

Killer savagery in "lord of the flies"

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Civilization, at its core, was created to suppress barbaric instinct. However, in extreme circumstances, it is possible for instinct to prevail over civility. William Golding's timeless *Lord of the Flies* is a prime example of instinct overpowering civility, along with many other important themes and ideas. Savagery and darkness are two significant motifs that reoccur in the book, both of which supply evidence to the theme of the novel that the nature of mankind is savage and dark at its core.

The motif of savagery begins to operate early on in the novel with the intent to disparage civility. Towards the beginning of the book, the boys have the sensible idea of building a signal fire in order to alert any ships in the area. However, this civil idea quickly turns savage, as fire quickly engulfs the entire forest, ultimately killing one of the littluns. The boys are essentially left with no control over the fire: " Small flames stirred at the trunk of a tree and crawled away through leaves and brushwood, dividing and increasing. One patch touched a tree trunk and scrambled up like a bright squirrel" (Golding 44). The author compares the fire to a " squirrel," animalistic by nature, with no sense of human order controlling it, thus operating in a very savage fashion. The passage continues: " the squirrel leapt on the wings of the wind and clung to another standing tree, eating downwards... Beneath the capering boys a quarter of a mile square of forest was savage with smoke and flame" (44). The author continues with comparing the fire, the brainchild of the boys, to an animal, further symbolizing the beginning of the transition of the boys from civilized humans to barbaric animals. Additionally, the author depicts the immense fire with a sense of confusion and chaos, progressing the idea of this " savage" fire. This fire is a landmark event in

the novel. Before the fire, the boys try to maintain civility, thus preventing savagery, with the election of a leader and the use of the conch. However, the fire marks the transition in the novel where most of the boys, excluding Piggy and Simon, embrace their savage roots and ignore civility as a whole. The violent fire the boys have created even kills one of their own, yet, still only a few kids continue to make active attempts to try to remain civilized; the others begin to buy into the savage and uncivilized lifestyle because it is human nature to do so.

As the novel progresses, the boys become increasingly savage in nature, destroying their innocence, and providing evidence for the theme.

Throughout the novel, Simon is seen to be a very innocent character with a rare sense of morality on the island. He is even considered by some to be the Christ-like figure of the novel due to the biblical parallels in his "sacrificial" death and his deep connection with nature and the island. Yet, with Jack as their leader, the boys descend upon Simon like a piece of meat, with savagery in their hearts, ultimately murdering him: "Simon was crying out something about a dead man on a hill. Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood Do him in! The beast [Simon] was on its knees in the center, its arms folded over its face... At once the crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt onto the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore" (153). Simon's death is a sacrifice that reveals the true savage nature of these boys, and of mankind as a whole. The boys project their own evil and experience onto Simon by believing him, although pure at heart, to be the beast, which causes them to "tear him" to shreds with their own bare hands. This act speaks akin to the power of savagery. These boys, originally wealthy and

proper English boys, in just a few weeks, have become savages. They are able to literally murder one of their own brethren based on a sheer insecurity. If proper and innocent English school children can revert to savagery so easily, to killing each other, it exemplifies that all humans are, in essence, savages by nature, and that civility is a mere tool to suppress savagery and instinct.

The author uses the motif of darkness to demonstrate that all humans are dark and "evil" at heart, which correlates to the theme of the book. When Jack and the chorus are first introduced in the story, a sense of darkness blunders around: "Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along. Ralph saw it first and watched till the intentness of his gaze drew all eyes that way. Then the creature stepped from mirage onto clear sand and they saw that the darkness was not all shadow, but mostly clothing" (19). The darkness, a symbol of evil and the unknown, foreshadows the bad intentions and mystery of the chorus, Jack in particular.

Metaphorically, Jack and the chorus are living masses of evil and darkness, yet the others still flock to follow them later in the story. However, Jack and the chorus are not the only "dark" and evil beings on the island. In fact, the author believes all of mankind to be inherently evil, hence: "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" (202). In the closing moments of the book, Ralph realizes that all of the boys, including himself, have lost their innocence. Furthermore, Ralph becomes aware that all men and women are innately evil. "The darkness of man's heart" plagues each and every individual. Ralph finally understands that all of the savagery and death that

occurred on the island was due to the darkness of man's soul, man's true evil nature.

In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, savagery and darkness are reoccurring motifs that provide textual evidence to the theme that mankind is barbaric and evil at its nature. Throughout the novel, savagery is shown to belittle civility, thus rendering it ineffective, revealing man's true instinctual nature. Furthermore, the author illustrates that darkness is ever-present in the soul of all men and women, revealing man's true evil nature. *The Lord of the Flies* shows that, given the chance, it is relatively easy for man to break the bonds of civilization that rule them, and develop into savage beasts.