

# *The Characters and Symbolism in Lord of the Flies*

Yiyi Lin<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*School of Languages, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, Wenxiang Road 1900, Shanghai, China*  
*a. 1811571116@mail.sit.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** The Second World conflict had just ended when William Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies*, which exposed the brutality and evil of both human nature and conflict. Golding employs a lot of symbolism to convey his viewpoint and examination of human nature in this book, whether it is through the creation of the characters, the structuring of the plot, or the choice of language. The symbolism of the characters in *Lord of the Flies* will be the main topic of this study. This study explores the author's background at the time of writing, the symbolism that employed, and the significance of a number of the book's central characters, such as Ralph, who stands for democracy and civilization, Piggy, who stands for intelligence and reason, Jack, who stands for savagery and desire, and Simon, who stands for human kindness. Furthermore, the study also skims over the absence of a female gender viewpoint in *Lord of the Flies*.

**Keywords:** William Golding, Lord of the Flies, Symbolism

## 1. Introduction

The well-known novel *Lord of the Flies* [1] by British author William Golding addresses the negative aspects of human nature and society in a futuristic setting. The character development, structural design, language use, and other aspects of this work's high level of artistic excellence all contribute to its thought-provoking nature. Among these, one of the crucial factors in Golding's outstanding aesthetic achievement is his frequent use of symbolism. This study will examine the ways in which Golding employs symbols to convey philosophical concepts and topics, analyzing it from the viewpoints of the characters.

## 2. The Background

William Golding was born in Cornwall in 1911 and lived through the First World War of 1914-18, which overshadowed the optimism about human progress that had prevailed since Victorian times. Growing up he went on to Oxford University, eventually graduating in English, and became a teacher. In 1940 William Golding volunteered to join the Royal Navy and served until 1945, when in the Second World War he took part in the Normandy landings and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. After the war he resumed teaching, at Bishop Wordsworth's School, Salisbury, and published his first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, in 1954 [2]. This is true of *Lord of the Flies*, a fictional novel that is profoundly influenced by the two world wars and explores the conflict between man's

innate savagery and civilized reason. As a result of his experiences in the Second World War, elements and themes related to seafaring and seafarers frequently appear in his work.

The experience of a group of British boys on an uninhabited island is the main subject of the story. Due to the nuclear war and air accident, there are no adults in the area. They were so forced to fight on their own. Children conducted meetings to get organized and kept bonfires to send out a distress signal at first, when everything was calm and in order. Over time, though, the terror and fear of the beast caused their hearts to become increasingly chaotic, and the rules of civilization ceased to be. The kids were split into two groups, with Jack in charge of one group and Ralph in charge of the other. Jack represents the savage, and Ralph represents a civilized way of life. Ralph was the only child who eventually joined Jack's side, and he was pursued by the other children. The British Navy arrived on the island just before Ralph was about to be apprehended and saved all the kids.

### 3. The Symbolic Meaning

A theme is one or more of the main ideas explored in a literary work. A literary work may have more than one theme. According to Alnajm [3], Golding's themes in *Lord of the Flies* are mainly the following: the theme of evil; the theme of childhood; the theme of human civilization in the 20th century; the biblical In order to express these themes, Golding employs narrative techniques to carefully construct and harmonize the content and form of the story, in which he is obsessed with the use of symbolism. In the anthology *The Hot Gates* [4] he says: "I understand that neither their meaning nor their effect can be described, since a symbol is that which has an indescribable effect and meaning. I have never heard of levels of meaning, but I experience them." In Golding's novels, the use of symbols makes various concepts become figurative, and makes people more deeply aware of the complexity of human nature and civilization. to the complexity of human nature and civilization.

*Lord of the Flies* is an attempt of William Golding to reveal and discuss the nature of human kind, and how human's behavior patterns could influence the directions of society and civilization.

To stated the story's purpose clearly, William Golding created a miniature version of independent society, which was built by the children on the isolated island. In this miniature version of human world, nearly all interference factors are eliminated, such as technology and tradition. Thus only bare human nature was left, and the behavior patterns could be glimpsed.

There are many unmistakable symbols in the story, from different characters to various objects. These symbols of scenes, objects and characters not only help him with his narrative and plot construction, but also provide the reader with hints about themes in the real world [5]. Golding himself has explained about *Lord of the Flies* that the whole work is symbolic and the intention is to trace from the flaws of society to the flaws of human nature [6].

### 4. Symbols in Characters

Among all the characters, Ralph, Jack, Piggy and Simon are remarkable characters containing different metaphors. They are in token of different elements of humanity.

#### 4.1. Ralph: Civilization and Democracy

The protagonist, Ralph, with his blonde hair, robust physique and good looks, comes from a well-to-do middle-class English family and is the charismatic protagonist of *Lord of the Flies*. As a representative character of civilization and democracy, Ralph lives by rules, acts ethically and values the collective good, revealing profoundly the state of civilization and democracy in Golding's time [7]. Though his instinct for civilization outlasted all others and he was the only one who worried about the other kids' safety, he lacked the necessary resolve when faced with challenges. His intelligence is impaired by panic when the beast materializes, so he doesn't insist that the distress

signal be set in the proper location. Ralph does not stand his ground when Jack challenges his authority, and even tries to resign from his post as chief in order to attend Jack's party and murder Simon. Ralph plays a significant role in the spread of ignorance and brutality. Although he recognizes the causes of barbarism at the book's end and laments the demise of humanity, he eventually fails to bring about democracy and civilization, and humanity is lost.

#### **4.2. Piggy: Wisdom and Reason**

Piggy is the epitome of knowledge and reason. He is the first to understand the gravity of their plight on the island, reminding Ralph of their challenging circumstances when he believes they will be rescued soon. The lads respect Piggy when they learn that his glasses may be used to start a fire, but when his glasses are taken, Roger throws a boulder and kills him. One of the author's metaphors implies that the boys are involved in the killing of Piggy when Jack and the hunters experience the overpowering emotion of "killing the pig" together. Additionally, Piggy's hair never grows, implying that he is less impressionable and uncivilized than the other boys and that Piggy thinks that people are the main source of dread. He has sharp vision. He sees horrible individuals, yet he is unable to change them. However, Piggy's nearsightedness also impairs his mental capacity. Piggy, who stands for reason and intelligence, is like a sacrificed pig on a spear that cannot be saved under the laws of anarchy and animalism.

#### **4.3. Jack: Savagery and Desire**

In symbolism, Jack represents the savagery that is inherent in human nature and the pursuit of power and want. He is the traditional spokesman and leader of the adversaries, the polar opposite of Ralph. Jack's eyes, which are often furious and disappointed, show his inner nature. Jack is frequently connected with shadows and haze on the outside. He asserts that he hunted the boar right from the start of the tale. In actuality, he prefers to share the thrill of conquest and murder over eating meat. Jack is oozing with the sins of the adult world since he has inherited them all. He and his choirboys brazenly transform into barbarians when they learn that they can do as they please without being punished or warned by an adult, openly engaging in hunting and murdering not only animals but even other humans. Blood, prestige, and power are what he seeks. He can only be content when he has absolute power and everyone bows down to him. He represents evil in modern civilization.

On the other hand, after gaining absolute dominance, Jack gradually realizes that the children's inner fear of the beast is the best tool for him to control them, and this move vividly symbolizes how the ruling class in real society uses religion to control and exploit the commoners in order to defend their power and status [8].

The character of Jack not only shows us how primitive desires and behaviours can be unleashed where there are no civilized limits, but also what a dictator has done and will do when driven by evil power and bloodthirsty desires.

#### **4.4. Simon: Good Nature of Human**

In this book, Simon is a unique character because he is the only child who is nice at heart; even Ralph doesn't pay attention to the little ones, in Simon's perspective; only Simon treats the weak little ones well out of the goodness of his heart. Both Jack's nasty nature and Simon's goodness come naturally. Simon is the only child on the island who upholds his own moral standards and is not motivated by some sort of binding influence, unlike Ralph, whose behavior is a product of civilization and conditioning rather than his heart and nature, and so Ralph has his moments. Despite the fact that Simon is also a good character, he is completely different from Ralph. Simon is also the first child to understand that the creatures on the island are actually the beasts that reside within humans.

Simon is the epitome of this goodness, the hope, and the way to salvation for mankind, and William Golding does not reject the existence of goodness in human nature. The fact that Ralph and the piglets were involved in Simon's death gives it a special significance. Simon's death at Jack's hands is understood, but Ralph and the piglets—a symbol of civilization and morality—also serve as the executioners, which is unexpected but yet a crucial aspect of the story. According to the author, human civilization frequently involves the repression of nature and submission to rules. According to the novel's examination of human psychology, the desire for civilization is less ingrained in people's hearts than the desire for barbarism [9].

#### 4.5. The Lack of Feminine Perspective

In *Lord of the Flies*, the lack of a female viewpoint is very apparent. The male-centric social structure and predominately male population of the novel's characters are reflected in its wartime backdrop. The only female character in the novel is an aunt who only appears in Piggy's perspective, and the main conflict revolves around a bunch of males attempting to survive and fight for their dominance on a barren island. As Kevin McCarron [10] points out, all four of Golding's novels published in the 1950s centre on war and masculinity. However, McCarron similarly argues that it is the aggressive spirit of masculinity and the violent nature of patriarchal rule that Golding criticizes in his work. Even so, however, the absence of female perspective, who make up roughly half of humanity, is still not negligible for a novel that aims to criticize and expose the evils of human nature.

#### 5. Conclusions

To sum up, When portraying the characters in *Lord of the Flies*, Golding frequently used symbolism in order to more effectively convey the book's theme, to increase the book's vibrancy and depth, and to convey Golding's personal attitudes and viewpoints on societal issues. The conflict of human nature is the subject of the novel *Lord of the Flies*. According to Golding, although there is a dark side to human nature, such as savagery, which is represented by Jack and others, as well as a bright side (such as civilisation represented by Ralph, Piggy, and Simon), as long as the environment changes, the darkness of human nature may break through the boundaries of civilized norms and cause social disasters. Despite the lack of representation of female perspective in the book, Golding has achieved a high level of artistic achievement in making his literary characters readable and socially realistic. This has inspired readers to reflect on human nature and society for generations.

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