**Lord of the flies - William Golding**

***General***

Title: Lord of the flies

Author: William Golding

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***Contents***

*Summary:* Lord of the Flies explores the dark side of humanity, the savagery that underlies even the most civilized human beings. William Golding intended this novel as a tragic parody of children's adventure tales, illustrating humankind's intrinsic evil nature. He presents the reader with a chronology of events leading a group of young boys from hope to disaster as they attempt to survive their uncivilized, unsupervised, isolated environment until rescued.

In the midst of a nuclear war, a group of British boys find themselves stranded without adult supervision on a tropical island. The group is roughly divided into the "littluns," boys around the age of six, and the "biguns," who are between the ages of ten and twelve. Initially, the boys attempt to form a culture similar to the one they left behind. They elect a leader, Ralph, who, with the advice and support of Piggy (the intellectual of the group), strives to establish rules for housing and sanitation. Ralph also makes a signal fire the group's first priority, hoping that a passing ship will see the smoke signal and rescue them. A major challenge to Ralph's leadership is Jack, who also wants to lead. Jack commands a group of choirboys-turned-hunters who sacrifice the duty of tending the fire so that they can participate in the hunts. Jack draws the other boys slowly away from Ralph's influence because of their natural attraction to and inclination toward the adventurous hunting activities symbolizing violence and evil.

The conflict between Jack and Ralph — and the forces of savagery and civilization that they represent — is exacerbated by the boys' literal fear of a mythical beast roaming the island. One night, an aerial battle occurs above the island, and a casualty of the battle floats down with his opened parachute, ultimately coming to rest on the mountaintop. Breezes occasionally inflate the parachute, making the body appear to sit up and then sink forward again. This sight panics the boys as they mistake the dead body for the beast they fear. In a reaction to this panic, Jack forms a splinter group that is eventually joined by all but a few of the boys. The boys who join Jack are enticed by the protection Jack's ferocity seems to provide, as well as by the prospect of playing the role of savages: putting on camouflaging face paint, hunting, and performing ritualistic tribal dances. Eventually, Jack's group actually slaughters a sow and, as an offering to the beast, puts the sow's head on a stick.

Of all the boys, only the mystic Simon has the courage to discover the true identity of the beast sighted on the mountain. After witnessing the death of the sow and the gift made of her head to the beast, Simon begins to hallucinate, and the staked sow's head becomes the Lord of the Flies, imparting to Simon what he has already suspected: The beast is not an animal on the loose but is hidden in each boy's psyche. Weakened by his horrific vision, Simon loses consciousness.

Recovering later that evening, he struggles to the mountaintop and finds that the beast is only a dead pilot/soldier. Attempting to bring the news to the other boys, he stumbles into the tribal frenzy of their dance. Perceiving him as the beast, the boys beat him to death.

Soon only three of the older boys, including Piggy, are still in Ralph's camp. Jack's group steals Piggy's glasses to start its cooking fires, leaving Ralph unable to maintain his signal fire. When Ralph and his small group approach Jack's tribe to request the return of the glasses, one of Jack's hunters releases a huge boulder on Piggy, killing him. The tribe captures the other two biguns prisoners, leaving Ralph on his own.

The tribe undertakes a manhunt to track down and kill Ralph, and they start a fire to smoke him out of one of his hiding places, creating an island-wide forest fire. A passing ship sees the smoke from the fire, and a British naval officer arrives on the beach just in time to save Ralph from certain death at the hands of the schoolboys turned savages.

*Setting:* The story of the British boys takes place on a tropical island in the South Pacific. It takes place during World War II. There are no adults, this is important in the story. The boys got evacuated by plane, and now, having crashed, are dependent on their inner nature and resources. Without supervision of any adults they are free to discover for themselves how they can survive.

*Title:* The title of the book the ‘Lord of the Flies’ is what Simon calls the severed sow’s head on the stick, with all the flies flying around it. So, calling the book ‘lord of the flies’ brings the boys’ primitive violence front and centre. Lord is a word of power, and the desire for power, like Jack’s and Ralph’s. Flies on the other hand mean death and decay. So, together it is death and power. The sow's head 'tells' Simon the truth about the beast. The beast are the boys themselves. This is also the main theme in the book. Also, the lord of the flies is a literal translation of the biblical figure Beelzebub, who's either a demon or the devil himself.

***Characters***

*Ralph:* Ralph is the image of a gentleman, he is socialized, civilized, intelligent and charismatic. He is a natural leader and at all times remains polite and diplomatic. He is the one who suggests the boys make a fire to attract attention from passing ships. He is the one to tell the boys to make huts for protection. In the beginning Ralph is excited now that they are on an island without any adults, but the more the story progresses, the more excitement Ralph loses. He starts longing for home and for the familiar. As he gains experiences on the island, he loses his naivety and his innocence. Over time he starts to lose his power of organized thought. But Ralph is also the only one to keep some sense. Some sense of morality. When he encounters the officer at the beach he is not relieved at being rescued from a certain grisly death, but discomforted over "his filthy appearance," an indication that his civility had endured his ordeal. Though he had now learned that humankind’s natural character is evil, only held back by intellectual and morality.

*Jack Merridew:* Ralph on the other hand is the image of evil and violence, the dark side of human nature. He is a former choirmaster. He wants to make rules, and punish those who break them. On the island he wants to hunt for meat, and that is his main interest. Instead of working together with Ralph, Jack tries to dominate him, questioning his authority as a leader with the conch. the boys had been moderated by rules set by society against physical aggression. On the island, however, that social conditioning fades rapidly from Jack's character. He quickly loses interest in that world of politeness and boundaries, which is why he feels no compunction to keep the fire going or attend to any of the other responsibilities for the betterment or survival of the group. Over time Jack gets power-mad, the dictator in his personality becomes dominant. When he encounters the officer, he understands that the old rules will be enforced again.

*Piggy:* Piggy is the intellectual of the group, he has glasses (which are symbolic for vision and truth), is overweight and has asthma. Despite his intelligence, he is the most vulnerable of the group. He represents the rational world. Throughout the book he acts as Ralphs adviser. He is not fitting as a leader. Piggy is the ‘brainy representative of civilization’.

*‘Piggy is so intent on preserving some remnant of civilization on the island that he assumes improbably enough that Jack's raiders have attacked Ralph's group so that they can get the conch when of course they have come for fire. Even up to the moment of his death, Piggy's perspective does not shift in response to the reality of their situation. He can't think as others think or value what they value. Because his eminently intellectual approach to life is modelled on the attitudes and rules of the authoritative adult world, he thinks everyone should share his values and attitudes as a matter of course. Speaking of the deaths of Simon and the littlun with the birthmark, he asks "What's grownups goin' to think?" as if he is not so much mourning the boys' deaths as he is mourning the loss of values, ethics, discipline, and decorum that caused those deaths.’*

*Simon:* Simon is a saint/Christ-like figure. He is philosophical, silent and withdrawn. Therefore, he has a secret hiding spot in the jungle where he spends time alone. He is the one who comes to the understanding that the beast is not something that the boys can hurt or kill (at least not externally), but that it is part of the boys themselves. He also discovers that the monster is a paraglider, but when he wants to tell the others this, he is mistaken for the beast, and is killed. When Simon tries to visualize what the beast might look like, "there arose before his inward sight the picture of a human at once heroic and sick". Simon is a visionary.

*‘By courageously seeking to confront the figure on the mountaintop, Simon fulfills his destiny of revelation. He doesn't get to share his revelation with the other boys because they are not ready to accept or understand it.’*

***Form***

The story is told by an omniscient narrator. Mainly told through Ralph his perspective.

***Theme and moral***

The main idea Golding expresses in his work, it that of the evil nature of humankind. He shows us what happens when man is stripped of the rules of civilisation. In his story a lot of allegories are being used. The island of just a few square miles, is an allegory of the world. The boys are allegories of all the people, left with nothing but their inner nature. Ralph and Jack are, besides being each other’s opposites in personality, allegories for two different approaches to leadership. While Ralph largely maintains his civilized good attitude, Jack gets power-mad and dictates discipline. This way, Golding expresses a deeply pessimistic view of human nature.

*‘When Lord of the Flies was first released in 1954, Golding described the novel's theme in a publicity questionnaire as "an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature."’*

He places supposedly innocent schoolboys in the protected environment of an uninhabited tropical island to illustrate the point that savagery is not confined to certain people in particular environments but exists in everyone as a stain on, if not a dominator of, the nobler side of human nature. Though, Ralph does learn that, even though the human nature is dark and evil, at the same time, intellect, reason, sensitivity and empathy are the tools to keep evil away from us.

*‘Maybe there is a beast . . . .maybe it's only us.’*

***My opinion***

Of course Golding’s pessimism is understandable. He wrote this book in 1954, just after the second world war, where six million Jews were killed and the USA threw two atomic bombs on Japan.

The book has an interesting concept. The question whether man is naturally evil or good, is a question that will continue to exist. And yes, it is also very pessimistic. I like to believe that the human nature is somewhat good. But that conversation would get philosophical very quickly. Although I am very interested in the topic. Golding does think that man has also a good side, as portrayed by Ralph and Simon and Piggy. For if there was no good in man, why would they have civilisations to keep evil under control. I must say that the vocabulary used in this book, was sometimes a bit hard. Not that I couldn’t understand what was being said, but some words I didn’t know. Ululation for example, meaning ‘gehuil’ in Dutch. The symbolism and the deeper meaning, although more obvious than in some books I think, really kept my attention. And as I said, it is topics like these, that you could philosophize over for a long time.