

Summer Reading

English 3EP

2018

In this packet, you will find a collection of expository and critical articles on dystopian fiction and George Orwell's classic dystopian novel, *Animal Farm*. They will help you to make sense of the novel and the allegory that it relies upon for its meaning. Completing the questions and annotations should prepare you well for class discussion, the Summer reading test, and first semester of 3EP, which will focus almost entirely on dystopian literature.

Please hand-write all responses to questions from the packet on loose-leaf paper, with clearly labeled sections. Any annotation should occur directly in your copy of the novel. Please use highlighter and pen, as pencil does not stand out well on a page full of text.

Enjoy!

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Title: **Dystopia**

- 1) After reading the first two paragraphs, write a clear definition of the word dystopia in your own words.
  
- 2) Characteristics of dystopia:
  - a) List **three general features of dystopian societies** as stated in the first two paragraphs
  - b) You have been given a list of historical dystopias, as well as a list of examples of dystopia in tv shows, games, and film. **Choose 2 examples and write 2-3 sentences indicating some elements of dystopia in each.** (If you have not seen/played any of the TV shows, films, or games, then choose 2 historical examples to look up. You don't have to choose the Nazis, Branch Davidians, or Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints groups mentioned on page 1; find your own if you prefer. If you don't know what the FLDS or Branch Davidians are, then look them up!).
  
- 3) Most dystopias in literature occur during the second half of the nineteenth century and later. What societal changes happened during these times that facilitated the growth of dystopian literature?
  
- 4) You are given four examples of dystopian literature. Answer the following questions about each example. Don't worry about a correct answer. Next year, you will be asked to demonstrate how you reach your answer through your reading of the text. Underline sentences/words from the passage that help you justify your answer. Quote that phrase or sentence in your answer. (each answer should be 2 sentences in length--at least 1 sentence with your response and another sentence incorporating your quote).
  - a) *1984*, by George Orwell (we will be reading this book in class): What did the Party claim about life before their Revolution, and how do you think they use this claim to justify their takeover?
  - b) *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury: How does this society teach people to view God? How does the society utilize this view of God to its own advantage?
  - c) *Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood (we will be reading this book in class): What do you think the women have to give up in order to have "freedom from," as Aunt Lydia tells them?
  - d) *Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins. How do the Hunger Games allow the government to assert its power over the people?

# DYSTOPIA

## Definition of Dystopia

Dystopia is a genre in literature that depicts a frightening society or community. The society can be frightening for many reasons, and generally has one or more of the following problems: a corrupt and/or totalitarian government, dehumanization due to technological advances, environmental disasters, eradication of the family, cultish religions, limited resources, and unchecked violence. Dystopias therefore usually have an abundance of human misery, though in some cases there are phenomena at work to make people believe they are not miserable (which is perhaps even more horrifying). For example, dystopian regimes often promote propaganda within the society to make the people think that it is, in fact, a utopia. It is usually the quest to make a society into a utopia—a perfect place—that ironically leads to such horrifying conditions.

The word dystopia is a combination of the Greek prefix *δυσ-* (*dys-*), meaning “bad” and *τόπος* (*topos*), meaning “place.” The definition of dystopia came about as an antonym to the word utopia, which philosopher Thomas More coined in 1516 for a work of fiction set on an imaginary ideal island nation.

## Common Examples of Dystopia

There have been real examples of dystopias in history, such as Nazi Germany. Cults such as the Branch Davidians and the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints also qualify as dystopias due to brainwashing and their attempt to create a “perfect” society.

There are also plenty of dystopia examples in film, television, video games, and music. Here are some examples of dystopia in each of the different mediums:

### Films:

- *Planet of the Apes*
- *V for Vendetta*
- *Wall-E*
- *District 9*
- *The Fifth Element*
- *Mad Max*
- *Gattaca*
- *I, Robot*
- *The Matrix*
- *RoboCop*

### Television:

- *Firefly*
- *The Walking Dead*
- *Doctor Who*
- *Black Mirror*
- *Aeon Flux*

### Video Games:

- *Final Fantasy VI and VII*
- *Resident Evil series*
- *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*
- *Warhammer 40,000*
- *Deus Ex*

## **Significance of Dystopia in Literature**

It is interesting to note that there are very few examples of dystopian works written before the late nineteenth century. There are a few notable exceptions, such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, written in 1726. However, the great proliferation of dystopian works did not begin until the second half of the nineteenth century, while the majority of dystopian examples comes from the second of the twentieth century until the present day.

There are several possible explanations for this phenomena. First is rise of technology associated with the first and second industrial revolutions, as well as the dehumanization of the worker at this time, especially in factories with assembly lines. Second was the very real experience of a dystopia in the Third Reich, which pledged to create a perfect race and society that would go on for a thousand years. The nightmare of Nazi Germany has loomed large in literature for more than a half century in different ways. Third, and most recently, is the terrifying speed at which we humans are extinguishing the world's resources and contributing to climatic changes that may very well prove to be incompatible with human life.

## **Examples of Dystopia in Literature**

### **Example #1**

The Party claimed, of course, to have liberated the proles from bondage. Before the Revolution they had been hideously oppressed by the capitalists, they had been starved and flogged, women had been forced to work in the coal mines (women still did work in the coal mines, as a matter of fact), children had been sold into the factories at the age of six. But simultaneously, true to the Principles of doublethink, the Party taught that the proles were natural inferiors who must be kept in subjection, like animals, by the application of a few simple rules.

(*1984* by George Orwell)

George Orwell's *1984* is one of the most famous examples of a dystopia in all of literature. The protagonist, Winston, becomes aware of the hypocrisy of the ruling Party, and fights to overthrow it. In this excerpt, he explains how the Party brainwashed the majority of working-class citizens, called Proles, to believe they're better off now than before.

### **Example #2**

"Christ is one of the 'family' now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we've dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He's a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn't making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshipper absolutely needs."

(*Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury)

In this short quote from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* we see many different elements of a dystopian society: the erasure of the real family, the perversion of religion, and the dehumanization that is brought on by technology. There are many more dystopian themes in the novel such as totalitarian rule and brainwashing.

### Example #3

Now we walk along the same street, in red pairs, and no man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. No one whistles.

There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia. Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it.

(*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood)

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are appropriated by the ruling class to bear their children for them. In a classic case of brainwashing as part of a dystopia, the character of Aunt Lydia explains that there are certain freedoms these women have now that they didn't have before.

### Example #4

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch – this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. "Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen."

(*The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins)

Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy is a popular contemporary example of dystopia. There is a ruling class who lives in the Capitol which forces the rest of the country to send children to compete in the blood-soaked Hunger Games. Here we see the pervasiveness of technology, the unmitigated violence, and the totalitarian government so common to dystopia examples.

## ***THE REAL REASON DYSTOPIAN FICTION IS ROARING BACK (EXCERPTED BY WIRED MAGAZINE) 2.22.2017***

FROM THE "EVERYTHING old is new again" files: Bygone dystopian fiction is officially back in vogue. As reported last month, Penguin Random House has seen a 9,500 percent sales increase for George Orwell's 1984 since Trump's inauguration; that was enough to propel the book to the top spot on Amazon's bestseller list.

Nor is this newfound popularity a reflection of blue-state tastes. At Brazos Bookstore in Houston, Texas, general manager Ben Rybeck says copies of 1984 and other titles are “flying” off the shelves. Iconoclast Books in Ketchum, Idaho sold eight copies of 1984 in January—compared to one in January 2016. And at Book Loft in Columbus, Ohio, sales manager Glen Welch has seen unprecedented demand. “All of a sudden, these books started taking off,” says Welch, who describes the store's customers as an even split between liberal and conservative. “I haven’t seen this before, in my 10 years here.”

Part of the appeal of these classics, of course, is a morbid strain of escapism: Dystopian fiction enables readers to taste a darker timeline, albeit one that a protagonist invariably triumphs over. The world could be a lot worse, you think while reading. But the thrill goes beyond the vicarious. A dystopian worldview, whether derived from fiction or real-world events, can have therapeutic value—no matter which side of the aisle your politics belong on.

### "We're Saturated With Dystopia"

Dystopian literature has long given writers a means of interrogating the world around them. Orwell conceived of 1984 under the looming threat of the Soviet Union, and Margaret Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* after the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. “We can work our way through problems by telling stories better, at times, than by writing philosophical treatises,” says Chris Robichaud, an ethicist at Harvard who teaches a course on utopia and dystopia in fiction and philosophy. “You look to fiction to see how people are wrestling with serious problems.” That's valuable for readers as well, especially in a politically divided climate like today's. “We can't look at dystopias as merely some bad slippery slope argument,” says Robichaud. “Rather, they challenge us: What are the values in this dystopia, and what do they say about our values right now?”

People naturally gravitate toward a narrative that validates their own worldview. For some, President Trump's tweets about a conniving elite and a corrupt media echo their feelings that the odds are against them. For others, George Orwell's chronicle of totalitarian doublethink provides comfort that we've fought “alternative facts” before, and we're still standing. Either way, people are reaching out to dark visions to make sense of an increasingly unrecognizable country. A well-told narrative, truthful or not, can awaken a reader's imagination and push them to action—and a neat dystopia is often more satisfying than a complicated truth.

Title: In 1946, The New Republic Panned George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'

Author: George Soule

1. Highlight four unique criticisms of *Animal Farm* that George Soule makes in the second paragraph. (These could be found in a complete sentence, a short phrase, or even a single adjective).

2. In paragraph three, Soule identifies key characteristics of a few of *Animal Farm's* characters. In your copy of the novel highlight and label moments when Benjamin, Mollie, Clover, and Boxer demonstrate those traits.

(For example, on pg.5 you might highlight the passage about Benjamin never laughing because he feels nothing funny exists. Then in the margin you would add a label like, "Ben.-nothing matters")

3. In your copy of the novel, highlight three passages which support Soule's argument that the animals in *Animal Farm* have "just cause for revolt" (pg. 3) against Mr. Jones. Annotate each with an appropriate label.

4. In your copy of the novel, highlight three passages which support Soule's argument that "condition[s are] improved under the new [pig] regime" (pg. 3). Annotate each with an appropriate label.

5. In the last paragraph on page three of Soule's article, he suggests four different explanations for the cause of Socialism's failure in *Animal Farm*. Highlight a passage in your copy of the novel that would support each explanation. Annotate each with an appropriate label. You will have at least four.

6. In the second to last paragraph of Soule's article, he identifies four targets of Orwell's satirical attack in *Animal Farm*. Highlight a passage in your copy of the novel that demonstrates Orwell's hatred of these things. Annotate each with an appropriate label. You will have at least four.

# In 1946, The New Republic Panned George Orwell's 'Animal Farm'

September 2, 1946

By GEORGE SOULE

September 26, 2013

*In honor of Banned Books Week, we're publishing our original reviews of frequently banned books. In 1946, our critic George Soules read Animal Farm with disgust, calling the book "on the whole dull...a creaking machine...clumsy." We imagine he may have lived to regret these judgments.*

George Orwell in his critical writings shows imagination and taste; his wit is both edged and human. Few writers of any period have been able to use the English language so simply and accurately to say what they mean, and at the same time to mean something. The news that he had written a satirical allegory, telling the story of a revolution by farm animals against their cruel and dissolute master, and of their subsequent fortunes, was like the smell of a roast from a kitchen ruled by a good cook, near the end of a hungry morning. The further news that this book had been chosen and was being pushed by the Book of the Month Club, though it occasioned surprise, was pleasant because it seemed to herald one of those instances when unusual talent of the sort rarely popular receives recognition and a great tangible reward.

There are times when a reviewer is happy to report that a book is bad because it fulfills his hope that the author will expose himself in a way that permits a long deserved castigation. This is not one of them, I was expecting that Orwell would again give pleasure and that his satire of the sort of thing which democrats deplore in the Soviet Union would be keen and cleansing. Instead, the book puzzled and saddened me. It seemed on the whole dull. The



allegory turned out to be a creaking machine for saying in a clumsy way things that have been said better directly. And many of the things said are not instantly recognized as the essence of truth, but are of the sort which start endless and boring controversy.

Orwell does know his farm animals and gives them vivid personalities. Many will recognize Benjamin, the donkey who never commits himself, never hurries and thinks that in the end nothing much matters. Mollie the saddle horse, who wanders from the puritanical path of the revolution to seek ribbons for her mane, the cat who never does any work, the hens who sabotage by laying their eggs in the rafters, Clover and Boxer, the powerful, trusting and honest draught horses, are all real enough. But these spontaneous creatures seem in action like circus animals performing mechanically to the crack of the story-teller's whip.

Part of the trouble lies in the fact that the story is too close to recent historical events without being close enough. Major, the aged pig who on his deathbed tells the animals of their oppression and prophesies revolution, must be Karl Marx. His two followers who lead the revolution, Napoleon and Snowball, are then readily identified as Lenin and Trotsky. This identification turns out to be correct in the case of Snowball, but the reader soon begins to puzzle over the fact that Napoleon disapproves the project of building a windmill—an obvious symbol for electrification and industrialization—whereas this was Lenin's program. The puzzlement is increased when Napoleon chases out Snowball as a traitor; it was Stalin who did this.

And so it goes through incident after incident. The young dogs are alone selected for schooling; later they appear as the secret police. Is this a picture of Soviet education? The pigs not only keep the best food for themselves, but also become drunkards, taking over the pasture reserved for retirement of the superannuated in order to raise the necessary barley. Of course prohibition was abolished early in the revolution, but have the leaders drunk too much and has social insurance been abolished? There is a pathetic incident when Boxer, the sturdy and loyal old work horse, is sent off to be slaughtered and turned into dog food and bone meal,

under the pretext that he is being hospitalized. Just what part of Soviet history corresponds to this?

Nobody would suppose that good allegory is literally accurate, but when the reader is continually led to wonder who is who and what aspect of reality is being satirized, he is prevented either from enjoying the story as a story or from valuing it as a comment. Masters like Swift and Anatole France, with whom Orwell is compared in the blurbs, were not guilty of this fault. They told good stories, the interest of which did not lie wholly in their caricature. And their satire, however barbed, was not dependent on identification of historical personages or specific events.

The thoughtful reader must be further disturbed by the lack of clarity in the main intention of the author. Obviously he is convinced that the animals had just cause for revolt and that for a time their condition was improved under the new regime. But they are betrayed by their scoundrelly, piggish leaders. In the end, the pigs become indistinguishable from the men who run the other nearby farms; they walk on two legs, have double and triple chins, wear clothes and carry whips. *Animal Farm* reverts to the old Manor Farm in both name and reality.

No doubt this is what George Orwell thinks has happened in Russia. But if he wants to tell us why it happened, he has failed. Does he mean to say that not these pigs, but Snowball, should have been on top? Or that all the animals should have been merged in a common primitive communism without leaders or organization? Or that it was a mistake to try to industrialize, because pastoral simplicity is the condition of equality and cooperation? Or that, as in the old saw criticizing socialism, the possibility of a better society is a pipe-dream, because if property were distributed equally, the more clever and selfish would soon get a larger share and things would go on as of old? Though I am sure he did not intend this moral, the chances are that a sample poll of the book-club readers in the United States would indicate that a large majority think so and will heartily approve the book on that account.

There is no question that Orwell hates tyranny, sycophancy, deceitful propaganda, sheeplike acceptance of empty political formulas. His exposures of these detestable vices constitute the best passages in the book. There have been plenty of such abuses in Russia, They also crop up in other places. It is difficult to believe that they determined the whole issue of the Russian revolution, or that Russia is now just like every other nation. No doubt in some respects she is worse than most; in other respects she may be better.

It seems to me that the failure of this book (commercially it is already assured of tremendous success) arises from the fact that the satire deals not with something the author has experienced, but rather with stereotyped ideas about a country which he probably does not know very well. The plan for the allegory, which must have seemed a good one when he first thought of it, became mechanical in execution. It almost appears as if he had lost his zest before he got very far with the writing. He should *try* again, and this time on something nearer home.

Title: "Orwell and Me"  
Author: Margaret Atwood

Before you read, define the following:

- Palaver
- Despotism
- Hedonistic
- Ersatz
- Doublethink
- Proletariat

1. How do the animals in *Animal Farm* relate to the roles of people in society? Share specific examples.
2. Atwood reiterates Orwell's teaching by noting that "it isn't the labels . . . that are definitive." What labels is she referring to and what does she determine?
3. What controls/elements are required for a successful dictatorship?
4. Review the historical background and consider how the dungeons of Rome, the Inquisition, Star Chamber, and the Bastille relate to dystopias.
5. Reviewing the article, describe how Atwood was affected by Orwell's novels *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Highlight the phrases/sentences that contribute to your answer. Include both her initial impressions and deeper realizations.

# Orwell and me

By Margaret Atwood

I grew up with George Orwell. I was born in 1939, and *Animal Farm* was published in 1945. Thus, I was able to read it at the age of nine. It was lying around the house, and I mistook it for a book about talking animals, sort of like *Wind in the Willows*. I knew nothing about the kind of politics in the book - the child's version of politics then, just after the war, consisted of the simple notion that Hitler was bad but dead. So I gobbled up the adventures of Napoleon and Snowball, the smart, greedy, upwardly mobile pigs, and Squealer the spin-doctor, and Boxer the noble but thick-witted horse, and the easily led, slogan-chanting sheep, without making any connection with historical events.

To say that I was horrified by this book is an understatement. The fate of the farm animals was so grim, the pigs so mean and mendacious and treacherous, the sheep so stupid. Children have a keen sense of injustice, and this was the thing that upset me the most: the pigs were so unjust. I cried my eyes out when Boxer the horse had an accident and was carted off to be made into dog food, instead of being given the quiet corner of the pasture he'd been promised.

The whole experience was deeply disturbing to me, but I am forever grateful to Orwell for alerting me early to the danger flags I've tried to watch out for since. In the world of *Animal Farm*, most speechifying and public palaver is bullshit and instigated lying, and though many characters are good-hearted and mean well, they can be frightened into closing their eyes to what's really going on. The pigs browbeat the others with ideology, then twist that ideology to suit their own purposes: their language games were evident to me even at that age. As Orwell taught, it isn't the labels - Christianity, Socialism, Islam, Democracy, Two Legs Bad, Four Legs Good, the works - that are definitive, but the acts done in their name.

I could see, too, how easily those who have toppled an oppressive power take on its trappings and habits. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was right to warn us that democracy is the hardest form of government to maintain; Orwell knew that to the marrow of his bones, because he had seen it in action. How quickly the precept "All Animals Are Equal" is changed into "All Animals Are Equal, but Some Are More Equal Than Others". What oily concern the pigs show for the welfare of the other animals, a concern that disguises their contempt for those they are manipulating. With what alacrity do they put on the once-despised uniforms of the tyrannous humans they have overthrown, and learn to use their

whips. How self-righteously they justify their actions, helped by the verbal web-spinning of Squealer, their nimble-tongued press agent, until all power is in their trotters, pretence is no longer necessary, and they rule by naked force.

A revolution often means only that: a revolving, a turn of the wheel of fortune, by which those who were at the bottom mount to the top, and assume the choice positions, crushing the former power-holders beneath them. We should beware of all those who plaster the landscape with large portraits of themselves, like the evil pig, Napoleon.

Animal Farm is one of the most spectacular Emperor-Has-No-Clothes books of the 20th century, and it got George Orwell into trouble. People who run counter to the current popular wisdom, who point out the uncomfortably obvious, are likely to be strenuously baa-ed at by herds of angry sheep. I didn't have all that figured out at the age of nine, of course - not in any conscious way. But we learn the patterns of stories before we learn their meanings, and Animal Farm has a very clear pattern.

Then along came Nineteen Eighty-Four, which was published in 1949. Thus, I read it in paperback a couple of years later, when I was in high school. Then I read it again, and again: it was right up there among my favourite books, along with Wuthering Heights.

Nineteen Eighty-Four struck me as more realistic, probably because Winston Smith was more like me - a skinny person who got tired a lot and was subjected to physical education under chilly conditions (this was a feature of my school) - and who was silently at odds with the ideas and the manner of life proposed for him. (This may be one of the reasons Nineteen-Eighty-Four is best read when you are an adolescent: most adolescents feel like that.)

I sympathised particularly with Winston's desire to write his forbidden thoughts down in a deliciously tempting, secret blank book: I had not yet started to write, but I could see the attractions of it. I could also see the dangers, because it's this scribbling of his - along with illicit sex, another item with considerable allure for a teenager of the 50s - that gets Winston into such a mess.

Animal Farm charts the progress of an idealistic movement of liberation towards a totalitarian dictatorship headed by a despotic tyrant; Nineteen Eighty-Four describes what it's like to live entirely within such a system. Its hero, Winston, has only fragmentary memories of what life was like before the present dreadful regime set in: he's an orphan, a child of the collectivity. His father died in the war that

has ushered in the repression, and his mother has disappeared, leaving him with only the reproachful glance she gave him as he betrayed her over a chocolate bar - a small betrayal that acts both as the key to Winston's character and as a precursor to the many other betrayals in the book.

The government of Airstrip One, Winston's "country", is brutal. The constant surveillance, the impossibility of speaking frankly to anyone, the looming, ominous figure of Big Brother, the regime's need for enemies and wars - fictitious though both may be - which are used to terrify the people and unite them in hatred, the mind-numbing slogans, the distortions of language, the destruction of what has really happened by stuffing any record of it down the Memory Hole - these made a deep impression on me. Let me re-state that: they frightened the stuffing out of me. Orwell was writing a satire about Stalin's Soviet Union, a place about which I knew very little at the age of 14, but he did it so well that I could imagine such things happening anywhere.

Orwell became a direct model for me much later in my life - in the real 1984, the year in which I began writing a somewhat different dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*. By that time I was 44, and I had learned enough about real despotisms - through the reading of history, travel, and my membership of Amnesty International - so that I didn't need to rely on Orwell alone.

The majority of dystopias - Orwell's included - have been written by men, and the point of view has been male. When women have appeared in them, they have been either sexless automatons or rebels who have defied the sex rules of the regime. They have acted as the temptresses of the male protagonists, however welcome this temptation may be to the men themselves.

I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view. However, this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a "feminist dystopia", except insofar as giving a woman a voice and an inner life will always be considered "feminist" by those who think women ought not to have these things.

The 20th century could be seen as a race between two versions of man-made hell - the jackbooted state totalitarianism of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the hedonistic ersatz paradise of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where absolutely everything is a consumer good and human beings are engineered to be happy. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, it seemed for a time that *Brave New World* had won - from henceforth, state control would be minimal, and all we would have to do was go shopping and smile a lot, and wallow in pleasures, popping a pill or two when depression set in.

But with 9/11, all that changed. Now it appears we face the prospect of two contradictory dystopias at once - open markets, closed minds - because state surveillance is back again with a vengeance. The 1984 torturer's dreaded Room 101 has been with us for millennia. The dungeons of Rome, the Inquisition, the Star Chamber, the Bastille, the proceedings of General Pinochet and of the junta in Argentina - all have depended on secrecy and on the abuse of power. Lots of countries have had their versions of it - their ways of silencing troublesome dissent.

Democracies have traditionally defined themselves by, among other things - openness and the rule of law. But now it seems that we in the west are tacitly legitimising the methods of the darker human past, upgraded technologically and sanctified to our own uses, of course. For the sake of freedom, freedom must be renounced. To move us towards the improved world - the utopia we're promised - dystopia must first hold sway.

It's a concept worthy of doublethink. It's also, in its ordering of events, strangely Marxist. First the dictatorship of the proletariat, in which lots of heads must roll; then the pie-in-the-sky classless society, which oddly enough never materialises. Instead, we just get pigs with whips.

I often ask myself: what would George Orwell have to say about it?

Quite a lot.



Title: "Revolution on Animal Farm: Orwell's Neglected Commentary"

Author: V.C. Letemendia

Source: *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1

Before you read, define the following through brief internet research:

- Parody
- Allegory
- Socialism (including Socialist ideals)
- Vladimir Lenin
- Karl Marx
- Disillusionment
- Totalitarianism

1. What three qualities "unite the majority of animals with their human counterparts, the common working people" (129)?
2. What is the use of "education and self confidence in any working class movement" (129)?
3. In a revolution, according to Orwell, why is disillusionment important (134)?
4. As articulated by Orwell's friend, Dwight MacDonald, what are the two ways in which *Animal Farm* is being interpreted by its readers (135)?
5. Orwell's response is quoted in full on pages 135 -- 136. What does he say is the primary purpose of *Animal Farm*? What does he cite as the "moral" of the novella? How does he end his reply (a direct quotation) (136)?
6. What might cause a revolution to betray its own principles, according to the second paragraph of page 136?
7. What does Orwell warn is "as dangerous as blind admiration for the Stalinist regime," and with what should those qualities be replaced, if a revolution is to be successful (137)?

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## Revolution on Animal Farm: Orwell's Neglected Commentary

IN THE LAST SCENE OF GEORGE ORWELL'S "fairy tale," *Animal Farm*, the humbler animals peer through a window of the farmhouse to observe a horrible sight: the pigs who rule over them have grown indistinguishable from their temporary allies, the human farmers, whom they originally fought to overthrow.<sup>1</sup> The animals' fate seems to mirror rather closely that of the common people as Orwell envisaged it some six years before commencing *Animal Farm*: "what you get over and over again is a movement of the proletariat which is promptly canalized and betrayed by astute people at the top, and then the growth of a new governing class. The one thing that never arrives is equality. The mass of the people never get the chance to bring their innate decency into the control of affairs, so that one is almost driven to the cynical thought that men are only decent when they are powerless."<sup>2</sup> Obviously *Animal Farm* was designed to parody the betrayal of Socialist ideals by the Soviet regime. Yet it has also been interpreted by various readers as expressing Orwell's own disillusion with any form of revolutionary political change and, by others, as unfolding such a meaning even without its author's conscious intention. It is time now to challenge both of these views.

Orwell himself commented of *Animal Farm* that "if it does not speak for itself, it is a failure."<sup>3</sup> The text does indeed stand alone to reveal Orwell's consistent belief not only in democratic Socialism, but in the possibility of a democratic Socialist revolution, but there is also a considerable body of evidence outside *Animal Farm* that can be shown to corroborate this interpretation. The series of events surrounding its publication, and Orwell's own consistent attitude towards his book provide evidence of its political

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (Harcourt Brace, 1946), p. 118. Further references to the text are to this edition and are given parenthetically.

<sup>2</sup> Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (Penguin, 1971), Vol. I, p. 372. (This four-volume collection will be referred to henceforth as *CEJL*). Even when Orwell wrote this, in deep distress after his experience of the Spanish Civil War, he was not completely pessimistic, as he remarked with some surprise: see *Homage to Catalonia* (Penguin, 1984), p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> *CEJL*, III, p. 459.

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meaning.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, of the two extant prefaces written by Orwell, the one designed for the Ukrainian edition, composed in 1947, is of particular political interest.<sup>5</sup> Orwell's correspondence with his friends and acquaintances on the subject of *Animal Farm* provides a further source of information. Some of these letters are well known to Orwell scholars, but his correspondence with Dwight Macdonald, with whom he became friends when he was writing for the American journal, *Partisan Review*, does not appear to have been fully investigated. Macdonald himself raised a direct question about the political intent of *Animal Farm* and was given a specific answer by Orwell, yet this fascinating evidence has apparently been neglected, in spite of the generous access now available to his correspondence in the Orwell Archive.<sup>6</sup>

Commentators on Orwell find it easy to conclude from *Animal Farm* the utter despair and pessimism either of its author, or of the tale itself.<sup>7</sup> It must be remembered, however, that through his allegory Orwell plays a two-sided game with his reader. In some ways, he clearly emphasizes the similarities between the beasts on Animal Farm and the humans whom they are designed to represent; at other times, he demonstrates with both humor and pathos the profound differences separating animal from man—differences which in the end serve to limit the former. In doing so, he forces his reader to draw a distinction between the personalities and conduct of the beasts and those of the human world. Of course, the animals are designed to represent working people in their initial

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<sup>4</sup> Much of Orwell's other writing, particularly that which is contemporary to the creation of *Animal Farm*, also supports the interpretation offered here. See, for example, *CEJL*, III, pp. 83 and 280–82; "Tapping the Wheels," *Observer*, 16 January 1944, p. 3. This is not to mention Orwell's radical writings of the earlier war years, exemplified by his revolutionary enthusiasm in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (see *CEJL*, II, pp. 74–134) and his two essays for Gollancz' *The Betrayal of the Left* (1941), "Fascism and Democracy" and "Patriots and Revolutionaries" (pp. 206–14 and 234–45). After *Animal Farm*, Orwell's position remained unchanged; see, for example, "The British General Election," *Commentary*, November 1945, pp. 65–70, and "What Is Socialism?" *Manchester Evening News*, 31 January 1946, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> For the Ukrainian preface, see *CEJL*, III, pp. 455–59; see also "The Freedom of the Press," *The Times Literary Supplement*, 15 September 1972, pp. 1036–38.

<sup>6</sup> The author would like to thank the staff of the Orwell Archive, University College, University of London for their very kind assistance in searching out the relevant materials for this discussion, as well as for their help in finding resources for the larger work on Orwell's politics of which it is but a small part. She would like to thank the estate of the late Sonia Orwell and Martin Secker & Warburg for permission to publish extracts from their collection of Orwell's correspondence. She would also like to thank the Yale University Library for permission to publish extracts from the Dwight Macdonald Papers and for its generosity in making available to her copies of other letters in their Manuscripts and Archives collection. This article was obviously accepted for publication (28 March 1990) before the appearance of Michael Shelden's *Orwell: the Authorized Biography* (Heinemann, 1991). Shelden's thorough research uncovered the Macdonald correspondence, quotations from which were employed for the purpose of biographical, rather than political, analysis.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Patrick Reilly, *George Orwell: the Age's Adversary* (Macmillan, 1986), pp. 266–67; Alan Sandison, *George Orwell: After 1984* (Macmillan, 1986), p. 156; Alok Rai, *Orwell and the Politics of Despair* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 115–16; Stephen Sedley, "An Immodest Proposal: Animal Farm," *Inside the Myth* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), p. 158; and Alex Zwerdling, *Orwell and the Left* (Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 90–94.

social, economic, and political position in the society not just of Animal Farm but of England in general. The basic antagonism between working class and capitalist is also strongly emphasized by the metaphor: pig and man quarrel fiercely at the end of the story. The diversity of the animal class, like the working class, is equally stressed by the differing personalities of the creatures. Just because all have been subjected to human rule, this does not mean that they will act as a united body once they take over the farm. The qualities which, for Orwell, clearly unite the majority of the animals with their human counterparts, the common working people, are a concern for freedom and equality in society and a form of "innate decency" which prevents them from desiring power for any personal gain. While this decency hinders the worker animals from discovering the true nature of the pigs until the final scene, it also provides them with an instinctive feeling for what a fair society might actually look like. Yet Orwell was obviously aware, in using this metaphor, that the animals differ fundamentally from their human counterparts. Unlike men, the majority of the beasts are limited naturally by their brief lifespan and the consequent shortness of their memory. Moreover, their differentiated physical types deny them the versatility of humans. Their class structure is fixed by their immutable functions on the farm: a horse can never fill the role of a hen. The class structure of human society, in contrast, is free from such biological demarcations. These two profoundly limiting aspects of the animal condition, in which men share no part, finally contribute to the creatures' passivity in the face of the pig dictatorship. The metaphor, then, cannot be reduced to a simple equivalence, in the way that the pigs reduce the seven Commandments of Animal Farm to one.<sup>8</sup>

Evidently the animals lack education and self-confidence in spite of the active role which most of them played in the first rebellion and, in the case of some, are naturally stupid. Orwell is not implying by this the hopelessness of a proletarian revolution: he rather points to the need for education and self-confidence in any working class movement if it is to remain democratic in character. Both of these attributes, he appears further to suggest, must come from within the movement itself. The crude proletarian spirit of the common animals necessarily provides the essential ingredient for a revolution towards a free and equal society, but it needs careful honing and polishing if it is not to fall victim to its own inherent decency and modesty. If this simple, instinctive decency is to be preserved in the transition from revolution—which is all too easy—to the construction of a new society—which is not—other kinds of virtue are also necessary and must at all costs be developed by the working class if it is not to be betrayed again. The text itself, however, hints at disaster for the rule of the pigs. Their single tenet asserting that some animals are more equal than others is in the end a meaningless absurdity. In spite of their great intellectual gifts, the pigs are ultimately the most absurd of all the farm animals, for they are attempting to assume a human identity which cannot belong to them. It is left to the reader to ponder the potential for political change, given the evident weakness and vanity at the core of the pig dictatorship. The final scene of the book, moreover, reveals the disillusionment of the working beasts with their porcine leaders, an essential step in the process of creating a new revolution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> A full discussion of the animal-human metaphor and its political purpose is not within the scope of this brief study, but is elaborated upon fully in the author's doctoral dissertation, "Free from Hunger and the Whip": Exploring the Political Development of George Orwell" (University of Toronto, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, in his *George Orwell* (Viking, 1971), shares this view: see pp. 74-5.

does not actually offer an interpretation of *Animal Farm* explaining Orwell's political intention, it is necessary to look for this information in his more private communications on the subject.

Orwell commented explicitly on his book to his friends Geoffrey Gorer and Dwight Macdonald. Crick states that Orwell gave a copy of *Animal Farm* to Gorer having marked in it the passage in which Squealer defends the pigs' theft of the milk and apples. He told Gorer that this "was the key passage."<sup>22</sup> This emphasis of Orwell's is reiterated and explained more fully in a letter to Dwight Macdonald written shortly after *Animal Farm* first appeared in the United States, in 1946. Macdonald was one of a group of American intellectuals who had broken with Soviet Communism as early as 1936 and had gone to work with Philip Rahv and William Phillips on *Partisan Review*.<sup>23</sup> From January 1944 to the summer of 1946, Orwell had sent regular "letters" to the review and had had cause to correspond with Macdonald fairly frequently. Macdonald was later to move to the editorship of *Politics*, described by Orwell in a letter to T.S.Eliot as "a sort of dissident offshoot" of *Partisan Review*, and had already championed a review written by Orwell that had been rejected for political reasons by the *Manchester Evening News*.<sup>24</sup> This shared political understanding soon developed into a literary friendship which lasted until Orwell's death in 1950.<sup>25</sup>

In September 1944, Orwell had already written to Macdonald expressing his views about the Soviet Union. Given that only a few months separated the completion of *Animal Farm* from this letter, it seems safe to assume that the views expressed in both might be similar. To Macdonald, Orwell stated, "I think the USSR is the dynamo of world Socialism, so long as people believe in it. I think that if the USSR were to be conquered by some foreign country the working class everywhere would lose heart, for the time being at least, and the ordinary stupid capitalists who never lost their suspicion of Russia would be encouraged." Furthermore, "the fact that the Germans have failed to conquer Russia has given prestige to the idea of Socialism. For that reason I wouldn't want to see the USSR destroyed and think it ought to be defended if necessary." There is a caution, however: "[b]ut I want people to become disillusioned about it and to realise that they must build their own Socialist movement without Russian interference, and I want the existence of democratic Socialism in the West to exert a regenerative influence upon Russia." He concludes that "if the working class everywhere had been taught to be as anti-Russian as the Germans have been made, the USSR would simply have collapsed

<sup>22</sup> Crick, p. 490. It is a pity that Crick does not provide here the source of this important information.

<sup>23</sup> David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1973), pp. 88-9; see note. See also Crick, p. 392.

<sup>24</sup> See letter from Orwell to T.S.Eliot, 5 September 1944 in the Orwell Archive, reproduced by kind permission of the estate of the late Sonia Orwell and Martin Secker & Warburg. For details of the rejected book review, see *CEJL*, III, pp. 169-70.

<sup>25</sup> An indication of its depth is that Sonia Orwell, when first considering the possibility of contravening her husband's dying wish and authorizing a biography of him, wrote to Macdonald to see if he would undertake it. He accepted with enthusiasm, but she later withdrew her offer, having decided that it was too early for a biography to appear. See correspondence between Sonia Orwell and Dwight Macdonald in the Orwell Archive.

in 1941 or 1942, and God knows what things would then have come out from under their stones. After that Spanish business I hate the Stalin regime perhaps worse than you do, but I think one must defend it against people like Franco, Laval etc."<sup>26</sup>

In spite of its repressive features and its betrayal of basic human freedoms, then, Orwell still considered the Soviet regime to be vital as an example to the working class everywhere. The real danger lay in the idea that it defined Socialism. What was most needed was a new form of democratic Socialism created and maintained by the people. He offers meanwhile the possibility that such democratic forms of Socialism elsewhere might actually have a benign effect on the Russian regime.<sup>27</sup> In the allegorical context of *Animal Farm*, Napoleon's dictatorship would still seem to be a step forward from that of the human farmers—according to Orwell's letter, the rule of "the ordinary stupid capitalists." For animals outside the farm, it would provide a beacon of hope—so long as the truth about the betrayal taking place within was made plain to them. For it would now become their task to build their own movement in a democratic spirit which might, in Orwell's words, "exert a regenerative influence" on the corruption of the pigs' realm.

When *Animal Farm* finally appeared in the United States in 1946, Macdonald wrote again to Orwell, this time to discuss the book: "most of the anti-Stalinist intellectuals I know . . . don't seem to share my enthusiasm for *Animal Farm*. They claim that your parable means that revolution always ends badly for the underdog, hence to hell with it and hail the status quo. My own reading of the book is that it is meant to apply to Russia without making any larger statement about the philosophy of revolution. None of the objectors have so far satisfied me when I raised this point; they admit explicitly that is all you profess to do, but still insist that implicit is the broader point. . . . Which view would you say comes closer to your intentions?"<sup>28</sup>

Orwell's reply deserves quoting in full: "Of course I intended it primarily as a satire on the Russian revolution. But I did mean it to have a wider application in so

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from Orwell to Dwight Macdonald, 5 September 1944, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; copy in Orwell Archive, reproduced by kind permission of the estate of the late Sonia Orwell and Martin Secker & Warburg. Orwell made a similar point in a later letter to Frank Barber, in which he states: "My attention was first drawn to this deliberate falsification of history by my experiences in the Spanish civil war. One can't make too much noise about it while the man in the street identifies the cause of Socialism with the USSR, but I believe one can make a perceptible difference by seeing that the true facts get into print, even if it is only in some obscure place." (15 December 1944, Orwell Archive), reproduced by kind permission of the estate of the late Sonia Orwell and Martin Secker & Warburg. At this date, of course, Orwell was still waiting for *Animal Farm* to "get into print"; it might be that his comment about "some obscure place" could refer to the book itself.

<sup>27</sup> In another letter to Macdonald written at the time that Orwell was involved with his final novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, he argues with an optimism which might surprise some of his critics: "Communism will presently shed certain unfortunate characteristics such as bumping off its opponents, and if Socialists join up with the CP they can persuade it into better ways" (2 May 1948, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; copy in Orwell Archive).

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Dwight Macdonald to Orwell, 2 December 1946, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; copy in Orwell Archive. The argument to which Macdonald objects is still a favorite with Orwell's critics on the Left: Stephen Sedley offers it in his critique of *Animal Farm* (Sedley, *op. cit.*).

much that I meant that that kind of revolution (violent conspiratorial revolution, led by unconsciously power-hungry people) can only lead to a change of masters. I meant the moral to be that revolutions only effect a radical improvement when the masses are alert and know how to chuck out their leaders as soon as the latter have done their job. The turning point of the story was supposed to be when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves (Kronstadt.) If the other animals had had the sense to put their foot down then, it would have been all right. If people think I am defending the status quo, that is, I think, because they have grown pessimistic and assume there is no alternative except dictatorship or laissez-faire capitalism. In the case of the Trotskyists, there is the added complication that they feel responsible for events in the USSR up to about 1926 and have to assume that a sudden degeneration took place about that date, whereas I think the whole process was foreseeable—and was foreseen by a few people, e.g. Bertrand Russell—from the very nature of the Bolshevik party. What I was trying to say was, 'You can't have a revolution unless you make it for yourself; there is no such thing as a benevolent dictatorship.'<sup>29</sup>

Yes, *Animal Farm* was intended to have a wider application than a satire upon the Russian regime alone. Yes, it did indeed imply that the rule of the pigs was only "a change of masters." Yet it did not condemn to the same fate all revolutions, nor for a moment suggest that Farmer Jones should be reinstated as a more benevolent dictator than Napoleon. According to Orwell's letter, the problem examined by *Animal Farm* concerns the nature of revolution itself. Unless everyone makes the revolution for him or herself without surrendering power to an elite, there will be little hope for freedom or equality. A revolution in which violence and conspiracy become the tools most resorted to, one which is led by a consciously or unconsciously power-hungry group, will inevitably betray its own principles.<sup>30</sup> Failing to protest when the pigs kept the milk and apples for themselves, the other animals surrendered what power they might have had to pig leadership. Had they been "alert and [known] how to chuck out their leaders"<sup>31</sup> once the latter had fulfilled their task, the original spirit of *Animal Farm* might have been salvaged. The book itself, Orwell makes clear in his letter, was calling not for the end of revolutionary hopes, but for the beginning of a new kind of personal responsibility on

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Orwell to Dwight Macdonald, 5 December 1946, Dwight Macdonald Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library; copy in Orwell Archive. It is interesting to compare this statement with one made by Orwell in a commentary on Randall Swingler's *Violence* published in *Polemic*, V (September–October, 1946), pp. 45–53: "I do not believe in the possibility of benevolent dictatorship, nor, in the last analysis, in the honesty of those who defend dictatorship. Of course, one develops and modifies one's views, but I have never fundamentally altered my attitude towards the Soviet regime since I first began to pay attention to it some time in the nineteen-twenties. But so far from disappointing me, it has actually turned out somewhat better than I would have predicted fifteen years ago" (p. 53).

<sup>30</sup> This is not to argue that Orwell defended pacificism; his fighting in Spain and his urgent and frequent attempts to join the army during the Second World War demonstrate his acceptance of the need for violent combat in order to defend basic human liberties. Yet he was evidently aware of the ease with which violence and conspiracy could be turned against the initial purpose which seemed to justify them. In the text of *Animal Farm*, Boxer's sorrow at the necessity of violence even in the struggle to overthrow human rule suggests a deeper wisdom than he is often given credit for (see pp. 36–7).

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Orwell to Dwight Macdonald, 5 December 1946.

the part of revolutionaries. The most important barrier in the way of such a democratic Socialist revolution was the Soviet myth: if people outside still thought that that particular form of revolution could succeed without betraying its goals, nothing new could be accomplished. The final note of Orwell's letter is optimistic: if people mistook his message for a conservative one, it was precisely their problem. They had no confidence in the possibility of an alternative to either capitalism or dictatorship. In a sense, they would be like those animals who, when forced into making a choice between a false set of alternatives by Squealer—either the return of Farmer Jones or unquestioning obedience to the rule of the pigs—failed to consider the possibility of a third choice, a democratic Socialist society. For although Orwell was prepared to provide a fairly detailed explanation of his animal story for his friend Macdonald, his letter makes it quite evident that the burden of understanding *Animal Farm* still lay with its reader.

Given the striking congruity between the text and Orwell's political commentary about it, it would be rash to argue that he had lost control of his allegory in *Animal Farm*. If it takes time and effort to expose the political intricacies behind the stark prose of his animal fable, this must have been partly his intention: the lesson of democracy was not an easy one to learn, and the next revolutionary move towards democratic Socialism could surely not be allowed to repeat the mistakes of Old Major. Still, we may wonder if the grain of hope provided by the final scene of the book is not, in this light, too insubstantial to feed a new generation of revolutionaries. Yet if Orwell had presented an easy political resolution to the horrors of totalitarianism, his warning would lose its force. His reader could remain complacent, detached from the urgent need for personal involvement in political change so emphasized by the animal allegory. If he had designed a political solution for the other beasts, furthermore, he could be accused of hypocrisy: his whole argument both inside and outside the text rested on the proposition that the people had to make and retain control of the revolution themselves if they wanted it to remain true to its goals. The deceit of the pigs was not the only failure on *Animal Farm*, for the foolish simplicity of the other animals and, indeed, of Old Major's naive idea of revolutionary change were as much to blame for the dictatorship which ensued. Orwell had to warn his readers that their apathy and thoughtlessness were as dangerous as blind admiration for the Stalinist regime. Only when all members of society saw the essential need for individual responsibility and honesty at the heart of any struggle for freedom and equality could the basic goals of Socialism, as Orwell saw them, be approached more closely. Meanwhile, no single revolutionary act could create a perfect world, either for the animals or for the humans whom they represent in the story. Acceptance of the notion of class struggle could not lead to an instant transformation of society unless those who would transform it accepted also the difficult burden of political power, both at the time of and after the revolution. While the most corrupting force on *Animal Farm* was the deception practiced upon the other animals by the pigs, the greatest danger came from the reluctance of the oppressed creatures to believe in an alternative between porcine and human rule. Yet it was in the affirmation of dignity, freedom, and equality tacitly provided by the nobler qualities of the presumed lower animals that Orwell saw the beginnings of such an alternative. So it is that, in the last moment of the book, he leaves open the task of rebuilding the revolution on a wiser and more cautiously optimistic foundation.