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DEMYSTIFICATION OF HUMAN INSTINCT: ANGELIC INFANCY SHATTERED IN
LORD OF THE FLIES

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Abstract

Like animals, humans are instinctive by nature. Instincts, in general sense, are uncontrollable urges that drive living beings toward an unwanted and complicated behaviour. In the behavioural sciences, instinct is generally understood as the innate part of behaviour that emerges without any training or education in human beings. Our society keeps these instincts in check by exerting some dominant rules and regulations. So, human beings always face within their mind a conflict -- a conflict between two impulses regarding two completely opposite human dispositions -- be civil or be savage. This present paper, through *Lord of the Flies*, the allegorical novel of William Golding, is basically intended to demystify the basic savage instincts within children who are generally considered innocent and angelic.

Keywords: Human instinct, innocent, savage, demystification, society, civilization.

When situation prompts, man can resist everything but temptation. Even the children, who are the prototypes of adults, cannot refrain themselves from being 'experienced', as is vividly evident in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* where he intentionally deviates from the conventional idealistic notion about the children. This novel of Golding becomes an ironic retelling of R. M. Ballantyne's juvenile fiction *The Coral Island*. Golding's tone, however, is not that of triumphant response to a naive and mistaken ideology. Rather his shaping of events and experience on the island, his sense of the inherent predatory and evil characteristics his boys reveal, are dominated by 'grief, sheer grief'. There are lots of things to regard

the island on which the boys are left, to be a kind of Eden -- uncorrupted and 'Eveless'. But the gradual increasing of savagery leads them to make 'the Eden' an inferno. The boys serve as the projection of the adult world, and as Harold Bloom in his 'Introduction' to *Lord of the Flies* opines:

Though Lord of the Flies is a moral fable in the form of a boys' adventure story, in a deeper sense it is a war story. (Bloom, p. 1)

The Coral Island is directly referenced by Golding in *Lord of the Flies*. During the first assembly when Ralph is persuading the boys that they can have a 'good time' on the island, he says: 'It's like in a book'. Ralph voices the initial enthusiasm of all the

boys stranded on an island free from adults. The boys shout back excitedly:

'Treasure Island ... Swallows and Amazons ... Coral Island'. (p. 34)

As the titles are well - known to every school boys, they compare the reality to their reading experiences, and what they imply, as Ralph says, that until the grown - ups come to fetch them, they will have fun. The microcosm of the great world seems to them to be a fairy land. If the initial intention is to enjoy their games and to make fun, gradually their game and fun - making take the larger colour of savagery and power - struggle on the island. The innocence with which the boys compare their island with the 'Coral Island' soon vanishes to bring into surface the savagery, that is latent within them. Golding here intentionally sets himself to write an island story that deliberately challenges Ballantyne's. The thematic brilliance of the novel and a character study would unveil the instinctive evil in man by projecting the gradual savage regression of the boys. They are not angels or innocent but the prototypes of the adult world, swayed by savagery, brutality and power - struggle.

Golding in *Lord of the Flies* clearly focuses on the fundamental human nature and if the adults are capable of practising savagery and have a strong liking for dominance, the children are not slow in these aspects. An unequal power struggle is projected in this novel, which is going on between Ralph, elected as the leader of the boys and Jack, who usurps his leadership. Ralph is tolerant by nature, willing to take advice from others, especially from Piggy, and careful to follow the democratic procedure symbolized by the "conch shell". But, in spite of his basic goodness, he has a strong urge for power, which appears in the long run. On the other hand, Jack is eaten up by ambition. He has the mentality of a 'fascist' and a total disregard for those who are weaker than him. From the beginning, he dominates the choir boys like a regimental sergeant and does not show the least concern when Simon faints. He succeeds in liberating himself and his hunters into savagery, and is obsessed with killing, which suggests the ultimate assertion of power and the reflection of the adult world.

The sense of adventure with which the novel had started off, begins to fade when confronted with the harsh realities of life. Discipline is breaking down and the seeds of power - struggle between Ralph and Jack are sown. The possibility of discord makes its appearance from the beginning when Jack and his choir boys appear on the beach. The beginning of degeneration of their newly created society lie in Jack's natural arrogance and his urge for power:

"I ought to be chief", said Jack with simple arrogance, "because I'm chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing C sharp." (p.19)

The boys are a formless mass who can be swayed one way or another at the slightest provocation. When Jack first misses to kill a pig, instead of admitting his failure he covers up it by boasting that next time around he will be able to kill the pig. In Chapter 2, the efforts to hold a democratic assembly fails to take off because the boys lack the discipline. Even a simple thing to start a fire becomes stuck as the boys keep on piling wood without discipline, which sets the jungle ablaze. As in the island they are untrammelled by the adults, the savagery, which was latent within them begins to assert itself. It means that the seeds of 'fascism' are present in all of us from the very beginning and it only needs a demagogue and the proper circumstance to assert itself. *Lord of the Flies* is a study of human society -- what makes it work and what makes it break down. Golding has chosen his characters to be young boys because this would help us to understand that the elements that make it difficult to govern peacefully and democratically, are present in us from the childhood. Time and circumstance will bring these out on the surface and destroy the cohesiveness of the society. Arthur Marsden observes in the book *The Novels of William Golding*:

It [the novel] is not the evolution of a primitive social pattern, but the gradual fading of a civilized one, and the conflict of the two, that is central in the novel. (Kulkarni, p. 4)

Pig - hunting becomes an image of violent savagery. After Jack and his hunters kill their first victim (a pig), Jack is elated with the knowledge that they have outwitted a living thing; that they have

imposed their will upon a living thing; that they have taken away its life like a long satisfying drink. The chant of the boys becomes: "Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in! (p. 127) The excitement Jack feels in killing a pig does not bind itself in their necessity, but leads on the murder of Simon, and then Piggy and then to the near - murder of Ralph. The necessity of pig - killing becomes a passion, and the passion of hunting and bloodlust portrays the slackening hold of civilization on the boys and their consequent savage regression. Jack is trying to destroy Ralph not merely because Ralph is his rival, but for the sake of establishing his power which makes him as ruthless with himself as with others. He is under a compulsion to obliterate all opposition to himself and to destroy whatever is out of control. He even eliminates his individual identity to set himself up as a tribal chief with life and death at his command and finally sits like an idol on his throne. Authority is said to sit on his shoulder. It creates an image that fittingly conveys the brutal and the brutish nature of the power he wields.

Golding shows the reversal of nature of the characters. He reads the situation well and anticipates what is going to happen. He is not direct and explicit to narrate the whole situation; rather he finds delight in giving the story a mythic shape by reversing the established notion about the children. It is Golding's genius for which the mere 'factual' incidents have been metamorphosed into very significant events. Ralph is elected as a leader and thus a sense of jealousy emerges from Jack's heart as he himself was a contender for the post of leadership. Gradually Jack's power grows and he along with other "hunter" boys progresses towards savagery. The death of Piggy and Simon is quite significant. Piggy's death emphasizes the failure of intellectual power to overcome the power of evil and by killing Simon the boys themselves destroy all hopes of their salvation. So, the novel besides dealing with the story of a group of boys alienated on a deserted island, is also about man's incessant rapacity for power and the dominance of evil.

Lord of the Flies provides an insight into the fascination of power even on the part of a littlun named Henry. He pokes about on the shore with a stick making runnels to trap the tiny scavenging

organism brought in by the tide and becomes absorbed in power - play rather than mere joy, as he feels himself "exercising control over living things" (p. 65). As in the competition between Ralph and Jack, Henry has no chance of dominating others, his desire for power reveals itself through this activity. Whereas Ralph and Jack control and order the other boys, Henry orders and controls the little fishes as his subordinates:

He talked to them, urging them, ordering them....they were trapped and gave him the illusion of mastery. (p. 65)

The transformation of Roger proves to be violent. As Henry is busy in controlling the fishes, Roger feels the urge to tease Henry and throws stones at him. But, he throws them so that they miss, as Henry is surrounded by "the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law" and "Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization". On the other hand, when Jack appears at a nearby tree, Roger sees him and "a darker shadow" creeps "beneath the swarthy skin" like the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In fact, Roger graduates from teasing to torture and shows the clearest instance of the perversion of power and sadism when Roger kills the sow by cruelly lodging his spear in the sow's anus and forces it forward with all his strength till "the terrified squealing" becomes "a high pitched scream". The fulfillment of his perverted nature is seen when, towards the end of the novel, "with a sense of delirious abandonment", Roger hurls the boulder at Piggy and this time he does not miss.

Golding in *Lord of the Flies* breaks the conventional notion of the children. The children are compared to the innocent lamb. But, in *Lord of the Flies* a series of hunts for either pigs or humans symbolically denotes the boys' gradual deterioration into savages. Discipline and morality - the things that persist in a civilized world - just vanish in this island and the consequence is very very chaotic. L. L. Dickson in his article "Lord of the Flies" points out nine separate instances to depict this gradual deterioration:

(1) The first piglet, "caught in a curtain of creepers", escapes when Jack is mentally unable to the helpless creature (p. 32); (2) A

second pig eludes the hunters, much to Jack's disgust (p. 55); (3) Jack is successful the next time, and the hunters conceive the ritual chant of "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood" (P. 78); later Maurice briefly pretends to be the pig (p. 86); (4) During a mock ceremony that gets out of hand, Robert plays the role of the pig, in a scene that sinisterly foreshadows the transition from nonhuman to human prey (p. 135 - 136); (5) After another successful hunt, the boys smear themselves with animal blood, and Maurice plays the pig while Robert ritually pokes him with a spear, to the delight of Jack's hunters (p. 161 - 163); (6) Jack and Roger play hunter and pig respectively, as Piggy and Ralph "find themselves eager to take a place in this demented but partly secure society (p. 181);

(7) Simon is mistaken for the beast and is torn to pieces;

(8) Piggy is killed by Roger who acts "with a sense of delirious abandonment" (p. 216); (9) And finally Ralph is the object of the last murderous hunt (p. 212). (Bloom, pp.48-49)

In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding creates only two of the boys with the realization of human nature. The first one is Simon who embodies a kind of innate and spiritual human goodness that is deeply connected with nature. Golding, in his conversation with Frank Kermode, called Simon "a christ figure". The other boys abandon moral behaviour as soon as civilization is no longer there to impose it upon them. On the contrary, Simon acts morally not out of guilt or shame, but because he believes in the inherent value of morality. He is the first to realize the problem posed by the beast and "the lord of the flies", and that the beast on the island is not a real, physical beast, but rather a savagery that lurks within each human being. The pig's head on the stake implies this idea, as we see in Simon's vision of the head speaking to him. Unlike the other boys, Simon represents an idea of essential human goodness. His brutal murder at the hands of the other boys indicates the scarcity of goodness amid an overwhelming abundance of evil.

The other one is Ralph who takes time to understand that savagery exists within all the boys. Ralph, in the first place, is attracted to the game of savagery. When Ralph hunts a boar for the first time, he experiences the exhilaration and thrill of bloodlust and violence. He attends Jack's feast and is swept away by the frenzy dances on the edge of the group, and also participates in the killing of Simon. This experience of the evil that exists within him, as within all human beings, is tragic for Ralph, and it plunges him into listless despair for a time. S. J. Boyd has pointed out:

The loss of innocence for which Ralph weeps at the novel's close is not, however, a matter of transformation, from childish goodness to adolescence depravity, is not a growing into wickedness. It is rather the coming of an awareness of darkness, of evil in man's heart that was present in the children all along. (Bloom, p.27)

Through the portrayal of the characters, who strive unsuccessfully to convey "the majesty of adult life", Golding creates heavily ironic situation in the novel. While Ralph stands for civilization and democracy, Piggy represents intellect and rationalism. The conversation between Ralph and Piggy tells us that they both believe in the capability of the adult world. Ralph always thinks of getting rescued by the adult society and strives to set up a 'civilized society' for all the boys on the island. But, when Ralph expresses his frustration at the deteriorating society of the boys on the island, Piggy tells the boys that they must persevere because that is what the "grownups" would do. Again, ironically it is the adult world that caused the boys to be in the situation they are in and the rumoured "beast" -- the dead parachutist who really does become the symbol of what the boys fear -- is also from the world of the adult. Actually the world they remember -- a world of civilized behaviour, of order, of stability -- is dead.

William Blake, through the poems in his 'Songs of Experience', demystifies social evils and here in *Lord of the Flies* Golding through the character of Ralph tells us that evil actually remains within every human being from the very beginning.

Even the 'civilized' world they live in is full of violence and wickedness. Piggy's faith in civilization is shown to be ludicrously collapsed. The scientific progress that Piggy confidently affirms has left the world in ruins, just as Jack's savages have turned the island into. Piggy accuses the boys of acting like "a pack of kids" without realizing that the adults behave exactly like the kids, but rather on a dishearteningly grandeur scale by using atom bombs instead of sticks.

William Golding's first - hand experience of World War II " was to shock him into questioning the horror of war. These experiences inform his writing; he was at what human beings can do to one another, in terms of the wartime atrocities and in their being innately evil" (Foster, p.7). Again, it is not merely the adults who act brutally; the children also can act with just as much barbarism as is revealed in the adult world. They are innocent, but nevertheless budding adults -- and so potentially evil and sadistic. Golding in his novel *Lord of the Flies* isolates young children on a deserted island and thereby showing the demystification of the basic instinct of human beings. Apart from his horrible experience from the Second World War, his insight as a school - master into the way children behave and function makes the author reject the Arcadian ideas that hail the angelic innocence of children. And this is powerfully reflected in the novel *Lord of the Flies*. Virginia Tiger opines:

There is no essential difference between the island world and the adult one and it the burden of the fable's structure ... to make it clear that the children's experiment on the island has its constant counterpart in the world outside (Bloom, p. 36).

The novel points out that a conflict between the impulse toward civilization and the impulse toward savagery rages within each human being, regardless an adult or a child. At the end of the novel when the boys are rescued by a British naval officer and his party, Ralph bursts into tears and realizes that, although he is saved from the death on the island, he will never be the same. He has lost his innocence

and learned about the evil that lurks within all human beings.

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