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The Meaning of Animals in the First Farm Revolts: From Kostomarov's Ukraine to Reymont's Poland at the Turn of the 20th Century

ABSTRACT

In 1945, George Orwell published *Animal Farm*, a critique of Cold War totalitarianism wherein animals acquire human speech, walk on two legs, and ultimately oppress themselves once gaining power. Its concern for the lived experience of farmed animals is marginal. But it was not the first farm animal revolt. Two decades prior, Polish novelist Władysław Reymont published *Bunt* (*Revolt*) about a farm animal uprising in search of equality that degenerates into chaos and abuse of power. It was a metaphor for the Bolshevik takeover in Russia that formed a model for Orwell's later metaphorical criticism of a different generation of totalitarians. Even earlier, Ukrainian historian Nikolai Kostomarov published his own tale of animal revolution, "Skotskoi Bunt" ("Animal Riot") in 1880, a story that was given a wider audience upon its republication in 1917, just prior to that same Bolshevik Revolution. The case for Kostomarov's tale being an allegory for human travails, however, is more difficult to make, and there is linguistic and historical evidence that the story is less concerned with human revolution and more with a case against harming nonhuman animals. Both narratives were written and published in a specific cultural context in time and space that would have created distinct receptions to the works partially based on human political realities, but also rooted in flourishing vegetarian and animal rights movements in Ukraine and Poland at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: farm animals, rebellion, literature, Ukraine, Poland.

"I saw a little boy," wrote Orwell of his inspiration for *Animal Farm*, "perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them" (Reed). Or so he claimed. Whatever the potential motivation that drove Orwell to his subject, it is clear that *Animal Farm* is far more concerned with a critique of Cold War totalitarianism than it is about the fate of farmed animals. *Animal Farm* is an allegory wherein the animals acquire human speech, walk on two legs, and ultimately oppress themselves once gaining power. Its concern for the lived experience of farmed animals is marginal, despite their ubiquity in the novella.

But a whipped cart horse and distaste for totalitarianism were likely not the only inspiration for Orwell's work. There has been recent scholarship that attempts to read the animal back into *Animal Farm*, arguing that the book can be interpreted in a posthuman context (McHugh 2009; Kerr 1999; Cole 2017; Bishop 2020; Drew 2022), but those works ground their theory in the literature of the Anthropocene rather than emphasizing the historical context of the novella's authorship. It is, to be sure, contested ground. Less contested is the fact that two decades prior to the appearance of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Polish novelist Władysław Reymont published *Bunt* (*Revolt*) about a farm animal uprising in search of equality that degenerates into chaos and abuse of power. It was a metaphor for the Bolshevik takeover in Russia that formed a model for Orwell's later metaphorical criticism of a different generation of totalitarians. Even earlier, Ukrainian historian Nikolai Kostomarov published his own tale of animal revolution, "Skotskoi Bunt" ("Animal Riot") in 1880, a story that was given a wider audience upon its republication in 1917, just prior to that same Bolshevik Revolution. The case for Kostomarov's tale being an allegory for human travails, however, is more difficult to make, and there is linguistic and historical evidence that the story is less concerned with human revolution and more with a case against harming nonhuman animals.

While it is clear that Orwell borrowed (and perhaps even plagiarized) linguistically from Kostomarov, the scope of his narrative borrowed far more heavily from Reymont. Reymont's *Bunt*, like *Animal Farm*, tells an allegorical narrative of the cost of revolution in service to totalitarian regimes. It describes the takeover of a farm by nonhuman animals, only for that takeover to descend into chaos and bloodshed. Kostomarov's story, however, is an account of a failed revolution, one where the animals attempt to redress the legitimate grievances of all farm animals for the abuse and death experienced on animal farms, only to be rebuffed by humans, given the same problematic excuses for human behavior still used by advocates of

animal slaughter in the 21st century, and ultimately condemned to continue on in the approximation of life given to farmed animals.

Both of the narratives, then, one from Ukraine and one from Poland, were vital to the creation of Orwell's later totalitarian allegory. More importantly, each were written and published in a specific cultural context in time and space—Central and Eastern Europe from the 1880s to the 1920s—that would have created distinct receptions to the works partially based on human political realities, but also rooted in flourishing vegetarian and animal rights movements in Ukraine and Poland at the turn of the 20th century. Orwell's *Animal Farm*, one of the most influential novels of the 20th century, may not have been a story of animal rights, but it was based, and in some cases almost copied directly, from stories far more closely linked to such concerns.

Nikolai Kostomarov was an early progenitor of what today we would call social history. A century before Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre founded the Annales School in France, and even longer before historians in western Europe and the United States took up the cause of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, Kostomarov studied the Ukrainian peasantry and its desire for cultural autonomy against the influences of Russia and Poland. He was also a polymath who wrote fiction and collected contemporary ethnographic material relating to the people of Russia's western frontier (Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov* 8–10, 27–34, 86–92, 104–08, 174–78; Prymak, *Ukraine* 93–94, 146–48).

It is generally assumed that Kostomarov's tale of animal revolt in 1880 was an allegorical denunciation of Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), a revolutionary populist movement posed against the autocracy of Tsar Alexander II. People's Will grew out of an earlier organization, Land and Liberty, which itself was a response to rural poverty in Russia that was not remedied by the emancipation of serfs in 1861. Calling for "complete freedom of conscience, speech, press, assembly, association, and electoral agitation" (Offord 28–29), the group turned to terrorism and political violence, which would ultimately culminate in 1881 with the assassination of Alexander. A forerunner to the broader anarcho-syndicalist movement that swept across Europe and the United States, Narodnaya Volya weaponized peasant discontent in a way that Kostomarov found to be counterproductive and dangerous. When he was eleven years old, Kostomarov watched as a peasant uprising killed his father (Schmid 620). As a social historian, he was not unsympathetic to peasant discontent, but saw revolutionary violence as unnecessary and ultimately doomed to failure.

While initially sympathetic to the Poland of Władysław Reymont, he turned away from that support in 1860 (Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov* 111–17, 142–43, 147). "The Poles can deceive the European public with

their proclamations about liberty and nationality, but they will find it difficult to fool us South Russians," he wrote in a letter to Russian journalist Konstantin Kavelin; "We do not want to be enslaved for the sake of certain European ideas" (Schmid 626).

The futility of revolution and loyalty to established authority was always part of Kostomarov's fiction. Both his 1860 novel *Syn* (*The Son*) and his 1875 *Kudeiar* tell the stories of failed revolutionaries and the ultimate futility of the act itself. A version of this motif can also be seen in his later historical allegory *Elliny Tavridy* (*The Greeks in Taurus*) (1883). In a letter Kostomarov wrote in 1860, he explained: "Freedom is pure nonsense. If you destroy the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the police, weaker spirits and bodies will always become slaves of stronger ones" (Schmid 633). At the same time, however, Kostomarov described Ukrainian poetry as "inseparable from nature: it brings it alive and makes it a part of the joy and the grief of the human spirit. The grasses, the birds, the animals, the heavens, morning . . . they all breathe, think, and feel together with mankind" ("Two Russian Nationalities" 125–26).

Kostomarov's love of animals, and the constant critique of rebellion in both his historical and fictional work, without need for allegory, calls into question whether his work in "Animal Riot" was itself a metaphor for human actions. After all, as John Reed explains, "Tolstoy was a friend, colleague, collaborator, and neighbor of Kostomarov." Editor Vladimir Grigoryevich Chertkov, like Tolstoy a strict vegetarian, described in 1891 one story written by Kostomarov and "worked on and perfected by L. N. Tolstoy 'who gave to it quite a new and original ending'" (Dillon 145). Chertkov described Kostomarov as a "famous satirist" and claimed that the story was "from an ancient legend of Little Russia" and that it "has wonderful spiritual force and is very sensational—for it depicts a sorrowful characteristic side of Russian life" (Dillon 146). Tolstoy, apparently, was still deciding whether or not to give his consent to publish the piece abroad in England, and ultimately never agreed to do so. We cannot be sure that the story was "Animal Riot," but it seems likely. Chertkov assured his English colleagues that if the story was eventually published in England, "[i]t must be signed thus: written by Kostomarov and Leo Tolstoy" (Dillon 147). Even if it was not "Animal Riot," however, the relationship between the two was real and substantial.

Tolstoy first began transitioning to vegetarianism after his 1879 *Confession*, beginning in earnest in 1882 and completing the process in 1885. He was influenced most directly by Vadim Konstantinovich Geins, who had lived in a variety of American communes under the name William Frey and returned to Russia an advocate for a vegetarian lifestyle. Another of his confidants, Vladimir Chertkov, had converted to vegetarianism in

England in 1884 and after his return to Russia the following year would advocate for animals and author, in 1890, *An Evil Pastime: Thoughts on Hunting*, which argued that as humans no longer required dead animals for sustenance, "hunting is no longer now a natural form of the struggle for existence, but rather a voluntary return to a primitive beastlike state" (LeBlanc 4). Though Tolstoy himself did not read the book until 1891, there was also *Man's Diet in Its Present and Future* (1878), by Russian scientist Andrei Nikolaevich Beketov, which argued against a diet rooted in animal flesh. Tolstoy himself had British author Howard Williams's *The Ethics of Diet* (1883) translated into Russian and wrote an introductory essay for it, "Pervaia stupen" ("The First Step"), which became his most influential piece of writing on the ethics of vegetarianism (LeBlanc 4–6).

Kostomarov would have been familiar with all such works published prior to April 1885, the time of his death. In addition, late Victorian socialism and anarchism included interest in animal rights and vegetarianism throughout the continent (Hinely 13). Henry Stephens Salt's "A Plea for Vegetarianism" would appear in Manchester in 1886, beginning decades of animal rights publications and activism (7–20).

When Kostomarov's story appeared (or, perhaps, reappeared) in 1917, it did so at an auspicious time (Malitska, "Meat and the City" 5). As Ronald LeBlanc has explained, "on the very eve of the outbreak of World War I, the vegetarian movement would seem to have reached its peak in Russia" (10). In 1913 and 1914, there were All-Russian Vegetarian Congresses in Moscow. Vegetarian ephemera like postcards and portraits of famous vegetarians were for sale throughout the country. The most dominant vegetarian organization was the Kiev Vegetarian Society, and Ukraine found itself at the center of the vegetarian movement in Russia, challenged only by the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, founded in 1902, while other vegetarian societies developed in Warsaw, Kiev, Moscow, Minsk, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Saratov, and Odessa. In the inevitable schism that grew between the two organizations, it was the Ukrainian contingent that made the case that there was a fundamental ethical difference between "hygienic vegetarians" who chose not to eat meat for health reasons, and "moralistic vegetarians" who believed that animals' lives should be protected, siding decisively with those who chose to not to eat animals for moral reasons (Goldstein 106; LeBlanc 11).

In January 1909, the first issue of the *Vegetarian Review* (*Vegetarianskoe obozrenie*), founded by Iosif and Moisei Perper, appeared from Chișinău in modern-day Moldova, but from 1910 until the end of its print run in 1915 emanated from Kiev (Malitska, "Mediated Vegetarianism" 315). In its first issue, the monthly periodical explained that "vegetarianism primarily rejects slaughtered food, since it is obtained through killing, which corrupts

humanitarian feelings, destroys the beauty of the world around us, and ruins the lives of both animals and people" (Perper 3–4).

In May 1914, the *Vegetarian Herald* first appeared in Kiev, making the case for compassion for animals. Its editors were not "opposed to an appreciation of nutrition from a hygienic point of view," but "we do not consider it an essential or distinguishing feature of vegetarian teaching" ("Ot redaktora" 2, translation mine). The Ukrainian vegetarian movement of the 1910s did not deny the ancillary benefits of refusing to eat meat, but they still saw such benefits as decidedly ancillary. Vegetarianism was about protecting animals.

For those influenced more by St. Petersburg, health began to take precedence in vegetarian literature, and as the 1910s bore on, more and more Russian vegetarians began citing health reasons as their prime motivation for turning to a meat-free diet. Influential vegetarian advocates like Evgenii Lozinskii, Natal'ia Nordman-Severova, and Aleksandr and Olga Zelenkova all emphasized the human benefits of vegetarianism, certainly not denying that animals were protected (Olga Zelenkova's vegetarian cookbook was titled, *I Don't Eat Anyone*), but seeing that as the ancillary benefit (Goldstein 105, 107, 109–10; LeBlanc 13).

Despite the schism, by the 1917 publication of Kostomarov's story, vegetarianism had become extremely popular in Russia. After the Bolshevik Revolution, in December 1917, vegetarian periodicals were shuttered, but meat shortages resulting from the Great War and internal political strife led vegetarianism itself to remain decidedly popular (LeBlanc 22). Such was the climate into which Kostomarov's "Animal Riot" appeared.

The story itself is framed as a letter written by a Ukrainian farmer to a friend in St. Petersburg, mirroring the divide in the vegetarian and animal rights movements in the country. It describes an uprising on a Ukrainian farm, led by the bulls, then spreading to the horses, pigs, sheep, and chickens, all of whom are rebelling against the cruelty of treatment toward farm animals. "This was not a riot of subordinates exactly but of the indentured, and not of humans but of farm animals and house pets," he explains early in the story:

> We are used to thinking that since animals are mute, they must also be foolish. It seems rational using human logic: they can't talk, we say amongst ourselves, so they must not think or understand anything! But is this actually true? We can't reason with them so we consider them foolish and mute, but it turns out—as we'll thoroughly discuss here—that we can't understand their language. (Kostomarov, "Animal Riot")

In speaking of Omelko, the farmhand who speaks with the animals: "This one-of-a-kind expert on animal nature would never agree with those

who believe that the logical faculties animals possess are much weaker than those of humans. Omelko insists that animals display an intelligence no lesser—and sometimes even greater—than that of humans" ("Animal Riot").

Those commenting on Kostomarov's story have drawn parallels to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, both in its language and its allegorical critique. John Reed has cataloged all of the instances in which Orwell could have come into contact with Kostomarov's work in the 1930s and has demonstrated how parts of the British text mirror that of the Russian. He compares the first 5,300 words of Kostomarov's story to the first 5,200 of Orwell's, arguing that most of it, at least twenty paragraphs, "are directly analogous."[1]

Reed's case is well-proven, and it is clear from the evidence that Orwell must have had some contact with Kostomarov's story. It is less certain, however, that because Orwell's story was an allegory for mid-20th-century politics, Kostomarov's must be an allegory, or would necessarily have been read as an allegory, for a late-19th-century version of revolutionary upheaval. For example, the bull's speech in the Ukrainian animal revolt—in contradistinction to that of Orwell's Old Major—describes uniquely animal problems:

> Look what they do to our poor calves. They load the poor little things in a cart, tie their legs, and take them away! And where do they carry them? To have their throats cut, torn from their mother's teat! The greedy tyrant has taken a liking to their meat, and how! He considers it one of his best dishes! (Kostomarov, "Animal Riot")

There is no correlation between the taking of veal calves to human violence against other humans. There is, however, a real danger to calves that they will be forcibly removed from their mothers and killed for veal. Further, Orwell's version speaks of farm exploitation in general so as to heighten the similarities to the exploitation of human labor. Kostomarov does not. "The humans milk our mothers and wives, depriving our little baby-calves," says the Ukrainian bull. In his specificity, Kostomarov clearly describes actual farm practices and the torture practiced on the animals kept in such situations. The taking of milk, of course, could be read as allegorical, as a metaphor for the taking of working-class human production, but it does not have to be. Without the generalized effect of Orwell's heavy-handed comparisons to human situations, it would be perfectly reasonable,

[1] This is ground previously covered by other analysts, and there continues to be debate about the similarities between the manuscripts and Orwell's knowledge of his predecessors (see, for example, Hac-Rosiak, who claims that Orwell did not know about Reymont's work).

particularly in a hub of animal advocacy like Ukraine, to read the narrative as a critique of cruelty to farm animals.

The specificity of Kostomarov's slaughterhouse narrative is similar. It continues after Reed's brief selection:

> Do you know, brother, about this slaughterhouse where they are taken? You will feel a chill creep through your veins as soon as you realize what they do at that slaughterhouse, so it is for good reason that our brother-beast lows pitifully when nearing the city where it is located. They tie the poor bull to a post, and then the evildoer approaches with a hatchet and hits him square on the head between the horns. The bull howls from fear and pain, stands on his hind legs and the evildoer gives it to him one more time—then a knife to the throat. One after the first, then a third, then a dozen and another dozen, until he's gotten a hundred bulls. Bovine blood spills in torrents. Then they take the skin off the dead ones, cut the meat into chunks and sell it in their markets. The other bulls that were brought to the city to be killed walk past those stands and see the meat of their comrades hanging there, and their bovine hearts sense that soon the same fate will befall them!

Such is not the fate of humans in 19th-century Ukraine. It is treatment specifically reserved for farmed animals, described with sympathy for their plight and with no real functional corollary to human concerns.

There is in Kostomarov's story a similar diatribe about horses used in battle:

> They mount our brother and rush at one another. They want to kill each other, and they kill us in the process. Their ruthless, severe hearts do not pity us. So much noble equine blood is shed. Then such horrible sights! . . . And for what? . . . They don't ask the cavalry horses if they want to fight a war, but they saddle and ride them to fight; they never consider that maybe our brother has no interest in dying without knowing what he is dying for.

Again, the complaint here is directly related to the experience of horses in battle, horses who die alongside humans for specifically human concerns. There is no allegorical correlation to the experience of these horses and those of a different set of humans not already included in the narrative as participating in any given conflict. Kostomarov is not comparing the suffering of horses used in human wars to that of humans conscripted unwillingly into infantry units. He is describing the specific experiences of horses who are conscripted into use for those wars not as fighters themselves but as property, as part of the equipment of soldiers, whose lives are ancillary concerns of those humans participating in the conflict.

The pigs in the story complain that "pig" is used as a human epithet. And "while despising pigs and criticizing our characteristics, man still cuts us up for lard and makes ham and sausage from our pig meat." There is, without question, bigotry and totalitarian cruelty in the human treatment of pigs, just as there is bigotry and totalitarian cruelty practiced by humans against other humans. But Kostomarov's description of this particular bigotry and totalitarian cruelty is decidedly specific to that practiced on pigs.

Omelko attempts to confront the animals. "I told them that God himself made them to serve man and man to be their master. But they all shouted, 'Who is this god? That is your human thing, this god business. We animals do not know any god.'" Of course, the peasant class in Ukraine and the Russian working poor more broadly were among the most religious in the country. There is in the description of religion no comparison to human concerns. Rather, it is a commentary on religion being used by humans to prioritize themselves over and against nonhuman populations, to justify animal cruelty with claims of God creating humans in his image and God granting those humans dominion over nonhuman animals.

Eventually Omelko confronts the geese. "We don't have the strength to fly," they tell him, "so we're staying with you. Just don't butcher us. We want to live." But the caretaker's response to the geese is similar to common justifications for animal abuse in both the 19th century and the 21st, the proposal of a quid pro quo between humans and farmed animals. "You want to live, you say. But I assume you also want to eat. So you expect us to feed you but not get any use out of you? No, no, that won't work," says Omelko. "If you want to stay with us and want us to feed you, then give us something in return. We feed you, and so we eat you." Omelko makes a similar argument to the chickens: "You more than any of the other birds on earth can't live without us brother-humans. Accept it, stupids, and submit: this is our fate, you and me. We have to watch over you and feed you, and for that we butcher you and take your eggs."

Thus the animal revolt is suppressed. The bull who begins the agitation is beaten to death, the stallion castrated. The animals lose, just as farm animals always lose in confrontations with humans. That they are not able to topple the human administration of the farm is significant. There is no opportunity in the story for Kostomarov to make a grand gesture bemoaning totalitarianism, or even bemoaning the outcome of successful revolutions in general, despite the fact that his historical and fictional work often dealt with such subjects. Instead, with a failed revolution, the animals attempting to better their own lives, and in most cases save their own lives, become tragic figures, heroes who fail. The failed revolution makes them sympathetic. The rebels cannot become the dictators in such a story,

because animals are always victims of human caprice, and Kostomarov's plot is structured to make that point, rather than any allegorical point about the problematic nature of revolution itself.

Kostomarov, Ulrich Schmid explains, "condemned every kind of secret political activity that was directed against the existing government" (624). But the case of the animal revolt appears to be different. The narrative itself is just over 9,000 words, much of the story taken up with specific depictions of cruelty to animals that take place on farms and in human wars, none of which carry direct correlations to the kinds of human suffering that existed in Russia in the late 19th century. Moreover, with the flourishing of the vegetarian movement in Ukraine and Russia both in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the close relationship between Kostomarov and Tolstoy, and the long historiography the author left behind of specific critiques of human rebellions that required no allegorical flourish, it is reasonable to assume that Kostomarov either intended his story to be about the plight of farmed animals or that a substantial portion of his readership would read it that way, or both. The linguistic and historical evidence seems to point to the latter option.

Intent in the work of Władysław Stanislaw Reymont, however, is far more certain. He was responding directly to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. But equally certain is that he would have been familiar with the work of Kostomarov. When the Ukrainian died in 1885, Reymont had just finished a tailoring apprenticeship and was traveling as an actor for various theater companies. He was born in 1867 in Kobiele Wielkie near Łódź, occupied by the same Russia that occupied Ukraine. His family was poor, but devoted to Roman Catholicism and Poland. Members of his family had participated in the 1863 Insurrection, and his patriotism led him to resist his Russian education and ultimately to be expelled from school. He began his writing career in 1894, creating careful portraits of provincial Polish life, and became a sensation in the late 1890s with *Ziemia obiecana* (*The Promised Land*, 1899) and in the 1900s with *Chłopi* (*Peasants*, 1904–09), work that won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1924 (Napierkowski 48–49; Krzyżanowski 64–75).

That year, however, he published a novel radically different from *The Promised Land* and *Peasants*, a work that had been serialized two years previously in the popular Warsaw magazine *Tygodnik Illustrowany* and that seemed, on the surface, to contain resonances of Kostomarov's depiction of a farm animal revolt, republished seven years prior in 1917 (Krzyżanowski 135–36). By 1924, however, the geo-political context into which Reymont's novel, *Bunt*, entered, was decidedly different than it had been in Kostomarov's 1880. And the emphasis on vegetarianism and the value of animal life was less pronounced in interwar Poland than it had been in early-20th-century Ukraine and Russia.

Moreover, what vegetarianism existed in the country was steeped in the health concerns championed by those in St. Petersburg. The vegetarian movement in Poland, such as it was, began at the time Kostomarov was writing his story. In a partitioned nation, as Ewa Kokoszycka has explained, "vegetarian Poles were not only vegetarians, but also Polish patriots striving to maintain their national identity. Many of them viewed vegetarianism as a way to improve the condition of the Polish nation, and in this way vegetarianism was seen as patriotic" (150). That said, vegetarianism was decidedly located on the cultural fringe of the partitioned nation. "In the country in which the bourgeoisie systematically gorge themselves and working classes dream of doing the same," wrote Józef Hempel in 1908, "a vegetarian is regarded as a harmless lunatic" (1625, translation by Ewa Kokoszycka).

Konstanty Moes-Oskragiełło, one of the founders of the vegetarian movement in Poland in the late 19th century, proclaimed the spiritual and health benefits of a meatless diet as Kostomarov was writing "Skotskoi Bunt." Acting as a kind of religious guru and homeopathic healer, he founded "Odrodzisko Jarskie" ("Vegetarian Retreat"), a therapeutic healing retreat that included vegetarian eating. In 1888, he published *Jarstwo i Wełniarstwo w Dziejach Dawnej Słowiańszczyzny* (*Vegetarianism and Wool Processing in the Ancient Slavic Times*, 1888), which tied historical Slavic success to vegetarian diets in an attempt to make the case that the natural legacy diet of Poles should exclude animal products. While his spa did attract some early interest, his pronouncements about vegetarianism met with skepticism, if not outright scorn, among much of the Polish population (Rzeczycka and Hess 159–75; Hozyasz 431).

In 1912, Maria and Augustyn Czarnowski began publishing the magazine *Jarskie Życie: Miesięcznik Etyczny o Kierunku Odrodzeńczo-Wyzwolennym* (*Vegetarian Lifestyle: An Ethical Monthly Oriented to Revival and Liberation*). Though the magazine was printed in Berlin, it was published in Polish, and the Czarnowskis distributed it to all parts of partitioned Poland (Pasieka 45–63; Zając, Wrona and Wójcik 10–16). As with the work of Oskragiełło, the magazine focused principally on health concerns, and vegetarian leaders in the first decades of the 20th century tended to follow a similar line (Krasińska 342–55). Pediatric psychologist Józefa Joteyko argued that plant-based diets helped child development, and physicians Józef Drzewiecki and Apolinary Tarnawski argued for similar benefits in adults. Tarnawski himself developed another vegetarian spa, with less emphasis on spirituality and more on health and wellness, that stayed active until World War II. Vegetarianism in Poland was typically marginalized, and when it was not, it was making claims about the benefits of abstaining from meat for holistic healing and general health rather than arguing for the importance of animal life (Konieczna 149–58; Migała and Jandziś 273–90).

The one real exception to the general Polish rule in the first decades of the 20th century was a pamphlet published in 1907 by Janisław Jastrzębowski, a frequent contributor to *Jarskie Życie*, *Precz z mięsożerstwem!* (*Down with Carnivorousness!*). While Jastrzębowski makes health arguments tying meat-eating to alcoholism and other addictions, he also emphasizes the barbarity of eating animals. Butchers were culprits in a scheme that robbed living beings of lives they did not voluntarily give, and the broader culture of killing animals led to human degeneration into war and violence (Smaga 28–30). His was, however, a voice pushing against both the mainstream of Polish culture and the trends in vegetarian advocacy in the country.

This does not mean, however, that there were no protectionist voices for animals in Poland, particularly in metropolitan areas. They were led by a significant animal welfare community that pushed back against acts of urban animal cruelty. Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami (Society for the Protection of Animals) had formed in 1868, a branch of a similar organization founded in St. Petersburg earlier in the decade, and remained vibrant into the 20th century. Based in Warsaw, the organization also had chapters in Łódź, Poznań, Kraków, Lwów, Wilno, Stanisławów, and Częstochowa ("Rozporządzenie Ministra" 12). After World War I and the birth of the Second Polish Republic, interest in animal welfare expanded. The Warsaw group had 1200 members in 1922 and the Society had eighty-four branches across the country by 1930. Just as in Ukraine, however, dissension tormented the group. In 1927, some disaffected members broke away and created a new organization, Polska Liga Przyjaciól Zwierząt (League for the Friends of Animals), which itself had more than three thousand members and, by 1934, twenty branches in cities across Poland. Significantly, however, the schism in Poland was not doctrinal or philosophical. Those defecting from the Society cited leadership issues in the group's administration rather than any specific animal welfare-related grievance (Plach 24–25).

Still, that lack of doctrinal grievance was largely due to the limited scope of the groups' concerns. The goal of the organizations was to minimize animal suffering, particularly in the public sphere, rather than to champion any tangible form of animal rights. Farmed animals were rarely part of the agenda of the groups and there was little to no contact between the various branches of the welfarist societies and vegetarian activists in Poland. As Eva Plach has explained, "Poland's interwar animal protectionists believed that animals could and should be used by humans for various purposes, as long as the animals were not made to suffer 'needlessly'" (26).

There was, to be sure, progress led by the two animal welfare organizations. In 1928, four years after Reymont's *Bunt* appeared, Poland's Sanacja government, led by Józef Piłsudski, passed the country's first

animal protection law, which prohibited the "tormenting" of animals. That tormenting, however, did not include the kinds of torment pronounced by farm animals in Kostomarov's tale. Milking and killing, even among protectionists, were seen as fair use for farmed animals. Their emphasis instead was on the plight of city horses and urban domestic pets, declared in organizational newspapers like *Przyjaciel Zwierząt* (*Friend of Animals*) and *Swiat Zwierzęcy* (*World of Animals*) ("Rozporządzenie Prezydenta" 723–24; Plach 22, 26–29).

It was an effort to "counteract the brutalizing effects of the Great War," Plach explains, "to include a humanitarian ethic in the post-partition nation, and to build a modern and 'civilized' independent Poland" (23). Animal activism was in aid of patriotism, expanding Polish civilization and "Europeanness" in the interwar period (ibid.). And so the cultural context, particularly in relation to the lives of nonhuman animals, into which Reymont's *Bunt* appeared, had not created the conditions wherein the book would be received as a defense of animals; and the tenuous political situation of the Second Republic and the reverberation of the nearby Bolshevik Revolution, combined with Reymont's own respect for Polish peasant life and the animal killing that sustained it, demonstrated so clearly in *The Promised Land* and *Peasants*, ensured that his intent would have little if anything to do with actual concern for the fate of farmed animals. *Peasants*, for example, described the slaughter of animals ten different times without any attempt at problematizing the practice. What had begun in Ukraine as a sympathetic portrait of the suffering of traditional food animals had become, seven years after the communist takeover in Russia, an allegory far more concerned with human political endeavors.

Not only was the cultural and political landscape of Second Republic Poland ripe for such work; there was also a long national tradition of animal allegory and fable on which Reymont could draw, most notably in the work of 18th-century poet Ignacy Krasicki. One of the best-known figures of his era, Krasicki served as Primate of Poland, he was an advisor to the country's last king, and was a friend of Prussia's Friedrich the Great (Kapolka 271–79; Welsh 42–51). He was also a fablist and satirist who historian and translator Charles S. Kraszewski describes as "Poland's LaFontaine" ("Krasicki" 7). Much of his animal work came in his 1779 *Satyry* (*Satires*) and his 1802 *Bajki i przypowieści* (*Fables and Parables*). One of those parables was "The Lamb and the Wolves":

> Who seeketh spoil is quick to rationalize.
> Two wolves a straying lamb took by surprise:
> "You'll eat me?" cried the lamb, "and by what right?"
> "Thou'rt tasty, lost, and we've an appetite" (Kraszewski, "Krasicki" 9)

It was a takedown of the powerful and their justifications for abusing the poor and vulnerable, cloaked in the guise of an animal fable.

However, perhaps his most influential animal account featured a different kind of animal revolt. *Myszeida* (*The Mouseiad*), first published in 1775, tells the story of a group of mice and rats fighting for survival against a gang of predatory cats. While the poem went through so many drafts that Krasicki's biographers cannot exactly place humans and cats in a one-to-one ratio, describing who each of the feline characters is supposed to represent, the overall message of the plight of the powerless against the powerful remains trenchant. "The work is a general comment on the failings and trials common to all humans," Kraszewski explains ("Krasicki" 13), and it provided a clear example of how to marshal an animal revolt in the service of allegorical human statements about the culturally constructed politics of the day. The epic features no humans or farm animals, but it demonstrated the modern Polish effectiveness of using animals as stand-ins for human political concerns in a way that older foreign accounts, like those of Homer or Aesop, might not have done.

Thus while Reymont certainly had Kostomarov's tale at the ready, his own version of the farm revolt would take place in a social, cultural, political, and literary climate different from that of its forebear to the south. In his hands, the revolt of the animals would turn from a statement on the condition and life of farmed animals to a statement on the politics of the age.

Bunt tells the story of a group of "domestic and wild animals who seek freedom from human tyranny" (Krzyżanowski 135). Led by a dog named Rex, an obvious stand-in for "King," they wander through the wilderness, seemingly failing at every turn. Rex had been raised in luxury before being cast out following the death of his owner, leading him in his bitterness to foment a revolution against humans to lead captive animals to a place away from civilization. Their failure leads them to revolt again, this time against Rex himself. After lynching him and deciding that human leadership is the best of bad options, they are unable to find humans and so submit to the leadership of a gorilla. Reymont biographer Jerzy R. Krzyżanowski has noted that nowhere in the story does Reymont name a specific political system, leader, or state: "Reymont's story dissolves in grandiloquence and generalizing symbolism and misses the point, even if only by a hair" (135). It was a "satire against the idea of revolution rather than its fulfillment, and his use of allegory to charge actual events with a broader, more universal meaning, proved to be a mistake" (135–36). Ultimately, Krzyżanowski concludes that Reymont "produced an unfortunate hybrid of an almost Biblical parable and the anthropomorphic tale typical, for instance, of Kipling's animal stories" (ibid.).

Jerzy Kwiatkowski, too, assesses the novel poorly: "It is shallow and luridly exaggerated. The tastelessness of its idea (presenting the 'revolt of

the masses' as a revolt of beasts) blew up in the author's face, as it limits the possibilities of analysing the phenomena it condemns" (206, translation by Charles S. Kraszewski). Contemporaries reacted similarly, seeing the allegory as far less effective than Reymont's more realistic portrayals in novels like *Peasants*.

For critics and commentators who do not see animal representation as tasteless, however, it is clear that Reymont does treat animal cruelty seriously. In one early instance, a donkey releases a "bloodcurdling cry" and runs up to a dunghill. "The master's whelp's splashed him with boiling water! It all but took off his skin!" (Reymont 64), explains one of the animals looking on. "With a horrid, mournful bellow, the donkey rolled in the cool muck, while a pack of boys, with the young master at their head, ran up to continue their fun, pelting the beast with stones and knocking at his legs with staves" (ibid.). Reymont describes not the institutionalized cruelty of the farm animal complex but instead the kind of cruelty fought against by Polish groups like Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami and Polska Liga Przyjaciół Zwierząt. That dogs are the central characters of the book also maintains the emphasis of Poland's dominant animal welfare groups at the time.

What exists in Reymont's tale, then, is a transition from the animal advocacy of Kostomarov and the base symbolism of Orwell. Kostomarov uses his animal revolt to demonstrate the moral problems of animal agriculture. *Animal Farm* uses animals as props to comment on human events. Reymont falls somewhere in between them. His revolt is an allegory to be sure, but he does describe human cruelty to animals, and those who respond are animals who behave like animals. "They don't read, they don't build windmills or brew beer," explains Charles S. Kraszewski, "and—what is conceptually even more interesting—they act like animals: children of a nature proverbially, and truly, red in tooth and claw" ("Humanity" 22–23). Predator animals kill other animals, for example, despite the collective grievance against humans. Rex himself is particularly bloodthirsty as he moves from domesticity to ferality. Reymont, in other words, takes animals seriously.

At the same time, however, the animals develop a human hierarchy and begin killing for political rather than biological reasons. As Kraszewski explains, though the novel does, "on occasion, argue for the respect due to non-humans, especially domesticated breeds," ultimately the author is arguing that animals "are no better than that scoundrel man" ("Humanity" 31). Man, however, was still the principal scoundrel, and the allegorical nature of the work led it to be banned in Poland after the communists took over the country following World War II.[2]

[2] Though Orwell's *Animal Farm* was also banned by the Communists, it was translated to Polish in 1946, soon after its first English printing. (Kraszewski, "Humanity" 7–8, 45).

There exist several possibilities for how the stories of Kostomarov and Reymont got to Orwell. Olga Kerziouk speculates that perhaps they arrived through his wife Sonia Brownell, who had previously worked as an assistant to Russian emigre Eugene Vinaver, son of Maxim Vinaver, who had been in Russia at the time of the publication (or republication) of Kostomarov's story and who studied in Warsaw at the same time that Reymont was at school there. Or perhaps the stories came to Orwell via Teresa Jeleńska, a Polish refugee in London who was *Animal Farm*'s first translator and a friend of Orwell (Kerziouk). John Reed has argued that Reymont's story could easily have come to Orwell because it was published the same year that the author won the Nobel Prize, and Kostomarov's work would have been a staple of Orwell's university education. "Orwell wouldn't have read about Kostomarov once," Reed explains, "[h]e would have read about him hundreds of times."

However it happened, two significant animal revolts occurred in literature before Orwell spread the phenomenon throughout the western world.[3] But the revolts changed along the way. Orwell took the farm from Kostomarov and the allegory from Reymont, but as the riots developed, the animals themselves were lost along the way. What began in Ukraine as a set of legitimate grievances by farmed animals, demonstrating a response to active movements advocating for respecting nonhuman animal life, devolved through time and space, moving west through the first half of the 20th century, where the actual plight of farmed animals was replaced by anthropomorphized animals presented as revolutionaries for their metaphorical value as human replacements to make political commentary about the meaning of uprisings and totalitarianism. Though most of Reymont's peasants still lived a provincial farm life, concentrated factory farming had already commenced in much of the west. As human society developed between 1880, when Kostomarov's story was written, and August 1945, when Orwell's novella was published, nonhuman farmed animals continued to be victimized at increasingly greater rates, as all of the complaints made by the animals in "Skotskoi Bunt" were exacerbated by mechanization. And yet, as the popularity of such animal revolts increased, the voices of the fictional animals making a case for their own liberation, for the dignity of animal life, human and nonhuman, which had been the subject of advocacy in Ukraine, Poland, and Britain, were lost in translation, drowned out by the human atrocities they came to represent.

[3] And, of course, that phenomenon is still happening. In 2010, for example, David L. Levy published *Revolt of the Animals: A Novel*, wherein animals discover that humans are plotting to use nuclear weapons, thus destroying animal life, so they rise up to help stop it.

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