[[essay date spring 1990) In the following essay, Grofman examines aspects of Animal Farm, including its literary roots, its place in didactic literature, and its critical reception.]

This essay has a very simple aim: to rescue *Animal Farm* from the often repeated claim that it is merely a children's story and to demonstrate how closely its events are tied to the events of Soviet political history. In the process I hope to demonstrate that *Animal Farm* works at several levels, as a charming story about "humanized" animals, as an allegory about the human condition, and, most importantly, as a thinly disguised and biting political satire about Soviet totalitarianism. No reader can fully enjoy the book without knowing, for example, that the pig Snowball represents Trotsky and the pig Napoleon represents Stalin.

### I. Literary Roots

The work to which *Animal Farm* is most often compared is *Gulliver’s Travels* (see, e.g., 1946 reviews by Edward Weeks in *The Atlantic* and Edmund Wilson in *The New Yorker*), although comparisons with *Candide* are also common. It is true that for *Animal Farm* Orwell draws inspiration from many satirists, including, of course, Voltaire (whom Orwell greatly admired) and Swift (on whom he wrote a lengthy and penetrating essay in 1946: "Politics Versus Literature: An Examination of *Gulliver’s Travels,*" in *CEJL,* Vol. 4). But it is to the moralizing beast fable that *Animal Farm* owes its form.

The beast fable is an ancient and apparently culturally universal satiric technique, as illustrated by such examples as Aristophanes’s plays *The Birds* and *The Wasps; The Panchatantra,* a collection of fables from India; Aesop’s *Fables; Reynard the Fox,* 1481 in the English version; and *Uncle Remus,* 1880, Harris’s reworking of traditional African folk tales into an American idiom and setting. Orwell was familiar with such tales of humanized animals, having read, among others, Beatrix Potter and Rudyard Kipling. In fact, one literary critic rather snidely says of *Animal Farm*:

This particular form of the nursery story has been borrowed from that cozy world prior to the first world war upon which ... Orwell was so ready to dwell. *Animal Farm* specifically reminds us of Kipling’s stories for children. The laws of the revolution that are painted on the wall of the cowshed and chanted by the animals clearly owe something to "The Law of the Jungle" in Kipling’s *Second Jungle Book.* Indeed, the central device of *Animal*
Farm, the convention of humanized animals, may also derive immediately from Kipling's Jungle Book. And Orwell's narrative tone is obviously modelled on that of the Just So Stories. (Alldritt, 1969; 149)

If, however, one is going to seek the inspiration for Animal Farm in Orwell's childhood reading, one could with at least as much justice turn to Beatrix Potter's Tales of Pigling Bland. According to Orwell's childhood friend, Jacinth Buddicom (1974:3a):

the genealogical tree of Animal Farm has its roots in Pigling Bland ... Eric and I were far too old for it, but we adored it all the same. I remember his reading it to me twice over from the beginning to end, to cheer me up one time when I had a cold. And we used to call each other Pigling Bland and Pigling in moments of frivolity.

One other work that provides a direct model for Animal Farm has been neglected, quite strangely, by the critics, perhaps because its author is currently out of literary favor. I have yet to find a critic who mentions Anatole France's Penguin Island as possible inspiration for Orwell. Yet his familiarity with this work is shown in "As I Please," June 23, 1944 (in CEJL, Vol. 3, pp. 172-175), in which Orwell praises Anatole France for his "passion for liberty and intellectual honesty," calls "Crainquebille' one of the best short stories I have ever read," and refers to the author's "comic history of France." Moreover, France's thinly disguised historical pastiche of the Frenchman as penguin, "a scathing satire of the entire course of French history" (Caute, 1968:v), offers striking parallels to Animal Farm in style and tone.

The two works share a pessimistic tone, an acerbic wit, and a wide-ranging historical scope. There are, of course, important differences between the two works: e.g., the beast fable element of Penguin Island is quickly dropped; its pessimism is less leavened by humor than that of Animal Farm; and its satire is often more in the nature of diatribe. Nonetheless, it seems obvious that Animal Farm owes at least as much to Anatole France as to Rudyard Kipling and that, as novelists and essayists, France and Orwell have much in common. Consider Orwell's comparison of Mark Twain and Anatole France in his essay on Twain. One could simply substitute Orwell's name for that of France with little loss of accuracy.

Both men were the spiritual children of Voltaire, both had an ironic, skeptical view of life, and a native pessimism overlaid by gaiety; both knew that the existing social order is a swindle and its cherished beliefs mostly delusions. Both were bigoted atheists and convinced ... of the unbearable cruelty of the universe. But there the resemblance ends. Not only is the Frenchman enormously more learned, more civilized, more alive aesthetically, but he is also more courageous. He does attack the things he disbelieves in; he does not, like Mark Twain, always take refuge behind the amiable mask of the "public figure" and the licensed jester. He is ready to risk the anger of the Church and to take the unpopular side in a controversy. ...("Mark Twain: The Licensed Jester." In CEJL, Vol. 2:327)

II. Animal Farm as Literature and Didactic

Animal Farm is the first work by Orwell which is other than grittily naturalistic. (See esp. DOPL, CD, RWP and HC.) Even Burmese Days, despite frequent lapses into purple prose, has descriptions of British colonial life which are carefully detailed and brutally precise. Animal Farm is subtitled "A Fairy Story," which has misled some critics, for "we are accustomed to think of the fairy story as the escapist form of literature par excellence." (Woodcock, 1966:7)
Indeed, *Animal Farm* is written so simply and entertainingly that in many libraries it will be found in the juvenile section as well as (if not instead of) the adult section. (cf. Blount, 1974:66-68)

There are two common mistakes in reading *Animal Farm*. The first is to confuse simplicity of form with simplicity of idea; the second is to fail to understand the importance of the events in *Animal Farm* as a form of political history. One persistent oversimplification of *Animal Farm* is typified by Laurence Brander's claim (1954:171, cited in Greenblatt, 1974:106) that *Animal Farm* was written by Orwell in a state where "the gaiety of his nature had completely taken charge ... writing about animals whom he loved." There are two errors here. The first is to overestimate the importance of the animal nature of the protagonists in *Animal Farm*. The second is to view the fable as in any way a happy one.

That Orwell was an animal lover there is no doubt. "Most of the good things in my childhood and up to the age of about twenty are in some way connected with animals." (SSWJ; cf. "Shooting an Elephant" in SE) However, although *Animal Farm* rests on an analogy between animals and the exploited underclass (echoed elsewhere by Orwell in his comparisons of the proles in *1984* to the beasts and of the plongeurs in *Down and Out in Paris and London* to imprisoned animals), it is quite absurd to attach undue importance to Orwell's love of animals as a key to *Animal Farm*. 5 "What is essential to the success of the satirical beast fable," as Ellen Douglas Leyburn observes, "is the author's power to keep his reader conscious simultaneously of the human traits satirized and of the animals as animals." (Leyburn, 1962:215, cited in Greenblatt, 1974:106) I am in flat disagreement with Christopher Hollis's assertion that

The animal fable, if it is to succeed at all ought clearly to carry with it a gay and light-hearted message. It must be full of comedy and laughter. The form is too far removed from reality to tolerate sustained bitterness. (Hollis, 1962:226)

*Animal Farm* contradicts Hollis's literary dictum that the animal fable cannot successfully encompass tragedy. Greenblatt is correct (1974:106-107) that Orwell uses the apparently frivolous form of the animal tale to convey a profoundly bitter message.

*Animal Farm* does indeed contain much gaiety and humor, but even in the most comic moments there is a disturbing current of cruelty or fear. ... While Snowball ... is organizing the Egg Production Committee for the hens, the Clean Tails Committee for the Cows, the Wild Comrade's Re-education Committee ... , the Whiter Wool Movement for the Sheep, Napoleon ... is carefully indoctrinating the dogs for his own evil purposes. Similarly, the "confessions" forced from the animals in Napoleon's great pages are very funny, but when the dogs tear the throats out of the "guilty" parties and leave a pile of corpses at the tyrant's feet, the scene ceases to amuse.

Keith Alldritt, one of several critics to commit the error of viewing *Animal Farm* as an unsophisticated work, writes that "the allegorical form in which *Animal Farm* is couched is a means for turning away from the disturbing complexities of experience rather than for confronting them." (Alldritt, 1969:149) Likening Orwell to Kipling—and a Kipling suitable only for the nursery at that—Alldritt belittles both the seriousness of purpose and the literary achievement of *Animal Farm*, dismissing it as written in a fashion which "allows only simple ideal, easy responses, and obvious conclusions." (Alldritt, 1969:149)
Aldritt gives as an example of Orwell's juvenile oversimplifying, "the emotional climax of the book, which comes when Boxer, the loyal and hard-working but unintelligent workhorse, emblematic of the 'common people,' is sold to knackers by the pig-commissars when he becomes too ill to work any more." Aldritt then asserts that

The feelings of simple compassion and absolutely righteous indignation which this incident is calculated to evoke may be tolerable in a nursery tale that has no pretensions to being anything other than a nursery tale. But in one which lays claim to offer the adult intelligence some feeling for the realities of modern social and political life, they cannot, because of their crudity and sentimentality, merit serious attention ...

He adds that "Whatever we may think of the Russian revolution or, for that matter of any revolution, we cannot but be aware that the crises of a society are much more complex than Orwell is here able to suggest." (Aldritt, 1969:148-149)

Aldritt's charges are misleading. As a story, Animal Farm is straightforward, engrossing, witty, and memorable. As a political fable, it is insightful and frighteningly accurate in its broad historical overview. Any description of events, whether it be literary or historical, excerpts from the minutiae of existence some key elements. On these the narrative is hung. Selectivity is inescapable. A work is judged at least in part by its success in capturing the "essentials." Furthermore, the fate of one individual animal (e.g., a Boxer or a Rubashov) may be more sympathetically portrayed than the most realistic picture of the deaths of thousands of "old Bolsheviks" or millions of Kulaks in the mass.6

In "Why I Write" (1947, in CJEL), Orwell says that "what I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. 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 I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention. ..." Orwell, a harsh critic, particularly of his own work, goes on to say "Animal Farm was the first book in which I tried, with full consciousness of what I was doing, to fuse political purpose and artistic purpose into one whole." In this, he achieved remarkable success.

The book generates that "willing suspension of disbelief" which allows full entrance into the world Orwell had created without a doubt of the animals's ability to communicate with each other or their ability to successfully rebel against humanity. (cf. Hollis, 1962:226) None of the animals ever acts in a way which seems, within the context of our suspension of disbelief, to be at variance with its animal nature. The characterizations: Boxer, the loyal Stakhanovite; Molly, the bourgeois luxury lover; the chickens, as Kulaks, unhappy with collectivization; the silly geese who confess to Trotskyite-inspired crimes of a preposterous nature are among those to ring delightfully true.

Orwell's choice of pigs as the "brain-worker" elite is biologically well-founded. Pigs are among the most intelligent of domestic animals. That pigs are also the villains of Animal Farm is consonant with common folk beliefs about the pig as a dirty, selfish, sluggish, brutish, refuse-eating animal. The terms "pig" and "swine" symbolize degradation in Christian parables (cf. "The Moral Pigsty" in Small, 1975: Chapter 4) and derivatives from these terms (e.g., "roadhog," "male chauvinist pig," "pig-headed") are invariably terms of abuse in western culture.7

One of the great virtues of Animal Farm is the unforced nature of both its prose and its narratives. Although we can recognize the actual sequence of historical events, the story in Animal Farm has a life of its own which does not seem dictated by purposes external to it; further, the story is comprehensible without stepping out of the context of the fable and ascending to a higher order of understanding.
Aldritt, while erring in his judgment of *Animal Farm*’s literary merit, is accurate in identifying the historical realities underlying the allegory:

We may identify old Major, the aged porker who has the dream and who provides the ideological impulse to the revolution, as Karl Marx, and we may recognize the quarrel between Napoleon and Snowball as representing the rift between Stalin and Trotsky. And we may like to find the allegorical counterparts of the treason trials, the emergence of the Soviet secret police, the drive for technological achievement, the perversion of the ideals of the revolution and the misuse of propaganda. (Aldritt, 1969:148)

Other critics, some perhaps because pro-Soviet attitudes blinded them to Orwell's thrust or because of a literary penchant for the "work-in-itself" or most simply because of unfamiliarity with Soviet history, read *Animal Farm* as a general satire on "plus ça change plus c'est la même chose," or on "the rule of the many by the few." (cf. Beresford, 1945:3; Blount, 1968:66-681) This view misses the point, which is well stated by Leonard Woodcock, a writer of anarchist persuasion who became a close friend of Orwell in the 1940s:

There was no doubt in Orwell's mind about his intentions in writing *Animal Farm*. He felt that the English in 1943 were allowing their admiration for the military heroism of the Russians to blind them to the faults of the Communist regime, and he also believed that the Communists were using their position as unofficial representatives of Russia in England to prevent the truth from being known, as they had done in Spain. *Animal Farm* was meant to set his compatriots thinking again. (Woodcock, 1966:193)

More generally, there is Orwell's statement in "Why I Write" (1947, in *CJEL*):

The Spanish War and other events in 1936-37 turned the scale and thereafter I knew where I stood. 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. ... [T]he more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's esthetic and intellectual integrity.

But the clearest statement of Orwell's purpose in writing *Animal Farm* and his inspirations for it is his preface to the 1947 Ukrainian Edition. Because the original English test of this edition was lost, it was not till it was retranslated from the Ukrainian in 1968 that it became readily available. (In *CEJL*, Vol. 3, pp. 402-406.) No one who reads this preface can doubt that *Animal Farm* was intended as an exposé of Soviet Communism or that it is based quite explicitly on incidents in Soviet history. Writes Orwell,

On my return from Spain, I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages ... Although the various episodes are taken from the actual history of the Russian Revolution, they are dealt with schematically and their chronological order is changed; this was necessary for the symmetry of the story. ... I included some events, for example the Teheran Conference, which were taking place when I was writing.

Having strongly warned against the folly of reading *Animal Farm* as if Stalin, the banishment of Trotsky, the Moscow Purge trials, etc. are irrelevant to its understanding, I will now sound a cautious note by endorsing, at least in part,
the views of B. T. Oxley on reading *Animal Farm* as allegory:

This book is not an allegory in which everything has to stand for something else. To read it this way reduces it to the level of a sophisticated crossword puzzle. Thus, there is no figure corresponding to Lenin (Major dies before the rising takes place); and the farm does take on a life of its own. The friendship between Clover and Boxer, or the cynicism of Benjamin do not need to be explained in terms of actual history. (Oxley, 1967:81)

So far so good, but I part company with Oxley when he continues:

It may be that, for those who know their history, the rebellion of the hens seems parallel to the rebellion of the Russian sailors at Kronstadt in 1921, or that the two farmers Frederick and Pilkington represent Germany and England. But it is not really necessary to an understanding of the book (and may lead to incorrect history) to work at this level of detail. (Oxley, 1967:81)

It is crucial to an understanding of *Animal Farm* to realize that Orwell was concerned not only with the internal dynamics of Soviet Communism but also with the hypocrisy underlying relations between states of purportedly antipathetic ideologies. To fail to draw the connections between, on the one hand, the timber sale to Frederick, Frederick's payment in counterfeit notes, and the subsequent attack on Animal Farm leading to the destruction of the windmill and, on the other hand, the zigs and zags in German-Soviet and Anglo-Soviet relations from the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939 to Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, is to miss the full irony of this section. So when another critic (Kubal, 1972:127) asserts, "The historical relevance, the fact that the author was satirizing the Soviet revolution is ... of comparatively minor importance," he is, in my view, quite wrong. Of course, Oxley is right when he claims that "Napoleon is presumably not given that name by accident, and the Russian Revolution is not the only one to have ended in dictatorship." (Oxley, 1967:81) But *Animal Farm* is not about the French Revolution and its aftermath or the rise to power of Hitler or, for that matter, the rise to power of Genghis Khan. As Orwell himself has made explicit: however many lessons of universal applicability it may contain, *Animal Farm* is about the Soviet Union 1917-1943.

Few genres are as fleeting as satire, because satire so heavily rests on topicality and immediate relevance. Most satire written before 1920, and most satire not originally meant for an English-speaking audience, is in fact incomprehensible to us without such detailed annotation as to make reading it an exercise in pedantry not pleasure. (Here, I call your attention to the content of, say, Johnson [1945]--which was inflicted on undergraduates for a number of decades.) Works of satire that last must be capable of being read on several different levels and of being enjoyed even by those oblivious to historical or literary allusions. Even when the allusions are lost, a large part of the bite must remain. *Animal Farm* fully meets these tests.

That *Animal Farm* recapitulates in condensed and symbolic form the history of the Soviet revolution does not prevent its being seized on as a general weapon in any antidictatorial or antitotalitarian cause; and Orwell's ghost would no doubt chortle with glee at such uses. Orwell was never an "anti-Communist" (as we currently use that phrase, often to describe a rabid zealot of the right); he was that rarer and quite different creature, an "anti-totalitarian." The sole reason that Orwell concentrated the bulk of his fire on totalitarianism of a left-wing variety was that he thought that England (and English intellectuals in particular) had more to fear from the seductiveness of the communist illusion than from its fascist counterpart--a view borne out by the political history of intellectuals in the 30s and 40s in Great...
Britain (and the U.S.).

However history-laden the details of Animal Farm may be, the antitotalitarian lessons it conveys are universal. In a mixed review of 1984 ("Although George Orwell's 1984 is a brilliant and fascinating novel, the nature of its fantasy is so absolutely final and relentless that I can recommend it only with a certain reservation.") Diana Trilling (1949:716-717) perceptively evaluates Orwell's broader themes in Animal Farm:

Even where, as in his last novel, Animal Farm, Mr. Orwell seemed to be concerned only with unmasking the Soviet Union for its dreamy admirers, he was urged on by something larger than sectarianism. What he was telling us is that all along the path the Soviet revolution has followed to the destruction of all the decent human values, there have stood the best ideals of modern social enlightenment. ... In the name of a higher loyalty, treacheries beyond imagination have been committed; in the name of Socialist equality, privilege has ruled unbridled; in the name of democracy and freedom, the individual has lived without public voice or private peace. ... [We] are being warned against the extremes to which the contemporary totalitarian spirit can carry us, not only so that we will be warned against Russia, but so that we will understand the ultimate dangers involved whenever power moves under the guise of order and rationality.

One last point: It is a grave error to see Snowball as the hero in Animal Farm, as does Laurence Brander, author of a full-length study of Orwell (Brander, 1954), who sees Snowball as "a symbol of altruism, the essential social virtue" and sees Snowball's expulsion as the defeat of "his altruistic laws for giving warmth, food and comfort to all the animals." (Brander, 1954:175 cited in Greenblatt, 1974:109) But as Greenblatt points out, "This is very touching, but unfortunately there is no indication that Snowball is any less corrupt or power-mad than Napoleon." (Greenblatt, 1974:109) As Orwell himself wrote, "Trotsky, in exile, denounces the Russian dictatorsip, but he is probably as much responsible for it as any man now living." (CEJL, Vol. 1:38; cited in Williams, 1971:63)

III. Animal Farm's Critical Debut

For a time it appeared as if the fate of Animal Farm would parallel that of Homage to Catalonia, in being rejected by Orwell's regular publisher and, upon publication, vilified by the Left. Homage at first sold only 900 copies and was eventually remaindered. Orwell attributed this reception largely to the left intellectuals's Russophile views which blinded them to the truth about the Communist party's role in the Spanish Civil War and led them to seek to suppress evidence unfavorable to the communists. He wrote:

I had discovered that it was almost impossible to get any publicity in the English press for a truthful account of what had been going on in Catalonia in May-June 1937 (mass imprisonments without trial, assassinations by the secret police, etc.). A number of people had said to me with varying degrees of frankness, that one must not tell the truth about what was happening in Spain, and the part played by the Communist Party, because to do so would be to prejudice public opinion against the Spanish government and so aid (the dictator) Franco. I do not agree with this view, because I hold the outmoded opinion that it does not pay to tell lies. ("Letter to Editor of Time and Tide," February 5, 1938, in CEJL, Vol. 1:297-298)

One influential figure, Kingsley Martin, editor of The New Statesman, epitomized for Orwell the person who acted on the point of view that "truth must bow to expediency and the Soviet Union can do no wrong":

As soon as I got out of Spain I wired from France asking if they [The New Statesman] would like an article and of course they said yes, but when they saw that my article was on the suppression of the POUM they said they couldn't print it. To sugar the pill they sent me to review a very good book which appeared recently, The Spanish Cockpit, which blows the gaff pretty well on what has been happening. But once again when they saw my review they couldn't print it, as it was against editorial policy. (cited in Pryce-Jones, 1971:144)

Victor Gollancz, publisher for the Left Book Club, and Orwell's regular publisher, had refused Orwell a book advance before he went to Spain, in anticipation of a probable rejection of Orwell's manuscript. Orwell's previous book for the Left Book Club, The Road to Wigan Pier, which had been commissioned by them, stirred a great deal of controversy upon its receipt. His outspoken views on the futility of intellectuals seeking to recruit workers to socialism by haranguing them with unintelligible and prolix Marxist rhetoric were not well received.

According to Philip Toynbee (Encounter, August 1959), The Road to Wigan Pier had been received "with considerable obloquy by Communists and fellow-travelers, but with enthusiasm by many". ... In The Daily Worker (which twice had reviewed earlier Orwell books quite favorably) Harry Pollitt discovered in Orwell "a disillusioned little middle-class boy" who had only to hear what Left Book circles would say about his work before resolving never to write again on any subject that he did not understand. From then on, it became standard practice on the far left to make some play about the Blair/Orwell change of name, and a mention of Eton and the Indian Imperial Police was almost obligatory. (Pryce-Jones, 1971:145)

The Daily Worker, not surprisingly, was even less pleased with Homage to Catalonia. It referred rather nastily to books produced by individuals who have splashed their eyes for a few months with Spanish blood. ... The value of the book is that it gives an honest picture of the sort of mentality that toys with revolutionary romanticism but shies violently at revolutionary discipline. It should be read as a warning. (cited in Pryce-Jones, 1971:146)

Although Gollancz had published Orwell's novel Coming Up for Air in 1939, he rejected the manuscript of Animal Farm. For him "the war-time alliance put the Russians beyond criticism." (Pryce-Jones, 1971:146)

Three English and some twenty American publishers followed Gollancz's lead and turned the book down for fear of upsetting a military ally, although some thought it was too short at 30,000 words to make a book at all. T. S. Eliot, editorial director of Faber and Faber, was among those who rejected it, and for some months Orwell was gloomy about the book's prospects. (Pryce-Jones, 1971:148)

Only one publisher, Secket and Warburg, was willing to accept Animal Farm, and even that publisher "dared not bring it out till the war was over." ("Letter to Frank Barker," September 3, 1945, in CELJ, Vol. 3:402) Thus the publication of Animal Farm was delayed for one year, to a point when in fact the Cold War had already begun and Russophile sentiments were muted or reversed. Until the publication of Animal Farm, Orwell had never been able to live on what he earned from writing alone; and indeed his literary earnings had been scant. After Animal Farm, Orwell was comfortably prosperous. The publisher with the wisdom to accept Animal Farm sold half a million copies within three years. (Pryce-Jones, 1971:148)

Reviews in the U.S. were largely favorable and in most cases enthusiastically so, judging by the abstracts in the 1949 volume of the Book Review Digest, which includes virtually all American political and literary journals of any

But there were negatives, too. The critics of a strong anti-communist bent said things like: "[T]he book saddened and puzzled 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." (George Soule, *The New Republic*, Vol. 115, September 2, 1946). "**Animal Farm** should have been written years ago; coming as it does in the wake of the event, it can only be called a backward work." (Isaac Rosenfeld, *The Nation*, Vol. 163, September 7, 1946) Some reviewers of a communist bent wrote for esoteric small circulation journals with pens dipped in venom: "To write **Animal Farm**, attacking the Soviet Union at the moment that the defenders of Stalingrad struck one of the decisive blows which won the war for the United Nations was for Blair/Orwell an act of integrity. Only incidentally did it bring him a fortune from reactionaries in this country and the U.S.A." (Arthur Calder Marshall, *Reynolds News*, 1949; cited in Pryce-Jones, 1971:149) "For Orwell, life is a dunghill." (Samuel Sillen, "Maggot-of-the-Month," *Masses and Mainstream*, Vol. 2, August 1949; reprinted in Howe, 1963:210)

**Kingsley Martin**, previously mentioned as *The New Statesman*'s editor, also came up with reasons for discounting **Animal Farm**. He admitted that the story had its truth and that the "shafts strike home." But the logic of Orwell's satire, he believed, is ultimate cynicism, and that could not be permitted. Orwell, he thought, "has not quite the courage to see that he has lost faith, not in Russia, but in mankind." (Pryce-Jones, 1971:150). To Martin's charge, Pryce-Jones rebuts:

> It was beside the point that Orwell had never had faith in Russia or in mankind, whatever faith in mankind may mean. The argument enabled the Socialist left to go in for a bit of doublethink: to accept that Orwell was a truthful, admirable, and perhaps great writer, but simultaneously to discount him because he was a pessimist ... offering neither hope nor solutions. (Pryce-Jones, 1971:150)

This overview of the initial critical reception of **Animal Farm** will close with citation of the view of K. T. Willis in the *Library Journal* (Vol. 71, August 1946): "Stimulating reading but not imperative for all libraries."

The whole story of **Animal Farm** and its delayed publication is filled with ironies of a sort that are humorous only in retrospect. For example, in 1947, Orwell gave permission for Ukrainian refugees in the American Zone in Germany and Belgium to translate **Animal Farm** into Ukrainian, charging them no fee. Of the 3500 copies of this edition, 1500 were confiscated by American authorities in Munich and handed over to Soviet officials. ("Letter to Arthur Koestler," September 20, 1947, in *CEJL*, Vol. 4:379) Furthermore, the English language version of Orwell's preface to this translation, which provides a Rosetta stone to the events in **Animal Farm**, was lost until some two decades later. Had that preface been better known, it is inconceivable that any critic would have dared to claim that **Animal Farm** was not an allegoric account of events in Soviet history. However, the central irony surrounding **Animal Farm** is that "a book written against the grain of prevailing public opinion should have appeared, eighteen months later, at a time when the political situation had changed and it could be used, eagerly, in what was becoming the Cold War." (Williams, 1971:69) Williams (1971:69) continues:
For a long time the book was inseparable from that ironic political context. Orwell was described on the left as having run "shrieking into the arms of the capitalist publishers" (Marxist Quarterly, January 1956) which was certainly not how it felt to him at the time ("I am having hell and all to find a publisher for it here though normally I have no difficulty in publishing my stuff."). At the same time, the book was undoubtedly used by people with whom Orwell had no sympathy and when followed by 1984 which was even more extensively used, it fixed a vision of Orwell which he, at least, would have considered misleading.

IV. Animal Farm as History

The story of Animal Farm is so well-known that I shall assume the reader is familiar with it in basic outline. The annotations provided in Table 1 and in the footnotes thereto are based on statements in Orwell's own writings (particularly those in CEJL); comments made by various Orwell scholars (especially Atkins, 1954; and Oxley, 1967); the discussion in several books on Soviet history and international relations (e.g., Wren, 1968, Kennan, 1960, Laqueur, 1965); but rest primarily on two books, Dallin (1944) and Fischer (1952), which are critical of the Soviet Union. According to Atkins (1954:223), "Orwell had read both these books and he received one." If so, he must have read the Fischer book in a preliminary manuscript form, since this book was not published till 1952 and refers to events in 1951 which took place after Orwell's death. In any case, both review Soviet history in terms which, I believe, Orwell would find familiar and not too distant from his own views (although, especially in the case of Fischer, probably too simplistically anti-communist for his taste).

To attempt to treat events in Animal Farm as literal history is, of course, absurd. Animal Farm is a fable and the correspondence between fable and reality involves metaphoric transformations, not one-to-one and onto mappings. Furthermore, as Orwell himself notes (see "Preface to Ukrainian Edition of Animal Farm," in CEJL, Vol. 4), in Animal Farm, he has taken liberties with chronology, and certain important details (e.g., the slave labor camps) are missing completely. Moreover, it is impossible to match in a simplminded way all the characters in Animal Farm with their historical equivalents since many (e.g., Molly, Boxer, the sheep, etc.) stand not for particular individuals but for types (e.g., Squealer is the spineless propagandist who parrots the party line in Pravda no matter how much it may zig or zag); and characters may also combine traits (e.g., Boxer is a Stakhanovite worker, but he is also a simple peasant who becomes a loyal-to-the-death convert to Animalism's revolutionary and utopian vision).

Nonetheless, to belabor a point already made in the discussion above, Animal Farm is based on Soviet history 1917-1943; and tracing the exact correspondences provides important insights into the irony, the wit, and the tremendous presence of the apt metaphor which underpin what, in my view, is Orwell's greatest work. Furthermore, it is foolish to assume that the post-revolution history of the Soviet Union is known even in broad compass (much less in detail) to most Americans, even those with a college education. Atkins remarked in 1954 that the average British "public library borrower does know whom Snowball, Squealer, and Boxer represent." (Atkins, 1954:223) My own experience in teaching Animal Farm to college students in both New York and California is that the majority of students who read the book in high school were not taught that it is about Soviet history and that only a handful were clever enough or knowledgeable enough to make that connection on their own.

Notes

1. This paper would have been impossible without the extraordinary assistance of my secretary Helen Wildman and that of Lillian White, Kathy Alberti, Nancy Kain, and other staff members of UCI's Word Processing Center in translating my handwritten scribbles into finished copy, and without the extensive library research performed by my research assistants Nancy Black and Beth McFadden at Irvine and by students in my course in "Political
Propaganda" at the State University of New York, Stony Brook.

To the extent that this article proves a contribution to Orwell scholarship it will be because I, a political scientist, have simply performed the somewhat tedious labor of inventorying events and individuals in *Animal Farm* and mapping them onto their historical counterparts. Not being an expert in Soviet history, I particularly welcome emendations to my classifications from historians and Sovietologists.

2. Kipling fell into what Orwell called the "good-bad" category, author of works which "reek of sentimentality ... , yet ... are capable of giving true pleasure to people who can see clearly what is wrong with them." ("Rudyard Kipling" in *CEJL*, Vol. 2) For Orwell, likening his work to that of Kipling would not have been the ultimate insult it apparently is for Alldritt. Furthermore, the biblical "Ten Commandments" and the observed-only-in-the-breach clauses of the much-heralded Soviet Constitution of 1936 are much more direct sources for the "Laws of Animalism" than is Kipling's "Law of the Jungle."

3. Once an extremely celebrated author, France's work has been denigrated since before his death in 1924. In his essay on France, Orwell attributes the author's fall from grace partly to political motives, asserting:

> He may or may not have been a great writer, but he was one of the symbolic figures in the politico-literary dogfight which has been going on for a hundred years or more. ... Anatole France had championed Dreyfus, which needed considerable courage; he had debunked Joan of Arc; he had written a comic history of France; above all, he had lost no opportunity of poking fun at the Church. ("As I Please," in *CEJL*, Vol. 3:173)

As Orwell catalogues France's traits, it is clear that, for him, this is a litany of virtues. A similar litany would be easy to generate for Orwell. It would be easy enough, too, to imagine events which would lead to the same virtually universal downgrading of Orwell's literary reputation as happened to France. Had Orwell lived somewhat longer, he might have made himself almost as unpopular with the Right who mistook him (on the basis of a misreading of *Animal Farm* and *1984*) for an anti-communist of the same breed as they, and with the Labor Party hacks who still don't know what to make of someone who equated socialism with "honesty" and "decency," and with the liberals who dislike being reminded that, if they really acted on their own professed beliefs, they wouldn't be having strawberries with cream while other human beings starve, as he still is with the dogmatic Left.

4. Critics have variously interpreted Orwell's intent in using the phrase "fairy story" as a subtitle for *Animal Farm*. According to the most plausible hypothesis, offered by Oxley (1967:80; emphasis ours), Orwell subtitled his book "A Fairy Story" to call attention to the Soviet Revolution as something which "had proved to be a disappointing illusion. This to many people in the West was what one of the potentially greatest experiments in political engineering ever undertaken had turned into, as the Russia of the 1917 Revolution became the Stalinist Russia of the thirties and forties." This interpretation of the intended meaning of "Fairy Story" is buttressed by Orwell's own statement in the preface to the Ukrainian edition of *Animal Farm* (*CEJL* Vol. 3:405):

> Nothing has contributed so much to the corruption of the original idea of Socialism as the belief that Russia is a Socialist country and that every act of its rulers must be excused, if not imitated. And so for the past ten years I have been convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement. On my return from Spain I thought of exposing the Soviet myth in a story that could be easily understood by almost anyone and which could be easily translated into other languages.
5. The analogy at the heart of *Animal Farm* arose from an incident witnessed by Orwell of "a little boy, perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the proletariat." (*CEJL*: 406)

6. A number of scholars have claimed that surpassing evil is not an appropriate target of satire; e.g., Highet (1962:23) writes:

> If Leibniz's theory of optimism had not been merely a superficial and silly hypothesis which could lead to nothing more than folly and eventual disillusionment, Voltaire could not have written a satire (*Candide*) about it. ... No one could write a successful satire on Attila or Genghis Khan or Hulagu with his pyramids of skulls. No one could satirize leprosy or cancer ... Some villains are too awful for us to despise. We can only shudder at them and in horror turn away--or try to write a tragedy. Against such crimes, satire is almost impotent. Against lesser crimes and against all follies it is a powerful weapon.

*Animal Farm* in large part belies this proscription. By focussing on the fates of individuals who are themselves clearly representative "types," Orwell reduces the magnitude of evil to a scale which permits the relief of laughter, while at the same time continuing to engender horror and disgust.

7. We might parenthetically note that the pig is much maligned. "Contrary to general opinion, the pig is a clean animal if given sanitary surroundings. Many pigs are forced to live in an unsanitary environment." (*Encyclopedia Brittanica*, Vol. 17, 1968, "Pig": p. 1070)

8. For example, John Gay's *Beggars' Opera* is an attack on the 18th century prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, depicted as the highwayman MacHeath: but we don't need to know this to enjoy Gay's wit (or its 20th century incarnation as Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*). Swift's *Gulliver* begins with a belief that men and women are reasonably honest and wise, but "finds stage by stage, that they are ridiculous midgets, disgusting giants, eccentric lunatics, and apelike anthropods." Of course, "Gulliver is not really voyaging to different countries, but looking at his society through distorting lenses." (*Hight*, 1962:159) *Gulliver's Travels* involves what were at the time thinly disguised, though to latter-day readers unversed in 18th century history, quite opaque allusions to personages in the royal courts of several European countries of Swift's day. For example, Flimnap, the Royal Treasurer (in Book I) is almost certainly the much satirized Prime Minister Walpole; but Swift's description of Flimnap's skill as a tightrope walker (a prerequisite for office in the Land of the Lilliputs) is barbed wit whoever its target may be--and its sting will be felt as long as there are politicians to be mocked (which is to say, forever) (Cf. Oxley, 1967:82.)

I don't wish to argue that the only satire that is worthwhile is that whose message is all on the surface. While *Gulliver's Travels* can be enjoyed without annotation, subtleties and even not-so-subtle points are lost through an inability to comprehend the author's intent. However enjoyable a satire may be when we read its surface meaning, it is difficult to appreciate irony when we aren't in on the joke; knowing the context helps us to appreciate the satirist's skills. An adult should not expect to read a *Gulliver's Travels* or an *Animal Farm* at the same level of understanding or, indeed, with the same innocent pleasure, as when first read as a young adult or child. For the adult rereading a classic work of satire, what was once merely comic may now be perceived as pathos or even tragedy.

9. Oxley (1967:82) points out that "*Animal Farm* was apparently serialized some years ago in an opposition newspaper in Ghana under the Nkrumah regime, and for its readers then, Napoleon presumably took on another, more local meaning."
10. Edward Hyams, the author of The New Statesman's official history, writes that Orwell came back to Britain with a blistering series of articles attacking the Spanish government and that Martin did not disbelieve them. But "The New Statesman had become a committed paper while recognizing that, Fascism defeated, we might then have to fight for our principles against the worst elements in Communism." Deciding that The New Statesman had "the mentality of a whore," Orwell as an alternative published his views on Spain in The New English Weekly where his Homage to Catalonia would also receive one of its most perceptive reviews, from Philip Mairet: "It shows us the heart of innocence that lies in revolution; also the miasma of lying that, far more than the cruelty, takes the heart out of it."

11. One of the ironies concerning Animal Farm, which as far as I'm aware has not previously been pointed out, is that concerning a too facile equation of Orwell and Swift. Consider Orwell's judgment of Swift, "Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels" (CEJL, Vol. 4:207; with some sentence reordering):

   Politically, Swift was one of those people who are driven into a sort of perverse Toryism by the follies of the progressive party of the moment. Part I of Gulliver's Travels, ostensibly a satire on human greatness, can be seen if one looks a little deeper, to be simply an attack on England, on the dominant Whig Party, and on the war with France, which--however bad the motives of the Allies may have been--did save Europe from being tyrannised over by a single reactionary power ... [N]o one would deny that Gulliver's Travels is a rancorous as well as a pessimistic book, and that ... it often descends into political partisanship of a narrow kind.

Substitute Russia for England, Communist for Whig, and Germany for France, Orwell for Swift, and Animal Farm for Gulliver's Travels, and this could be a Left polemic against Orwell and Animal Farm!

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This essay has a very simple aim: to rescue Animal Farm from the often repeated claim that it is merely a children's story and to demonstrate how closely its events are tied to the events of Soviet political history.