Animal Farm, A Fairy Story


As George Orwell published his book in the USA, narrates the fable of the Animals in Manor Farm who revolts against his owner, Mr Jones. It could be read as a simple fairy story that students, especially children, will love. They will feel pity for the animals, especially for Boxer and they will most probably hate the pigs and his leader, Napoleon. Nevertheless, adults will read between the lines and they will find a ferocious critic against communism and totalitarianism. As an English teacher, the reading of this book is highly recommended. Here is include an essay about this book that should be commented in the classroom while reading it.

PLOT

The formerly prosperous Manor Farm is in a bad condition due to the drinking problems of its owner, Mr Jones. One night, the animals attend the speech of old Major, the oldest and most respectful pig in the farm. The dogs and the pigs stay in the front row, after them, the rest of the animals like the sheep, cows, the horses and the donkey.

Old Major’s speech encourages animals to take control of the farm, to rebel against men who are the big and only problem of the animals. He warms them about the vices of men and he gives some basic ideas that will become the seven commandments. The animals adopt them to rule the farm under their power. Old Major also teaches the animals the song “Beast of England” which they start to sing waking up Mr Jones who shots his gun and all the animals go back to their sleeping-place.

Three days later, old Major dies and he is buried in the orchard. During three months, nothing happens. However, the pigs realise that they should be prepare for the Rebellion. They start to meet in secret, they learn to read and write and start to organise the other animals.

Among the pigs, Napoleon, Snowball and Squealer out stand. Napoleon is a fierce-looking Berkshire boar while Snowball is a vivacious pig with more inventive and quicker in speech than Napoleon. Squealer is a brilliant talker too capable of convincing everyone. They elaborate old Major’s teachings into a system of thought that they call “Animalism” which they expound to the rest of the animals.

Most of the animals are convinced thanks to the most faithful pigs' disciples, Boxer and Clover (the horses). However, the pigs have problems with Moses, Mr Jones’ tame raven who is always talking about Sugarcandy Mountain, the place animals go when they die.

On Midsummer’s Eve, Mr Jones gets drunk at the Red Lion while his men had left the farm in the early morning without having fed the animals. On the next day, the animals break the store-shed and begin to eat. Mr Jones and his men go there with whips but the beasts go mad and the men after being butted and kicked, flight away. Moses, the raven, flights away too. Rebellion had happened and the farm is theirs.

The first action they take is to destroy in a big fire the instruments men used to subdue them. They serve a double ration of corn that day, they sing the song “Beast of England” several times and they sleep that night as they had never done before.
On the following day, they tour the whole farm and go into the farmhouse despite being scared. They inspect the house and they decide to preserve it as a museum. Later, Snowball will change the name of the farm to Animal Farm in front of the other animals and on the end wall of the big barn he writes the seven commandments:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animals shall wear clothes.
4. No animals shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animals shall drink alcohol.
6. No animals shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

Even thought most of the animals are unable to read them, all they agree and the cleverest animals learned them by heart. It is time to start the harvest but the cows start to low as they had not been milked for one day. The pigs milk them and then the animals ask what is going to happen to that milk. Napoleon, asks the animals to start the harvest while he will attend the milk problem. At night, the milk had disappeared.

They work hard but they have a great reward as the harvest is a good one. The animals are happy despite the difficulties they find. The pigs always solve the problems and the great force of Boxer, who has become the great admiration of everybody, the work is easily done. On Sunday, there is no work and they attend the ceremony to hoist the flag they have created for the farm. A green tablecloth with a painted hoof and a horn in white. The green represents the green fields of England, the hoof and horn signify the future Republic of the Animals. Then they attend an assembly in the big barn where the work for the following week is planned and resolutions are debated and taken. But it is always the pigs who put forward the resolutions while the other animals vote. Snowball and Napoleon are the most active in the debates opposing each other to his partner proposal. This meeting always finished with the singing of “Beast of England”.

Pigs and some animals like Benjamin, the donkey, Muriel, the goat and the dogs learn to read but the rest of the animals can get further than the letter A. It is found that the stupider animals such as the sheep, hens and ducks are unable to learn the Seven Commandments by heart and they can only memorised “Four legs good, two legs bad”.

Meanwhile, Napoleon takes aside nine puppies who are born from Jessie and Bluebell, the dogs. He is in charged of his education. He keeps them in a loft in the harness-room and with such a secretly that the rest of the farm forgets their existence.

Soon, the pigs start to have “privileges” like drinking the milk and eating the apples. Squealer convinces the rest of the animals, that the burden of the farm is on pigs’ shoulders, that they are watching after the welfare of the whole farm and that it is for their sake that they must have this food. He frightens the animals by saying that Mr Jones will come if the pigs fail.

In October, Mr Jones, his men and other workers from neighbouring farms try to “conquer” the farm. However, Snowball who had read Julius Caesar’s campaigns, had planned the defensive and attacking plan.
Animals fight bravely and defeat men who again run away. Some animals are dead, others are wounded like Snowball. They create a military decoration for the heroes (Animal Hero, First Class) and the dead animals (Animal Hero, second class). That decoration is to be worn on Sundays and holidays. They decide to call this day the Battle of the Cowshed and it is going to be celebrated together with the day of the Rebellion anniversary by shooting Mr Jones’ gun.

In winter, there are a lot of meetings in the big barn where Snowball announces proposals to improve the farm while Napoleon always disagrees with him. Napoleon has found the support of the sheep who frequently interrupt the speeches of Snowball.

Napoleon debates about the need to protect themselves from a future attack of men while Snowball discusses the necessity of propagating their Rebellion to the other farms. However, their most intense debate is held when Snowball presents his plans for building a windmill. It will be a hard business, but in a year they could have finished it. The windmill will provide the farm with electricity and the animals would only work for three days. He is so convincing that there is not doubt that he is going to win the vote but when he finishes, Napoleon utters a terrible whimper and nine enormous dogs appear. They chase after Snowball who achieves to escape and he is seen no more.

The dogs come back and keep close to Napoleon. The animals discover that these terrific dogs are the puppies Napoleon has reared apart. Napoleon gives a speech from the floor where old Major had delivered his speech. He announces that the Sunday-morning debates will finish and that the working plan of the farm will be settled by a special committee of pigs presided over by himself. They will communicate their decisions and plans for the week to the rest of the animals who will salute the flag and they will sing “Beast of England”.

The animals could have protested by the expulsion of Snowball and the recently adopted news but they are unable to find a right argument. Only four porkers protest but they are soon silenced by the growls of the dogs and the bleating of the sheep “Four legs good, two legs bad!”. This intervention puts an end to the discussion.

In spring, the skull of old Major is unburied and set up on a stump at the foot of the flagstaff, beside the gun. The animals file past the skull in a reverent manner before entering the barn. Inside the barn, the places occupied by the animals change as well. On the platform, Napoleon is circled by the dogs and is followed by Squealer and the pig Minimus who is in charged of composing songs and poems. They sit at the front of the platform, facing the rest of the animals.

Three weeks later, Napoleon changes idea and announces the building of the windmill. Despite the hard work the animals will do, their food rations will be reduced. That evening, Squealer convinces the animals that Napoleon was from the beginning in favour of building the windmill and it was Snowball who stole his idea.

Animals work as slaves in the windmill building but they are happy the whole year through. Thanks to Boxer, the hardest worker and most admired animal, big progress is done. However, the animals need products they can not produce, for example nail, paraffin oil, string...so Napoleon is forced to trade with the neighbouring farms, first with hay and later with eggs. Certain unease raises among the animals because they think trade was forbidden but Squealer convinces them that this uneasiness is provoked by the lies of Snowball, that they have dreamed it or that nothing similar was written in the seven commandments.

Mr Whymper starts business with Animal Farm and Napoleon thinks on selling the harvest to Mr Pilkington of Foxwood farm or to Mr Frederick of Pinchfield farm. At that time, the pigs decide to move into the farmhouse. Some animals remember that there is a commandment that forbids that, but they read commandment number 4 which now says... “No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets”. Squealer passes by
while Clover is reading the commandment and he convinces the animals that the prohibition was against sheets and pigs have get rid of sheets and he threatens them with the returning of Jones.

In November, in a stormy night, the windmill is destroyed. Napoleon accuses Snowball of its destruction as footprints of a pig are discovered in the grass at a little distance from the windmill. They decide to rebuilt it.

The animals know that the outside world is watching them, that the windmill is a symbol to show the whole world that the animals can manage a farm without men. This idea strengthens their proud and the animals work harder, especially Boxer.

That winter is a bitter one; there is a shortage of food and Napoleon deceives Mr Whymper in showing him the storage-room, full with food, although the tanks are apparently full. From then on, Napoleon is rarely seen and when that happens he is always escorted by the dogs and he emerges in a ceremonial manner.

Napoleon accepts a contract for four hundred eggs a week in exchange of grain and meal for the farm. The hens protest. They fly up to the rafters and lay their eggs. Napoleon orders the hens' rations to be stopped and if there is any animal who helps them, they will be punished by death. Five days later, the hens give up and go back to their nesting boxes.

Fear spreads again in the farm as it is said that Snowball visits the farm at night to steal food or to break things. It is quite frequent that whenever anything goes wrong, it becomes attributed to Snowball. Napoleon exclaims that he notices Snowball's smell in the whole farm. Squealer explains the animals that Snowball has been seen in the Frederick of Pinchfield Farm and he was planning to attack them. Moreover, he says that Snowball was an accomplice of Mr Jones as some documents recently discovered proof.

Napoleon confirms that Snowball is Mr Jones’ agent. Boxer believes him because he has said it and so does everyone. Napoleon warms the animals that there are other agents and that they should pay attention.

Four days later, the dogs chase the four pigs who always protest against Napoleon's propositions. They are accused of treason and of being in contact with Snowball. The frightened pigs confess their crime as they think that they will not be punished but the dogs kill them. At the same time, the rebellious hens also confess the same treason and they are slaughtered too. Other animals confess other crimes and all of them are dead.

Animals are shocked by the treachery of animals and by the bloodshed they have just been witness. Some animals, like Clover and Benjamin, remember one commandment against killing animals. They read it and it says “No animal will kill another animal without cause”.

Other changes happen, for example, the song of “the Beast of England” is no longer sung and now the animals recites the poems by Minimus. Animals are still convinced that they are better now than when they lived under the rule of Mr Jones. Nevertheless, Clover imagined a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak...

Every Sunday morning, Squealer reads out figures proving that the production have been increased, but the food stays the same. Napoleon sells the pile of timber to Fredericks despite having spent a year putting the animals against him. Frederick pays him with forgeries banknotes and he and his armed men attacks the farm.

They fight ferociously. In the end animals win, despite the fact that Boxer is wounded and other animals have died. At the fight, the windmill is exploded by two men. The animals are depressed because they have lost the windmill but Squealer convinces them to rebuild it. He also emphasises the important victory against men and that from that day on, they should be respected by men.
Then pigs discover whisky and spend money in buying machinery to produce whisky. Some animals remember the commandment about drinking, but they are surprised as it now says “No animals will drink alcohol to excess”.

The windmill is rebuilt again. Boxer has an accident caused by the great quantity of work done and because he is not completely recovered from the day of the fight. He is said to be sent to the vet. However, the van that takes him away from the farm is the horse slaughter’s van. Benjamin realises this fact and starts to protest and makes a lot of fuzz with other animals. Boxer tries to escape from the van but he is too weak and he is taken away.

Three days later, Squealer, in a melodramatic way, says to the animals that Boxer is dead and that his last words were: “I will work harder” and “Napoleon is always right”. He justifies the van by saying that it was vet’s van but he had not had time to paint it.

The farm now becomes a Republic and Napoleon is the president. He has a lot of piglets which are bring up apart. Only pigs can wear ribbons on Sundays. Moses, the tame raven, comes back because the pigs allow him.

Years pass and only some animals who has seen the rebellion live (Clover, Benjamin, Moses, Napoleon, Squealer and some pigs). No animals has retired as old Major had promised in his speech.

The farm is more prosperous and better organised than ever. The windmill is finally completed and it is used for milling corn and bringing money profit but it does not bring electricity light to the stall or even reduce the week to three-day work. This idea is contrary to the spirit of Animalism according to Napoleon and he abolishes it. He states that happiness lays in working and having a frugally life.

Pigs and dogs are richer than the other animals. Nevertheless, they are proud of living in Animal Farm and they never lose hope. Squealer convince some sheep to learn this motto “Four legs good, two legs better” because the pigs are starting to walk in their hind legs. Benjamin and Clover go to the big barn to see the commandment but they are all erased and a new commandment is written “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others”.

A week later, neighbouring farmer come to Animal Farm to make a tour inspection. They celebrate a banquet inside the farmhouse. Napoleon and the farmers make speeches of friendship and future relationships. Napoleon announces that Animal Farm will become Manor Farm as it was previously known.

Clover, Benjamin and other animals look the scene through the window and they observe that pigs are very similar to men and men faces to pigs.

**SYMBOLISM**

Animal Farm is a clear allegoration against communism in the former USSR and his leader Stalin. Orwell describes the beginning of the Russian Revolution against the tzar symbolised by Mr Jones, the idea of the communism (the speech given by Old Major, who is the representation of Stalin) and its development into the animalism. The two main leaders Trotsky and Stalin are represented by the pigs Snowball and Napoleon.

The barn is also a symbol of the common memory of a nation. The commandment written on its back which are continuously changed represent the way an institution in power can revise a community’s concept of history to bolster its control.
The windmill is a strong symbol of the technological advances undertaken in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution and it outstands as a symbol of modernity and power that can be well seen from the outside. The windmill is also an excuse for the pigs to explode the rest of the animals. The pigs will take profit of the windmill' electricity and earn money thanks to the effort made during years from the other animals in their building. It is also a good way to stop the animals to revolt against pigs because they are too busy in working and they do not have time to think.

The State Ritual. The Soviet Union as a big communism country has a representative flag (red with a sickle and a hammer up in the left corner). In the book, the animals have a green flag with a hoof and a horn in white. The Soviet Union had its national anthem represented in the book by the “Beast of England” song; the parades and the military decoration where also frequent as the celebration of the main days as the day of the revolt celebrating with gunshot in the case of the farm.

The Farmer Frederick represents Hitler and his attempt of invading the USSR during the Second World War. Hitler and Stalin were allied at the beginning of the war but it finished when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union.

MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE BOOK

Old Major An old boar whose speech about the evils perpetrated by humans rouses the animals into rebelling. His philosophy concerning the tyranny of Man is named Animalism by his followers. He also teaches the song ”Beasts of England" to the animals. He represents Karl Marx and Lenin.

Snowball A boar who becomes one of the rebellion’s most valuable leaders. After drawing complicated plans for the construction of a windmill, he is chased off of the farm forever by Napoleon’s dogs and thereafter used as a scapegoat for the animals' troubles. He represents Trotsky.

Napoleon is a boar who, with Snowball, leads the rebellion against Jones. After the rebellion’s success, he systematically begins to control all aspects of the farm until he is an undisputed tyrant. He is Joseph Stalin.

Squealer A porker pig who becomes Napoleon’s mouthpiece. Throughout the novel, he displays his ability to manipulate the animals' thoughts through the use of hollow yet convincing rhetoric. He represents the propaganda of the dictatorial regime.

The pigs represent the Bolsheviks, the bureaucratic power elite; The dogs are Stalin’s secret police, known as the GPU.

Boxer A dedicated but dimwitted horse who aids in the building of the windmill but is sold to a glue-boiler after collapsing from exhaustion. He symbolises the working class.

Mollie A vain horse who prefers ribbons and sugar over ideas and rebellion. She is eventually lured off the farm with promises of a comfortable life. She represents traitors who escape to other countries.

Clover A motherly horse who silently questions some of Napoleon’s decisions and tries to help Boxer after his collapse.

Benjamin A cynical, pessimistic donkey who continually undercuts the animals’ enthusiasm with his cryptic remark, "Donkeys live a long time." He represents the intellectual elite.

Moses A tame raven and sometimes-pet of Jones who tells the animals stories about a paradise called Sugarcandy Mountain. He represents the church.
THE LANGUAGE

The language of the book is quite simple, but there is a lot of detail, which makes the events seem more realistic despite his fairy tale design. The book is divided in ten chapters.

THE AUTHOR

Eric Arthur Blair, later known as George Orwell, was born in 1903 in Mothari, Bengal, in a poor but proud middle-class family. At the age of five, he was sent back to England together with his sister and mother. He attended the prestigious public school of Eton although his life at this institution was not an easy one. He was not an academic success and he did not seem to be interested in going to University.

In 1921, George Orwell left Eaton and from this experience he has a strong distaste for middle-class values but a sense of guilt towards the working classes. One year later, he joined the Indian Imperial Police as a subdivisional officer in Burma till 1927. He resigned because he felt he had become an oppressor and he developed the idea that the oppressed people were always right while the oppressors were wrong. This idea is reflected in most of his main works (Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four...)

He spent the rest of his life writing as a freelance novelist and a journalist getting involved in war conflicts like the Spanish Civil war. He died of cancer in 1950.

Among his works, we found: Burmese Days, A Clergyman’s Daughter, Keep the Aspidistra Flying, The Road to Wigan, Homage to Catalonia, The Lion and the Unicorn, Animal Farm and Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Orwell’s work continues to influence popular and political culture with concepts like Big Brother.

Animal Farm was published by Secker and Warburg in England in 1945 after facing many problems with different publishers who did not want to have problems with the censorship.

Bibliography

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