

Critical Explanation of Passages

Chapter 1

Passage 1

I have had a long life, I have had much time for thought as I lay alone in my stall, and I think I may say that I understand the nature of life on this earth as well as any animal non-living. It is about this that I wish to speak to on.

Questions:

- (1) Fix the context of this passage.
- (ii) What does the Speaker want to convey to other animals?
- (iii) Relate the impact of this passage to the plot of the novel.

The Speaker is Old Major known formerly as Willingdon Beauty. The words themselves tell of his tiredness in life, having lived long, bearing many experiences, which have groomed him. He visualises his demise and deems it proper to advise the living animals on the howabouts of life, its vicissitudes. He had a dream a few days ago, and it is about this dream that he is going to speak. Though not certain as to the actual content of the intended speech, the preparedness of Old Major is the springboard that is going to set the plot of the novel in motion. Not only the animals, but the readers too are alert, eager to listen. This statement begins the drama of the novel. There is Shakespearean temper in this statement of Old Major because the beginning of action is sudden and striking as it is in the opening scenes of Shakespeare's plays.

Passage 2

It is summed up in a single word-Man. Man is the only real enemy we have. Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished forever.

Questions:

- (i) State whether the animals are in the know of their real enemy before the emphatic declaration made in the passage? How do you base your opinion?
- (ii) Elaborate on 'hunger' and 'overwork' the animals suffer from.
- (iii) What is the Speaker's (identify the speaker) intention here?

Old Major ventilates his pent up emotion on the pretext of the travails of the animals. The farm in which they are all living is capable of providing a comfortable living for a dozen horses, twenty cows and hundreds of sheep. They all can live with dignity. But what happens in reality is that their labour is eaten up by the humans. Here, it is specifically the exploiter Jones, the Farm owner. The animals labour hard for man who denies them their dues. The animals are deceived, abandoned and pooh-poohed. The scene minus man will certainly result in restoration of dignity to animals. There will be alleviation of hunger and overwork.

The seed of discontentment is sown here to blast in the form of revolt in a short time in the future. From the state of not knowing of their exploitation and indignity at the hands of man, the animals reach the stage of being aware of how they are vulgarized by their owner. This awakening is the turning point in the initiation of the defacto action in the novel. What is to be noted is the subdued key of incitement by Old Major. A clever persuasive technique!

Passage 3

And even the miserable lives we lead are not allowed to reach their natural span.

Questions:

- (i) What is the cause for regret expressed here?
- (ii) How is 'misery' in animal life related to its natural span'?
- (iii) Describe briefly how man is an exploiter of the animal population.

Old Major's lamentation over man's infliction of misery on the animals reaches its zenith with this statement. Even in their misery, the animals are not allowed their go. Old Major is critical of man's leadership over animals despite his inability to produce anything as the animals do. Milk, eggs, and farm produce are all the works of animals and fowls and Man with his craftiness uses them to his advantage giving a little to the animals. The milk of cows has not fattened the calves. The eggs have not been allowed to hatch. Jones has capitalised all these for his betterment. Even the horses have not been spared their foals. Before their first year, they are sold out and thereby their mothers are rendered sterile in their mind. All these indignities and miseries the animals have borne so far just for poor rations. Not only this, the animals capable of providing meat are butchered within a year of their birth. Old Boar says he has been lucky to have survived for twelve years, a surprising longevity. The horses will be sent to the knacker who will boil them for foxhounds. Old Dogs would be drowned with bricks tied to their necks.

Thus, Old Major instils fear in the animals showing how they have been ignorant of their lot so far. The animals are thus geared up for their rebellion.

Passage 4

All men are enemies. All animals are comrades.

Questions:

- (i) How is man presented naked in his intentions with regard to animals?
- (ii) How according to Old Major, comradeship among animals can be achieved?
- (iii) How is this passage contributive to the feeding of the idea of rebellion in animals?

The end of Old Major's speech has its sledge on the anvil. Hence this exhortation. The only way to get rid of the misery of animals is to get rid of the tyrannies of man. In the course of the rebellion against man, he might advance an argument saying that man and animals have a common interest. This, the Old Major says, should never be believed. Man serves unto himself only. Unless there is perfect understanding among animals, there cannot be any comradeship and unity. Only with unity, man can be countered. To strengthen this point Major makes this emphatic remark and the foundation is perfectly laid for the animal rebellion.

Passage 5

No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money or engage in trade. All the habits of Man are evil.

Questions:

- (1) Why is that animals are insisted on not to adhere to man's ways of life? (1) What implication is meant on the animal behaviour by this statement?
- (iii) How is hatred for man conveyed in this passage?

This passage is reflective of the animals' misanthropy if it could be termed so. This is a sort of dictate Old Major is giving the animals for dutiful adherence. Since man is a tyrant sipping the sap of

animals, he has to be deemed an arch enemy and the animals have to shun him lock stock and barrel. All his habits are to be kept off reach. House, bed, money, trade, alcohol and tobacco to which man has abundant access are to be avoided; Old Boar is of the view that whatever is connected with man is evil. This kind of exhortation goes to forge unity among the animals with a sense of equality among themselves. The animals are forewarned against infliction of pain on their own clan. A sense of oneness is thus instilled in animals so that their rebellion can be strong enough to thwart the secret viciousness of man.

Passage 6

The cows lowed it, the dogs whined it, the ducks quacked it.

Questions:

- (i) Identify the reason for the animals' excitement.
- (ii) How is the idea of freedom pictured as could be recalled in this passage?
- (iii) What could be the poetic reason for the bellowing, whining, bleating and quacking of the lines presented by Old Boar?

The narrator (George Orwell) who has so far, until two paragraphs before the end of the first chapter, dealt with the technique of 'showing', now begins to tell. That is, he intrudes into the scene of action. The song which Old Major regains in his memory during his sleep thrills the animals, so says Orwell. The internal rhythm together with ideas of man's ignominy at the hands of animals, and the bright future in store for them thrill them that each animal with its appropriate expressive sound sings it. Hence, the author says, "The Cows (bel) lowed it, the sheep bleated it, the horses whined it, and the ducks quacked it". It is for the reader to hear in his mind's ears as to how it would sound if a cow were to sing it in its bellowing voice. Instead of an agonising experience even at the thought of rebellion, there is exultation even in protest provided by the rhythmic number from the Old Boar.