

GEORGE ORWELL

LIFE (1903 - 1950)

George Orwell was born in India. His father was a minor customs official who worked hard and made sacrifices to send his son to preparatory and public schools in England. From his schooldays on, Orwell was aware of class divisions and developed strong sympathies for the working class. After school he joined the Indian Imperial police. After leaving the colonial police force, he worked in ill-paid jobs in Paris and London. By this time he disliked colonialism and his working-class sympathies developed into strong left-wing political convictions. When the Communists succeeded in destroying the anarchists, he became an outspoken critic of Stalinism, which he regarded as reactionary as Fascism. Both *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are written from the point of view of an unaligned democratic socialist and present two tyrannical political systems characterized by both Stalinism and Fascism elements. He died of tuberculosis in 1950.

ACHIEVEMENT

Both *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* contain political ideas in disguise but they are also powerful works of the imagination. With the exception of these two novels, Orwell had been admired for his works of non-fiction, and is regarded as one of the great essayists of the modern period. His essays reveal his suspicion of conventional and dogmatic opinions and are valued for their use of plain and clear English in the service of intelligent argument. He himself recognized that he was not a novelist in the "literary" sense, but that he used the novel as a vehicle for his ideas about society.

Orwell's most important works are:

- ***Burmese Days***, based on his experiences as a superintendent in the Burmese Imperial Police;
- ***Animal Farm***, a political fable, satirizing the progress of the Russian Revolution from liberation to totalitarianism;
- ***Nineteen Eighty-Four***, a novel which attempted to describe life in the totalitarian states which would dominate the world;
- ***Down and Out in Paris and London***, based on life among the urban poor;
- ***Homage to Catalonia***, a description of Spanish Civil War as he personally experienced it.

ANIMAL FARM

In *Animal farm* Orwell uses very old narrative forms to point out and illustrate political convictions. Works which use anthropomorphized animals to teach a lesson are commonly called **fables**. Orwell's fable could be summed up as "**power corrupts**". This lesson is relevant in the 30's and 40's, when socialist revolutions had succeeded in replacing corrupt systems of government with new men who would themselves duplicate the corruption and abuses of power they were meant to end. The fable is a more sophisticated **allegorical structure**. There are specific correspondences between certain animals and episodes in the story and real historical figures and events. In fact *Animal farm* satirizes the progress of the Russian Revolution from liberation to totalitarianism and some animals are associated with figures like Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Hitler.

PLOT. Manor farm is owned by the farmer Mr Jones, a tyrant who mistreats the animals. One of them, a pig called Major, inspires the others with a dream of freedom from tyrannical human beings. He dies, but his ideas live on and two young pigs, Napoleon and Snowball, lead an attack and drive their human masters out. Now all the animals work for each other, but the pigs begins to enjoy small privileges; they also insist on total obedience as the price for protecting the farm against humans. However, Napoleon is jealous of Snowball's influence and drives him from the farm with the help of some dogs. Now Napoleon holds absolute authority. The animals are forced to work ceaselessly on the construction of a windmill to make the farm self-sufficient. When the windmill collapses in a storm, Napoleon says that it has been sabotaged by Snowball. Next, Napoleon declares himself president of a Republic. The egalitarian spirit of Animal Farm disappears. In the final chapter, the farm is described ten years later. The animals are working harder than ever. The pigs now entertain human guests and increasingly resemble men.