

SEMESTER IV- APPRECIATING FICTION

Module III- Animal Farm

PLOT SUMMARY

Animal Farm is a novel about a group of animals who take control of the farm they live on. The animals get fed up of their master, Farmer Jones, so they kick him out. Once they are free of the tyrant Jones, life on the farm is good for a while and there is hope for a happier future of less work, better education and more food. However, trouble brews as the pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, fight for the hearts and minds of the other animals on the farm. Napoleon seizes power by force and ends up exploiting the animals just as Farmer Jones had done. The novel ends with the pigs behaving and even dressing like the humans the animals tried to get rid of in the first place.

SUMMARY

Old Major, a prize-winning boar, gathers the animals of the Manor Farm for a meeting in the big barn. He tells them of a dream he has had in which all animals live together with no human beings to oppress or control them. He tells the animals that they must work toward such a paradise and teaches them a song called "Beasts of England," in which his dream vision is lyrically described. The animals greet Major's vision with great enthusiasm. When he dies only three nights after the meeting, three younger pigs—Snowball, Napoleon, and Squealer—formulate his main principles into a philosophy called Animalism. Late one night, the animals manage to defeat the farmer Mr. Jones in a battle, running him off the land. They rename the property Animal Farm and dedicate themselves to achieving Major's dream. The cart-horse Boxer devotes himself to the cause with particular zeal, committing his great strength to the prosperity of the farm and adopting as a personal maxim the affirmation "I will work harder."

At first, Animal Farm prospers. Snowball works at teaching the animals to read, and Napoleon takes a group of young puppies to educate them in the principles of Animalism. When Mr. Jones reappears to take back his farm, the animals defeat him again, in what comes to be known as the Battle of the Cowshed, and take the farmer's abandoned gun as a token of their victory. As time passes, however, Napoleon and Snowball increasingly quibble over the future of the farm, and they begin to struggle with each other for power and influence among the other animals. Snowball concocts a scheme to build an electricity-generating windmill, but Napoleon solidly opposes the plan. At the meeting to vote on whether to take up the project, Snowball gives a passionate speech. Although Napoleon gives only a brief retort, he then makes a strange noise, and nine attack dogs—the puppies that Napoleon had confiscated in order to "educate"—burst into the barn and chase Snowball from the farm. Napoleon assumes leadership of Animal Farm and declares that there will be no more meetings. From that point on, he asserts, the pigs alone will make all of the decisions—for the good of every animal.

Napoleon now quickly changes his mind about the windmill, and the animals, especially Boxer, devote their efforts to completing it. One day, after a storm, the animals find the windmill toppled. The human farmers in the area declare smugly that the animals made the walls too thin, but Napoleon claims that Snowball returned to the farm to sabotage the windmill. He stages a great purge, during which various animals who have allegedly participated in Snowball's great conspiracy—meaning any animal who opposes Napoleon's uncontested leadership—meet instant death at the teeth of the attack dogs. With his leadership unquestioned (Boxer has taken up a second maxim, "Napoleon is always right"), Napoleon begins expanding his powers, rewriting history to make Snowball a villain. Napoleon also begins to act more and more like a human being—sleeping in a bed, drinking whisky, and engaging in trade with neighboring

farmers. The original Animalist principles strictly forbade such activities, but Squealer, Napoleon's propagandist, justifies every action to the other animals, convincing them that Napoleon is a great leader and is making things better for everyone—despite the fact that the common animals are cold, hungry, and overworked.

Mr. Frederick, a neighboring farmer, cheats Napoleon in the purchase of some timber and then attacks the farm and dynamites the windmill, which had been rebuilt at great expense. After the demolition of the windmill, a pitched battle ensues, during which Boxer receives major wounds. The animals rout the farmers, but Boxer's injuries weaken him. When he later falls while working on the windmill, he senses that his time has nearly come. One day, Boxer is nowhere to be found. According to Squealer, Boxer has died in peace after having been taken to the hospital, praising the Rebellion with his last breath. In actuality, Napoleon has sold his most loyal and long-suffering worker to a glue maker in order to get money for whisky.

Years pass on Animal Farm, and the pigs become more and more like human beings—walking upright, carrying whips, and wearing clothes. Eventually, the seven principles of Animalism, known as the Seven Commandments and inscribed on the side of the barn, become reduced to a single principle reading “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” Napoleon entertains a human farmer named Mr. Pilkington at a dinner and declares his intent to ally himself with the human farmers against the laboring classes of both the human and animal communities. He also changes the name of Animal Farm back to the Manor Farm, claiming that this title is the “correct” one. Looking in at the party of elites through the farmhouse window, the common animals can no longer tell which are the pigs and which are the human beings.

MAJOR THEMES IN ANIMAL FARM

The Corruption Of Socialist Ideals In The Soviet Union

Animal Farm is most famous in the West as a stinging critique of the history and rhetoric of the Russian Revolution. Retelling the story of the emergence and development of Soviet communism in the form of an animal fable, Animal Farm allegorizes the rise to power of the dictator Joseph Stalin. In the novella, the overthrow of the human oppressor Mr. Jones by a democratic coalition of animals quickly gives way to the consolidation of power among the pigs. Much like the Soviet intelligentsia, the pigs establish themselves as the ruling class in the new society.

The struggle for preeminence between Leon Trotsky and Stalin emerges in the rivalry between the pigs Snowball and Napoleon. In both the historical and fictional cases, the idealistic but politically less powerful figure (Trotsky and Snowball) is expelled from the revolutionary state by the malicious and violent usurper of power (Stalin and Napoleon). The purges and show trials with which Stalin eliminated his enemies and solidified his political base find expression in Animal Farm as the false confessions and executions of animals whom Napoleon distrusts following the collapse of the windmill. Stalin's tyrannical rule and eventual abandonment of the founding principles of the Russian Revolution are represented by the pigs' turn to violent government and the adoption of human traits and behaviors, the trappings of their original oppressors.

Although Orwell believed strongly in socialist ideals, he felt that the Soviet Union realized these ideals in a terribly perverse form. His novella creates its most powerful ironies in the moments in which Orwell depicts the corruption of Animalist ideals by those in power. For Animal Farm serves not so much to condemn tyranny or despotism as to indict the horrifying hypocrisy of tyrannies that base themselves on, and owe their initial power to, ideologies of liberation and equality. The gradual disintegration and perversion of the Seven Commandments illustrates this

hypocrisy with vivid force, as do Squealer's elaborate philosophical justifications for the pigs' blatantly unprincipled actions. Thus, the novella critiques the violence of the Stalinist regime against the human beings it ruled, and also points to Soviet communism's violence against human logic, language, and ideals.

The Societal Tendency Toward Class Stratification

Animal Farm offers commentary on the development of class tyranny and the human tendency to maintain and reestablish class structures even in societies that allegedly stand for total equality. The novella illustrates how classes that are initially unified in the face of a common enemy, as the animals are against the humans, may become internally divided when that enemy is eliminated. The expulsion of Mr. Jones creates a power vacuum, and it is only so long before the next oppressor assumes totalitarian control.

The natural division between intellectual and physical labor quickly comes to express itself as a new set of class divisions, with the "brainworkers" (as the pigs claim to be) using their superior intelligence to manipulate society to their own benefit. Orwell never clarifies in Animal Farm whether this negative state of affairs constitutes an inherent aspect of society or merely an outcome contingent on the integrity of a society's intelligentsia. In either case, the novella points to the force of this tendency toward class stratification in many communities and the threat that it poses to democracy and freedom.

The Danger Of A Naive Working Class

One of the novella's most impressive accomplishments is its portrayal not just of the figures in power but also of the oppressed people themselves. Animal Farm is not told from the perspective of any particular character, though occasionally it does slip into Clover's consciousness. Rather, the story is told from the perspective of the common animals as a whole. Gullible, loyal, and hardworking, these animals give Orwell a chance to sketch how situations of oppression arise not only from the motives and tactics of the oppressors but also from the naïveté of the oppressed, who are not necessarily in a position to be better educated or informed. When presented with a dilemma, Boxer prefers not to puzzle out the implications of various possible actions but instead to repeat to himself, "Napoleon is always right." Animal Farm demonstrates how the inability or unwillingness to question authority condemns the working class to suffer the full extent of the ruling class's oppression.

The Abuse Of Language As Instrumental To The Abuse Of Power

One of Orwell's central concerns, both in Animal Farm and in 1984, is the way in which language can be manipulated as an instrument of control. In Animal Farm, the pigs gradually twist and distort a rhetoric of socialist revolution to justify their behavior and to keep the other animals in the dark. The animals heartily embrace Major's visionary ideal of socialism, but after Major dies, the pigs gradually twist the meaning of his words. As a result, the other animals seem unable to oppose the pigs without also opposing the ideals of the Rebellion.

By the end of the novella, after Squealer's repeated reconfigurations of the Seven Commandments in order to decriminalize the pigs' treacheries, the main principle of the farm can be openly stated as "all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." This outrageous abuse of the word "equal" and of the ideal of equality in general typifies the pigs' method, which becomes increasingly audacious as the novel progresses. Orwell's sophisticated exposure of this abuse of language remains one of the most compelling and enduring features of Animal Farm, worthy of close study even after we have decoded its allegorical characters and events.

Corruption

Animal Farm demonstrates the idea that power always corrupts. The novella's heavy use of foreshadowing, especially in the opening chapter, creates the sense that the events of the story are unavoidable. Not only is Napoleon's rise to power inevitable, the novella strongly suggests that any other possible ruler would have been just as bad as Napoleon. Although Napoleon is more power-hungry than Snowball, plenty of evidence exists to suggest that Snowball would have been just as corrupt a ruler. Before his expulsion, Snowball goes along with the pigs' theft of milk and apples, and the disastrous windmill is his idea. Even Old Major is not incorruptible. Despite his belief that "all animals are equal," (Chapter 1) he lectures the other animals from a raised platform, suggesting he may actually view himself as above the other animals on the farm. In the novel's final image the pigs become indistinguishable from human farmers, which hammers home the idea that power inevitably has the same effect on anyone who wields it.

The Failure Of Intellect

Animal Farm is deeply skeptical about the value of intellectual activity. The pigs are identified as the most intelligent animals, but their intelligence rarely produces anything of value. Instead, the pigs use their intelligence to manipulate and abuse the other animals. The novella identifies several other ways in which intelligence fails to be useful or good. Benjamin is literate, but he refuses to read, suggesting that intelligence is worthless without the moral sense to engage in politics and the courage to act. The dogs are nearly as literate as the pigs, but they are "not interested in reading anything except the Seven Commandments" (Chapter 3). The dogs' use of their intelligence suggests that intellect is useless—even harmful—when it is combined with a personality that prefers to obey orders rather than question them.

The Exploitation Of Animals By Humans

As well as being an allegory of the ways human exploit and oppress one another, Animal Farm also makes a more literal argument: humans exploit and oppress animals. While the animals' rebellion is mostly comic in tone, it ends on a serious and touching note, when the animals "wipe out the last traces of Jones's hated reign. The harness-room at the end of the stables was broken open; the bits, the nose-rings, the dog-chains, the cruel knives with which Mr. Jones had been used to castrate the pigs and lambs, were all flung down the well" (Chapter 2).

The novella also suggests that there is a real connection, as well as an allegorical one, between the exploitation of animals and the exploitation of human workers. Mr. Pilkington jokes to Napoleon: "If you have your lower animals to contend with [...] we have our lower classes!" (Chapter 10). From the point of view of the ruling class, animals and workers are the same

SYMBOLISM IN ANIMAL FARM

Animal Farm

Animal Farm, known at the beginning and the end of the novel as the Manor Farm, symbolizes Russia and the Soviet Union under Communist Party rule. But more generally, Animal Farm stands for any human society, be it capitalist, socialist, fascist, or communist. It possesses the internal structure of a nation, with a government (the pigs), a police force or army (the dogs), a working class (the other animals), and state holidays and rituals. Its location amid a number of hostile neighboring farms supports its symbolism as a political entity with diplomatic concerns.

The Barn

The barn at Animal Farm, on whose outside walls the pigs paint the Seven Commandments and,

later, their revisions, represents the collective memory of a modern nation. The many scenes in which the ruling-class pigs alter the principles of Animalism and in which the working-class animals puzzle over but accept these changes represent the way an institution in power can revise a community's concept of history to bolster its control. If the working class believes history to lie on the side of their oppressors, they are less likely to question oppressive practices. Moreover, the oppressors, by revising their nation's conception of its origins and development, gain control of the nation's very identity, and the oppressed soon come to depend upon the authorities for their communal sense of self.

The Windmill

The great windmill symbolizes the pigs' manipulation of the other animals for their own gain. Despite the immediacy of the need for food and warmth, the pigs exploit Boxer and the other common animals by making them undertake backbreaking labor to build the windmill, which will ultimately earn the pigs more money and thus increase their power. The pigs' declaration that Snowball is responsible for the windmill's first collapse constitutes psychological manipulation, as it prevents the common animals from doubting the pigs' abilities and unites them against a supposed enemy. The ultimate conversion of the windmill to commercial use is one more sign of the pigs' betrayal of their fellow animals. From an allegorical point of view, the windmill represents the enormous modernization projects undertaken in Soviet Russia after the Russian Revolution.

CHARACTERS IN ANIMAL FARM

Napoleon

From the very beginning of the novella, Napoleon emerges as an utterly corrupt opportunist. Though always present at the early meetings of the new state, Napoleon never makes a single contribution to the revolution—not to the formulation of its ideology, not to the bloody struggle that it necessitates, not to the new society's initial attempts to establish itself. He never shows interest in the strength of Animal Farm itself, only in the strength of his power over it. Thus, the only project he undertakes with enthusiasm is the training of a litter of puppies. He doesn't educate them for their own good or for the good of all, however, but rather for his own good: they become his own private army or secret police, a violent means by which he imposes his will on others.

Although he is most directly modeled on the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, Napoleon represents, in a more general sense, the political tyrants that have emerged throughout human history and with particular frequency during the twentieth century. His namesake is not any communist leader but the early-nineteenth-century French general Napoleon, who betrayed the democratic principles on which he rode to power, arguably becoming as great a despot as the aristocrats whom he supplanted. It is a testament to Orwell's acute political intelligence and to the universality of his fable that Napoleon can easily stand for any of the great dictators and political schemers in world history, even those who arose after Animal Farm was written. In the behavior of Napoleon and his henchmen, one can detect the lying and bullying tactics of totalitarian leaders such as Josip Tito, Mao Tse-tung, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet, and Slobodan Milosevic treated in sharply critical terms.

Snowball

Orwell's stint in a Trotskyist battalion in the Spanish Civil War—during which he first began plans for a critique of totalitarian communism—influenced his relatively positive portrayal of Snowball. As a parallel for Leon Trotsky, Snowball emerges as a fervent ideologue who throws himself heart and soul into the attempt to spread Animalism worldwide and to improve Animal Farm's

infrastructure. His idealism, however, leads to his downfall. Relying only on the force of his own logic and rhetorical skill to gain his influence, he proves no match for Napoleon's show of brute force.

Although Orwell depicts Snowball in a relatively appealing light, he refrains from idealizing his character, making sure to endow him with certain moral flaws. For example, Snowball basically accepts the superiority of the pigs over the rest of the animals. Moreover, his fervent, single-minded enthusiasm for grand projects such as the windmill might have erupted into full-blown megalomaniac despotism had he not been chased from Animal Farm. Indeed, Orwell suggests that we cannot eliminate government corruption by electing principled individuals to roles of power; he reminds us throughout the novella that it is power itself that corrupts.

Boxer

The most sympathetically drawn character in the novel, Boxer epitomizes all of the best qualities of the exploited working classes: dedication, loyalty, and a huge capacity for labor. He also, however, suffers from what Orwell saw as the working class's major weaknesses: a naïve trust in the good intentions of the intelligentsia and an inability to recognize even the most blatant forms of political corruption.

Exploited by the pigs as much or more than he had been by Mr. Jones, Boxer represents all of the invisible labor that undergirds the political drama being carried out by the elites. Boxer's pitiful death at a glue factory dramatically illustrates the extent of the pigs' betrayal. It may also, however, speak to the specific significance of Boxer himself: before being carted off, he serves as the force that holds Animal Farm together.

Squealer

Throughout his career, Orwell explored how politicians manipulate language in an age of mass media. In *Animal Farm*, the silver-tongued pig Squealer abuses language to justify Napoleon's actions and policies to the proletariat by whatever means seem necessary.

By radically simplifying language—as when he teaches the sheep to bleat “Four legs good, two legs better!”—he limits the terms of debate. By complicating language unnecessarily, he confuses and intimidates the uneducated, as when he explains that pigs, who are the “brainworkers” of the farm, consume milk and apples not for pleasure, but for the good of their comrades. In this latter strategy, he also employs jargon (“tactics, tactics”) as well as a baffling vocabulary of false and impenetrable statistics, engendering in the other animals both self-doubt and a sense of hopelessness about ever accessing the truth without the pigs' mediation.

Squealer's lack of conscience and unwavering loyalty to his leader, alongside his rhetorical skills, make him the perfect propagandist for any tyranny. Squealer's name also fits him well: squealing, of course, refers to a pig's typical form of vocalization, and Squealer's speech defines him. At the same time, to squeal also means to betray, aptly evoking Squealer's behavior with regard to his fellow animals.

Old Major

As a democratic socialist, Orwell had a great deal of respect for Karl Marx, the German political economist, and even for Vladimir Ilych Lenin, the Russian revolutionary leader. His critique of *Animal Farm* has little to do with the Marxist ideology underlying the Rebellion but rather with the perversion of that ideology by later leaders. Major, who represents both Marx and Lenin, serves

as the source of the ideals that the animals continue to uphold even after their pig leaders have betrayed them.

Though his portrayal of Old Major is largely positive, Orwell does include a few small ironies that allow the reader to question the venerable pig's motives. For instance, in the midst of his long litany of complaints about how the animals have been treated by human beings, Old Major is forced to concede that his own life has been long, full, and free from the terrors he has vividly sketched for his rapt audience. He seems to have claimed a false brotherhood with the other animals in order to garner their support for his vision.

Mr. Pilkington

Mr. Pilkington is the owner of Foxwood, a farm near Animal Farm. He is introduced as "an easy-going gentleman farmer who spent most of his time in fishing or hunting according to the season" (Chapter 4). In other words, he is more interested in doing what he enjoys than in running his farm. As a result, Foxwood is "neglected, old-fashioned" (Chapter 4).

Within Animal Farm's allegory of Soviet Communism, Foxwood represents the United Kingdom, and Mr. Pilkington represents the British ruling class. Animal Farm therefore suggests that Britain is an old-fashioned country, badly run by self-serving aristocrats. This criticism of Britain's rulers deepens when Mr. Pilkington eats dinner with the pigs in the novella's final chapter. Mr. Pilkington congratulates Napoleon on his cruel efficiency. He jokes: "If you have your lower animals to contend with [...] we have our lower classes!" (Chapter 10). This moment crystallizes the novella's argument that Soviet totalitarianism and British capitalism are essentially the same: cruel and exploitative.

Benjamin

Benjamin is Animal Farm's donkey. He is intelligent and able to read, but he "never exercised his faculty. So far as he knew, he said, there was nothing worth reading" (Chapter 3). He is the only animal who never really believes in the rebellion, but he doesn't oppose it, and he doesn't oppose Napoleon's rise to power either. When the animals ask him to help them by reading the Commandments which have been changed on Napoleon's orders, Benjamin refuses "to meddle in such matters" (Chapter 8).

Within the novella's allegory of Soviet history, Benjamin represents the intellectuals who failed to oppose Stalin. More broadly, Benjamin represents all intellectuals who choose to ignore politics. Benjamin pays a high price for his refusal to engage with the Farm's politics. When he finally tries to take action and save his best friend, Boxer, it is already too late.