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## Thematical Study Of William Golding's Lord Of The Flies

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### Abstract:

*One of the salient characteristics of Golding's fictional world is that he has been viewed as a writer very much interested in putting his characters "into extreme situations, observe the evil they do and the sin they suffer, and do this in a mythmaker's style, well beyond the constraints of Christian morality" (Trahair 1999:159). A running theme in William Golding's fiction is that man is savage at heart, always ultimately reverting back to an evil side and primitive nature. Therefore, he exposes evil and darkness lurking in human nature. Golding finds evil within, rather than outside human nature. Golding symbolizes this in different manners, varying from the illustration of the mentality of actual primitive man to the reflection of a corrupt seaman in purgatory. Eventually the 'stranded boys of Lord of the Flies almost entirely shake off civilized behaviour' (Riley, 1973: 119). When the confusion finally leads to a manhunt (for Ralph), the reader realizes that despite the strong sense of British character that has been instilled in the young throughout their lives, the boys have shown the underlying savage side existent in all humans. The novel shows how easy it is to revert back to the evil nature inherent in man when the circumstances are ripe as felt in this novel.*

**Key Words:** Golding, Lord, Flies, Evil, Thematic, Evaluation, Civilization, Motif

### Introduction

The English Nobel laureate, Sir William Gerald Golding (1911-1993) published his first novel, Lord of the Flies in 1954. Like many other contemporary novelists, Golding seems to have been influenced by the annihilation and the aftermaths of the Second World War. The novelist creates a microcosm dominated by the evil impulses which are inherent in human beings. Lord of the Flies may be classified as a thematic novel, sociological novel or allegorical novel. It calls our attention to the evil inherent in human nature in particular and in society at large. It reflects symbolically the author's notion of the breakdown of civilization and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Indu Kulkarni, in his The Novels of William Golding (2003, p.10) talks about this phenomenon very effectively, "Golding presents the conflict between good and evil with the intention of reforming human nature like most other allegorists." Golding's work seems to be reformatory and he seems to preach about the notion of evil inherent in man, which needs to be purged if society is to maintain its sanity. Indu Kulkarni says that Golding examines the phenomenon of social rebels, deviant behaviour, terrorism and chaos which is symptomatic of a diseased, unloving, inhuman and intolerant society. Ralph, Piggy and Simon and their colleagues are said to be representative of the principle of good, while Jack, Roger, Robert and their accomplices and even Maurice are the embodiment of evil in the novel.

### **Primitivism**

The primitiveness of man and the darkness of his heart also carry thematic importance in the novel, *Lord of the Flies*. Painted faces and long hair of the characters, the building of castles and making of huts, the rolling of stones, hunting of animals, drinking of water with Coconut shells, roasting of meat, the making of fire, living in caves and taking delight in killing and dancing, and so on, are the discernible symptoms of primitivism in the novel.

### **Loss of Innocence**

*Lord of the Flies* starts with the innocent playfulness of the boys on an uninhabited island. They take delight in their boyish adventures. All the boys except Piggy are happy, when they find themselves without any adult supervision

### **Loss of Civilization**

*Lord of the Flies* is a philosophical allegory about the nature of evil and the precariousness of civilization." (Ifor Evans, 1940, p 363) Golding has explicitly revived the notion of an English philosopher Thomas Hobbes who says that Man in a state of nature would be corrupt, brutal and antisocial. He suggests that civilization provides us with a kind of sanctuary; where we can peacefully promote our social values. When this veil of civilization is taken away; man morally and socially degenerates and his brutal qualities come to the surface.

### **The Motif of Power**

Almost all the principal characters in *Lord of the Flies* seem to possess in a way, a gifted power. They may be termed as the embodiments of different powers existing within a society. Golding has attributed democratic power to Ralph.

### **The Spiritual Power**

The spiritual power is vested in the character of Simon. He is a Christ-like figure and is helpful to all those who are in need. It is his farsightedness which helps the boys in the discovering of the real truth about the beast seen by the twins. He further ensures the boys that there is no beast on the island. Although he himself is a victim to some sort of hallucination, he does not believe in the existence of the beast

### **The Intellectual Power**

The intellectual power in the novel rests with the fat boy, Piggy. We first meet him when he comes out of the undergrowth and guesses with insight about the other boys who may be lying scattered on the island.

### **The Fate of the Intellectual**

The tragic and unexpected deaths of the noble men also seem to have a thematic interest in the novel. It is the intellectuals who have always brought humanity out of the abyss of ignorance and barbarism in every society. Unfortunately, they have never been given their rightful prestige and honour in the society. William Golding has realistically depicted the true condition of the contemporary intellectuals in *Lord of the Flies*

### **The Uncertainty of Life**

After World War II, people began to wonder whether life was good or bad. This element of uncertainty may be seen in most of the Post War literary masterpieces. *Lord of the Flies*



also reflects the contemporary approach to life. The plot of the novel has minutely been saturated with uncertain events.

### **A Thematic Novel – A Reformative Mood**

Lord of the Flies may be classified as a thematic novel, sociological novel or allegorical novel. It calls our attention to the evil inherent in human nature in particular and in society at large. It reflects symbolically the author's notion of the breakdown of civilization and the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Golding's work seems to be reformative and he seems to preach about the notion of evil inherent in man, which needs to be purged if society is to maintain its sanity. Golding examines the phenomenon of social rebels, deviant behaviour, terrorism and chaos which is symptomatic of a diseased, unloving, inhuman and intolerant society. Ralph, Piggy and Simon and their colleagues are said to be representative of the principle of good, while Jack, Roger, Robert and their accomplices and even Maurice are the embodiment of evil in the novel.

The main meaning of the novel would be the idea that man is inherently evil. Much of the public disgust of the time was on society: the bad influence of people that it has today. Golding challenges this view: he says that public institutions such as policemen and schools serve to keep the darker side of human nature in line. He shows this by illustrating what may this by illustrating what may happen if these barriers are eroded or removed. Civilized living and behaviours are shown to be little more than a 'veneer', one that is easily removed under certain circumstances. This theme is hidden on a level beneath the story: it is possible to read Lord of Files as just as adventure novel. If we did, however the title would remain a mystery, for only through meaning the novel for meaning would reveal the evil in all of us: the title is a literal translation of the word Beelzebub, the most evil of devils in Hebrew mythology. In the novel, we see the rise to power of Jack, the misleading, corrupting influence, the devil figure. We must look at the leadership among the boys to look at the level below, to ask why; it is that man is inherently evil.

The story is set during World War II; the story describes the plight of a group of British schoolboys stranded on a Pacific island after their plane was shot down enroute to England. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, discover a conch in the lagoon near the beach and use it to call all the other survivors, setting up a mock democratic government with Ralph as a leader. Piggy continues to advise and give logic and reason to Ralph's rule. A signal fire, kindled with the lens of Piggy's glasses, is established on the mountain to call passing ships to their rescue while shelters are constructed. However, the school's choir leader, Jack, soon becomes obsessed with hunting the pigs of the island and loses sight of Ralph's democratic vision. Further discord results with an increasing fear of a supposed "beast" on the island, stemming particularly from the younger boys dubbed the "littluns". Jack later speaks out of turn during their assembly meetings and eventually leaves the group to start a "tribe". Other children gradually delete to his side except for Ralph, Piggy, Simon and the twins Sammeric (Sam and Eric). One by one these children are eliminated from the opposition. Upon discovering the beast, the boys had all feared on the mountain is only the rotting corpse of a pilot whose plane had been shot down near the island. Simon runs down from the mountain to share this happy news. However, the boys (including Ralph, Piggy, and Sammeric) are all, following Jack's example caught up in a primal ritual celebrating the murder of a

Pig they have just eaten and Simon runs into the midst of this. Mistaken to be the beast, Simon is killed by the boys. Ralph, Piggy and Sammeric remain resistant to joining speare, Jack's tribe.

They attempt to cling to the democracy they had set up, still using the conch to call an assembly and struggling to keep a signal fire burning on the beach. Then Jack and his hunters attack the four and steal Piggy's glasses to kindle the fire he needs for pig – roasting fires. Angry and blinded, Piggy decides to go to the place on the island called Castle Rock where the hunters have set up a base reluctantly; Ralph and Sammeric agree and upon arriving Roger stop them at the gate. Jack emerges from the forest and begins to fight with Ralph while Piggy stands nearby shrieking in fear, wanting only for his sight is restored by retrieving his glasses. Sammeric are seized at jack's command by the hunter and Roger, Jack's second – in – command, drops a large boulder on the head of Piggy, killing him and shattering the conch which he holds which in his hands. Ralph alone is left to flee, with no friends left to aid him. Sammeric have become hunters as well and betray the secret in the forest to Jack. The island is set ablaze and hunters fan out to kill Ralph with their spears, the sole remaining opposition to their tribes, as even now he tries to cling to his old democratic ideas. Ralph stabs with his spear at the hunters pursuing him.

He is chased by all until he at last comes to the beach. The shelters he had built with such labour are in flames and, falling at last upon the sand with sea before him and nowhere left to run. He looks up to see a naval officer. Rescue comes at last to the boy's aid, seeing the smoke from the mighty blaze set by Jack's hunters after his signal fire had earlier failed to alert anyone of their presence. When officer expresses disapproval for savage like deed and chaos, Ralph breaks down in tears for the end of innocence and darkness of man's heart. The present paper focuses especially themes of this novel. Human nature, civilization versus savagery, the weak versus strong, innate goodness, and loss of innocence, the universal fascination with power and the universality of fear etc. are the prominent for thematic study of this novel. Golding shows that the civilization that the boys initially tried to develop in their world collapses not because of any enemy outside, but due to their innate savagery. Most of the children do not prefer to work hard or to follow rules. They prefer to have fun and play games. Instead of using logic and reason, they succumb to fear. This fear is not really of some animal, but of the unknown. The selfishness and cruelty become dominate and prove much more powerful than the attempts to maintain some resemblance to a civilized society governed by moral and rational rules. Though the boys think the best lives in the jungle, Golding makes it clear that it exists with their hearts.

Thus, he exposes the human nature. Golding depicts civilization versus savagery in the following way: He depicts civilization as a veil that through its rules and laws just masks the evil within every individual. It does not eliminate the beast. The beast lives on beneath this veil. This novel is about civilization giving way to the savagery within human nature. Ironically, Golding shows a group of British boys. This is done as the British consider themselves as extremely supreme civilized society and superior to all other communities. Even these British Children become savages – ruled only by fear, superstition, and desire. However, if the boys on the island give up civilization for savagery, are they rescued when the adults finally come and stop their savage behaviour? Golding depicts that these supposedly "civilized" adults are engaged in a savage; and as such, the boys are not really 'rescued' at the end from savagery. Novelist then speaks and brutal nuclear



world war. Golding delves into the power dynamics on the island. Boys want to be respected and to belong to the group. This is not just happening on the island in the novel, but is observed among all school children. The main way they choose to gain respect is to seem strong and powerful. In the novel, this leads them to mock the weaker boys, or to ignore them and finally to physically hurt them. This is a sign of vulnerability as a boy who feels vulnerable, chooses to target a weaker boy to save himself.

Piggy is aware that he is weak and hence at danger in this set up. And wants to the civilized society of the adults as civilization protects the weak, the wilderness doesn't. The boys can be divided into two neat groups – those like Jack who succumb to the violence and savagery and those like Ralph and Piggy whose love for righteousness is result mainly from fear of rules imposed by the society. However, the novelist also shows through Simon an alternative to civilized suppression and beastly savagery. *Other boys want to act good because they are conditioned by the rules of the adults.* Simon acts moral because he believes in the value of morality from his heart. He is a real truth – seeker, who is not afraid to look into his own heart and to accept that there is a beast within, and face it head – on.

The novel traces a journey – the well behaved children waiting for rescue in the beginning of the novel to the violent blood thirsty savages with no desire to return to civilization at the end of the novel. The loss of innocence resulting in their hunting, torturing and killing animals and human beings is, according to Golding, a result of innate savagery within human beings. This is underlined at the end of the novel when Ralph weeps when he is rescued from the island and the hunters: "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of a true, wise friend called Piggy". Lust for power seems to be a universal feature. It is exhibited even in the play of children who like to take on roles associated with power – father, police officer, King, hero etc. This tendency is used by Golding in the novel in many forms. For example, a young child Henry amuses himself on the beach by playing, controlling small sea creatures and experiencing power over them. This desire for power is the reason for all the strife on the island. Jack wants to be the leader and forms his own tribe of hunters. Each child tries to assume power by finding a weaker child and exerting power over him.

However, Golding depicts that this feeling of power and control is just an 'illusion of mastery' and so, it is soon lost. Even Jack's power is temporary and is gone the moment adults arrive to rescue them. Various means of gaining power – physical force, knowledge, looks, insights, currency (here meat) are tested and proved to be false. Fear is a fundamental emotion. But like power struggles fear, if beyond useful limits, can become a destructive force. Secondly, people, especially children, when facing sudden changes, create an imaginary danger if some real danger is not present. The same happens in the novel. The real cause for fear for the children should be the failure of getting rescued and being returned to the world of adults. But this fear is mentioned only by Piggy. Whatever the circumstance in which a man finds himself, he should hold up his tradition, civilization and not fall into barbarism as the boys under Jack does. This is the message that Golding seems to give through the novel.

The Critic Karl, on the other hand, appreciates Golding's courage to experiment with form and to attempt exploring "daring themes" (Karl, 1965: 254). He also suggests that Golding has

damaged his literary potential by an excessive concern with morality. In this regard he argues that "the idea of a Golding novel invariably is superior to the performance itself" (Karl, 1965: 259). Indeed Karl finds Golding's work to be the representative existential beat in that Golding is interested in states of being and aspects of survival, not just in human response to a given society.

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