

From Idealism to Corruption: Ethical Leadership and the Psychology of Power in Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

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Abstract

The main aim of this article is to investigate the shift from idealism to systematic corruption by comparing and contrasting Orwell's "Animal Farm" (1945) and Armah's "The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born" (1968). It examines why ethical leadership can become corrupt and how the exercise of power can lead to corruption through the lens of cognitive, structural, and societal processes that enable corruption. Close textual analysis, political psychology, ethical leadership, postcolonial theory and narrative ethics, are used in a qualitative, interdisciplinary framework, such as the "power paradox" (2016) by Dacher Keltner, the theory of moral disengagement (1999) of Albert Bandura, the "situational analysis" (2007) of Philip Zimbardo, and the critique on postcolonial elites (1963) of Frantz Fanon. The findings show that, in both novels, corruption is presented as systemic and mentally conditioned, rather than an individual fault. The transformation of a cognitive frame-shift from empathy to entitlement, and the normalisation of unethical practices through leaders' routine operations within institutions. The study culminates in a conclusion that corruption is a universal phenomenon inherent in the politics of power, and provides helpful insights into the nature of leadership, moral responsibility, and the issues of idealism and domination.

Keywords: Revolutionary Idealism, Postcolonial Corruption, Ethical Leadership, Psychology of Power, Resistance, Bureaucratic Decay.

Introduction

One of the most disturbing transformations in political thought and literature is the shift from an idealist to a corrupt figure. Narratives of liberation across cultures depict the movement from ethical aspiration and collective hope to authoritarianism, moral collapse, and injustice. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *the Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) offer important literary explorations of this phenomenon, which had much in common beyond their geographical settings and cultural backgrounds. Despite their different geographical and cultural settings, both texts examine the effects of power on moral leadership and its capacity to erode the ethical foundations of revolution.

Animal Farm is a political satire that traces the collapse of the ideals of the Russian Revolution into authoritarian rule. The novel begins with an ethic of "collective liberation," expressed in the principle: "All animals are equal" (Orwell, 1945, p. 21). As Napoleon and the pigs assume power, this principle is transformed into "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p. 112), revealing how leadership degenerates when separated from accountability and moral restraint (Brown, 2007, pp. 84-87).

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born portrays post-independent Ghana as a society permeated by corruption, moral decay, and existential despair. Unlike Orwell's overt political allegory, Armah's novel is psychological and sensory, immersing readers in images of rot and decay. The metaphor that "the gleam of hope had become the slime of decay" (Armah, 1968, p. 87) reflects the deterioration of moral leadership in the postcolonial state. Armah's work emerges from profound disillusionment following independence and the persistence of exploitative systems resembling colonial structures (Fanon, 1963, pp. 119–123).

Both explore the paradox of leadership, in which those who rise to power in the name of justice become oppressors. Political psychology offers insight into this paradox, suggesting that power is often attained through empathy and social intelligence, yet these same qualities decline once power is secured (Keltner, 2016, pp. 44–46). In *Animal Farm*, Napoleon evolves from revolutionary organiser to paranoid dictator, illustrating moral disengagement and ethical blindness. In Armah's novel, the political elite, described as the "big men" who "eat until their bellies swell" (Armah, 1968, p. 63), embody self-centred domination.

This change reflects Lord Acton's warning that, "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Acton, 1887, p. 335). Corruption, however, is not merely a personal failure,

but also an institutional effect of unchecked power and perverse institutional incentives (Hannah, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2011, p. 979–982). Thus, Orwell and Armah describe corruption as gradual and socially normalised through compromises, rationalisations, and silences. Philip Zimbardo's concept of situational ethics further explains how authoritative systems encourage individuals to abandon personal moral values (Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 211–214).

From a postcolonial perspective, Armah's novel aligns with Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie and Edward Said's concept of internalised domination, highlighting how power survives political transformation at cultural and psychological levels (Said, 1993, pp. 25–27). Corruption in Armah's *Ghana* is therefore structural rather than incidental. Viewed through ethical leadership theory, both novels expose failures at individual and institutional levels. Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) define ethical leadership as behaviour and interaction grounded in normative ethical standards (pp. 120–121). Literature is especially valuable in this context because it enables readers to confront the vulnerability and moral complexity of human experience (Nussbaum, 1995, pp. 5–7). This paper argues that the corruption of the idealist is not inevitable. Through comparative analysis, it examines ethics, psychology, power, responsibility, and the fragile boundaries between liberation and oppression in both novels.

Statement of the Problem

Both Armah and Orwell's texts have been subjects of many political, allegorical, and postcolonial discourses. Orwell's novel is usually read as a satire of totalitarianism and revolutionary betrayal, and Armah's work is usually seen as the product of post-independence disillusionment and the decay of African politics. Both novels tended to see corruption as a political, economic or moral problem, failing to look at the psychological factors that make it possible for moral judgment to become corrupted and for moral compromise to become "normal." (Achebe, 1958, pp 38–40); (Bayart, 1993, pp. 95–97). Moreover, the comparative discussion of these two texts is rarely pursued in current scholarship, even though both address the moral decay of leadership and the institutionalisation of corruption across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

More importantly, much of the research on the topic justifies the obvious shortcomings of leadership in exercising authority and presents a minimalist view of the masses' responsibility in sustaining corrupt structures. In Orwell's story, corruption is abrupt, jarring, and shocking, while in Armah's, corruption is subtler and has emerged from the silence, conformity, and rationalised self-interest of the governed. This is the dimension that is socially normalised and accepted as part

of a normal life, which is not sufficiently theorised in literary criticism. However, there is a very large conceptual and analytical void surrounding the process of understanding the failure of utopian and idealistic conceptions of liberation when faced with the psychological dynamics of entitlement, dominance and moral exemption that go hand in hand with power.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that integrates theories of power and ethics in psychology, as well as literary and narrative theory, enabling the analysis of *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945) and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Armah, 1968). This approach examines the systemic corruption of emancipatory idealism across individual cognition, narrative representation, and structural context. In “The Power Paradox” (2016), Dacher Keltner argues that people's ability to be social and cooperative is linked to the acquisition of power. However, that power also causes them to lose empathy and ethical reasoning. (pp. 44–46). Keltner asserts that as power decreases, people's abilities to make moral judgments decrease, and they become more concerned with self-interest than with moral judgment (2016, p. 72). This theory helps account for the evolution of leaders' behaviour, such as Napoleon in *Animal Farm*, who starts with good revolutionary intentions but end up adopting authoritarianism and moral disengagement as their methods of leadership (Orwell, 1945, pp. 97–102). In the postcolonial Ghana of Armah (1968), the “big men” illustrate how power, acquired through means such as guns and money, can foster an attitude of entitlement and a focus on self-enrichment rather than the public good. (pp. 63–66). In addition, Philip Zimbardo, in “*The Lucifer Effect*” (2007), illustrates how social roles and systemic pressures can corrupt even well-intentioned people (pp. 211–214). Keltner considers cognitive and affective change, while Zimbardo emphasises the structural and situational factors that encourage people to act unethically and provides a full explanation of the roles of leadership and society in corruption. Albert Bandura's “Moral Disengagement Theory (1999) adds to these viewpoints by highlighting a range of cognitive processes that can make it easier to commit unethical actions while minimising moral self-doubt, such as moral justification, displacement of responsibility, and dehumanisation (pp. 193–195). In *Animal Farm*, the pigs rationalise their corruption with a new set of commandments: “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others” (Orwell, 1945, p. 112); in *The Battle of Amritsar*, bribery and institutionalised graft are a normal form of moral compromise in postcolonial society (1968, pp. 29–32). Furthermore, Bandura et al. (1996) suggest that moral disengagement is reinforced by social systems, in that

organisational and cultural norms and pressures foster attitude shifts toward placing blame on others and adopting unethical norms (pp. 360–362).

Although psychological arguments address the initiation of moral compromise, the concept of narrative ethics, introduced by Martha Nussbaum (1995), helps explain the importance of literature in ethical understanding. Nussbaum explains that stories develop moral perception because readers can relate to the choices and problems characters' face. They can feel sorry for them, understanding the moral challenges and the repercussions of a wrong moral choice (Nussbaum, 1995, pp 5–7; 227–230). *Animal Farm* is a farm drama of the effects of self-destruction wrought by power, and Armah's portrayal of postcolonial Ghana is a portrait of the reality of self-destruction by power. Both writers use narrative to illustrate the conflict between personal decision-making and the overarching structure, prompting readers to consider complicity, resistance, and moral accountability.

Thus, this study combines the psycho-literary principles of Keltner's analysis of power and empathy, Bandura's moral disengagement theory, Nussbaum's narrative ethics, and postcolonial literature to develop a psycho-literary model for studying corruption and resistance in literature.

Contextual and Literary Overview of *Animal Farm* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Both texts are indeed literary works that depict the abuse of power, the corruption of public officials and the decay of moral values. However, the two were written in different historical and cultural backgrounds. Written after World War II, *Animal Farm* is a political satire on the Russian Revolution and the subsequent totalitarianism. Orwell uses the fable to make the mechanisms of revolutionary fervour into an oppressive autocracy dramatic by giving farm animals human characteristics (Orwell, 1945, pp. 21–22). It is an apparently straightforward story that challenges the ideals of equality in the face of human power, domination, manipulation, and moral corruption. The text illustrates how collective liberation organisations, with good intentions, can be used for personal enrichment and to perpetuate a system of injustice (Orwell, 1945, pp. 63–64; 97–102).

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, on the other hand, is set in post-independent Ghana, a time of disillusionment with the new political structures (Armah, 1968, pp. 7–8). Armah's story is not allegorical, like Orwell's *Animal Farm*, but rather realistic, depicting a morally corrupt society and a nameless man who struggles with it. It is the day-to-day life of ordinary people in postcolonial government, with a focus on the antagonism between moral purity and government pressures to conform to self-serving practices (Armah, 1968, pp. 20–21). 29–32; 63–66). Armah's visceral

images of the "filth-caked cedi notes" and omnipresent sexually charged corruption position the psychological and emotional damages of moral degradation to a wider institutional and societal paradigm of moral failures (Armah, 1968, pp. 87–88).

The texts range from idealism to corruption, but the approaches to the narratives and their cultural contexts differ. In Orwell's allegorical form, a universalised critique of power, corruption, and ethical collapse is possible, as the mechanisms by which leaders and followers justify oppression are revealed (Keltner, 2016, pp. 44–46; Bandura, 1999, pp. 193–195). Armah's postcolonial realism situates these dynamics within a particular sociohistorical and economic context, highlighting the structural and moral issues faced by citizens of newly independent states (Fanon, 1963, pp. 122–124; Said, 1993, pp. 25–27).

Furthermore, both writers discuss the resistance and moral awareness in the face of systemic corruption. Benjamin the donkey symbolises cognitive resilience and ethical scepticism in *Animal Farm*; his presence is a reminder that the regime is manipulating him, yet he does nothing about it (Orwell, 1945, pp. 62–64). In Armah, the protagonist, whose morality is impeccable and who is deeply repulsed by corruption, is a reminder of the personal price to be paid for upholding standards of right conduct in a morally corrupt society (1968, pp. 29–31).

As a result, both *Animal Farm* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* are densely layered stories that explore how idealism can be corrupted, ethical choices compromised, and systems of corruption can emerge. The allegorical critique of Orwell and the postcolonial realism of Armah provide a powerful means of analysing cognitive, ethical, and structural means of power and also emphasise moral resistance. This study places these texts in historical, psychological, and literary settings that highlight their continuing relevance for understanding leadership, morality, and the interaction of human behaviour within systems of authority.

Revolutionary Idealism and Its Discontents

In both *Animal Farm* (1945) and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), revolutionary idealism is a strong moral and political impulse that springs from a sense of equality, justice, and collective renewal. As both stories proceed, though, this idealism turns into disillusionment as Frantz Fanon (1963, p. 122) finds that the postcolonial elites end up replacing the coloniser without changing the system. Orwell and Armah use allegory and psychological realism to illustrate the progression from aspiration to moral deterioration and how power can warp the moral perceptions of both individuals and institutions.

The revolutionary idealism is expressed, in a moral sense, in *Animal Farm*. Old Major's vision is a foundational one that states, "All men are enemies. All animals are comrades" (1945, p 9), creating a binary ethics: one of solidarity and one of justice. This vision is reflected in the Seven Commandments, of which the one that stands out the most is "All animals are equal" (p. 21). In the early revolutionary moment, there is a collective enthusiasm, as when "the animals were happy as they had never conceived it possible to be" (p. 27). This is the herald of power, of leadership based on shared purpose and mutual empathy, as Dacher Keltner (2016) puts it, a power of prosocial origin. In Armah's Ghana, the concept of independence starts as a moral awakening and a national one, too. The Teacher has a fond recollection of a time when "we were ready to build a new world" (Armah, 1968, p. 54). However, the hope is short-lived as he becomes disillusioned and reaches the bitter conclusion: "We believed that independence would bring purity, but instead it had simply changed the eaters" (p. 73). This is a typical example of how "revolutionary idealism" is translated into a "transfer of power," as Fanon charges.

In both novels, the betrayal of the ideals of revolution is a process, both psychological and institutional. The pigs start taking advantage of privileges, and in *Animal Farm*, they say they must have a quiet place to work. This rationalisation is an example of Bandura's (1999) moral justification, in which unethical behaviour is presented as serving a greater good. Another example of the use of language is the way Squealer uses it to manipulate a reader's understanding, as he does here: "You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege?" (p. 36). In this way, the pigs re-normalise inequality and leave the impression that the revolution is continuous. The most chilling changes in the commandments are the rewritings "No animal shall sleep in a bed; with sheets" (p. 45) and later, "No animal shall kill any other animal; without cause" (p. 67). These little changes show how moral lines are blurred through distorted language and collective submission. So the basic tenet of the revolution is turned on its head: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p. 112). That is Isaiah Deutscher's (1955, p. 89) description of "the moment revolutionary energy turns into dogma. The pigs' change is not only political, but it is also psychological, as described by Keltner (2016): "The power paradox is that the more powerful a person is, the less empathetic and the less aware of their moral duty they become.

In Armah's novel, corruption operates less through overt ideological manipulation and more through sensory and psychological saturation. The protagonist encounters a world where "the

gleam of hope had turned into the slime of decay” (Armah, p. 87). The recurring imagery of filth, “the money... was covered with some kind of slimy, rotten substance” (p. 7), serves as a metaphor for moral degradation. Corruption is not exceptional but endemic, embedded in everyday transactions. The “big men” epitomise this transformation: “They eat and eat and eat... and then they come to take more” (p. 63). Their insatiable consumption reflects both material greed and psychological entitlement, fitting with Zimbardo's (2007) insight that systems of power incentivise and normalise unethical behaviour. The protagonist's wife reinforces this normalisation, urging him to accept bribes: “Everyone is doing it... why must you be the only one?” (p. 45). Here, Armah exposes the social pressures that sustain corruption, illustrating how moral compromise becomes a condition of survival.

As idealism collapses, both novels foreground the psychological burden of disillusionment. In *Animal Farm*, the animals’ fading memory enables their continued subjugation: “The animals could hardly remember what life had been like before the Rebellion” (Orwell, p. 98). This cognitive erosion facilitates what Hannah Arendt (1963) terms the “banality of evil,” where systemic injustice persists through ordinary compliance rather than overt malice. Benjamin the donkey, however, embodies critical awareness. His remark, “Donkeys live a long time. None of you has ever seen a dead donkey” (p. 62), signals a historical consciousness that resists ideological manipulation.

It is an existential and more corporeal disillusionment in Armah's story. The main character thinks that “in the offices, in the homes, in the very air” (p. 101). This is, as Ato Quayson (2020, p. 114) puts it, the “psychic weight of unfulfilled utopias,” in which the sense of failure of the national ideals not only brings about political decay but also a deep moral fatigue. “The future?” says the Teacher. “What is it?” Armah does not close the circle as Orwell does, and there is no ambiguity about the characters as “pig to man” as there is in Orwell's case, but a thin vein of possibility for the resistance, for trying to deny corruption despite its consequences, in the protagonist's refusal to accept the corruption.

Both texts, however, hold several signs of moral resistance in the face of disillusionment. Boxer further exemplifies the strength and fragility of a good heart and an unyielding trust in the best in people, as his pledge to “work harder” (Orwell, p. 29) demonstrates. The betrayal of Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer” (p. 83) of the regime only adds to the lesson of the value of trust.

In the novel, Armah is subtler about the resistance. "The slime could not be washed off" (p. 29) is literal and figurative as it is a physical response to a moral corruption being offered by the protagonist. His attitudes are consistent with Bandura's (1999) idea of moral agency: the ability to engage in cognitive processes that facilitate moral disengagement.

Both Orwell and Armah demonstrate that the discontent with revolutionary idealism is not culturally specific but structurally and psychologically universal. These novels, however, from a political, psychological and postcolonial perspective, make it clear that corruption is not just a personal and moral problem of individual agents but a systemic byproduct of unchecked power, moral disengagement and collective complicity. Both works are a criticism of the past and a warning about the moral weakness of all revolutionary futures: "idealism calcifies into dogma, then rots into tyranny."

Psychology of Power: From Empathy to Entitlement

One of the most profound insights the texts offer is a psychological mapping of power and its origins in collective empathy and moral purpose. How power slowly transforms into entitlement and moral disengagement, and then into domination. The two texts look forward to what Dacher Keltner (2016) theorises as the power paradox; that people often become powerful by empathetic and cooperative means but then lose them once they have acquired power (pp. 44–46, 72). Orwell and Armah depict this change in form with gripping force. Leadership is born out of suffering, as in *Animal Farm*. Old Major's speech is based on a collective empathy: "Is it not crystal clear... that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings? (Orwell, 1945, p. 9). His vision is not about himself but about his community, and it is about justice, dignity and caring. The animals' rebellion can therefore be said to result from what Keltner calls prosocial motivation, or the desire to gain power by joining others in their needs and pain.

The moral orientation of national renewal underpins the early post-independence moment in Armah's novel. The Teacher remembers a time of aspiration to be good: "There was a time when we believed all things could be made new" (Armah, 1968, p. 54). The hope and moral imagination that accompany this belief are a social and collective emotional investment, meaning that the legitimacy of political power starts with a shared hope and moral imagination. However, as power consolidates in both novels, empathy slowly dies. The pigs start to isolate themselves from the other animals, both physically and mentally, in *Animal Farm*. The act of moving itself is simple: "the pigs moved into the farmhouse" (Orwell, p. 45), but it is a greater change in mentalities: a

distancing from what is lived by the governed. This aligns with Keltner's (2016) findings of less perspective-taking among the powerful. It is further shown through Squealer's rhetoric that this lack of empathy is there: "Surely, comrades, you do not want Jones back?" (Orwell, p. 36).

In Armah's *Ghana*, the dehumanisation of empathy portrays it with even more visceral impact. "Eating and eating and eating is the way these guys do business, and they leave the crumbs for the rest of us" (Armah, p. 63) is the description of the ruling elite, "*the big men*". They are apathetic toward social pain and suffering and are psychologically removed from the social body. The metaphor of consumption shifts from service to exploitation, similar to Bandura's (1999) notion of dehumanisation, which refers to treating people as a means to personal use. The protagonist's surroundings help to sustain this feeling of decay: "The air itself seemed full of a rotten sweetness" (Armah, p. 12). This sensory imagery represents the normalisation of moral corruption and a blunted sense of empathy that develops from repeated exposure.

As empathy decreases, both texts show how moral disengagement begins to occur, a cognitive process by which individuals rationalise immoral behaviour without feeling guilty (Bandura, 1999, pp. 193–195). This is most clearly seen in the rationalisations the pigs give for their privilege, such as "It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples" (Orwell, p. 36). Here, self-interest is recapitalised as a shared need, and the pigs continue to be moral beings, but exploit others. The more violence becomes normal, the more this process is accelerated. The animals are noted to be "shaken and miserable" (p. 68) after the executions, and yet nothing ensues. The regime's actions are implicitly justified in terms of necessity and security; terms that "Zimbardo 2007" identifies as "situational conformity to authority" (p. 211–214).

Armah uses social normalisation as his means of moral disengagement in the novel. The wife of the protagonist accuses: "Everyone is doing it... Why must you be the only one?" (Armah, p. 45). This call to action spreads the blame and makes corruption seem commonplace and reasonable. In the same way, a fellow actor says, "The world is bad, and you cannot live in the world without being bad yourself" (p. 92). These sorts of claims illustrate Bandura's 'displacement and diffusion of responsibility' concept, in which people believe their behaviour is down to the situation rather than their own choices.

The last step in this psychological process is the development of a sense of entitlement; the idea that they are entitled to privilege and domination. This is what happens in *Animal Farm*, for Napoleon becomes this. As a revolutionary leader, he becomes an absolute dictator, "a large, rather

fierce-looking Berkshire boar" (Orwell, p. 25), and commands without question. His life is the internalisation of his superiority: He is trading with man, drinking alcohol and sleeping in beds. The most basic commandment of this entitlement is the one that became "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p. 112). This is not just ironic; it is a re-thinking of inequality as natural and legitimate.

Entitlement in Armah's *Ghana* is seen in an abundance of material things and a pride in social standing. The "big men" are defined as those who "have made eating a profession" (Armah, p. 63) and thus exploitation plays an intrinsic part in their lives. Their wealth and station go hand in hand with their feeling of being untouchable, and the lack of penalties for corruption. The hero silently and firmly ignores this: "He would not become one of them" (p. 139). So far, his refusal has been a warning of the price of defying entitlement when it is the norm of the system. Whereas the pigs go about their transformation as if nothing had happened, Armah's main character is acutely conscious of the lessons of power.

This makes the strategies of narration in both texts seem to converge on a similar understanding: power is not only a structural condition but also a psychological process that alters perception, emotion, and moral judgments. Empathy-driven leadership turns into an attitude of entitlement through stages of detachment, rationalisation and normalisation.

This transformation supports Keltner's claim that power fundamentally changes cognitive and affective functioning (2016), Bandura's (1999) theory of moral disengagement, and Zimbardo's (2007) theory of situational analysis of authority. Both novels build on the theories by incorporating into them the social systems within which these psychological changes occur: the world of reward and punishment for compliance and resistance. So, corruption of power is not accidental or inevitable; it depends on the loss of empathy and the unchecked growth of entitlement. These dynamics are uncovered, providing more than just a critique of leadership; they are a more troubling warning of the fragile psychological roots of good leadership.

Structural Corruption: Bureaucracy as Moral Quicksand

The basic dynamics of bureaucracy are the reason behind the normalisation, routinisation, and near-inescapability of corruption. In both texts, corruption is not perpetuated endlessly by bad people, but by institutional systems that imbibe, proliferate, and validate unethical conduct. Bureaucracy in these texts is like a moral quicksand: as soon as people get in, they have a hard

time staying in the right place, and they become increasingly morally corrupt to cope with the routine, compliance, and rationalisation of bureaucracy.

The shift from equality to hierarchy is not that apparent in *Animal Farm*. Following the rebellion, the pigs are put in charge of the administration: "The pigs were not, of course, at work, but they were in charge of things and could direct and supervise the others" (Orwell, 1945, p. 27). It is easy to see how what seems sensible and efficient specialisation within an organisation can turn into institutionalised privilege. Leadership separates from labour, thereby creating a structure that distinguishes decision-makers from labour. This division grows as rules are codified and manipulated. The Seven Commandments were originally meant to be clear moral rules which could be changed, rather than formal rules: "No alcohol drinking too much" (p. 78). Moral flexibility is evident in the addition of two words, which shift the meaning of 'prohibition' to 'permission'. This is consistent with Bandura's (1999) "euphemistic labelling," which sanitises harmful actions in technical or ambiguous terms (pp. 193–195). The pigs control everything, and they say that the production of each type of foodstuff has increased, "through lists of figures read out by squealer" (Orwell, p. 85). Whether true or not, these figures foster an impression of improvement and perpetuate the idea of the "objective" truth arising from the bureaucratic process and obscuring systemic injustice, as Arendt (1963) would put it, "the production of objective truth" (pp. 135–136). The animals are convinced and slip further into submission.

In Armah's novel, bureaucracy is not so much a tyranny as merely an oppressive system of ordinary exchange. The protagonist is part of a system in which corruption is ingrained in day-to-day operations. Thus, as Armah puts it: "In this country you cannot do anything unless you pay something" (1968, p. 31). This normalisation phenomenon is what Bandura (1999) calls the diffusion of responsibility, in which moral responsibility is spread throughout the system, so there seems to be no point in resisting. The novel's sensory imagery reinforces this structural decay. For example, the railway office is described as being dirty and stagnant: "The place had the smell of urine and rot in it" (p. 8). Bureaucracy turns into a realm of moral muddying, and people bend to survive. Even the language that is used within the system is a sign of moral decay. Official speak is in cryptic terms, euphemisms, which are actually bribery disguised as a "something small" (p. 34). The language used, such as this, helps to reduce the ethical violation, and thus a sense of normalcy for the participants.

Hence, both novels show that bureaucratic corruption persists, driven by compulsion, custom, and reward. In *Animal Farm*, the animals work harder and harder, even as conditions grow progressively worse: "They worked like slaves" (Orwell, p. 88), yet they believed they were better off working than before. The internalisation of the bureaucratic logic is more insidious, as is the threat of violence, which is channelled through Napoleon's dogs. Boxer's motto, "Napoleon is always right" (p. 56), is an example of surrendering cognition to authority. Unlike the fear in Armah's novel, the element of compliance is not overt; rather, it is more economic and social. Colleagues are involved in corruption because they can gain material benefits and social mobility. One of the characters explains that if one does not do it, someone else will do it (Armah, p. 52). It is a competitive logic which sees corruption as a rational choice in a flawed system. His resistance isolates him: "He was surrounded by people who had taken the easy way" (p. 139). His integrity is fine, but it underscores the structural challenge of remaining loyal to one's principles in a system that rewards compromise.

A central theme in the two texts is that bureaucratic corruption can become ingrained. The pigs eventually become like their former enemies, the humans, just as the animals at the end of the novel are no longer able to tell the difference between a pig and a man: "The animals outside could not tell one from the other, nor could the pigs tell one animal from another: For now, one was like the other; now, one was like the other" (Orwell, p. 113). This convergence is the end of the institutionalisation of corruption: it is no longer linked to individuals, but to the system itself. Armah's Ghana is a cyclical process in which new elites repeat the behaviour of past elites. The Teacher comments: "The old stories... they come back again and again" (Armah, p. 85). This reiteration of Frantz Fanon's (1963) cautioning that independence "reproduces colonial hierarchies" (p. 122), if not worse.

In this bureaucratic world, then, people are progressively losing their moral ability. Decisions are broken down into small, relatively trivial tasks that, together, form a system of corruption. The animals' lack of the power to assert themselves against authority in *Animal Farm* results not only from fear but also from habituation. The main character in Armah's novel is just as much an internal as an external battler, as he has to strive against the pull of normalisation at every turn. His words, "The slime could not be washed off" (Armah, p. 29), are a stark reminder of the psychological burden of living through such a system.

So, through the characters of their bureaucratic systems, Orwell and Armah expose corruption not just as top-down, but also as bottom-up; it is not just imposed, but designed. Moral failure becomes routine practice in the bureaucracy and becomes ingrained in its procedures, language, and incentives. The two novels take the discussion of corruption to the level of structural dynamics and show that ethical leadership, if it is to be effective, is not possible without institutional accountability and structural change. It is clear that both *Animal Farm* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* teach that revolution does not work when leaders become corrupt, but also when systems are created that allow for a corrupt form of leadership to become normal.

Resistance and Ethical Loneliness

If corruption is systemic and psychologically normalised in both novels, then resistance becomes not only imperative but extremely individualistic. In both novels, those who maintain their moral sense are marginalised or rejected by society, misunderstood, or rendered powerless. In *Animal Farm*, Benjamin the donkey embodies intellectual scepticism and historical awareness. Unlike the other animals, he is not seduced by revolutionary optimism or ideological propaganda. His cynical observation, "Donkeys live a long time. None of you has ever seen a dead donkey" (Orwell, 1945, p. 62), suggests not only longevity but also a seasoned awareness of the cyclical nature of oppression. Benjamin recognises that systems of domination tend to reproduce themselves regardless of ideological rhetoric.

However, Benjamin's resistance is fundamentally passive. Although he perceives the gradual corruption of the revolution, he rarely intervenes. His scepticism protects him from ideological deception but does not translate into transformative action. Only when Boxer is taken away does Benjamin openly protest, crying: "Fools! Fools! Do you not see what is written on the side of that van?" (Orwell, 1945, p. 82). This moment of moral urgency comes too late. Benjamin's tragedy lies not in ignorance but in the paralysis of critical awareness.

Whereas Armah's protagonist is also a resister, but one who is more active, more resistant. He refuses to be involved in corruption; he does not think about it or like it. If given a bribe, he is physically displeased: "The money... was smeared with some sort of slimy, rotten matter" (Armah, 1968, p. 7). Through this imagery, he makes corruption something he can touch and something dirty, which makes it more moral to him. He has rejected it outright and at great expense: "He would not take the money" (p. 29). By doing so, this choice puts him on the side of the other social order, in which it is common to bribe others and to be expected. This opposition leaves him socially

and emotionally cut off. His wife scolds him, "You are a stupid man that you do not take what everybody takes" (p. 45). Her irritation is symptomatic of a broader 'social logic' that sees moral action not only as unfeasible but even irrational.

Resistance in both novels, therefore, demands more than moral awareness; it requires endurance under conditions of alienation. Benjamin's survival is not based on his resistance, but rather his non-resistance. His moral isolation is internalised; he lives within the system, but is not a part of it. The condition that Arendt (1963) calls the isolation of individuals who refuse to join those who are doing wrong (pp. 135–136). The main character's sense of loneliness is more pronounced in Armah's novel. Armah says that he was "the only one in a mob of people who had all taken the easier path" (p. 139). This is an expression of ethical loneliness: that one's moral position sets him apart rather than bringing him together. This situation is philosophically expressed by the Teacher: "The world is full of people who have forgotten how to be clean" (p. 79). His disengagement from the front lines marks a retreat into intellectual despair.

Nevertheless, the resistance in both texts is not merely social but also psychological. In a world that tolerates compromise, maintaining a moral compass takes work. While one can overcome corruption, the protagonist's thought, "The slime could not be washed away" (Armah, p. 29), implies that purity is not the result of resisting evil but rather a heightened awareness of corruption. This is consistent with Zimbardo's (2007) idea that people in corrupt systems must go out of their way to defy situational pressures that seek to make them conform (pp. 211–214). Boxer's tragic devotion, "Napoleon is always right" (p. 56), illustrates the psychological problems of resistance for those who have internalised authority, as seen in *Animal Farm*. He eventually proves unfaithful to the system, demonstrating the system's lack of loyalty, making it important to be aware of it.

Both novels have lugubrious portrayals of their characters, but they retain a fragile hope: hope within one's conscience. This hope is not fulfilled at the conclusion of *Animal Farm*, where the difference between pigs and men fades away: "It was impossible to say which was which" (p. 113). Resistance does not change the system, implying the structural corruption's power. In Armah's novel, however, hope is 'deferred, but not denied'. With the Teacher's statement, "The beautiful ones are not yet born" (Armah, p. 85), it seems as if ethical renewal can be achieved; however, not immediately.

Hence, Orwell and Armah demonstrate that resistance within corrupt systems is rarely heroic in conventional terms. Rather, it is marked by solitude, psychological strain, and limited agency.

Through Benjamin and the unnamed protagonist, both authors reveal the profound personal cost of ethical consistency in morally compromised societies.

Literary Symbolism of Decay

Both texts feature decay as an integral part of their symbolic systems, making visible the moral, political, and psychological corruption. Orwell and Armah depict the physical decay of spaces, bodies, language, and objects as metaphors for the erosion of revolutionary ideals. Both use allegorical distortion and sensory realism to create a world where decay is not an accident but a systemic problem, echoing Bandura's (1999) theory of the normalisations of the moral unacceptability of evil and (Arendt's 1963) sense of the subtle permeation of moral decay in bureaucratic systems.

In Orwell's allegory, decay is more symbolic and linguistic, manifested in the gradual subversion of revolutionary ideals. At the beginning of the revolution, the fact that all animals are equal is an expression of ideology (Orwell, 1945, p. 21). This is a shocking transformation, though, as power is consolidated, and it becomes "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (p. 112). This mutation is not only a political joke; it is a mutation in the language itself, the language of morality. The ethical basis of words is lost, and they become instruments of domination. Just as the humans' language has fallen into decay, so too has the language of the pigs. They start just like the other animals; over time, they begin to exhibit human characteristics: "The pigs suddenly began to move on their hind legs" (p.110). This is the point at which the revolutionary identity has been totally lost. The last image, 'It was impossible to say which was which' (p. 113), shows the entire erasure of distinction between oppressor and liberator. It is a circular decay: The revolution to get rid of exploitation creates exploitation in a new form.

Whereas Orwell's decay is primarily allegorical, Armah's is very much sensory, immersive and visceral. His Ghana is rife with images of rot, filth and bodily corruption, and what has been termed "the aesthetics of disgust. Corruption is not just in theory; it is in reality. The site is in bad condition: "The area had a foul odour of foulness; it was smelly" (p. 8). Public areas, workplaces, buses and houses are said to be filthy and unventilated, due to the breakdown of institutional integrity. Armah's setting is not symbolic, as in Orwell's case, but very much real, in which decay permeates every surface and encounter.

Furthermore, in both texts, objects are used as symbols of decay, which are condensed. The barn wall, a place of collective memory and truth in *Animal Farm*, has been corrupted. The wall itself

is manipulated, becoming a palimpsest of history rewritten for power. Likewise, the windmill, a symbol of progress, is repeatedly exploited, destroyed, and reinvented at great expense to the animals. It is a sign of the vacuousness of promises made by revolutionaries in an unscrupulous government. In Armah's writing, things are freighted with the repugnance of the senses. A seemingly mundane object becomes a moral experience for the protagonist when he is confronted with a bribe: "The slime could not be washed off" (p. 29). The slime that cannot be washed away represents the permanence of the system's corruption. There is no purity in refusing; it only brings the awareness of the contamination.

In addition to physical and symbolic aspects, decay is an indicator of a greater deterioration, the loss of moral imagination in both novels. The animals begin to forget to dream of an alternative world in *Animal Farm*. "They could not think of any other condition" (Orwell, p. 98), a form of cognitive narrowing that brings about oppression. The past is erased, the present is blurred, and the future is unknown. In Armah's novel, however, the loss is conveyed in an existential sense. The Teacher reflects, "The world is full of people who have forgotten how to be clean" (Armah, p.79). This cleanliness is not just physical; it is also about integrity and clarity; it is metaphorical. The lack of this indicates a failure of imagination and effort for moral renewal at the collective level. The theme that "the beautiful ones are not yet born" (p. 85), however, is a recurrent theme introduced by Armah in a subtle counterpoint. This sentence is about an imagined future, a potential redress of balance, as decay takes centre stage in the here and now. Armah's world is not a closed cyclical one like Orwell's, but space, no matter how fragile, is the space for future ethical rebirth. Orwell and Armah, through their unique aesthetic approaches, bring together to express decay as a universal language of moral and political failure. Both writers show that corruption extends beyond institutions into perceptions, language, and embodiment. In these texts, decay is not only a description of decay, but it is a diagnosis of decay. Explores the psychological processes (moral disengagement), structural processes (bureaucratic normalisation) and historical processes (post-revolutionary betrayal) that underpin corruption.

Conclusion

This study has argued that *Animal Farm* (1945) and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) offer complementary and interdisciplinary analyses of how revolutionary idealism deteriorates into systemic corruption. Based on political psychology, postcolonial theory, ethical leadership studies, and narrative ethics, the analysis demonstrates that the failure of emancipatory projects is neither

accidental nor culturally isolated. Rather, it follows recurring psychological and structural patterns. It has been shown that idealism, while morally generative, remains fragile unless supported by durable ethical institutions and systems of accountability. In Orwell's novel, the corruption of revolutionary language is captured through the transformation of equality into hierarchy. In Armah's postcolonial Ghana, the promise of independence deteriorates into institutionalised decay, material greed, and psychological exhaustion.

A major contribution of this study is its emphasis on ordinary complicity. Corrupt systems are sustained not only by elites but by the passivity, rationalisation, and adaptive behaviours of ordinary individuals. This challenges reductive explanations that attribute corruption solely to individual immorality and instead locates it within collective patterns of conformity, fear, and survival.

Finally, this research proposes a more holistic understanding of corruption as simultaneously psychological, structural, ethical, and historical. Both novels remain deeply relevant to contemporary political realities marked by democratic erosion, authoritarian resurgence, and declining trust in institutions. Orwell and Armah therefore offer not only literary critiques of the past but enduring warnings about the fragility of ethical governance. At the end, the study concludes that preventing the transformation of liberation into domination requires more than revolutionary enthusiasm. It requires ethical leadership grounded in empathy, institutional accountability, moral courage, and sustained resistance to the corrupting effects of power.

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