

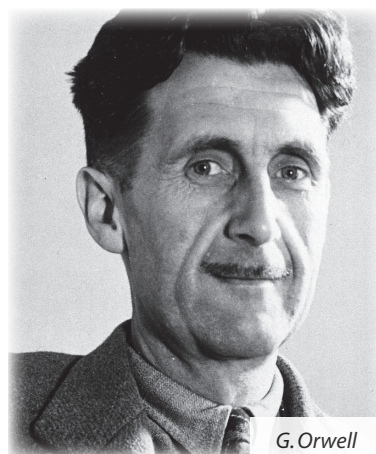
GEORGE ORWELL • ANIMAL FARM

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950)

Eric Blair, whose **pen-name** was George Orwell, was born in India in 1903, son of a **Customs** official. Educated in England, he joined the Indian Imperial Police, from where he **resigned** after five years, as he could not bear British imperialism. Back in Europe, Orwell worked in Paris and London, living in extremely **awkward** and dangerous situations, mostly among the poor and the **destitute**. This experience inspired his first novel, *Down and Out in Paris and London*. At the break of the Civil War he went to Spain as a reporter, but he soon joined the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, a small anarchic, trade-union movement: a critical account of his experience was given by *Spain in Homage to Catalonia*. Due to his bad health he was **exempted** from military service in WW2: he worked, instead, for the BBC Indian Service and became editor of the socialist journal *Tribune*. In those years Orwell wrote book reviews, articles and essays, and completed his allegorical fable, *Animal farm* (1945), in which he satirises the degeneration of all revolutions. His growing pessimism and disillusionment with totalitarian regimes were also expressed in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, his last novel published shortly before his death (1950).

As Orwell was sceptical about fascism in the 1930s, **likewise** he watched with alarm the growing power of communist Russia, which he considered a real **threat** to democracy.



G. Orwell

ABOUT THE NOVEL

Animal Farm

The story symbolically parallels specific developments in the history of Russian communism, and several of the animal characters are based on real participants in the Russian Revolution in 1917. Tired of being exploited by their cruel farmer, Mr Jones, the farm animals rebel against him and set up a community based on equalitarian principles. But little by little, a hierarchical power structure re-emerges, with the pigs forming a ruling élite. 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.

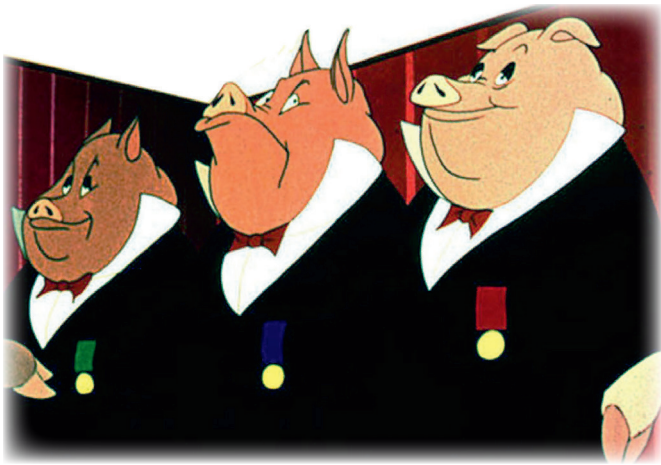
As time passes, however, Napoleon and Snowball increasingly **quibble over** the future of the farm, and they begin to struggle with each other for power and influence among the other animals. Napoleon assumes leadership of Animal Farm and declares that there will be no more meetings. From that point on, he **asserts**, the pigs alone will make all of the decisions – for the good of every animal. Napoleon also begins to act more and more like a human being – sleeping in a bed, drinking whisky, and engaging in trade with neighbouring 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.

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 labouring classes of both the human and animal communities.

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.

The main theme is the importance, but also the failure of political ideals. Orwell represents the historical and social process of the corruption of revolutionary ideals, and the trend to recreate class stratification and develop class tyranny.



THE TEXT

Chapter I

This extract is the beginning of the book. As soon as Mr Jones, the proprietor and overseer of the Manor Farm goes to bed, all of the farm animals convene in the big barn to hear a speech by Old Major, a prize boar and pillar of the animal community. Sensing that his long life is about to come to an end, Major wishes to impart to the rest of the farm animals a distillation of the wisdom that he has acquired during his lifetime.

At one end of the big barn, on a sort of raised platform, Major was already ensconced on his bed of straw, under a lantern which hung from a beam. He was twelve years old and had lately grown rather stout, but he was still a majestic-looking pig, with a wise and benevolent appearance in spite of the fact that his tushes had never been cut. Before long the other animals began to arrive and make themselves comfortable after their different fashions. [...]

“Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty [...]

“But is this simply part of the order of nature? Is it because this land of ours is so poor that it cannot afford a decent life to those who dwell upon it? No, comrades, a thousand times no! The soil of England is fertile, its climate is good, it is capable of affording food in abundance to an enormously greater number of animals than now inhabit it. This single farm of ours would support a dozen horses, twenty cows, hundreds of sheep – and all of them living in a comfort and a dignity that are now almost beyond our imagining. Why then do we continue in this miserable condition? Because nearly the whole of the produce of our labour is stolen from us by human beings. There, comrades, is the answer to all our problems. It is summed up in a single word – Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever.

“Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin.

You cows that I see before me, how many thousands of gallons of milk have you given during this last year? And what has happened to that milk which should have been breeding up sturdy calves? Every drop of it has gone down the throats of our enemies. And you hens, how many eggs have you laid in this last year, and how many of those eggs ever hatched into chickens? The rest have all gone to market to bring in money for Jones and his men. And you, Clover, where are those four foals you bore, who should have been the support and pleasure of your old age? Each was sold at a year old – you will never see one of them again. In return for your four confinements and all your labour in the fields, what have you ever had except your bare rations and a stall? [...]

And even the miserable lives we lead are not allowed to reach their natural span. For myself I do not grumble, for I am one of the lucky ones. I am twelve years old and have had over four hundred children. [...]

“What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the **overthrow** of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! [...]

“Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest, that the prosperity of the one is the prosperity of the others. It is all lies. Man serves the interests of no creature except himself. And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle. All men are enemies. All animals are comrades.” [...]

Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil. And, above all, no animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers. No animal must ever kill any other animal. All animals are equal”.



to assert: *affermare*
awkward: *disagevole*
bare: *nudo*
beam: *trave*
beyond: *al di là di*
boar: *verro/maiale non castrato*
to convene: *riunirsi*
customs: *dogana*
to cut tushes: *castrare*

destitute: *indigente*
dung: *letame*
to ensconce: *accomodarsi*
exempted: *esentato*
foal: *puledro*
to forbid: *proibire*
to hatch: *schiodersi*
likewise: *allo stesso modo*
overseer: *supervisore*
overthrow: *deposizione*

pen-name: *pseudonimo*
to quibble over: *cavillare*
to resign: *licenziarsi*
stall: *stalla*
sturdy: *vigoroso*
threat: *minaccia*
to till: *dissodare*
upright: *in posizione eretta*
whip: *frusta*
wisdom: *saggezza*

COMPREHENSION

1 Read the text and answer the questions.

1. What is the story about?
2. What themes does it deal with?
3. What is the dream that Old Major shares with the other animals?
4. Why is Mr Jones seen as an enemy?
5. Who is good and who is bad, according to Old Major?
6. What is Old Major's message to the animals?
7. List the elements characterising the setting of the first chapter.

ANALYSIS

2 Read the introduction to the author and the text again and answer the questions.

1. The Old Major's speech is a striking example of political propaganda. What makes it so?
2. What point of view is used in the fable?
3. Who is the narrator?
4. What does dramatic irony mean?
5. What is the setting?
6. Whom does Old Major represent?
7. Is Old Major a positive character?

DISCUSSION

3 Research the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its origins. What similarities do you see between it and the events in *Animal Farm*? Are there any relationships between the protagonists of the story and the real protagonists of the historic events? Surf the net and write a short essay on it.