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The Allegorical Study of William Golding's Lord of the Flies and Its Significance

[1]Devesh Rao Bouddha

[1]Research Scholar,
Deptt. of English
Jiwaji University, Gwalior (M.P.)

[2]Dr. M.S. Rathore

Professor of English,
Govt. Girls College, Shivpuri
(M.P.)

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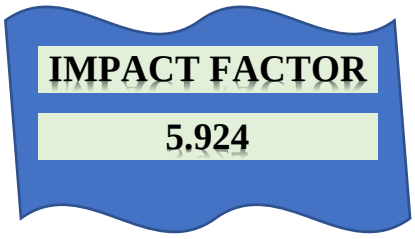

ABSTRACT

In the words of Jesus in St. Mathew, 18:4, "The greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the one who humbled himself and becomes like this child," childhood is presented as a state of innocent goodness, a state which may be regarded as the kingdom of heaven on earth. As adults, fallen from this happy state, we may hanker after a return to it and the possibility of such a conversion is held out to us by Jesus in the Biblical passage, St. Mathew, 18:3, "I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." There is room for optimism about human nature of our Universe, for the speaker is the Creator and loving ruler of the Universe who came down to earth to suffer and die so that we might be redeemed or rescued from our wickedness and restored to the original purity and happiness as we see in children and remember as our experiences of childhood.

But we live in a cruel world which can only be governed by malevolent demons whose delight is to torture us. If we wish to see an image of these dark gods or devils we need to look no further than children or our childhood, need only examine the ghastly and ferocious play of children, where we see how little devils torture and kill insects for fun, playing God with flies. From within and without we are beset by evil-in our human. The nature there is a terrifying propensity towards wanton cruelty which is evident even in children. There are number of occasions in the Bible which highlights that every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood. David confesses before the Lord in Psalm, 51:5, "I have been evil from the day I was born; from the time I was conceived I have been sinful."

Keywords: kingdom, humbled, conversion, nature, children.

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One allegorical feature of Golding's Lord of the Flies (1954) a powerful first novel, written with style and authority, is that the innocence of the child is a crude fallacy, for Homo-sapiens have by nature a terrible potentiality for evil, which cannot be controlled and eradicated by any humane political system, no matter how respectable.

This novel enjoyed a modest initial success. Lionel calls it *"One of the most striking literary phenomena of recent years and a book that seem to have captivated the imagination of a whole generation".*[(1)] It is hard to think of another first novel that moves forward with such sureness and confidence. Part of the explanation, of course, is that it was not his first novel. Golding remarked in a television interview in 1959 that he spent *"ten years, perhaps, learning to write by imitating other people and learning very late that, of course, I was merely writing other people's novels indeed of my own".* [(2)] This novel, quickly became both a campus cult-book and an examination text and was filmed in 1963.

Lord of the Flies is first and foremost a gripping adventure story: it falls well within the main stream of several English literary traditions. It's a boys' book as are Treasure Island, The Wind in the Willows, A High Wind in Jamaica and other books primarily about juvenile characters which transcend juvenile appeal; *"it is in the tradition of the survival narrative, along with Robinson Crusoe, The Swiss Family Robinson and even Barrie's Admirable Crichton".* [(3)] In addition to being an adventure story, the novel has important dimensions, morally, psychologically and theologically.

It has been variously interpreted as religious, political, psychological and anthropological study. *"In the essay "Fable", in The Hot Gates Golding avers that Lord of the Flies is a multi-layered work and open to various interpretations".*[(4)] It highlights although social phenomenon that are concerned to the human society. It is said, "*The novel has been plausibly interpreted as a Christian Parallel and Greek tragedy and less plausibly with reference to neo-Freudian, Jungian, and Marxian concepts".* [(5)]

James R. Baker and Bernard Dick conclude that the novel is an allegory on the disintegration of society due to a tragic flaw in human nature: man fails to recognize, and thereby appease, the irrational part of his soul. *Howard Babb, argues that the "innocent pride" attributed to the boys is pride in their own wisdom.* As Jack says, "After all we're not savages, we're English and the English are best at everything".[(6)]

E.L. Epstein believes that the Freudian psychoanalytic theory is relevant: *"The Devil is not present in any traditional religious sense, Golding's Beelzebub is the modern equivalent, the anarchic amoral, driving force that Freudians call the Id".* [(7)]

Viewed from another perspective, the novel becomes what some commentators call an anti-Utopian satire. For the island society is microcosmically a human society, related to the 'grown-up' society that occasioned the Original fall from the skies. *"Anthropologically the society is a mirror of the first primitive societies of*

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prehistoric man; its progress illustrates a biological maxim: that the development of the individual recapitulates in capsule time the development of the species". [8]

Further we see "*The tale can be viewed in social psychological terms to show how intelligence (Piggy) and common sense (Ralph) will always be overthrown in society by sadism (Roger) and the lure of totalitarianism (Jack). Seen in political terms it is a dramatization of 'the modern political nightmare'".* [9] in which responsible democracy is destroyed by charismatic authoritarianism.

Terms such as allegory, parable, fable, science fiction, romance have been variously suggested. Judging from his comments in the essay "Fable" Golding's own preference is the term fable, which he once defined as *"allegory that has achieved passion".* [10] Another persistent classification that has attended to the book's intellectual schemata is affinity to neither romance nor realism, its definition as neither parable nor fable, but its relation to the Christian apologia. Frederick Karl's discussion in A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel, was first to suggest that Golding wrote religious allegories whose conceptual machinery undermines the 'felt life' of the tale: *"The idea...invariably is superior to the performance itself".* [11]

This passage really sums up all the pertinent critical attitudes with regard to this text: *"It is, in fact, a cannily constructed perhaps contrived-allegory for a twentieth-century doctrine of Original sin and its social and political dynamics and it conforms essentially to a quite orthodox tradition not really more pessimistic than the Christian view of man".* [12]

Reacting against the Romantic notion that man is basically noble, if freed from the fetters of society, Golding insists that evil is inherent in man; a terrifying force which he must recognise and control.

Golding's experiences in World War II provided him with a tremendous insight into human nature. He realised that everyone had within him the potential to be utterly brutal should circumstances demand it. His essay, 'Fable' provides a clear and interesting statement of the intellectual background which lay behind the novel. He remarked that before the World War II *"I believed in the perfectability of social man, that a correct structure of society would produce goodwill, and that therefore you could remove all social ills by a reorganization of a society...but after the war, I did not because I was unable to. I had discovered what one man could do to another".* [13] He realized how rational intelligence and material progress made man more corrupt, violent and destructive. *Golding said, "World War II was a turning point for me. I began to see what people were capable of doing".* [14] The impact of this realization was that this potential for greed, innate cruelty and selfishness lay within all of us, not just our war-time enemies, waiting only for circumstances suddenly to unleash it into a powerful manifestation. It was this observation that led Golding to investigate a theme common to all his novels: man's capacity for inhumanity to man and the point in time when man fell from the perfect state of innocence into which he was born.

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Experience of war, as well as of such totalitarian regimes as Fascism and Stalinism made Golding realize that *"man was sick-not exceptional man, but average man...the condition of man was to be a morally diseased creation"*. [(15)] When he put this into theological terms, this is how he expressed his notion of the morally diseased creation in an interview:

Man is a fallen being. He is gripped by Original sin. His nature is sinful and his state perilous. I accept the theology and admit the triteness, but what is trite is true; and a truism can become more than a truism when it is a belief passionately held. I looked round me for some convenient form in which this thesis might be worked out and found it, in the play of children. I have lived for many years with small boys, and understand and know them with awful precision. I decided to take the literary convention of boys on an island, only make them, real boys instead of paper cutouts with no life in them, and try to show how the shape of the society they evolved would be conditioned by their diseased, their fallen nature.

Since it is a simple statement about the darkness of man's heart, it would be saying nothing that has not become a religious and perhaps even psychological common place. These comments suggests the initial idea or thesis which governs the novel. It could be summarized that the book is governed by the idea that man is a fallen creature.

Viewed in anthropological terms of the Fall, Lord of the Flies is a sequel to The Inheritors. In The Inheritors, Golding shows that the fragmentation of man's consciousness constitutes the Fall. W.H. Auden, in one of his poems, states how the Fall has fragmented man's consciousness into four faculties-intuition, feeling, sensation and thought. Simon, Ralph, Jack and Piggy the four main characters in the novel may be said to represent the four faculties respectively. The clash among them is in its essence symbolic of the various pulls and pressures man experiences on the existential level as a result of his fragmented consciousness.

The overall picture of man's nature which emerges from the novel is that a return to the state of nature, an escape into primitivism, leads only to the unleashing of brutality, greed for power, sadism in the most naked and brutal forms, to the horror of orgiastic and murderous midnight dances and human heads stuck on poles. It is a grim view of human condition.

There is no rescue, no way out and the ending of the novel is anything but happy. But to regard it as such would be to ignore the prophetic vision of Simon.

Golding has remarked, "I am by nature an optimist, but a defective logic or a logic which I sometimes hope desperately is defective-makes a pessimist of me." The tension between optimism and pessimism, between hope, and despair is characteristic of Golding's fiction.

When questioned about the full meaning and wider implication of the book, Golding remarked: "I think the book was a kind of escape out of a drab England into the South seas-followed by a sad realization that, even if

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you make your surrounding beautiful, you will take yourself with you, ...I felt a tremendous visional force behind the whole book. At the end, for example, there's a scene where Ralph is fleeing from the fire on the island and the point is not just that the boy is being hunted down, but that the whole natural world is being destroyed. That idea was almost as important to me as Ralph himself: the picture of destruction was an atomic one, the island had expanded to be the whole great globe. The book concerned what human beings were doing to each other and to the world in which they lived."

The boys return to nature then, is not an idyll, but a nightmare. Piggy's view of the matter, if only they would spot them, they would be saved, is a comforting view of the book, since it seems to endorse the view that our civilization is rational and peaceful. But to take such a view is to deny the beast in us. Piggy's faith in grown-ups seems to be sadly misplaced. Displaying typical commonsense and faith in the known laws of science he tries to reassure Ralph: "The trouble that it wouldn't work".

We aspire to reasonableness and would like to construct and live in rational societies, but the horrible truth is that man's organized civilization and sophisticated systems of communications have failed to work, have been destroyed or have broken down in the nightmare of nuclear war. The nature of the beast within us, the innate propensity towards violence, cruelty and selfish and self-destructive wickedness makes such optimistic schemes incapable of realization. It's heart breaking to see how friendship and fair-play are replaced by hostility and tyranny. Our civilizations are condemned as barbaric and monstrously destructive.

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