

The turn of the screw and the lord of the flies

Literature



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Everyone likes to believe that childhood is a time of innocence. However, these two novels try to show that this is incorrect, that everyone contains is tainted by original sin. Incidents of violence like the James Bulger murders shock us profoundly. The two young children in James's "The Turn of the Screw" shocked the Victorians who could not believe children could be evil. William Golding's "The Lord of the Flies" presents children with a strong sense of evil and disorder. However there is a mixture of types, containing the saintly Simon and the barbaric Jack.

Though these two novels are slightly different they both represent evil in a quite convincing way. These two novels are written for different purposes. William Golding's is a fable and James's is a ghost story. Golding writes a kind of fable, in which the boys are intended to be representative of humankind. Simon is there to stand for the kindness of the human heart, to listen to the others and to interpret the evil "the Beast", who is inside each and everyone of them. Jack and Roger on the other hand represent evil and savagery, and there to stop them are Ralph and Piggy.

Piggy and his glasses represent clear-sightedness and intelligence and Ralph stands for order, democracy, law and responsibility. In cooperation they show the darkness of disorder and evil of human-hearted nature. By contrast Henry James is writing a ghost story of an alternative kind. The whole novel is written from a different perspective, the evil is haunting the governess instead of coming from inside. James makes the haunting clear by the governess's interpretations of seeing the ghosts whilst Golding's evil is explained through the children's characters.

We do not see the evil as an object in Golding's "The Lord of the Flies" like in James's "The Turn of the Screw". In addition as being written for different purposes they are furthermore written from different points of view. In James's "The Turn of the Screw" we only see the children, Miles and Flora from the governess's point of view. Therefore we never see them as completely rounded individuals and we never get access to their thoughts and feelings as in the "The Lord of the Flies".

In "The Turn of the Screw" we don't know if Quint and Miss Jessel have corrupted the children as the governess believes or whether they are objects of the sexual fantasies of the governess. However, in Golding's "The Lord of the Flies" we are given the author's point of view of the boys, which allows us to recognize what the boys are thinking and feeling. This is exceptionally true for Simon, when he goes off into the island on his own. He is unafraid unlike the rest of the boys, his thoughts are much deeper, he has faith in the future and his moral support for others shows this: "You'll get back all right".

The governess introduces Miles and Flora in "The Turn of the Screw" through her romantic and idealising vision. She describes them as cherubs, innocent and beautiful, with the most perfect manners. When she meets Flora for the first time she portrays her as "a creature so charming... the most beautiful child" (p15) with "the vision of angelic beauty" (p16). Similarly Miles is described as having a "great glow of freshness, the same positive fragrance of purity. He was incredibly beautiful" (p23).

"He was therefore an angel... innocent" (p30-31). Though these descriptions are clear indications of how the governess sees the children they are seen

through a vision that can only see the good inside and from someone who is overwhelmed by her new responsibilities. However, these descriptions of the children's innocence make their wickedness (real or fantasy) seem more shocking, and thus enhance their immorality. In "The Lord of the Flies" Golding's boys are sketched far more realistically, for example the description of Piggy in chapter 1 with Ralph.

His intelligence is shown when he can describe to Ralph how to blow the conch as well his physical characteristics and background when he cannot keep up with Ralph and complains about his "ass-mar". These different introductions give you an idea of the characters being which enhances the evil and wickedness later in the novels, especially in the "The Turn of the Screw". As the children in James's "The Turn of the Screw" go from being describe pure and innocence to being portrayed as almost pure evil. Each novel treats evil in it's own way, as each author deals with evil differently.

In James's "The Turn of the Screw" and children are portrayed in such an idealistic light that when they are described as evil, corrupted by Quint and Miss Jessel it seems preposterous. James is deliberately vague throughout this novel. For instance we never know what offence Miles was expelled from school for. All James tells us towards the end of the novel is that "he said things", according to Miles. In chapter 6 the governess feels a "sudden sickness of disgust" when she learns from Mrs Grose that Quint was "too free" with Miles.

However, we never know what this means. Could it refer to sexual abuse? As James continues to be vague it could be said that this is what gives the novel

power and intensity. The ghostly apparitions provide a genuinely chilly impact. For example, when she observes a figure staring at her from the top of the tower and then sees him again at the window this time there is a great anxiety and caution. After seeing the figure for the second time she finds him to be Quint a previous worker who had a close relationship to Miles, during this time she learns that Miles misbehaved.

Following this the governess sees a second figure, Miss Jessel who had a firm relationship with Flora. When both of these are described to Mrs Grose perfectly, because of these descriptions they both show a chill, as they know the ghostly phantoms are watching the children. Following this Miles proves himself to be bad by waking the governess to realise that someone is in the garden, Miles. However, she does not understand this as she can only see the children through her romantic vision. Through the governess's reactions to the sights of Quint and Miss Jessel and Miles behaviour change we are aware of an atmosphere of evil.

From the children changing from the cherubs, angels she describes them to be carriers of evil, like Adam and Eve corrupted by the devil, Quint. The evil is supernatural as they are being controlled by the ghostly phantoms, their origin evil being enlarged whereas the evil of Golding's boys is all their inner selves. William Golding's view of the nature of evil is first obvious in the breakdown of the boys into separate tribes. The boys neglect things that will help them to survive, for example building the shelters. As well as ignoring the important elements they begin to pick on the weak.

At the beginning of the book they are all described by the author. Jack is the only one to be called by his surname, Merridew. He arrives in uniform and already has authority within the choir. We learn that he has no time for weakness or pity for others. When they first pick a leader and Ralph is chosen, this annoys Jack, as he seems to have more power over the others. Straight away Jack wants the choir to be an army, but quickly settles for them being hunters. However, later in the book the boys split into two tribes the warriors/hunters, Jack's tribe and Ralph's, which is mainly the littuns.

Ralph's idea of leadership involves a deep sense of responsibility for his tribe whereas Jack's authority derives from the law jungle, the survival of the fittest. Jack offers his tribe food and protection from the "beast" which we meet in chapter 5. Within Jack's is Roger who is another Satanic creature, who feeds off the over whelming power and pain he inflicts on others. They learn to pick on boys in Ralph's tribe like Piggy and Simon. Yet Simon is the only one, the visionary, with the insight to see that evil is a part of the human nature. In chapter eight Simon shows this when he talks to the "The Lord of the Flies".

He can see that the "The Lord of the Flies" represents great evil and danger, the "beast". Following this Simon climbs the mountain to find the "beast" is a dead parachutist and goes to warn the others of the news there is no "beast", that the only "beast" there is, is not an external creature to be feared and appeased, but is inside each and everyone of them. This evil is an enemy of reason and order. Its results are murder, first of Simon in chapter nine, then of Piggy, and finally the boys intend to hunt and kill Ralph and put his head on a stick, as they did with the "The Lord of the Flies".

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Evil is also seen as involving a return to primitive and ritualistic behaviour. In both novels evil is seen as a force, which consumes and destroys. In James's the " The Turn of the Screw" Miles is destroyed at the end of the novel, though in uncertain circumstances. The governess tries to remove the evil Quint from Miles yet fails as Miles falls into her arms dead. In Golding's novel, the entire island is turned from paradise into a raging inferno, as the boys turn against one another and try to destroy Ralph. However, this time the evil, wickedness saves them as the blaze attracts a ship to take them home.