

## An Analysis of Political Allegory in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell

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### ABSTRACT

*This study analyzes George Orwell's Animal Farm as a political allegory that critiques totalitarian regimes and the corruption of revolutionary ideals. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, the research applies semiotic and discourse analysis to examine the symbolic elements and political messages embedded in the novel. The findings reveal that characters such as Napoleon, Snowball, and Boxer symbolize key figures and classes from the Russian Revolution and Stalinist era, highlighting Orwell's critique of propaganda, ideological control, and exploitation. The study shows how Orwell employs satire and allegory to depict the manipulation of language and truth, reflecting broader political realities both historically and in contemporary society. The novel serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked power and remains highly relevant in today's political climate.*

**Keywords:** political allegory; totalitarianism; symbolism; Orwell; Animal Farm

Submitted	Reviewed	Revised	Published
10 June 2025	10 June 2025	20 June 2025	25 June 2025

### Introduction

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is widely regarded as a powerful political allegory that critiques the dangers of authoritarianism and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Set on a fictional farm where animals overthrow their human master in pursuit of equality and freedom, the novel unfolds as the new leadership primarily the pigs—gradually becomes indistinguishable from the tyrants they replaced. Orwell crafts this seemingly simple narrative as a sharp satire targeting the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent rise of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin (Rodden, 2017; Meyers, 2000).

Orwell was deeply influenced by his own experiences during the Spanish Civil War and his observations of political propaganda and repression. His disillusionment with

Stalinist communism, which he saw as a distortion of socialist ideals, became a core theme in his literary work (Crick, 1980). In *Animal Farm*, each character and event symbolically corresponds to real-life figures and incidents from Soviet history. For instance, the pig Napoleon represents Stalin, while Snowball symbolizes Leon Trotsky, and the working horse Boxer embodies the exploited proletariat. The gradual erosion of the farm's original egalitarian principles mirrors the way the Soviet regime shifted from revolutionary rhetoric to authoritarian practice.

Beyond its historical parallels, *Animal Farm* functions as a broader critique of the mechanisms through which power can corrupt, and how language, education, and propaganda are used as tools of control. The sheep who bleat slogans, the changing commandments on the barn wall, and Squealer's manipulative speeches illustrate how truth can be reshaped to serve those in power. These themes make *Animal Farm* a timeless piece of literature, relevant not only in its historical context but also in today's political landscape, where democratic backsliding and authoritarian tendencies continue to emerge around the world (Bottyan, 2017).

Literary scholars have praised Orwell's ability to merge political commentary with narrative simplicity, making complex political ideas accessible to a wide readership. As noted by Rodden (2017), Orwell's genius lies in his use of allegory to universalize the specific failures of Soviet communism into a broader warning about the cyclical nature of tyranny and the fragility of democratic ideals. Consequently, *Animal Farm* has remained a subject of critical interest across disciplines including literature, political science, history, and education.

Given these layers of meaning and historical relevance, this study aims to conduct a detailed analysis of the political allegory in *Animal Farm*. By identifying symbolic representations and aligning them with key events in Soviet history, the study seeks to understand how Orwell critiques totalitarianism and conveys his moral and political message. Such an exploration not only contributes to literary scholarship but also encourages readers to reflect on the enduring dangers of unchecked power and ideological manipulation.

## Research Questions

1. What symbolic representations are used in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*?
2. How does *Animal Farm* relate to real events in political history?
3. How does *Animal Farm* show George Orwell's critique of absolute power?

## Research Objectives

1. To identify symbolism in *Animal Farm*
2. To analyze the relationship between the novel's story and real-world political history
3. To uncover Orwell's critique of absolute power

## Theoretical Framework

### Theory of Allegory and Satire

#### 1. Definition and Function of Allegory in Literature

Allegory is a literary device in which characters, events, or settings symbolically represent abstract ideas, moral qualities, or political and social concepts. In literature, allegory functions not only as a narrative technique but also as a powerful means to convey deeper meanings beneath the surface of the story. According to M.H. Abrams (1999), "*An allegory is a narrative in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the 'literal,' or primary level of signification, and also to signify a second, correlated order of signification*" (Abrams, 1999, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*). In *Animal Farm*, the literal tale of farm animals mirrors the Russian Revolution and the rise of Soviet communism, making the text a classic example of political allegory.

#### 2. Satire as a Tool for Social and Political Criticism

Satire is a genre of literature that uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize the folly or corruption of individuals, institutions, or societies. It is especially potent when directed at political and social issues. According to Elliott (1960), satire functions as "*a corrective of human vice and folly through ridicule*" (Elliott, R.C., *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*). Orwell masterfully employs satire in *Animal Farm* to critique the perversion of socialist ideals and the mechanisms of political manipulation under totalitarian regimes. The anthropomorphized characters serve as satirical

representations of historical figures such as Stalin (Napoleon) and Trotsky (Snowball), thereby engaging the reader in a critical reflection of political realities.

## Political and Power Theories

### 1. Concepts of totalitarianism and authoritarianism

Totalitarianism refers to a political system in which the state recognizes no limits to its authority and seeks to regulate every aspect of public and private life. Authoritarianism, while also involving concentrated power, may not seek total control but limits political pluralism and suppresses dissent. Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956) define totalitarian regimes by six key characteristics: an official ideology, a single mass party led by a dictator, a monopoly of weapons, a monopoly of mass communication, a system of terror, and central control of the economy (Friedrich, C.J. & Brzezinski, Z.K., *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 1956). In *Animal Farm*, Orwell reflects these totalitarian traits through Napoleon's leadership. The distortion of truth, propaganda by Squealer, and the rewriting of the Seven Commandments symbolize how totalitarian leaders manipulate ideology and communication to maintain control.

### 2. Hegemony and ideological control theory (Gramsci)

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony argues that the ruling class maintains power not just through coercion but by shaping the cultural and ideological norms that define what is considered 'common sense' or natural in society. Gramsci (1971) explains that "*the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'*" (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci, 1971). This form of control is evident in *Animal Farm*, where the pigs manipulate language, education, and propaganda to shape the beliefs of the other animals, thereby maintaining their dominance without constant physical coercion. The ideological manipulation through the pig's slogans—such as "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others*"—illustrates Gramsci's idea of hegemonic consent, where the oppressed internalize the logic of the oppressors.

## **Method**

This study employs qualitative research with a descriptive-analytical approach. The aim is to explore and interpret the symbolic elements and political discourse embedded in *Animal Farm* through a deep reading of the text and related literature. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the themes, symbols, and historical references conveyed by George Orwell.

The primary data source is the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. The novel serves as the main object of analysis, with its narrative structure, characters, symbols, and dialogues being the focus of interpretation.

Secondary data includes books, scholarly journals, and articles that discuss George Orwell's biography, literary style, political ideology, and critical interpretations of *Animal Farm*. These sources provide contextual background and support the analysis of the novel's content.

The main techniques used for data collection are: Literature Review, Gathering and synthesizing theoretical references and previous research related to Orwell and *Animal Farm*. Textual Analysis is Conducting a close reading of the novel to identify symbolic elements and instances of political discourse.

The data analysis will be carried out through: Semiotic analysis to interpret symbols and their meanings, This method is used to interpret the symbols and sign systems within the novel such as characters, events, and objects that represent broader political or ideological meanings. For instance, the character of Napoleon represents a dictatorial figure, reflecting Stalinist rule. Discourse analysis to examine the novel's connection to political history

This technique examines how language and narrative structure in *Animal Farm* reflect historical and political discourse, particularly relating to the Russian Revolution and the rise of totalitarian regimes. It seeks to uncover the power relations and ideological constructs embedded in the text.

## **Finding**

Result The findings of the qualitative analysis reveal that *Animal Farm* is a compelling political allegory that mirrors the historical events surrounding the Russian

Revolution and the rise of totalitarianism under Joseph Stalin. Through the use of symbolic characters, events, and language, George Orwell crafts a powerful critique of how revolutionary ideals can be manipulated and corrupted by those in power. Employing semiotic and discourse analysis, the novel uncovers mechanisms of power control, ideological distortion, and the systemic exploitation of the working class.

Each major character in the novel represents a real-world political figure or social class. Napoleon, for instance, serves as an allegorical figure for Joseph Stalin, who consolidates power by removing Snowball (a symbol of Leon Trotsky) and establishing an authoritarian regime. The elimination of Snowball reflects Trotsky's exile and political erasure in Soviet history (Orwell, 1945). To maintain control, Napoleon uses violent repression through his loyal dogs and manipulates public opinion via Squealer, the propagandist. Orwell illustrates this manipulation with the quote: "If Comrade Napoleon says it, it must be right" (Orwell, 1945, p. 37).

Several powerful symbols enhance the novel's allegorical message:

1. Old Major represents Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin, whose ideological vision inspired the revolution.
2. Boxer, the hardworking horse, stands for the proletariat loyal, industrious, yet exploited.
3. The pigs, as a group, symbolize the corrupt political elite who appropriate power and resources while preaching equality.

Boxer repeatedly declares: "*I will work harder*" and "*Napoleon is always right*," (Orwell, 1945, p. 29). Demonstrating blind obedience without critical reflection on authority.

The gradual distortion of the Seven Commandments ultimately results in the infamous line: "*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others*" (Orwell, 1945, p. 52). This quote marks the climax of the betrayal of revolutionary ideals and symbolizes how laws and principles are manipulated to serve those in power.

### **1. Allegory in Animal Farm**

Animal Farm is constructed entirely as a political allegory. Orwell transcends mere historical parallels by offering a deep examination of how revolutions are often hijacked by those who seek power for personal gain. Each character and event reflects historical counterparts, particularly from the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the

Stalinist era. As noted by Meyers (1975), Orwell utilizes satire to portray how idealistic movements can deteriorate into oppressive regimes. The moral deterioration is symbolized through the alteration of the commandments. One significant example is: *“No animal shall kill any other animal”* being changed to *“No animal shall kill any other animal without cause”* (Orwell, 1945, p.45). Indicating how language is manipulated to justify violence and repression.

## 2. Critique of Totalitarianism

The novel vividly critiques totalitarian regimes through the portrayal of propaganda, censorship, and the suppression of dissent. Napoleon not only takes power forcefully but also systematically dismantles the revolutionary values, replacing them with authoritarian control. The pigs revise history and enforce conformity using fear and misinformation. The closing line of the novel serves as a grim reflection of totalitarian assimilation:

*“The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which”* (Orwell, 1945, p. 54).

Bloom (2007) *emphasizes* that *Animal Farm* is “a parable about the tendency of revolutionary movements to degenerate into authoritarian regimes”.

## 3. Exploitation of the Working Class

Boxer is the tragic embodiment of the working class. His dedication and labor sustain the farm, yet he is ultimately discarded when he becomes injured and unable to work. Napoleon sells him to the knacker for profit, a heartless betrayal of loyalty and sacrifice. This outcome reflects Orwell’s critique of how authoritarian systems exploit and discard their labor force when they are no longer useful (Hitchens, 2003, p. 69). Boxer’s repeated mantras show his inability to critically question authority a commentary on how political systems suppress critical thinking in favor of obedience.

## 4. Relevance to Modern Political Conditions

Although the novel is rooted in early 20th-century history, its warning remains strikingly relevant today. In the age of digital media, propaganda has evolved into algorithm-driven narratives and echo chambers that reinforce ideological

manipulation. Rodden (2000) argues that *Animal Farm* “remains a living critique of modern political discourse and manipulation” (Orwell, 1945, p. 88), urging readers to remain vigilant in the face of hidden authoritarianism masked by democratic language. Orwell’s message is clear: without accountability, power inevitably leads to corruption. The novel encourages readers to challenge narratives, question authority, and protect the core principles of justice and equality.

## Discussion

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### Conclusion

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* stands as a profound and enduring political allegory that critiques the corrupting nature of power and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Through symbolic characters and satirical narrative, Orwell reconstructs the events of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalinism, demonstrating how those who rise to power in the name of equality often become the very oppressors they once opposed. The novel highlights the manipulation of language, historical revisionism, and ideological control as tools of authoritarian rule.

The allegorical nature of the text allows Orwell to explore broader themes of

totalitarianism, class exploitation, and the fragility of democratic principles. Characters like Napoleon, Snowball, and Boxer function not only as representations of historical figures but also as reflections of recurring patterns in political systems where critical thinking is discouraged, and obedience is rewarded. The degradation of the Seven Commandments and the transformation of the pigs into indistinguishable versions of human tyrants offer a stark warning about how easily power can corrupt. Importantly, *Animal Farm* transcends its historical context. In an age where disinformation, populism, and ideological polarization dominate global politics, Orwell's message remains strikingly relevant. The novel serves not only as a critique of past regimes but also as a cautionary tale urging societies to remain vigilant, to question authority, and to defend truth and justice against manipulation and authoritarianism.

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