

# Animal farm and the russian revolution

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Katelyn Rachels AEGL102-008 Carlson April 30, 2010 Animal Farm and the Russian Revolution Animal Farm is an allegory for what happened in Russia between the years of about 1917 and 1943. Orwell uses characters and certain details to symbolize different situations in the Russian Revolution. Understanding the specific historical context underlying Animal Farm enriches one's reading of the book. The novel is about failed revolutions everywhere, but above all, it is about the Russian Revolution. Orwell uses Animal Farm to show how events step by step correspond to events ranging from the publishing of The Communist Manifesto in 1848 up through the Tehran Conference in 1943. One of the first events is how old Major's dream relates to Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. The first scene of Animal Farm opens with the news that old Major has called all the farm animals to a meeting to discuss a dream that he had. As he is explaining the dream to the other animals, he points out two important things to them. He says, "Man is the only creature that consumes without producing," and he further encourages them to "work night and day, body and soul, for the over-throw of the human race" (Orwell, Print). He explains that men have been taking advantage of them for years, and it is time to put them in their place and to an end. The only way they could do this was by one word that old Major stated at the end of his speech and that was "Rebellion!" What Orwell is trying to show through old Major's speech is a simplified version of the basic tenets of communism, which were originally put down by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the Communist Manifesto. What the Manifesto intended to show was that the capitalist economic system was seriously flawed. The workers never saw the products of their labor because the capitalists

claimed the profit for themselves. If common workers could overthrow the capitalists and claim the means of production for themselves, then all the workers of the world could live in peace with one another (Smyer, Print. ) This is what Marx was trying to suggest. The Manifesto famously ends with the workers of the world uniting and old Major essentially ends his speech in the same way with his final call to “ Rebellion! Both Marx and old Major are better at criticizing the existing system than at proposing a new one as we see very soon after the Rebellion where everyone does not really know what to do next. The Manifesto was written during a time of many revolutions across Europe, even though it did not happen in Russia until roughly sixty years later. Even while it was written, Russia was the top most interest for Marx’s message. The country had an enormous peasant class and it was ruled over by tsars. In other words, the barn animals were itching to overthrow Mr. Jones. Two other events that are have something in common is the fall Mr. Jones and the Russian Revolution 1917. The animals are not exactly sure what will come of this rebellion, but they begin to prepare for it as soon as old Major dies. We soon learn that “ the Rebellion was achieved much earlier and more easily than anyone had expected” (Orwell, Print). Mr. Jones forgets to feed the animals one night after he goes out and gets drunk. The cows are fed up and kick in the barn door, and all of a sudden all the animals are eating from the bins. When Mr. Jones and his men come in to whip the animals into their place, a huge rebellion erupts, and the animals chase Mr. Jones and his men off the farm. Soon after, Napoleon and Snowball step into the lead and begin organizing the animals around a new system based on the Seven Commandments. The most important of these is that “

All animals are equal" (Orwell, Print. ) Mr. Jones is an allusion to the last tsar of Russia, Nicholas II. Tsars were already known to not be on good terms with Russian people, but Nicholas was a prime example of being very bad at it. In 1914, he got Russia involved in World War I, and then mismanaged it. As a result, a famine was beginning to start across Russia. This comes in play with the animals not being fed. Nicholas was not a strong enough leader to inspire the people's confidence. As we see in Animal Farm, the revolution was relatively unorganized and seemed to just come out of nowhere. It began with several strikes and demonstrations which gradually grew in number. Nicholas eventually sent in the military, but by then the workers were out of control. From this, many of the military members began to sympathize with the strikers and switched sides. After the Revolution, Vladimir Lenin suddenly returned from exile and put up his April Theses. This relates to the Seven Commandments. The second phase of the Russian Revolution occurred when the Bolsheviks overthrew the provisional government. Animal Farm aims to simplify these events so we do not get the two rebellions, but we do get the pigs, what can be considered the Bolsheviks, sweeping in to take control over the revolution that already happened. The one event that is notably glossed in the novel is when we hear that the animals "raced back to the farm buildings to wipe out the last traces of Jones's hated reign" (Orwell, Print. ) In the novel, Jones and his family escape. However, Nicholas II and his family were executed and buried in a mass grave. The Battle of the Cowshed and the Russian Civil War also has common traits. In Animal Farm, before Mr. Jones and the men return, the animals have time to begin organizing a large harvest. The different animals

begin to take on clearer roles. We learn that Napoleon is a double for Stalin and Snowball, who could be seen as Lenin in the earlier chapters, will be a stand-in for Leon Trotsky. Boxer the horse comes to resemble the working class with his personal motto " I will work harder" (Orwell, Print. ) The pigs work to spread word around the farm and committees begin to set up. Yet in reality, the Bolsheviks hardly had time to spread the word before everything erupted into the Civil War. Trotsky had not wanted to end the Russian war effort and he and many others felt that without war, there could be no peace. As the Germans began to take over Russian territory, the Bolsheviks had no choice. They tried to seize on Trotsky's withdrawal as a sign of weakness. In Animal Farm, Mr. Jones goes off to the local bar to complain of his misfortune. He has trouble getting someone to listen to him because the two neighboring farmers, Mr. Pilkington and Mr. Frederick, are on bad terms. Here, Orwell gives the reader a glimpse into the relations between the United States and the United Kingdom, Germany, and Russia. Mr. Frederick, as it is very clear, is a stand in for the Germans. During the Bolshevik Revolution, the Germans were entangled in war with both the U. S. and the U. K. , and after the Revolution, they shut Russia out of the war. Mr. Pilkington represents the United States and the United Kingdom. At this time during the war, they were distracted by Russia's withdrawal from the war, feared a Russian alliance with Germany, and were worried about Bolshevik ideas spreading to the West. In other words, the Bolsheviks were able to fight their civil war because the rest of the world was still caught up in World War I. What united these different groups was mainly the fact that they were all anti-Bolshevik, and they went under the loose name the White Army,

contrasting themselves with the Trotsky-led Red Army. There are a few things to notice about the Battle of Cowshed. First, Snowball emerges as a military hero, just like Trotsky did. Second, Mollie the horse, who represents the Russian upper-middle-class runs off and plays little role in the battle. Third, Boxer reveals himself as a powerful military force. The actual Russian Civil War ended in 1922 with the defeat of the White Army and the founding of the Soviet state. Similarly, Animal Farm is established on the English farm scene. The question that can be asked frequently is to grow or not to grow. This is where the windmill and the Trotsky-Stalin Conflict come into play. As Lenin grew sick in the early 1920s, serious tension started to mount between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. Trotsky was already very critical of Stalin's war record. He wanted to continue to spread the Revolution, where Stalin wanted to focus on building communism in the places Russia had already acquired. After Lenin's death, Trotsky was forced into exile. This left Stalin in complete control. In Animal Farm, the divide between Stalin and Trotsky or Napoleon and Snowball is represented by the argument over the windmill. We learn that Napoleon despises the idea where even at one point he "urinated over the plans and walked out without a word" and "the whole farm was deeply divided on the subject of the windmill" (Orwell, Print. The windmill is, in many ways, the perfect symbol for the decision about whether or not to expand communism. In this case, the dream is worldwide communist revolution. Napoleon begins to consolidate power for himself as soon as Snowball is off the farm. We find that he has reared the nine pups and made them his guard dogs, which are related to Stalin's secret police, and that he has made Squealer his main man. The animals are troubled by

all of this, and many would argue the situation, but they do nothing. One of Stalin's first decisions as the leader of the Soviet Union was to initiate something known as the Five-Year-Plans. These plans are similar to Napoleon's initiative. The Plans main goal was to rapidly industrialize the nation so that it could catch up with the West. Along with the Five-Year-Plan was Stalin's decision to collectivize agriculture. He thought that he could increase crop output by moving to larger farms, and by bringing the peasantry under direct control. The plan back fired and caused widespread famines among peasants. Once the famines started, Stalin did very little to help the people (Carr, Print. ) In Animal Farm, we find that Napoleon has the animals working harder than ever. Even the neighboring humans respected the way the animals were managing themselves. Meanwhile, Napoleon's own deceit is becoming increasingly clear to anyone who is paying attention. The pigs have begun to sleep in the humans' beds, and Muriel the horse reads out the altered commandment " No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets" (Orwell, Print. ) Despite Napoleon's initiative, there are widespread food shortages across Animal Farm. Napoleon quickly realizes that it was necessary they keep this a secret from the outside world and he sends the sheep out to talk about their increased rations. At the same time, Napoleon has all the empty food bins in shed filled with sand in order to hide the lack of food. Napoleon, like Stalin, is floundering to make his policies look like they are working and to give the illusion of strength when in reality the farm is becoming weak. There are three events that have similarities: the hen rebellion, Napoleon's pile of corpses, and Stalin's Great Purge. Animal Farm is not particularly light tale, but the story takes a very dark turn about

halfway through. First, the hens refuse to give their eggs up to the pigs and in result of that Napoleon decides to starve them until they change their minds. Several of the hens die, while the rest give up. Napoleon then calls a meeting, and the dogs drag out several pigs squealing with pain and terror. The pigs confess that they were working with Snowball and Mr. Frederick, and a moment later the dogs kill them. The same thing happens with the surviving hens from the rebellion, a goose, and several sheep. At the end, there is “ a pile of corpses and Napoleon’s feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones” (Orwell, Print. ) What was supposed to be a fairy tale is now a nightmarish allusion to the Great Purge. What made Stalin’s purges so horrible was that he forced many to come forward and confess to crimes that they never committed, often after severe torment and outright torture. What we see in Animal Farm is a very simple and direct illustration of how Stalin’s purges worked. Squealer tells the other animals that Snowball, the scapegoat for everything, is not just working against them from outside the farm, but inside as well. He is trying to destroy them from within. Snowball here becomes the figure of general Stalinist paranoia, and what we get is an old-fashioned witch-hunt. The scheming Mr. Frederick stands for how Hitler broke the Non-Aggression Pact. There is an odd little episode after Napoleon’s executions that have to do with the need to sell a pile of timber to either Mr. Frederick or Mr. Pilkington. Mr. Frederick stands in for Hitler and Mr. Pilkington stands in for the United Kingdom. As Napoleon is first trying to decide to whom he will sell the timber, he notices that Frederick is more anxious to get the timber but will not offer a price. As the animals become



aware of what a threat Frederick might present, Napoleon teaches them to chant “ Death to Frederick” (Orwell, Print. Then suddenly Napoleon swaps sides and sells the timber to Frederick. Everyone is shocked. The other pigs claim that Napoleon only became buddies with Pilkington so that Frederick would raise his price. It soon back fires on Napoleon. Frederick has gave him forged money, and got the timber for nothing! Hitler and Stalin had long been mortal enemies. Stalin nearly signed an anti-German political alliance with France and Britain, which can be represented by Mr. Pilkington. When that fell through, Stalin signed a non-aggression pact with Hitler instead. Stalin began to get word from his spies that Hitler was planning to break the pact, but he just did not believe that the Germans would invade Russia before first defeating Britain. However, Hitler did indeed launch Operation Barbarossa, with millions of German troops pouring suddenly into Soviet territory, starting the war on the Eastern Front. Hitler betrayed Stalin as we learn in Animal Farm, “ The very next morning the attack came... ” (Orwell, Print. ) Russia suffered enormous casualties in World War II and similar events take place in the Battle of the Windmill. By the time Orwell was wrapping up Animal Farm, the war was not yet over, but the worst had passed for some. Animal Farm has its own miniature version of World War II in the Battle of the Windmill. Things happen fast as Frederick’s men progress, take a pasture and blow up the Windmill. Even Napoleon seemed at loss as the enemy rushed onto the field. A message arrives from Pilkington telling Napoleon, “ Serves you right” (Orwell, Print. ) The fighting in Animal Farm is extremely violent for it to be a fable story. Though the animals end up winning, they find that they are “ weary and bleeding”

(Orwell, Print. Almost immediately, Squealer begins “squealing” the war as a proud victory for Napoleon. Like so many that survived the war, Boxer no longer understands the word victory. When Squealer points out that they have won back the farm, all Boxer can say is, “Then we have won back what we had before” (Orwell, Print. ) No matter how good your advertising is, it’s hard to spin a war in which millions of lives are lost. Why fight for something you already have and lose lives, than to keep things the way they are and save lives? Even the loyal Boxer understands that. When Boxer has to leave the farm is very similar to the betrayal of the working class. Throughout Animal Farm, we’ve seen the pigs betray the principles of the Rebellion over and over again. Yet no betrayal is quite as noticeable as what happens after Boxer’s lung collapses. Squealer tells everyone that Boxer is going to be taken to a veterinary hospital for surgery. As the animals go to see Boxer leave, Benjamin the donkey appears and starts crying that they are all idiots. He reads the side of the van to them which says, “Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler” (Orwell, Print. ) All of the animals shout to Boxer that he must kick his way out. He tries, but he is old and too weak. A few days later, Squealer comes back and explains the misunderstanding. He says the surgeon purchased the van from the horse slaughterer, but that he has not yet changed the name. Squealer claims that they did everything they could to save Boxer. Napoleon holds the horse a memorial service. Boxer, in many ways, is an example of the perfect worker. He never complains, is extremely loyal and he literally works himself to death. Yet his reward is that he is sold off, slaughtered, and turned into glue. Meanwhile, getting drunk off cartons of whiskey, the pigs are living lavish lifestyles in the farmhouse. Though the

betrayal of Boxer is not a link to any specific episode in Russian history, it might be seen as a brief ' allegory for Stalinism as a whole. As the van moves down the road with Boxer trapped inside, it resembles many victims of the Stalinist regime that were made to disappear or were sent to concentration camps. As the book comes to an end, there is one last similarity and it is between Napoleon's last laugh and The Tehran Conference. The book ends with animals watching through a farmhouse window as the pigs hold a meeting between the neighboring humans to explain that there was some sort of misunderstanding. They want to make it clear to the humans that they never meant to incite rebellion; their entire goal has been " to live at peace and in normal business relations" (Orwell, Print, emphasis added. ) The pigs have hung the other animals out to dry and the Rebellion is dead. The meeting between the pigs and the humans is an allusion to the Tehran Conference, which was intended to map out a strategy to end World War II. It was a meeting of the leaders of the Big Three allied powers, Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom, and Joseph Stalin of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U. S. S. R. ). All of these men were against the power of Hitler. At the Tehran Conference, the Big Three argued out agreements on several matters of great significance to World War II and then the Cold War. What we often emphasize when we read the end of Animal Farm is that the pigs have become exactly like the humans. The final line goes, " The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (Orwell, Print. Though the animals cannot tell pig from man, as they observe them, the pigs and the

men are caught in ferocious argument. The reason is that they're both cheating one another. The end of Animal Farm might be taken as the allegorical beginning of the Cold War. At the time the West decided to play cards with the Soviet Union because they would do anything to beat the Germans. The alliance of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin was convenient, but as soon as the war ended it fell apart. This caused distrust, which led to fifty years of stalemate, to fifty years of tension between Russia and the West. So much that schoolchildren in both countries were drilled on what to do if a nuclear bomb landed nearby. Orwell must have seen this coming from a mile away.

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