

# William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*: man's capacity for evil

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Published in 1954, William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies* exemplifies man's capacity for evil which is revealed in his inherent human nature. The underlying evil within man is the most prominent theme of the novel, and perhaps its most controversial one. To portray this theme, *Lord of the Flies* details the lives of a group of young school age boys who have been stranded on a deserted island. As these youngsters struggle to survive they are faced with the challenge of sustaining life by nourishing and sheltering themselves, as well as trying to figure out how to be rescued. Along the way they endeavor to maintain a civilized order as well as their own humanity, however it becomes apparent that most of the boys are capable of evil perhaps due to their extreme circumstances. Golding employs specific literary devices to develop the novel's theme by utilizing characterization, diction, and symbolism in this narrative on man's inhumanity towards man, whereby he is able to portray the theme that evil is an inborn trait of mankind.

It can be argued that Golding's use of characterization solidifies his contention that all men have the capacity for evil due to their innate human nature. Golding depicts the two main alpha male characters of Jack and Ralph as the primary examples of this theme. As the story unfolds, Golding reveals Jack to be selfish, violent and corrupt as he was driven "to violence. The bolting look came into his blue eyes. He took a step, and able at last to hit someone, stuck his fist into Piggy's stomach" (Golding 71). Additionally, the description of Jack towards the conclusion of the book reveals how deceitful, antagonistic and monstrous Jack has become.

Ralph accuses Jack of being “ a beast and a swine and a bloody, bloody thief!” (Golding 179). This statement is the concise summation of all that Jack has become. Furthermore, the fact that Jack has begun to become more tribal in appearance indicates his reversion into a more primal being. As Roger approaches Jack’s tribe at Castle Rock, he sees that Jack is simply “ sitting there, naked to the waste, his face blocked out in white and red” (Golding 160). Finally, as depicted mid way through the story, Jack reveals his true sadistic nature as he was “ on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife.

.... Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands” (Golding135). All of these intensely descriptive characterizations of Jack committing violence as a beast and becoming a thief show that he has fully exhibited his capacity for evil, proving Golding’s point that all human beings can succumb to their inner demons.

Therefore, Golding’s use of characterization through the boys’ dialogue and actions supports his premise that all human beings are capable of evil. A further explanation of Golding’s perspective is that he uses diction to reinforce the theme of man’s capacity for evil through their inherent human nature, as well as its impact on even the most seemingly innocent children. The following quote is repeated frequently in the book, and it is always expressed in the context of bloodlust and rage. During hunting expeditions for both pigs and boys, and in this particular instance, the boys become caught up in their own tribal dance while enacting the hunt. The tribal members scream, “ Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!” (Golding

152). This quote demonstrates the primal and evil diction that Golding utilizes through each character's speech.

Although it is vehemently uttered by such young boys, this aggressive verbal expression conveys the harshness of their wicked and blood thirsty intent. Additionally, the diction of the boys is immature and unsophisticated which aids in portraying and reinforcing the youthfulness of the characters. After building the fire for the first time, Piggy becomes scared and wishes to speak to the other boys, but only taking possession of the conch will give him the power to do so: " I got the conch!" said Piggy bleakly. He turned to Ralph. " I got the conch, ain't I Ralph!" (Golding 45).

Other examples of this type of uneducated language occur throughout the novel as Jack humiliates Piggy by yelling " Sucks to your auntie!" Golding (13). Another more juvenile term, " Whizzoh!" is spoken by Ralph as he comes upon the lagoon at the beginning of the story (Golding 22).

Furthermore, the designation of a chief to act as the group's leader conveys the boyish quality of all of the characters, as boys are universally known for playing the game of cowboys and indians. After becoming stranded, the boys all gather together and they realize that they need a leader and shout " A chief! A chief!" (Golding 22). Additionally, Ralph offered up Jack as a potential leader, saying " All right.

Who wants Jack for chief?" (Golding 23). As well as portraying the youth of the boys, this figure of speech foreshadows the fact that the boys will slowly regress back to primal ways. Even Ralph, who is perhaps one of the most mature of them all shows his youth by standing on his head and saying " No

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grown ups!" as he initially realizes the boys do not have adult supervision (Golding 8). Furthermore, as Ralph is also the most civilized of them all, as the narrative progresses, he eventually succumbs to his own primordial urges as he boasts about attacking the beast: " I hit him all right. The spear stuck in.

I wounded him!" (Golding 113). Although it would seem to be a contradiction for children to have the capacity for evil, the boys' circumstances provoke it, and therefore Golding's use of this type of diction further conveys the theme of man's capacity for evil even when it is portrayed by such young characters. Consequently, Golding's use of more childlike and primal diction reinforces this theme. The final literary device that Golding utilizes to exemplify the theme of man's capacity for evil is symbolism. The following quote depicts the pig head of the *Lord of the Flies* who torments and tantalizes Simon with the truth.

The *Lord of the Flies* rhetorically questions Simon: " You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" (Golding 143). This quote certifies that the beast is indeed within Simon as well as all of the boys. In truth, when the *Lord of the Flies* is talking to Simon, it is really Simon hallucinating as he hears the voices of the boys as a whole in his own mind. In this case Simon has become overcome with the beast inside himself: " Simon found he was looking into a vast mouth. There was blackness within, a blackness that spread" (Golding 144).

However, Simon never exhibits evil tendencies, instead he denies it by merely blacking out as a result of his internal turmoil: “ Simon was inside the mouth. He fell down and lost consciousness” (Golding 144). The pig’s head on a stick symbolizes the metaphorical Lord of the Flies, which is ultimately the demon found to be within each of the boy’s hearts and minds. This can be interpreted as the inner voice of evil. Furthermore, it can be argued that because Simon is perhaps the most outwardly calm and even tempered of all of the boys, he was able to hear his conscience and his inner capacity for evil together as one.

This is one of the most significant examples of the use of symbolism in Lord of the Flies. It is clear that Golding’s implementation of symbolism through the verbal battle between Simon and the Lord of the Flies further exhibits the beast or evil lurking within the boys and therefore within humanity. Golding depicts the theme that all men have the capacity for evil due to their innate primal nature by implementing the literary devices: characterization, diction and symbolism. By utilizing characterization Golding reveals the true nature of Ralph, Jack, and Simon as well as the rest of the tribe. The numerous acts of violence committed by Jack as well as his clan further support Golding’s argument that all humans are capable of evil.

Furthermore, Golding’s use of diction conveys the youth and immaturity of the boys along with the surprising bloodlust of each tribal member, as well as the revelation of each character’s spurious personality. This particular literary device provides the controversial aspect of Golding’s theme that man is capable of evil, as society does not perceive children to be innately

wicked, as they are deemed to be innocent. In addition, Golding's use of symbolism through the interaction between Simon and the pig head of the Lord of the Flies portrays the beast within each character in the novel. Moreover, Golding's contention that all men are capable of evil because of their inherent human nature is relevant to the modern world. For example, as society has learned from The Holocaust and World War I, as well as the Bosnian Genocide, all men have the capacity for evil given the right set of circumstances. This proves that all individuals have the capability to commit evil acts in extreme situations.

While all human beings have the ability to be altruistic, darkness lies within all of humanity, and when provoked, everyone is capable of evil.