

Research Article

**FROM BOYS TO BARBARIANS: A CONFLICT STUDY ON WILLIAM GOLDING'S
LORD OF THE FLIES**

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Abstract

This study is an analysis of Lord of the Flies by Sir William Gerald Golding with respect to Karl Marx's modern conflict theory. The novel revolves around a group of English boys who survive a plane wreck by landing on a tropical island in the Pacific Ocean which has never been subdued by human habitation. The island which stood embellished with lushness soon travails between the wrestling forces of good and evil dwelling within these civilized English boys. There prevails a tug of war between one group that anchors onto civilization and the other which dives into barbarianism. Unfortunately, the anchor gives away in the latter part of the novel where the entire group of boys aging between six and twelve drown miserably into the deep trenches of barbarianism. This novel serves as a suitable specimen to comprehend Karl Marx's modern conflict theory. The conflict theory bulletins how the affluent in the top of the hierarchy device to hold their positions and continue to remain at the top of the pyramid. The theory is based on four social phenomena: competition, revolution, structural inequality, and war. The order of episodes in the island are in direct agreement with the four phenomena discussed in the theory.

Keywords: Civilization, Barbarianism, Savagery, Restoration, Conflicts, Disintegration.

Introduction

The author, William Golding, (19 September 1911 – 19 June 1993) was a British novelist, playwright, and a poet. He was born in Cornwall located in the south coast of England. Golding's mother partook in suffragette movement where women fought for their right to vote. His father, a schoolteacher was a buttoned-down rationalist. Golding pursued science during his first-two years at college but during his third year, he switched to literature where his heart belonged. Fresh out of college, Golding tried his hand in various fields as an actor, producer, and a writer. He finally traced his father's path of becoming a teacher. In 1936, he taught English and philosophy at a local school followed by serving in the navy between 1940 and 1945. His service in navy opened his eyes to the cruelty and evil that existed among mankind. His encounter with the schoolboys and

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his exposure to existence of evil at the navy twinned in the birth of the novel *Lord of the Flies*. This novel sustained rejections from 21 publishers and was finally published in the year 1954.

Karl Heinrich Marx, (5 May 1818 – 14 March 1883) was a German philosopher, economist, and a sociologist. He is called the father of communism. Marx's ideas collapsed the age-old pyramid of hierarchy and shook the traditions of the government. His political doctrines forced him into exile thus spending decades of his life in London. He ventured the field of journalism and published in both English and German. His achievements include establishment of various theories, penning down of 355 articles, formulation of new ideologies and so on. This paper spotlights his modern conflict theory.

Methodology

The novel is divided into four major incidents based on Marx's conflict theory. The first phenomenon in Marx's theory is competition. According to the theorists, scarcity of resources results in competition. An individual or class belonging to a society compete to take possession of both the tangible and intangible resources. The second phenomenon is revolution. Conflict between the classes in a society sparks off a revolutionary event. There is a shift in the power dynamics among these classes. This shift is not a result of gradual adaptation instead, it's an abrupt shift in power. The third phenomenon in conflict theory is structural inequality. Here prevails an inequality of power not only in the social but among human relationship too. A select class or individual in the society acquires power and reward than the others. In order, to perpetuate the power and reward, the beneficiary class or individual would work to sustain those structures in order, to sustain the power. The fourth phenomenon, the war, is perceived as the cleanser of the society, by conflict theorist. Piling up of conflicts among classes or individuals result in the war. The war may result in extreme outcomes. It may unify or destroy the society.

Just as there exists competition, revolution, structural inequality and war in a society, the island which beholds the survivors of the plane wreck too imitates the same, and squeezes into this structure of a society sprung out of conflict. This paper walks us through the fall of civilization and the glorious rise of barbarianism. The novel begins with Ralph's attempt to recreate society which is in direct contradiction to Jack's bloodthirst towards savagery. This conflict thus leads to disintegration of civilization and flourishing of full-fledged barbarianism. Fortunately, a crack of light shines upon the island on the arrival of the naval officer as a promising sign for restoration of civilization

Discussion / Analysis

Shortly after crash landing on the island, the boys unanimously chose Ralph as the leader which left Jack resentful. Jack having already been the head of the choir boys, wanted to lead the rest of the group on the island as well. The group comprised of boys aging between six and fourteen. The little one in the group were called the Littluns. Ralph's motives were well-intended towards the safety and well-being of the Littluns. Whereas, Jack's intentions were selfish and only benefitted the choir boys. Yet, in order to avoid a power struggle, Ralph gave Jack and his boys the responsibility of maintaining the signal fire so Jack too could share in the position of authority. Irrespective of this adjustment between Ralph and Jack, there remained a constant tension and competition between them, solely stirred by Jack's evil intentions. The first phenomenon of Marx's theory takes effect on the island before sundown.

Ralph's delegation of works to Jack and the boys were frowned upon by them. The idea of implementing Ralph's assignments came in the way of Jack's ego. Hence, Jack channelled his passion and time on hunting. Hunting served as an excuse to rebel against Ralph. Jack refused to take orders from Ralph and failed to keep the signal fire burning. It costed the group a chance at rescue by a passing ship. Jack's careless attitude towards finding a rescue is described in the following lines. "Rescue? Yes, of course! All the same, I'd like to catch a pig first-" He snatched up his spear and dashed it into the ground. The opaque, mad look came into his eyes again." (Golding, 52). These lines clearly state that Jack was least interested in finding a rescue. He channelled his interest and effort to fulfil his desire to hunt. He gained pleasure from hunting that it advanced into a drive for blood thirst. In the latter part of the novel, he graduates from hunting a sow, to an attempt to murder Ralph.

Another scheme of Jack to challenge Ralph's leadership was to strip-away the power of the conch. Piggy, the most intellect in the group, discovered the conch to which Ralph bestows power, whereby, the holder of the conch alone was permitted to speak during their meetings. But Jack despised the power of the conch. In direct contradiction, he intervened the meeting when the holder of conch was still sharing his thoughts. "Conch! Conch!" shouted Jack. "We don't need the conch anymore. We know who ought to say things. What good did Simon do speaking, or Bill, or Walter? It's time some people knew they've got to keep quiet and leave deciding things to the rest of us." (Golding, 103).

While Ralph provided fresh fruits to the Littluns in his group, Jack provided his boys with the meat of the sow he hunted. He tricked the Littluns into joining his group by offering them meat. The Littluns who were discontented with fruits-alone being their source of food, joined Jack to quench their desire for meat. All through the novel, Jack competes with Ralph by outright rebellion, to sway the Littluns over to his side in order to gain in number.

Marx's points out in his first phenomenon that scarcity of resources results in competition. The island provided the boys with an abundance of food and water but the boys were in short of tools that would help them make a fire and build shelters. Ralph's camp had a knife which aided in the building of shelters and Piggy's thick eye glasses were used as a magnifying glass to direct sun's rays to spark a small fire. The eye glasses were used to build the signal fire and to make fire for warmth. Jack needed Piggy's eye glasses to make fire in order to roast the meat. They also wanted the knife in order make a spear for hunting. There is tension and strife rising from Jack's group to take possession of these resources. Thus, as Marx pointed out, scarcity of resources resulted in constant strife and competition between Jack and Ralph's tribes.

According to Marx's first phenomenon, an individual or class belonging to a society will compete to take possession of both the tangible and intangible resources. As stated by Marx, one night, Jack and his boys raided Ralph's camp and stole both, the eye glasses and the knife. They shadily compete to take possession of the resources available in Ralph's camp by force.

The second phenomenon in Marx's conflict theory is revolution. Marx points out that the conflict will lead to an abrupt shift in the power dynamics. Similarly, there is a shift in the island whereby the boys elevate to the next phenomenon resulting in an abrupt transfer of leadership from Ralph to Jack. Power was not bestowed on him; Jack rather acquired the power by force. He used various tricks to lure the littluns over to his camp. Jack's strategy was to belittle Ralph's framework and to act in direct contradiction to the survival strategies designed by Ralph. While Ralph's

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strategy was to provide a secured environment for the boys and to find a rescue, Jack's was to hunt meat and to be in complete authority. Ralph toiled to maintain harmony in the island but Jack inflicted chaos and confusion. He plundered and destroyed Ralph's camp. While the littluns switched camps for a taste of the sow's meat, they were held hostage. One such example were the twins, Sam and Eric who were tied up and tortured. Thus, there was a sudden shift in power from Ralph - the leader, to Jack - the oppressor.

The third phenomenon in Marx's conflict theory is structural inequality. With the sudden shift in power from Ralph to Jack, the whole framework of the island collapsed. There was full-fledged savagery. Jack led his tribe into a barbaric lifestyle. Civilized English boys turned into barbarians. They no longer looked out for a rescue. They were instead on the look-out to find the beast they assumed to have been living in the island. Jack amps up the craze by planting a sow's head on a pole and offering it to the beast as a peace-offering. Thus, the structure that held the boys together fell apart when their focus changed. Alongside this shift in focus, Jack's plundering of Ralph's camp too caused a major set-back. It greatly contributed to lop-sidedness of equality as Jack's camp was well-equipped while Ralph's was stripped away of basic human necessities.

Marx points out that an individual or a group belonging to the beneficiary class would plot various schemes to sustain the benefits within the class. One of Jack's scheme was to portray Ralph's camp as a boring place to live in so he could continue to sustain the number of boys in his group. Ralph often pressed on the importance of following rules. Hence, Jack misleads the group saying, "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!" (Golding, 92).

He introduced the hunting dance where the boys danced wildly around the fire chanting slogans. "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood." (Golding, 68). This chant drove the boys to behave in a beastly manner. Wild fun and roasted pig meat led the boys from Ralph's camp to slip away to Jack's camp at night. Thus, Ralph's group began to disintegrate causing him to fall into depression.

The fourth phenomenon in Marx's conflict theory is war. The island which showered the boys with hospitality began to turn into a horrid land. The boys turned the island into a dark holding. Unfortunate deaths fell upon the group because of the beast that lurked within each of them. A littlun who was identified by a birthmark on his face went missing when the boys started the forest fire. The boy was never to be found since the fire. During the hunting dance at the feast hosted by Jack, the boys were so wildly energized, that when Simon emerged from the forest, the boys misunderstood him to be the beast and accidentally killed him.

"At once, the crowd surged after it [Simon], poured down the rock, leapt onto the beast [Simon], screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws," (Golding, 156).

The above lines describe the terrorizing manner in which poor Simon faced his death. While the death seems ruthless, it was purely accidental. Whereas the death of Piggy was no doubt a gruesome murder committed by Rodger, one of the choir boys from Jack's camp.

The conflict theorist perceive war as a cleanser of the society. When Ralph and Piggy confront Jack at his camp regarding the stealing of the eyeglasses. Ralph tries to explain the importance of having to follow the rules and to keep their eyes wide open for a rescue. Jack in response commands Sam and Erik to be tied together and tortured. Furious Ralph fights Jack. As

Piggy let's out a loud shrill to stop the fight, Rodger rolls a massive rock from the mountain top which Ralph quickly dodges but sadly it kills Piggy. "The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist." (Golding, 187). With the death of Piggy and the shattering of the conch there was complete darkness upon the island. The boys were on an overdrive of barbarianism.

Jack and the boys then began to throw spears at Ralph. He finds refuge in the thick forest blades. In the morning, Ralph wakes up to the smell of smoke. He realizes that Jack had set the forest on fire. With all his might, he sets off a great run but ends up exhausted on the beach sand. Just when he gives up, a naval officer appears on the beach astonished at the chaos in the island.

"The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body. His voice rose under the black smoke before the burning wreckage of the island; and infected by that emotion, the other little boys began to shake and sob too. And in the middle of them, with filthy body, matted hair, and unwiped nose, 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." (Golding, 229)

It was the arrival of the naval officer that slapped reality into them. The boys were lost in their miniature world of violence and blood thirst. It all came to a stand still at the sight of the naval officer. Ralph is struck with realization of the death of innocence and awakening of darkness within each man. The officer was baffled by the sight of the burning island and the extent of destruction the boys were capable of bringing upon the island. "I should have thought," said the officer as he visualized the scene before him, "I should have thought that a pack of British boys—you're all British, aren't you—would have been able to put up a better show than that." (Golding, 229).

According to Marx, the war may result in extreme outcomes. Truly the war on the island resulted in a massive forest fire and great destruction. It sadly claimed the life of Simon and Piggy. Marx adds that the war may unify or destroy the society. Here, the war destroyed them. Yet, despite its destructive end, it did hold a silver-lining of drawing the attention of a naval ship passing by.

Conclusion

Thus, the novel *Lord of the Flies*, is in direct-agreement with Marx's conflict theory. As the theory states, the island passes through the four phases in the very order stated by Marx. Conflict between the ideas proposed by Ralph and Jack led to a competition which resulted in Jack belittling Ralph's rescue strategy. It led to a revolution where there was a sudden shift in power from Ralph's leadership to Jack's oppression. This resulted in structural inequality where the entire framework in the island collapsed. This lop-sidedness in the structure led to the final phenomenon by Marx, the war; which resulted in destruction and loss of life. Thus, the island experienced the four phenomenon of conflict theory in the same sequence laid down by Marx.

Primary Source

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