

## The Manifestation of Man's Evil Nature in *the Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

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### Abstract

*This study, which investigates William Golding's masterpiece, The Lord of the Flies, concerns man's deterioration in the modern world and is built upon man's struggle between his instinct for civilization and his desire for barbarism. Hence, The Lord of the Flies deals with a dystopian world which presents the manifestation of evil in a community of human beings corrupted as a result of gaining absolute freedom. In exploring the underlying factors that made Golding delve into man's inner nature, this study first sheds light on Michel Foucault's view of episteme that is in close relationship with the current discourses of a particular epoch of history.*

**Keywords:** Barbarism, Civilization, Degeneration, Discourse, Egoism, Episteme, Evil, Self-destruction

### 1. Introduction

Michel Foucault, the most eminent philosopher of the twentieth century, believes that history does not have any definite beginning, middle or ending. Instead, it is the product of an interaction between a variety of discourses by which people present their views of the outer world. This abstract system of thoughts or discourses is used to define, describe and classify people, things, and even knowledge of a specific society. Sara Mill accounts that Foucault believes that "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures . . ." (216). Therefore, in order to study the nature of a society in which any work of art is produced, one should focus on the interconnected system of discourses. In this regard Foucault asks, "Where do books come from, especially those that seem defensive in one way or another?" (*The Order of Discourse* 10). To answer this question, Foucault rejects the idea that books are the products of their authors' way of thinking. Instead, he clarifies that "authors, disciplines and periods are the products of the way people agree to use language, and all reflect the possibilities and limits of particular verbal systems" (10). In order to indicate the total underlying order or set of relations that unite the interaction between these discourses within layers of the society, Foucault uses the term episteme in his work *The Order of Discourse*. He then clearly describes episteme as a historical priori that creates knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the conditions of their possibility within a particular epoch: "I would define the episteme respectively as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible, those that will be acceptable within, I won't say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which is possible to say, are true or false" (197).

Accordingly, each period of history has its own scope of knowledge and perception of reality through its own system of thinking that shape its episteme. Therefore, each period of history is specialized with a particular episteme that is exclusively unique to its own. Consequently, the episteme of different eras are definitely recognizable through a close study of literary works which are the products of specific contexts. Thus, this study sheds light on the episteme of post-World Wars by exploring Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*. In fact, episteme shapes a special concept in history and with regard to *The Lord of the Flies*, man's evil nature is manifested as the direct influence of an aftermath wartime and its bloodsheds. Foucault emphasizes that in any particular context at any time, there is only one episteme to describe its system of discourses whether theoretically or practically (Foucault 168). This is what led to the production of a piece of literary work that is related unconsciously to the structure of its own epistemic background.

Hence, an underlying mixture of different layers of a particular episteme that are in close relationship with each other should be studied precisely in order to examine its system of discourses that creates a piece of art. Macdonnell states that an episteme, “may be understood at a particular time and some statements --and not others-- will count as knowledge” (87).

## 2. Literature Review

Foucault believes that the author creates his work according to the social conditions in which he lives. As Gutting declares: Foucault concludes that we should, strictly, not speak of the “author” but of the “author function”. To be an author is not merely to have a certain factual relation to a text (for example to have casually produced it); it is rather, to fulfill a certain factual relation to the text. Authorship is a social construction, not a natural kind, and it will vary over cultures and over time. (11) Exploring Golding’s functions in the creation of *The Lord of the Flies*, would provide us with a unique epistemic framework to trace the concept of savagery versus civilization. Therefore, studying social events and their impacts within a particular epoch is necessary in determining how the historical formation of discourses has shaped its monopolistic episteme. Considering Michel Foucault’s emphasis on the historicity of a literary work by studying the configuration of the society in which it is created, one may focus on the context in which *The Lord of the Flies* has been created. Hence, this work can be best understood in accordance with the background of a real brutal war. Accordingly, Golding started his career as a novelist soon after World War II while the horrible memories of war still preoccupied people’s minds. Consequently, *The Lord of the Flies* is influenced strongly by Golding’s experiences as a naval officer in war time. He himself mentions that the genesis of his novel lies in the brutalities he witnessed during his service at sea. In fact such experiences widened his awareness about man’s savage nature, which gave him a dark understanding of life to the point that he believed there was always a force of evil at work in the world, and that its operation was tightly bound up with that of goodness. Therefore, episteme, as a certain structure of thoughts that man of a particular epoch experiences and cannot escape, is clearly recognizable in the aftermath of World War II by highlighting the various forms of tense discourses working in the context of *The Lord of the Flies*. Besides, in order to understand this work, we should dig the past to see what special discourses shaped it, while remaining detached as it is the remark of its own space and time within which its knowledge was constituted.

Through *The Lord of the Flies*, at times Golding reminds us of the bitter existence of evil that is at work in the world and insisted that no one could have lived through and after the Second World War without realizing that ‘man produces evil as a bee produces honey’. Yet, power circulation and the fear of getting killed among the characters of *The Lord of the Flies* can also be considered as the basis of the discourses of this specific part of history which highlights a murderous brutality among human beings. Therefore, Golding portrays this frenzy detest against anything or anyone outside one’s territories of his innate desires that led to savagery and barbarism symbolically in *The Lord of the Flies*. In his *Order of Discourses*, Foucault defines literature as a discourse in its nature which is a “silent, cautious deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being” (299). However, the episteme of a particular time, here the aftermath World War II, is understandable only after passing the specific time to which it is related. In other words, epistemology does not focus on the episteme of the current time. Mill also asserts that “it is easier to examine the episteme that were current in past periods and past cultures precisely because the machinery of thinking within the contemporary culture is so naturalized” (59). The post-World War episteme blurs boundaries between literature and man’s spiritual tensions as he gets aware of his own capacity for demolishing and killing the innocent just to relieve his animal desires. Nevertheless, *The Lord of the Flies* pictures man’s destiny throughout the history that degenerates toward depravity and a sort of uncontrollable barbarism that puts the whole society of man on the fire of egoism, impurity, cruelty, and ignorance. These vices make him descend the ladder of redemption, salvation, and mercy and lead him toward vanity and self-destruction. Besides, according to Christianity, man’s struggle between the opposing forces of good and evil goes back to Adam and Eve’s commitments of the original sin which led to their loss of innocence and fall. Hence, the emphasis on man’s depravity suggests that man has lost his innocence long before his existence in this world. Golding believes that human nature was discredited and descended by the original sin. He traces the flaws of all societies back to man’s inner nature. This underlying notion has made the whole novel as a symbolic representation of man’s fallen nature as the main consequence of the original sin. Carus asserts that “since the fall, evil is born in the heart of men and always remain at the heart of history as an inevitable force in human affairs” (165).

Therefore, this study explores the origin of such devastating discourse that brings about man's fallen nature and demands our full attention to guard against those dark ways of thinking. Foucault urges that man be aware of the power of discourses as they are the product of power struggles and the circulation of power through all layers of society. Therefore, the mind-boggling account of man's degeneration is to make him aware of such hidden perils in his immediate surroundings as the episteme of World Wars revealed. In fact, Golding's work provides the gist of Foucault's idea about episteme that is mainly concerned with the devastating discourse of its current time. Nonetheless, Foucault's *The Order of Things* examines mainly the history of thought. He mentions that all periods of history have their own underlying episteme which is in fact the conditions of discourses that make it possible as it goes under changes over time. In this regard, the two World Wars, the horrors of Stalin, the Holocaust of Hitler and his dominance over Europe, as well as the protracted thread of atomic annihilation during the cold war are among the most noticeable events that shape the episteme of Golding's era which reveals an indifferent brutal world. Although there is no notorious representation of these events in the novel, the impact of these fearful events on the society and the system of beliefs that establish the episteme of the time can be felt all throughout the incidents of the novel. Hence, Golding's presentation of the dark side of human nature that targets his readiness and susceptibility to commit evil deeds reveals the underlying system of discourses that overshadow its time. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the evil side of man's nature as the fundamental basis of the interconnected discourses that mainly the epistemic World War II has created and the impact of its spiritual tension that ends with man's self-destruction. Hence, *The Lord of the Flies* is the story of man's notorious capacity for brutality and violence leading to his degeneration. Based on the incidents of the novel, the basic reason for man's deterioration is also set up upon his vanity and his self-centered demands as the direct influence of post war mental depression which brings about his excessive concern to fulfill his own primordial demands regardless of his fellowmen in a society that is far from maintaining rules of a civilized community. In fact, it is the inherited mal-tempered nature of man that evokes evil and war in the outside world. By the way, the characters tendency toward barbarism is best meaningful in terms of "episteme", a term also used by "New Historicists to define the unifying principle or pattern that develops in each historical epoch, through language and thought, each period in history develops its own perceptions about the nature of reality (or what it defines as truth) . . . (Bressler 341). Therefore, the episteme of post-World War epoch is of great help to understand Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* and its gloomy atmosphere that shapes its context as the result of the dominant ideology of the current time that produces it. Nevertheless, *The Lord of the Flies* portrays man as a true egoistic creature who has lost God's mercy over the passage of time. Therefore, man's vanity is considered as the main reason for his self-destruction and deterioration which substitute a terrible dystopian world for a pleasant utopian one. The above discussion regarding the significance of historical events and their after-shocks in the revelation of man's inner savagery is in line with the fact that man has to bear the consequences of the original sin inevitably. Throughout the incidents of this novel, the joy of killing innocents is the only activity that is chosen by almost all characters to fulfill their inherited disobediences of the civilized rules.

In order to explore man's response to absolute freedom in his life, Golding brings his characters to a paradisaic island which is isolated from any known barbarity. Hence, one can experiment the depth of man's nature for viciousness in case the opportunity is given to him. Golding's treatment of evil is dramatized by a group of innocent and naïve school boys that are brought to the scene purposefully so that one can judge them objectively. Fredrick R. Karl pictures the innocent boys before their self-destruction as "the standard boys" who show a tendency toward assuming responsibilities as a result of the civilized training they grew up with: "The standard boys under Ralph's leadership divide into two groups: those who will supply the food and those who keep the fire, their only hope of attracting attention. In a way, the keepers are poets, the contemplative ones, while the hunters are men of action" (257). Accordingly, depicting an isolated utopian island with its new innocent and well-behaved inhabitants who struggle for the basic necessities of life is a "moral test" that is conducted as an investigation into human's real nature when there are no authorized rules to impose any sorts of limitation on him: "The moral test must be taken in circumstances which appear to strip away all social conventions. The setting. . . is providing perfect uncontaminated conditions in which to explore the nature of moral behavior" (Michael Waterhouse 9). Golding builds up the setting of his story by considering the original sin and man's egoistic nature as the primary reasons for his descent by confronting pure souls of his characters with their real selves versus social selves. Therefore, Golding creates the setting of his story in a way that his characters can confront their own real selves.

Consequently, the Eden-like island plays the role of a pure setting from which any kind of evil has been excluded so that absolute free will can be felt by the characters who symbolize modern men. Hence, this microcosm can be considered as the reflection of modern world in a limited scale so that its civilized inhabitants can be observed precisely far from any imposing system of civilization. David Spitz describes the boys as “the product of an already established middle-class society. They were civilized, and were a partial microcosm of twentieth century English (or western) civilization; and they had brought that civilization . . . with them (24-30). The predicament that is explored here is universal and can be generalized to all man’s communities throughout history which suggests that man alone is the source of all miseries that he has to deal with in the outer world. The theme of man’s capacity for savagery is interwoven into the structure of this novel so deeply that leads us to a deeper investigation about the epistemological notion of man’s depravity in his life. However, the emphasis is on a paradise that has been ruined in the modern era as the warlike discourse of the time demands. The heavenly soul of man is distorted completely and his virtue and philanthropy are replaced by inhumanity and savagery. Man is totally deteriorated and as Mathew Arnold believes, we are left alone in the “darkling plain” of the modern age which hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; And we are here on a darkling plain.

(“Dover Beach” 33-35) In the opening scenes, the alluring new-found land has the potential of being a utopia; it is a deserted and far-fetched one with no traces of satanic deeds. Consequently, the island is apt to be governed by a new ideal society of innocent inhabitants that can turn it into a beneficial paradise for everyone. Instead, this isolated piece of land gets corrupted by the new residents who perform the drama of the fallen man and it is a true manifestation of man’s gradual degeneration. These children no longer care for their paradisaical world and even put it on fire to highlight the extreme capacity of man for destruction and savagery far from any hope of salvation. Surprisingly, through the course of the novel at times we witness the victory of ill-tempered Jack, who is the primary representative of savagery, and his followers over wise Ralph and intelligent Piggy and we witness the inevitable triumph of inhumanity over humanitarianism. That’s why Tsarnaoff mentions Plato as the one who believes “evil can never pass away, for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good” (162). C.B. Cox also points out that *The Lord of the Flies* “on one level shows how intelligence (Piggy) and common sense (Ralph) will always be overthrown by sadism” (115). Here, children, though innocent at the beginning of the story, are free to reveal their true natures which are no longer curbed by the forces of civilization to the point that bloodshed becomes an ordinary activity among them. Gradually, the serenity of the island is disrupted and it is turned to an appalling dystopia as the boys indulge into viciousness and, therefore, one can see how the innocent heart of man is wiped out and wickedness is nourished.

As soon as the boys are marooned on the island, the faction between them shows up and ends in creating two contradictory groups that stand at opposing ends of a spectrum between civilization and savagery suggesting the two contradictory sides of man’s nature. As the novel fasts forward reconciliation between the two groups becomes impossible and insoluble and, therefore, one side has to be destroyed completely which reminds us of Darwin’s “survival of the fittest”. Ralph and his followers, on one side, try to keep their commitment to civilization while Jack and his group are the true representation of the dark side of man. In fact, Jack and his companions are the outcome of man’s darkness seeking rebellion, violence and anarchy and, therefore, exclude Ralph and his followers from their territory since their lightness is alien to Jack and his advocates’ dark world. Consequently, conflicts start up and the struggle between civilization and barbarism goes to extreme. However the main good characters, Ralph, Piggy, and Simon, are more passive than their rivals. For instance Piggy, who is the symbol of rationalism through the course of incidents, lacks the necessary power when confronting violence. His failure in saving others suggests that reason is powerless in the modern world where wickedness encompasses it. Sobosan (1976) believes that our age is that of “anti-hero, the man so completely incapable of significant action that any identification with him means at least a partial abandonment of that ego ideal toward which we all strive, if only in our dreams” (183) Ralph’s insistence on sticking with rules, making a shelter and keeping the signal fire alive to save the boys casts doubt on Jack’s inhumanity in propagating moral bankruptcy by turning the boys toward violence and viciousness. However, Ralph’s effort in keeping boys’ innocence and his human tendencies to regain composure in a world surrounded by sinful desires such as Jack’s ferocious demands, encourage man that even a degenerated life is susceptible to be redeemed and therefore it is still worth living. That’s why the end of the novel portrays an abrupt rescuing scene to soften the tense atmosphere felt throughout the course of the novel.

Coming from a civilized community, the boys decide to create their own society. But soon most of them get apart from adhering to the disciplined behaviors of civilization as they no longer feel the presence of adults to oversee them. Thus, the constraints of the society no longer linger around them and therefore chaos start. The signal fire which suggests the boys' connection to civilization goes out and disorder encompasses the whole island. Accordingly, it soon appears that their society inclines toward primitive barbarism. The clash between the two main characters, Ralph and Jack, contribute to the chaotic situation from which all the characters suffer consciously or unconsciously. In order to make the problem of man's descended nature and his fallen world more tangible, the inner savage tendency is dramatized as an illusionary fearsome monster with a sinister intent for cruelty which lurks in the island. This horrifying monster gradually turns out to be a part of man's soul: "a nameless figure that is Man himself, the boys' own nature, the something that all humans have in common." (John Peter 583) So instead of discovering, deciphering and defeating the beast they nourish their inner beast and make an idol out of it that should be perished. The fact that children look for the "beast" on the island which is in fact within each of them reveals that they are completely unaware of the dark side of their nature. Their killing a pig and sacrificing it to the beast as the religious rituals demand highlight their submitting to their inner temptation, the so called "beast".

The sow's head that is impaled on a stake and called lord of the flies, as it soon gets covered by the flies, pictures Jack and his followers who are the true reflections of the satanic and sinister figure of the primordial beast that lurks within each human. Jack and his followers are Devil's disciples that give their whole attention to their satanic inner monster and go to extremes to fulfill its demands and gratify their animal inclinations. This beast is in fact the source of all man's evil in the outer world. Keneryi associates such evil with "the knife; the cutting into a living thing even for a purpose of sacrifice to the gods" (16). This notion of devil deeds can be seen obviously in the scene Jack is practicing using his knife to slam into a living thing since he was unable to kill the pig the first time he tried it as the moral propriety is instilled within him by school and society: "He snatched his knife out of its sheath and slammed it into a tree trunk. Next time there would be no mercy. He looked around fiercely, daring them to contradict" (34). In fact Jack's bloodlust and his thirst for power make him ignore the taboo of killing a living creature as a moral guilt and alter it into a customary activity among his proponents. He paves the way for making a wrong attractive situation for his disciples to convince their primal instincts of brutalities by making them experience the wrong thrill of unbridle violence. Gradually, they all become obsessed by the joy of hunting and the more savagery they act, the more real the imaginary beast seems to become. Consequently, Jack becomes a powerful demon and the true lord of atrocity. Seeking supremacy and superiority over others, Jack keeps the boys in the fear of an existent monster and appeals to their hidden excitement in the dark side of their souls to kill a living thing.

Jack's egoistic nature is revealed more and more as he uses the fear of the claimed "beast" as an instrument to gain authority over the boys who are mentally distorted by the fear of an illusionary monster. In fact, he reveals the fact that he is unable to reach all his egoistic wishes through rightful deeds. Accordingly, Jack becomes the lord of devils who more than other characters indulges in destroying, hunting and murdering. He is, indeed, the true image of a severe dictatorship who casts off all his moral restraints and easily ruins the innocent identities of his followers by making them his obedient servants in committing bloodshed. They become a force in Jack's hands and are manipulated by him in order to fulfill his own egoistic wishes. Apparently, this predicament can be considered as the portrayal of the appalling modern world in which man desires to convince his atrocious passions by killing others. By any means, it was the warlike episteme of Golding's time that readily crept into his attentive and artistic mind to create his novel. Throughout the novel at times Golding reminds us of the bloodthirsty boys who see slaughter as a satisfying practice of their dark souls: "They have killed a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away his life like a long satisfying drink" (76). In fact, the more Jack, who is indeed the master of shedding blood among his followers, commits act of evil and murdering, the more he feels the joy of having wrong power in his hand to the point that blood becomes the symbol of his authority as he marks his face with it: "There was lashings of blood," said Jack laughing, and suddenly, "you should have seen it... you should have seen the blood! Jack stood as he said this, the bloodied knife in his hands... he transferred the knife to his left hand and smudged blood over his forehead (75). Jack's vicious treatments satisfy the dark sides of his followers as they practice hunting and gets to its climax when they participate in a wild ritualistic ceremony. This insane scheme that is directed by Jack degenerates all the participants to the point that ends with murdering Simon, an innocent human being.

Simon is indeed the representative of revelation and is assumed as a messenger of truth to convey the true identity of the fearsome beast to the boys. Ironically, this Christ-figure character that is able to see the true reality of the beast with his inner sight is taken by the boys' blindness as the imaginary monster they are after and intensifies how deep man has sunk into depth of his willful ignorance. The terrible dance scene in which even well-behaved Ralph and Piggy succumb to its barbaric and frenzy revelry acknowledges that man's hidden tendency to live voluptuously is much deeper than his impulse toward living under the limitations of civilized coercions. In fact, the importance of being conscious of the existence of evil in the depth of man's nature, even in well-civilized men, suggests that all human beings suffer from a mad demanding desire to "squeeze and hurt a living thing" (65) and this is what guides them toward barbarism and bloodshed. Therefore, this wild ritual scene more than any other scenes in the novel sheds light on man's primal savage tendencies. Accordingly, the novel becomes a dreadful account of man's sinful nature and his fallen status in a situation that the sickness of murdering and destroying overshadows the friendly utopian world of mercy and bliss once offered to him. In this forsaken situation that is far from salvation, man's depravity is inevitable. C.B Cox declares that Golding's novel "deals with the depravity of man, cares deeply about the condition of human life, and shows compassion for men who suffer and for men who sin" (113). Throughout all incidents no perfect Christ-figure comes to the scene to suggest man's redemption. Instead, a common naval officer comes to save the boys as the course of savage actions is to continue in the outer world. That is why at the end of the story Ralph weeps the demise of the civilized instinct in almost all the boys on the island and the ever "end of innocence" as there is no hope for the betterment of man's awful condition: "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" (223). The boys remain alive to keep their act of evil and revive its awful joyance in another dwelling since the original sin has doomed man to bear the burden of his depravity forever. Baker declares that "the rebirth of evil is made certain by the fatal defects inherent in human nature and the hunted island we occupy must always be a fortress on which enchanted hunters pursue the beast, there is no rescue" (17).

### 3. Conclusion

The unifying element which shapes different layers of discourse(s) in a given epoch is what Foucault calls episteme. As *The Lord of the Flies* is the product of the postwar era while the fear of fighting and being killed at the battle fields still overcome people's sprits, the dominate discourses that shaped the formation of this acclaimed novel is examined precisely through this paper. In fact, Golding goes to the depth of man's innermost nature and search for the reasons of his brutalities as he witnessed in the war time when he joined Royal Navy. Thus, *The Lord of the Flies* is deeply occupied with the problem of man's fundamental tendency for wrong doings and that man is degenerated and doomed to self-deterioration as the direct consequence of the original sin. Besides, this novel obviously attracts one's attention to the existence of such an inherent beast within man's own nature since the time of the original sin until the present time and the only way for his salvation is to take guard against the dangers of succumbing to such evil forces. In fact, through his novel Golding implies that if human being is left to his own, he reverts to cruelty and barbarism as man's ferocious desire is much more primal to his psyche than living by rules and acting peacefully.

*The Lord of the Flies* conveys the idea that man's nature is capable of becoming a horrible beast which ultimately ends in his own self-destruction. Here, the consequences of losing one's civilized training are best dramatized in the violent epistemology that overcomes the whole incidents of the novel which led to deterioration and the fall of once divine souls of almost all characters. However, moral behavior is something that must be propagated and forced by the society as those moral constraints are not a fundamental part of human's nature. Hence, a demand for a system of true morality as the basis of the episteme of any epoch is emphasized in order to implant strong and unshakable civilized beliefs in man so that alluring wrong situations and actions cannot beat superficial trainings as one witnesses in the characters of the novel as soon as absolute freedom is given to them.

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