

Consent to destruction: the phases of fraternity and separation in animal farm

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Within George Orwell's simple allegory *Animal Farm* lie lessons about the complex bonds between leadership, fraternity, and self-agency. The animals are at first subjugated by humans in a communal voiceless suffering, but Old Major inspires them to mobilize their powerful fraternity for their own good. However, the readers cringe as the originally successful revolution becomes increasingly thwarted; first, the intelligent pigs take over; then, the government devolves into a military dictatorship which destroys the original fraternity by creating a schism between the pigs and the other animals. Though the working animals are separated from their leaders, once again they find comfort in a frightened togetherness. Thus, each phase of the revolution is a step in a cycle of unity and separation. However the cycle is imperfect since as the story closes, the animals are stranded, unable to act for themselves in the face of Squealer's rhetoric; the power in their frightened unity can only be exploited by the pigs who, separated into a different category, do not have their interests at heart. The tragedy of the revolution is not simply that the pigs become even crueler oppressors than original man, but that at each step towards tyranny, it is the working animals themselves who are persuaded to give up their agency and consent to the increasingly terrorizing leadership. The animals first find their power in a visceral sense of brotherhood against humanity inspired by Old Major. Old Major divides the world into men and animals: "All men are enemies. All animals are comrades...Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers" (31). Despite their physical differences, all animals find something stirring in their anthem, *Beasts of England*. "The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whinnied it, the ducks quacked

it”(34). Though each animal is irreconcilably different, they can all raise their voices to sing the same song of hope. Their power to overthrow men is derived from this awareness of themselves as animals, the antihumans. This collective sense also propels the animals through the incipient stages of their self-government after the revolution, and it is a version of what literary critic V. C. Letemendia calls “innate decency” (119). Their first harvest is the biggest in history not only because each animal works honestly hard, but also because “not an animal on the farm had stolen so much as a mouthful” during the harvest (46). The new government is stable because “Nobody stole, nobody grumbled over his rations...” (47) and the animals’ “decency” is generally reliable, with only a few exceptions like Mollie the vain mare and the never-present cat. The new government works swimmingly because, as Letemendia notes, the worker animals’ decency “provided them with an instinctive feeling of what a fair society might actually look like” (120). The majority of the animals do not crave power “for any personal gain” (120)—at least, not yet. The fraternity is still the overriding social force. However, their revolution and hardship contains the genesis of a new conflict. In addition to unity, concrete animal leadership is also required to benefit from their own immense power. That very leadership generates a schism between the leaders and the led. Right from the beginning, the “work of teaching and organizing the others fell naturally upon the pigs, who were generally recognized as being the cleverest of the animals”(35). They expand Old Major’s ideas into a complete system of thought called Animalism, which emphasizes freedom from human oppressors and whose central tenets are summarized into seven commandments that oppose to all human

characteristics. Thus, the pigs constantly inflame the animals' anger and awareness of exploitation, which is essential overthrow of the humans. However, the pigs are "generally recognized" as cleverer; a distinction grows right from the start between the pigs and the rest of the animals. There is no competition; the pigs are "naturally" cleverer; they simply assume control and the unity of all the animals begins to fragment. Indeed, as the regime progresses, the original animal brotherhood deteriorates further. After Napoleon takes over, the animals do not "sit all together as they had done in the past. Napoleon, with Squealer and another pig named Minimus...sat on the front of the raised platform, with the nine young dogs forming a semicircle round them, and the other pigs sitting behind. The rest of the animals sat facing them in the main body of the barn" (70-71).

Already, the pigs and the dogs are divided from the rest of the animals; two groups sit facing each other in a strong aura of opposition. After awhile, the division is so severe that only the pigs themselves really know what the pigs are doing. They move into the farmhouse, further segregating themselves from the working animals who can rely only on rumors and hearsay to discern whether the pigs are sleeping in beds. Time passes, and Napoleon is even elevated to quasi-godhood. He is so much of a leader, so different from the rest, that his food must be tasted and dogs must guard him day and night. He is so separated that he almost never appears in public and has Squealer speak for him. Thus, out of the original sense of brotherhood has grown a horrific chasm that divides the new leadership from the rest. We then appear to have returned to the miserable beginning with this new schism. Again, the oppressed find a fraternity in oppression: a union that

may perhaps lead to another revolution. Just after Napoleon's first violent executions, the animals, "except for the pigs and dogs," instinctively creep away to brood "in a body"(93). As they are all "huddling together for warmth"(94), they tacitly share their shock and dismay over the bloodshed they have witnessed. This new fellowship is rooted in a wordless psychological rapport, much like the original sense of fraternity. One might be able to argue that since the animals are, at least physically speaking, in the same oppressed situation as they had been at the beginning of the book, another revolution might occur and the cycle might begin again. After all, they are in the perfect position for another leader to rise from among them, inflame their emotions and make them aware of their new oppression and its needlessness. True, once again the necessity of leadership might yet lead to another failed revolution; yet, a revolution might be possible nonetheless. If we return to Letemendia's argument that the animals possess an "innate decency," however, we can see that the animals are not quite in the same position as before; moreover, as long as that "innate decency" prevents them from comprehending "the true nature of the pigs" (120), they cannot tap their new potential power in unity. After the slaughter, Boxer still concludes that "It must be due to some fault in ourselves"(94); he cannot blame the pigs because his decency prevents him from recognizing that the pigs are not included in the fellowship of decent creatures: something of a paradox. Though Boxer is widely respected and admired for his tremendous working capabilities, even he cannot lead the animals to a possibly better future. In Clover's mind, too, there is still "no thought of rebellion or disobedience"(95); she still "would remain faithful, work hard, carry out the

orders that were given to her, and accept the leadership of Napoleon”(95). Though she feels the disillusionment keenly, she cannot express her feelings because she simply cannot comprehend why the picture is wrong. Hampered by their naive “innate decency,” the working animals are unable to translate their general disillusionment into action to correct the shortcomings of their government. Not only does their “innate decency” prevent them from recognizing the evil in their leaders, it is even exploited by Squealer until their oppression becomes consensual. Each time the pigs do something questionable, whether it is taking the milk and apples, resolving to trade with humans, or moving into the farmhouse, there is first a promising murmur of protest. However, though “some of the other animals murmured, it was no use”(52); that glimmer of self-agency dies as soon as Squealer delivers his rhetoric. For example, the animals blithely swallow Squealer’s statement that most pigs “actually dislike milk and apples...Our sole object in taking these things is to preserve our health”(52), because being unselfish themselves, they cannot imagine others being selfish. They have technically consented to the beginnings of injustice. When Napoleon wants to initiate trade with the humans, even though the animals question themselves—“never to have any dealings with human beings, never to engage in trade, never to make use of money—had not these been among the earliest resolutions passed?” (76)—Squealer exploits the lack of written records to ease their doubts until all animals are “satisfied”(77) and consenting. Any sparks of self-agency are mellowed into satisfaction. In his most significant speech, Squealer addresses the issue of agency and autonomy. He convinces the animals that only Napoleon can make the decisions, because they “might make the

wrong decisions” for themselves (69). He paints leadership as “ a deep and heavy responsibility”(69) rather than a place of privilege and power. Again, the animals are duped into believing the unselfish motives Squealer depicts because their naïve decency prevents them from knowing better. Thus, the “ general feeling” becomes “ If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right” (70); they have consented to the hijacking of their ability to act for themselves. The pigs essentially manipulate the animals’ decency to extract from them a monstrous consent to their exploitation, thereby robbing the animals of all self-agency and ability to better themselves. Thus, though “ innate decency” might have caused the animals’ initial fraternal success, it also brings upon their later inability to act for themselves. One is tempted to speculate that if only the animals were less passive and more ambitious their society might have failed less spectacularly. However, some of the pigs lack the problematic “ innate decency” and do have the ambition which propels them to act for themselves. Ironically, within the homogeneous species of pigs there is more dangerous violence than there is between the diverse working animals. Obviously we see that Napoleon ruthlessly kills to consolidate his power and shamelessly lies through Squealer to keep his honored position. Right from the beginning there is conflict between Snowball and Napoleon. They cannot agree on whether to export the revolution to other farms or whether to shore up their own defenses. They constantly squabble over the windmill, and their enmity culminates in a military coup: Napoleon calls up his secretly reared dogs and violently expels Snowball from the farm. Even after that, the constant drive to secure his hard-won power pushes Napoleon to eliminate opposition from within his

own ranks as well; his dogs savagely rip to pieces “ the same four pigs as had protested when Napoleon abolished the Sunday Meetings” (92). Even the pigs, who might have a chance to fulfill aspirations to power, live in a world. The ambition that governs the pigs does not ensure their happiness or survival any more than the “ innate decency” of the working animals. Society can be based on neither characteristic; the animals have a “ decent” fraternity but are exploited; the pigs have self-agency but live in a dangerous culture of ruthless ambition. There are several tragedies in Animal Farm, then. One belongs to the working animals; their tragedy we can hardly bear to witness is the desecration of decency, consent, and self-agency. One of the final impressions of the animals we have is their irrepressible, utterly misguided hope. In the final chapter when life before revolution is almost less than a memory, they secretly hum their inspirational anthem of yore. They are convinced that though it “ might be that their lives were hard and that not all of their hopes had been fulfilled...they were not as other animals...All animals were equal”(131). Though they live and work and feel together in a potentially powerful union, their naïve decency ensures their consent to their own destruction. The other tragedy belongs to the revolution and construction of society in Animal Farm at large. Even if the animals had the self-agency to revolt, the inevitable necessity for leadership would merely bring them along the same path of betrayal; if they had ambition instead of decency, they would be no better off. In the end there is little hope for permanent betterment of Animal Farm. Works Cited Letemendia, V. C.. “ Revolution on Animal Farm: Orwell’s Neglected Commentary.” Modern Critical Interpretations: Animal Farm, ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea

House, 1999. 119-129. Orwell, George. Animal Farm. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1996.