

Title: ***Animal Farm*** Fifty Years On
 Author(s): Michael Peters
 Publication Details: *Contemporary Review* 267.1555 (Aug. 1995): p90-91.
 Source: ***Short Story Criticism***. Ed. Joseph Palmisano. Vol. 68. Detroit: Gale, 2004. p90-91. From *Literature Resource Center*.
 Document Type: Critical essay

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2004 Gale, COPYRIGHT 2007 Gale, Cengage Learning

[(essay date August 1995) *In the following essay, Peters considers the continuing relevance and influence of Animal Farm on the fiftieth anniversary of its publication.*]

Few books are as well-known as ***Animal Farm***. Published fifty years ago, in August 1945, as the Cold War was about to begin, the novel with its mixture of simple fairy-tale and historical allegory, still has the power to charm and provoke, even though that war now seems to be part of a previous age. The novel, while frequently taught in schools to thirteen and fourteen year olds, is rarely to be found in sixth form or university syllabuses. Like the author, the book occupies an ambiguous place in the literary world. Yet its fame amongst the reading and, to an extent, the non-reading public is indisputable; the slogan, 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others', is one that has become part of the language.

Orwell was very clear about his intentions in writing the book. During the Spanish Civil War, he had seen the effects of the repressions and deceptions of Stalinism at first hand. He wished to open people's eyes to the reality of the Soviet regime 'in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone', even when that regime had become an ally to Britain and the USA in the fight against German fascism. Such an exposure was essential, Orwell believed, if a true and democratic form of socialism was to be created. Working in London, first as a BBC journalist, and then as the literary editor of *Tribune*, ***Animal Farm*** was written whilst the bombs dropped; one bomb even damaged the manuscript when it fell on the street where Orwell and his wife lived. Certainly the process by which the book saw the light of day was a tortuous one, with publisher after publisher finding reasons for refusing or delaying publication. For Gollancz, who had first option, and Faber, in the person of T. S. Eliot, the novel was too much of an attack on Russia, which had suffered so hugely at Stalingrad. Cape first consulted the Ministry of Information, who were concerned that the Russian leaders would take offence at their depiction as pigs, before turning the book down.

At the other end of the spectrum, even the Anarchist, Freedom Press, took exception to the novel. In America, the Dial Press thought it 'impossible to sell animal stories'. When, eventually, Warburg agreed to take the book, publication was delayed for almost a year, until the end of the European War. The question of whether this was due to a shortage of paper--the official explanation--or to political necessity, is still unresolved. From Paris, to which he travelled in February 1945, to report the War for *The Observer* at closer quarters, Orwell checked the proofs, making one last change. When the Windmill is attacked Napoleon stays standing, instead of dropping to the ground, as a tribute to Stalin's courage in remaining in Moscow during Hitler's advance; even to his enemies Orwell is determined

to be fair.

Inevitably ***Animal Farm***, when it was finally published, created controversy, although not of the kind originally envisaged. With the end of the struggle against fascism, a new conflict had begun to develop--the Cold War. Once effectively banned because of its politics, the book started to become an instrument of propaganda in the West's campaign to claim the moral high ground. Many new translations were produced, some with the assistance of the US State Department, and were circulated in places where Soviet influence prevailed--for example, the Ukraine and Korea. In 1947 the 'Voice of America' broadcast a radio version to Eastern Europe. The success of the novel in propaganda terms may be gauged by the Soviets' fear and loathing of the book, expressed by the seizure of copies in Germany, as well as by the cancellation of proposed radio dramatisations in Czechoslovakia. This occurred just before Soviet crackdowns in 1948 and again in 1968 on regimes which seemed to be dangerously libertarian.

Whilst Orwell was happy to see his book used to attack the Soviet myth, he did become increasingly worried about the way it was being used by the Right as a means of demonstrating that all revolutionary change was bound to fail. Picking out as central the moment when the pigs keep apples and milk for themselves, he makes the point that if 'the other animals had had the sense to put their foot down then it would have been all right'. Major's dream could have been realised. The masses should be 'alert', ready to 'chuck out their leaders as soon as they have done their job'. This is rather a different message than that found in the anti-Communist propaganda which so frequently surrounded, and surrounds, the novel.

For Orwell personally, ***Animal Farm*** marked his entry into the halls of literary fame. With the first impression of 4,500 copies soon sold out, sales in the UK reached 25,000 within five years, and over half a million in the US within four years. From being a marginal left-wing figure, Orwell became one of the most celebrated writers of the day, with periodic radio and television adaptations of both ***Animal Farm*** and ***Nineteen Eighty Four***. In 1954, the first animated version of a literary text--a cartoon of ***Animal Farm***--was made. However, in the last few years of his life, with a newly adopted son to bring up alone after his wife's unexpected death, and with his tuberculosis becoming increasingly serious, the success of what Orwell called his 'little squib' may have been some small comfort.

George Orwell, as many readers have done, recognised that the book's great achievement was to 'fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole'. For this reason, fifty years on, in spite of the collapse of the Soviet system, in spite of the dilution of democratic socialism into liberalism, and in spite of the habit of literary critics to favour complex texts for deconstruction, ***Animal Farm*** may still be read with pleasure and profit, inside and outside the classroom, as one of the most imaginatively compelling satires on what Orwell called, in another of his fine phrases, the 'gramophone mind'.

Source Citation: Peters, Michael. "*Animal Farm* Fifty Years On." Contemporary Review. 267.1555 (Aug. 1995): 90-91. Rpt. in Short Story Criticism. Ed. Joseph Palmisano. Vol. 68. Detroit: Gale, 2004. 90-91. Literature Resource Center. Gale. MIAMI DADE PUBLIC LIBRARY. 3 Feb. 2010 <http://go.galegroup.com/ps/start.do?p=LitRC&u=29081_mdpls>.

Gale Document Number: GALE|H1420056279

Years go by, and though Animal Farm's population has increased, only a few animals that remember the Rebellion remain. Conditions are still harsh despite technological improvements. The pigs and dogs continue to do no manual labor, instead devoting themselves to organizational work. One day, Squealer takes the sheep out to a deserted pasture where, he says, he is teaching them a song. On the day the sheep return, the pigs walk around the yard on their hind legs as the sheep chant, "Four legs good, two legs better." The other animals are horrified. Clover consults the barn wall again.