

Short Story Criticism



SSC

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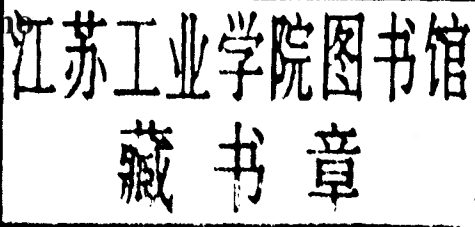


Volume 68

Short Story Criticism

Criticism of the
Works of Short Fiction Writers

Joseph Palmisano
Project Editor



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Short Story Criticism, Vol. 68

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Preface

Short Story Criticism (SSC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest short story writers and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical materials to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the authors of short fiction. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on short story writers. Although major short story writers are covered in such Gale series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), and *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to writers of the short story genre.

Scope of the Series

SSC is designed to serve as an introduction to major short story writers of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, SSC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately eight to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of an SSC volume.

Organization of the Book

An SSC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by the title of the work and its date of publication.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises short story collections, novellas, and novella collections. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All short story, novella, and collection titles by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the

beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *SSC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** lists all short story, novella, and collection titles contained in the *SSC* series. Titles of short story collections, separately published novellas, and novella collections are printed in italics, while titles of individual short stories are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *SSC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

Citing Short Story Criticism

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association (MLA) style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<i>Animal Farm</i>	1
<i>Entry devoted to the political satire by George Orwell</i>	
<i>Bloodline</i>	63
<i>Entry devoted to the only collection of short stories by Ernest J. Gaines</i>	
Rosario Castellanos 1925-1974	125
<i>Mexican poet, short story writer, novelist, and essayist</i>	
Kate Chopin 1851-1904	158
<i>American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, diarist, and memoirist</i>	
Aidan Higgins 1927-	275
<i>Irish novelist, short story writer diarist, travel writer, essayist, and autobiographical fiction writer</i>	
David Foster Wallace 1962-	312
<i>American novelist, short story writer, and essayist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 349

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 447

SSC Cumulative Nationality Index 457

SSC-68 Title Index 461

Animal Farm

George Orwell

(Pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair) English novelist, essayist, critic, journalist, and memoirist.

INTRODUCTION

The following entry presents criticism of Orwell's short novel *Animal Farm*, which was published in 1945.

Animal Farm (1945) is considered one of Orwell's most popular and enduring works. Utilizing the form of the animal fable, the short novel chronicles the story of a group of barnyard animals that revolt against their human masters in an attempt to create a utopian state. On a larger scale, commentators widely view *Animal Farm* as an allegory for the rise and decline of socialism in the Soviet Union and the emergence of the totalitarian regime of Joseph Stalin. Critics regard the story as an insightful and relevant exploration of human nature as well as political systems and social behavior. After its translation into Russian, it was banned by Stalin's government in all Soviet-ruled areas.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The story opens as the barnyard animals of Manor Farm discuss a revolution against their master, the tyrannical and drunken farmer Mr. Jones. Old Major, an aging boar, gives a rousing speech in the barn urging his fellow animals to get rid of Jones and rely on their own efforts to keep the farm running and profitable. Identified as the smartest animals in the group, the pigs—led by the idealistic Snowball and the ruthless Napoleon—successfully plan and lead the revolution. After Jones and his wife are forced from the farm, the animals look forward to a society where all animals are equal and live without the threat of oppression. But soon, the pigs begin to assume more power and adjust the rules to suit their own needs. They create and implement an ideological system, complete with jingoistic songs and propaganda as well as strict rules. Once partners and friends, Napoleon and Snowball disagree on several issues regarding the governing of the farm. Snowball's attempted coup is repelled by a pack of wild dogs—



controlled by Napoleon—who also enforce punishment against the other animals when they oppose or question Napoleon's rule. Before long, the pigs separate themselves from the other animals on the farm and begin to indulge in excessive drinking and other decadent behavior. Under the protection of the dogs, they consolidate their iron-fisted rule and begin eliminating any animal they consider useless or a threat to their power. *Animal Farm* ends with the majority of the animals in the same position as in the beginning of the story: disenfranchised and oppressed under a corrupt and brutal governing system.

MAJOR THEMES

Critics note that like many classical animal fables, *Animal Farm* is an allegory—in this case, of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin's tyrannical government. It is generally accepted that Orwell constructed his story to reflect this purpose: Manor Farm represents

Russia; Mr. Jones is the tsar; the pigs represent the Bolsheviks, the bureaucratic power elite; Snowball is Leon Trotsky, who lost a power struggle with Stalin; Napoleon is Stalin; and Napoleon's dogs are Stalin's secret police, known as the GPU. The corruption of absolute power is a major theme in *Animal Farm*. As most of the animals hope to create a utopian system based on the equality of all animals, the pigs—through greed and ruthlessness—manipulate and intimidate the other animals into subservience. Critics note that Orwell was underlining a basic tenet of human nature: some will always exist who are more ambitious, ruthless, and willing to grab power than the rest of society and some within society will be willing to give up power for security and structure. In that sense *Animal Farm* is regarded as a cautionary tale, warning readers of the pitfalls of revolution.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Animal Farm is regarded as a successful blend of political satire and animal fable. Completed in 1944, the book remained unpublished for more than a year because British publishing firms declined to offend the country's Soviet allies. Finally the small leftist firm of Secker & Warburg printed it, and the short novel became a critical and popular triumph. It has been translated into many languages but was banned by Soviet authorities throughout the Soviet-controlled regions of the world because of its political content. As a result of the book's resounding commercial success, Orwell was freed from financial worries for the first time in his life. A few years after its publication, it attracted critical controversy because of its popularity amongst anticommunist factions in the United States; Orwell was alarmed that these forces were using his short novel as propaganda for their political views. In the subsequent years, *Animal Farm* has been interpreted from feminist, Marxist, political, and psychological perspectives, and it is perceived as an important and relevant book in the post-World War II literary canon. Moreover, it is considered one of Orwell's most lasting achievements.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Short Fiction

Animal Farm (short novel) 1945
The Complete Works. 20 vols. (novels, short novel, essays, diaries, and letters) 1986-1998

Other Major Works

Down and Out in Paris and London (nonfiction) 1933
Burmese Days (novel) 1934

A Clergyman's Daughter (novel) 1935
Keep the Aspidistra Flying (novel) 1936
The Road to Wigan Pier (nonfiction) 1937
Homage to Catalonia (nonfiction) 1938
Coming Up for Air (novel) 1939
Inside the Whale, and Other Essays (essays) 1940
The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius (essays) 1941
Critical Essays (essays) 1946; also published as *Dickens, Dali, and Others* 1946
James Burnham and the Managerial Revolution (nonfiction) 1946
The English People (essays) 1947
Nineteen Eighty-Four (novel) 1949
Shooting an Elephant, and Other Essays (essays) 1950
England Your England, and Other Essays (essays) 1953; also published as *Such, Such Were the Joys* 1953
The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell. 4 vols. (essays, letters, and diaries) 1968

CRITICISM

Times Literary Supplement (review date 25 August 1945)

SOURCE: Review of *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell. *Times Literary Supplement* (25 August 1945): 401.

[In the following review, the reviewer considers Orwell's views on revolution and dictatorship as expressed in *Animal Farm*.]

Animals, as Swift well knew, make admirable interpreters of the satiric intention, and Mr. George Orwell has turned his farm into a persuasive demonstration of the peculiar trick the whip wrested from the hands of a tyrant has of turning itself into a lash of scorpions and attaching itself to the new authority. The animals are naturally pleased with themselves when they rise in revolutionary fervour and chase the drunken farmer off his own land, and their enthusiasm survives the prospect of the labour and discipline that lie before them if the farm is to be properly worked. From the first, however, there are inequalities of brain and muscle, and the pigs gradually assume the intellectual leadership. The revolution changes its shape and form, but lip-service is still paid to its first precepts; if they become more and more difficult to reconcile with the dictatorial policies of the large Berkshire boar, Napoleon, such a loyal and

simple creature as Boxer, the carthorse, is ready to blame his own stupidity rather than the will to power working in those who have the means to power in their trotters.

Even more powerful than Napoleon is Squealer, Napoleon's publicity agent, who justifies every reactionary decree by arguing that it is really in the animals' own interest and persuades them that to add to the seventh commandment of the revolution, "All animals are equal," the rider "but some animals are more equal than others," is not to tamper with the principle of equality. Dictatorship is evil, argues Mr. Orwell with a pleasant blend of irony and logic while busily telling his fairy story, not only in that it corrupts the characters of those who dictate, but in that it destroys the intelligence and understanding of those dictated to until there is no truth anywhere and fear and bewilderment open the way for tyranny ferocious and undisguised. Mr. Orwell's animals exist in their own right, and his book is as entertaining as narrative as it is apposite in satire [*Animal Farm*].

C. M. Woodhouse (essay date 6 August 1954)

SOURCE: Woodhouse, C. M. "Animal Farm." *Times Literary Supplement* (6 August 1954): xxx-xxxi.

[In the following essay, Woodhouse discusses *Animal Farm* as a fairy tale.]

In the sixth volume of *The Second World War*, Sir Winston Churchill has described the scene at Potsdam in July, 1945, when from a little distance he watched President Truman tell Marshal Stalin of the great event that was to take place in the following month; the latest triumph of western genius, the masterpiece that was destined so profoundly to affect the history of the world. The Marshal showed polite interest, the mildest of curiosity that barely rose above the level of indifference, and no comprehension whatever. Sir Winston was sure, he tells us,

that he had no idea of the significance of what he was being told. . . . If he had had the slightest idea of the revolution in world affairs which was in progress his reactions would have been obvious. . . . But his face remained gay and genial. . . .

According to President Truman, he did not even ask a single question.

What Marshal Stalin was being told about was not, though as a matter of mere chronological chance it could have been, the imminent publication of a little book called *Animal Farm*, which appeared on the bookshelves in the same month in which the atomic bomb hit

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No doubt the Marshal's reaction would have been much the same if it had been; and perhaps—though this is still a very much longer shot—his reaction would have been just as inappropriate. It was nothing but an arbitrary coincidence that brought these two events together in August, 1945, though they took almost equally long to prepare: George Orwell's whole life was spent in preparation of *Animal Farm*, and the text itself bears the dates "November, 1943—February, 1944," months when the Manhattan project was also moving towards a climax. But it was a coincidence that must have given Orwell a sad, ironic satisfaction: for there are those who have argued that, looked at in a wider historical context, the first atomic bombs were aimed at a quite different political target which had nothing to do with the Japanese war; and there are others who have convinced themselves that *Animal Farm* was also aimed at a political target—the same one. Orwell himself might perhaps have admitted to agreeing with both interpretations; but he would also surely have argued that his personal enemy was no single individual or government—it was the system of the world capable of producing and using atomic bombs. In this case the coincidence of August, 1945, was even more remarkable. Disciples of Professor Toynbee yet unborn may well point to it as one of history's most striking conjunctions of challenge and response.

These are early days to claim that the pen is mightier than the atomic bomb; but Orwell would not have flinched from the confrontation. It is not much more than one hundred years since Bulwer Lytton discovered for us that the pen is mightier than the sword, already then an obsolescent weapon, and even that only Beneath the rule of men entirely great, a sufficiently rare state of affairs. In the last hundred years enough has happened to justify us in believing that the pen's response to the challenge of force is at least not ludicrous and hopeless; indeed, it is perhaps the one serious hope we have. Certainly it would not have seemed ludicrous to Sir Winston Churchill to have spoken in the context of 1945 of a book instead of a bomb, for the pen has always been the first weapon in his armoury; and with it he won the most crucial victory in the history of our race, in the battle that was joined with the words: "We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. . . ." Sir Winston had the advantage, it is true (though it is also true that he furnished that advantage himself), of proving Bulwer's epigram in the exact conditions required by Bulwer's qualifying line. George Orwell had come to doubt before he died (at any rate, when he wrote 1984) whether those conditions would ever be seen on earth again. But there is no doubt whatever that it was a purpose of the same kind that Orwell was setting himself to achieve by his writings, and especially when he wrote *Animal Farm*.

If the book itself had left any doubt of the matter, Orwell dispelled it in an article which he called "Why I Write" a few years later:

Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism . . . *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 the criticisms of some of his contemporaries which Orwell wrote even earlier than *Animal Farm*, his recurrent theme was their failure to protest against the world they lived in. This is the whole burden of his longest and most serious piece of literary criticism, written in 1940 on Henry Miller; and he called it "Inside the Whale" to illustrate this same point, that Miller had failed in his duty to protest, had "performed the essential Jonah act of allowing himself to be swallowed, remaining passive, *accepting*." In the same essay he criticized a line of Mr. Auden's poem "Spain":

The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder,

with the comment that: "it could only be written by a person to whom murder is at most a *word*. Personally I would not speak so lightly of murder." It is odd, then, to find that in *Animal Farm* he does speak just so lightly of murder; that in fact he places on record a score of murders without a measurable flicker of emotion in excess of Mr. Auden's. It is odder still, at first sight, to find *Animal Farm* sub-titled "A Fairy Story"; for we are accustomed to think of the fairy-story as the escapist form of literature *par excellence*.

In what sense can *Animal Farm* properly be called a fairy-story? It tells how the animals captured the Manor Farm from its drunken incompetent farmer; how they changed its name to Animal Farm and established it as a model community in which all animals were equal; how two pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, gained control of the revolution and fought each other for the mastery; how the neighbouring humans reacted and counter-attacked and were beaten off; how Napoleon ousted Snowball and declared him a traitor; how economic necessity compelled the animals to compromise with the human system; how Napoleon negotiated an alliance with the human enemy and exploited it to establish his personal dictatorship; how the farm learned that "some animals are more equal than others" and their last state was as bad as their first; and how the ruling pigs became daily more and more indistinguishable from their human neighbours. There is little here at first sight that we associate with the fairy-story: there is no element of magic, once the initial convention of zoomorphism is accepted; there is no happy ending, except one for the villains; there is no Prince Charming or maiden in dis-

tress or sentimental interest of any kind, beyond the personal tragedy of the cart-horse Boxer and the frivolous vanity of the white mare Mollie. The fairy-story is an elastic category—Andrew Lang included *A Voyage to Lilliput* in the very first of his coloured fairy-books; and certainly not all the conventional ingredients are essential to a fairy-story. Yet it would be natural to suppose that at least some of them ought to be found there; and at first sight it is tempting to conclude that Orwell wrote his sub-title with his tongue in his cheek, and to read *Animal Farm* with our tongues in ours. And then it is impossible to understand why the book has had such a world-wide appeal to human sentiment in the past nine years, for books written in a mere spirit of teasing do not.

In fact Orwell was a deep lover of words who never consciously misused them. If he said he had written a fairy-story with a political purpose, we cannot lightly suppose he spoke lightly. A political purpose suggests some kind of moral, and that suggests rather the fable, the medium of Aesop or La Fontaine or even Thurber. There have been fairy-stories purporting to have morals before now: Rimsky-Korsakov called *Le Coq d'Or* "a fairy-tale with a moral," though no one except possibly the Russian Imperial Censor (who objected to the original version of the opera as subversive) has ever been able to detect what it was. There is something freakish about the idea, anyway, which makes it seem unlikely to stir the emotions of the common reader; and it is impossible to attach a moral in any familiar sense to *Animal Farm*, where wickedness ends in triumph and virtue is utterly crushed. There is perhaps a moral for farmers: don't take to drink and let your animals get out of hand; but, even so, the villains will be comforted to find that everything comes out all right for them in the end. For the downtrodden animals there is nothing but misery, cruelty and injustice; and in place of a moral there is only the tragic chorus of the donkey Benjamin, who held that "life would go on as it had always gone on—that is, badly." This is not like the kind of moral that tells us to look before we leap or not to count our boobies before they are hatched. For the animals never had a chance to choose, and if they had it would have made no difference.

It is just this sense of purposeless cruelty, though, that gives the clue to Orwell's purpose, as well as to his deadly serious reason for calling *Animal Farm* a fairy-story. The point about fairy-stories is that they are written not merely without a moral but without a morality. They take place in a world beyond good and evil, where people (or animals) suffer or prosper for reasons unconnected with ethical merit—for being ugly or beautiful respectively, for instance, or for even more unsatisfactory reasons. A little girl sets out to do a good deed for her grandmother and gets gobbled up by a wolf; a young rogue escapes the gallows (and gets an old Jew hanged

instead) by his talent on the fiddle; dozens of young princes die horrible deaths trying to get through the thorn-hedge that surrounds the Sleeping Beauty, just because they had the bad luck to be born before her hundred-year curse expired; and one young prince, no better or worse, no handsomer or uglier than the rest, gets through merely because he has the good luck to arrive just as the hundred years are up; and so on and so on. Even when Grimm's step-mothers are called "wicked," it is well to remember that in German their *Bosheit* is viciousness and bad temper, not moral guilt. For all this is related by the fairy-story tellers without approval or disapproval, without a glimmer of subjective feeling, as though their pens were dipped in surgical spirit to sterilize the microbes of emotion. They never seek to criticize or moralize, to protest or plead or persuade; and if they have an emotional impact on the reader, as the greatest of them do, that is not intrinsic to the stories. They would indeed only weaken that impact in direct proportion as soon as they set out to achieve it. They move by not seeking to move; almost, it seems, by seeking not to move.

The fairy-story that succeeds is in fact not a work of fiction at all; or at least no more so than, say, the opening chapters of Genesis. It is a transcription of a view of life into terms of highly simplified symbols; and when it succeeds in its literary purpose, it leaves us with a deep indefinable feeling of truth; and when it succeeds also, as Orwell set out to do, in a political as well as an artistic purpose, it leaves us also with a feeling of rebelliousness against the truth revealed. It does so not by adjuring us to rebel, but by the barest economy of plain description that language can achieve; and lest it should be thought guilty of a deliberate appeal to the emotions, it uses for characters not rounded, three-dimensional human beings that develop psychologically through time, but fixed stereotypes, puppets, silhouettes—or animals. (A specially good instance is *The Adventures of Pinocchio*: for Pinocchio was in fact a wooden puppet; and when at last, by acquiring a heart and a conscience, he became a little boy instead, at that exact point, with a sure instinct, Collodi brought the whole matter to a full-stop, since he was writing a fairy-tale and not a didactic children's romance.) In these respects *Animal Farm* is after all correctly labelled a fairy-story. Its message (which is by no means a moral) is that of all the great fairy-stories: "Life is like that—take it or leave it." And because it is written by a poet, our reaction is like that of another poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, to another (not so very different) situation:

I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

To argue thus is to class Orwell among the poets; and that is not absurd. It happens that when he wrote in verse, the results were not particularly distinguished. The song in *Animal Farm*, "Beasts of England," is not

a fair example, since it was no more intended to be poetry than "God Save the Queen": it is in fact a happy example of what Professor Collingwood, in his aesthetic theory, used to call "magic art." But there are a few examples in Orwell's other works (in the posthumous collection of essays, *England Your England*, for example) which do purport to be poetry, and as such fail. Orwell was a poet who happened to find his medium in prose; a poet not so much in his means of expression as in the nature of his vision, which could strip the sprawling tangle of the world around him down to its core with the simplicity of a timeless flash of intuition (the sort of intuition enjoyed by Dionysiacs, according to Plato, or by epileptics, according to Dostoevsky, or by devotees of mescaline, according to Mr. Aldous Huxley); and which then turned deliberately to the most ascetically plain tools of expression to communicate it. He was the kind of prose-writer whom poets accepted as one of themselves, as Shelley accepted Herodotus, Plato, Livy, Plutarch, Bacon, and Rousseau among the poets he was defending in *A Defence of Poetry*. And Shelley, who may be supposed to have known his business, would surely have been glad to accept a writer who so confidently supported, and strove so stubbornly to substantiate, his own claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Is the claim justified of Orwell? Clearly, not yet; and even for the future, only by offering precarious hostages to fortune. But everything has been a bit precarious since August, 1945, when *Animal Farm* and its formidable twin first saw the light of day together. Which of the two has so far made the biggest impression—there is no blinding or deafening ourselves to that; but Orwell's still, small voice has also made itself continuously heard in its own quiet, persistent, almost nagging way. Already there have been momentary intervals in the nuclear uproar of the mid-twentieth century when its steady, reassuring murmur has come through. Already in a score of countries and a dozen languages *Animal Farm* has made its peculiar mark in translation and in strip-cartoon (one of the most appropriate of modern vehicles for a fairy-story); and the political flavour of its message at least, whether rightly or wrongly particularized, has not been lost in the transcription. Already Orwell has launched the "long haul" of wresting back some of those cardinal, once meaningful, words like "equality," "peace," "democracy," which have been fraudulently converted into shibboleths of political warfare; and already it is impossible for anyone who has read *Animal Farm* (as well as for many who have not) to listen to the demagogues' clap-trap about equality without also hearing the still, small voice that adds: ". . . but some are more equal than others."

There is a long way to go yet; but there is a long time ahead, too. *Animal Farm* will not, like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, contribute to changing history within a decade

or so. But it probably has as good a chance as any contemporary work of winning its author a place—unacknowledged, of course—among Shelley's legislators of the world. And even if the chance does not come off, Orwell has, anyway, two strings to his bow: he is the author of *1984* as well as of *Animal Farm*. If the worst comes to the worst and he fails as a legislator, he is then virtually certain of immortality as a prophet.

Timothy Cook (essay date winter 1984)

SOURCE: Cook, Timothy. "Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Orwell's *Animal Farm*: A Relationship Explored." *Modern Fiction Studies* 30, no. 4 (winter 1984): 696-703.

[In the following essay, Cook investigates the influence of Sinclair's *The Jungle* on *Animal Farm*.]

Although George Orwell tells us that the idea of *Animal Farm* came from his actual experience of seeing a small boy easily controlling a huge carthorse with a whip,¹ various scholars have suggested literary sources or precedents for his fable. These include a number of Kipling's short stories,² the fourth book of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and, least plausibly, a section of John Gower's tedious Latin complaint *Vox Clamantis*, cited by Sean O'Casey, who makes his dislike of *Animal Farm* and his scorn for those who think it original very clear.³

Orwell was of course far too well read to have claimed "originality," in the narrow sense of his having been the first person to make use of the human-animal relationship for political or social commentary. As an Eton scholar he would have known that the tradition goes back at least as far as Aristophanes' *Birds*. More importantly, we know from his own writings how much he admired Swift, in particular *Gulliver's Travels*, where he would have found the relationship between man and horse devastatingly reversed; indeed it is interesting that Orwell felt the Houyhnhnm nation had reached "the highest stage of totalitarian organization," the stage when conformity becomes so general that there is no need for a police force.⁴ In other words, this nation has achieved an equine version of the ideal Party that Orwell was to make O'Brien look forward to in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The boot he imagines stamping forever on the human face is foreshadowed by the unshod hoof that keeps the Yahoos in permanent subjection. In this context the Houyhnhnms' simplified language, although not deliberately created, can be seen as a parallel to Newspeak in making certain thoughts impossible.

The resemblances between *Animal Farm* and Houyhnhnm land are superficial. The latter may or may not be, in Orwell's words, "about as good as [sic] Utopia as

Swift could construct,"⁵ but it certainly can be seen as one, whereas *Animal Farm* of course presents a version of something that has happened in the real world. Indeed, underlying O'Casey's dismissal of Orwell's importance as a writer and his scorn of critics who compare Orwell with Swift is his outraged reaction to what was really "original" in *Animal Farm*, Orwell's effective development of his farm analogy into a detailed and devastating exposé of the betrayal of the October Revolution in Russia, a revolution that for O'Casey and other Party members was still a glorious, untarnished achievement.

Like all myths about ideal societies, the myth of the socialist utopia began to lose its attractiveness once an opportunity to establish it had arisen. Eleven years before Soviet Russia had come into being, however, it was possible to believe with much more fervor in the myth's validity as the solution to man's miseries. When Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was published in 1906, readers, depressed by his grimly vivid account of the sufferings of exploited Lithuanian immigrants in Chicago's stockyards, could still thrill to the revolutionary message of the socialist speakers and theorists in its closing pages. Orwell certainly knew *The Jungle*, and I would argue that *Animal Farm* owes more of a debt to Sinclair's best-known novel than it does to any preceding beast fable or animal story. In certain respects it can be seen as his answer to the hopeful message of the earlier book, though it is doubtful that he consistently intended it as such. Although he admired Upton Sinclair for his grasp of facts, especially in *The Jungle*, he criticized Sinclair's novels as little more than political tracts with nonexistent plots and unconvincing characters.⁶ At one point he even goes so far as to dismiss Sinclair, among other writers, as "a dull windbag."⁷

Windy, in the sense that its rhetoric is overblown and that it makes the same points over and over again, *The Jungle* certainly is, but most people would find the first part, the misadventures of Jurgis Rudkus and his family as they struggle to survive amid the Chicago slaughterhouses and packing factories, anything but dull. Of that first part Sinclair wrote in his *Autobiography*, "I wrote with tears and anguish, pouring into the pages all the pain that life had meant to me. Externally the story had to do with a family of stockyard workers but internally it was the story of my own family."⁸ Such passionate self-identification of the struggling young writer with his central characters has helped to keep *The Jungle* constantly in print to the present day, making the story carry more conviction than we find in much of Sinclair's later documentary fiction. It certainly made a great impression on Orwell, for he says of the Lithuanian family's experiences that they are "truly moving."⁹ The book is of course no beast fable, though the man-beast comparison is implicit from the start in its title. Like *Animal Farm*, *The Jungle* is written to demolish a

myth, but in this case it is the opposing, and older, one of America as the promised land, the capitalist Zion, the myth enshrined in the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. This myth had brought Jurgis from his native, semifeudal Lithuania, ironically czarist-Russian dominated, to a system in which he soon finds himself as helpless, as uncomprehending, as the hogs queuing to be turned into the products of the huge Durham pork factory.

In his powerful description of the mechanical pork-making process, Sinclair stresses the individuality and the human qualities of the hogs, right up to the moment when, despite his "protest, his screams," each is seized by a fate that "cut his throat and watched him gasp out his life."¹⁰ Jurgis Rudkus, the strong, naive peasant who is the central figure of Sinclair's novel, turns away from the scene of slaughter with the words "Dieve—but I'm glad I'm not a hog!" He has only just arrived in Chicago, and that very morning he has been given his first job in the factory. Soon he will be married to his sweetheart, Ona Lukoszaite, and they will live in an apparently new house bought on credit, but by that time he will have begun to realize how little he matters in his new country.

Later, destitute, bereft of wife and children, he finds himself at a political meeting listening to the message of a speaker calling for the socialist revolution. The speech he hears is lengthy and highly emotional, contrasting the lot of the workers being "ground up for profits in the world wide mill of economic might" with that of the few thousand bosses living in their "palaces" on "the products of the labor of brain and muscle" of the whole of society. It ends with a stirring appeal to the audience of working men, twice compared to beasts of burden, to look forward to the moment when the great giant of oppressed Labor will break free from his chains (*J*, pp. 356-366). This final vision brings the audience to its feet in wild enthusiasm. A few moments later, when someone starts singing the *Marseillaise* and the whole crowd excitedly joins in, Jurgis is stirred as never before in his life. He seeks to learn more about socialism from the orator and is referred to a Polish tailor under whose guidance he learns about the system for which he has been working:

To Jurgis the packers had been equivalent to fate; Ostinski showed him that they were the Beef Trust . . . Jurgis recollected how, when he had first come to Packingtown, he had stood and watched the hog-killing and thought how cruel and savage it was, and come away congratulating himself that he was not a hog; now his new acquaintance showed him that a hog was just what he had been—one of the packers' hogs.

(*J*, p. 376)

These passages could well have provided Orwell, consciously or subconsciously, first with the idea of choosing pigs as the animals to lead his revolution and then

with the essential elements in the rhetoric of old Major's speech, through which at the start of *Animal Farm* the animals are inspired to rebel against their human masters. Indeed, Sinclair's hog with his individual character, protesting and screaming as he gasps out his life, is surely the prototype of the young porkers who (Major tells them) "will scream your lives out at the block within a year,"¹¹ just as the singing of the *Marseillaise* at the end of the socialist's speech seems to foreshadow the singing of the animal liberation hymn *Beasts of England* when Major finishes his. Jurgis, the exploited "packer's hog," is moved by the occasion to take charge of his own destiny, just as the Manor Farm animals are, under the pigs' leadership.

Although some might feel that the ideas in these sections of Sinclair's book were readily available in any number of political tracts, Orwell's familiarity with *The Jungle* makes it possible that he had these passages, with their man-hog comparisons and their references to workers as beasts of burden, at the back of his mind when working on *Animal Farm*, and that his fable is in part an ironic and disillusioned response to the earlier work's propagandist enthusiasm, showing how cruelly deceptive the hopes of a socialist heaven on earth can be; indeed *Animal Farm* may be, in this sense, actually a sequel to *The Jungle*.

This possibility is greatly strengthened when we look at an earlier part of the book, where Jurgis and his family struggle to survive in Packingtown, ignorant of the forces that are controlling their destinies. Jurgis is one of the two strongest members of the group; the other is his cousin, the broad-shouldered, good-natured Marija, who has "a broad Slavic face with prominent red cheeks. When she opens her mouth it is tragical, but you cannot help thinking of a horse" (*J*, p. 8). Sinclair uses this image again in describing how the forelady at Marija's first job is attracted by her "combination of a face full of boundless good nature and the muscles of a dray horse" (*J*, p. 50). Later, when she loses her first job at the canning factory, she is again seen as "a human horse" (*J*, p. 123).

Jurgis also is described in terms of his strength, his "mighty shoulders and giant hands," his "broad back" and his "rolling muscles." The two cousins are the mainstays of their family and, until in one way or another they fall foul of the system, are valued by their bosses as workers. Indeed work is Jurgis' answer to every crisis. At the start of the novel Jurgis and his child-wife Ona discover that their *veselija* or wedding party is going to cost much more than expected because of swindles over the drink and because of the various subterfuges used by other members of the Lithuanian community, corrupted by residence in America, to avoid paying their traditional share of the costs. He turns to his wife and reassures her,