

Animal Farm: Chapter 7 - The Show Trials

Matthew Williams • English Literature • May 11, 2026

Summary

The winter is bitter and the animals ration down. The windmill must be rebuilt with thicker walls, which requires carrying yet more stone. Rations are cut when the potato stores are found to have frozen. Napoleon devises a strategy to conceal the shortages from Mr. Whymper: he has the bins filled with sand with the small remaining food on top, so that Whymper sees apparently full stores.

In January, Napoleon announces that the hens must surrender their eggs for export: four hundred per week, to be traded for grain until the harvest. The hens have been planning spring clutches and refuse. They fly to the rafters and lay their eggs there, which fall and smash on the floor. Napoleon cuts their rations. The rebellion lasts five days and nine hens die before the others give in. Napoleon announces that the nine hens died of disease.

Rumours circulate that Snowball is hiding at Foxwood or Pinchfield. Napoleon announces a full investigation into Snowball's activities. He and the dogs tour the farm, sniffing out traces of Snowball's scent. Squealer then announces what the investigation has discovered: Snowball was in league with Mr. Jones from before the Rebellion. Documents have been found proving this. Snowball's role at the Battle of the Cowshed was not heroic but treacherous: he was secretly working for Jones. Napoleon, not Snowball, led the charge and bit Jones's leg. When Boxer says he clearly remembers Snowball being wounded by Mr. Jones's gun, Squealer tells him he is mistaken and that Napoleon has the documentary proof. Boxer, since Napoleon says it, accepts this.

Napoleon then calls all the animals to an assembly. He arrives with the dogs. Four pigs confess to having been in secret communication with Snowball and to conspiring to deliver the farm to Frederick. The dogs tear them apart. Three hens confess that Snowball appeared to them in a dream and told them to disobey Napoleon. A goose confesses to stealing corn. A sheep confesses to urinating in the drinking pool. Each is executed by the dogs. The pile of bodies in the yard is the first bloodshed on the farm since Jones's departure.

The animals slink away to the hill. Clover looks out over the farm and thinks about what they had aimed for: a world without hunger or cruelty, where the strong protected the weak. She begins quietly to sing "Beasts of England." The others join in and they sing it three times through, mournfully. Squealer and two dogs arrive and announce that "Beasts of England" is abolished. The revolution is complete; the song was the song of the struggle, and the struggle is over. He

introduces a replacement song by Minimus: "Animal Farm, Animal Farm, / Never through me shalt thou come to harm." Most animals find it does not move them in the same way.

Analysis

This is the novel's darkest chapter, and arguably its structural centre. Every escalation that precedes it has been gradual, ambiguous, deniable. The show trial executions are not. Animals confess to crimes and are killed in public. This is the Great Purge given animal form, and Orwell does not soften it.

The specific structure of the confessions is important. The animals do not simply die; they first confess. This is the mechanism that made the historical purges so effective: the confession converts the victim into a participant in their own destruction. It suggests guilt was real; it implicates the confessing animal in the crimes described; and it transforms the regime's violence into a judicial procedure rather than a murder. The dogs carry out the executions, but the confessions do the ideological work.

Boxer's response to the revision of the Battle of the Cowshed is one of the most carefully written moments in the novel. He clearly remembers that Snowball fought on the animals' side and was wounded by Jones's gun. He says so. Squealer tells him he is mistaken. Squealer cites documents. Boxer cannot read the documents. His conclusion is: "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right." He does not say he believes the revised account; he says he is choosing to defer to Napoleon's authority over his own memory. This is the structure of totalitarian consent: not conviction but submission.

Clover's response is the chapter's emotional climax, and Orwell allows it more space than any other interior moment in the novel. She does not think of rebellion. She does not know what to do. She only knows that this is not what they aimed for. Her singing of "Beasts of England" is the only form of protest available to her, and Napoleon removes even that, immediately, with two dogs and Squealer's explanation.

The abolition of "Beasts of England" is the most explicit censorship in the novel. The song provided a standard; now the standard is removed. The animals are not allowed to have, even in music, a vision of what the farm was supposed to be.

Themes

- **Totalitarianism and terror:** The show trials are the novel's most direct representation of Stalinist political terror. The structure (confession, execution, the implication of wider conspiracy) mirrors the mechanics of the Great Purge. The point is not only that animals are killed but that the system of confession makes the killing look like justice.
- **Memory and resistance:** Boxer remembers the Battle of the Cowshed accurately and says so. He is told he is wrong. He accepts this. Clover also remembers the promise of the revolution. She cannot formulate what she knows. Both are defeated not by the falseness of the revised account but by their own inability or unwillingness to insist on their own memory.
- **Censorship and the removal of standards:** The abolition of "Beasts of England" shows that controlling the present requires controlling what the population can imagine. As long as the animals can sing about the golden future the revolution promised, they have a measure against which the present falls short.
- **The revolution's complete betrayal:** This chapter is the moment when any remaining ambiguity about Napoleon's regime is resolved. He is not a flawed leader making difficult decisions; he is a tyrant who kills opponents in public and abolishes the song that expresses the revolution's own ideals.