



Researcher paper

Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely” With Reference to George Orwell’s Animal Farm

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>This study examines the theme of “absolute power corrupts absolutely” as represented in English literature, with special reference to <i>Animal Farm</i> by George Orwell. The analysis explores how literature reflects the dangers of unchecked authority and its impact on individuals, society, and political systems. Through allegorical representation, Orwell demonstrates how revolutionary ideals of equality gradually deteriorate into dictatorship when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few. The study focuses on key literary elements such as character development, symbolism, and propaganda to show the process of moral and political corruption. It further highlights how English literature uses such themes to critique tyranny, expose social injustice, and promote awareness of ethical governance. The findings suggest that the concept of absolute power remains a significant and recurring concern in literary studies, emphasizing its relevance in understanding both historical and contemporary power structures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 09-11-2024 ▪ Accepted: 28-12-2024 ▪ Published: 30-12-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(6); 2024: 291-293 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes <p>How to Cite this Manuscript Chandana B. Absolute power corrupts absolutely: with reference to George Orwell's <i>Animal Farm</i>. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2024;3(6):291-293.</p>

KEYWORDS: Absolute Power, Characters, Corruption, Individuals, Society, George Orwell, Animal Farm

INTRODUCTION

The idea that “absolute power corrupts absolutely,” attributed to Lord Acton, suggests that when an individual or group gains unchecked authority, it inevitably leads to misuse of power and moral decline. This concept is clearly reflected in George Orwell’s allegorical novella *Animal Farm*, which portrays the rise and transformation of a revolutionary society into a dictatorship. Written as a political satire, the novella depicts how the animals of Manor Farm overthrow their human owner in pursuit of equality and freedom. However, the initial ideals of the revolution gradually deteriorate as power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few leaders, particularly the pigs. Through this transformation, Orwell highlights how noble intentions can be corrupted when authority is not balanced by accountability. The

story serves as a powerful critique of totalitarian regimes, showing how leaders can manipulate truth, control the masses, and ultimately recreate the same oppression they once fought against. In this context, *Animal Farm* becomes a symbolic representation of how absolute power leads to corruption, reinforcing the timeless relevance of Lord Acton’s principle in political and social structures.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study on “Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely” with reference to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* are:

1. To analyse the concept of absolute power and its effects on individuals and society.
2. To examine how George Orwell portrays the corruption of power through the characters and events in *Animal Farm*.

Historical and Modern Context: “Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely” with Reference to Animal Farm

This study investigates how George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* is deeply rooted in the historical realities of the early 20th century, particularly the events surrounding the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the rise of totalitarian rule under Joseph Stalin. Orwell uses the allegorical setting of a farm to reflect how a revolution that begins with ideals of equality, freedom, and justice can gradually transform into a system of oppression when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few. Historically, the novella mirrors how the overthrow of Tsarist autocracy in Russia led to the establishment of a communist state that eventually became authoritarian. The pigs’ rise to power, especially Napoleon’s dictatorship, represents the consolidation of authority by Stalin, while the manipulation of truth and rewriting of laws reflects the use of propaganda and state control in totalitarian regimes. In this context, Orwell illustrates how absolute power enables leaders to suppress opposition, distort reality, and exploit the masses.

In the modern context, the relevance of the idea “absolute power corrupts absolutely” remains strong across political systems worldwide. Contemporary societies continue to witness concerns about authoritarian leadership, misuse of political authority, and manipulation of information through media control and propaganda. The novel serves as a warning that without transparency, accountability, and democratic safeguards, any governing system risks falling into corruption, regardless of its original ideology. Thus, both historically and in today’s world, Orwell’s message in *Animal Farm* emphasizes that unchecked power inevitably leads to moral decay and the erosion of justice, making the text a timeless critique of political authority.

Concept of Absolute Power and Its Effects on Individuals and Society

Absolute power is a concept famously summarized by historian Lord Acton in the statement “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”—is a political and psychological condition in which an individual or governing body holds total authority, unrestricted by laws, constitutions, or institutional checks and balances.

I. Effects on the Individual

Erosion of Empathy: Psychological studies, including those on the “power paradox,” reveal that gaining unchecked power often diminishes an individual’s capacity for empathy and perspective-taking.

Cognitive Distortion: Leaders with absolute power frequently suffer from the “hubris syndrome,” a disorder of the possession of power characterized by disproportionate self-confidence and contempt for others.

Moral Disengagement: Unrestrained rulers often begin to view themselves as exceptions to the moral rules that govern ordinary

people, leading to impulsive, unethical, and self-serving behaviour.

II. Effects on Society

Destruction of Institutions: Autocratic rulers systematically dismantle democratic mechanisms, a free press, and an independent judiciary to eliminate friction and consolidate control.

Systemic Inequality: Without accountability, wealth and resources are often hoarded by the ruling elite, exacerbating economic disparities and marginalizing the general populace.

Culture of Fear and Paranoia: Because absolute power relies on subjugation rather than voluntary cooperation, it frequently utilizes surveillance, censorship, and violence to suppress dissent.

George Orwell’s Portrayal of the Corruption of Power in Animal Farm

In *Animal Farm*, George Orwell illustrates the principle that absolute power inevitably leads to corruption. Through the gradual transformation of the pigs from idealistic revolutionaries into oppressive tyrants, he reveals how authority is consolidated and misused. The novella highlights the manipulation of language, the rewriting of history, and the abandonment of democratic ideals as tools used to maintain control over the working class. Orwell masterfully portrays the insidious nature of corruption through several core mechanisms are discussed below:

The Slippery Slope of Privilege: The pigs begin their rule by establishing equal rights for all animals, but they gradually arrogate privileges to themselves. By quietly reserving the milk and apples for “their health,” they take the first steps toward inequality, using their positions to avoid physical labour while demanding more benefits.

Rewriting History and Truth: Through the character of Squealer, Orwell shows how propaganda reshapes reality. The ruling pigs continually manipulate the other animals by revising the Seven Commandments. When a rule such as “No animal shall sleep in a bed” is violated, it is quietly changed to “No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets,” causing the animals to doubt their own memories and accept the altered truth.

The Use of Fear and Violence: Napoleon’s use of his vicious attack dogs represents totalitarian coercion. By banishing his rival Snowball and carrying out public executions of dissenting animals, Napoleon transforms the farm from a space of shared revolutionary camaraderie into one ruled by absolute fear.

Complicity and Ignorance: Orwell does not only blame corrupt leaders; he also highlights the danger of a complacent and uneducated working class. Characters such as Boxer the horse, whose blind loyalty and inability to question authority enable the pigs to exploit him, represent the vulnerability of the masses.

Role of “Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely” with Reference to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in English Literature

The idea that “absolute power corrupts absolutely” is a central political and moral concept in English literature, most clearly demonstrated in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. This principle explains how unchecked authority leads to moral decay, oppression, and the betrayal of original ideals. Orwell uses allegory to show how revolutionary movements can fail when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few.

1. **Importance of the Concept in English Literature:** In English literature, the theme of absolute power is used to criticize political tyranny and dictatorship, explore moral and ethical decline in leadership, warn against the misuse of authority, and highlight the vulnerability of common people under systems of control.
2. **Representation in *Animal Farm*:** In Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the principle is shown through the transformation of a revolutionary society into a dictatorship.
 - A. **Rise of Napoleon:** Napoleon represents the shift from collective leadership to absolute control. He eliminates opposition and centralizes all decision-making power.
 - B. **Use of Propaganda:** Squealer manipulates truth to justify the pigs’ actions, showing how absolute power controls information and reality.
 - C. **Betrayal of Equality:** The original commandment “All animals are equal” is changed to: “*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.*” This reflects the complete moral corruption of authority.
 - D. **Exploitation of Workers:** Characters like Boxer symbolize loyal workers who are exploited and discarded, showing how absolute power uses the masses for its own benefit.
3. **Role in English Literary Tradition:** The theme of absolute power in *Animal Farm* continues a long-standing tradition in English literature in which writers critique tyranny, injustice, and the abuse of authority. George Orwell’s work stands alongside major political allegories that expose the dangers of oppressive leadership, the failure of revolutions to sustain their ideals, and the gradual corruption that develops within systems of governance. Through this tradition, Orwell demonstrates that literature is not only a form of artistic expression but also a powerful tool for political and social critique. His writing highlights how unchecked authority can distort truth, suppress freedom, and betray the very principles it claims to uphold, making *Animal Farm* a significant contribution to English literary and political discourse.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the theme “absolute power corrupts absolutely” in English literature, with reference to *Animal Farm* by George

Orwell, clearly demonstrates that unchecked authority inevitably leads to moral decline and systemic oppression. Orwell’s allegorical representation shows how revolutionary ideals of equality and justice are gradually destroyed when power becomes concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. Through characters, events, and the use of propaganda, the novel exposes the transformation of leadership into dictatorship and highlights the betrayal of original principles. In broader English literature, this theme serves as a powerful warning against tyranny and emphasizes the importance of accountability, justice, and balance in governance. Thus, the concept of absolute power remains a significant literary device for critiquing political systems and understanding the consequences of corrupted authority.

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