

Chapter VIII

Summary

A few days after the bloody executions, the animals discover that the commandment reading “No animal shall kill any other animal” now reads: “No animal shall kill any other animal without cause.” As with the previous revisions of commandments, the animals blame the apparent change on their faulty memories—they must have forgotten the final two words. The animals work even harder throughout the year to rebuild the windmill. Though they often suffer from hunger and the cold, Squealer reads continuously from a list of statistics proving that conditions remain far superior to anything the animals knew under Mr. Jones and that they only continue to improve.

Napoleon has now taken the title of “Leader” and has dozens of other complimentary titles as well. Minimus has written a poem in praise of the Napoleon and inscribed it on the barn wall. A pile of timber lies unused on the farm, left over from the days of Mr. Jones, and Napoleon engages in complicated negotiations for the sale of it to either Mr. Frederick or Mr. Pilkington. When negotiations favor Mr. Frederick, the pigs teach the animals to hate Mr. Pilkington. When Mr. Pilkington then appears ready to buy the timber, the pigs teach the animals to hate Mr. Frederick with equal ferocity. Whichever farm is currently out of favor is said to be the hiding place of Snowball. Following a slew of propaganda against Mr. Frederick (during which Napoleon adopts the maxim “Death to Frederick!”), the animals are shocked to learn that Mr. Frederick eventually comes through as the buyer of the timber. The pigs talk

endlessly about Napoleon's cleverness, for, rather than accept a check for the timber, he insists on receiving cash. The five-pound notes are now in his possession.

Soon the animals complete the construction of the windmill. But before they can put it to use, Napoleon discovers to his great outrage that the money Mr. Frederick gave him for the timber is simply a stack of forgeries. He warns the animals to prepare for the worst, and, indeed, Mr. Frederick soon attacks Animal Farm with a large group of armed men. The animals cower as Mr. Frederick's men plant dynamite at the base of the windmill and blow the whole structure up. Enraged, the animals attack the men, driving them away, but at a heavy cost: several of the animals are killed, and Boxer sustains a serious injury. The animals are disheartened, but a patriotic flag-raising ceremony cheers them up and restores their faith somewhat.

Not long afterward, the pigs discover a crate of whisky in the farmhouse basement. That night, the animals hear singing and revelry from within, followed by the sound of a terrible quarrel. The next morning the pigs look bleary-eyed and sick, and the animals hear whisperings that Comrade Napoleon may be dying. By evening, however, he has recovered. The next night, some of the animals find Squealer near the barn, holding a paintbrush; he has fallen from a ladder leaned up against the spot where the Seven Commandments are painted on the barn. The animals fail to put two and two together, however, and when they discover that the commandment that they recall as stating "No animal shall drink alcohol" actually reads "No animal shall drink alcohol to excess," they once again blame their memories for being faulty.

Analysis

By this point, Napoleon and Squealer have so systematically perverted the truth that the animals cannot recognize their leaders' duplicity even when they witness it directly. Karl Marx had theorized the need for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" during the early years of his prescribed revolution, under which democratic freedoms would take second place to stamping out resistance in the bourgeoisie. In Soviet Russia, Stalin and his colleagues used Marx's theories as a justification for their increasingly violent and tyrannical actions. Moreover, they used this one Marxist principle to justify their neglect of the other principles. The Stalinist government, for example, quickly altered the noble ideals of equal work and equal compensation in order to favor the politically and militarily powerful. Even when the machinations of the government became clear to everyone in Russia—in the novella we see such a moment when the animals catch Squealer literally rewriting the law on the side of the barn—no significant popular revolt among the working classes ever occurred. Similarly, the animals show no signs of rebellion.

Minimus's poem provides compelling evidence for the animals' largely uncritical attitude toward the regime that oppresses it. Though the poem is outrageously inflated and tastelessly sentimental, the animals don't question it; instead, they allow it to speak for them. With the poem, Orwell creates a passage of great irony and a wonderful satire of patriotic rhetoric. Much of the poem's humor arises from its combination of high and low language, exposing the ridiculousness of what it intends to celebrate. Thus, the poem praises Napoleon as "Fountain of happiness!" but also "Lord of the swill-bucket!" While it glorifies life

under Napoleon, it emphasizes its simple triviality: “All that [his] creatures love” amounts to a “full belly” and “clean straw.” This stylistic use of contrast helps render the poem’s tone of utter devotion (“Oh how my soul is on / Fire”) a mockery of itself. At the same time, of course, the poem parodies actual anthems and patriotic odes. Orwell aims to expose the inanity of such patriotic sentiment, and also its emptiness, if not its misdirection. He suggests that such rhetoric fails to examine the essence of that which it praises.

The description of Napoleon’s dealings with his neighbors, Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick, elaborately parodies Stalin’s diplomatic tap dance with Germany and the Allies at the outset of World War II. Stalin, faced with an unpleasant choice between the capitalist Allies and the fascist Germans and reluctant to enter into another large war, stalled by alternately siding with one country and then the other, using propaganda to drag the populace along with his changing allegiances. At the last minute, and quite unexpectedly, he signed the Non-Aggression Pact (an agreement not to wage war on each other) with the German leader Adolf Hitler, much as Napoleon makes the surprise move of selling the timber to Mr. Frederick. Hitler almost immediately went back on his word—as is evoked by Mr. Frederick’s forged banknotes—and invaded Russia’s western frontier, eventually killing over twenty-five million Russians and demolishing much of the infrastructure that the Soviets had built since the Russian Revolution. In his depiction of the animals’ response to Mr. Frederick’s gratuitous destruction of the great windmill, Orwell aptly conveys the tremendous sense of betrayal and feelings of anger that Russians felt toward Germany during and after World War II.

The pigs, echoing another tactic of the victorious governments after World War II, use the heroism of individuals from the lower classes to reinforce the patriotism of the demoralized survivors. Orwell crafts particularly keen descriptions of the patriotic celebrations and rituals after the animals' war with Mr. Frederick's men. He subtly implies that while such ceremonies have the apparent function of bestowing the glory of the state upon the individual, they truly serve the opposite goal: to transfer the nobility of individual sacrifices onto the state.

There are several notable parallels between *Animal Farm* and Orwell's final novel, *1984*. One can argue that *Animal Farm* was even a sort of study for *1984*, which applies many of *Animal Farm*'s themes and ideas to human society, rendering the horror of totalitarian government all the more real. One of the principal ideas that each work addresses is the ability of those in power to control and alter both attitudes and history, especially by subverting language. Just as Squealer offers a host of statistics to show that Animal Farm is in better shape than ever, despite the fact that the animals are hungry and cold, so too does the Ministry of Plenty, in *1984*, crank out misleading reports about how greatly production has increased; indeed, the ministry reduces rations but convinces people that it is actually increasing them. Similarly, Animal Farm's ever-alternating alliance with Mr. Frederick and Mr. Pilkington and the leaders' claim that the farm has always remained committed to the same farmer reaches the apex of absurdity in *1984*. In the middle of a speech during Hate Week, the masses mindlessly accept the speaker's assertion that their country, Oceania, which has indeed been at war with Eurasia, is actually not at war and never has been at war with Eurasia. He says the country is and always has been at war with East-

sia. The masses, carrying explicit anti-Eurasia signs, become embarrassed about their apparent mistake.