

Civilisation and savagery in an isolated setting essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Compare the ways H. G. Wells in *The Island of Dr Moreau* and William Golding in *Lord of the Flies* examine the struggle between civilisation and savagery in an isolated setting. H. G. Wells and William Golding diversely explore the struggle between civilisation and savagery in an isolated setting, through their novels: *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and *Lord of the Flies*. Both texts feature an untainted island location, where characters' morality and humanity is challenged by fear and lack of order. Wells emphasises through vivid imagery and characterisation, the qualities of humanity that exist outside of the physical body, and employing rhetorical questions and biblical allusions, plays with class expectations and distinctions in his theoretical world. Contrastingly, Golding employs characterisation and metaphorical imagery, to present a rapid process of devolution from boys to beastly savages and utilises powerful symbols and biblical allusions, to reinforce a loss of humanity and lack of civilisation.

In both texts, the impact of these environments upon the individual demonstrates the fight to retain morality in a corrupt regime, where characters are forced to channel their inner beast to survive. Employing powerful setting, Wells and Golding position their characters within anarchic microcosms that expose the true nature of human and animal. In both texts, a civilised societal structure is formed to achieve power on the uncivilised island, though, where Golding's setting imposes animalistic qualities on the humans resulting in a rapid process of "devolution," Wells contrastingly presents an eventual society of extreme order. This is suggested through his characterisation of God-figural Moreau, as his desire for power and control has resulted in the "Law," which serves as a structure to govern his animal

experimentations on the island. Similarly, in *Lord of the Flies*, Golding's characterisation of the boys desiring their home's safe, civilised society is shown through their attempt at creating order through meetings governed by the conch shell.

These attempts at civilisation are further emphasised through dramatic imagery and symbolism of the bright, "roughly boat shaped" island and its calm weather, to influence the reader into believing the island is a civilised, tropical paradise. This cleverly heightens the reader's distress during Simon's murder, when the ocean's "placid" waves become extremely "rough," symbolising the boys' anger and the calm sky becomes a "violent" storm, representing the tribe's growing savagery. Similarly, pathetic fallacy is evoked through the isolated setting's increasingly ominous conditions, as nothing can prosper but for "the flies who blackened their lord and made the spilt guts look like a heap of glistening coal." This descent into savagery is clearly illustrated when Ralph asks "how do you plan to weather the storm[?]" and in response Jack orders his tribe to perform the wild hunting dance.

In contrast to the boys' freedom in *Lord of the Flies*, the claustrophobic prohibitions of Wells' setting immediately constricts the reader. These orders known collectively as the "Law", evoke our sympathy for the Beast People who, "stumble in the shackles of humanity." Restricted by Wells' employment of the first-person perspective, we feel frustratingly alienated as ethical Prendick is forced to conform to the island's unjust hierarchy. With Moreau's sub-human "Beast People" representing the island's exploited

lower-class, and dictator Moreau with second-in-command Montgomery presenting the nobility, we are moved to despise this savage setting, rhetorically questioning with Prendick, " what could it all mean?" Suggested through dark imagery of the island, where " all the pain in the world had found a voice," we acknowledge the power of corruption and lure of beastly savagery. Moreover, through sadist Moreau's chaotic society and ultimate death, Wells illustrates that all individuals must be constrained to some degree by civilization to avert savagery.

Effectively, the novels each affirm that human qualities ultimately perish to primal urges in isolated settings. Further examining the central conflict between the human impulse towards savagery and the rules of civilisation which direct it, Wells employs contrasting characters and biblical allusion, whilst Golding allegorically utilises symbols and clashes between central characters Ralph and Jack, who respectively represent civilisation and savagery. While Ralph uses his authority to protect the good of the group and enforce morality, insisting " we must keep the fire burning", Jack abuses it, choosing to indulge his primal impulses. These distinctions are heightened through contrasting symbols: the conch shell which is associated with Ralph, Piggy's glasses, and The Lord of the Flies which represents Jack. Ralph's shell symbolises democratic order on the remote island, yet as the conflict between Jack and himself deepens, it becomes meaningless; ultimately signifying the deterioration of the island's civilisation, further enforced through alliterative imagery, where " the sniggering of the savages became a loud, decisive jeer."

Finally, during Piggy's murder, its destruction whilst in Jack's possession signifies the complete eradication of civilisation on the island.

Correspondingly, the breaking of Piggy's glasses represents a break from society, as Ralph's signal fire can no longer burn. Moreover, The Lord of the Flies represents the unity of the boys under Jack's rule, as motivated by fear of the Beast, which symbolises humanity's primal instinct of savagery. Its demolition with in Ralph's possession, signals Golding's protagonist's own descent into savagery and violence, suggested when " he found himself understanding the weariness of this life". This is echoed by the tribe, for when the boys are first deserted on the island, they behave like innocent children, playing with nesting birds that look " like icing on a pink cake," but disturbingly by the end of the novel, they act on " the darkness of man's heart," by harming without hesitation or regret.

This lost innocence, as well as the island's conflicts and symbols, powerfully highlight humanity's inherent savagery. Similarly, Wells' God-figural Moreau echoes Golding's antagonist's violence, as through anaphoric expression, " this time I will burn out all the animal. This time I will make a rational creature of my own," his savagery is exposed. Reprehensibly, this results in his total control of the island society, as well as his safety from the Beast People's suggested " sabre-like canines," presented through unsettling simile as " keen and brilliant as knives." Analogous to Ralph, Wells' Prendick represents civilisation, evoking our sense of morality and justice when rhetorically questioning the Doctor's actions, " one long internal struggle, one long dread of Moreau-and for what?" Effectively, we are moved to

associate with Prendick, feeling alienated from inhumane Moreau who commands “ sharp and sure” punishment over the island.

Moreover, Wells’ strictly civilised hierarchy commanded by the “ Law”, evokes a religious undertone to the island’s society, further aiding Moreau’s control. This is suggested through powerful allusion to Christianity’s Original Sin, for his creature’s quest for humanity echoes the spiritual purity sought by religious followers. Correspondingly, the “ Sayer of the Law” and his followers’ fervent, rhetorical recital of it, is unsettlingly recognised as a religious ritual. The reader is moved to empathise with their “ mock-human existence,” for since Moreau rules “ emotions” to be what “ makes humans better than animals,” their quest to overcome their animal nature, to become godly like Moreau, is unachievable. Similarly, when Golding’s antagonist assumes leadership of his own tribe, leaving behind Ralph’s civilised society, his complete dominance over the boys causes them to worship him as their idol.

Unsettlingly, “ a taboo was evolving around” Jack’s very name, thus “ the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law,” was gone. By rejecting civilisation, the dangerous characteristic aspects of Wells’ Moreau and Golding’s Jack have emerged, “ his mind was crowded with memories” of when he “ outwitted a living thing” and “ took away its life like a long satisfying drink.” Through disturbing biblical allusions, symbols and characterisation, both authors emphasise the negative consequences of savagery, suggesting it is an inescapable fact of human existence that must be controlled by civilisation. Further highlighting the imminence of savagery,

Wells and Golding's examination of humanity's animalistic impulses ultimately addresses the nature of humanity. Through contrasting characters and metaphorical imagery, *Lord of the Flies* draws our attention to the savagery that lurks inside every individual.

Through the lack of restriction, the children begin to act like animals by relying on their primal instincts. This is horrifically illustrated by Piggy's murder, which is foreshadowed by his nickname's symbolism of the hunted boar, and by Ralph's flight from the spears of Jack's hunters. Here, Golding presents Ralph as one of the island's hunted animals, as he feels their fear for survival during his flight. This is likewise foreshadowed by Roger's pretence to be a pig in the hunting dance and by Jack's suggestion that the group should, "hunt a littlun." Unsettlingly, Golding's humans and animals become indistinct. Similarly, Wells's protagonist feels "hopelessly perplexed," as animal instinct takes over him when evading Moreau's sub-humans. Golding's Ralph, who admirably stood for pragmatism and civilization, has been despairingly reduced to an animal of prey, just as Jack and his hunters have reduced themselves to predatory beasts.

Moreover, during Ralph's flight from the hunters he sees the headless sow that Jack's tribe slaughtered, which evokes the imaginary Beast, whose patronising of Simon rhetorically highlights the novel's key idea, "fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill[?...]I'm part of you". Through Simon, whose name alludes to Apostle Peter and manner of his death draws parallels with Jesus's, the reader realises that every human has an inherent beast. Correspondingly, the relationships between Golding's

“ biguns” and “ littluns” further highlights the island’s society’s division, for civilized protagonist Ralph, and Simon use their power to protect the younger boys feeling, “ so full of pride on [their] contribution to the good of society,” whilst savage antagonist Jack, and Roger use their power to treat the “ littluns” as objects for their own amusement. Consequently, the reader feels sympathetic towards the boys who are alienated from society, and angry towards Jack’s tribe of savages.

Similarly, throughout the novel Wells refers to the Beast Men as “ travesties” of humanity even though they have been created to be human equals. This is emphasised through sympathetic Prendick, who sees the terror in the “ humanised” animals’ eyes and consequently begins to attribute them human qualities: “ seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude[,] realised the fact of its humanity.” This heightens the reader’s shock when contrastingly, Wells’ antagonist Moreau drags “ the very soul out of the creature[s.]” This encouragement of our sympathy, by presenting the “ Beast People’s” cries in the form of a voice, cleverly juxtaposes the animal’s instincts with those of human qualities.

Curiously, the authors highlight the fine line between human nature and animal like savagery in humanity, through Golding’s characters’ natural change into animal nature, and contrastingly Wells’ unnaturally “ humanised animals,” which have been cut into “ rational creature[s.]” Moreover, Montgomery, whose characterisation alludes to Christianity’s Jesus, provides an alternative perspective, for his “ long absence from humanity” and “ vicious sympathy” for the Beast People has made him consequently unable

to make as clear a distinction between them and humans. Intriguingly, Wells emphasises that compassion and morality, explored through the Beast People's welcoming interactions between Montgomery and later Prendick, are what define humanity, not appearances. This consequently encourages our sympathy for "Moreau's Horrors," and outrage with antagonist Moreau. He furthermore enforces this concept when "thousands of things that had seemed unnatural and repulsive speedily became natural and ordinary" to Prendick, as he became "habitual to the Beast People," after Moreau's death.

Through the use of characterisation, foreshadowing and symbols, both texts powerfully expose the imminence of savagery in seemingly civilised societies, and the blurry line between beastly and humane. Through contrasting examinations of life in an untainted island setting, authors H. G. Wells and William Golding employ various stylistic features to explore the struggle between civilisation and savagery. This utilisation of imagery, characterisation and biblical allusions in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and characterisation, metaphorical imagery and symbols in *The Lord of the Flies*, contrastingly highlight the struggle to retain morality in a corrupt regime, resulting in a rapid process of devolution and an examination of the definition of humanity. In conclusion, both authors similarly come to the same understanding; to survive in an untainted setting the individual must embrace their inner beast, as suggested by Ralph, "it looks like we must become savages, or die."