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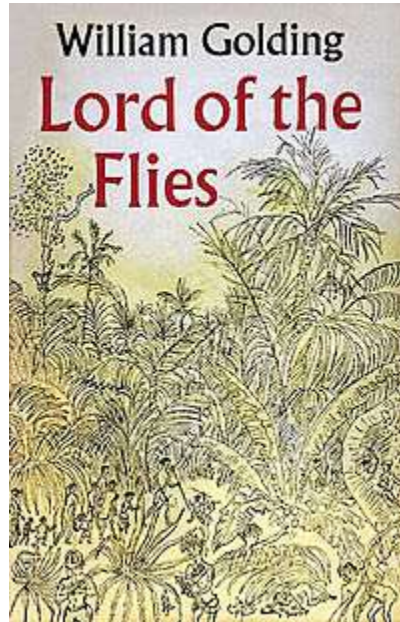
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Loss of Civilization and Innocence in *Lord of the Flies*

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Conflict between Civilization and Savagery

Lord of the Flies dramatizes the fundamental conflict between civilization and savagery, endorsing the essential evil nature of human being meant to bend towards the destructive side in the absence of any civilization. The “civilizing instinct” of a man urging him to behave lawfully, follow rules, act morally and the feral instinct inciting him to act brutally, become violent and a selfish breaker of rules run parallel in this novel with the ultimate result of the feral instinct gaining expression by splintering the thin thread of civilization. The former instinct is manifested in many characters like Ralph, Piggy and Simon and the later devastating impulse is shown protruding in the characters of Jack, Roger and other hunters.

So, the structure basically deals with the idea that what happens when man is out of center of civilization. Golding accentuates loss of innocence and reason, development of overarching brutality, anarchy and fall from humanity to unbridled animality as the consequences of such desertion from civilization. In the end Ralph

“Wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy.” (Chapter 12, page 184)

The strange glamour of the island existed no more; the island was scorched up like a dead wood. The painted savages who were indulged in murdering were a far cry from naïve and candid children.

The Savagery of the Marooned Boys



William Golding (1911-1993)

Courtesy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Golding

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The savagery of the marooned boys, Golding delineates, upsurged because of the inherent evil nature. In this philosophy of human nature Golding contradicts Rousseau's philosophy. Rousseau presented the concept of "noble savages" in his "Dissertation on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind". He believed that man is essentially good; it is society which corrupts his soul.

But Golding propounds an opposite view, he sees man as naturally evil and, therefore, corrupting the society through his dingy nature. The school boys who were left on the island without any grownup illustrate his concept of innate violent nature of man which emerges out in the absence of any civilization. That is why; Golding suggests the rule of reason and civilization to mitigate the effect of such nefarious instincts.

Reason as the Foundation of Rules

Reason is the foundation of rules, therefore in the novel *Piggy* and Ralph tried to "*put first things first and act proper*" (Chapter 2, page 45). Rousseau was against this reason promoting order, for he considered it the founder of all ills of mankind. Hunting and homicide also negate Rousseau's idea of natural compassion of savage man which restricts him from inflicting any harm on human beings. Golding goes for the idea of an increase in man's cruelty when in uncontrolled situation. The essential goodness leading to perfection of nature, Rousseau believed, can be achieved through an instant contact of man with Nature, as he pen-pictures in his novel *Emile*.

But what happens from Golding's point of view is represented in *Lord of the Flies*.

Civilization as an Enchanting Cloak

Golding suggests that civilization provides an enchanting cloak to the essential evil nature of a man and this is what the children lost, to the extent that their savage image "*refused to blend with that ancient picture of a boy in shorts and shirt*" (Chapter 12, page 183). The horrendous consequences of this crisis could never be averted. The painted faces, with a fierce look in eyes, spears in hands, naked and ululating, they were boys--Were they schoolboys who had said 'yes sir'? Daylight might have answered 'yes' but the darkness and death said 'no'. This was the loss of innocence and identity, Ralph wept for.

This loss was gradual. Earlier a little compunction could have made Maurice uneasy on account of teasing the littluns. Roger's arm was also conditioned by the traces of civilization and he flinched stones at a harmless distance. Here, "*yet invisible, was the taboo of old life*" (Chapter 4, page 56). But later on the same Roger threw a boulder on piggy putting him to death. Such signs and instinct proved massive for the thin threads of civilization to get hold off and darkness of mind over-whelmed. Children were saved in their other life by dint of the "protection of parents,

and school, and policeman, and the law', but now all such facilitators were absent, so being exposed to any extreme condition.

Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* also draws a similar comparison between civilized world and the savage primitive world. It is easy for the goodness of man to thrive "*with solid pavement, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to fall on you and cheer you, steppind delicately between the butcher and the policeman*". "*But in the absence of all these "you must fall back upon your innate strength"*", which Golding proposes too weak to hold in some characters like Jack.

Aggressive and Destructive

Golding seems to follow some of the perceptions of Thomas Hobbes, presented in his book *Leviathan*. He agrees with Hobbes that human nature is aggressive and destructive, that's why man remains in a constant need of an authority to punish him and to keep the system going on. Self-interest and selfishness are other features of man's nature which Hobbes and Golding propound and are rightly manifested in the character of Jack.

Concrete Manifestation of an Abstract Evil

A notable point is that Ralph considered Jack a concrete manifestation of an abstract evil. The word 'Jack' became a taboo for him. But Golding conceived this as the incarnation of inherent evil, this is what Lord of the Flies proffered,

"I'm a part of you.....I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" (Chapter 8, page 130)

If this is so then Jack's character appears more as a scape-goat of man's wrong-doings just like Satan is in daily life.

A Variety of Different Symbols and Characters

The loss of civilization in the novel can be traced through different symbols and characters with the progression of novel. The failure of the boys to create a stable system and a lawful order is propagated through the symbols of fire, conch, glasses, language, garments and government exploiting them as barometers of measuring the level of civilization among the deserted boys.

Fire, generally is regarded as the elementary step to development and progress. In chapter 1 the boys maintained the fire reflecting their desire to be rescued and return to society. But the letting out of fire showed their complacency with the savage life of island. This is what Ralph did not want...

"We shan't keep the fire going out. We will be like animals. We will never be rescued."

Being the source of signal fire, the glasses of Piggy were respected. Like its product, the glasses in the inception were clean and unbroken. But when Jack smashed Piggy, they were broken, slipping away the memories of civilization. And these memories were totally washed away when the glasses went into the hands of Jack.

The conch is another symbol of order. Piggy tried desperately to protect it, but gradually it lost its influence. In chapter 6, Jack declared...

"We do not need conch anymore." (Chapter 6, page 110)

This hammering of value reached its culmination with the crushing of conch into one thousand white fragments. And then it ceased to exist.

Nicety in Language and Appearance

Language and appearance are counted as the significant aspects of a civilized society. Nicety in them depicts the social stature and the civic sense of a person. In the novel, the deterioration in language and garments also symbolized the loss of sense and civilization. Chapter 1 describes the semblance of boys as school boys properly uniformed, wearing different signs of cultured life like *"mottoes, badges and stripes of color in stockings and pullovers"*. And these colors were used later on not for decoration but for dissimulation. Hunters painting their faces were a massive leap into the realm of savagery, henceforth identifying themselves with the primitive world of no discipline. The boys started discarding all of their cloaks and clothes till in Chapter 3; Golding describes Jack as *"except for a pair of laterred shorts naked"*. Moreover language also met change. From childish slangs like 'wacco', 'wizzo', to swear words like 'bloody', 'bullocks' were frequently and unconsciously used.

Gradual Collapse of Government and Individual Personality

The loss of civilization can be traced through the gradual collapse of government. Mimicking their grown-up's system. They establish their democratic rule headed by Ralph, holding his power in a conch.

"We have got to have rules and obey. After all we are not savages, we are English" (Chapter 2, page 40)

Taking into account the age of the kid, almost everything ran smoothly at the beginning. Everybody helped out in every chore, designated tasks were fulfilled consciously. But things started falling apart with the very slipping of first chance of rescue when a ship passed. Jack created problem to the stability of this system through his obsession of hunting and transgression of rules. Jack considered that rules were meant to be broken, sounding much like Hitler – laws are like paper meant to be torn. Jack ignored the preliminary efforts of rescue and shelter and broke himself from the social setup making his own separate way...

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"I am going off by myself."

Those who were afraid of Jack and his power became his tribesmen and he became an undisputable chief of the hunters, henceforth shattering the democratic rule of Ralph. This conflict represents the conflict between the civilizing impulse of Ralph and the barbaric instinct of Jack. This conflict was heightened with the intention of Ralph-hunt by Jack so as to present the head of Ralph to the "Beast" as a gift, and once again mobocracy prevailed.

Piggy and Ralph no matter how much stood for up righteousness could not avoid the 'Id' part of their personality. Ralph put the first stone of transgression by breaking the promise of Piggy related to his name. He was also included in a game ritual once on a mountain-top and was soundly driven by mob's power. In a hysterical situation, Ralph was also intoxicated by the "desire to squeeze and hurt". And this passion overcame his reason for some moments. During one such situation, Simon was killed and the presence of Ralph and Piggy was like that of silent abettors.

In lieu of all this, Ralph still held a balanced state among all others. He was a voice of reason and sanity and a harbinger of law. Throughout the novel he remained vexed for the issue of rescue and for this he kept on foregrounding the importance of fire. Among all other boys only his memory was visited by the reminiscences of past life. The littluns obeyed him mostly because of his conch and partly because he "was big enough to be a link with the adult world of authority". This direct tie-up with the world of good made him a responsible fellow, that is why Piggy wanted his rule of rationality which was put to question by Jack's obstinacy and obsession of hunting. Piggy notified this as,

"Which is better -to be a pack of painted niggers or to be sensible like Ralph?" (Chapter 11, page 164)

"Which is better-to have rules and agree or to hunt and kill?"

From Pig-Hunting to Man-Hunting

Starting from a simple pig-hunting, the passionate endeavours of the hunters changed into dramatic assault first through a game and then through a man-hunt. Pig-hunting was a source of food to the good of group but when Jack refused to recognize the validity of the rules and subjugate before his powerful instinct, the productive task became a destructive task and genocide was rampant. The ritual dance and game was meant to be a source of enjoyment and a subject of gaining experience but this also diminished the line that separated humans from animals. With hunters presenting themselves as prey for hunt, the hunters lost their ability to identify humanity and, during one such game, Simon was butted to death. The frenzied and hysterical situation created during such mob's ritual through the chant

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"Kill the pig, cut his throat, spill his blood" (Chapter 9, page 138)

Even made the comparatively suppressed evil of Ralph to exhilarate and he was elated.

Golding has accounted "Fear", an irrational fear the solid cause of disintegrity and things fell apart when side-issues like "beast" and its hunting diverted the attention of the boys from the major issues of rescue, shelter and fire. The assemblies were no more a decisive sessions, fun and laughing became bulbous. To Ralph this seem the obscurity of sanity,

"Things are breaking up, we began very well; we were happy, and thenPeople started getting frightened".

Lack of general agreement on the presence of beast was problematic. Piggy considered its existence against the scientific rationality, Ralph tried to ignore it, Jack regarded it a nightmare. Only Simon came to a true conclusion that *"Beast is within us"* through his vis-a-vis meeting with the lord of the flies--an emblem of evil. The scenario of the abandoned atmosphere and terror galloping in the form of darkness cannot be spared; they did play their roles in developing fear among the boys. It was in night that the littluns took creepers as snakes, Phil unfounded Simon as a beast "big and horrid", he was killed in darkness; the dead parachutist was mistaken as a beast of teeth and black eyes due to night. The island and people appeared differently at night and it was usual and apt to nature that the boys behaved irrationally and course of life became hectic and hopeless.

Representation of Uncivilized Life

The vignette of physical devastation and uncleanness was also the representation of uncivilized life. Long hair, filthy smell, bitten nails, dirt and dust amplified their alienation from sophistication and in the end the thing struck to officer's amazement was Ralph's appearance and he acknowledged that a boy needed *"a bath, a hair-cut, a nose-wipe"*.

Rules and authority can provide a lawful outlet to the wild instincts of a man. But sometimes this order also fails to curb the externalization of that evil; the background of war is a tricky representation of this assertion. In spite of all his efforts when his hopes dashed to the ground, Ralph wishes for a sign from the world of grown-ups--the world where legal statutes and civilization were considered to be the role model for the children. However, they did get that sign; in an aerial flight, a figure dropped beneath a parachute, and this parachutist later on became the cause of all fear and the bogey of the Beast.

What Golding wants to acclaim is that the world of grown-ups was no more different than the world of children, for in spite of all their rules and codes the adults were failed to offer a perfect resistance to the expression of innate evil of man, so what model children could have followed to give a better show-off. This is the notion which made the army officer embarrassed; he could not

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believe that the British boys could fall to such a depth of savagery and atrocity of killing. But what to say to the children when the civilized grown-ups themselves are indulged in killing others?

This loss of civilization, emerging out of evil nature of man, can be regarded as the basic theme, so the novel appears to be an attempt “to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature”. The elements of progressive corruption of human nature are clearly identifiable in the savagery of the marooned boys.

Primary Source:

William Golding *Lord of the Flies*. Faber and Faber, London. 1954.

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