

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF CONFLICTS REFLECTED IN THE NOVEL “LORD OF THE FLIES”

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Abstract

Sir William Golding (1911-93), an English novelist achieved literary fame with the publication of his first novel Lord of the Flies (1954). Golding used both of his experiences in writing Lord of the Flies. The Lord of the Flies comes to symbolize the instincts of power and cruelty awakened among the boys. As Lord of the Flies progresses, Golding shows how different boys feel the influences of the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Here, the conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil. Throughout the novel, Golding associates the instinct of civilization with good and the instinct of savagery with evil. Like Conrad's work, Golding's novel emphasizes the brutal and violent human impulses that arise in the absence of political order.

Key Words: Conflict, civilization, Savagery, Loss of Innocence.

Introduction

Sir William Golding (1911-93), an English novelist, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1983. He achieved literary fame with the publication of his first novel *Lord of the Flies* (1954). The name *The Lord of the Flies* given to the sow's head that Jack's gang impales on a stake and erects in the forest as an offering to the "beast." *The Lord of the Flies* comes to symbolize the primordial instincts of power and cruelty that take control of Jack's tribe. Golding joined the Royal Navy in 1940 during World War II. Before and after the war he worked as a school teacher. In 1944, as part of his war service, As a naval officer, he experienced the brutalities of war. *Lord of the Flies* is an inversion of the Scottish writer R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1857), which tells the story of three boys stranded on a desert island. In *Lord of the Flies* in the midst of a war, a plane evacuating a group of schoolboys from Britain is shot down over a deserted island. The boys, free from the rules

imposed by the society, struggle with the two conflicting human instincts - civilization and savagery. While the boys in *The Coral Island* spend their time in pleasant adventures, the boys in *Lord of the Flies* quickly degenerate into savagery and barbarism. John Peck and Martin Coyle comment:

Lord of the Flies looks at a group of schoolboys marooned on an island and their reversion to savagery; as such the novel considers the frailty of the structure of civilization.

Conflict:

The conflict between the two instincts is the driving force of the novel, explored through the dissolution of the young English boys' civilized, moral, disciplined behavior as they accustom themselves to a wild, brutal, barbaric life in the jungle. The human capacity for evil and guilt is a predominant theme in *Lord of the Flies*. Throughout the novel, Golding associates the instinct of civilization with good and the instinct of savagery with evil. He represents the conflict between civilization and savagery in the conflict between the novel's two main characters: Ralph and Jack. Ralph represents order and leadership, and Jack represents savagery and the desire for power. Jack and his hunters kill a pig. Simon finds the dead pig's head calls it "the Lord of the Flies" because of the insects that swarm around it. The pig's head, held on a stake, functions as a totem and represents the savagery and amorality of Jack's tribe. Thus "the Lord of the Flies" comes to symbolize the instincts of power and cruelty awakened among the boys. Regarding *Lord of the Flies*, Robert J Fletcher comments:

Golding's use of an effective symbolism throughout the story allows it to work as an allegory of humanity's fallen nature as well as a graphically realistic scenario.

There is also a Judeo-Christian allegory in *Lord of the Flies*. The Hebrew term Ba'alzevuv, (Beelzebub in English) means "God of the Flies." Beelzebub is synonymous with Devil or Satan. In Judaism and Christianity, Satan is considered the source of all evil in the world. However, for Golding the English boys' evil instincts spring from within the human psyche rather than from a supernatural agency. Simon is the most spiritually motivated among the boys but other boys kill him savagely. Alastair Niven comments:

Simon functions as a prophet-martyr for the other boys.

Lord of the Flies is a dystopia published early at the beginning of the Cold War era. In the form of a story of young children stranded on an island, the novel reflects the conflict between liberal democracy and totalitarian communism after World War II. Ralph represents the liberal tradition, while Jack represents the communist dictatorship in the mid twentieth century. As *Lord of the Flies* progresses, Golding shows how different boys feel the influences of the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Piggy



represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization. Ralph stands for the political and moral facets of civilization and Simon for the spiritual side of human nature. The idea of innate human evil is central to *Lord of the Flies*. By the end of the novel, Jack and his tribe of boys have become savages hunters and have no desire to return to civilization. They set the forest on fire to hunt for Ralph who collapses on the beach. On waking up, Ralph is relieved to find a British naval officer instead of his pursuers. But Ralph weeps for the end of innocence of the boys. The naval officer too realizes the same truth and meaningfully comments:

I should have thought that a pack of British boys would have been able to put up a better show than that.

Civilization Vs Savagery

The central concern of *Lord of the Flies* is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil. Throughout the novel, Golding associates the instinct of civilization with good and the instinct of savagery with evil.

The conflict between the two instincts is the driving force of the novel, explored through the dissolution of the young English boys' civilized, moral, disciplined behavior as they accustom themselves to a wild, brutal, barbaric life in the jungle. *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, which means that Golding conveys many of his main ideas and themes through symbolic characters and objects. He represents the conflict between civilization and savagery in the conflict between the novel's two main characters: Ralph, the protagonist, who represents order and leadership; and Jack, the antagonist, who represents savagery and the desire for power.

As the novel progresses, Golding shows how different people feel the influences of the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Piggy, for instance, has no savage feelings, while Roger seems barely capable of comprehending the rules of civilization. Generally, however, Golding implies that the instinct of savagery is far more primal and fundamental to the human psyche than the instinct of civilization. Golding sees moral behavior, in many cases, as something that civilization forces upon the individual rather than a natural expression of human individuality. When left to their own devices, Golding implies, people naturally revert to cruelty, savagery, and barbarism. This idea of innate human evil is central to *Lord of the Flies*, and finds expression in several important



symbols, most notably the beast and the sow's head on the stake. Among all the characters, only Simon seems to possess anything like a natural, innate goodness.

Loss of Innocence

As the boys on the island progress from well-behaved, orderly children longing for rescue to cruel, bloodthirsty hunters who have no desire to return to civilization, they naturally lose the sense of innocence that they possessed at the beginning of the novel. The painted savages in Chapter 12 who have hunted, tortured, and killed animals and human beings are a far cry from the guileless children swimming in the lagoon in Chapter 3. But Golding does not portray this loss of innocence as something that is done to the children; rather, it results naturally from their increasing openness to the innate evil and savagery that has always existed within them. Golding implies that civilization can mitigate but never wipe out the innate evil that exists within all human beings. The forest glade in which Simon sits in Chapter 3 symbolizes this loss of innocence. At first, it is a place of natural beauty and peace, but when Simon returns later in the novel, he discovers the bloody sow's head impaled upon a stake in the middle of the clearing. The bloody offering to the beast has disrupted the paradise that existed before a powerful symbol of innate human evil disrupting childhood innocence.

Sir William Golding composed *Lord of the Flies* shortly after the end of WWII. At the time of the novel's composition, Golding, who had published an anthology of poetry nearly two decades earlier, had been working for a number of years as a teacher and training as a scientist. The novel's plot, in which a group of English boys stranded on a deserted island struggle to develop their own society, is a social and political thought-experiment using fiction. The culmination of the plot in war and murder suggests that Golding's overarching hypothesis about humanity is pessimistic, that is, there are anarchic and brutal instincts in human nature. The title has two meanings, both charged with religious significance. The first is a reference to a line from *King Lear*, "As flies to wanton boys, are we to gods." The second is a reference to the Hebrew name Ba'alzevuv, or in its Greek form Beelzebub, which translates to "God of the Flies" and is synonymous with Satan. For Golding however, the satanic forces that compel the shocking events on the island come from within the human psyche rather than from an external, supernatural realm as they do in Judeo-Christian mythology. Golding thus employs a religious reference to illustrate a Freudian concept: the Id, the amoral instinct that governs the individual's sense of sheer survival, is by nature evil in its amoral pursuit of its own goals.

Published in 1954 early in the Cold War, *Lord of the Flies* is firmly rooted in the sociopolitical concerns of its era. The novel alludes to the Cold War conflict between liberal democracy and totalitarian communism. Ralph represents the liberal tradition, while Jack,



before he succumbs to total anarchy, represents the kind of military dictatorship that, for mid-century America and Great Britain, characterized the communist system. Golding's novel capitalizes on public paranoia surrounding the atom bomb which, due to the arms race of the Cold War, was at a high. In addition to science, mythology, and the sociopolitical context of the Cold War, *Lord of the Flies* was heavily influenced by previous works of speculative fiction. In particular, Golding's novel alludes to R. M. Ballantyne's 1857 *The Coral Island*, which tells the story of three boys stranded on a desert island. Golding, who found Ballantyne's interpretation of the situation naive and improbable, likely, intended *Lord of the Flies* to be an indirect critique of *The Coral Island*. Golding preserves the names of two of Ballantyne's characters, Ralph and Jack, to force the two texts into deeper comparison. While the boys of *Coral Island* spend their time having pleasant adventures, Golding's characters battle hunger, loneliness, and the deadly consequences of political conflict after they are deserted. The pessimistic character of Golding's story reflects the author's emphasis on the necessity of democratic civilization. Critics also have noted the relationship between *Lord of the Flies* and Joseph Conrad's canonical 1902 *Heart of Darkness*, which follows a soldier's excursion into marginal African civilizations. Reflecting some biases, *Heart of Darkness* depicts these parts of Africa as places where social order is absent and anarchy rules, breeding death and disorder; the novel sees the same problem as an issue within the individual human soul. Like Conrad's work, Golding's novel emphasizes the brutal and violent human impulses that arise in the absence of political order.

Conclusion

Thus, *Lord of the Flies*, with its dystopian and speculative characteristics, established Golding as a solid author with an interest in the science-fiction literary genre that was popular in the 1950s. Golding's subsequent works saw him moving even further into the science fiction genre. *The Inheritors*, heavily influenced by H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*, imagines life during the dawn of man and is considered a modern classic of speculative fiction. *Lord of the Flies* was not an instant success, selling fewer than 3,000 copies before going out of print in 1955. The enduring popularity of the novel inspired two film adaptations, one by Peter Brook in 1963, and the second by Harry Hook in 1990. Golding's original novel, however, remains the best-known version of the tale. In 2005, *Time Magazine* named the novel one of the 100 best English-language novels since 1923. A continuing controversy surrounding the political message of the novel and its view of human nature has led some readers to challenge its status as a book suitable for children. The American Library Association thus positioned *Lord of the Flies* at number 70 on its list of the 100 most challenged books of 1990-2000. This historicizing does not do justice to the novel. But in terms of reception history, contemporary critics are right to note that the novel's position at the center of many English curricula across America and Great Britain





during the Cold War illustrates how the pedagogy of literature has been used to bolster national identity and ideology.

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