



The execution

The following text shows the animals of the farm while they experience Napoleon's brutal methods and see the disillusionment of their revolutionary ideals.

George Orwell
Animal Farm
(1945)

Chapter 7

Napoleon stood sternly¹ surveying his audience; then he uttered a high-pitched whimper². Immediately the dogs bounded forward, seized³ four of the pigs by the ear and dragged them, squealing with pain and terror, to Napoleon's feet. The pigs' ears were bleeding, the dogs had tasted blood, and for a few moments they appeared to go quite mad. To the amazement of everybody, three of them flung themselves⁴ upon Boxer. Boxer saw them coming and put out his great hoof⁵, caught a dog in mid-air, and pinned him to the ground. The dog shrieked for mercy and the other two fled with their tails between their legs. Boxer looked at Napoleon to know whether he should crush the dog to death or let it go. Napoleon appeared to change countenance, and sharply ordered Boxer to let the dog go, whereat Boxer lifted his hoof, and the dog slunk away, bruised⁶ and howling.

Presently the tumult died down. The four pigs waited, trembling, with guilt written on every line of their countenances. Napoleon now called upon them to confess their crimes. They were the same four pigs as had protested when Napoleon abolished the Sunday Meetings. Without any further prompting they confessed that they had been secretly in touch with Snowball ever since his expulsion, that they had collaborated with him in destroying the windmill⁷, and that they had entered into an agreement with him to hand over Animal Farm to Mr Frederick. They added that Snowball had privately admitted to them that he had been Jones's secret agent for years past. When they had finished their confession, the dogs promptly tore their throats out⁸, and in a terrible voice Napoleon demanded whether any other animal had anything to confess.

The three hens⁹ who had been the ringleaders¹⁰ in the attempted rebellion over the eggs now came forward and stated that Snowball had appeared to them in a dream and incited them to disobey Napoleon's orders. They, too, were slaughtered. Then a goose came forward and confessed to having secreted six ears of corn¹¹ during the last year's harvest and eaten them in the night. Then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool – urged to do this, so she said, by Snowball – and two other sheep confessed to having murdered an old ram¹², an especially devoted follower of Napoleon, by chasing him round and round a bonfire¹³ when he was suffering from a cough. They were all slain on the spot¹⁴. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones.

When it was all over, the remaining animals, except for the pigs and dogs, crept away in a body¹⁵. They were shaken and miserable. They did not know which was more shocking – the treachery¹⁶ of the animals who had leagued themselves with Snowball, or the cruel retribution they had just witnessed. [...] They had made their way on to the little knoll where the half-finished windmill stood, and with one accord they all lay down as though huddling together¹⁷ for warmth – Clover, Muriel, Benjamin, the cows, the sheep, and a whole flock of geese and hens – everyone, indeed, except the cat, who had suddenly disappeared just before Napoleon ordered the animals to assemble. For some time nobody spoke. Only Boxer remained on his feet. He fidgeted¹⁸ to and fro, swishing¹⁹ his long black tail against his sides, and occasionally uttering a little whinny²⁰ of surprise. 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.'

And he moved off at his lumbering trot²¹ and made for the quarry²². Having got there, he collected two successive loads²³ of stone and dragged them down to the windmill before retiring for the night.

- 1 sternly. Severamente.
- 2 high-pitched whimper. Gemito acuto.
- 3 seized. Afferrarono.
- 4 flung themselves. Si lanciarono.
- 5 hoof. Zoccolo.
- 6 slunk away, bruised. Scappò via, ferito.
- 7 windmill. Mulino a vento.
- 8 tore their throats out. Li sgozzarono.
- 9 hens. Galline.
- 10 ringleaders. Capobanda.
- 11 ears of corn. Pannocchie di granturco.
- 12 ram. Montone.
- 13 bonfire. Falò.
- 14 slain on the spot. Uccisi sul posto.
- 15 crept away in a body. Strisciarono via in massa.
- 16 treachery. Tradimento.
- 17 huddling together. Stringendosi gli uni agli altri.
- 18 He fidgeted. Si muoveva inquieto.
- 19 swishing. Frusciando.
- 20 whinny. Nitrito.
- 21 lumbering trot. Trotto pesante.
- 22 quarry. Cava.
- 23 loads. Carichi.



50 The animals huddled about Clover, not speaking. The knoll where they were lying gave them a wide prospect across the countryside. Most of Animal Farm was within their view – the long pasture stretching down to the main road, the hayfield, the spinney²⁴, the drinking pool, the ploughed fields where the young wheat²⁵ was thick and green, and the red roofs of the farm buildings with the smoke curling from the chimneys. It was a clear spring evening. The grass and the bursting hedges were gilded
55 by the level rays of the sun. Never had the farm – and with a kind of surprise they remembered that it was their own farm, every inch of it their own property – appeared to the animals so desirable a place. As Clover looked down the hillside her eyes filled with tears. If she could have spoken her thoughts, it would have been to say that this
60 was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to work for the overthrow of the human race. These scenes of terror and slaughter were not what they had looked forward to on that night when Old Major first stirred them to rebellion. If she herself had had any picture of the future, it had been of a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip²⁶, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the
65 strong protecting the weak, as she had protected the last brood of ducklings²⁷ with her foreleg on the night of Major's speech. Instead – she did not know why – they had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed²⁸ everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades²⁹ torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes. [...] Such were her thoughts, though she lacked the words to
70 express them.

At last, feeling this to be in some way a substitute for the words she was unable to find, she began to sing 'Beasts of England'. The other animals sitting round her took it up, and they sang it three times over – very tunefully, but slowly and mournfully, in a way they had never sung it before.

75 They had just finished singing it for the third time when Squealer, attended by two dogs, approached them with the air of having something important to say. He announced that, by a special decree³⁰ of Comrade Napoleon, 'Beasts of England' had been abolished. From now onwards it was forbidden to sing it.

The animals were taken aback³¹.

80 'Why?' cried Muriel.

'It is no longer needed, comrade,' said Squealer stiffly. 'Beasts of England' was the song of the Rebellion. But the Rebellion is now completed. The execution of the traitors this afternoon was the final act. The enemy both external and internal has been defeated. In 'Beasts of England' we expressed our longing for a better society in days to
85 come. But that society has now been established. Clearly this song has no longer any purpose.'

- 24 the hayfield, the spinney. Il prato da falciare, il boschetto.
25 wheat. Frumento.
26 whip. Frusta.
27 brood of ducklings. Covata di anatroccoli.
28 roamed. Erravano, vagabondavano.
29 comrades. Compagni.
30 decree. Decreto.
31 were taken aback. Furono presi alla sprovvista, colti di sorpresa.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their meaning.

- 1 punishment
- 2 groaning
- 3 group
- 4 expression of the face
- 5 golden
- 6 desire
- 7 sadly
- 8 hill
- 9 examining
- 10 brutally killed



COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT**2 READ** the text again and define

- the setting;
- the characters involved;
- the situation.

3 MATCH these references to the history of USSR between 1917 and 1943 with their corresponding symbols in the text. Some have been provided for you.

- 1 Stalin →
- 2 The Kremlin →
- 3 Stalin's secret police →
- 4 The representatives of the proletariat →
- 5 Trotsky → *Snowball*
- 6 Hitler →
- 7 Tsar Nicholas II →
- 8 The five-year plans → *the Windmill*
- 9 Stalin purge trials in the 1930s →
- 10 Marx → *Old Major*
- 11 'L'Internationale' →
- 12 The propagandist of the regime →

COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**4 DECIDE** whether the narrator interferes with the narration. From whose point of view is the story narrated?**5 DISCUSS.** *Animal Farm* is a beast fable. What is the advantage of this form? Do you think the novel would be more effective in another form?**6 FOCUS** on the way the animals are portrayed.

- 1 Analyse the figure of Napoleon. Write down his actions. How is his personality connoted? Does his name suit his role?
- 2 Now concentrate on Boxer. What does the choice of his name suggest? Complete the table below with the words and phrases referring to the traits of his species and those conveying his symbolical role.

Traits of his species	Symbolical role

7 CONSIDER the character of Clover.

- 1 Go through Clover's reflections after the execution and underline the words and phrases denoting her character. Then say what she is like.
- 2 Clover can be regarded as Orwell's spokesman. What subject do her reflections bring about?

8 DISCUSS. The confession and execution of the animals marks a crucial point in the book. What themes does it introduce? What do they suggest about Orwell's political views?



➤ COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

9 DISCUSS. Compare this text with Text Bank 106 as regards the lives of the animals under Farmer Jones and under Napoleon.

10 DISCUSS. Draw a comparison between *Animal Farm* and any classic fairy tale or fable in which animals are the protagonists.