

“Good” out of Evil in William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies”

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Abstract

The paper discusses the good and evil of the main characters in William Golding’s novel “Lord of the Flies”. Simon’s complete human good, Piggy and Ralph’s flawed human good and Jack and Roger’s deteriorating good are analyzed in detail. The conclusion is that self-reflection through the lord of the flies is the only way that enables the boys to return to human good, which is an unattainable task in the adult human world in reality for Golding.

Keywords

Good, evil, “Lord of the Flies”.

1. Introduction

William Golding won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983 for his revelation of the very situation of the real world in his masterpiece “Lord of the Flies”. For some critics, the innate evil in humans results in their inevitable tragedy such as world wars in the real world. Wu Mei points out that the novel reveals a basic theme on human morality---the innate human evil.[1] Actually, one of Golding’s purposes of writing this novel is to ponder on human evil and appeal to people to love all humankind. While the exposure of human evil runs throughout the whole novel, constituting the theme and main plot, Golding gives descriptions about some of the boys’ wandering between good and evil and other boys’ gradual deterioration to evil, the two of which can be attributed to not only their innate character but also the unique external environment. Therefore, the evil in “The Lord of the Flies” is not complete evil that cannot be changed for the better. In my opinion, the author still holds a ray of hope and a hint of faith in the human good.

2. Body

2.1. Simon : The Incarnation of Complete “Human Good”

Simon is a complete saint who represents Jesus Christ in the Christian religion. A humanist, he is quite the opposite of evil. Simon loves everybody on the deserted island. He even tries to pick up fruits on the trees for the younger boys. He is also establishing a harmonious relationship with nature which in other boys’ eyes is scary and mysterious for its dense vegetation and insufficient sunlight. Simon’s pure good drives away all the evil in his heart, so he dares to stay alone in the natural world, meditating on the past occurrence and the possible ways out of the island. Due to his complete human good, he bravely confronts the so-called monster and discovers that it is nothing but a dead human body. Simon intends to share his discoveries immediately, which shows his sense of collectivism and self-sacrifice as a complete saint. Ironically, he is mistaken for the beast and beaten to death in the dark because of his discovery. By creating such a good character in his novel, Golding seems to suggest that in the real world there exist such a small group of good humans who stick to their beliefs and remain good despite the change of external circumstances. That is, Golding believes in the existence of love in the real world and the possibility of converting evil to good and hate to love.

2.2. Piggy and Ralph: The Incarnation of Flawed “Human Good”

Though physically weak because of his heavy weight and asthma and low self-esteem because of his humble origin, like Ralph, Piggy is also a symbol of human good. While Simon symbolizes humanitarianism, Piggy is a symbol of science and democracy in the real world. Piggy's goodness is best shown in his realizing his physical weakness and voluntarily and selflessly making way for Ralph who he thinks is more appropriate and qualified as a leader. Piggy suggests that a signal smoke should be kept, but when Jack intends to stop keeping fire to produce signals, he dare not stand up and stick to his own stance. Here Piggy's silence should be interpreted as a weakness in his character instead of the evil in him. Piggy holds tightly the conch in his hand when dying, which indicates his firm belief in democracy. By creating such a character Piggy who represents science and democracy in his novel, Golding intends to reveal that in the real world a tiny group of humans are not only good but also capable of finding ways to survive and thrive. On the whole, Ralph is a good human. As a leader who is selected by all the boys, Ralph does everything for the whole group rather than for his own interest. A boy from a middle class family, Ralph understands the importance of civilization and builds his society with the help of Piggy. He assigns the boys either to hunt, build huts or keep the fire so that everything runs in order. However, Ralph sometimes also makes fun of Piggy and both of them join in the persecution of the innocent Simon. Therefore, under certain circumstances, Piggy and Ralph's evil can triumph over his human good. Different from Simon, Their human good is kind of unstable and can be changed to evil in extreme situations.

2.3. Jack and Roger: The Incarnation of Deteriorating “Human Good”

Jack is portrayed as an ugly boy in the novel to show consistence with his ugly heart. Jack possesses the evil aspect of a human being in the depth of his heart which may easily defeat the good aspect in him. But Jack's turning into a complete devil like Satan cannot be achieved in a single day. Instead, it is a gradual process with the change of the situation on the island. At the beginning, there is still some good left in Jack, as can be seen from his obedience in following orders and fulfilling his own duty as part of the collective group though he loafs on his job and envies Ralph's leading position. Over time, the boy's social responsibilities and restraints yield to human instinct and animal desires. Seeing no hope of getting rescued from the island, Ralph is attracted by the notion of hunting and consuming meat. When hunting wild boars, Ralph fails the first two times. At that time, Jack is not evil enough to kill the wild boar with a knife, let alone kill his peers. But isolated in the island, they have to survive, and the tasty meat is a major temptation for most boys on the island. Here I would like to point out that in the real world butchers kill animals such as pigs, chicken, sheep or goats in large quantities every day, and seldom does anyone blame them for their merciless acts imposed on the helpless animals. Similarly, it is unfair to define Jack as an evil when he tries to kill the wild boar for survival. In other novels of the “island adventure” genre, many heroes in the novel also kill wild animals for survival without receiving criticism or being defined as evils. Therefore, the attempt to kill the wild boar, which is out of human need, is nothing wrong. But their slogan “Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Bash her in.”[2] shows their savageness and lays the basis for their further decay. When Jack intends to kill Ralph even at the cost of destroying the whole island by starting a fire, that makes quite a different story. At that time, he deteriorates into a complete evil, or has been overwhelmed with hysteria. By creating such an evil character Jack, Golding seems to suggest that environment determines people's behavior. So to some extent, the hunting of wild animals for meat is a more practical choice for the boys, which can be proved by the fact that Ralph also joins in the consumption of meat.

Roger somewhat resembles Jack in terms of deterioration of morality. At the very beginning, Roger is a very kind, gentle and tolerant boy. After shooting Henry from behind a tree, he feels restless, nervous and ashamed of his evil conduct. As time goes by, tortured by the possibility

of starving to death, he follows Jack and begins to do evil things out of his instinct rather than out of social rules and morality. One detail deserving our attention is that when killing wild boars, Jack and Roger paints their body colors. In this way, they seem to have concealed their real identity. For them, it seems as if it were not they who have committed the crime, but others. So there is still some humanity left in them as they feel frightened and ashamed when killing wild animals face to face.

2.4. Lord of the Flies: The Means to Return to “Human Good”

The dead parachutist on top of the mountain is definitely from the outside of the adult world. He is the production or result of the evil human behaviors caused by world wars. Ironically, the boys on the island mistake the dead body for something enchanting, mysterious and evil or the lord of the flies. No boys want to conduct thorough investigations to solve the mystery because they all have their evil aspects in their hearts. Simon is an exception because he is totally good and pure, not afraid of being killed by the mysterious natural force. Only by eliminating the evil in the boys' hearts can they face the “lord of the flies” and discover all the truth. So “the dead body” or “the lord of the flies” has served as something that can repress the boys' exploding desires and irrationality. If the boys want to lead a peaceful life and have a peaceful mind, they have to get rid of their inner evil, otherwise “the lord of the flies” will forever stay in their hearts.

3. Conclusion

The paper analyzes the main characters' good and evil in William Golding's novel “Lord of the Flies”. Simon is a complete saint, showing his love for all humankind with his fearless and sacrificial spirit. Piggy is also a good boy despite his timidity. The leader Ralph is approaching human good, as he sometimes shows his primitive desires and gives up his ideals. Jack and Roger are complete evils, but their evilness is not developed overnight. Instead, their way to evil is a process stimulated by external environments. The “Lord of the Flies” is the root of all evil as it represents the real evil in the real world. Only by eliminating the influence of the lord of the flies can the boys become true good humans. But it seems to be an impossible task because the evil in the real world in which Golding lives can never be truly gotten rid of for adult human's greed. Some critics believe that the novel “Lord of the Flies” is not a stiff preaching on human evil. [3] From the above analysis we can see that it is a mistaken idea to classify a person as a completely good or evil, because it is a rather complicated issue which involves the consideration of the external influences as well the person's innate morality.

References

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