

Civilization, Savagery and Allegory in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

*Project submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of*

Bachelor of Arts

In

English and History

by

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CCASADER15



March 2021

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Declaration

I, **Amal Raj Thettummal**, hereby declare that this project entitled **Civilization, Savagery and Allegory in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies***, submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History, is a research work done by me under the supervision and guidance of, **Miss. Lis Merin Peter**, Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda.

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Certificate

This is to certify that this project entitled **Civilization, Savagery and Allegory in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies***, a record of research work carried out by **Mr. Amal Raj Thettummal** under my supervision and guidance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English and History submitted to the University of Calicut.

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Acknowledgement

I owe my gratitude to God for his endless blessings and intervention in helping me complete my project without any hassles and on time. I am indebted to my supervising teacher, **Miss. Lis Merin Peter**, Assistant Professor, Department of English & History, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, for guiding me throughout the project and for the countless hours and efforts she put in to help complete my project.

I thank Dr. George Alex, Coordinator, Department of B.A. English & History, for the timely help and generous encouragement.

I am eternally grateful to Rev Fr. Jolly Andrews, the Principal, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda for the congenial research atmosphere he has always tried to foster.

I owe my thanks to my parents, my teachers, my friends and all those who have helped me indirectly and indirectly, in the successful completion of the project work.

Amal Raj Thettummal

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Introduction

William Gerald Golding was born in 1911 in Cornwall, England. His father was a schoolmaster and his mother was in the women's movement. Golding studied science from his school days up to the second year of college in Oxford when he decided to reject it and read English literature instead. After a brief period of writing poetry and working on the stage as an actor, director, and writer, he took to school teaching as his father had done. Golding was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1983 and was knighted five years later. During the second world war, he entered the Royal Navy in 1940. He served on destroyers and rocket launchers. The philosophy teacher turned Royal Navy lieutenant was constantly confronted by the atrocities of his fellow man. When he returned to England after the war, he witnessed the Cold War superpowers threatening one another with nuclear annihilation. This forced him to interrogate the very roots of human nature. The horrors of the second world war taught him that evil was always inherent in human beings and manifested itself at the appropriate time. These musings on the inevitability of violence would inspire his first and most famous novel *Lord of the Flies*.

After being rejected by 21 publishers, the novel was finally published in 1954. It takes its title from Beelzebub, a demon associated with pride and war— two themes very much at the heart of Golding's book. The novel was a bleak satire of a classic island adventure story, a popular genre where young boys get shipwrecked in exotic locations. The protagonists in these stories are able to master nature while evading the dangers posed by their new environments. The genre also endorsed the problematic colonialist narrative found in many British works at the time, in which the boys teach the island's native inhabitants their allegedly superior British values. Golding's satire even goes so

far as to explicitly use the setting and character names from R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*—one of the most beloved island adventure novels. But while Ballantyne's book promised readers a pleasurable and unbounded amusement, Golding's had darker things in store.

Lord of the Flies opens with the boys already on the island, but snippets of conversation hint at their terrifying journey—their plane had been shot down in the midst of an unspecified nuclear war. The boys, ranging in age from 6 to 12, are strangers to each other. All except for a choir, clad in black uniforms and led by a boy named Jack. Just as in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, the boy's new home appears to be a paradise—with freshwater, shelter, and abundant food sources. But even from the novel's opening pages, a macabre darkness hangs over this seemingly tranquil situation. The boys' shadows are compared to “black, bat-like creatures” while the choir itself first appears as “something dark... fumbling along” the beach. Within hours of their arrival, the boys are already trading terrifying rumors of a vicious “beastie” lurking in the woods. From these ominous beginnings, Golding's narrative reveals how quickly cooperation unravels without the presence of an adult authority. Initially, the survivors try to establish some sense of order.

A boy named Ralph blows into a conch shell to assemble the group and delegate tasks. But as Jack vies for leadership with Ralph, the group splinters and the boys submit to their darker urges. The mob of children soon forgets their plans for rescue, silences the few voices of reason, and blindly follows Jack to the edge of the island, and the edge of sanity. The novel's universal themes of morality, civility, and society have made it a literary classic, satirizing both conventions of its time and long-held beliefs about

humanity. While island adventure stories often support colonialism, "Lord of the Flies" turns this trope on its head. Rather than cruelly casting native populations as stereotypical savages, Golding transforms his angelic British schoolboys into savage caricatures. And as the boys fight their own battle on the island, the far more destructive war that brought them there continues off the page. Even if the boys were to be rescued from themselves, what kind of world would they be returning to? With so few references to anchor the characters in a specific place or period, the novel feels truly timeless— an examination of human nature at its most bare. And though not all readers may agree with Golding's grim view, "Lord of the Flies" is unsettling enough to challenge even the most determined optimist.

In the novel, Golding expressed a deeply pessimistic view of the human as would virtually all of the novels and essays he wrote over the course of his life. William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* following World War II, during which the Nazis exterminated six million Jews and the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. In the wake of the second war, a reaction against modernism eventualise. With its disrespect for human rights, just confirmed in the Geneva Convention, through the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, took the splintered views of modernism and destroyed them completely. This worldwide military conflict resulted in the deaths of over 70 million people and made numerous cities destroyed and people homeless. It is the deadliest conflict in human history and a calamity in human civilization. After the second world war, the dream of a peaceful and harmonious society had collapsed in the capitalist world and the reliability of human rational thought and self-control are under suspicion, people began to reflect the society and human nature and

are also less confident in their own judgment, these had caused a sense of loss, insecurity, and anxiety. In one word, the traditional values and beliefs are re-examined. The revolution in science and technology since the 1950s and the second world war are the two main historical events that catalyzed the emergence of postmodernism. In this context, the novel's profound pessimism is understandable.

But it was not just the experience of war that influenced Golding; it was also his experience as a schoolmaster, in dealing with young boys, that taught him that evil was often 'interred in the bones'. This conviction was further strengthened when he returns to school teaching after the war which gave him the opportunity of observing young boys and how they behaved towards each other in times of stress and crisis. The notion of innocence refers to children's simplicity, their lack of knowledge, and their purity not yet spoiled by mundane affairs. Such innocence is taken as the promise of a renewal of the world by the children. Innocence has been attributed to children and childhood by adults at all times, but the content and social function of such glorifying assessments show considerable variation over time and context, and the valuation is never unanimous among contemporaries. Innocence used to be a religious notion in earlier times. From the 19th century onward, the idea of children's innocence is strongly interrelated with children's sexuality. Innocence is then emphasized to defend the assumption of an absence of sexuality in children and the demand for such absence. In his novel, *Lord of the Flies*, Golding tears down the notion of associating innocence with children. Golding is more interested in shocking the reader with the image of *innocence* as cruelty than in demonstrating the *innate* cruelty of human nature. Innocence in *Lord of the Flies* is not merely unsocialized childhood, but a symbol of unawareness, unconsciousness of the

meaning of one's actions. The children aren't animalistically violent. They select sacrificial victims. And they create morality to justify their violence. Such is the state of warfare in the mesocosm beyond the island. It deconstructs the pretenses of 'civilized' society by showing us how our own morally justified warfare is akin to ignorant children needlessly massacring their fellow innocents for their own pleasure. It is no great accomplishment to demonstrate that we are innately cruel or that society prevents us from being so under ordinary circumstances.

The aim of this project is to engage in careful examination of William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*, in order to analyze and clarify Golding's key ideas on civilization and savagery. The project will focus on how Golding's views about his civilization were different from the traditional western view of British supremacy in the first chapter. This chapter will also highlight Golding's difference of opinion regarding the notion that British children brought up with Victorian morals are inherently innocent. This is achieved by comparing R. M Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. The civilizing effect of Christianity, 19th-century British imperialism in the South Pacific, and the importance of hierarchy and leadership are the major themes of *The Coral Island*. In the second chapter of this project, Golding's view on society building, functioning of the government, power structures within the society are analyzed. Also, this chapter focuses on the decline of a society from civilization to savagery. The third chapter of the project throws light on the allegorical nature of *Lord of the Flies* and attempts to decode the major allegories used in the novel.

Chapter 1

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* As a Reply to R.M Ballantyne's *The Coral*

***Island* : A Comparative Analysis**

Lord of the Flies explores the dark side of humanity, the savagery that underlies even the most civilized human beings. William Golding intended this novel as a tragic parody of children's adventure tales, illustrating humankind's intrinsic evil nature. He presents the reader with a chronology of events leading a group of young boys from hope to disaster as they attempt to survive their uncivilized, unsupervised, isolated environment until rescued.

In the midst of a nuclear war, a group of British boys finds themselves stranded without adult supervision on a tropical island. The group is roughly divided into the "littluns," boys around the age of six, and the "biguns," who are between the ages of ten and twelve. Initially, the boys attempt to form a culture similar to the one they left behind. They elect a leader, Ralph, who, with the advice and support of Piggy (the intellectual of the group), strives to establish rules for housing and sanitation. Ralph also makes a signal fire the group's first priority, hoping that a passing ship will see the smoke signal and rescue them. A major challenge to Ralph's leadership is Jack, who also wants to lead. Jack commands a group of choirboys-turned-hunters who sacrifice the duty of tending the fire so that they can participate in the hunts. Jack draws the other boys slowly away from Ralph's influence because of their natural attraction to and inclination toward the adventurous hunting activities symbolizing violence and evil.

The conflict between Jack and Ralph — and the forces of savagery and civilization that they represent — is exacerbated by the boys' literal fear of a mythical beast roaming the island. One night, an aerial battle occurs above the island, and a casualty of the battle floats down with his opened parachute, ultimately coming to rest on the mountaintop. Breezes occasionally inflate the parachute, making the body appear to sit up and then sink forward again. This sight panics the boys as they mistake the dead body for the beast they fear. In a reaction to this panic, Jack forms a splinter group that is eventually joined by all but a few of the boys. The boys who join Jack are enticed by the protection Jack's ferocity seems to provide, as well as by the prospect of playing the role of savages: putting on camouflaging face paint, hunting, and performing ritualistic tribal dances. Eventually, Jack's group actually slaughters a sow and, as an offering to the beast, puts the sow's head on a stick.

Of all the boys, only the mystic Simon has the courage to discover the true identity of the beast sighted on the mountain. After witnessing the death of the sow and the gift made of her head to the beast, Simon begins to hallucinate, and the staked sow's head becomes the Lord of the Flies, imparting to Simon what he has already suspected: The beast is not an animal on the loose but is hidden in each boy's psyche. Weakened by his horrific vision, Simon loses consciousness. Recovering later that evening, he struggles to the mountaintop and finds that the beast is only a dead pilot/soldier. Attempting to bring the news to the other boys, he stumbles into the tribal frenzy of their dance. Perceiving him as the beast, the boys beat him to death.

Soon only three of the older boys, including Piggy, are still in Ralph's camp. Jack's group steals Piggy's glasses to start its cooking fires, leaving Ralph unable to

maintain his signal fire. When Ralph and his small group approach Jack's tribe to request the return of the glasses, one of Jack's hunters releases a huge boulder on Piggy, killing him. The tribe captures the other two biguns prisoners, leaving Ralph on his own.

The tribe undertakes a manhunt to track down and kill Ralph, and they start a fire to smoke him out of one of his hiding places, creating an island-wide forest fire. A passing ship sees the smoke from the fire, and a British naval officer arrives on the beach just in time to save Ralph from certain death at the hands of the schoolboys turned savages.

Due to the popularity of *Lord of the Flies*, Golding also described his motivations in writing it and the decisions he made about the content and the story. Having been one of the masses of English schoolboys who read Robert Michael Ballantyne's idealized island adventure book *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean* (1858), Golding explained that he wanted to write a realistic alternative to it. In his masterful biography of Golding, John Carey writes that Golding was inspired to write the 'real' story of what would happen if boys were stranded on an island – 'in *Lord of the Flies* he had written *Coral Island* in reverse'. Golding and his wife Ann frequently read stories about islands to their children, David and Judy, and one night, Golding said to Ann: 'Wouldn't it be a good idea if I wrote a book about children on an island, children who behave in the way children really would behave?' *Lord of the Flies* then, represents Golding's vision of the reality of boys left to their own devices and is a world away from the events of *The Coral Island*. Golding went as far as to borrow Ballantyne's character names for *Lord of the Flies*; the narrator in *The Coral Island* is Ralph and the mature leader of the three stranded boys is Jack.

The Coral Island is directly referenced by name on three different occasions by Golding in *Lord of the Flies*. Once upon their arrival to the island, it is compared in beauty to the one in *The Coral Island* (10). 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’. The boys shout back excitedly: ‘*Treasure Island ... Swallows and Amazons ... Coral Island*’ (34). Also, at the end of *Lord of the Flies*, when the naval officer arrives, and before he fully understands what has happened, he says, ‘Jolly good show. Like *The Coral Island*’ (230). These allusions are quite deliberate to show Golding’s subversion of Ballantyne’s fantastical tale. Ballantyne presents a romantic vision of three boys who, without the conventions of society, are still able to usefully work together for each other’s good and against the savage forces that threaten them. Golding shatters this illusion in *Lord of the Flies*. Without rules and without adult guidance, Golding’s boys demonstrate the evil within. As Simon says, ‘maybe there is a beast ... maybe it’s only us’ (97).

Depicting exotic locales and adventures—often featuring young male protagonists—books such as *The Coral Island* dominated boy's fiction of the late nineteenth century, trumpeting the British lifestyle and its Victorian ethos to eager young readers. The three boys who primarily populate *The Coral Island* are therefore generalized stereotypes of the types of British boy with which Ballantyne's readers would be familiar. The story is told in the first person by Ralph Rover, a teenage boy whose life story up until the point of his stranding on Coral Island is quickly told in the space of eighteen pages. Ralph is shipwrecked on a seemingly uninhabited Polynesian island with two companions—the trio's unofficial leader, Jack Martin, a charismatic and strapping

eighteen-year-old that other boys instinctively follow, and Perkin Gay, a short and stout boy of fourteen prone to tricks and laughter. After an initial introduction to the boys, the story progresses in a typical Robinsonade fashion. The first half of the book is dedicated towards orienting the children into survival mode, wherein they must set up a camp and learn the sorts of food-gathering and fire-building activities that will keep them alive. In the second half of the story, the three boys are able to stray farther from camp and become exposed to threats from some primitive local natives as well as a band of pillaging British pirates, before ultimately embarking upon the last mission to save a sympathetic native girl who has been forced into a marriage to a non-Christian chief when the girl's own desires are to be united with another chieftain who has converted to the Christian faith. Of these last chapters, M. F. Thwaite has asserted that they are "much concerned with natives, cannibalism, and Christian missionaries, and the author succeeds in mingling many thrilling incidents of narrow escape and rescue with appreciation of the mission work in the South Seas."

Ballantyne's narrative includes various acts of inhumanity, including the feeding of babies to eel gods, the physical crushing of opponents, the eating of flesh for pleasure, as well as plenty of gore and violence meant to titillate his juvenile readership. In addition, Ballantyne made sure to contrast these descriptions with the godliness of his British protagonists, who serve as de facto missionaries throughout. As a result of these contrasts, contemporary criticism has suggested that *The Coral Island* is essentially an imperialist and colonialist text, depicting brave British citizens at war with the primitive world. Fiona McCulloch has noted that there is a pervasive belief among literary critics that, through *The Coral Island*, Ballantyne enabled his protagonists to "help to bring the

light of western civilization to the savage native, ostensibly legitimizing the colonial expansion which occurred throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century."

In *The Coral Island* Jack Martin declares that he should be the leader as he's the oldest and Ralph and Peterkin gladly agree for he inspired them with confidence. Peterkin later gushes to Jack: "Jack, you're a Briton – the best fellow I ever met in my life", recalling Golding's Jack Merridew's declaration: "We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things" (43-44). Here we can see two key contrasts between *The Coral Island* and *Lord of the Flies*. Both Jacks declare that they should be chiefs and while in Ballantyne's story, this is accepted without argument, in Golding's novel, Ralph was voted to be the chief by the boys on the island instead of Jack. Though this event sets into motion the eventual divide on the island, Golding succeeded in the inclusion of democratic values on his island. Golding's Ralph never lets the boys forget that their main aim is rescue but the boys on *The Coral Island* rarely mention rescue; instead, they live on 'their' island in 'uninterrupted harmony and happiness'.

The boys in *The Coral Island* do not face any danger from each other. However, they do come across enemies in the form of 'savages' –native inhabitants of the surrounding islands. *The Coral Island* is at heart an imperialist text; the boys come across some 'natives' who have been 'tamed' by Christian missionaries and these are juxtaposed with tribes of cannibals who sacrifice babies to their gods. When two warring tribes invade their island; the boys intervene and manage to stop the atrocities. R. M Ballantyne's portrayal of Victorian era Christian boys to be peace-loving is in direct contrast to the pack of British boys in *Lord of the Flies* who had resorted to brutality and

violence. In the Ballantyne book, as critic James Baker has written, “everything comes off in exemplary style.” The boys master their island environment, they use “sheer moral force” to easily defeat pirates and use Christianity to readily convert and reform the cannibal inhabitants. The contrast between what happened in *The Coral Island* and what occurs in *Lord of the Flies* is severe. While the contrast between how life is at the beginning of *Lord of the Flies* and how it is at the end is also striking, it is even more disturbing, since the same boys act so very differently in a relatively short period of time. Not only do they kill other boys, but their desire to kill leads them to set such a destructive fire on the island that they destroy even their own source of protection and food; destruction seems to know no limits.

In regard to the ending of *Lord of the Flies*, Golding has explained that at the time he wrote the novel he believed that saving the character of Ralph was the only way to provide the opportunity for him to become self-aware (although his awareness provokes despair). This mix of hope and despair seems fitting for Golding, who in a 1964 interview observed, "I think that democratic attitude of voluntary curbs put on one's own nature is the only possible way for humanity, but I wouldn't like to say that it's going to work out, or survive." *Lord of the Flies* appears to function as William Golding's immediate response to the unsubtle nationalist pride in *The Coral Island*, offering same or similarly-named reinterpretations of Ballantyne's heroes in the forms of Ralph, Piggy, and Jack. Golding's novel is equal parts reflection of the internalized evil in all men and a retort to Ballantyne's overt nationalistic leanings. In *Lord of the Flies* Golding, in fact inverted the morality of *The Coral Island*; in Ballantyne's story the children encounter evil, but in *Lord of the Flies*, the evil is within them.

Chapter 2

Society Building, Savagery and the Heart of Darkness in William

Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

The novel starts with a group of boys, aged between six and twelve, being marooned on an uninhabited island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. They are the sole survivors of the plane crash which takes place during their evacuation from England. It is more than likely that they are being evacuated from their home country to escape the possibility of atomic warfare, which Piggy hysterically mentions to Ralph at the beginning of the first chapter: "Not them. Didn't you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They're all dead" (9). The naïve, inexperienced boys who have unexpectedly found themselves dropped into a place where there are no adults, no social institutions, and no order, try to mimic the social organization that they envisioned would reflect the adult world faithfully.

One of the most prominent themes in *Lord of the Flies* is society and its creation and shape. It is created out of necessity: they identify a leader, select symbols that give their society-building enterprise significance, establish rules and norms, and make attempts to fulfill their basic human needs while maintaining workable relationships with one another. Although all of these activities mirror the society from which they have become alienated—a society, which it is worth noting, is experiencing its own collapse due to war—the boys are ultimately unsuccessful in maintaining a workable and livable microcosm. What Golding seems to be saying about society in *Lord of the Flies* is that its institutions and norms will only have meaning and will only be effective if the people

who make them and the citizens who agree to them are truly concerned about the greater good and if they understand why these elements of society were established and how they function.

Their society building project in *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding begins innocently enough. Recognizing the reality of their situation, namely, that they will not be rescued immediately, the boys understand that they must band together and use their skills collectively in order to simply survive. When they realize and remark in one of the important quotes from *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding that there are “No grownups!” (2) on the island, it becomes clear that no one can save them but themselves. The boys also recognize that devising an organized and structured set of roles and responsibilities is essential to their survival in a place that is so distinct from everything that they know. To this end, Ralph is elected as the general leader because the other boys are impressed that he has demonstrated ingenuity by calling them together with the conch shell.

As the leader of choirboys who were among the castaways, Jack Merridew was envious of Ralph as he was voted to be the chief of the boys instead of Jack. To pacify him, Ralph suggested that Jack would be in charge of the choir and could undertake hunting. Jack welcomes this and says that they will also watch the fire and keep a lookout. Ironically enough, the choir boys who are supposed to be more light-hearted and spiritual, followers of the church, choose to play hunters which is an obvious sign of the contradictions of their personalities. Ralph and Piggy, a fat intelligent boy with asthma, arrange to build shelters. The other boys are to play supporting roles in the day-to-day operations that will be required to keep them alive. They are, in effect, the common

citizens of this makeshift society. The efforts of the characters in *Lord of the Flies* are well-intentioned, especially because they do have enough insight to recognize that they will simply not live unless they cooperate with one another and share responsibility for tasks of daily living, such as providing for the basic needs of shelter and food.

The boys are only partially attentive to the upkeep of their first responsibility, which was to light a fire that could be used to signal passing ships and attract them to the island for the boys' rescue. While they were clever in igniting the fire by using Piggy's spectacles, they do not tend the fire as they should. The boys pay more attention to playing than to monitoring the fire, and the flames quickly engulf the forest. A large swath of dead wood burns out of control, and one of the youngest boys in the group, the boy with a mulberry birthmark, disappears, presumably having burned to death. Jack and the hunters become increasingly preoccupied with the act of hunting. When a ship passes by on the horizon one day, Ralph and Piggy notice, to their horror, that the signal fire—which had been the hunters' responsibility to maintain—has burned out. By the time Ralph, Simon and Piggy ran up to the mountain where the fire was, it was too late. Furious, Ralph accosts Jack, but the hunter has just returned with his first kill. While Jack gets respect from the other boys for getting the meat, he felt humiliated by Ralph. Jack could not do anything to hurt Ralph. So he chooses the physically weak Piggy, who supported Ralph, to avenge the humiliation he faced. He punches Piggy's stomach and smack's his head, breaking one of the glasses of his spectacles. Later, the fire goes out altogether and despite the effort that is required to revive it, the boys' inattentiveness to this one act that could save them is a persistent motif in the novel. The fire, of course, is a

symbol both of life and destruction, providing light and warmth, two resources that are needed in society.

Yet so often, as Golding in terms of the political structure in *Lord of the Flies* alludes, those functions that are most essential to the maintenance of a stable society, and which are also the most simple to tend, are those that are neglected and overlooked so easily by the very people who are dependent upon them. Their inability to perform this simple task foreshadows the crisis that is to follow. The fire marks a turning point for another reason. Some of the boys are so disappointed by the fire keepers' oversight that they begin to split into competing groups; in doing so, they lose sight of the need to maintain a commitment to the good of the entire group, rather than the petty needs or interests of individuals. The already loose social order begins to unravel; boys who were assigned to certain tasks failed to fulfill them and began to pursue their own interests. The competing groups become suspicious of one another and thus begin to act in ways that do not foster the strength and survival of the community. The boys begin to become petty with one another and act out in violent ways. It is at this point that the more mature boys recognize that "The world, that understandable and lawful world, was slipping away" (99). Golding is pointing out that the structure of government has the power to protect and sustain when each individual in the society plays the role that has been assigned to him; however, when the responsibility is avoided, the government cannot rescue them.

The boys recognize that their government, their society in *Lord of the Flies*, is falling apart, but their recognition of this fact does not help them determine how they can restore order. Ralph attempts to do so by insisting upon adherence to a strict code of

conduct. "[T]he rules are the only thing we got!" (100), Ralph says in an impassioned speech. Piggy appeals to any remaining attachments and memories that the boys might have of the adult world by asking, "What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages? What's grown-ups going to think?" (99). The boys are not convinced by the speech, however. They continue to pursue their own individual or small group interests and their society loosens its grasp on any semblance of normality and functionality. The boys do indeed become savages, inconsiderate of each other, and more so, inconsiderate of the idea of the society building enterprise, the central work of which involves establishing a functional government.

William Golding seems to insist that there is no such thing as an ideal society that can be built; rather, we are living in a society that is as adequate as it can be, for human nature does not permit true egalitarianism. The presence of a utopia in *Lord of the Flies* is visible but often fleeting, thus it seems that Golding is trying to express that a utopia is idealistic and cannot truly exist in a permanent way. Golding's novel begins against the larger backdrop of a society that itself seems to be falling apart. The young boys who are the main characters in *Lord of the Flies* are conscious of the war that has been raging in Europe, and they even seem to believe it will last "a year or two" longer (91). Although the boys in *Lord of the Flies* rarely reference World War II directly, they both resist and appropriate the images, actions, and strategies of war in the society that they create. When they first take stock of their surroundings and of each other, the boys are determined to survive on the deserted island where they have been stranded. Initially, they are convinced that if they can organize themselves properly, assigning roles and responsibilities to each boy, that they will be able to sustain themselves until their signals

for help are recognized and the boys can be rescued. What they fail to recognize until much later is that the strategies that they use for building their small society mimic the strategies of the larger society, which have clearly not been effective and which have led to the war in which Europe was, at that time, embroiled.

Jack smears his face with some clay and goes with his choir to hunt. He needs that facial camouflage and explains that he believes the pigs see him rather than smell his odour. The degeneration of the boys' way of life is also very evident through the symbolic masks. When concealed by masks of clay paint, the hunters, especially Jack, seem to have new personalities as they forget the taboos of society that once restrained them from giving in to their natural urges. For example, when Jack first paints his face to his satisfaction, he suddenly becomes a new, savage person. "He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling. He capered toward Bill, and the mask was a thing of its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness" (68). The hunters fail in their first attempt to catch a wild pig, but their leader, Jack, becomes increasingly preoccupied with the act of hunting until finally he succeeds. His mental state in the aftermath of killing his first pig, another important event in the boy's decline into savage behaviours:

His mind was crowded with memories; memories of the knowledge that had come to them when they closed in on the struggling pig, knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink. (75)

Jack rejoices in the killing and is unable to think about anything else because his mind is "crowded with memories" of the hunt. Golding explicitly connects Jack's

exhilaration with the feelings of power superiority he experienced in killing the pig. Jack's excitement stems not from pride at having found food and helped the group, but from having "outwitted" another creature and "imposed" his will upon it. Earlier, Jack claims that hunting is important to provide meat for the group; now, it becomes clear that Jack's obsession with hunting is due to the satisfaction it provides his primal instincts and has nothing to do with contributing to the group's welfare. When the hunters return, chanting in triumph after having killed a pig, Ralph, at odds with the torrent of enthusiasm, states that the signal fire was out when there was a ship passing by. Eventually, Jack realizes the futility of hunting against the possibility of rescue. Unable to face the barrage of supporting comments from Piggy, he punches Piggy, breaking one side of his spectacles. Jack's reaction is very influential and lets violence escalate as we witness earlier the beginning of the cruelty of Roger, one of the eldest boys, towards the youngest ones or the "littluns" - an important early step in the group's decline into savagery. At this point of the events, the boys try to build their civilization as the civilized instinct still dominates the savage instinct. The cracks are beginning to show, however, particularly in the willingness of some of the older boys to use physical force and violence to give themselves a sense of superiority over the young ones:

Roger gathered a handful of stones and began to throw them. Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and the law. Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that knew nothing of him and was in ruins. (66)

The above quotation shows us the psychological workings behind the beginnings of that willingness. Roger feels the urge to torment Henry, the little one, by pelting him with stones, but the slight remains of socially imposed standards of behaviour are still too strong for him to give in completely to his savage urges. Roger and most of the other boys misplace their respect for these forces “parents and school and policemen and the law”; violence, torture, and murder break out as the savage instinct replaces the instinct for civilization among the group.

With Ralph’s harmless nature, good is always the dominant force. This situation is threatened as Jack continues his attempts to take over the conch group; it worsens after a confrontation over the dying fire, which he was supposed to look after and the humiliation he was exposed to and Jack declares his rebellion. Jack declares himself the leader of the new tribe of hunters and organizes a hunt and a violent, ritual slaughter of a sow to solemnize the occasion. The hunters then decapitate the sow and place its head on a sharpened stake in the jungle as an offering to the beast which all of the other boys believe exists in the island and preoccupies them with its presence. Later, Simon has a terrible vision after encountering the bloody, fly-covered head, during which it seems to him that the head is speaking. The voice, which he imagines as belonging to the Lord of the Flies, says that Simon will never escape him, for he exists within all men. Simon faints. When he wakes up, he goes to the mountain, where he sees the dead parachutist. Understanding then that the beast does not exist externally but rather within each individual boy, Simon travels to the beach to tell the others what he has seen. But the others are in the midst of a chaotic revelry—even Ralph and Piggy have joined Jack’s feast—and when they see Simon’s shadowy

figure emerge from the jungle, they fall upon him and kill him with their bare hands and teeth. Golding successfully portrays the danger of mob mentality in this scene. The presence of Piggy and Ralph shows that even moral beings will subject themselves to immorality for the purpose of joining a group. When Simon is murdered, the boys think that he is the beast, and enable each other to believe this fantasy. Again, they kill as a mob, nobody stepping in to disrupt the collective fantasy or prevent injustice.

The following morning Ralph, who took part in the murder along with Piggy, though both indirectly, feels intense remorse and has great difficulty accepting the fact that they have murdered Simon. Jack's hunters attack them and their few followers and steal Piggy's glasses in the process. Ralph's group travels to Jack's stronghold in an attempt to make Jack see reason, but Jack orders Sam and Eric tied up and fights with Ralph. In the ensuing battle, one boy, Roger, rolls a boulder down the mountain, killing Piggy and shattering the conch shell that stood for order and civilization on the island. Ralph barely manages to escape a torrent of spears.

Ralph hides for the rest of the night and the following day, while the other boys hunt him like an animal. Jack, now nearly complete in his demonic role as the ultimate savage, sets the entire island ablaze. He has the other boys ignite the forest in order to smoke Ralph out of his hiding place. Ralph stays in the forest, where he discovers and destroys the sow's head, but eventually, he is forced out onto the beach, where he knows the other boys will soon arrive to kill him. Ralph collapses in exhaustion, but when he looks up, he sees a British naval officer standing over him. However, the fire started by Jack is large that it has attracted the attention of a nearby

warship. The navy officer lands on the island near where Ralph is lying, and his sudden appearance brings the children's fighting to an abrupt halt. Upon learning of the boys' activities, the officer remarks that he would have expected better from British boys, believing them only to be playing a game, unaware of the two murders that have taken place and the imminent occurrence of a third. "Amazed at the spectacle of this group of bloodthirsty, savage children, the officer asks Ralph to explain. Ralph is overwhelmed by the knowledge that he is safe but thinking about what has happened on the island he begins to weep"(Muller,1203). Ralph cries, in mourning for his friend Piggy, his own loss of innocence, and his newfound awareness of the darkness of human nature. The other boys begin to sob as well. The officer turns his back so that the boys may regain their composure.

However, even from the sociological perspective, Golding's human animal is far more complicated. In *Lord of the Flies*, society is actually structured upon such violence. Hierarchies are constructed, power becomes a dominant factor, and bloodlust erupts in the symbolism of removing the trappings and suits of childish innocence. No longer just the attainment of food, hunting becomes ritual sacrifice as the children discover the pleasure in killing. Such violence is power over life and death; over others in dominance and the sheer pleasure in taking life with one's own hands, when Ralph emphasized on the necessity of rules for the maintenance of order on the island society, Jack refutes the idea: "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong—we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat—!" (100). This shows the transformation of Jack from someone who abided by the rules to a savage that discards all types of rules. This bloodlust is soon transferred again from the joy of mastering the

life and death of animals to mastering and inflicting suffering on human beings. Jack's cadre despises Piggy, the weak, loathsome child who represents intelligence as well as the helplessness they need to disavow: ' "Piggy was a bore; his fat, his ass-mar [asthma] and his matter-of-fact ideas..." ' (69). Murdering the poor, obese, defenceless, nearsighted Piggy satiates the savage children. By slaughtering a victim, the community not only satisfies its anger and violence, but also siphons and displaces the violent feelings away from the community members onto the victim.

Such savagery in *Lord of the Flies* is not merely an indictment of human nature, however. While the use of children might seem to be merely a cynical portrayal of unsocialized human cruelty, Golding is now saying that society is actually *founded* upon such cruelty. It is not that human beings are bad or evil. They are indeed prone to violence and wickedness. The problem is not only that we are violent and capable of horrific slaughter, but that 'civilization' manages to rationalize such acts and justify them in the name of God, King, and Country. Thus Golding is vilifying modern society for its barbarism and vicious brutality, which are disguised by the lies of moral justification, necessity, and 'civility.' Not human nature, but the dishonest society that lies about its own violence is the problem for Golding. The sequestered island of children is not just human nature in its own primal unsocialized element but is a microcosm of the adult 'civilized' society off the island, the one which is engaged in mature war and slaughter even as the children repeat that same sociogenic violence on a smaller scale. It is true that human violence erupts when social controls diminish, but it is also true that this image of lawless violence is placed explicitly at a time when war was ravaging the entire world beyond the sheltered confines of the oasis.

Chapter 3

Allegorical Significance of *Lord of the Flies*

Lord of the Flies, written by William Golding, is an allegorical novel in that it contains characters and objects that directly represent the novel's themes and ideas. An allegory is a form of imaginative literature that encourages the readers to seek hidden meanings beneath the literal surface. Allegory involves either a creative or informational process that shows symbols and themes. There are historical and political allegories in which characters and actions tend to historical parsing and events. In another type of allegory, which is the allegory of ideas, the central device is the personification of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, state of mind, modes of life, and types of character and places. *Lord of the Flies* is a striking combination of the aforementioned allegories.

Golding's central point in the novel is that a conflict between the impulse toward civilization and savagery rages within each human individual, regardless of a child or an adult. *Lord of the Flies* is both a historical and political allegory for life after World War II. Golding was traumatized by the events of the war, which he fought in, and the terrors it brought with itself. This experience served as a source of inspiration for the author to write how devilish a human can be and that every single human being is capable of participating in such heinous acts. Golding also aimed to demonstrate the fact that even in a civilized society like that of England, evil acts can emerge as well as anywhere else. The novel was intended to be a tragic lesson that English has had to learn over a period of one hundred years. This chapter reconsiders *Lord of the Flies*, on its use of allegory to convey a broader message to the world.

The title of the novel, *Lord of the Flies* is allegorical. Golding's original title for this novel was *Strangers from Within*. After it was accepted by Faber & Faber, the book was named *Lord of the Flies*. The title refers to Beelzebub, the ancient name of the devil or Satan in Christian theology. As the boys' savagery and malevolence increase, they seek a symbol, a god to worship. When Jack and his hunters kill a sow, they have their opportunity; they leave the pig's head impaled on a stake as an offering to the beast. The head is soon rotting and covered with flies and the narrator names it the 'Lord of the Flies' which serves as a symbol of the evil and savagery of Jack's tribe of hunters. Simon discovers it decaying in the forest while flies buzz around the head. Simon hallucinates having a conversation with it. The scene becomes even more terrifying as the Lord of the Flies appears to speak out loud and claims that he is the Beast and he cannot be hunt and killed as he is a part of them (161). The Lord of the Flies speaks in the 'voice of a schoolmaster' and represents an authority figure to Simon. This incident is all the more chilling since the boys are desperate for someone, like a teacher, to help them survive. As he continues to speak, and as Simon begins to have a seizure, the head appears to expand like a balloon. The pig's head threatens Simon and insists they are going to have fun on this island and Simon is not wanted. At the end of the chapter, Simon is metaphorically swallowed by the head.

The Lord of the Flies thematically relates to Golding's beliefs regarding humanity's inherent wickedness. In the imaginations of many of the boys, the beast is a tangible source of evil on the island. However, in reality, it represents the evil naturally present within everyone, which is causing life on the island to deteriorate. The skull becomes a kind of religious totem with extraordinary psychological power, driving the

boys to abandon their desire for civilization and order and give in to their violent and savage impulses. At the end of the novel, Ralph, with disgust, knocks the pig's skull to the ground and seizes the stick to use as a spear. He understands the evil that surrounds him in the person of Jack, and he seeks to destroy it.

The novel is allegorical with the historical and cultural contexts, which is the conflict between dictatorships and democracy in World War II. Meanwhile, the war is used to teach moral, ethical, or religious lessons with satirical political purposes to convey a message. Golding adopts a realistic approach that presents both positive and negative, pessimistic, and optimistic thinking. His experience in World War II had encouraged him to seek the real reasons behind these destructive wars. Writing in an era following the Second World War known as the 'atomic age,' Golding tapped into a widespread cultural panic over nuclear destruction and man's capacity for warfare in *Lord of the Flies*. After the first atomic bombs were detonated over Japan at the end of the war in 1945, the Soviet Union and the United States began building their nuclear arsenals, leading many people to fear apocalyptic nuclear conflict. The Soviet Union and the United States engaged in a policy of brinkmanship that would come to be known as the Cold War. By placing his novel after a presumably nuclear attack, Golding asked questions that were common for the time period: How will human beings behave if society is destroyed? Are the world's great empires capable of mutual destruction? And maybe most importantly, is human nature intrinsically self-destructive, or does it have the moral capability to act in the interest of the greater good? Golding used the allegory of boys stranded on an island to explore the kind of all-too-human drive for violence and domination that lead to nuclear acquisition in the first place.

When Jack ties up dissenters and beats them, or Roger delights in terrorizing boys into submission, Golding creates parallels to the use of force to establish a brutal, repressive system of authority. Jack's reign of terror resembles Hitler's violent repression of political dissent or Stalin's bloody political purges of the 1930s. While the concerns of the novel are timeless, it would have held particular resonance for readers just recovering from global conflict, and anxious about the fate of the world in the face of fascism, totalitarianism, and increasing nuclear threat. The novel also takes the form of religious allegory. It merely focuses on human beings' "morality, ethics, and values," which finally established a pleasant "social life." What Golding insists on is the ability of the individual to rule himself, not the rule of law. Due to these factors, the novel is completely a religious allegory. *Lord of the Flies* is also an example of dystopian fiction because it presents the characters as living in a nightmarish, oppressive society due to their inherently flawed natures.

Lord of the Flies is an allegorical novel, and many of its characters signify important ideas or themes. Ralph represents order, leadership, and civilization. Piggy represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization. Jack represents unbridled savagery and the desire for power. Simon represents natural human goodness. Roger represents brutality and bloodlust at their most extreme. To the extent that the boys' society resembles a political state, the littluns might be seen as the common people, while the older boys represent the ruling classes and political leaders. The relationships that develop between the older boys and the younger ones emphasize the older boys' connection to either the civilized or the savage instinct: civilized boys like Ralph and Simon use their power to protect the younger boys and advance the good of the group;

savage boys like Jack and Roger use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the littler boys as objects for their own amusement.

The conch shell becomes a powerful symbol of civilization and order in the novel. The shell effectively governs the boys' meetings, for the boy who holds the shell holds the right to speak. As the island civilization erodes and the boys descend into savagery, the conch shell loses its power and influence among them. The boulder that Roger rolls onto Piggy also crushes the conch shell, signifying the demise of the civilized instinct. Piggy is the most intelligent, rational boy in the group, and his glasses represent the power of science and intellectual endeavor in society. This symbolic significance is clear from the start of the novel, when the boys use the lenses from Piggy's glasses to focus on the sunlight and start a fire. When Jack's hunters raid Ralph's camp and steal the glasses, the savages effectively take the power to make fire, leaving Ralph's group helpless.

The ending of the novel, *Lord of the Flies* is allegorical. Ralph was being hunted by Jack and his hunters who have ignited the forest to smoke Ralph out of his hiding. He makes it to the beach and collapses at the feet of a newly arrived British naval officer, whose ship had been attracted by the smoke from the huge fire. He thinks that the group of boys is having a storybook adventure: no rules, no adults, and all fun. When he learns what has happened on the island, the officer is reproachful that a group of British boys has lost all reverence for the rules of civilization. The officer represents civilization, but he also represents the horror of civilization: war. He might be cleaner and donned in a uniform but the act of war is no less savage. The boys may be getting off the island, but they're just going to grow up into soldiers destroying another Eden—only this time, the Eden is the whole world; and the "fire" is an atomic bomb.

Conclusion

William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* as a reaction to *The Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean*, a novel by R.M Ballantyne, written in 1857. Among the novel's major themes are the civilizing effect of Christianity, 19th-century British imperialism in the South Pacific, and the importance of hierarchy and leadership. In *The Coral Island*, the boys encounter the evil whereas in *Lord of the Flies* the evil is within them. After gaining first-hand experience of the horrors of wars, Golding was forced to change the way he perceived the world. He became disillusioned in the theory of British supremacy and the grandeur of British culture and civilization. This is reflected in his novel as he tries to portray a realistic image of the concept of civilization. Golding also challenges the notion of British children being inherently moralistic and virtuous by choosing a pack of marooned British boys for his novel that ultimately falls into savagery.

In *Lord of the Flies*, novelist William Golding is not government-bashing. In fact, he seems to genuinely believe in the power and potential of a thoughtfully organized and executed government, especially one that is democratic in its ideology and structure. The situation that he establishes in *Lord of the Flies* demonstrates that the power and potential of government about which Golding is so confident is incredibly vulnerable to threats. Such threats are not limited to external enemies; indeed, the most significant threats may come from within the government itself. In *Lord of the Flies*, the boys enthusiastically pursue the project of developing a government that will help them establish and maintain social norms and expectations, and which will provide for their basic needs. However, the project is doomed for the outset. They choose a leader based on a single criterion rather than a thorough evaluation of his capacities. They assign roles without assessing citizens'

abilities and resources. They have no checks and balances to compensate for social unrest. For all of these reasons, the boys' society-building project fails. One can read *Lord of the Flies* as a cautionary tale. While the novel is about children with limited insight striving to establish a society, the same challenges and threats they confront are common today.

Lord of the Flies serves as a searing commentary on the nature of human beings and how they both facilitate and thwart the construction of an egalitarian society. There is an enormous discrepancy, they suggest, between the dream of an ideal society and the ability to see it into being. Even when a group of people can nurture an ideal society into its founding stages, enjoying some successes and social cohesion and equality, such a society is incredibly vulnerable and it is impossible for the society to persist over a long period of time. The reason for the failures of the social projects depicted in *Lord of the Flies* is that individualism and base human characteristics interfered and threatened the stability of these societies. While it may be difficult to accept that power, privilege, and greed are as compelling and gripping as they are, there are innumerable examples throughout the entire history of humankind that prove that the allegorical collapse of these fictional societies is by no means an anomaly.

Given this conclusion, the reader must accept that building an ideal society is impossible. Although the idea is highly attractive in theory, and it may even impel members of society to band together in an effort to construct such the perfect society, what Golding asserts is the knowledge that we already know: human beings are imperfect creatures. Our fallibility precludes us from being able to construct something that is itself infallible, particularly when that thing is a society, which is, after all, only a collective

unit of imperfect beings. This observation should not be a cause for despair. Rather, the conclusions offered by Golding in *Lord of the Flies* should support the lessons of history and point us toward living and working with the realities that characterize who we are. We cannot build perfect societies, perhaps, but nor are we condemned to live in a dysfunctional, dystopic world. Instead, we must live in a realistic world, recognizing the extent of our capabilities, as well as our limitations, and in doing so, simply strive to be as good as we can.

Golding is not just showing us that violence erupts when social controls weaken. *Lord of the Flies* is a parable that is pertinent to the understanding of violence within our culture, and to atrocities inflicted by governments on external enemies. But it can also evoke the genesis of violence in cultures considered more ‘savage’ and insular. This parable can resonate with recent enactments of violence and murder. It is a literary evocation of the gestation of brutality and contagious violence, and may enable us to envisage the spawning of murder and sacrifice, the very birth of atrocity.

Lord of the Flies thus becomes an excellent example for a political and religious allegory as well as an allegory of ideas. James Stern pointed out in 1955 review for the New York Times Book Review that “*Lord of the Flies* is an allegory on human society today; the novel's primary implication being that what we have come to call civilization is at best no more than skin deep”. This novel has been praised on literary grounds much less often than a sociological psychological or religious tract. The bleak picture presented in the novel rises thought-provoking questions in the readers’ mind, especially about civilization, enlightenment, rationality, and human nature.

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