The Paradox of “Natural Selection”—The Lord of Flies

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Keywords: Paradox, Natural Selection, Ecology, Destroy.

Abstract. From the perspectives of humanity, ethics and ecology, an analysis is made in terms of the text, theme, and moral of the novel The Lord of Flies. It is argued that the dual confrontation between the good and the evil, and that between civilization and brutality contains a profound thesis that the evil of the humanity is the very source of its own destruction. Meanwhile, “Natural Selection” is not the whole of the natural and human history. One cannot abuse the natural resources regardless the interests of others, ignoring the natural laws. Human beings’ fighting each other, resorting to war will greatly accelerate the process of their destruction. The novel is mirroring the real world of the time and predicting the future. As a responsible writer, Golding puts forward his alert: our environment and the survival of mankind are seriously threatened.

Introduction

The Lord of Flies has been widely focused on ever since its publication in 1954. Scholars interpreted and commented it from various perspectives of characters, theme, narration techniques, colonialism, myth prototype, psycho-analysis, etc[1]. In recent years, many others began writing remarks from the angles of female-missing, symbol of politics, eco-critic, literary ethics about the novel. While reading this novel of simple plots and profound thoughts, we find its realistic significance of the allegory narration of the present ecosystem and survival crisis besides the binary opposition between good and evil, and that of ration and brutality. According to the theory of Natural Selection, Jack is undoubtedly the great winner. On the other hand, Ralph, as a representative of civilization and ration should be the perfect loser, even deserves an early death. However, the historical wheels of human society won’t move backward. With unique thoughts and writing technique, Golding knitted a moral of life-death, doom-survival into a simple but philosophical story. One can hardly help exclaiming his profound thoughts, exquisite writing skill, and non-didactic function of novel. In this paper, we will analyze the text of the fiction from the perspectives of humanity and ecology and try to reveal the realistic significance of sustainable development.

The Defeat of Civilization

The novel is simple in plot. In a future nuclear weapon war, a group of boys are being taken away by a plane to a safe place in the south. However, the only pilot lost his life in the crash and the boys luckily escaped from the crash and managed to gather themselves on a wild island. The most important thing they were being faced was how to survive and how to be saved by any passers-by. Coordination, teamwork and division the task into small ones among the boys to overcome any difficulty and waiting for rescue would be the natural plot the readers may expect, which would fall in the trap of the set model.

The boys fall into two parties: one is represented by blonde juvenile Ralph from a middle-class family, which is the symbol of ration and civilization; the other party is led by Jack who is the chapter chorister and head boy of the choir, which is the symbol of ignorance, benighted, cruelty, savage. With the help of the Piggy, who is physically weak but more mature in mind, Ralph is able to organize the boys big and small to do different things: to make fire and smoke for sending
life-saving signals, keeping the fire in turns, to build shelters to stay in, to gather twigs and branches to keep the fire alive, and to look for food. These are the feasible ways the persons are always taking if they want to survive on a wild island before being rescued. As least, under the same conditions, the group live longer if they can follow the right way, which can be easily understood by the older boys in terms of being scientific and correct, since the stories of Treasure Island, Swallows and Amazons, Coral Island, and the like have already offered excellent examples. The boys in this novel must be familiar with the novels because the name of the novels were mentioned in their conversation[1](pa16, 70). However, led by Jack and Roger, the “pig-hunting” party indulged in carnivals, bloody slaughtering, burning the woods for the sake of hunting. In the foolish actions, the fire for sending smoke signals died out and missed the opportunity of being saved. What’s more tragic was the fact that the brutal party lured the children by means of the pig meat and finally won over all the civilized party, resulting in the total defeat of the latter. The brutal actions of pig-hunting were extended to kill of the partners and Simon (who is the symbol of the prophet of kindness) was killed in the carnival. Piggy(who believes in science) was killed with rocks by them on purpose only because he wanted to fetch his glasses.

Without the adults coming in rescue, Ralph would be killed in the brutes’ chase and hunting. The only reason for the Civilized of being killed was that they have different views and modes of survival. Jack, the brutal who is cold-blooded, tyrant, cruel to pigs and human beings as well, fear of the so-called beast symbolizes the “evil”, short-sighted profit-seeking, immoderate utilization of the resources and destroying of the Nature and of the human kind.

**Mirror of the Real World**

Young Golding used to believe that “human beings can completely change the social environment, can eliminate the evil and achieve self-improvement and better the survival condition”. [3](63)As a soldier, he experienced WWII, and found that “humans can do anything among themselves. It’s not the question of the hunting human heads among the primitive tribes of New Guinea or Amazon area. The atrocity was carried out by those well-educated, polished persons with professional skills. Among them were doctors, lawyers, and those who were backed with highly-civilized traditions. They do savage acts against human being [3]64. The tragedy and pains of the real world undoubtedly warn the writer, and greatly changed his values about life and the world. In the fifties of the last century, people were still obsessed with the fear of the Second World War since it was only ended just within years. The Cold War was on the wings and the confrontation between the two camps of the USA and that of the USSR became more and more serious. The Korean War lasted for three years. And the shadow of the atomic bomb horror was still on the mind of the people. It seemed there was no bright future at all. Thus, in the very beginning, the write plotted a doomed group implying a tragic ending of the humans. A group of boys in escape, instead of reaching a safe place were thrown upon a wild island. Or rather, there was no safe sheltering at all. Even after various hardships, the seemingly safe place where they could stay for time being would come to an end no matter what efforts they would make. Since there were no girls or women among them, they would not have any offspring. What they could do was to extend their lives in hunger, disease, and pains. Just like the “little”, even though there was no fight, the boys might disappear from the vision of the group one by one (because of various dangers as drowning, etc.). The sudden appearance of the officer and the cruise was no more than a temporary consolation to avoid the over-tragic ending of the story. Or it is an implication of the human hunting of a larger scale.

There are other items in the novel symbolizing the extermination of the world, take the wild island for instance. The earth is in fact a wild island in the universe. In the historical time and space, the human survival is but a short visitor to the nature. There are always scientists claiming the lifespan of the earth. There are always scientists exploring the secrets of the earth and the universe. There are some countries wanting to seek a planet other than the earth for survival. Some of the scientists imagine that once the earth is no longer suitable to inhabit, some of the VIPs as high officers, politicians, and the rich would be sent to a safer place like the selected by God. However,
during the course of going to a safer place, one is likely to be “dropped” on a wild island if he is lucky enough. If he is unlucky, he might die like the pilot in the fiction.  

*The Lord of Flies* was published in 1954. For over 60 years, the worry and concern of the destruction of the earth by humans has never been out of date. Rather, the concern of the earth’s being destroyed is constant, given the fact that “end of the world” rumor in 2012 was rather popular. Actually, such concern and worry has never been unreasonable. The problems we are being faced with are obvious not only by scientists, but also by ordinary people such as you and me thanks to various channels of mass media. The ever-insufficient natural resources, the deteriorating environment, plagues, food shortage are among the most common problems that are always the topics by everyday conversation. In the novel *The Lord of Flies*, Ralph’s party put forward the ideas of burning less sticks, branches or twigs to keep the smoke and fire alive, which is a thrift way of utilizing the resources. Yet, the pig-hunting party led by Jack keeps a blind eye to the relative scientific way of staying on the wild island. What they would do was burning the woods for hunting. While they were killing the pigs and their rivals in carnivals and ignoring the possible consequences they were not far from their own tombs. There is a very impressive pig hunting scene in the novel: “A little apart from the rest, sunk in deep maternal bliss, lay the largest sow of the lot. She was black and ping; and the great bladder of her belly was fringed with a row of piglets that slept or burrowed and squeaked.” [2](52) This is a rather happy time for the pigs or any life-beings with the mother and the babies. However, Jack’s party would not care about the life or death of the piglets and flung the wooden spears to the sow. In the craze and carnival of the hunting, the sow was killed by wooden spears and Jack’s cut-throat knife. The fate of the piglets is obvious. The practice is just like “fishing by draining up the pond”. There’s no potential for sustaining development.  

In fact, nowadays, such kinds of practice are not uncommon at all. Immoderate utilization and development of the natural resources are widespread. For instance, the proper way of fishing and taking them as food is to fish when they are in certain size. In some places, the mesh of the fish net would be set in rules. That is the small ones would be let off in fishing according to the local practice. However, some of the people are too “clever” when they use power-line or detonators while fishing. In that case, all the fish, big or small won’t have escape. In recent years, some of the fishermen can only have fruit in far sea area. Other obvious problems include deforestation, waste of coal, oil, and gas, etc., pollution of the soil because of overuse of pesticides, fertilizer, etc. In both developed and developing countries, environmental problems are more common than not. The over utilization of the natural resources would accelerate the decay of the world. The conflict and fighting among humans would quicken the steps of the destruction of the world. To defeat and destroy the rivals, some of the people would clear the living circumstance. Even they would use nuclear weapons, bio-chemical weapons. Such thought and practice are the same as the Jacks’ burning the woods for hunting and trying to kill Ralph. The difference between fiction and the real world is in that the plot and characters of the fiction are invented and the participants of the ridiculous action are fewer in the fiction.  

**Where Are the Beasts?**  

The novel is not very long in terms of volume. However, the writer paid a lot of ink on the terror brought about by the beast. Besides the two chapters of “Beast from Water”, “Beast from Air”, other chapters as “Gift for the Darkness”, “A View to a Death” are in fact the extension of the terror of the beast and the exploration of where the beast come from. Then, are there really beasts on the small island, and where on earth are the beasts come from? The Chinese translator Gong Zhicheng gives a very good interpretation of the beasts in his preface of the Chinese version. From the perspective of the whole story, the so-called beasts from water or from air are but a kind of bedding only for the purpose of emphasizing the fact that “beast” is from the inner part of the human himself (that is play of the “brutish nature”). For the source and interpretation of “beast”, Simon is an important character. In the argument of the existence of “the beast”, Simon put forward the idea “What I mean is . . . maybe it's only us.” “We could be sort of…” [4](5)
Simon wanted to express mankind’s essential illness. However, the laughter from the children beat him cruelly…. To the terror of darkness and the beast, the group of the children took two measures: one was to search all over the island and testified that there was no beast except some pigs on the island at all; the other was to put the pig head on a sharpened wooden spear and stood it on the clearing of the woods as a sacrifice to the beast. The so-called “beast” was but the body of the dead pilot in the crash, who was pulled to and fro, up and down by the parachute lines with the force of the wind. It was Simon who saw the dead pilot. When Simon wanted to climb down the mountain in rain to tell the truth to the group, the hunters killed him in carnival and terror, frightened by taking him as the beast.

To interpret the event and its result, most critics would attribute it as the darkness or evil of humanity. As the translator of the Chinese, Mr. Gong Zhicheng gives his views on the naming of the characters, the characters and their symbols in his preface of the Chinese version. There was also a Ralph and a Jack, and a Peter King in “The Coral Island”, written by another British writer. The three of the teenagers also drifted on a wild island, but they were united and friendly to each other. They helped the weak and the native people, defeated the pirates. Like the traditional “Robinson Crusoe”, as a fiction about the story of a wild island, civilization, ration, and Christianity can always defeat brutes, instincts, and totem worship. It seems it’s like a fiction of transmitting positive energy. Yet, in the “The Lord of Flies”, originally Jack was in charge of a choir of Christianity. It was right in Jack’s leading that the children took the way of brutes and killing. He drew some of the big boys away to hunt, which resulted in the shortage of hands to keep the fire alive or put up the hut. He crashèd the conch which is the symbol of civilization and authority. He took the lead to put on colors and his face and body, which served as a kind of mask to hide the identity of the children, making them unrecognizable as brutal, primitive persons. Simon’s death was caused by his ridiculous hunting. He also planned to snatch away Piggy’s glasses. He managed to make himself as the highest authority, forcing the twins to be under his funny rule. He allowed his royal follower Roger killing Piggy by rolling down the big rock. He also planned how to kill Ralph successfully.

Jack is a great irony to Christianity in “The Lord of Flies”. As the foreman of the Christian choir, he was not enlightened by the religion at all. He was more than a little worse than the little boys who were too innocent to the cruel world or who were not religious at all. His ambition for power, for his selfish desire, his blood-thirsty nature completely overcame his normal wants and needs as a rational person.

The conflicts between the two parties of the boys are quite similar to the conflicts and confrontation between the two groups’ different civilization and culture of the real world of the 1950s.

The values and ethics of the west world, which stress on Natural Selection and jungle justice, are too far from the East’s “harmonious and different”. From the 16th century, the powerful Western countries began to fight among themselves, invaded the new continents and conquered the old civilizations, making them as their colonies killing and driving away the local people, turning some of the people as their slaves until the 20th century. Even nowadays, the world economic order is quite favorable to the western, developed countries. With the help of high-techs, better developed science, intellectual properties, the developed countries buy cheap materials from the relatively backward countries and sell manufactured products back with high prices. Meanwhile, they would impose their value on the less developed countries with cultural penetration. There is not so much difference from the Jacks’ practice in “The Lord of Flies”. Some powerful country would act as the world police in the name of democracy, emancipation, and human rights to interfere with the inner politics of other countries and obtain profits and resources from the places where they can have military existence. On the one hand they would transfer the energy-consuming, less productive and heavy polluting industries to the less developed areas. On the other hand they would criticize the latter ones as pollution sources, unfriendly to environment. In fact, their civilization, improvement is based on their value system of Natural Selection, jungle justice. Is it pirates’ logic of the Jacks?
What is the Lord of Flies

Why Golding named the novel as “The Lord of Flies”? What is implied with such a title? Mr. Gong Zhicheng pointed out: the expression “the Lord of Flies” comes from the Hebrew word “Baalzebub”. In the Bibles, “Baal” is regarded as the head of the evils. In English, it means the head of the filth, also the synonym of the evil spirit. The naming of the novel seems implying that the brutes defeats the humanity. The boys are frightened by the so-called beast. However, the real “beast” is the brutish nature of the human(3).

Besides the evil nature of humanity, the lord of flies has more connotations: the flies are a kind of disgusting insect which has a short life and is blood-thirsty. There is nothing but blood and flesh for their survival in their eyes. The lord of flies in the novel is the pig head sacrificed to the beast by Jack. With the help of Simon, the writer expressed the views of the animals on human and the relationship between the animals and human being.

“The half-shut eyes were dim with the infinite cynicism of adult life.”… “Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!” said the head. …”You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? “ [2](158-160)... The Lord of Flies (the pig head) mocked at the hunters trying to catch the beast to be naïve and in vain. It can talk to Simon and predicted Simon's death.

Meanwhile, the truth of another “beast” was the pilot’s body. His head also drew a lot of flies. Although the body did not talk to Simon, it was as attractive to the flies as “the Lord of Flies” as well. We can interpret the allegory as this: both the head of the pig and the head of the pilot are the host of the flies. There is no difference between them. There’s no higher or lower form. They are just two forms of existence. The more advanced and more intelligent human can conquer and hunt the more primitive, less intelligent pigs. However, the ending would be the same. Then the conquering and hunting would be funny farce to the nature.

To make the idea further, the pilot’s head and the pig head can be compared to advanced civilization and the backward living mode respectively. And whatever way of existence, advanced or backward has its own way of survival and its own group of individuals. Actually, human being can be compared to a certain kind of flies. They would make their profits and would put survival as the fundamentals.

There are some writers who would compare the numerous, poor, dirty people as flies or locusts. Though the writers might originally want to express their sympathy to the poor, there may be some detestation to them, for instance, George Orwell’s “Marrakech”. The “advanced civilization” or life style would feel that they are superior to the backward, primitive way of living and contempt the latter. Thus, they would think of influence, change even resort to force to spread or rule the backward areas. However, whether the advanced or the backward living style, they are just different ways of living, and are relatively advanced or backward. Historically speaking, the most advanced living way would be backward some day. Then forcefully imposing the so-called living way is against the natural law and making the advanced people as brutal as the beast.

The Paradox of “Natural Selection”

The kid with a mark on his face (the weak) disappeared. Simon (slow to talk but seeking for truth) was mistaken as a beast and killed. Piggy (fat and has asthma) was killed with a big rock. The littluns forgot them identity and became brutes. Ralph, who has golden hair has the leading air but no leading power, was saved by an officer while he was being chased and hunted. No matter how the chances of such a result are, the readers’ nerve, pain can be relieved. Within a second, the readers might wonder who can save the adult world though the boys can be saved. [5](195) The wild island of the boys is just an epitome of the adults. The confrontation, conflicts, battles, and wars among different political and economic systems, different races, different nations, and countries or regions are nothing less than hunting of larger scales. It is evident that Golding would not allow the “Natural Selection” principle or theme to rule his working. In the confrontation and conflict between Jack and Ralph, Jack has overwhelming
advantage. The Ralphs would be definitely wiped out from the island within the “jungle law” framework. The problem is how long the beast-like Jacks can last. Their wild practices could only accelerate the exhaust of the resources of the wild island. Then the crisis of their survival would fall in since there is no “future” concept on their mind. Not to mention the thought of sustaining development.

**Duty of the Novelists**

The functions of fictions would not be discussed here since there are a lot of articles and critics on that issue. It is argued here that the entertaining function of the novels is a necessity. Otherwise, the novel would not go far due to narrow spread and less recognition by the readers. However, the moral or ethical function is no less important that the entertaining function. If a novel can not arouse any reflection on life and the world among the readers, its value and survival would also be too limited. It can only serve as a pastime rather than a classic.

The entertaining function of “The Lord of Flies” is self-evident through scene description, characters, plots, etc. Critics from both home and abroad interpreted the novel from various perspectives of theme, characters, implication, and so on, which can be regarded as its ethical function.

Golding used to express the thought of “the evil nature of human”, “The Lord of Flies” implied his worry about the gloomy future of the world. In 1983, Golding expressed his reflection on the future of human being. He hoped “they can go into a rational world without any war threat”. Thus, a responsible novelist should illustrate the survival circumstance in their works, so as to illuminate and enlighten the mankind to improve their living condition and create harmonious social environment by means of creating instructive images and stories.

**References**


