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Bakalářská práce

Symbolické významy v románu  
W. Goldinga Pán much

Symbolism in William Golding's  
Lord of the Flies

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## Poděkování

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## Anotace

Předmětem zkoumání práce je román W. Goldinga *Pán much*, který vznikl v poválečných letech 20. století jako experimentální alegorické dílo odehrávající se ve fiktivní dystopické budoucnosti a je zároveň poměrně reálným obrazem možných událostí v uzavřeném lidském společenství. Práce v úvodu představí autora románu a jeho životní zkušenost, která měla vliv na celkovou podobu díla. Dále se pokusí zařadit dílo do kontextu britské poválečné prózy s ohledem na žánr dystopie a v interpretační analýze bude zkoumat prvky alegorie a literárního symbolismu, vývoj jednotlivých postav a proměnu konkrétních symbolů románu. Jádrem práce bude analýza hlavního tématu zla, temné stránky lidské povahy a selhání uzavřené komunity tvořené výhradně dětmi (chlapci). Práce se v závěru zamyslí nad možnými alternativami existence podobných společenství v izolovaném prostředí a nad případnými možnostmi pozitivního scénáře v dané situaci.

## Abstract

The subject of this thesis is W. Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, which was written in the post-war years of the 20th century as an experimental allegorical work set in a fictional dystopian future and is at the same time a relatively realistic depiction of possible events in a closed human community. The thesis starts with an introduction of the author of the novel and his life experience that influenced the work. It will then attempt to place the work in the context of British post-war prose with regard to the genre of dystopia and, in an interpretive analysis, it will examine elements of allegory and literary symbolism, the development of individual characters, and the transformation of specific symbols in the novel. The core of the thesis will be an analysis of the main theme of evil, the dark side of human nature, and the failings of a closed community made up entirely of children (boys). The thesis will conclude by reflecting on possible alternatives to the existence of similar communities in an isolated environment and the possibilities of a positive scenario in the given situation.

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## **1 Introduction**

The aim of my thesis is to analyse the symbolism that is present in William Golding's novel "Lord of the Flies." In doing so, this paper will try to examine how these symbols help the novel convey the main themes and messages.

The second aim of my thesis is to explore the role of symbols in understanding the concepts mentioned throughout the novel. These concepts are for example "Civilization vs. Savagery", "Fear and the Unknown" or "Loss of Innocence."

The next focus of my thesis is to try to provide a complex and comprehensive understanding of the key symbols and motifs in the novel. There are a lot of symbols and motifs that are brilliantly used throughout the novel to convey important information and this paper will try to examine them one by one.

The fourth aim of my thesis is more centred around the author, William Golding, himself. This paper will investigate the ways in which the author's personal experiences, his beliefs, and the societal influences that have been present in his life, may have shaped the thematic elements and maybe more importantly symbolism present in this masterfully written novel, "Lord of the Flies."

The fifth focus of my thesis is to summarize the novel on its own, to better understand the narrative of the novel.

The sixth focus of my thesis is to analyse the characters present in the novel. This thesis will centre on the story of each of the characters, what has shaped them, how the experience changed them, and how they ended their journey.

My seventh and final focus is to offer a critical insight into the relevance and significance that this novel still has to this day, especially when we talk about its exploration of human nature, societal structures, and the absurdly complex problems of morality, which are all discussed at length in this novel.

## 2 Background and Context

“Lord of the Flies” was written as a mixture of Golding’s personal experiences and the experiences of the entire world, especially in connection to the recently ended World War II. This era had a very big impact on Golding’s feelings and beliefs about the world and humanity itself. These were dark times of history which made everyone scared of the possible devastation by the newly found weapon, that being the nuclear bombs. Talking about World War II, Carey states: “Golding records that, for him, it brought about “a sort of religious convulsion which is not uncommon among people of a passionate and morbid habit.” It gave him, for the first time, “a kind of framework of principles which I still hold mainly, even when I am untrue to them,” and it made him see the “viciousness” and “cruelty.”<sup>1</sup> Golding’s personal transformation and the atrocities that he witnessed during the war made the author a completely different human being, instilling in him something that can be described only as a deep sense of scepticism about the future of humankind.

Golding compares the behaviours of the English schoolboys to the brutality typically associated with the Nazis. Crawford observes, “In Lord of the Flies particularly [...] Golding’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or “coming to terms with the past,” concludes that the English and Nazis are not so different as one might expect.”<sup>2</sup> This comparison, when realised, is something very disturbing. It challenges the reader to reconsider his views and ideas about Western civilizations, showing us that we all are, under certain circumstances, susceptible to barbarism.

Evil is something very much prevalent in “Lord of the Flies.” There is a constant battle between the supposedly good and supposedly bad side of human nature, represented mainly by Ralph and Jack. The whole story is basically the product of this battle, same way the Manichaeans believe that: “the universe is the product of an ongoing battle between two coequal and coeternal first principles: God and the Prince of Darkness.”<sup>3</sup> Another school of thought that is in line with the novel’s story is the Kant’s one. When talking about Kant theory about evil, Calder says: “Kant makes several other

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<sup>1</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 82

<sup>2</sup> CRAWFORD, P. Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down. University of Missouri, 2002. ISBN 0826214169. p. 53

<sup>3</sup> CADLER, T (2022). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [online]. c2022, last revision 3rd October, 2022 [cit. 2024-06-26]. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/#DuaPriTheEvi>>

controversial claims [...] that there is a radical evil in human.”<sup>4</sup> Based on the story of “Lord of the Flies” Golding shares this idea. As the boys are predestined to fail to keep up their society.

Golding thought of writing this book during a quiet evening at his home in Salisbury, England in 1951. Carey describes it like this: “The idea for the book that changed Golding’s life, and was to enter the lives of millions of readers came to him in the course of a conversation with Ann. They used to read to David and Judy at bedtime, and the books they read – Treasure Island, Coral Island, The Swiss Family Robinson – were often about islands. On winter evening they had been reading one of the books, had got the children to bed, and were sitting by the fire “in a state of complete parent exhaustion,” when, staring into the fire, and “thinking of this and that,” he had a brainwave. “Wouldn’t it be a good idea if I wrote a book about children on an island, children who behave in the way children would behave?”<sup>5</sup> This inspiration is something that gives the narrative a stark contrast between the stories about kids on an island that everyone was used to at the time and the story that Golding wrote. It was something completely new to normal readers of literature. Golding was writing about kids in a realistic way. He wasn’t optimistic about people, and he definitely had no hope for any people who would find themselves in this kind of situation. Interestingly, the original title was not “Lord of the Flies” it was supposed to be “Stranger from Within” which would reflect its original concept that is still to be found in the novel nowadays, “The novel’s original title, under which he sent it out to publishers, was not Lord of the Flies but Stranger From Within.”<sup>6</sup>

After all of this, we can clearly see that Golding’s work has been deeply influenced by his personal life. His experiences of World War II, together with his own personal journey had a big influence on the themes and symbolism found in “Lord of the Flies,” and it is thanks to these experiences that the novel keeps on being a timeless classic.

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<sup>4</sup> CADLER, T (2022). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [online]. c2022, last revision 3rd October, 2022 [cit. 2024-06-26]. <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/#DuaPriTheEvi>>

<sup>5</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 149

<sup>6</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 150



## *2.1 William Golding and His Life Influences*

William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Newquay, Cornwall, England. He'd went on to study Natural Sciences for two years at Brasenose College, Oxford University. However, after his short 2 years long experience there, he decided to switch to English Literature, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1934. He had many personal and professional influences on his life that shaped the way he wrote not only "Lord of the Flies." One of his biggest influences was his father, Alec Golding, as noted by Carey: "Alec, Golding's father, influenced him more strongly than any other human being."<sup>7</sup> Alec had a big influence on Golding's career choice. He is the reason Golding started studying science in the first place. Golding himself says: "My father was a scientist and I took from him a great admiration for science, which in a curious way, I've still got."<sup>8</sup> His background in science had an influence on his later career. In "Lord of the Flies" he takes a methodical and scientific approach to examining the boys' behaviour. The island is basically a big laboratory for us to study their actions.

Golding started writing poetry at first, but that was mainly because of his falling in love, as Carey describes it, "He says that he started writing poetry "at the age of about seventeen" when he fell "hideously, beautifully and catastrophically" in love".<sup>9</sup> He continued writing only poetry for quite some time, he believed that poetry is the only type of writing that makes sense. He himself puts it like this: "I never believed that anything more than poetry, or perhaps poetical dramas, is worth writing."<sup>10</sup> Even at a very young age, he was interested in social issues, which is mirrored in his later works, like "The Inheritors" or "The Spire". He started writing a history of trade unions at twelve. Crawford says this about it: "At the age of twelve, Golding began to write a history of the trade unions, organizations that he later found to be totalitarian in their application of the "closed shop." He has even described himself as "Bitterly left of center" and a non-Marxist "socialist"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 7

<sup>8</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 88

<sup>9</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 59

<sup>10</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 31

<sup>11</sup> CRAWFORD, P. Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down. University of Missouri, 2002. ISBN 0826214169. p. 4

Despite his unquestionable talent, Golding had to deal with many challenges in his life. When talking about his professional challenges, the biggest one is probably his job as a teacher. He started as a teacher at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury, England, in 1945, teaching English and philosophy. Golding disliked it very much. He thought of it as an unfulfilling and useless spending of his time. As Carey states: "He disliked teaching very much, not only because he wanted to be a writer but, also because, when he thought about it on any level deeper than routine, he did not know what it was for."<sup>12</sup> However, it can't be said that it was completely useless. His experiences with children must have had a profound impact on his writing, especially in the case of the novel discussed here, "Lord of the Flies." Golding had a lot of time to observe how kids act and interact with each other. It can therefore be said that this is one of the reasons "Lord of the Flies" is such a realistic novel.

One other reason for it being such a realistic and raw novel is for sure his wartime experiences. Golding joined the navy as an ordinary seaman in 1940, participating in significant wartime operations, including the hunt for Bismarck: "He joined the navy as an ordinary seaman on 18 December 1940 [...] to take part in one of the most dramatic episodes of the war at sea, the hunt for the Bismarck."<sup>13</sup> The war had a massive impact on Golding and his worldviews. He admitted to Biles, "You said to me last spring that before the war you were a very naive person. You said that, then, you believed in, I suppose, the perfectibility of man [...] Now you changed your mind during the war."<sup>14</sup> This is an ever-present feeling throughout his many works, including "Lord of the Flies." He explores the darker aspect of human nature, stating, "I wrote Lord of the Flies, which was things I had come to believe during the war."<sup>15</sup> However, it is important to mention that Golding does not believe that we all must be inherently bad. He believes that there is an inherent savagery and brutality in us the same way there is an inherent goodness. As he himself states: "Most of us are potential murderers and most of us are potential surgeons, nurses all these things; but our path leads us so straight a line that, unless we

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<sup>12</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 118

<sup>13</sup> CAREY, J. William Golding: The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies. Free Press, 2010. ISBN 1439187320. p. 82

<sup>14</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 30

<sup>15</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 13

are brought up by nature to be surgeons because we have three generations of surgeons behind us, we don't become surgeons.”<sup>16</sup>

One of his less obvious literary influences is also the Greek literature. He acknowledged, “I think it is true that Greek literature really has been the big literary influence in my life.”<sup>17</sup> Because of this, his works integrate realistic narrative with the universality and diversity of myth, reflecting a deep engagement with both contemporary and classical literature.<sup>18</sup> All these different influences gave us an author who was uniquely equipped to explore the complexities of human nature and societal constructs.

## ***2.2 Historical and Cultural Context***

The historical and cultural context of “Lord of the Flies” is a very important thing for us to fully understand the novel as a whole. It was published in 1954, a period characterized by global distress and transformation, especially after the just ended World War II. England, as well as the rest of the world, was devastated on the outside, the same way as on the inside. Golding himself and his life experiences are seen throughout this novel. As Judt puts it, “Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War offered a prospect of utter misery and desolation. Photographs and documentary films of the time show pitiful streams of helpless civilians trekking through a blasted landscape of broken cities and barren fields.”<sup>19</sup> This moral and physical devastation was definitely one of the main reasons for Golding to explore all those existential and moral questions in “Lord of the Flies.” This post-war era can be characterized by words like tension, distress, or uncertainty. People, especially Europeans, who have lived through the war were living “in the shadow of the Second World War and in anxious anticipation of a third. The failed settlement of 1919 was still fresh in the minds of statesmen and public alike. The imposition of Communism in Eastern Europe was a pointed reminder of the revolutionary instability that had followed World War One.”<sup>20</sup> This is also greatly shown in the novel. The whole narrative is set during the Third World War, only adding to the anxiety that

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<sup>16</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 43

<sup>17</sup> BILES, Jack I. Talk: Conversations with William Golding. Harcourt Brace, 1970. ISBN 0151879869. p. 21

<sup>18</sup> Nobel Prize [online]. c1993 [cit. 2024-06-21] <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes-in-literature/1989-1980/>>

<sup>19</sup> JUDT, T. Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945. London: Vintage, 2010. ISBN 9780099542032. p. 13

<sup>20</sup> JUDT, T. Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945. London: Vintage, 2010. ISBN 9780099542032. p. 242

was felt by the public at the time. But there were also some positive thinkers at the time. Judt writes: “To many in Britain, France, or the Netherlands, their countries’ colonies and imperial holdings in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas were balm for the suffering and humiliations of the war in Europe; they had demonstrated their material value in that war as vital national resources.”<sup>21</sup> But it was not all just about the war. There was a lot of tension in Britain as well. The social and economic landscape was undergoing significant changes, there were the nationalization efforts, for example, the one in 1948, which were trying to combine public service with commercial efficiency, but there was a lot of struggle with it due to massive underinvestment: “Nationalisation in 1948 had given the railway industry a near-impossible brief of combining public service with commercial efficiency, but the fundamental problem was crippling underinvestment, freight as well as passenger service, reflecting the failure of politicians and mandarins to face up to the need for an extensive modernisation programme.”<sup>22</sup> These politicians and mandarins, those being typically high ranking bureaucrats within the government, gave the civilians no hope for a better future. Things like this highlight the bigger picture of a struggling country, that was trying to adapt to a fast-changing world in the aftermath of the biggest war ever.

All these challenges were also the reason for the shift of Britain’s role internationally. As Allegretti puts it, “World War II ended in 1945 and its conclusion marked an important shift in Great Britain’s global role. For the first time, Britain was a secondary imperial power, something that was painful for many British citizens.”<sup>23</sup> This in combination with all the facts already mentioned had a massive impact on the mood of British citizens. As Allegretti also explains, “The expectations after the war were that the economy would again rise, but inflation and unemployment led to an overall increase in national cynicism,”<sup>24</sup> but this expectation was not being met. The exact opposite was in fact happening. Britain started losing colonies and with it their number-one spot in the world. This all only contributed to a growing sense of cynicism in society.

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<sup>21</sup> JUDT, T. *Postwar: a history of Europe since 1945*. London: Vintage, 2010. ISBN 9780099542032. p. 278

<sup>22</sup> KYNASTON, D. *Austerity Britain*. Bloomsbury Paperbacks, 2008. ISBN 0747599238. p. 634

<sup>23</sup> ALLEGRETTI, C. Eastern Connecticut state university [online]. c2024, last revision June of 2024 [cit. 2024-06-21]. <<https://www.easternct.edu/speichera/understanding-literary-history-all/british-literature-after-wwii.html>>

<sup>24</sup> ALLEGRETTI, C. Eastern Connecticut state university [online]. c2024, last revision June of 2024 [cit. 2024-06-21]. <<https://www.easternct.edu/speichera/understanding-literary-history-all/british-literature-after-wwii.html>>

The loss of many colonies was at the time seen as a bad thing, but in today's world, we can see a lot of positives in it. People were immigrating from the ex-colonies into Britain which led to a massive cultural diversity in the nation: "As a result of immigration, Britain transformed to a multi-ethnic society, thus leading to greater cultural diversity as a result."<sup>25</sup> It was a complicating factor as racism towards different races was coming to surface more than ever before. But as already mentioned, from today's point of view it is a big advantage to have a diverse country, as it brings different ideas and world views to the table when discussing some pressing issues.

Cultural shifts were a massive part of those years. As mentioned, immigration played a massive factor, but there were also some technological innovations that completely changed the world. Halberstam states: "By 1949, radio was on the verge of being overtaken by television as a commercial vehicle. For more than two decades, radio had virtually been minting money; now it was struggling, changing, and trying to find a new role."<sup>26</sup> This change had a massive impact on public perception of everything. Ordinary people were able to see everything happening in the world from their sofa. But it was not all just positive as television quickly became able to change public perception of everything: "Television would change more than just the face of comedy and entertainment. Politics was soon to follow."<sup>27</sup>

These historical and cultural factors should provide us all a deeper sense of understanding the symbols and themes in "Lord of the Flies." The dystopian feeling, that is coming out of this novel, has a deep connection to the post-war context: "Dystopian novels typically portray an alternate world to that of the author. They are usually political and social commentaries and focus on oppression and corruption."<sup>28</sup> We just put the novel into its historical and cultural context and thanks to this we are now able to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the novel itself.

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<sup>25</sup> JAMES, R. History@Portsmouth [online]. C2022, last revision 26<sup>th</sup> of August 2022 [cit. 2024-06-21]. <<https://history.port.ac.uk/?p=2668>>

<sup>26</sup> HALBERSTAM, D. The Fifties. Ballantine Books, 1994. ISBN 0449909336. p.180

<sup>27</sup> HALBERSTAM, D. The Fifties. Ballantine Books, 1994. ISBN 0449909336. p.188

<sup>28</sup> ALLEGRETTI, C. Eastern Connecticut state university [online]. c2024, last revision June of 2024 [cit. 2024-06-21]. <<https://www.easternct.edu/speichera/understanding-literary-history-all/british-literature-after-wwii.html>>

### 3 Human Nature in “Lord of the Flies”

William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies” is an exploration of human nature and how we would act without any rules we set for ourselves. As it was written in the aftermath of World War II, Golding is telling us, through the story, how he had lost the belief that humans are perfect. As Baker notes, “The war itself and other terrible events [...] made up a trial of preparation in which Golding, who served in the war, came to disillusionment with his youthful humanistic beliefs.”<sup>29</sup> This pessimistic way of thinking is evident as Golding shows us the primal instincts of humans that come to light when we strip all the societal constructs. He is doing this, particularly through the symbolism that he employs throughout the novel to convey deeper meanings. The conch shell, the beast, and the titular “Lord of the Flies” are not merely what is seen on the surface, they are symbols of order, fear, and the intrinsic evil within humanity. Northrop Frye tells us that “A word, a phrase, or an image used with some kind of special reference are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis.”<sup>30</sup> With this in mind, we start seeing the importance of these symbols when trying to fully understand the meaning of the novel.

Throughout the novel Golding challenges the narrative that Brits are somewhat exceptional or better than any other nation. As Crawford says: “William Golding, in particular, challenged the notion that the British were, in some peculiar way, different or special.”<sup>31</sup> He uses a group of English schoolboys that even though they are from England still succumb to the inherent evil that is inside them. By doing this he shows that even people from Britain are not immune to barbarism. The “Beast” is not some force or animal that is living with them on the island, but it is the inner cruelty and savagery that is living inside the boys themselves. Crawford mentions it when he writes, “In Lord of the Flies, fantastic hesitation breaks into the shocking natural explanation that the “Beast” is not an external supernatural force of evil. The only “Beast” on the island is the fascist group of English adolescent males who kill or attempt to kill outsiders.”<sup>32</sup> This fact completely

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<sup>29</sup> BAKER, James R. *Critical Essays on William Golding*. G K Hall, 1988. ISBN 0816187649. p. 1

<sup>30</sup> FRYE, N. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton University Press, 200, ISBN 0691069999. p. 71

<sup>31</sup> CRAWFORD, P. *Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down*. University of Missouri, 2002. ISBN 0826214169.p. 50

<sup>32</sup> CRAWFORD, P. *Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down*. University of Missouri, 2002. ISBN 0826214169.p. 50

changes the narrative of the novel from trying to find what is threatening them to trying to fight the internal darkness inside them.

To talk more about Golding's symbolism, it is important to mention that it is far too advanced to be interpreted easily. Kinkead-Weekes observes, "Golding's symbols are not in fact clear, or wholly articulate, they are always an incarnation of more than can be extracted or translated from them."<sup>33</sup> This fact allows us to delve deeper into the text. It makes us think about all the hidden meanings and messages in between the lines. Golding himself says that the main theme of "Lord of the Flies" is strictly grief. He tells this in "A Moving Target" explaining, "The years of my life that went into the book were not years of thinking but of feeling [...] The theme of Lord of the Flies is grief, sheer grief, grief, grief, grief."<sup>34</sup> This sense of loss and the constant sadness is a driving force for the narrative of the novel. Golding's symbolism helps us understand the underlying themes of civilization, savagery, and the inherent darkness within humanity. As Northrop Frye puts it, "The more familiar one is with a great work of literature, the more one's understanding of it grows."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, we need to study not only this great work of literature to understand the full meaning of it. A simple reading of a novel of this calibre is not enough for us to get a full grasp of all things that are happening in the background. As Kinkead-Weekes states: "At every point and with a kind of inevitability that is as impressive as the story itself, we are made aware that much more than this story is being told."<sup>36</sup> For example, Golding's own experiences during the war that challenged any type of national superiority need to be understood, so we can fully appreciate the story that is crafted from them.

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<sup>33</sup> KINKEAD-WEEKES, M. William Golding: A Critical Study. Faber & Faber, 1984. ISBN 0571132596. p. 19

<sup>34</sup> CRAWFORD, P. Politics and History in William Golding: The World Turned Upside Down. University of Missouri, 2002. ISBN 0826214169.p. 53

<sup>35</sup> FRYE, N. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. Princeton University Press, 200, ISBN 0691069999. p. 71

<sup>36</sup> KINKEAD-WEEKES, M. William Golding: A Critical Study. Faber & Faber, 1984. ISBN 0571132596. p. 15

## 4 Plot Summary of “Lord of the Flies”

At the start of the novel, we meet a group of boys ranging from 6 to 12 years old. Their plane crashed possibly due to an attack as the whole story is happening during a nuclear war. They ended up on a deserted island without any adults who could serve as supervisors. In the very beginning, the boys are hopeless, they do not know what to do and how they should react to this situation. The first thing the boys do is that they vote for their leader. Ralph becomes this leader in the end even though Jack also wanted to lead the boys. We also meet Piggy, Samneric, Simon, Roger, and lots of other boys who do not play a big role in the story. When Ralph becomes the boys' leader, he does not waste any time and quickly sets up rules. Ralph emphasizes the importance of building shelter and keeping up the signal fire for the possibility of them being saved by a passing ship. He also talks about the importance of the conch that he and Piggy found earlier on the beach. The conch holds authority as only the one that is holding it can speak at an assembly.

Very soon Ralph finds out that being a leader will not be as easy as he expected. He finds it very difficult to make the boys do anything useful. The only person that he finds a closer connection with is Jack. Ralph makes him the leader of the hunters, which consists of Jack's old musical band. It is because of this, that Ralph finds himself somewhat alone as all the older boys except for him, Piggy, and Simon leave the camp regularly to go hunt. Ralph is left in charge of the younger boys from the group who only want to play in the water and do not want to build shelters.

Meanwhile, Jack's group of hunters are loving their lives. They are enjoying hunting perhaps even more than they should. This becomes increasingly obvious when they kill their first pig. As a result of their hunger for hunting, they abandon the signal fire they were supposed to be guarding, causing it to eventually go out. After their successful hunt, they come back to the camp with their dead pig. They are met by Ralph who is furious at them. It turns out that when they were hunting and the signal fire was out, there was a ship passing the island that could have saved them if the signal fire was kept alive. Jack is not happy with Ralph as he feels like Ralph should be grateful for the meat they have brought to the camp. These once best friends are now becoming sworn enemies.

The tension between Ralph and Jack is building up through their more and more regular disagreements. It all ends with Jack leaving the camp followed by many of the older boys.



This makes for a whole lot of trouble for the boys as now there are two tribes living on this island. Ralph decides to try to make things once again good between him and Jack and goes to negotiate with him. But Jack's tribe can no longer be saved from the darkness. Their negotiation eventually ends with the death of Simon who was killed by Jack's tribe members. This is slowly followed by the death of Piggy, who is intentionally killed by Roger, Jack's righthand man. Ralph decides to try to avenge everyone but is unsuccessful in doing so. His whole plan flips, and it is him that is being chased by others. There is total chaos in which the whole island catches in flames. These flames attract a passing ship, which saves Ralph from being the next one killed.

## 5 Themes and Motifs

In the following chapter, this paper will introduce the main themes and motifs of the “Lord of the Flies” novel. It will talk about the themes such as “Civilization vs. Savagery,” or “Loss of Innocence” and it will try to explain how the author likes to convey meaning to us readers. It will try to analyse them to get a better understanding of what they mean for the story, and it will try to place them in the story where they take place.

### 5.1 *Civilization vs. Savagery*

Civilization vs. Savagery is a major conflict throughout the entire novel. The boys start as a civilized group that wants to have the same rules as they had in their lives before they ended up on this island. One of the first things we see the boys do is organising a meeting which only shows their need for order: “Ralph spoke to his back. “No, we’re having a meeting. Come and join in.” The group of cloaked boys began to scatter from close line. The tall boys shouted at them. “Choir! Stand still!” Wearily obedient, the choir huddled into line and stood there swaying in the sun.”<sup>37</sup> Their first instinct was to have a meeting and especially in the case of the choir boys and Jack we can see how disciplined they are and how they understand that they should be responsible and act in a nice, civilised way.

The first switch from this mindset is almost immediate. In chapter three “Huts on the Beach” we see the boys having trouble building their shelters. Mainly Jack and Ralph talk here about how the other boys are useless and how they only want to have fun and not to do the things they need to be doing, building huts: “Two shelters were in position, but shaky. This one was a ruin. “And they keep running off. You remember the meeting? How everyone was going to work hard until the shelters were finished?” “Except me and my hunters” “Except the hunters. Well, the littluns are” He gesticulated, sought for a word. “They’re hopeless.”<sup>38</sup> In this chapter, we can also see how the society the boys have built on the island is starting to crumble right before their eyes. They are starting to realise that having a nice, civilized society is not as easy as they expected: “Meeting. Don’t we love meetings? Every day. Twice a day. We talk.” He got on one elbow. “I bet if I blew the conch this minute, they’d come running. Then we’d be, you know, very solemn, and someone would say we ought to build a jet, or a submarine, or a TV set.

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<sup>37</sup> GOLDING, William. Lord of the flies. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 22

<sup>38</sup> GOLDING, William. Lord of the flies. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 61

When the meeting was over, they'd work for five minutes, then wander off or go hunting."<sup>39</sup> The civilization they want to have is starting to show some major cracks that they had not anticipated.

Probably the biggest shift towards savagery occurs after Jack and his hunting squad finally achieve their goal of hunting down a pig and killing it with their spears. Killing a living animal would probably be a horrifying experience for anybody, but these boys have already succumbed to their inner savagery when they killed it: "The twins stood with the pig swinging between them, dropping black gouts on the rock. They seemed to share one wide, ecstatic grin. Jack had too many things to tell Ralph at once. Instead, he danced a step or two, then remembered his dignity and stood still, grinning."<sup>40</sup> Even though they got food for themselves they forgot about what is really important. Jack's hunters were supposed to keep up the signal fire that they started so that they could be eventually saved by a ship going by: "You let the fire go out." [...] "There was a ship. Out there. You said you'd keep the fire going and you let it out!" He took a step toward Jack, who turned and faced him."<sup>41</sup> It is this shift in not understanding what is important in their situation that shows us that their civilization is crumbling down, and savagery is taking over. For Jack, the signal fire was a secondary thing because his passion for hunting and subsequently killing had already taken over. And this was the start of their end.

This is only more evident as we read more and more. Jack and his hunters only continue becoming more and more like uneducated savages, which is shown for example by them continuously hunting down pigs and not doing anything else, or by them giving offerings to the imaginary beast that is supposedly living with them on the island: "Jack held up the head and jammed the soft throat down on the pointed end of the stick which pierced through into the mouth. He stood back and the head hung there, a little blood dribbling down the stick [...] "This head is for the beast. It's a gift." The silence accepted the gift and awed them."<sup>42</sup> Later their transformation into savages is visible by their painted faces, primitive songs, and their further actions like ransacking the other camp to get Piggy's glasses, not even thinking about the fact that they might be able to get them by communicating.

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<sup>39</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 62

<sup>40</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 82

<sup>41</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 84

<sup>42</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 168

This transformation from vulnerable English schoolboys into full-blown savages who do not care who they must hurt or what they must do to survive and get what they want is finished with the death of two of the boys – Simon and Piggy. Simon’s death shows how the boys around Jack completely lost their minds. They mistake him for the beast and their only and first solution how to deal with the beast is to kill it: “The blue-white scar was constant, the noise unendurable. Simon was crying out something about a dead man on a hill [...] The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed. The beast was on its knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face. It was crying out against the abominable noise something about a body on a hill [...] Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon’s dead body moved out toward the open sea.”<sup>43</sup> Piggy’s death shows us more the boys’ inner evil. Simon’s death was a mistake, even though the mistake was caused by their own action, it was still a mistake. Piggy’s death was a totally intentional thing: “High overhead, Roger, with a sense of delirious abandonment, leaned all his weight on the lever [...] The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee [...] Suddenly Jack bounded out from the tribe and began screaming wildly. “See? See? That’s what you’ll get I meant that!”<sup>44</sup> It shows us how the boys have changed towards the worst side that resides in us all. It was a planned thing to roll the stone on them and it is also visible from Jack’s reaction that there is no remorse for their actions. It shows us that the civilized boys who wanted to have rules and meetings, who voted for their leader democratically, are long gone.

## **5.2 *Fear and the Unknown***

The boys’ initial fear stems solely from being in a scary and unfamiliar situation. They are stranded on an island with no grown-ups, and they have only each other. The initial fear that is present in all the boys is best visible by examining Piggy’s words: “Where’s the man with the megaphone?” [...] “All them other kids,” the fat boy went on. “Some of them must have got out. They must have, mustn’t they?” [...] Aren’t there any grownups at all?”<sup>45</sup> There is a palpable fear of being left alone in a place that no one knows. At the beginning, the only important thing the boys talk about is that there are no grownups with them. They are scared, they do not know what to do. They just want to leave this island

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<sup>43</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 186

<sup>44</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 224

<sup>45</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 7

and go home. However, this initial fear quickly transforms into excitement, as some of the older boys explain to the younger ones that this is actually a good thing, that they can do whatever they want to: “A kind of glamour was spread over them and the scene and they were conscious of the glamour and made happy by it. They turned to each other, laughing, excitedly, talking, not listening [...] “Come on,” said Jack presently, “we’re explorers.”<sup>46</sup>

The true fear starts when they first start to talk about the beast that is supposedly living on the island with them. At first, it is just a funny little thing that one of the littluns is scared of some fictional snake-thing: “The small boys looked round in panic. “Speak up!” [...] “He wants to know what you’re going to do about the snake-thing.” Ralph laughed and the other boys laughed with him [...] “You couldn’t have a beastie, a snake-thing, on an island this size,” Ralph explained kindly. “You only get them in big countries, like Africa, or India.”<sup>47</sup> Even though Ralph does not take the fears of the littlun seriously, it is interesting that he believes that something like that can exist. It shows us that even the older boys are still little kids who believe in something supernatural. This only adds to the initial fear of the littluns as Ralph does not tell them that it is not real, he only tells them that something like what they are describing would not be living on a small island like this one. So, the littluns are maybe just momentarily calm and not scared, but the fear quickly comes back. What is even more worrying is that the fear comes back even greater than before: “Things are breaking up. I don’t understand why. We began well [...] Then people started getting frightened [...] We’ve got to talk about this fear and decide there’s nothing in it. I’m frightened myself, sometimes; only that’s nonsense” [...] Jack stood up and took the conch [...] “You littluns started all this, with the fear talk. Beasts? Where from? Of course we’re frightened sometimes but we put up with being frightened. Only Ralph says you scream in the night.”<sup>48</sup> Both Jack and Ralph, probably the most rational people at this point in the novel, admit that they are also scared. They are scared because the littluns are scared. Even though they believe it to be nonsense, they cannot just ignore the fear that is building up.

The fear of the unknown affects the boys more than they would like. It makes them do irrational decisions that are solely based on their terror. It is this fear and the belief in the

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<sup>46</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 29

<sup>47</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 43

<sup>48</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 98

existence of the beast that causes the boys to turn on each other. Because of the fear they become increasingly more and more paranoid which in consequence makes them much more aggressive to one another, which eventually leads to the breakdown of their society. The final to this gradual increase of paranoia and aggression is the death of Simon who is killed because the others thought he was the beast.

### ***5.3 Loss of Innocence***

Loss of innocence is a major theme throughout the novel. When we all were little kids, we all were a little bit naive or innocent if you want. For most of us, the moments that make us grow up are quite similar. It probably is the death of someone close to you or maybe getting your heart broken that makes you lose your innocence and grow up. These kids are no different from normal kids you meet on the street every day. They are innocent. They do not understand the situation they find themselves in. They do not know what to do. They think it will be fun, that they will spend a few days on the island and then will be saved by a ship. Their naive optimism is something that we can clearly see during their first meeting. They elect a leader and give each other roles and things to do. Their initial innocence is visible when they try to form a civilization the same way they have it in their normal world.

However, this is quick to change. Their loss of innocence is marked by their first dead pig. The hunting and subsequent killing make at least one part of the group different. They change after this; their primal instincts come out and their tendencies to stay civilized and have rules go out the window. This is beautifully shown through the chant they create: "Kill the pig, Cut her throat. Spill her blood."<sup>49</sup> This chant and the killing itself symbolizes their transformation from civilized English school boys into savages. Their excitement during the hunt and the killing shows how they have succumbed to their primal instincts and how they have lost their innocence. This is further shown when the meaning of killing changes, at first it is a necessity, but as time goes on it becomes more of a ritualistic act.

But as already mentioned this is only the case for one part of the boys, Jack and his hunters. The other boys were not involved in the hunting and therefore could not have lost their innocence by killing pigs, as they had never witnessed a pig being killed. Some

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<sup>49</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 81

of the boys as time progresses choose to follow Jack, so they go through the same things, but namely Ralph and Piggy never experience this. Ralph loses his innocence quite late. Even after Jack left the camp Ralph still believed that he would just simply come back and everything would be great: "He'll come back, When the sun goes down he'll come."<sup>50</sup> His breaking point is not even their camp being attacked by Jack and his hunter, he still believes that it all can be resolved candidly. What finally gets through to Ralph is Simon's death. After Simon dies, Ralph changes, and he decides that it is time to finally change how things are going, he realizes that the only way it will work is if he will use physical power to do so.

Piggy is even more interesting in this. He never changes. He starts off as a very innocent young boy, who fears everything and believes in rules and democracy. He still believes in this at the moment of his death. This is cleverly shown through him holding the conch until the very end: "The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist."<sup>51</sup> Piggy remains until the very end a believer in democracy and rules. The destruction of the conch together with death is a symbol of the fragility of these societal constructs.

To put it simply, throughout the novel with every new page we see how the boys are changing from those innocent naive young boys into straight-up savages. The narrator, presumably Golding himself, says this at the very end: "Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy."<sup>52</sup> Ralph's tears are not just for his dead friend, they are for the little something that died in every one of the boys that ended up on that island, their innocence. In "Lord of the Flies" the loss of innocence is a gradual and slow process, and it is important to keep that in mind even though this paper tried to pinpoint the exact moments when it happened. Through the experience, that the boys have on the island, Golding is showing us how fragile our civilization really is and how easy it is to lose our innocence when faced with a situation like this.

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<sup>50</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 157

<sup>51</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 224

<sup>52</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 250

## 6 Character Analysis

In this next section the main topic of discussion will be the main characters of the novel. To get a full understanding of the story and thy symbolic meaning in it, it is important to understand what the characters are like and what they are doing throughout the story. This section will summarize the most important parts of the individual boy's story and will draw connections between the actions they take and what they later do because of them. For all of this, these characters have been chosen: Ralph (as he is the one who is understood to be the main character, it is only natural that he will be the first one looked on), Jack (as he is the main antagonist of the novel a closer look at his emotional state throughout the story has to be taken), Piggy (probably the heart of the story, Piggy is the character with the most tragic story of all of them, therefore it is necessary go through it), and Simon (probably the most interesting character of the novel, he is full of mystery and very spiritually gifted, he will definitely be the hardest one to examine).

### 6.1 *Ralph*

As already stated in the introduction of this section, Ralph is the main character of this novel. It is very interesting to watch Ralph evolve throughout the novel from the confident boy we see at the start of the story to the broken boy who has lost everything. By the end, he is shattered, he does not have the confidence he had in the beginning and becomes the symbol of the loss of innocence.

At the start of the novel, Ralph is viewed as a curious young boy: "The fair boy reached out and touched the jagged end of a trunk. For a moment he looked interested. "What happened to it?" he asked. "Where's it go to now?"<sup>53</sup> Golding sets up Ralph as the fair-haired boy who shows curiosity and interest in his surroundings, setting the stage for his character development later in the story. Ralph is later voted to be the leader of the boys and the author tries to persuade us that he is the greatest leader the boys could have ever wished for: "Ralph cleared his throat. "Well then." All at once he found he could talk fluently and explain what he had to say. He passed a hand through his fair hair and spoke. "We're on an island. We've been on the mountain top and seen water all round. We saw no houses, no smoke, no footprints, no boat, no people. We're on an uninhabited island

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<sup>53</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 8



with no other people on it.”<sup>54</sup> Ralph is shown as someone who can effectively communicate with others and set the tone for their discussion. All and all Ralph is shown as someone amazing.

As the story continues, we can very soon see that even though he might have seemed like the greatest leader ever he is in fact not all that amazing: “Ralph move impatiently. The trouble was, if you were a chief you had to think, you had to be wise. And then the occasion slipped by so that you had to grab at a decision. This made you think; because thought was a valuable thing, that go results. [...] Only, decided Ralph as the faced the chief’s seat, I can’t think. Not like Piggy.”<sup>55</sup> In this excerpt we can see how Ralph grapples with the expectations and responsibilities of being a chief, acknowledging his own limitations in comparison to Piggy’s intellect. This inner struggle highlights the challenges he faces in his leadership role on the island.

During the story, many different things happen that affect Ralph mentally. Even though Ralph despises Piggy at the start of the novel, he is the one who tells the others this ridiculous nickname for him, during the course of the story he grows fond of him, so his death towards the end of the story affects Ralph very much. The same goes for Simon’s death and the breakdown of chaos on the island. The further we read the novel, the more we can see how broken Ralph actually becomes: “Ralph looked at him dumbly. For a moment he had a fleeting picture of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched up like dead wood – Simon was dead – and Jack had. [...] The tears began to flow and sobs shook him. He gave himself up to them now for the first time on the island; great, shuddering spasms of grief that seemed to wrench his whole body.”<sup>56</sup> Ralph is here depicted as completely broken and devastated by the events that have unfolded on the island, including the loss of innocence, the darkness within humanity, and the death of his friend. His emotional breakdown in front of the naval officer showcases the extent of his despair and trauma from the harrowing experiences he endured.

In summary, Ralph’s character in “Lord of the Flies” undergoes a profound evolution from a curious and confident boy to a broken and emotionally devastated individual. Initially, he is portrayed as a charismatic leader who can communicate effectively, but as

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<sup>54</sup> GOLDING, William. Lord of the flies. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 38

<sup>55</sup> GOLDING, William. Lord of the flies. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 93

<sup>56</sup> GOLDING, William. Lord of the flies. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 249

time goes on Ralph grapples with the weight of leadership responsibilities and his own limitations.

## **6.2 Jack**

Jack can be seen as the main antagonist of the entire story. But the truth is maybe very different. Jack represents the descent into savagery and the darker aspects of human nature, but does that make him the antagonist? We still need to be looking at him like the very young boy that he is. The fact that he succumbs to his primal instincts is very much in line with the human psyche. But let's see how it all happens.

At the start of the novel, we can see that Jack thinks of himself as a leader: "Well then," said Jack, "I—" He hesitated. The dark boy, Roger, stirred at last and spoke up. "Let's have a vote." "Yes!" "Vote for chief!" "Let's vote—" This toy of voting was almost as pleasing as the conch. Jack started to protest but the clamor changed from the general wish for a chief to an election by acclaim of Ralph himself. None of the boys could have found good reason for this; what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack."<sup>57</sup> Jack actually wanted to be the leader and actually, he already was the leader of the choir boys, that is why it is mentioned that he was the obvious choice, but Ralph just was in the right place at the right time.

Jack feels like he is supposed to be the leader the entire novel but at the start, he still acts like a civilized person, and he decides to respect the decision for Ralph to become the leader. We can even see that Ralph and Jack start to develop a friendship: "Ralph stared back to the shelters with Jack by his side. "Do a bit for you," muttered Jack, "before I have a bathe." "Don't bother." But when they reached the shelters Simon was not to be seen. Ralph put his head in the hole, withdrew it, and turned to Jack. "He's buzzed off." "Got fed up," said Jack, "and gone for a bathe." Ralph frowned. "He's queer. He's funny." Jack nodded, as much for the sake of agreeing as anything, and by tacit consent they left the shelter and went toward the bathing pool. "And then," said Jack, "when I've had a bathe and something to eat, I'll just trek over to the other side of the mountain and see if I can see any tracks. Coming?"<sup>58</sup> Jack and Ralph feel a closer connection to each other than to others. It is quite natural when you think about it. In elementary school the two

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<sup>57</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 25

<sup>58</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 66

biggest, strongest, and most athletic guys were always the best friends, this is exactly what we see here. But this friendship unfortunately does not last very long.

The first major conflict they have with each other is actually after Jack's biggest triumph of the novel. He just hunted down his first pig, but because of it the signal fire they had set up so they could be saved by a ship was left unguarded and it even went out. And by sheer coincidence, a ship was just passing by. This resulted in the first big argument between Ralph and Jack. We can clearly see that Jack is really happy about their first hunted down pig, but Ralph is more interested in their rescue. The savagery in Jack comes out.

From this point on Jack's savagery only becomes worse and worse. Jack becomes obsessed with killing pigs. It is the only thing he can think about: "His mind was crowded with memories; memories of the knowledge that had come to them when they closed in on the struggling pig, knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink."<sup>59</sup> Jack becomes obsessed with hunting. He creates a chant for it, he starts painting his face with blood, and he uses a pig's head on a spear as a decoration. He becomes crazy.

As Jack descends deeper into savagery, his hunger for power intensifies. It is a stark contrast to his initial civilised demeanour, when he was the leader of the choir. His transformation from a civilized boy into a complete savage consumed by his primal urges shows us how the darkness in us can easily overtake and we all can end up the same way Jack ended up.

### **6.3 Piggy**

Piggy is the symbol of intelligence in the novel. He is there to remind us that we should trust those smarter than us even though they might be physically weaker. Right at the beginning he is almost pitiful. He is fat, has asthma and the only thing he talks about is his auntie: "The fat boy stood by him, breathing hard. "My auntie told me not to run," he explained, "on account of my asthma."<sup>60</sup> It is of course even sadder when we find out that his parents are dead: "Piggy flushed suddenly. "My dad's dead," he said quickly, "and my mum ---" He took off his glasses and looked vainly for something with which to clean

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<sup>59</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 83

<sup>60</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 8

them. "I used to live with my auntie. She kept a candy store. I used to get ever so many candies. As many as I liked."<sup>61</sup> This is a very sad realisation that we make right at the start of the novel, and it makes us look at Piggy in a completely different way than we would otherwise.

Piggy symbolizes intellect and how it is useful for us in any type of civilisation. We can see this right at the beginning when he explains what the conch is: "S'right. It's a shell! I seen one like that before. On someone's back wall. A conch he called it. He used to blow it and then his mum would come. It's ever so valuable ---"<sup>62</sup> Later he is also the only one who understands that they cannot possibly build an airplane and instead, he thinks that they could make a clock: "I've been thinking," he said, "about a clock. We could make a sundial. We could put a stick in the sand, and then---" The effort to express the mathematical processes involved was too great. He made a few passes instead. "And an airplane, and a TV set," said Ralph sourly, "and a steam engine." Piggy shook his head. "You have to have a lot of metal things for that," he said, "and we haven't got no metal. But we got a stick."<sup>63</sup> Piggy is the smartest one of the group but his appearance makes it almost impossible for the other boys to acknowledge him. Ralph is the only one who believes in Piggy and knows that he is smart, even though at the start it is not like that.

Piggy's story is a tragic one, nonetheless. It was tragic even before the novel started. He was bullied at school, his parents died and all he had left was his auntie. He ends up on the island together with the other boys who immediately start to bully him as well. He tries to make them like him but the only one who understands him and acknowledges his intelligence is Ralph. In trying to make the other boys understand logic and not letting them succumb to their primal instincts he even ends up dead at the hand of Roger. Piggy's story is the most tragic one.

#### **6.4 Simon**

Simon is probably the most interesting out of all the boys. He is very quiet and when he says something us readers usually feel like there is something more behind it. He acts as a kind of enigma for us to think about throughout the novel and the author never gives us

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<sup>61</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 14

<sup>62</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 17

<sup>63</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 76

any answers to our questions about him. Simon embodies spirituality, morality, and the innate goodness within humanity.

At the start Simon is described as a small, skinny boy with bright eyes: “He was a small, skinny boy, his chin pointed, and his eyes so bright they had deceived Ralph into thinking him delightfully gay and wicked.”<sup>64</sup> But throughout the novel, we get to know Simon on a much deeper level, and we can try to understand his mind and what he is thinking about. Simon is the only boy who does not in any shape or form exhibit fear of the beast. He understands the real meaning of the beast, that is that the beast is just something within all of us: “Simon felt a perilous necessity to speak; but to speak in assembly was a terrible thing to him. “Maybe,” he said hesitantly, “maybe there is a beast.” The assembly cried out savagely and Ralph stood up in amazement. “You, Simon? You believe in this?” “I don’t know,” said Simon. His heartbeats were choking him. “But...” The storm broke. “Sit down!” “Shut up!” “Sod you!” “Shut up!” Ralph shouted. “Hear him! He’s got the conch!” “What I mean is... maybe it’s only us.”<sup>65</sup> This shows us that Simon is connected to things on the island much more than the other boys, he does not even seem like a real human being. He looks a lot more like a spiritual saviour of the boys.

This is only made stronger by his vision that happens after he ventures into the forest and encounters the Lord of the Flies in the form of a pig’s head on a spear: “What are you doing out here all alone? Aren’t you afraid of me?” Simon shook. “There isn’t anyone to help you. Only me. And I’m the Beast.” Simon’s mouth labored, brought forth audible words. “Pig’s head on a stick.” “Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!” said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. “You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?”<sup>66</sup> This makes us think that Simon is somehow connected to everything. He has a conversation with the Lord of the Flies and from the things they are saying we find out a lot. The Lord of the Flies says that he is part of Simon, and this can be transported onto the other boys as well, thanks to this we can see that the Beast is within the boys and does not physically exist. Simon is the only one experiencing these kinds of visions and is the only one who thinks about things in a different spiritual way.

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<sup>64</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 68

<sup>65</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 106

<sup>66</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 176

Simon's story sadly does have a sad ending as well. After his vision and conversation with the beast where he realises the true nature of it, he rushes back to the rest of the boys to tell them the news. Unfortunately, he comes back at a time when Jack and the rest of the hunters perform a primal dance and in the darkness of the night, they mistake Simon for the Beast. They then attack him and eventually kill him: "Somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling, and the film of water on the earth planet was held, bulging slightly on one side while the solid core turned. The great wave of the tide moved farther along the island and the water lifted. Softly, surrounded by a fringe of inquisitive bright creatures, itself a silver shape beneath the steadfast constellations, Simon's dead body moved out toward the open sea."<sup>67</sup> This symbolizes that the truth could have never been understood by the other boys, only Simon was able to understand that the Beast is only within them.

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<sup>67</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 188

## 7 Symbolism

Symbolism is something very much prevalent in “Lord of the Flies.” William Golding uses a lot of different things and techniques to describe something else than we might think at the first glance. He is doing this masterfully during the novel. He uses mostly objects to showcase how the society on the island prospers or declines. He also uses just concepts that the boys form in their own heads with their own imagination. This makes the symbolism even stronger. In this section what follows is an explanation of what different symbols used in this story represent and how they do it.

### 7.1 *The Conch Shell*

The conch shell in “Lord of the Flies” symbolizes civilization, order, and everything that comes with it. The conch first appears right at the very start of the novel, when Ralph and Piggy find it and use it to call their first meeting: “We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting. They’ll come when they hear us.”<sup>68</sup> The fact that they use it to call a meeting shows us how the conch shell symbolizes democracy and civilization as meetings and listening to each other is something that we all associate with them. As the story continues the meaning of the conch becomes more and more clear. It becomes a symbol of authority, as the other kids do not really give attention to Ralph for any other reason than the fact that he blew the conch: “The children gave him the same simple obedience that they had given to the men with megaphones.”<sup>69</sup> The shell gives Ralph authority. And from the moment he blew it, it was obvious that no one else could be the leader. As Kinkead-Weekes says: “As the novel proceeds this meaning becomes more and more sharply defined. “We can use this to call the others. Have a meeting...” It is his association with the shell rather than his size or attractiveness that makes the children choose Ralph as their leader.”<sup>70</sup>

But the conch is not just a tool to call the other boys for a meeting. It is a representation of the law, showing us how the boys are trying to mirror the societal structures they have at home. The conch itself therefore becomes a symbol of their desire to keep and maintain order. “I’ll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it when he’s

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<sup>68</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 18

<sup>69</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 20

<sup>70</sup> KINKEAD-WEEKES, M. *William Golding: A Critical Study*. Faber & Faber, 1984. ISBN 0571132596. p. 18

speaking,”<sup>71</sup> Ralph says, by this, he basically makes up the rule that only the one person who holds the conch has a permission to speak during an assembly. This just further shows us that the conch is even for the boys themselves a symbol of civilization, that they can adhere to. The conch becomes suddenly much more than just a simple shell, it is the boys’ connection to the outside world, the world they wish to come back into.

But as the story unravels, we can see a massive shift in the meaning of the conch. The importance of the conch mirrors the boys’ descent into savagery. As the story continues, the boys more and more succumb to their primal instincts and they still less and less respect the conch itself. For example, Jack’s lack of respect for the conch is evident when he says this: “Conch! Conch!” shouted Jack. “We don’t need the conch anymore. We know who ought to say things.”<sup>72</sup> Jack’s primal instincts have already kicked in, he only thinks about himself and his survival. The conch was once even for him a symbol of democracy a symbol to show everyone that everyone’s thoughts and ideas matter, that anyone can freely speak. But now Jack can only think about what he wants and what he is thinking, and the conch, democracy, is standing in his way. The conch is slowly losing its power.

The end of the conch shell is a very important moment for the novel. Piggy is holding the conch in the final moments, trying to reason with the other boys, who have already succumbed to their primal instinct and their inner savagery, and therefore reasoning with them makes no sense. Holding the shell symbolizes that he believed in order and democracy until the very last moment of his life. The destruction of the conch however symbolizes the triumph of savagery and the loss of civilization. Golding uses the conch shell to show us how beautiful order and democracy can be, whilst also being so fragile.

## **7.2 Fire**

In the novel fire symbolizes many different things. At first, it is the symbol of hope, the boys see it as their chance for getting saved by a ship. The fact that they decided to set up a signal fire on top of the mountain shows us their desire to be saved and get back home. Ralph especially realizes the importance that fire has for all of them: “We must make a fire.”<sup>73</sup> The fire also shows us the boys’ efforts to stay civilized, especially in the way that

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<sup>71</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 39

<sup>72</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 124

<sup>73</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 46



they will return home to civilization. Their initial to first create and then maintain the fire also symbolizes their cooperation. It shows us that they want to work together, they want to help each other. The fire essentially becomes the symbol of their unity, of the fact that they will stay together no matter what. When we understand this symbolism, we get a completely different look at their troubles with keeping up the fire. We can therefore understand it as foreshadowing for what is to come when talking about their unity. They struggle to keep the fire alive; they are angry at each other for not keeping the fire up, and they blame each other for whose fault it is. The same problems later arise in their cooperation. Someone needs to always keep up the fire. It requires constant effort, much like the order and rules of their civilization. The fire's meaning changes as the boys' commitment to keeping up the civilization changes. And when the fire gets low and eventually goes out the civilization and order go low and out with it to make space for savagery.

The fire's meaning becomes even more interesting as the story moves on. When the boys initially try to create a signal fire they set part of the forest on fire with it: "The flames, as though they were a kind of wild life, crept as a jaguar creeps on its belly toward a line of birch-like saplings that fledged and outcrop of the pink rock [...] Beneath the capering boys a quarter of a mile square of forest was savage with smoke and flame."<sup>74</sup> This fire that the boys created but cannot control, destroys a big part of the forest and presumably kills one of the littluns. The fire shows us how it can be a great servant but a very bad master. Something that was intended to rescue the boys from the island actually is the reason one of the boys is never going to leave the island. It is the symbolism of how everything has two sides, the good one and the bad one, and it is mostly up to us to decide whether we will be using the good side or the bad side. The more we read the more we get the sense that the fire's role as the symbol of hope and cooperation completely diminishes. The fire becomes the symbol of power more than anything else. Jack's group of hunters do not care about the fire whereas Ralph understands that it is the most important thing on the island: "The fire is the most important thing on the island. How can we ever be rescued except by luck, if we don't keep a fire going? Is a fire too much for us to make?"<sup>75</sup> The fire that was once a symbol of cooperation is now more of a symbol of division, changing its meaning more than we could have ever expected.

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<sup>74</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 53

<sup>75</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 96

The final change in the meaning of the fire happens in the final chapter. Jack's group starts a massive fire on the entire island to kill Ralph. Ironically, it is this fire that actually saves Ralph and brings them a rescue. This final twist is again showing us the many meanings of one single element. The fire started as the symbol of hope and cooperation, then changed its meaning into that of destruction and division, and finally achieved its initial purpose of saving the boys from this island in the end. Golding uses the fire to show us again how slim is the difference between hope and destruction, between cooperation and division, and is making sure we understand it for us to not repeat the mistakes the boys made.

### **7.3 *The Glasses***

The glasses are a powerful symbol, representing being able to see clearly, both in the literal and metaphorical way. The glasses also serve as an indispensable tool, because the boys soon find out that they can start a fire with them: "His specs—use them as a burning glasses!"<sup>76</sup> After they make fire, they then use it to see in dark, only continuing the symbolism of helping them to see. Their reliance on them on the other hand symbolizes how the boys depend on intellectual and technological means to maintain order and civilization. The boys also fully understand their need for these glasses, this need symbolizes their need for order and civilization. As Piggy is the one with the glasses, they also become a kind of an extension of him, therefore everything that Piggy symbolizes, the glasses symbolize it as well, that is mainly the intellect and logical thinking. Piggy's ability to see through all the bad things and try to logically get out of the situation is associated with his glasses. We can therefore say that the glasses help Piggy see both literally and metaphorically. The more the glasses become damaged, the more the boys, and Piggy especially, are blind to the seriousness of the situation. Their deterioration symbolizes the decline of rationality and civilization.

In connection to the glasses, there is one moment that is perhaps more important than the others. It is the moment when Jack together with his hunters goes to the camp and steals the glasses from Piggy. It represents the fact that the boys have been overtaken by savagery completely. When the glasses are stolen Piggy cries and says: "I got to have them specs. Now I only got one eye."<sup>77</sup> We see Piggy being completely desperate

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<sup>76</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 49

<sup>77</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 85

symbolizing how important the glasses are not only for him but for all of them. The theft of these glasses symbolizes the shift of power on the island. The savages have beaten the civilized ones. It tells us that the primal instincts have won. It shows us how easy it was to beat reason and order and how easy it would be in the real world.

As the story continues the broken glasses become the symbol of the boys' broken and divided society. The more damaged the glasses are the harder it is to start the signal fire. This symbolizes how the tools of civilization, in this case the glasses, are important to keep up the order. The damage the glasses have taken is also making seeing much harder for Piggy. This symbolizes how the boys are losing their ability to see what is important and what they really should be doing. It is also showing us how naive Piggy is becoming. It is almost like the more blind he goes, the naiver he gets.

The end of the glasses happens at the same time Piggy dies and the conch is destroyed. The fact that the character that is mostly characterized by his intellectual abilities and his tendencies for democracy and the two main tools for order and symbols of civilization are all destroyed at once symbolizes the ultimate and final destruction of everything that could be perceived perhaps as normal or civilized. It is showing us how easy it is to overthrow all these principles when the primal instincts and savagery take over. It is showing us how fragile our civilization really is.

#### ***7.4 The Beast***

The beast is a powerful symbol all throughout the novel. It is first mentioned by one of the littluns, who is scared of a "beastie" that is supposed to be on the island. It is the representation of fear inside every single one of the boys. At first, it is just an imaginary thing that most of the boys do not believe in, but soon after its first mention, it becomes much more than just a product of someone's imagination. It becomes a real thing that is inside every single one of the boys. At the start, it symbolizes just their inner fears of the unknown that is on the island. But as the fear gets bigger, the symbol changes its meaning, soon it symbolizes the inner darkness of the boys themselves. The more they believe in the beast the more it actually becomes real, transforming itself into a manifestation of the boys' primal instinct and their inner evil.

The more we read the more we realise that the beast is just what we all have inside ourselves. Simon is the one who realises this in the novel: "maybe there is a beast." [...]

“maybe it’s only us.”<sup>78</sup> Simon is definitely the one who understands the beast the best out of all of them. And because he realises what it really is, it seems to have no effect on him. His realisation is showing us that the real evil is not some monster lurking at night in the forest, it is the inner evil, that lives in us. It is a very important realisation in the novel, as from this point on we realise that the boys themselves are the ones to blame for the rise of primal instincts, savagery, and all-around evil on the island. The beast is therefore the symbol of the potential for evil that exists in all of us. This realisation makes us realise that the boys are not fighting against some external force, they are fighting against themselves.

The beast takes on a physical form after the landing of the parachutist on the island. When the parachutist lands on the island, he is presumably already dead, but when the boys find him the fear that is already inside them transforms the human corpse into a massive scary beast: “The beast had teeth [...] and big black eyes.”<sup>79</sup> This shows us how the fear that was already in the boys altered the reality and intensified itself. We can say that the fear is the cause of the fear. The parachutist is a casualty of the ongoing war, he has nothing to do with the boys, but it is the symbol of the outside world, of what is happening out there. He is our link between the boys’ descent into savagery and the world’s descent into chaos, the beast is therefore not just the representation of the boys’ inner darkness, but the darkness that lives inside every human.

### ***7.5 The Lord of the Flies***

The Lord of the Flies in this novel is a representation of the evil that is lurking in the minds of us all. It is very closely associated with the beast, but it has a slightly different meaning. The term itself, Lord of the Flies, is according to Fred Gettings’ *Dictionary of Demons* a direct translation of the original Baalzebub, nowadays Beelzebub.<sup>80</sup> Beelzebub is a demon mentioned in the Bible and is often associated with Satan, this connection between the novel titular symbol and demons is only underlying the true intentions of the novel, that being the exploration of the inner evil in humans. Most of the time the Lord of the Flies is nothing physical, but at one moment there is its physical representation. This physical representation is a severed pig’s head that Jack with his hunters mounted

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<sup>78</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 106

<sup>79</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 152

<sup>80</sup> GETTING, F. *Dictionary of Demons*. Random House UK, 1988. ISBN 0712616292 p. 53

on top of a sharp stick as a gift for the beast: “Jack held up the head and jammed the soft throat down on the pointed end of the stick which pierced through into the mouth. He stood back and the head hung there, a little blood dribbling down the stick [...] “This head is for the beast. It’s a gift.”<sup>81</sup> It is a very gruesome visual, only adding to the evil and savagery that is already present. When the boys succumb more and more to their primal savage instincts the head starts to symbolize their downfall. The Lord of the Flies itself is introduced in a scene where Simon encounters it in the forest and starts having a hallucination of it speaking: “Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! [...] You knew didn’t you? I’m part of you? Clo, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?”<sup>82</sup> In this pivotal scene, we get the explanation of the 2 major symbols of the novel from the author himself. The Lord of the Flies explains in this scene what he and subsequently the beast really is. It explains that there is nothing external about the beast, everything is happening internally in their heads. It tells Simon that the real and only source of evil is residing within them, symbolizing the inner evil and savagery.

The image of the severed pig’s head on the stick is definitely not a pleasant one. It must have been rotting and flies must have been all around it because of this. This rotting is a symbol of the boys’ civilization and how it rots as well the more they argue and have conflicts. It is the symbol of the boys’ brutality, of the horrible actions that they can do, and of their fears. The power of this symbol is shown most brilliantly after Simon’s first encounter with it. After Simon has a conversation with the Lord of the Flies he tries to tell the other boys that there is no real monster, but unfortunately, the power of Lord of the Flies has already corrupted the boys’ minds, so when he reaches them, they mistake him for a beast and kill him. This event is the one thing that symbolizes the most the complete abandonment of any order, rules, civilization, or perhaps even logic.

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<sup>81</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 168

<sup>82</sup> GOLDING, William. *Lord of the Flies*. London: Faber & Faber, 1958. ISBN 0571084834. p. 176

## 8 Conclusion

In the course of writing this thesis, I have tried to uncover the deeper meanings hidden in between the lines of this William Golding's postwar novel "Lord of the Flies." I have done so using several theoretical approaches. Very important for my analysis were the theoretical foundations I have found in Northrop Frye's theory of symbols. This paper was a very important starting point for me which provided me with a framework of how literary symbols function and how they communicate to us the important ideas hidden behind them. Frye's notion that literature is structured through a network of symbols that resonate with cultural and archetypal significance has been particularly useful. As Frye puts it himself: "archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience."<sup>83</sup> Symbols in literature often represent more than their immediate meaning, which gives us the possibility of analysing them based on our life experiences.

I have also used some of the works done by philosophers who have studied and examined the nature of evil in us. One of these great philosophers was Immanuel Kant, who thought that the evil in us humans is inescapable. This very much aligns with what is written in the "Lord of the Flies" as well. Not only Kant's theories have provided me with a greater understanding of the novel's portrayal of innate human darkness and the fragility of societal constructs.

By using not only these theoretical perspectives I have tried to demonstrate and explain how William Golding is using symbolism in the novel to convey deeper meanings and to explore the themes of civilization, morality, and human nature. The conch shell, the signal fire, the glasses, the beast, these are not just narrative devices that Golding uses to push the narrative forward, they are symbols carrying a significant weight in illustrating the collapse of civilised order and the emergence of primal instincts. Ultimately, this approach underscores the richness of this masterfully written novel and is showing us how simple literary things, like shell, or glasses, communicate complex ideas like the inner evil and savagery in people. By writing this study, I am hopeful that I will contribute

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<sup>83</sup> FRYE, N. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton University Press, 2000. ISBN 0691069999.

p.99

to a deeper understanding of “Lord of the Flies” and its relevance to discussions about human nature and societal structures.

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