



### III Sección

#### Literatura, estética e historia

**Iguales en responsabilidad: Participación civil  
en el nacimiento de un estado totalitario**  
**Un estudio de *La rebelión en la granja*, de George Orwell**

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**Resumen:** La novela corta *La rebelión en la granja* (*Animal Farm*), de Orwell, ha sido ampliamente discutida y analizada desde múltiples perspectivas, algunas hasta diametralmente opuestas entre sí. El presente artículo examina las características que han permitido estas interpretaciones socio-políticas divergentes y sostiene que la contribución civil en la creación de los sistemas políticos es un recurso literario central de la novela que se excluye por lo general. Al enfocarse en el papel de los ciudadanos, es posible ver cómo la obra pone de manifiesto la responsabilidad de la clase no política en el desarrollo de un gobierno totalitario al aceptar ésta el discurso de la élite, abrazar sus símbolos nacionales y mantener una actitud apática y negligente hacia la política. El artículo socava la idea de que los aparentemente indefensos animales son meras víctimas de un sistema opresivo y muestra que, al forjar un nuevo gobierno, todos los animales comparten igualmente la responsabilidad.





**Palabras clave:** responsabilidad civil; *La rebelión en la granja*; prácticas significativas; sistemas políticos

## **Equal in Responsibility: Civilian Participation in the Birth of a Totalitarian State. A Study in George Orwell's *Animal Farm***

**Abstract:** Orwell's *Animal Farm* has been widely discussed and analyzed from multiple standpoints, some of them diametrically opposite. This article examines the features that enable such divergent socio-political interpretations and argues that a core literary device that has been generally disregarded is that of the civilian contribution in the creation of political systems. When one shifts the focus to citizens, one sees how the work actually manifests the responsibility of regular individuals in the development of a totalitarian government by means of their acceptance of the elite's discourse, their creation of national symbols, and the apathetic, negligent attitude of many toward politics. The article undermines the idea that the seemingly powerless animals stand as mere victims of an oppressive system and shows that, in forging a new governmental system, all animals were indeed equal in responsibility.

**Keywords:** civilian responsibility; *Animal Farm*; signifying practices; political systems

### **I. Introduction**

Orwell's short novel *Animal Farm* has been widely discussed and analyzed. Indeed, some oppose the multiplicity of interpretations that it has undergone and claim that such critiques decontextualize the work historically. Still, many others advocate for the contemporary validity of the political content of the novel, for it fits numerous current political viewpoints. Two questions arise from this debate: Why do many want to keep Orwell's original intentions for their analysis and what causes many others to perceive the novel as a manifestation of today's politics? The answers for both questions lie in the image of Orwell as a political writer and in two basic political aspects in the novel's content, namely the figure of a respected leader and the revolution, elements which will be discussed below.



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### A. George Orwell: A politically conscious writer

George Orwell, whose real name was Eric Blair (Herring, 2016, note 1), was born in the British India in 1903 and died, aged 43, in England in 1950. Along with his writing career, he was a journalist and literary critic. He realized that he wanted to write at about age 6 (Orwell, 1968, para. 1) and is best known for his novel *1984*. Orwell also wrote short stories like “Shooting an Elephant” and published in 1945 his short novel *Animal Farm*, which is also highly political and became a widespread cultural reference. The author himself discloses his political views when reflecting about his motives for writing: “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, AGAINST totalitarianism and FOR democratic socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects.” (Orwell, 1968, para. 11). Readers, indeed, can observe Orwell’s political biases in his short stories, essays and novels without much effort.

Although Orwell capitalized on his current political situation to write, he did it without disregarding the aesthetic element of his works: “When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art'. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience.” (Orwell, 1968, para. 12). The aesthetic dimension of writing, in fact, is responsible of the many different interpretations to which his work *Animal Farm* has been subjected.

### B. *Animal Farm*: A short novel with contrasting interpretations

Orwell’s *Animal Farm* has fueled all kinds of social and political criticism. This is, in part, thanks to the educational system of English-speaking countries (Herring, 2016, para. 1). Although the novella was published in 1945, some interpretations of



the work are deeply tied to current times. One example is *The Observer's* article "‘Animal Farm’ Perfectly Describes Life in the Era of Donald Trump," (2018) in which J. Russo states ideas like "Trump's transformation into a golf course habitué after roundly criticizing his predecessor's golf outings is right out of *Animal Farm*" (para. 7) or "That the populist Trump has offered unprecedented access to some of the largest corporations in America in exchange for their millions of dollars of donations is another page straight out of *Animal Farm*" (para. 8). Such examples show the extended interpretative reach of Orwell's novella.

Other scholars, however, have attacked the flexibility of criticism toward *Animal Farm*. For example, the article entitled "Some Interpretations are More Equal Than Others: Misinterpreting George Orwell's *Animal Farm*" states: "*Animal Farm* was written for a specific time and place: expressly as an allegory for the formation of the Soviet Union" (Herring, 2016, para. 1). The article's author, Rebecca Herring (2016), laments the amount of misinformation surrounding much of the current interpretations of the novel, even in classrooms, and claims that the book has been misused by many political movements (para. 1). She then examines three specific movements that have appropriated the novel to further their specific agendas: Western propagandists from the Cold-War era, neoconservatives from the 1960s who were opposed to communist ideals, and the modern left who support elements of democratic socialism.

Paul Kirschner (2004) also opposes wide interpretations of Orwell's novel. He claims that the novel's "built-in artistic contradictions" have turned *Animal Farm* into "fine meat for propagandists" and seeks in his article "The Dual Purpose of *Animal Farm*" to, if not resolving such contradictions, at least transcending them (p. 760). The author asserts that Orwell's short novel was actually intended to add a type of literature that the English did not have at the time: one of disillusion (2004, p. 760). For creating this feeling, Orwell had to resort to experiences that were meaningful to the English:



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If we apply Tolstoy's definition of art (which includes Orwellian hallmarks of simplicity, clarity, and accessibility) as the evocation of a feeling once experienced so as to make others feel it, Orwell had to evoke his disillusion over the Russian failure to achieve what to English Conservatives was anathema: social equality. The disillusion is conveyed by continuous negation of what is being said, through wit, dramatized irony and intertextuality. (Kirschner, 2004, p. 760)

In this light, the aesthetic element in the novel is what causes many to feel identified with the work and thus, disregarding its specific context and purpose, use *Animal Farm* for their own specific political goals.

Harold Bloom himself, in spite of having excluded *Animal Farm* from his *Western Canon* (1994), edited a book of essays on the novel: *George Orwell's Animal Farm* (2009). The book includes different types of criticism toward Orwell's novel, from very varied perspectives. For example, while Valerie Meyers (2009) sees the novel as an allegory of revolution and Samir Elbarbary (2009) takes a linguistic approach, Robert Pierce (2009) compares Orwell and Tolstoi. Bloom, who opposed modern socially-oriented literary approaches, distances himself from some approaches in the book: "Daphne Patai offers a feminist critique of *Animal Farm* that does not persuade me, but then I am seventy-nine and resistant to ideologues, as in fact Orwell was" (2009, p.vii).

These examples show the critical and interpretative multiplicity surrounding Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which has transcended the author's original intentions and the work's specific temporal, social and political context. Yet, without ascribing to any given political agenda, it is possible to observe two basic components of politics in *Animal Farm*: the figure of the respected leader (embodied by the pig Old Major), and the fall of an oppressive political system (depicted by the failure of the farmer Jones and his loss of Manor Farm after his animals revolt.) These two elements become the starting point of worldwide political systems, regardless of their specific aims and methodologies, and propel the many diverging interpretations of the literary work.





The aforementioned elements are strong influences in the perception of *Animal Farm* as an allegory of political elites creating a new state and, therefore, most criticism directs toward the analysis of such elites and their means to oppress the population. However, political leaders are not the only accountable figures for the formation of states. Although political analysis of Orwell's *Animal Farm* usually focuses on the birth of a state, such studies are generally built from the perspective of the elites in power, which in turn omits the civilian contribution in the creation of political systems and usually places them as mere victims. When one shifts the focus to citizens, one sees that the work actually manifests the responsibility of regular individuals in the development of a totalitarian government by means of their acceptance of the elite's discourse, their creation of national symbols, and the apathetic, negligent attitude of many toward politics.

## II. Civil responsibility by acceptance of the elite's discourse

From the point of view of the citizens, in the specific case of the working animals of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, their acceptance of the elite's discourse becomes paramount for the revolution to take place. Also, this acceptance is vital for the elite to start and keep their new political system.

The working animals (the chickens, the cows, sheep, the horses and the donkey) first assimilate the pigs' discourse as their own. This is known as acquiesce, which is defined as to assent tacitly, without protest. It is also defined as to submit or comply silently or to agree (Meyers & Pacheco, 2012, p. 44).

In Orwell's work, acquiesce occurs thanks to the animals' trust. Animals participate in creating the government that later is going to oppress them by trusting the system, by accepting the privileges of the political elite, and by internalizing the concept of a common enemy.

### A. Acquiesce by trusting the system





Acquiesce, in Orwell's novel, is built upon the trust of the low-class animals. They have confidence in the pigs and thus, they believe that the pigs are going to act with best interests of all the animals in mind. Indeed, Luisa Passerini (2017) argues that the root of totalitarian regimes is inside every society and individual alike: "Totalitarianism is not only external to us but also inside ourselves, with its roots continuously present in our societies and our lives" (p. 7). This is highly important because, in general, no political system can work initially without the support of its citizens. This support and trust, in Orwell's work, results from the animals' belief in two illusory ideas, along with their acceptance of the privileges of the rulers and with the internalization of common enemies.

First, one should notice that the system (called *Animalism*) is an invention of the pigs, who institutionalized it and tried to teach it to the other animals: "These three [the pigs Napoleon, Snowball and Squealer] had elaborated old Major's teachings into a complete system of thought, to which they gave the name of Animalism. Several nights a week, after Mr. Jones was asleep, they held secret meetings in the barn and expounded the principles of Animalism to the others. At the beginning they met with much stupidity and apathy" (Orwell, 1945, p. 6). The animals, however, did not receive the foreign discourse well at first, which shows that a system that is imposed vertically meets opposition and, thus, it needs the trust of the citizens to be successful. The trust in the system relies on two main illusions: that the new system is functional and that it is inclusive.

### 1. Internalization of the illusion of a working system

For the sake of legitimacy, the animal citizens must believe that the system is effective and that it prioritizes their best interests regardless of the morally-questionable actions that they may perform. For example, when the horse Boxer accidentally kills a boy and feels remorseful, Snowball the pig reassures the horse and justifies his crime: "No sentimentality, comrade!" cried Snowball from whose wounds the blood was still dripping. "War is war. The only good human being is a







dead one” (Orwell, 1945, p. 17). Boxer fully knows he did wrong, but the pig overlooks the death, leading to the portrayal of the horse as a hero, who is later awarded a medal along with Snowball (Orwell, 1945, p. 17). With this political maneuver, animals truly believe that the revolution works.

## 2. Internalization of the illusion of belonging

Along with the illusion that the government of the pigs is indeed effective, animals must feel that they are included in it for them to trust it. The low-class animals must first believe that they are part of the pigs’ political agenda to trust their discourse and help them replace the old system, represented by humans. Again, the pigs can do little if the other animals feel segregated; therefore, a discourse of inclusion must become realistic enough for the working animal class to trust the pigs. In the farm, this illusion of belonging to the system becomes manifest through the maxim “Four legs good, two legs bad,” that all animals learn by heart: “When they had once got it by heart, the sheep developed a great liking for this maxim, and often as they lay in the field they would all start bleating ‘Four legs good, two legs bad! Four legs good, two legs bad!’ and keep it up for hours on end, never growing tired of it” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). By liking the maxim and repeating it tirelessly, the sheep show that they feel utterly part of the system.

Another area in which the illusion of being part of the system becomes evident is the decision-making process: “ It had come to be accepted that the pigs, who were manifestly cleverer than the other animals, should decide all questions of farm policy, though their decisions had to be ratified by a majority vote.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 18). This system may seem democratic but it fits Passerini’s description of totalitarianism: “Totalitarianisms need the comedy of unanimity” (2017, p. 8). A more detailed analysis of the situation reveals that the decision-making system of Animal Farm is not really democratic: while pigs propose, the others just ratify. As it can be seen, the animals from the lower class do not have full access to decision making. Still, ratification rights give them the illusion that they are involved in the process of







formulating ideas and making decisions, leading them in turn to believe that they enjoy equal participation.

#### B. Trust by accepting privileges for the governing class

The belief in the illusion that they are part of a system that works is not the only source of trust for the low-class animals. Their trust is also based on the idea that the governing class (the pigs) are better and thus, their privileges are justified. But how do other animals become persuaded that pigs are better than themselves if the animal revolution was based on the idea that all animals were equal? The answer is tied to the processes that enable ideologies: “Ideas become ideologies with tension and with time. Social needs and individual views reinforce their structures. Thus, by means of sets of principles, doctrines and norms, ideology, visualized by some, criticized and/or concretized by others, is being constructed day by day” (Meyers & Pacheco, 2017, p. 72).

The evolution of ideology is evident when the pigs drink the milk and eat the apples. Squealer, the pig, tries to persuade the murmuring animals that pigs take those resources as part of their duty to all the other animals: “We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. . .” (Orwell, 1945, p. 14). Although Squealer’s words may be perceived as a subtle form of oppression, such oppression should not be seen as one of a purely vertical, top to bottom direction because the other animals are deeply involved in it, too.

A bottom-to-top relation also support the privileges of the pigs, for the animals at the base of the social pyramid actually have a strong influence in the creation and acceptance of such privileges. The unhappy animals could have complained against the pigs’ arbitrary appropriation of exclusive resources, but they accept Squealer’s justification instead:



Now if there was one thing that the animals were completely certain of, it was that they did not want Jones back. When it was put to them in this light, they had no more to say. The importance of keeping the pigs in good health was all too obvious. So it was agreed without further argument that the milk and the windfall apples (and also the main crop of apples when they ripened) should be reserved for the pigs alone. (Orwell, 1945, p. 14)

The animals agree to give the apples and milk to the pigs because they trust the latter's work as protectors. They fear that, without the pigs, humans may return to enslave all the animals in Animal Farm. It is clear that, without this belief of the lower class animals that pigs are better, the oppressive animals cannot justify their privileges.

### C. Trust by internalizing a common enemy

For Animalism as a system to succeed, it also needs a very important contribution of the low-class animals: their internalization of a common enemy. The perception of a shared enemy is vital because it causes animals to identify with each other across species and to form an alliance, in spite of their differences. In other words, it forges a sense of identity: "Identity is never truly individual, in the sense that we define ourselves in relation to others; who are we includes who we are not" (Meyers & Pacheco, 2017, p. 67). In this light, an enemy (upon whom all the blame will be laid) must be present for the animals to create a sense of collective identity. In the first stage of the revolution, the human being functions as this enemy.

*Animal Farm* presents several instances that let readers perceive the processes by which the animals accept the image of a common enemy and thus become part of the system that later will oppress them. The very first is when Old Major, the respected pig, tells all animals about their pitiful state and plants the seed of the future revolution: "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" (Orwell, 1945, p. 2). Although this represents a thought of a member of the



elite, the reality is that low-class animals, having acquiesced to the elite's perspective, also participated in the process of indoctrination: "Their most faithful disciples were the two cart-horses, Boxer and Clover. These two had great difficulty in thinking anything out for themselves, but having once accepted the pigs as their teachers, they absorbed everything that they were told, and passed it on to the other animals by simple arguments." (Orwell, 1945, p. 7). As it can be seen, regular citizens are as responsible for the creation of a common enemy as the elite is in the novel.

The same is true in the previously mentioned example of Boxer's accidental killing of a person during the battle. When a member of the elite points out that humans are the enemy (Orwell, 1945, p. 17), the horse becomes an example of citizen's internalization of external ideas (indoctrination) and its consequent development of obedience. According to Stanley Milgram (1974), "the essence of obedience consists in the fact that a person comes to view himself as the instrument for carrying out another person's wishes, and he therefore no longer sees himself as responsible for his actions." (pp. xii-xiii). The horse's obedience leads him to accept the view that killing humans is fine because they are the enemy and they deserve death.

Later, once that the human being no longer represents a threat to the political system in Animal Farm, the government needs a new target of the blame and hatred, and animals must internalize this second enemy as they did with the first. Snowball becomes this new enemy (Orwell, 1945, p. 22). The animals, upon hearing that Squealer calls Snowball "a criminal", refuse to believe his words because the banished pig fought bravely for them in the battle of Cowshed. Still, the elite resorts to indoctrination and revisionism to forward their agenda: "Bravery is not enough,' said Squealer. 'Loyalty and obedience are more important. And as to the Battle of the Cowshed, I believe the time will come when we shall find that Snowball's part in it was much exaggerated'" (Orwell, 1945, p. 22). Even though Snowball had nothing to do with humans, the other animals take him as an enemy. Once again, even if



the ruling class is the one in charge to appoint this opposing figure (it is Napoleon, the pig, who decided that Snowball is a threat to his authority), the other animals must comply with Napoleon's perspective. In other words, they must accept his discourse and act according to its premises.

Animals do this because they have acquiesced to the elite's perspective and the result is blind obedience. Milgram (1974) explains this idea: "Once this critical shift of viewpoint has occurred in the person, all of the essential features of obedience follow" (pp. xii, xiii). Although animals had the chance to stand upon Napoleon's injustice toward Snowball, fear of their enemy (Jones) is stronger than their idea of justice, which highlights the importance of the presence of a common enemy for citizens to comply with external ideas.

### III. Citizenship and the creation of national symbols

For political systems to succeed, they must secure a degree of loyalty from the population they intend to rule. Even if only some sectors of their society become loyal (or partially loyal), political systems must foster such loyalty. However, when they impose obedience to their citizens, systems fail. In this light, the feeling of loyalty must start within the hearts of the people, not in the governing elite's demands. For citizens to become involved and thus forge a bond with a ruling class, they must feel part of a society: "Identity... usually implies not only identification with a social group (or many groups), but also efforts to promote the group's interests and well-being" (Meyers & Pacheco, 2017, p. 67). To form this identity bond, animals must create and promote a number of meaningful actions that will work as catalysts of loyalty through identification with the system. These actions, called "signifying practices," work as the mortar that affixes the many bricks of the different sectors of a society because they are activities whose meaning is derived from and ascribed by the cultural context in which they occur (Meyers & Pacheco, 2012, p. 44).



The animals not belonging to the governing class in Orwell's *Animal Farm* actually create, propagate, and keep a series of signifying practices that build their loyalty to the pigs' cause. This happens because the citizens of the farm are "transindividual subjects," which Meyers & Pacheco (2012) define as representatives of a larger cultural group, rather than simply individual people acting independently (p. 41). As transindividual subjects, the animals are linked to a social system and respond to the discourse of this system: "Totalitarian systems are social systems like other ones, in the sense that their language and discourse have a meaning for their protagonists, even if that meaning is unacceptable to us." (Passerini, 2017, p. 7). Some of the practices that become significant for the non-human population of the state *Animal Farm* are the respect toward heroes, the reproduction of the song "Beasts of England," and the popularization of a number of celebrations that promote each animal's loyalty.

#### A. Heroes as community products

For the political system of *Animal Farm* to work, there must be heroes whose symbolic value turns them into both examples and figures of respect to the rest of the citizens in the farm. This is so because societies need symbolic representations of their culture, as Meyers & Pacheco (2017) claim: it is impossible to separate the concept of representation from that of culture and society, for people produce representations. (p. 129). The lower classes must have an active participation in the creation of these symbolic figures because if they are meaningful to the elite only, the lower classes will feel excluded and the system may start collapsing. *Animal Farm* exemplifies the participation of the low classes in the creation of "national" heroic figures.

In Orwell's novel, the active participation of all animals, regardless of their political class, creates the first heroic symbols and heroes of their movement: Snowball the pig and Boxer the horse: "The animals decided unanimously to create a military decoration, 'Animal Hero, First Class,' which was conferred there and then



on Snowball and Boxer. It consisted of a brass medal ... to be worn on Sundays and holidays.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 17). Snowball and Boxer, the first two “national” heroes of Animal Farm, belong, respectively, one to the ruling class and the other to the lower class.

#### B. The song “Beasts of England” as a patriotic expression

The song “Beasts of England” was not created by the animals from the lower classes. It was actually a creation of the pig Old Major. Still, he first sang it before the revolution, at the time when all animals were slaves alike of the humans. In this sense, even if the pig was respected, he did not belong to the system that the other pigs were about to institutionalize. The song, by being the creation of a respectable figure who shared the same destiny of all other animals, became the first symbol of the revolution.

“Beasts of England” is highly important because it does not place any animal above the others and appeals to every animal species, becoming a source of both identification and inspiration for the creatures that suffer in the human system:

Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,  
Beasts of every land and clime,  
Hearken to my joyful tidings  
Of the golden future time.  
Soon or late the day is coming,  
Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown,  
And the fruitful fields of England  
Shall be trod by beasts alone. (Orwell, 1945, p. 4)

The song uses a series of devices to appeal to animals regardless of their species. For example, it uses the plural word “beasts” to include all creatures. Also, it names the different geographical locations followed by the determiner “every” to promote inclusion and union. Also, it excludes human beings in the verses “And the fruitful fields of England / Shall be trod by beasts alone” (Orwell, 1945, p. 4), thus increasing the sense of union of all animals in a single cause.



The next stanza of the song clearly depicts the suffering of animals and its ending: “Rings shall vanish from our noses, / And the harness from our back, / Bit and spur shall rust forever, / Cruel whips no more shall crack” (Orwell, 1945, p. 4). These verses reproduce some human signifying practices that cause suffering and places them together for other animals to identify specific kinds of torment even when they are not subjected to them. For example, rings are attached to the noses of cows and bulls, also to pigs, but not to horses or chicken. Pigs are not hit with whips although cows and oxen are, and horses are the ones who suffer from bits and spurs. The song, thus, makes animals to identify with each other across species and also forges all animals’ loyalty to the revolution to come.

The song continues with the promise of a happy future for all animals:

Riches more than mind can picture,  
Wheat and barley, oats and hay,  
Clover, beans, and mangel-wurzels  
Shall be ours upon that day.  
Bright will shine the fields of England,  
Purer shall its waters be,  
Sweeter yet shall blow its breezes  
On the day that sets us free. (Orwell, 1945, p. 4)

The lines above create an idealized dream related to the food preference of each animal. Also, it groups all animals together by the use of the pronoun “us,” which is linked to the hope for freedom. “Beasts of England,” however, does not simply depict a bright future for all animals. It also asks for their collective commitment to the cause, even if it means working and dying without seeing the success of their revolution:

For that day we all must labour,  
Though we die before it break;  
Cows and horses, geese and turkeys,  
All must toil for freedom’s sake.  
Beasts of England, beasts of Ireland,  
Beasts of every land and clime,  
Hearken well and spread my tidings  
Of the golden future time. (Orwell, 1945, pp. 4-5)





To achieve a sense of union, the song mentions specific animals species. Again, the verses mention both mammals and birds, which compose farm animals, and uses the word “all” and the modal “must” to urge them to join the movement and to be constant.

The song, as a signifying practice that drew animals together and built in them a sense of loyalty to the revolution, was immediately effective: “And then, after a few preliminary tries, the whole farm burst out into *Beasts of England* in tremendous unison. The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked it. They were so delighted with the song that they sang it right through five times in succession, and might have continued singing it all night if they had not been interrupted.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 5). As it can be seen, the diverse species offered their loyalty to the incipient movement thanks to the message of the song that Old Major made.

### C. Celebrations

A signifying practice that conveys the animals’ acquiesce of the new regime is their active role in the institution of celebrations, both spontaneous or regular. While the spontaneous celebrations mark important events that were unplanned, the regular ones relate to military achievements. Still, both types of celebrations provide a means for “civilian” animals to feel part of the animal government established by the pigs.

#### 1. Spontaneous celebrations and unplanned events

Spontaneous celebrations include those events that the animals did not necessarily expect but which are a source of joy to them. They are important because, as signifying practices, each helps to build a sense of unity among the different animal species in the farm. Also, they provide an opportunity for low-class animals to participate actively as “citizens” of the government and thus feel part of the pigs’ regime. An example of such celebrations is the victory over the humans



who wanted to recover the control over the farm: “The animals had now reassembled in the wildest excitement, each recounting his own exploits in the battle at the top of his voice. An impromptu celebration of the victory was held immediately. The flag was run up and *Beasts of England* was sung a number of times. (Orwell, 1945, p. 17).

All animals are participating in the retelling of the battle. Their passion is perceived in the high volume of their voice. Such level of excitement indicates that all of them feel involved. Then, they dignified the dead sheep by means of a funeral that the pigs used to indoctrinate the other animals to die for a regime that every animal has embraced as theirs. From their point of view, all of them are alike and thus they are willing to sacrifice their lives for a government that supposedly represents them.

## 2. Regular celebrations

Along with unplanned celebrations, regular celebrations serve as a point of identification between low-class animals and the government that exploits them. These ceremonies remind all animals that they are part of a functional and inclusive political system. Unlike the other festivities, these are more directly related to the government and its achievements:

There was much discussion as to what the battle should be called. In the end, it was named the Battle of the Cowshed, since that was where the ambush had been sprung. Mr. Jones’s gun had been found lying in the mud, and it was known that there was a supply of cartridges in the farmhouse. It was decided to set the gun up at the foot of the Flagstaff, like a piece of artillery, and to fire it twice a year — once on October the twelfth, the anniversary of the Battle of the Cowshed, and once on Midsummer Day, the anniversary of the Rebellion. (Orwell, 1945, p. 17)

One notices that, although there was a seemingly democratic method to name the battle, those in power ultimately control the celebration, which is evident because the name (or species) of the animal that found the gun is omitted. Had it been a pig,



the fact would have been properly recorded, but the lack of details hints to the fact that the founder of the gun was an “unimportant” member of Animal Farm.

Also, other signifying practices point out to the fact that pigs are in control of the celebrations that are held regularly. In the case of the battle anniversaries, their signifying practices are related to the military system: the gun becomes “a piece of artillery” and is fired ceremoniously. That means that it is controlled by the pigs, not by the other animals. Still, the ones who have been denied the use of the gun feel represented in the act of firing it.

#### IV. Apathy and negligence: A tacit form of agreement

Along with their willful acceptance of the elite’s discourse and their active contribution in creating national symbols, low-class animals in *Animal Farm* are also part in the establishment of the totalitarian state that oppresses them because of their apathetic and negligent attitude toward politics. Jia Peijuan (2012) has made a distinction of political apathy in free countries and that in totalitarian regimes: “although ‘political apathy’ has become a common problem in mature western democracies as a consequence of the enrichment of private and social life, such apathy of the public is completely different from being silenced under power” (p. 45). In the case of the citizens of Animal Farm, their apathetic attitude is not the result of the regime, for the government is in an incipient state. Their attitude is intrinsic, and it is manifested through the animal’s reluctance to learn, their lack of historical memory, and their low assertiveness.

##### A. Reluctance to learn

The animals’ negligence is manifested in their disdain for learning. Even though this attitude may seem unimportant at first, it is relevant from a cultural poetics point of view: Cultural poetics posits the interconnectedness of all our actions . . . everything we do is interrelated to a network of practices embedded in



our culture. No act is insignificant; everything is important.” (Bressler, 2011, p. 244). Taking into account Bressler’s idea, it is possible to notice that an apparently insignificant act as not wanting to learn indeed causes considerable harm to the low-class animals in their society. Their reluctance to learn prompts them to transfer all important decisions to the pigs, with the belief that the latter will consider their best interests. Although some may consider this lack of interest on studying as a possible result of the animals’ lack of intellectual abilities, in reality this idea is not true since all animals learned the song “Beasts of England” by heart and they could read: “The reading and writing classes, however, were a great success. By the autumn almost every animal on the farm was literate in some degree.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). As it can be seen, the problem was that animals did not want to expand their intellectual horizons and were simply content with their current state: “The dogs learned to read fairly well, but were not interested in reading anything except the Seven Commandments.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). The same is true for other animals, like Mollie: “Mollie refused to learn any but the six letters which spelt her own name. She would form these very neatly out of pieces of twig, and would then decorate them with a flower or two and walk round them admiring them.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). These examples manifest the lack of interest in learning that the most intelligent animals showed.

An important fact to remember is that Animal Farm was also inhabited by animals whose intellect was extremely limited, like the chicken, the sheep and the ducks. Their minds are so poorly developed that they cannot learn the Seven Commandments of Animalism by heart (Orwell, 1945, p. 13) and thus, their literacy level is null. For them, Snowball had to reduce the commandments to a simple maxim: “Four legs good, two legs bad.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). Even when Snowball explained this short maxim to them and justified birds as good in spite of not having four legs, they could not understand the explanation but accepted it anyway (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). In this light, one could think that these animals are deprived of any access to information and thus, their only option is to follow what the other animals



say; however, even these animals could benefit from information: “Muriel, the goat, could read somewhat better than the dogs, and sometimes used to read to the others in the evenings from scraps of newspaper which she found on the rubbish heap.” (Orwell, 1945, p. 13). These animals indeed received information from the goat, but did not do anything with it.

The reluctance to learn that characterized the animals in Animal Farm justified the perception that the important affairs were the exclusive responsibility of the pigs. Indeed, this attitude prevents animals from realizing that the pigs are taking advantage of them and manipulate them, as becomes evident when the pigs sent Boxer to be slaughtered and tell other animals that the horse was sent to a veterinarian to recover from overwork. The farm animals crowd the van to bid goodbye to Boxer and Benjamin, the donkey, unsuccessfully tries to point out the truth: “Fools! Fools!” shouted Benjamin, prancing round them and stamping the earth with his small hoofs. ‘Fools! Do you not see what is written on the side of that van?’ . . . ‘Do you not understand what that means? They are taking Boxer to the knacker’s!’” (Orwell, 1945, p. 47)

As in the example above, pigs take advantage of the other animals because the latter refused to learn and exercise their knowledge out of sheer negligence and apathy. Thus, low-class animals share the responsibility in the establishment of the political system that oppresses them.

#### B. Lack of historical memory

Along with their refusal to learn, the animals’ lack of historical memory becomes another foundation stone for the totalitarian government in Animal Farm. Passerini (2017) claims that: “We can remember only thanks to the fact that somebody has remembered before us, that other people in the past have challenged death and terror on the basis of their memory. Remembering has to be conceived as a highly inter-subjective relationship.” (p. 2). In this context, memory becomes a subversive act, but the low-class animals decide not to exercise it. By not



remembering the past, the citizens in the farm let the ruling class to take advantage of them, for cultural events are volatile: “Lived culture is culture as lived and experienced by people in their day-to-day existence in a particular place and at a particular moment in time; and the only people who have full access to this culture are those who actually lived its structure of feeling. Once the historical moment is gone the structure of feeling begins to fragment.” (Storey, 2009, p. 46). One example of the former idea is when Boxer argues against Snowball being a traitor and Squealer deliberately changes the account of the battle:

Do you not remember how, just at the moment when Jones and his men had got inside the yard, Snowball suddenly turned and fled, and many animals followed him? And do you not remember, too, that it was just at that moment, when panic was spreading and all seemed lost, that Comrade Napoleon sprang forward with a cry of ‘Death to Humanity!’ and sank his teeth in Jones’s leg? Surely you remember that, comrades?’ exclaimed Squealer, frisking from side to side.

Now when Squealer described the scene so graphically, it seemed to the animals that they did remember it. At any rate, they remembered that at the critical moment of the battle Snowball had turned to flee. (Orwell, 1945, p. 32)

In the example above, Squealer clearly resorts to revisionism. This goes along with Passerini’s description of what totalitarian governments do to memory: “ideology replaced memory, not simply by cancelling it, but by trying to impose an artificial and homologizing memory.” (2017, p. 8). Although in the previous example Squealer is guilty of revisionist practices to favor the ruling class, such actions would hardly be possible if animals remembered the past well and had taken past lesson to heart.

The same is true about the Seven Commandments. Each time the pigs transgress one, they justify themselves with reinterpretation or revisionism. The other animals, unable to recall the past accurately, go along with the new versions: “They had thought the Fifth Commandment was ‘No animal shall drink alcohol,’ but there were two words that they had forgotten. Actually the Commandment read: ‘No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*.’” (Orwell, 1945, p. 42). Therefore, the lack of



interest toward remembering past events becomes an indirect way in which the farm's animals agree with the elite's points of view and decisions.

### C. Low assertiveness

A result of the negligence and apathy of Animal Farm's citizens is their low assertiveness. Since animals cannot remember the past correctly and have willingly disdained the means to think critically, they cannot stand for their own ideas and are unable to defend their position against the abuses of their rulers:

The early apples were now ripening, and the grass of the orchard was littered with windfalls. The animals had assumed as a matter of course that these would be shared out equally; one day, however, the order went forth that all the windfalls were to be collected and brought to the harness-room for the use of the pigs. At this some of the other animals murmured, but it was no use. All the pigs were in full agreement on this point, even Snowball and Napoleon. (Orwell, 1945, p. 14)

Since their negligent attitude has caused the farm animals to lack the tools to stand against those who govern them, they end up complying with everything the pigs say or do, even if it is at their own expense.

Another example of this same result is when the pigs start carrying out executions in Animal Farm, which was forbidden by the Sixth Commandment ("No animal shall kill another animal") (Orwell, 1945, p. 9). The animals were shocked but still knew that such action by their rulers was wrong. Still, they refused to do anything about it and left the place. Boxer's words show the resulting passive attitude of the animals: "Finally he said: 'I do not understand it. I would not have believed that such things could happen on our farm. It must be due to some fault in ourselves. The solution, as I see it, is to work harder. From now onwards I shall get up a full hour earlier in the mornings.'" (Orwell, 1945, p. 33). Boxer's words show how animals, having lost their tools to be assertive, start blaming themselves for the abuses of the ruling class.





Another example of compliance with the rulers as the result of the animals' negligent attitude is when Boxer argues with Squealer about Snowball's condition as a traitor. Boxer disagrees with the charges, but since he cannot read, he is unable to corroborate the existence of the "secret documents" proving Snowball's crime. The horse then changes his position partially and, when Squealer claims that Napoleon, the leader, has declared the accusation as factual, Boxer abandons his position altogether: "Ah, that is different!" said Boxer. 'If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right'" (Orwell, 1945, p. 32). Boxer's blind faith in his political leader is the result of his refusal to learn and of his poor historical memory.

As the above instances show, the apathetic and negligent attitude of the low-class animals in Orwell's short novel becomes a catalyst for the establishment of the oppressive political system in the farm. In fact, some have perceived a link between lack of political participation and the development of anti-democratic movements: "Low-participation democracies are open to manipulation by well-financed economic and social forces with narrow agendas. Without the broad participation that establishes a countervailing democratic context within which narrow views must be broadened to survive, the prospects of serious distortions and problems increase markedly." (Segal, 2002, para. 4). *Animal Farm* becomes an example of such outcomes and thus highlights the fact that, as all animals have been responsible, pigs should not be signaled as the only promoters of the government.

## V. Conclusions

*Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, has raised numerous types of criticism and with that, the debate over the legitimacy of the studies that take the book away from its original context has raised. Still, separating the content from specific ideologies, the short novel offers a very accurate glimpse to the basic elements for the birth of totalitarianism: the presence of a respected leader and the revolution against an oppressive state. These elements have caused many to relate the book



intertextually to all sorts of governments, and thus most of the criticism of the novel has taken into account the perspective of the elite in power.

*Animal Farm*, however, also offers the point of view of those who lack power. If the analytical scope shifts to them, one realizes that low-class animals share part of the blame for the emergence of the totalitarian government of the farm. The apparently powerless citizens of *Animal Farm* have actually had a strong degree of participation in the formation of their oppressive society.

Animals in *Animal Farm* have contributed to the establishment of the pigs' ruling by acquiescing to the pigs' discourse. They preferred to sink progressively into a more and more desperate state by trusting that the pigs would help them and that they would protect them from Jones, the former owner of the farm and their former master. Their fear of Jones (and of changing their *status quo*) has submerged them into a totalitarian state but the animals keep trusting it.

The inhabitants of the former Manor Farm have also promoted the birth of the system that subjugated them even more than Jones's yoke by participating in the forging of a national identity through symbols like heroes, hymns, and other celebrations. These actions mirror Passerini's observation of the means by which totalitarian states aim to control their population: "The obsessive repetition of new toponyms, celebrating the revolution, tended to abolish all regional and cultural diversities, reducing the whole country to the same image, that of the centre." (2017, p. 8). This shows that the animals, having acquiesced to the discourse of the ruling class, have also merged with the system.

Finally, the low-class animals of Orwell's short novel, by neglecting their civilian responsibilities of learning, keeping historical records, and standing against abuse, have let the pigs to seize the total power and control of the society. Their apathy has become a tacit agreement to the system, and once that such system is firmly established, animals cannot fight against it. Thus, the idea that the seemingly powerless animals are mere victims of oppression is contested. Although the new



government clearly made distinctions among animals, the forging of such system shows that all animals were indeed equal in responsibility.



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