

Human and Nature in *Lord of the Flies*

Jie Dai*

College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Sichuan University, Chengdu, 610065, China

Email: dzora95@hotmail.com

*corresponding author

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Abstract: *Lord of the Flies* (1954) was best-known for its theme of human nature's degradation. Accordingly, the description of the nature was often overlooked. This paper will explore the deteriorating relationship between man and nature from the perspective of ecocriticism in order to reveal the final destruction of mankind in the novel in their excessive exploration of nature.

1. Introduction

Lord of the Flies was Golding's first novel and won him the reputation as "Lord of the Campus" [1] for its popularity in England, narrating the adventure in an uninhabited island of a bunch of boys that survived in an air accident. The book was translated into diverse languages and was welcomed across the world.

The depravity of human nature is the prevailing topic discussed by scholars at home and abroad. Carl Niemeyer [2] made comparative studies between *Lord of the Flies* and R. M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. In contrast to the heroes labeled with civilization in *The Coral Island* who fought evil with their inherited Christian value, Golding's boys in *Lord of the Flies*, as Niemeyer maintained, exposed their brutality when they are left without adults in an uninhabited island, revealing Golding's ironic attitude towards European civilization and human nature. Robert J. White [3] revealed that Golding was explicit in suggesting that defects of human nature accounts for the desolation of modern society as well as the human failure in creating the Utopia. Defending against the darkness of human heart, however, Ebeling held that the barbaric behavior resulted from heat stress, dehydration and a "pork-linked parasitic infection" [4] in the severe environment rather than human nature.

They invariably focused on the human ethics by analyzing characters and their relationship and the description of the natural environment accounting for over one third of the novel does not receive due attention. Therefore, this present paper will explore the relationship between human and environment that has been long neglected in *Lord of the Flies*. Based on ecocriticism, this paper will excavate the relationship between human and nature in *Lord of the Flies*, holding that in this nightmarish story, Golding cautioned the ruin of the nature and ensuing destruction of human beings if people are destitute of the reverence for nature.

2. Ecological Harmony

Lord of the Flies began with an air crash where all adults died. Only boys survived and were scattered in an inhabited island. The environment unfolds with its mysteriousness and tranquility. Palm trees stood alone the shore, "tiny, glittering fish flicked hither and thither" [5] in the water, and "white surf flinked on a coral reef" [5] miles away. The scene is indicative of the wilderness which existed for and by itself before the arrival of human beings.

The unspoiled island offered Ralph freedom at home. When boys found themselves abandoned in the isolated island, the little-uns cried for adults to lead them home and the big-uns kept on the alert against any possible danger. Distinguished from them, Ralph was overwhelmed with cheerfulness in discovering that he was left in a real island. He giggled, danced, and even stood on

his head to express his delight. "Patting the palm trunk softly" [5], Ralph seemed to shake hands with a new friend. The nature was so attractive and powerful to Ralph that he cannot wait to enjoy the closeness with it by ignoring Piggy's tedious words.

As the son of nature, Ralph valued the conch which embodied beauty and power of the nature and could merely be founded and employed by Ralph. Firstly, the beauty of the conch was appreciated merely by Ralph. As Piggy and Ralph found the conch together, while Piggy emphasized its high price and the instrumental value to call other boys, Ralph was fascinated just with its natural beauty. He observed its shape and pattern closely in different ways in and out of water. For Ralph, the conch was charming for its intrinsic value rather than for anthropogenic one. Meanwhile, the conch also represents the overwhelming power of nature and it empowered Ralph in competing for leadership with Jack. Endowed with supernatural power, Ralph was not terrified by Jack and was eventually chosen as the leader. To other boys, what distinguished Ralph from them was the conch in his hand, which incarnated the mysterious natural power. The pristine landscape is the Garden of Eden to which all ecologists dreamed to return. The union of Ralph and nature reflected the healthy relationship between man and nature that is fervently appealed. Turning now to Simon who continued to be a faithful friend to nature.

3. Mastery over Nature

This chapter will focus on the boys' exploitation of nature after they settled in the island. Boys, headed by Jack, began their exploration in the island with violence and arrogance. On the one hand, nature was treated as a formidable opponent which they endeavored to conquer and control. On the other, nature was rendered as an instrument to satisfy personal desires. Nature was regarded as the repressed Other.

3.1. The Conquest of Nature

In *Lord of the Flies*, boys under the leadership of Jack aimed at conquering nature, which was even more crucial than keeping the lifesaving fire. To boys, the wilderness possessed a threatening power which must be conquered in order to survive. Pigs and beasts, therefore, became the direct target to reach the goal.

Hunting was not so much to acquire food as to conquer nature. Before boys arrived, pigs were "sensuously enjoying the shadows under the trees" [5]. Abruptly, pigs were shocked out of their dream and the biggest sow was killed. The hunters felt no sympathy for pigs who enjoyed a comfortable afternoon with families. More cruelly, they tortured the mother pig until each piece of its flesh was prodded by spear. Killing pigs offered them the joy of triumph over the strange power of nature.

Beast, identified with primitivism and with the state of nature, were untraceable and more terrifying than pigs. To kill beasts, Boys created a kind of circle dance in order to gather all their strength. Meanwhile, the dance was accompanied by a song with repeated lyrics: "Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!" [5]. Jack and his boys were crazy for the dance as they were thirst for blood and death. Even Ralph and Piggy were captivated by their song. They went numb in front of ritual dance, standing by the death of Simon. The scene of killing beast was transformed into a sacred ritual to celebrate human power in wiping out all evil. Ironically, the only beast they killed was Simon who came to enlighten them that there was no beast in the island.

Pigs and beasts represent the natural enemy boys intended to conquer. Boys regarded themselves as the superiority in the island, exercising their power in eliminating everything threatening to them. However, it turned out that they were beasts who killed Simon and tortured pigs. The self-centered view of those boys reflects the anthropocentrism of modern society.

In conquering nature, the boys took killing as the only life goal even at the expense of their lifesaving fire. Another significant aspect of their conquest is the control of the island by fragmenting and maltreating it. Boys divided the islands into several parts in two steps. At first, to defend themselves from the attack of animal, they divided the island into two fields: the platform and other places. In this way, human beings in this island was symbolically separated from other

organisms. Later, to distinguish the new tribe from the old, Jack and his boys settled in a new and exclusive place. Different Fields were thus used to distinguish Jack's boys from Ralph's boy. In addition, field is the name of safety. When boys felt worn out in tracing beast at dusk, Ralph would rather lead his group back to the platform than repose wherever were in order to ensure safety. In the struggle of two tribes, Jack also asked his boy to defend the gate in case others sneaked in to "spoil things we do" [5].

By dividing the island into various fields, boys undermined the integrity of the island. As Meeker argued, while other organisms adapt themselves to its surroundings, human beings are special in modifying the nature to serve human ends. Losing its own wholeness and natural complexity, the land was broken up into pieces in order to assure safety of the human. Just as farmers' fields specialized for different crops, fields of knowledge that fragmented humanities and work fields estrange human beings, the division of the island resulted from boys' desire for effective control of nature. Aside from the division of the island, boys abused the island as their inhabitation at will. The trunk was clouted repeatedly by Jack when he felt displeased. Trees and grasses were brunt, being made the scapegoat for misusing fire. The nature which provided them with all necessities eventually fell victim to human evil or stupidity.

3.2. The Instrumentalization of Nature

What follows in this part is how nature is reduced to a facile instrument in the hand of private interests. For Jack who was struggling to be the chief, conquering nature was the most efficient method to earn prestige and establish hegemony; for some others, destroying nature was the optimal choice to overcome fear and kill boredom.

Being "chapter chorister and head boy" [5] who could sing C sharp, Jack thought that he would undoubtedly be chosen as the leader. Unexpectedly, Ralph won in the voted instead of him. Psychologically wounded for being declined as the chief by boys, he grasped every opportunity to demonstrate his strength. He led the way in tracking beasts, picked up clues about pigs and clouted trees with knives. The conquest of nature, therefore, was only a means to win back the support of other boys and be chosen as the chief.

It is obvious that hunting helped regain his control of the boys. Besides, burning forest was used as a strategy to annihilate his enemy. In the final chapter, as Ralph was left to be the only threat to his status, Jack ordered to burn the forest to kill Ralph. Burning the island, just as killing animals, was targeted at gaining supremacy over other boys. Nature, namely, was transformed into an instrument for Jack to establish his hegemony. Neither animals nor forests were treated as citizens of the earth. To Jack, any organisms in the island were inferior to him. This arrogant and ignorant attitude to nature is the reflection of the idea of human centralism prevailing in the modern society.

Following Jack to be a hunter was not only to satisfy the hunger for meat, but to conquer fear. In hunting, all the worries and hopelessness faded away. What would obsess them would only be their target--pigs. Challenging and exciting as it was, hunting gave meaning and value to boys' life. Joy of killing animals or in mimicking the killing scene helped them overcome fear. The fact that they killed pigs one after another built their confidence in their strength. In the dancing night when they killed Simon, boys felt strangely exhilarated in believing that they killed the beast with concerted effort.

4. Final Destruction

At the end of the novel, the island which was excessively exploited for human ends were left behind to take the blame for the mistake of boys who run to new life. The chief culprit in the tragedy is human beings. Among boys, the struggle for power between Jack and Ralph gave rise to the confrontation between themselves and they murdered their friends in cooperation. Meanwhile, they slaughtered pigs, plundered forests and burnt the island. Overwhelmed by greed and violence under the guidance of individualism, boys damaged both the relationship between human beings and between human and nature. It turned out that those boys were the beasts with demonic teeth and claws. However, the boys were not punished. They were brought home and began anew. It was the

island that wound up taking the blame for human misdeeds. In the thrice burning in the island, the flames licked up everything. The ecological environment which had supported their life was destroyed. It was those boys who mastered and transformed the island into a horrifying place, while they left it as if they were victimized.

Not only was the island devastated, the ending of the story also denotes the destruction of human beings. Those boys degraded into beasts in the wilderness. Ernst Cassirer held that the factor that distinguished mankind from other animals is a “symbolic imagination and intelligence” [6]. The system of symbols presupposes the act of logical or abstract thought based on which mankind build their cultural system including art, math and so on. However, logical thought did not make sense to those boys. In exploration of the island, they were completely driven by desire and selfishness, and were thus degraded into thoughtless criminals. While those boys survived and was rescued physically, they have lost the essence of human nature.

On the other hand, homo sapiens is “plain member and citizen of” the “land community” [7]. The ecological system warrants the existence of all organisms including human beings. In other words, the destruction of nature is also indicative of the end of mankind. The picture of the burning island connotes the doomed future of the earth attributable to the strong anthropocentric attitude of mankind toward nature.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the deteriorating relationship between boys and the island. Ralph was close to nature at the beginning of the novel and Simon also maintained friendship with nature. Gradually, however, those boys were overwhelmed with the sense of mastery. The island was consequently conquered as the enemy. Much worse, the mastery over environment was taken as an approach to win supremacy among human beings or meet other psychological needs. In the excessive exploration of nature, as the story foretells, human beings would finally bring disaster upon nature and themselves.

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