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Conflict between Civilization and Savagery in *The Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract:

The conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil.

Conflict between Civilization and Savagery in *The Lord of the Flies*

The Biblical claim in Genesis 8:21 declares that man is evil and has been since his appearance on earth:

“And the Lord said to Himself, I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.”

William Golding alarms the world with his novel that the goodness is not a natural quality even in innocent young ones. Evil is the baser instinct of human beings. For the sake of civilization human beings try to be good and show themselves as a figure of goodness.

The central concern of *Lord of the Flies* is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil. Throughout the novel, Golding associates the instinct of civilization with good and the instinct of savagery with evil.

The conflict between the two instincts is the driving force of the novel, explored through the dissolution of the young English boys' civilized, moral, disciplined behavior as they accustom themselves to a wild, brutal, barbaric life in the jungle. *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, which means that Golding conveys many of his main ideas and themes through symbolic characters and objects. He represents the conflict between civilization and savagery in the conflict between the novel's two main characters: Ralph, the protagonist, who represents order and leadership; and Jack, the antagonist, who represents savagery and the desire for power.

Living by rules and authority does not always guarantee peace and acting violently does not make someone a savage. The boys in *Lord of the Flies* show the decision they have to make whether to live by rules or to live violently and gain power for themselves; this shows the boys' change of behavior from being civilized and having good behavior to being wild and violent, as shown in the two main characters Ralph and Jack, and the loss of the boys' innocence.

When Ralph and Piggy arrive on the island, they realize that there are other boys on the island other than themselves and decide to gather the boys all together by blowing through a conch that they find. Once all the boys are gathered, Ralph tells them they need a chief to rule over them. Some thought that they still needed adult leadership and asked, "Aren't there any adults?". Once they realized there were no adults on the island with them, they were not exactly sure what to do. The boys decide to still stick by previous rules and behavior. They decide they want a leader when they say, "Vote for a chief!". This shows the boys believed in some kind of leadership whether an adult or an older kid. Once they voted Ralph as chief, they also agreed to use the conch that Ralph used to call them together. The conch plays a very important role throughout the story. The conch helps gather meetings and also allows the person holding it to speak. This is an example of order among the boys. The conch governs the group of boys more than Ralph does. As the boys' good behavior starts to disappear, so does the power of the conch and order. The disappearance of this is shown throughout the entire story until at the very end of the story all the boys, even Ralph, became what Golding wanted to show:

"Golding sees moral behavior, in many cases, as something that civilization forces upon the individual rather than a natural expression of human individuality. When left to their own devices, Golding implies, people naturally revert to cruelty, savagery, and barbarism."

This shows the decision the boys in *Lord of the Flies* had to make either to live by rules or to live wild and violently. In the end they chose to live wild and violently.

The two main characters of *Lord of the Flies* are Ralph and Jack. Ralph is the protagonist and "the representative of civilization". Jack is the antagonist and symbolizes savagery and violence. The conflict between Ralph and Jack begins at the very first meeting when the boys vote for a chief and Ralph is chosen over Jack. "I ought to be chief," said Jack with a simple arrogance, "because I'm a chapter chorister and head boy. I can sing in C sharp". This shows the beginning of Jack's jealousy towards Ralph because he was used to being the leader. It also shows the jealousy of man and how it makes someone want their own power.

Ralph is a very big influence on the younger boys. He believes in taking care of the boys and finding ways for everyone to be rescued. Some ways he did this is by building the fire and huts. "For this reason, Ralph's power and influence over the other boys are secure at the beginning of the novel". To the boys, Ralph, Piggy, and Simon are a sign of security. However, gradually, throughout the story the security of Ralph is not enough for the boys when their violent side takes over. Throughout the whole story Ralph symbolizes

order until he is the only who doesn't join Jack's group. Jack is the opposite of Ralph. Jack desires to have power over all the boys but it is taken away when Ralph is voted chief. The violent side of Jack begins when he starts hunting pigs and uses the idea of the "beast." The idea of a beast causes the boys to feel fear. The more of a savage Jack becomes, the more he influences the boys to become savages. Some symbols that represent Jack are the "Lord of the Flies" that "becomes both a physical manifestation of the beast, a symbol of the power of evil, and a kind of Satan figure who evokes the beast within each human being". This shows the evil that hid in Jack but is also in mankind. The beast is "the primal instinct of savagery that exists within all human beings", the one thing that frightens all the boys and is the main reason that Jack gains power over the boys. In "The Scarlet Ibis" there is a resemblance between "brother" and "Jack" because they manipulate people to listen to them and do what they want them to do. The conflict between Ralph and Jack is the choice of gaining one's own power or caring for the needs of others.

When they come to the island the boys have no thought of acting violent or wild. They don't know really what to do without adult supervision so they create their own rules. Here it is hinted that the rules the boys have agreed to will not be followed or enforced for very long because of the situation the boys are in which is complete freedom from everything they've known. In "Liberty" the family wants freedom from the danger that they are in. However, there is good freedom and bad freedom. The boys are in a place where freedom is all around them and there are no adults to tell them what is right or wrong. This kind of freedom is very dangerous because the longer they stay on the island without any rules, the more they forget what good behavior is and eventually become wild and violent. Through the influence of the beast and Jack all the boys slowly become enthralled by the ways of savagery. The influence of Jack causes the boys to find pleasure in killing, torturing and spilling the blood of animals. The boys become so enthralled that they chant, "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!" They become so violent and wild that they even beat and kill some boys, pretending they are the pig. "It was dark. There was that – that bloody dance. There was lightning and thunder and rain. We were scared!" shows the boys don't think of what they did as wrong but as a game. Their savagery represents the evil that dwelt inside them of wanting to hurt someone or something. The group of boys in the beginning of the book is far from being the same group of boys at the end of the story. Ralph at the end of the story cries because he realizes that evil dwells not only in adults but also in children.

Throughout Lord of the Flies civilization represents good, while savagery represents evil. However, the book's theme also shows the evil that man has inside if given the opportunity to show it. The boys in Lord of the Flies had to decide if they wanted to live by rules or live violently. They had rules that they followed but there was no one to enforce it on them. Civilization may have rules but that does not mean that people will always obey them. Lord of the Flies shows that a good amount of time away from civilization can have a drastic effect on a person and they might not remember how to act properly in society. The decline of the boys' behavior throughout the story from being civilized and having good behavior to being wild and violent shows that evil dwells in every human. Man can choose to control that evil or fall under its control as shown in the fall of the boys in Lord of the Flies.

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