

*Signet Classics*

GEORGE ORWELL ANIMAL FARM



# ANIMAL FARM



A FAIRY STORY BY  
GEORGE ORWELL

With a Preface by Russell Baker  
and an Introduction by C. M. Woodhouse



SIGNET CLASSICS

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rights is appreciated.

**George Orwell** (pseudonym of Eric Blair [1903–50]) was born in Bengal and educated at Eton; after service with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, he returned to Europe to earn his living penning novels and essays. He was essentially a political writer who focused his attention on his own times, a man of intense feelings and fierce hates. An opponent of totalitarianism, he served in the Loyalist forces in the Spanish Civil War. Besides his classic *Animal Farm*, his works include a novel based on his experiences as a colonial policeman, *Burmese Days*; two firsthand studies of poverty, *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*; an account of his experiences in the Spanish Civil War, *Homage to Catalonia*; and the extraordinary novel of political prophecy whose title became part of our language, *1984*.

Prizewinning journalist and essayist **Russell Baker** was born in Virginia in 1925. The longtime author of the *New York Times* “Observer” column, he has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, in 1979 for distinguished commentary and in 1983 for his memoir, *Growing Up*. He is the author or editor of more than fifteen other books, including *Russell Baker’s Book of American Humor* and *The Good Times*. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and from 1993 to 2004 was host of PBS’s *Masterpiece Theatre*.

**C. M. Woodhouse** was born May 11, 1917, in London, England. During World War II, he led the British military mission in German-occupied Greece and later served two terms in the British parliament. In addition to many books on modern British and Greek history, he wrote an acclaimed memoir, *Something Ventured*. He died February 13, 2001.

## PREFACE

“**W**e were very lucky to get out of Spain alive,” George Orwell wrote afterwards. He was not talking about the nearly fatal throat wound he suffered in combat during the Spanish Civil War but about Stalin’s murderous political apparatchiks who had gained partial control of the Spanish government by 1937.

He had gone to Spain to fight for that government because he thought it represented political decency, and his belief in the importance of political decency had nearly been the end of him. More or less by chance, he had ended up in a Trotskyist outfit at a time when Stalinists were trying to destroy every trace of Trotsky’s contribution to the Russian revolution. These purges were directed from

Moscow but had deadly consequences even in faraway Spain, where Stalin was ostensibly supporting a democratic Spanish government.

“Many of our friends were shot, and others spent a long time in prison or simply disappeared,” Orwell recalled in his preface to a 1947 Ukrainian-language edition of *Animal Farm*.

This narrow escape from the long reach of Moscow-style politics left him alarmed about the gullibility of other well-meaning, decent people in Western Europe. He thought too many decent people in the Western democracies had succumbed to a dangerously romantic view of the Russian revolution that blinded them to Soviet reality.

Soviet communism paid a heavy price for what it did to Orwell in Spain. Out of that experience came *Animal Farm*. An attack on the myth of the nobility of Soviet communism, *Animal Farm* became one of the century’s most devastating literary acts of political destruction.

Orwell called the book “a fairy story.” Like Voltaire’s *Candide*, however, with which it bears comparison, it is too many other things to be so handily classified. It is also a political tract, a satire on human folly, a loud hee-haw at all who yearn for Utopia, an allegorical lesson, and a pretty good fable in the Aesop tradition. It is also a passionate sermon against the dangers of political in-

nocence. The passage in which the loyal but stupid workhorse Boxer is sold to be turned into glue, hides, and bone meal because he is no longer useful is written out of a controlled and icy hatred for the cynicism of the Soviet system—but also out of despair for all deluded people who served it gladly.

Maybe because it gilds the philosophic pill with fairy-story trappings, *Animal Farm* has had an astonishing success for a book rooted in politics. Since its first publication at the end of World War II, it has been read by millions. With *1984*, published three years later, it established Orwell as an important man of letters. It has enriched modern political discourse with the observation that “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” How did we ever grasp the true nature of the politics of uplift before Orwell explained it so precisely?

George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Blair, the son of a colonial official with long service in British India. Eric was educated as a scholarship boy at Eton and seemed to be miserable there most of the time, largely, one guesses, because of the money gap that divided him from so many of his well-heeled schoolmates. His dislike of the moneyed classes in turn influenced him toward a lifelong loyalty to democratic socialism. After Eton he went to Burma as a member of the Imperial constabulary

and had the enlightening experience of discovering he was hated by the Burmese people as a symbol of British imperialism. Hating the work himself, he quit and went back to England to try making a living by writing.

During the years when he was not very successful, he began to devote himself to work for British socialism. Afterwards he said he had never written anything good that was not about politics. Before he went to work on *Animal Farm*, his books were well enough received by the critics but sold modestly.

Those old enough to remember the wartime spirit of the 1940s may be startled to realize that Orwell started work on *Animal Farm* in 1943. As he discovered when he went looking for a publisher, Stalin's Soviet Union was so popular that year in Britain and America that few wanted to hear or read anything critical of it. It was as though a great deal of the West had willingly put on blinders, and this was because the Red Army that year had fought the Nazis to a standstill and forced them to retreat. Suddenly Hitler's army, which had looked invincible for so long, had begun to look vincible.

In this period the air on both sides of the Atlantic was filled with a great deal of justifiable praise for the Soviet people and their fighting forces. Stalin's political system, with its bloody purges and police-state brutality, was an important beneficiary of all this. Looking for a publisher



for his small book, Orwell was reminded that British socialists, who idealized the Russian revolution, had never been hospitable to critics of the Soviet Union. In 1943, however, even conservatives were pro-Soviet.

It became hard to write candidly of the Soviet system without being accused of playing dupe to the Nazis. Orwell discovered how hard when he began receiving publishers' rejections on *Animal Farm*. With its swinish communists, the book seemed heretical. And no wonder. Stalin and Trotsky, after all, were unmistakably Orwell's feuding pigs, Napoleon and Snowball. It was not until the war had ended that Fredric Warburg finally published it, on August 17, 1945.

It brought Orwell his first popular success, with sales in England vastly exceeding those of any of his previous books. In America, where it was published in 1946, it sold nearly 600,000 copies in four years and has not stopped selling since.

What's curious was Orwell's insistence that he had no intention of damaging the "socialist" cause. You would never have guessed this after reading the book, but he insisted that he intended only to write a cautionary story for the democratic West, warning it against a dangerously alien form of "socialism." Devoted to British socialism, Orwell cannot have found it very pleasant being denounced an enemy of what the Russians, and many of

his countrymen too, called “socialism.” Orwell, of course, was seldom happier than when he was attacking fraud and hypocrisy and hearing the squeals of the injured.

Despite his insistence on being “political” in his work, Orwell’s career suggests his politics were the sort that real politicians detest. Why, for example, was Orwell so determined to make the case against Soviet communism at precisely the moment all proper people preferred not to hear it? Devoted socialist he may have been, but he had none of the politician’s instinct for trimming sails to the wind when it is expedient to tell people what they want to hear. Worse, he insisted on telling people precisely what they did not want to hear.

He was that political figure all politicians fear: the moralist who cannot bear to let any wrong deed go undenounced. As a politician he had the fatal defect of the totally honest man: He insisted on the truth even when the truth was most inconvenient.

There is an aloneness about Orwell, an insistence on being his own man, on not playing along with the team as the loyal politician is so often expected to do, or else. This independence is brilliantly illustrated in his classic essay “Politics and the English Language,” showing how politicians twist the language to distort and deceive. The essay amounts to an act of treason within the political trade. The man is trying to make it harder for a politi-

cian to fool enough of the people enough of the time to gain power.

Orwell seemed more candid than usual about *Animal Farm* when he wrote the preface for its Ukrainian edition, and it reads very much like an anti-Soviet tract. The communist manhunts in Spain, which he had narrowly escaped, coincided with the Moscow purges, he wrote, and “taught me how easily totalitarian propaganda can control the opinion of enlightened people in democratic countries.”

After seeing innocent people imprisoned because they were suspected of unorthodoxy, he was appalled on returning to England to find “numerous sensible and well-informed observers believing the most fantastic accounts of conspiracy, treachery, and sabotage” alleged in the Moscow purge trials.

“And so I understood, more clearly than ever, the negative influence of the Soviet myth upon the Western Socialist movement . . . it was of the utmost importance to me that people in Western Europe should see the Soviet regime for what it really was. Since 1930 I had seen little evidence that the U.S.S.R. was progressing toward anything that one could truly call socialism.” To the contrary, it was becoming “a hierarchical society, in which the rulers have no more reason to give up their power than any other ruling class.”

Since 1937, the year he fled Spain for his life, he had been “convinced that the destruction of the Soviet myth was essential if we wanted a revival of the Socialist movement.” Here he was conceding that *Animal Farm* was meant to help destroy “the Soviet myth.”

In the late 1940s several books were published that heavily influenced intellectual attitudes about the future of totalitarianism. All were bleak, written, it seemed, from a deep conviction that the totalitarian state would develop such formidable powers in the future that humans would become helpless to preserve their identity.

Orwell, with *Animal Farm* and *1984*, and Arthur Koestler, with *Darkness at Noon*, were read on campuses everywhere and so spread a mood of pessimism, which was probably responsible for a great deal of the intellectual community’s enthusiasm for the cold war. Aldous Huxley’s utopian *Brave New World*, with its portrait of a heavily drugged society easily manipulated by politicians, also had considerable vogue in this era. What all had in common was a depressing pessimism about the future. Like so much other writing of the era, they rested on the assumption that individuals were no match for the efficient new technology at the disposal of totalitarian politicians.

Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon* is as powerless against the inhumane force of New Soviet Man Gletkin as Win-

ston Smith in *1984* is powerless to prevail over the incredible police efficiency of Big Brother. In the future worlds envisioned in this literature, inhumanity has triumphed over mankind's pathetic little attempts to stand up against totalitarian efficiency. *Animal Farm* ends on a slightly less hopeless note, but only slightly.

Well, here we are in that future that so many writers fifty years ago could only guess at, and what do we see? They were ludicrously wrong about the amazing efficiency with which totalitarians would destroy individualism.

Why did they get it all wrong? For one thing, they were men who had come to maturity in the age of the dictators. Hitler had terrified their generation with a glimpse of what inhuman tyrants could do with the modern technology at the state's disposal. The war with Hitler had been a close thing, won perhaps only because Hitler himself had conducted it with such human stupidity. The pessimists failed to allow for the stupidity and incompetence factor among people who would run the totalitarian states.

There was little cause for joy in the result of the Hitler war: a vast increase in Stalin's dictatorial power. The fantastic new technology seemed to provide the malevolent state with devices that would make it easy to enslave the individual. In *1984*, television makes it possible for Big Brother to watch everybody all the time. Huxley's

*Brave New World* hints at the power of drugs to keep people permanently pacified.

What was unpredictable was the liberating effect of technology. The Soviet Union could surround itself with walls but could not block out revolutionary radio and electronic waves, which stirred up the supposedly whipped human herd with an irresistible appetite for rock 'n' roll, blue jeans, and other such subverters of totalitarian rule.

Finally, the fearful efficiency of the totalitarian state turned out to be an absurd myth. As someone finally pointed out, making a simple telephone call in Moscow could sometimes take hours, if not days.

None of this is to say that Orwell and his fellow pessimists of the 1940s ought not be read with the greatest respect. They should be. They show us the edge of terror on which we lived fifty years ago and help us understand why that generation was willing to spend so much treasure and take such daring risks to keep totalitarianism at bay. And in *Animal Farm* Orwell left us a lesson about the human contribution to political terror that will always be as up-to-date as next year's election.

—Russell Baker

## INTRODUCTION

**I**n 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 book-stalls 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 this 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