



Breaking the chains of civilization: A study of authority and anarchy in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

Ajay M

Assistant Professor of English, Department of Languages, Sri Sathya Sai University for Human Excellence, Karnataka, India

Abstract

William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" is a thought-provoking novel that explores the loss of civilization and power. Set on a deserted island, the story follows a group of boys who are left to fend for themselves after a plane crash. Initially, the boys attempt to establish a system of rules and order, but as time goes on, their primal instincts begin to take over, leading to chaos and violence. This paper undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the intricate dynamics among innocence, authority, and societal order as depicted in Golding's seminal novel. Through a meticulous examination of these thematic elements, this study reflects the profound metamorphosis experienced by the group as they grapple with their descent into a state of primordial chaos. The research underscores the precarious and delicate nature of innocence when confronted with the coercive force of authority and the omnipresent spectre of fear, thereby illuminating the enduring pertinence of Golding's literary work in the ongoing discourse on the complexities of human nature and society.

Keywords: Civilization, power, innocence, fragility, society, order

Introduction

William Golding's magnum opus, "The Lord of the Flies," is a timeless exploration of the precarious nature of innocence and the disclosure of civilization in the face of innate human darkness. Published in 1954, this novel has left an indelible mark on the literary landscape by delving into the harrowing transformation of a group of British boys stranded on a remote island. Notably, "The Lord of the Flies" draws inspiration from R. M. Ballantyne's "The Coral Island." Although not in direct parallel, Golding's narrative carries undertones of response and critique to the idealized portrayal of British boys' island existence presented by Ballantyne in 1858. Golding's work serves as a stark departure from Ballantyne's optimism, plumbing the depths of human nature when stripped of societal constraints. It compels readers to confront the latent propensity for savagery that resides within individuals, fostering profound inquiries into the interplay between civilization and chaos. Moreover, this paper integrates concepts from notable thinkers such as William Ophuls, Carl Jung and Robert Greene. By combining these philosophical and psychological concepts into the analysis, it offers a comprehensive examination of Golding's masterpiece. The analysis aims to dissect the intricacies of innocence, the corrosive influence of power, the erosion of societal norms, and the pervasive presence of fear within the narrative.

Through this exploration, the study enhances the understanding of Golding's narrative, not only as a departure from the romanticism of "The Coral Island" but also as a reflection of the intellectual influences and inspirations that have shaped the narrative's depth and complexity. Golding's work thus remains a poignant and enduring discourse on the vulnerability of innocence when confronted with the seductive allure of authority and the haunting spectre of fear, challenging readers to contemplate the multifaceted nuances of human nature and society.

The innocence of children

The boys stranded on the island at the beginning are innocent and naïve, having been raised in a civilized society. They believe in the inherent goodness of humanity and trust in the authority of adults. This belief in the inherent goodness of humanity is reflected in Ralph, who can be regarded as the protagonist, who embodies this innocence with his fair hair and clear eyes symbolizing his purity. Initially, the boys attempt to maintain order and follow the rules of their former society, establishing a system of democracy and organization. They hold meetings, elect Ralph as their leader, and create rules such as the conch shell being used as a symbol of authority. The boys' initial efforts to create a civilized society reflect their innocence and their belief that society is inherently good. However, as time passes, the boys begin to lose their innocence and descent into savagery. The constraints of civilization and authority fade away, and the boys are left to their primal instincts. They begin to hunt, engage in violence, and turn against each other. This descent into savagery shows the loss of innocence and the inherent darkness within humanity. The contrast between the boys' initial innocence and their eventual descent into savagery highlights the theme of the novel, which is the inherent evil within human nature. The boys' loss of innocence is a powerful commentary on the nature of society and the human condition, showing that even those who are raised in a civilized society are capable of great evil.

One example of a line that reflects the innocence of the children in the novel is: "The fair boy began to trot along the beach, jumping over the little waves, the fat boy followed him, [...] and then stood bawling, his head bowed, searching with the miserable intensity of smitten inquiry in his eyes" (Chapter 1). This passage shows the boys at the beginning of the novel engaging in childlike behaviour, such as running and playing. The "miserable intensity of smitten inquiry" in the fat boy's eyes also reflects their naivety and innocence, as they have not yet been confronted with the harsh realities of their situation.

The influence of power

As time passes, the boys' innocence is corrupted by their thirst for power, and Ralph's leadership is challenged by Jack, who represents the desire for dominance and control. Jack's obsession with hunting and killing, as well as his manipulative tactics, gradually erode the boys' moral principles. Initially, the boys are committed to maintaining order and working towards rescue, but as Jack's influence grows, their priorities begin to shift. The pursuit of power leads to a breakdown of the boys' moral code, and they become more interested in satisfying their immediate desires and impulses than in maintaining order and working towards the rescue. The conflict between Ralph and Jack highlights the dangers of unchecked ambition and the corrupting influence of power. Jack's desire for dominance and control leads him to become increasingly violent and savage, and he manipulates the other boys to gain power and influence. The boys' descent into savagery is a direct result of their pursuit of power, and the breakdown of their moral code is a reflection of the corrupting influence of power. The novel shows how power can lead individuals to prioritize their interests over the greater good and how it can be used to justify even the most heinous acts.

This line in the novel for instance: "The chief [Ralph] was sitting there, naked to the waist, his face blocked out in white and red. The tribe lay in a semicircle before him. The newly beaten and untied Wilfred was sniffing in the background" (Chapter 11) shows Ralph's physical transformation into a domineering leader as he attempts to maintain his power and control over the other boys. The use of colour imagery, such as the white and red on Ralph's face, highlights the contrast between his former innocence and his current state of power and violence. Additionally, the fact that the tribe is "laying in a semicircle before him" shows Ralph's dominance and authority over the other boys, who have become subservient to his leadership. The inclusion of the newly beaten and untied Wilfred also highlights the violent and abusive tactics that Ralph has used to maintain his power, further emphasizing the corrupting influence of power in the novel.

Robert Greene's work, "The 48 Laws of Power," also explores the corrupting influence of power on individuals and the dangers of unchecked ambition. Like "Lord of the Flies," it highlights how power can lead individuals to prioritize their own interests and how it can be used to justify even the most ludicrous acts. In both works, the pursuit of power is shown to be a slippery slope, with individuals becoming increasingly ruthless and manipulative in their quest for dominance. The concept of Machiavellianism is prevalent in both works, with characters in "Lord of the Flies" and individuals in "The 48 Laws of Power" using deceit, manipulation, and aggression to achieve their goals.

The loss of civilization

The lines from William Ophuls' book "Immoderate Greatness," "The society's original vigour, virtue, and morale have been entirely effaced. Rotten to the core, the society awaits collapse, with only the date remaining to be determined." It speaks to the idea that societies, over time, can become corrupted and decayed to the point of collapse. In the context of "Lord of the Flies," this idea is reflected in the loss of civilization that the boys experience. At the beginning of the novel, the boys are part of a civilized

society, with rules, norms, and a sense of order. However, as time passes, their innocence is corrupted by their thirst for power, and they become more and more savage, losing their respect for the rules and norms of society. They discard their clothes, paint their faces, and engage in primitive rituals, completely abandoning their sense of civilization. The quote suggests that the original vigour, virtue, and morale of the society have been entirely effaced, or erased, in the boys' case. They have become rotten to the core, with their morality and civility eroded to the point of collapse. The only thing remaining is the date of their collapse, as it is inevitable given the direction they are headed. Thus, the quote from Ophuls' book emphasizes the idea that societies can become corrupted and decay over time, leading to their eventual collapse.

Simon, the voice of reason in the novel, recognizes the importance of civilization and the need for rules and order. He acknowledges the existence of a "beast" but realizes that it may not be a physical creature, but rather the innate evil within itself. He tries to convince the other boys to maintain their sense of civility and morality, but they dismiss him and continue down their path towards savagery. Simon's discovery of the truth behind the beast is related to Carl Jung's definition of the beast as a representation of the dark, primal aspects of the human psyche. Jung believed that the beast represents the "shadow" side of the human personality, which is made up of repressed emotions, desires, and impulses. Simon's encounter with the "Lord of the Flies" represents his confrontation with the beast within himself and the other boys. In this scene, the pig's head on a stick, which represents the beast, speaks to Simon, telling him that it is a part of him and all the other boys. Jung's ideas about the beast are reflected in Simon's realization that the beast is not a physical creature but rather a manifestation of the boys' inner darkness. This is expressed in Simon's famous quote: "Maybe there is a beast...maybe it's only us." Jung himself wrote, "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." This idea is reflected in the novel through the boys' gradual descent into savagery, as they become more and more disconnected from their sense of morality and civilization.

The boys' loss of civilization is ultimately a reflection of the darkness within human nature. It demonstrates the fragility of society and the ease with which individuals can be swayed towards violence and destruction. The novel suggests that without the constraints of civilization, individuals are capable of unspeakable acts of cruelty and violence.

The role of fear

The role of fear in the loss of innocence is a central theme. The boys' fear of the unknown, the beast on the island, and their mortality is the driving force behind their descent into savagery. Fear causes the boys to behave violently and to form alliances for protection, leading to the breakdown of order and the abandonment of their previous innocence. The boys' fear is further fuelled by their imaginations, which make them see the island as a hostile and terrifying place. This is evident in the boys' discussions of the beast and their reactions to the island's natural phenomena, such as the storm that destroys the signal fire. As the boys' fear intensifies, their moral sense becomes overwhelmed, and they abandon their previous sense of order and civility. This

is evident in their increasing violence and their disregard for the rules and norms of society. The boys become increasingly focused on their survival, willing to engage in any behaviour that will ensure their safety, regardless of the consequences. The role of fear in the loss of innocence is a common theme in literature and psychology. The psychologist Abraham Maslow, for example, identified safety and security as basic human needs that must be met before higher needs can be pursued. Fear, therefore, plays a crucial role in determining our behaviour and the decisions we make. In "Lord of the Flies," fear drives the boys to abandon their innocence and become increasingly savage. The novel suggests that fear is a powerful force that can overwhelm our moral sense and lead us to engage in destructive behaviour.

The lines from the novel, "The thing is – fear can't hurt you any more than a dream. There aren't any beasts to be afraid of on this island", illustrates the boys' fear of the unknown and the "beast" on the island. The fear causes them to become irrational and make decisions based on their emotions rather than reason. It leads to the breakdown of their moral code and the loss of their innocence, as they become increasingly savage in their attempts to protect themselves. The fear ultimately drives the boys to engage in violent behaviour, as they struggle to survive on the island.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Lord of the Flies* serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of human civilization and the ease with which it can crumble when the constraints of society are removed. Golding's exploration of power, civilization, and fear illustrates how quickly innocence can be lost and morality abandoned when left to our primal instincts. The boys' descent into savagery and violence on the island highlights the importance of societal norms and values in shaping human behaviour and preserving innocence. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the destructive nature of unchecked power, as demonstrated by Jack's obsessive desire for control and dominance. His disregard for the rules and his willingness to engage in violent behaviour leads to the breakdown of order and morality, ultimately resulting in tragedy. Golding's work also underscores the importance of maintaining order and morality in society. Without these values, humanity risks losing its humanity, devolving into chaos and violence. The novel serves as a warning against the dangers of allowing unchecked power and the importance of preserving civilization to prevent the decay of moral values.

References

1. Golding W. *Lord of the Flies*. Faber and Faber, 1954.
2. Beetz K. Violence and Civilization in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. *J Midwest Mod Lang Assoc*,2016;49(1):25-40.
3. Berkove L. Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. *Explicator*,2004;62(2):110-113.
4. Ballantyne RM. *The Coral Island*. Puffin Classics, 1996.
5. Biles J. To 'explore the darkness of man's heart': Nature and the Isolation of the Individual in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. *Stud Novel*,2003;35(4):424-444.
6. Jaffe A. The End of Innocence: Jack's Quest for Power in *Lord of the Flies*. *Engl Stud*,2005;86(2):151-161.

7. Maslow AH. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychol Rev*,1943;50(4):370-396.
8. Jung CG. The Concept of the Collective Unconscious. In: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Vol 9. Pantheon Books, 1959, 43-67.
9. Greene R. *The 48 Laws of Power*. Viking, 2000.