

Chapter III

"Four legs good, two legs bad."

(See Important Quotations Explained)

Summary

The animals spend a laborious summer harvesting in the fields. The clever pigs think of ways for the animals to use the humans' tools, and every animal participates in the work, each according to his capacity. The resulting harvest exceeds any that the farm has ever known. Only Mollie and the cat shirk their duties. The powerful and hard-working Boxer does most of the heavy labor, adopting "I will work harder!" as a personal motto. The entire animal community reveres his dedication and strength. Of all of the animals, only Benjamin, the obstinate donkey, seems to recognize no change under the new leadership.

Every Sunday, the animals hold a flag-raising ceremony. The flag's green background represents the fields of England, and its white hoof and horn symbolize the animals. The morning rituals also include a democratic meeting, at which the animals debate and establish new policies for the collective good. At the meetings, Snowball and Napoleon always voice the loudest opinions, though their views always clash.

Snowball establishes a number of committees with various goals, such as cleaning the cows' tails and re-educating the rats and rabbits. Most of these committees fail to accomplish their aims, but the classes designed to teach all of the farm animals how to read and write meet with some

success. By the end of the summer, all of the animals achieve some degree of literacy. The pigs become fluent in reading and writing, while some of the dogs are able to learn to read the Seven Commandments. Muriel the goat can read scraps of newspaper, while Clover knows the alphabet but cannot string the letters together. Poor Boxer never gets beyond the letter *D*. When it becomes apparent that many of the animals are unable to memorize the Seven Commandments, Snowball reduces the principles to one essential maxim, which he says contains the heart of Animalism: "Four legs good, two legs bad." The birds take offense until Snowball hastily explains that wings count as legs. The other animals accept the maxim without argument, and the sheep begin to chant it at random times, mindlessly, as if it were a song.

Napoleon takes no interest in Snowball's committees. When the dogs Jessie and Bluebell each give birth to puppies, he takes the puppies into his own care, saying that the training of the young should take priority over adult education. He raises the puppies in a loft above the harness room, out of sight of the rest of Animal Farm. Around this time, the animals discover, to their outrage, that the pigs have been taking all of the milk and apples for themselves. Squealer explains to them that pigs need milk and apples in order to think well, and since the pigs' work is brain work, it is in everyone's best interest for the pigs to eat the apples and drink the milk. Should the pigs' brains fail because of a lack of apples and milk, Squealer hints, Mr. Jones might come back to take over the farm. This prospect frightens the other animals, and they agree to forgo milk and apples in the interest of the collective good.

Analysis

Boxer's motto, in response to the increased labors on Animal Farm, of "I will work harder" is an exact echo of the immigrant Jurgis Rudkus's motto, in response to financial problems, in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. Whereas Boxer exerts himself for the common good, as his socialist society dictates he must, Jurgis exerts himself for his own good, as his capitalist society dictates he must. Both possess a blind faith that the key to happiness lies in conforming to the existing political-economic system. Committed to socialism, Orwell would almost certainly have read *The Jungle*, which, published in its entirety in 1906, was a searing indictment of capitalism and galvanized the American socialist movement. His appropriation of Jurgis's motto for Boxer implicitly links the oppression of capitalism with that of totalitarian communism, as, in each case, the state wholly ignores the suffering of those who strive to be virtuous and work within the system.

The varying degrees of literacy among the animals suggest the necessity of sharing information in order for freedom to be maintained. To the pigs' credit, they do try to teach the other animals the basics of reading and writing, but the other animals prove unable or unwilling. The result is a dangerous imbalance in knowledge, as the pigs become the sole guardians and interpreters of Animal Farm's guiding principles. The discrepancy among the animals' capacity for abstract thought leads the pigs to condense the Seven Commandments into one supreme slogan: "Four legs good, two legs bad." The birds' objection to the slogan points immediately to the phrase's excessive simplicity. Whereas the Seven Commandments that the pigs formulate are a detailed mix of antihuman directives ("No animal shall wear clothes"), moral value judgments ("No animal shall kill another animal"), and utopian ideals ("All ani-

mals are equal”), the new, reductive slogan contains none of these elements; it merely establishes a bold dichotomy that masks the pigs’ treachery. The motto has undergone such generalization that it has become propaganda, a rallying cry that will keep the common animals focused on the pigs’ rhetoric so that they will ignore their own unhappiness.

In its simplicity, this new, brief slogan is all too easy to understand and becomes ingrained in even the most dull-witted of minds, minds that cannot think critically about how the slogan, while seeming to galvanize the animals’ crusade for freedom, actually enables the pigs to institute their own oppressive regime. The animals themselves may be partially responsible for this power imbalance: on the whole, they show little true initiative to learn—the dogs have no interest in reading anything but the Seven Commandments, and Benjamin decides not to put his ample reading skills to use. Though the birds don’t understand Snowball’s long-winded explanation of why wings count as legs, they accept it nonetheless, trusting in their leader. It would be unfair, however, to fault the common animals for their failure to realize that the pigs mean to oppress them. Their fervor in singing “Beasts of England” and willingness to follow the pigs’ instructions demonstrate their virtuous desire to make life better for one another. The common animals cannot be blamed for their lesser intelligence. The pigs, however, mix their intelligence with ruthless guile and take advantage of the other animals’ apathy. Their machinations are reprehensible.

Squealer figures crucially in the novel, as his proficiency in spreading lie-filled propaganda allows the pigs to conceal their acts of greed beneath a veneer of common good. His statements and behaviors exempli-

fy the linguistic and psychological methods that the pigs use to control the other animals while convincing them that this strict regime is essential if the animals want to avoid becoming subject to human cruelty again. In the opinion of Orwell, the socialist goals of the Russian Revolution quickly became meaningless rhetorical tools used by the communists to control the people: the intelligentsia began to interpret the “good of the state” to mean the good of itself as a class, and anyone who opposed it was branded an “enemy of the people.” On Animal Farm, Squealer makes himself useful to the other pigs by pretending to side with the oppressed animals and falsely aligning the common good with the good of the pigs.

Summary

By late summer, news of Animal Farm has spread across half the county. Mr. Jones lives ignominiously in Willingdon, drinking and complaining about his misfortune. Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick, who own the adjoining farms, fear that disenchantment will spread among their own animals. Their rivalry with each other, however, prevents them from working together against Animal Farm. They merely spread rumors about the farm’s inefficiency and moral reprehensibility. Meanwhile, animals everywhere begin singing “Beasts of England,” which they have learned from flocks of pigeons sent by Snowball, and many begin to behave rebelliously.

At last, in early October, a flight of pigeons alerts Animal Farm that Mr. Jones has begun marching on the farm with some of Pilkington’s and Frederick’s men. Snowball, who has studied books about the battle campaigns of the renowned Roman general Julius Caesar, prepares a de-

fense and leads the animals in an ambush on the men. Boxer fights courageously, as does Snowball, and the humans suffer a quick defeat. The animals' losses amount only to a single sheep, whom they give a hero's burial. Boxer, who believes that he has unintentionally killed a stable boy in the chaos, expresses his regret at taking a life, even though it is a human one. Snowball tells him not to feel guilty, asserting that "the only good human being is a dead one." Mollie, as is her custom, has avoided any risk to herself by hiding during the battle. Snowball and Boxer each receive medals with the inscription "Animal Hero, First Class." The animals discover Mr. Jones's gun where he dropped it in the mud. They place it at the base of the flagstaff, agreeing to fire it twice a year: on October 12th, the anniversary of the Battle of the Cowshed—as they have dubbed their victory—and on Midsummer's Day, the anniversary of the Rebellion.

Analysis

This chapter extends the allegory of the Russian Revolution to Russia's interwar period. The spread of Animalism to surrounding farms evokes the attempts by Leon Trotsky to establish communism as an international movement. Trotsky believed, as did Karl Marx, that communism could only achieve its goals if implemented on a global scale, and he devoted much of his formidable intelligence and eloquence to setting off what Western leaders later called the "Domino Effect." The Domino Effect, or Domino Theory, posited that the conversion or "fall" of a non-communist state to communism would precipitate the fall of other non-communist governments in nearby states. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson used this theory to justify their military

involvement in Greece, Turkey, and Vietnam—countries they hoped to “save” from the spread of communism. In *Animal Farm*, the proprietors of the neighboring farms fear a similar contagion, which we might term the “Snowball Effect.” Just as the West tried to discredit Russian communism, so do Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick spread disparaging rumors about Animal Farm. Just as diplomatic skirmishes between the West and Russia ended up bolstering Trotsky and his allies, the armed skirmish between humans and animals ends up strengthening the animals’ hold on the farm.

In this chapter, Orwell makes masterful use of irony, an important component of satirical writing, to illustrate the gap between what the animals are fighting for and what they believe they are fighting for. All of the animals—except Mollie—fight their hardest in the Battle of the Cowshed, but as Chapter III demonstrates, they do not fully understand the ideals for which they fight, the principles that they defend. In putting all of their energies toward expelling the humans, the animals believe that they are protecting themselves from oppression. In reality, however, they are simply and unwittingly consolidating the pigs’ power by muting the primary threat to the pigs’ regime—the human menace. Moreover, though the animals are prepared to give their lives in defense of Animal Farm, they appear unprepared to deal with the consequences of their fight: Boxer is horrified when he thinks that he has killed the stable boy.

Snowball’s emphatic declaration after the battle of the need for all animals “to be ready to die for Animal Farm” sets up Orwell’s scrutiny of the motivations behind mass violence and manipulative leadership. Many readers have assumed that *Animal Farm*, in its critique of totalitar-

ian communism, advocates the Western capitalist way of life as an alternative. Yet a closer reading suggests that Orwell may take a more complicated stance. For if the animals represent the Russian communists and the farmers represent noncommunist leaders, we see that Orwell denounces the communists, but also portrays the noncommunists in a very harsh light. Mr. Jones proves an irresponsible and neglectful farm owner, and neither Mr. Pilkington nor Mr. Frederick hesitates to quash violently any animal uprisings that threaten his own supremacy. There is nothing noble in the men's unprovoked attack on Animal Farm—they undertake this crusade merely out of self-interest.