 1) 100

to all the animals that Boxer was sent to the best animal hospital in the land for treatment, to perpetuate the image of his caring nature. No peace is given even to the dead, as Napoleon proclaims all the animals to follow Boxer's two maxims, looking to gain selfishly even as one of his 'most loyal comrades' has died.

## **HERO WORSHIP**

The novel explains the perils of hero-worshipping. Napoleon, after his ascendancy to power soon became an animal who could do no wrong. Being at the top of the hierarchy of power, his word became the solemn truth, from which no one could deviate from. It sends a signal to the reader to be cautious of people or in this case animals who claim to be those who know it all. In this context, it is timely to remind ourselves of one of the wisest men ever - Socrates, who said that "Only thing I know and that is that I know nothing." This saying is meant to display that those who are wise and learned are those who are capable of accepting their limitations. Orwell weaves the story to indicate how those who worship these individuals are cooking a recipe for eventual disaster. Excerpts from the story indicate how Napoleon was being credited for each and every activity taking place on the farm, irrespective of whether he was instrumental in it or not. Remarks like "Under the guidance of our leader, Comrade Napoleon, I have laid five eggs in six days" and " Thanks to the leadership of Comrade Napoleon, how excellent this water tastes." <sup>4</sup>(*Animal Farm* 2002). Poems too were also composed in honor of their hero - Napoleon. This ingrained behavior of worshipping a leader who appeared to be infallible ultimately led to the downfall of the animals of the farm. The story also shows how a characteristic of faultlessness is often complemented by the general forgetfulness of the past. As the past is slowly effaced from the memories of all animals, the only thing that stays with them is the ingrained knowledge of the greatness of their leader.

## **CONCLUSION**

*Animal Farm* serves as a cautionary tale for its readers. Orwell cautions everyone against the tyranny of leaders who claim to work for the benefit of all, but in reality work for the welfare

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<sup>4</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (first published 1945, Hermes Inc) 80

of the selected elite, which is meant to be an allegory for oligarchy in present-day Russia. This story is a prime illustration of literature being used to criticize politicians and their dirty machinations. The finer aspects of the story, ranging from the perils of hero worship and forgetfulness to the windmill as a central object of technological pursuit shows the brilliance of how Orwell has crafted the prose to act as a critique of Stalinist Russia. But focusing only on Russia would defeat the purpose of Orwell writing such a masterpiece. For this reason, it is essential to understand his real criticism. All allegorical references are meant for tyrannous and totalitarian regimes and their devious ways of functioning. This short novella allows us to compare real political developments with the fictional ones that took place in Manor Farm. If there is one thing that a reader should take from this story, It is that through a web of lies and deception, 'unamendable' commandments can be changed for the benefit of a few. It does not take long for 'All Animals are Equal' to change to 'All animals are equal, But some are More Equal than Others.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Orwell (n 1) 114