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Main Themes of Lord of the Flies

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THE MAIN THEMES OF LORD OF THE FLIES

Lord of the Flies (William Golding, 1967), a direct production of the author's experience of World War II, offers a group of themes that are the second product of the writer's paramount concern for the future of civilization, annihilated almost by the brutality of the Second World War. The main themes of the novel may be categorized as follows: (1) the theme of evil (2) the theme of childhood (3) the theme of human civilization in the 20th century and (4) the biblical theme or the theme of sin and expiation.

The theme of evil

Golding believes that the evil nature of man is curbed only when he is under discipline. Thus, Jack's inherent evil nature is repressed by the disciplined school life and he hesitates for a moment to kill the pig that had been trapped and has managed to run away. At the beginning of the novel, Jack's cruelty and his going against nature are stated. Jack's narrow-mindedness, his material greed, and his eagerness for power are revealed as the basic qualities that lead to murder and destruction. He concentrates on hunting and breaking away from the order created by Ralph to gratify his pleasure. Golding does not intend to picture Jack as basically evil, as he states that Jack is a boy of anger, violence, and action and wants to be a leader.

Golding has made this exposition of cruelty in his novel probably to make his readers aware of what he deemed the real nature of the human mind. He may have believed that World War II did not present us with issues such as fighting—, nationalism, politics, and freedom; it corrupted the nature of human beings. Perhaps Golding also believed that the earth is mangled by men and can be saved only if men become aware of their nature and change it. According to the viewpoint of Golding, the most alarming quality of evil is that it can attract most people towards it because most people are attracted to the joys of life and are loath rational thinking.

Golding

also relates evil with fear which often causes risky activities (Kermode, 1962: 201). Another important aspect of evil shown in the novel is that it does not exist outside; only Simon can feel the truth of evil when he says that the beast might be within us. The other boys are afraid of the beast. It is displayed to Simon alone that evil in the form of a beast is just an illusion. Golding feels that evil does not emerge out of some political or other systems; therefore, the removal of a particular system does not ensure the removal of evil. He argues against those who think that it is the political or other systems that create evil. Evil comes from the depths of man himself.

Golding is almost obsessed with the existence of evil like human beings and emphasizes the recognition of this nature based on which one may take steps to exterminate it. He is not concerned with human nature in a particular time or with a particular type of people, though occasional references are taken from the contemporary (mid-twentieth century) world and the boys in the novel are all British schoolboys. Golding, however, avoids making any specific quality of British boys and the boys might as well belong to any modern civilized country.

The Theme of Childhood (Potential Savagery of Children)

Lord of the Flies is a novel about the activities of some schoolboys who ranged between six and twelve and who had been dropped by an airplane on an uninhabited island. The subject matter of the novel shows similarities with the adventurous stories written in the 19th century. Those stories are romantic tales that stress on the discovery of the unknown land by the boys who are away from the Christian notion of original sin. But Lord of the Flies is a reconstruction of Ballantyne's Coral Island in which three British-school boys find an uninhabited island that becomes a paradise for them. Golding does not share the romantic ideas that portray children as the status of innocent angels. According to him, children possess both good qualities and bad ones as do grown-ups. And in both cases, only a few possess good qualities like love, fellow feeling, sympathy, and pity. In this novel, Simon alone is called innocent. He is full of love, pity, and sympathy for others. He

brings ripe fruit for the littluns, offers his share of meat to Piggy to whom it was denied, and thinks that the supposed beast might be some ill man who could not even chase the boys that went so near him. But the other boys, even Ralph and Piggy who are noted for rationality and intelligence, do not possess the characteristic qualities of Simon.

The novel *Lord of the Flies* does not however present the views unexamined. Rather, it is the result of the author's microscopic observation of the changes in the thoughts of the boys and their ways of life. Even the skilled changes in their behavior do not decamp his eyes. The investigation by the author of the complex phenomenon called child becomes interesting because he makes this investigation fair and objective, and detects the psychological complexity through symbols.

For instance, when Ralph threw his school uniform and feels comfortable in the tropical atmosphere, the gesture expressed his delight in freedom, as he was sure that there would be no strict discipline on the island (Bernard, 1965: 481). Golding's hold on child psychology is further disclosed in the way he depicts the flickers of goodness in evil characters and vice versa. He curiously observes that Jack, the personification of evil, hesitates to kill a pig during their first discovery of the island because he is still unwilling to meet bloodshed. Piggy who is noted for his intelligence and commonsense becomes deceptive when he explains that Simon's death is just an accident. Unlike the believers in the golden childhood theory, Golding admires the role of discipline and order in developing a child's moral sense. And once the children have undergone a disciplined life, they take time to forget all about the moral codes they were taught. Thus, Roger fails to satisfy his agonized pleasure by throwing stones at Henry.

The author is a realist, and he finds that both the grown-up and the children contain evil qualities as well as good, but evil is always prominent. As some critics have rightly observed, the island gives the children freedom to find out themselves and it is given as a testing ground for the inherent goodness or evil. When the children in the novel are set free from the restriction and control of the adult world, their natural impulses surface and reveal their lust for power and savagery. This

revelation of brutality is found in human nature. Surely, love and sympathy are displayed one may remember Simon's love and pity, but these are insufficient. The death of Simon alone indicates the depravity of human beings as does the death of Piggy who related to rules and order almost fanatically.

The behavior of the boys as explained is natural. To say that these descriptions are simple is not correct. The reaction of the boys would be the same anywhere, be it a romantic novel or realistic. Golding's acute observation of the children's way of life enabled him to put side by side both the spontaneous joys of life and the intolerance and hostility towards others. Thus, Golding adds an extra dimension to a common, life-like incident enabling it to interpret his point of view about the power-hungry nature of human beings. In this way, the theme of the potential savagery of children in Golding's novel reveals a clarity of sign and intention that offers a new dimension of interest and oblige the readers to accept the psychological reality as true to life (Golding 17, 24)