

A STUDY ON GEORGE ORWELL'S ANIMAL FARM

Mônica Maria Montenegro de Oliveira

Escola Técnica Federal da Paraíba
Av. 1º de Maio, 720 - Jaguaribe
58.015-430 - João Pessoa - Paraíba - Brasil
E-mail: monica@jpa.etfpb.br

Letícia Niederauer Tavares Cavalcanti

Universidade Federal da Paraíba

Malcolm Coulthard

Birmingham University - England - U.K.

Abstract

Starting from presenting George Orwell's life and times, we propose an investigation about the author and his novel Animal Farm considering its literary point of view.

Key-words: George Orwell, Animal Farm,
Eric Arthur Blair

1. Introduction

George Orwell is considered a polemical writer. His sense of oppression and injustice accompanied him from the earliest days of his childhood. He was born at Motihari[Bengal in India in 1903, and christened ERIC ARTHUR BLAIR. He almost seemed to have been born to be notable as a satirical and political writer, as ORWELL admitted himself when he later claimed: "From a very early age, perhaps the age of five or six, I knew that when I grew up I should be a writer." [1] His father was a minor official in the India Civil Service and when he was eight, his parents wanted to bring him and his two sisters up in the English life style; therefore, he was enrolled in St. Cyprian's, in England.

2. George Orwell: Life And Writing Career

Young Eric won a scholarship to Eton in 1917, where he received the whole of his secondary education, graduating in 1921. He could not afford to go to Oxford or Cambridge, and without attending the

University he had no chance of following a profession in England, particularly as a writer.

In addition, he was against any form of authority and using the system to get his books published would have been difficult for him. So, he chose to join the Imperial Police in Burma in 1921. Disgusted with Imperialistic policies, he quit this Force in 1927, and spent some time living in the slum area of London and Paris among the poor workers and tramps to get to know the oppressed. His first book about those experiences was called **Down and out in Paris and London**. For its publication in 1933 and for all subsequent works he assumed the pseudonym **GEORGE ORWELL - ORWELL** is the name of an English river and **GEORGE** is England's patron saint.

Orwell worked as a journalist for the **B.B.C.**, the **American Partisan Review** and for the **Tribune**, where he was the editor. In November, 1943, he began to write **Animal Farm**, the novel he was to publish two years later. He also became a critic of Literature and popular culture. He is considered one of the finest English essayists of this century; occasionally he wrote poetry for school publications. On the royalties he made from **Animal Farm** he took a house on a remote Scottish Island; his finances were, for the first time, comfortable. Growing more and more ill every day, Orwell finished his second great novel - **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1984) - there; he finally published it in 1949, and died on January 21, 1950.

In spite of being a socialist, George Orwell was a severe critic of that political system. It may well be because of what he saw and lived through during the Spanish Civil War. Then he realized that the totalitarianism, oppression, and injustice he had read about in Swift and in other writers could occur in any system at any time or at any place; so, he felt the need to express his own experience as a way of relieving his tension, and fiction became a natural outlet for Orwell, a way out of his health problems.

Apparently a paradox, when he was physically at his worst, he was at his best as a writer; the paradox of his living condition was transferred to his writing ever since. Orwell used paradox as a tool to develop social criticism and to point out political corruption in society itself. He was a victim of exploitation and oppression, as he recalls in his famous essay "Such, such were the joys" (written around the month of May, 1947). He also recalled his pains in Spain in **Homage to Catalonia** (1938), and reported them through fiction in **Animal Farm** (1945). Oxley states:

"Perhaps all Orwell's books can be regarded as attempts to tell a true history of his times, but two - and many people regard them as the twin-summit of his achievement - come immediately to mind: **Homage to Catalonia** and **Animal Farm**. Seven years separated them, but taken together, as Orwell himself seems to have taken them, they crystallize most of the ideas presented in the chapter." [2]

As a political writer, George Orwell tried to show the injustice, brutality, and exploitation of political systems over the weak. As a creative writer, he tries to establish a special relationship between himself and the reader, in order to make the reader aware of what he wants to communicate. In order to get the reader's sympathy, Orwell uses an animal fable to tell a story describing a humorous situation represented in a satirical and moral way, to make the reader understand what he wished to say, and to show how words well

manipulated may attain a pre-conceived effect.

In this specific case of **Animal Farm**, it is evident that it is more than an animal fable; it goes beyond the purpose of satirizing the Russian Revolution. The novel is really Orwell's attempt to warn his readers of the danger absolute power may bring upon the future of mankind.

3. **Animal Farm: Circumstances Of Composition**

In November, 1943, George Orwell, started writing **Animal Farm** and finished it by the end of February, 1944. The novel had been in his mind for a period of six months before it was actually written. He exposes the creative impulse of the book in his special preface for the **Ukrainian** edition of **Animal Farm**, distributed in November the same year by a **Ukrainian Displaced Persons Organizations** in Munich, where he reports his full experience. [3]

4. **Animal Farm: Circumstances Of Publication**

Publishers and critics at large seemed to be aware of Orwell's book, and yet, at the same time they felt it was unsuitable for general consumption. **Crick** reports that **Victor Gollancz**, **Jonathann Cape**, and **Faber & Faber**, were among the important publishers of the time that rejected **Animal Farm** for publication for fear of consequences. [4] Orwell knew in advance that **Animal Farm** would be a short book, as he wrote to **Philip Rahv** (December 9, 1943) "It leaves me a little spare time, which the B.B.C, didn't, so I have got another book under weigh (sic) which I hope to finish in a few months if nothing intervenes." [5] He also wrote what it was about, as he told **Gleb Struve** (February 17, 1944) "I am writing a little squib which might amuse you when it comes out, but it is so not OK politically that I don't feel certain in advance that anyone will publish it. Perhaps that gives you a hint of its subject." [6] Once again, he wrote to **Philip Rahv** on May 1, 1944. [7] In addition

Cowshed. After the battle, Snowball plans to build a windmill in order to supply the farm with electrical power, but Napoleon prefers to increase food production. On Sunday when the animals are assembled to celebrate the rebellion, Snowball tried to persuade them about the value of the windmill, but he is expelled from the meeting by Napoleon's dogs. After Snowball's expulsion, Squealer becomes Napoleon's information officer. He tells all other animals that the windmill always was Napoleon's idea from the very beginning. Napoleon decides to engage in trade with the neighbouring farms to obtain material necessary for the construction of the windmill. Finally, the pigs move to the farmhouse and begin to live there. Most definitely they are changing the Principles of Animalism.

In November a violent storm destroys the windmill, and Snowball is blamed for this. All animals are persuaded to rebuild it. It is a hard winter and the food runs short; however, Napoleon reports to the outside world that there is plenty on Animal Farm. One day Squealer announces that the hens will have to produce four hundred eggs a week to be sold. They protest, and for the first time after the revolution there signs of rebellion among the animals.

Anything that goes wrong on the farm is usually attributed to Snowball. Some days later, when all animals are assembled in the yard, some of them are forced to confess their crimes and are all slaughtered in public. Napoleon is gradually changing the Seven Commandments of Animalism to fit them to his own policy. As time goes by, the pigs increasingly adopt human habits and begin to drink.

Napoleon finally becomes a merciless dictator and the animals are mere slaves. After years of hard work, Boxer is exhausted, but instead of being retired with a pension he is sent to the knacker's. Years pass by, the animals are still exploited by Napoleon. The pigs' habits are just those of human beings: they walk on their hind legs, carry whips, and increase their friendship with humans by

T.S. Eliot (June 28, 1944) stated: "If you read this MS. Yourself you will see its meaning which is not an acceptable one at this moment, but I could not agree to make any alteration except a small one at the end which I intended making anyway." [8] Later Leonard Moore (July 10, 1944) commented on it: "Meanwhile could you send me the copy of the MS. That you have. (...) You understand that it is important to get this book into print, & this year if possible." [9] So, Orwell had a hard time finding a publisher for *Animal Farm*; eventually, Secker and Warburg agreed to publish the book in August 1945, but not until Orwell had begun arrangements to publish it himself as a pamphlet. *Animal Farm* became an immediate best-seller and was afterwards translated by Penguin Books, in 1951, into over thirty languages, with a series of reprintings. At last, Orwell had got the hearing he wanted.

5. Animal Farm: The Plot

Animals rebels on Manor Farm, and expel Jones, the owner. The pigs become the leaders of the farm because they are the most intelligent. After the rebellion they change the name of the farm from Manor Farm to Animal Farm and sum up the Principles of Animalism to Seven Commandments which should, from then on, control all animals' actions. They are:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall drink alcohol.
5. No animal shall kill any other animal.
6. All animals are equal." [10]

Soon the pigs give themselves better treatment than they allow other animals, and rationalize that this is necessary because of the brain-work they do. Pilkington and Frederick - owners of Foxwood and Pinchfield - led by Jones make an attack on Animal Farm, but they are defeated by the animals led by Snowball in the Battle of

inviting the neighbouring farmers to visit Animal Farm. At last they change the name of Animal Farm to manor Farm, and considering both men and pigs, it is impossible to say which is which.

6. Animal Farm: The Novel, Form And Structure

At first reading, *Animal Farm*, on the surface level, is a fairy story, though it does not begin with the well known expression: "Once upon a time". Secondly, it is simply one thing consistently presented in the guise of something else; an allegory which, in the words of Fowler, becomes "an extended metaphor in which, characters, actions and scenery are systematically symbolic, referring to spiritual, political, psychological confrontations." [11] Thirdly, it uses animals to tell us something about human nature and institutions, and in this respect it becomes a fable. It is also a satire either because Orwell evolves a criticism of some human activity and presents it in such a way that it can be readily understood or he encourages the reader to adopt his point of view and accept it as his own.

LEE quotes Dyson that *Animal Farm* "is by no means about Russia alone. Orwell is concerned to show revolutionary ideals of justice, equality and fraternity always shatter in the event." [12] According to LEE, "Instead of being just an allegory of twentieth century Russian politics, *Animal Farm* is more meaningfully an anatomy of all political revolutions." [13] So, each of the animals represents an important character, and the story is really about politics aided by art; it is not just about a simple farm with rebellious animals, that is, a beast fable, a genre of long and honourable tradition cultivated even by Chaucer himself in *The Canterbury Tales*, with his *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. For Orwell, *Animal Farm* was, as he once admitted in his article "Why I Write", "the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole." [14] Indeed, *Animal Farm* is not

simply the story about animals it pretends to be, and for that reason it is a metaphor as all authors previously mentioned seem to agree; it is in fact, an allegory of the revolutionary process. As a consequence, it is really a moral story, as well as a political statement on the human condition and on human weakness, subject to variation at all times.

7. Animal Farm: Political Criticism

First of all, *Animal Farm* deals with society in particular, with the government of a given society at a certain period of its development. On the other hand, essentially Orwell's purpose is quite intentional; his remarks and observations are straight to the point, as he aims at political criticism. But this is not all.

In *Animal Farm* Orwell also contrasts two forms of government - capitalism, represented by Mr. Jones, the original owner of Manor Farm, and totalitarianism, represented by Napoleon and Snowball. With this framework Orwell opposes the two leaders - Snowball, the idealist, and Napoleon, the pragmatic. Orwell begins by showing the degenerate state of the farm under Mr. Jones; he concludes by showing the parallel degenerate state of the farm under Napoleon; thus it seems logical to conclude that Orwell found a classless society a particular kind of utopia, and found both capitalism and totalitarianism, paradoxically, strong forms of government, and yet still morally deficient.

To Orwell, the relative strength or weakness of the individual who leads the government is significant in determining the effectiveness of that form of government. The weakness inherent in both forms cannot be overcome even by the most dynamic of leaders. Thus, *Animal Farm* shows the transformation of pig into man. He shows pigs becoming the very thing they once revolted against - the "soft" human being who drinks, sleeps, eats, and grows fat.

After the rebellion, the animals are free from the dominion and supervision of man. They explore their territory with delight; they

meet in order to organize themselves for survival. The meeting is spontaneous; all animals seem to realize intuitively the importance of such a gathering. Rules and a daily schedule are set, but a significant incident occurs to break the established order. All incidents seem to symbolize the real beginning of moral decay, that is, they determine the breaking point of the original ideals and goals on which the farm was once organized.

Orwell uses the satirist's tool of irony, particularly evident in the conclusion of the novel. **Animal Farm** ends with a party held by the pigs and it is offered to their neighbours to celebrate the efficiency of the Animal Farm leaders. It is only then that the other animals, peering through the window of the house see the pigs on two legs, dressed in Mr. Jones' clothes; looking from pig to man to man and man to pig, they conclude that there is no essential difference in either. Pigs had actually become what they once had revolted against; the final state of the farm was bad as the first, if not worse. Essentially, then, Orwell seems to say - "this is life"; and apparently he adds, "take it or leave it." There is nothing else you can do about it; we are all victims of the times in which we live.

8. **Animal Farm: Contemporary Historical Background**

One of the reasons that may explain the difficulties Orwell had in the publication of **Animal Farm**, was the correlation of great historical personalities and the characters of animal leaders in the text - all of them **PIGS**. The identification of historical characters has already been made by Meyers in the political allegory of **Animal Farm**. [15]

MAJOR is a majestic looking pig who represents a mixture of **LENIN** and **MARX**. **NAPOLEON** is **STALIN**, the central character in the plot; he is a perfect dictator, both cynical and hypocritical. **SNOWBALL** is **TROTSKY**, a vivacious and inventive

character who is Napoleon's rival. **SQUEALER** is a brilliant talker representing the **PRAVDA**, a periodical founded by the Bolsheviks in 1922; it was a newspaper of opposition, and its title in Russian meant **truth**; it is the best known Russian word all over the world; it is the newspaper of the Socialist Establishment, USSR style. [16] Finally, **MINIMUS** represents the **poets and writers** of USSR who were almost always prompt to "toe the party line" and use their art in elevation and praise of its basic revolutionary and industrial principles; **MINIMUS** is specifically, the figure of **MAYAKOVSKY**.

It is worthwhile mentioning that most of Orwell's good memories are somehow associated with animals; yet, he once proclaimed his particular dislike for **PIGS** from the days he was a child. Then he produced the last evidence which is particularly interesting to mention, as he once said that "(...) pigs cannot swim because if they do they cut their throats with their trotters." [17]

9. **Conclusion**

Animal Farm is simple and straightforward in its structure and style; it reflects a real vision of the world. Orwell's themes suggest the collapse caused by dividing society into higher and lower social classes; there is no real distinction between oppressor and oppressed; on the other hand, there is no difference between man and animals. Politics and art fuse, and so do art and life. Speaking in general terms, **Animal Farm** is divided into three sections which include a thesis, an antithesis, and a synthesis, to use the Marxist classical approach. The novel is circular and includes oppositions, so the end is similar to the beginning, upside down. As to the plot, one may say that from the first moment on, it is interesting, with logical sequence and conclusion. The setting is the farm; the time-sequence is

chronological and clear; the repetition of actions and words establishes a circular and repetitive pattern. The use of figurative language reinforces Orwell's preoccupation with language, style, and diction.

"All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others." [18]

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