

# The lord of the flies: socio-historical look

Literature, British Literature



Henry Reichman, in his research titled *Censorship and Selection, Issues and Answers for Schools*. Censorship defines censorship as the "the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic or educational materials ... on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of the standards applied by the censor" (Cromwell, 2005) . Often, the judging of the books as unfit for public or classroom consumption is done unilaterally by an authorized policymaking body tasked with oversight functions.

This has adverse impact to the teachers' exercise of academic and creative freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment that protects "the students' right to know and the teachers' right to academic freedom" (Shupe, 2004). Throughout the history of literature, censorship of literary texts and judging them as unfit for public consumption has always provoked social and political debates. The offensive advocates who pose themselves as guardians of morality and social order insist that the society needs protection from destructive elements that may damage its moral and social fibers.

The defensive side, on the other hand, promotes the upholding of constitutional rights for free expression, criticizing censorship as a curtailment of this basic human right. Ironically, banning the books from public consumption has proven to have done the opposite. The public becomes even more curious, finds creative ways to get hold of these banned books and discover for themselves that the very reason of the banning should be the same reason why the public should read them in the first place.

For instance, while Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" was challenged because of its racial slur, many in the academic circles believe that it should all the more be read by the public to learn about racism and its adverse social impact (Shupe, 2004). Restraining the public from reading a literary text that reflects this social reality does not and cannot shield itself from seeing this happening in real life. Unsurprisingly therefore, these banned books or literary texts whose subjects are deemed taboos by the authorities became all-time best sellers continually being "consumed" by the public.

The public's curiosity has been sustained by the authority's persistent efforts to dictate what the public can and cannot read defying the provisions of the First Amendments that enshrines creative and academic freedom (Shupe, 2004). This has all the more invigorated the public's tendency to rebel against repressive authorities. Banning the reading of what the public considered acclaimed literature seems not just illogical but unwarranted. This has made acclaimed banned books like the Lord of the Flies sustained its popularity generations after generations.

I. The Lord of the Flies Restrained from Flying To understand the "restraint flight" of the novel, it may be deemed necessary to trace its roots from its conception to publication, illuminating the tumultuous routes it has taken before it reached the public eye. William Gerald Golding wrote the novel less than ten years after World War II after serving in the Royal Navy from 1940-1945 where he saw man's unnerving capacity for atrocities. As it is commonly believed, war brings the worst and the best of man's human nature.

But expectedly so, Golding identified more on the evil side of man, owing to his background as a disillusioned advocate of rationalism, championed by his father Alec Golding, a schoolteacher and ardent believer of rationalism. In his writing about his wartime experience, he wrote: “ Man produces evil as a bee produces honey” (Gyllensten, 1983). He felt that the atrocities committed by the Nazis in such magnitude could be committed just as well by any other nations owing to humankind’s innately evil nature.

He wrote the book at a time of Cold War, fresh from the hostilities of the Holocaust, the widespread dehumanizing aftereffects of atomic bombs, and the threat of the so-called “ Reds” behind the Iron Curtain. These conditions all found their way to the book, making it a good study of the political and ideological underpinnings of this milieu. From its pre-publication to its promotion to the public, the Lord of the Flies has undergone a turbulent path. Rejected by publishers a record of 21 times, the book was adjudged as “ absurd and uninteresting...rubbish and dull” (Conrad, 2009).

Conrad (2009) recalls that the book seemed to have reached a dead end, until a former lawyer hired as editor from the Faber publishing house, Charles Monteith, resurrected the book from its near oblivion and convinced his colleagues at Faber to publish the book at a measly sum of ? 60. As it turned out, Monteith’s business instinct earned Faber millions of pounds as the book sold millions of copies worldwide and continues to do so up to this time prompting the author of the book to retort that he considers the royalty income as “ Monopolymoney” (Conrad, 2009).

The book’s huge commercial success can be attributed to two things: first, it has a good narrative filled with thrilling action and a theme that amplifies the

endless battle between good and evil; and second, it has been continually challenged by certain school authorities making it all the more attractive to readers. The more it has become controversial, the more it has gathered cult following, assuming celebrity status as a literary text. The thesis of the book underscores the tendency of man for violence.

In the novel, a group of British schoolboys are trapped in a tropical island after the plane that would take them to someplace safer from the nuclear war crashed. Initially acting in a more civilized way, these schoolboys form some sort of a social group with a leader and sets of rules. As they discover the difficulties of such an arrangement within the uncertainty that surrounds them in that tropical island, they begin to question the existence of that social order and start to defy its conventions.

The “ good force” is led by Ralph who symbolizes man’s adherence to civilization and proper social decorum; while Jack leads the “ evil forces” symbolizing man’s innate evil nature that manifests with proper environmental stimuli engendered by the harsh realities of life such as surviving in a jungle. As the story progresses and the uncertainty of being rescued become remote, Jack begins to reconfigure the composition of the social order initiated by Ralph. Within these contesting ideologies, Jack starts to emerge as the leader of choice by the majority of the group.

Deciding that Jack’s aggressive stunts and hunting skills are the necessary skills of a leader in such a harsh environment, the majority of the boys shift their allegiance to him and leave the “ orderly” and “ civilized” leadership of Ralph. With Jack’s leadership, the boys undergo a downward spiral and turn to horrific violence to dismantle civilized social constructs in the name of

survival. In so doing, two boys are killed and they would have continued to slide down to ultimate self-destruction had their eventual rescue failed to come just in time.

Published in 1954 and written by Golding, the Lord of the Flies has been constantly challenged and banned from school curricula in the United States and other parts of the world. The Nettverksgruppa (1996) or NVG, an association of students and staff at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim recounts that the following academic institutions challenged this novel for its so-called “demoralizing effect that implies that man is little more than an animal”: