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Instinct or Society? A Rousseauist Analysis of Corruption in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

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ABSTRACT. The present study argues that William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* can be read as a manifest for the natural degeneration of human beings, and that human beings are violent and competent by nature. In doing so, the present article, firstly, draws upon the Hobbesian philosophy of human nature and how it is in conflict with the related ideas of Rousseau. The article, then, analyzes certain elements of the novel so as to show the Hobbesian ideas behind the novel where there is a society of children and the upcoming relations of power and individual desires. The article afterwards argues that human nature, against what the author declares in the *Hot Gates* (1965) as the degenerated human nature, is not naturally degenerating, but through society this savagery of human being takes place. Ideas of Rousseau are then used thereupon for backing this very argument. Golding's novel launches attack on Rousseau's ideas that society is the agent of corruption in beings.

1. INTRODUCTION

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) is a symbolic and dystopian novel about a group of children, stuck on an uninhabited island, who turn out to govern themselves and gradually become savages. The story, as many critics put it, shows that human nature is already deteriorated, while the society, as a grouping mode, lets people practice civilization and manner. As Golding himself described it, the novel is "an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable" (*Lord of the Flies*, p. 204). Golding comments on the book and clearly maintains that the human nature is defected and thus human is degenerated by nature.

The present article, nevertheless, argues that this is the society that jeopardizes the position of the human stance, whereas human nature is pure by itself. In so doing, the authors have drawn upon Rousseau's ideas over the society and human nature. What Golding states seems close to that of Hobbes's statement over human nature. Hobbes asserts that since man in the "state of nature . . . has no idea of goodness he must be naturally wicked; that he is vicious because he does not know virtue." On the other hand, there are the ideas of Rousseau where he holds that "uncorrupted morals" prevail in the "state of nature" [4]. These opposing ideas of the two philosophers would work as secondary sources of the present discussion and Golding's novel, as a primary source, would bring about a ground for the argument.

Rousseau believes that the more men deviate from the state of nature, the worse they would become. When instinct and emotion are not espoused with the unnatural limitations of civilization, men would be free, wise, and good in the state of nature. Instinct and emotion, moreover, are nature's voices and instructions to the good life, as far as they are not distorted by the rules of civilization. Rousseau's "noble savage" is in direct opposition to the man of culture [5]. Golding's novel, more or less, has implications leading one to see the degeneration of the trapped children, as representatives of a society, when they try to practice the relations of power and make up a society with certain limitations [8].

2. ROUSSEAU VS. HOBBS; NATURE VS. SOCIETY

Thomas Hobbes, a 17th-century philosopher, assumes that human nature is violent and competitive. His theory is based upon ‘individualism’, which implies the fact that a society is meaningful as far as individuals comprise it. This view, so to speak, maintains that humans are selfish creatures who only concern their self-preservation, even if it jeopardizes the status of the others. This, therefore, greases the rails for conflicts and thus human beings are always in a “state of war” [3]. Hobbes sees human nature negatively in that without an “absolute sovereign” to control our desires, human beings all will live in a constant ‘state of war’, which is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” [3]. This ‘materialist’ view is in conflict with the views proposed by such a philosopher as Plato, for whom the conflict between reason and desires is in decision making. Hobbes, on the contrary, puts this desire in line with the materialistic desire as the driving force for all actions while, on the other hand, reason brings about the best possible ground for the fulfillment of these desires.

Golding’s novel seems to be in line with the Hobbesian philosophy, mainly in his view over the nature of human beings. The group of schoolboys, after forming their society, falls in a state of war. As it will be shown in the next section of this article, the whole group represents a microcosm of the adult society, where every main character acts out a role we mainly see among the adult and mature societies. However, this sort of argumentation over human nature as being naturally violent and degenerating is in conflict with the ideas of Rousseau over human nature.

Rousseau thinks of human nature as good and pure. Accordingly, it is the society that corrupts and transforms ‘natural man’ into a beast who is always obsessed with his own desires. Rousseau claimed that Hobbes’s ideas on human nature were more concerned with the socialized people, where there uses a conflict among the members either for power or certain other desires. To this end, if we suppose human nature apart from society, one is born ‘neither good nor bad’, but as a blank slate, and this is the society and the environment’s influence that triggers degeneration. In Rousseau’s view, human beings are not aware of each other, thus cannot come into serious conflict. Therefore, this is the (modern) society, and the ownership along it which brings about the disruption of the state of nature. Rousseau sees this nature as true freedom [7].

Rousseau claims that “in short, intelligence is dangerous because it undermines reverence; science is destructive because it takes away faith; reason is bad because it sets prudence against moral intuition. Without reverence, faith, and moral intuition there is neither character nor society” [9]. The ‘State of Nature’, thus to say, for Rousseau, is beyond the removal of government, and it is but the removal of all ‘cultural clothes’, such as language, beliefs and even the conceptions one has of himself. For Rousseau self-love and pity are the mere sentiments one has naturally; human beings, therefore, have no desire for power since there are no other beings to exercise power over.

The inequalities established by men themselves, however, formed the dominant features of each community” [5, 6, 10]. And when it comes to our forbearers, Rousseau maintains that “in their original condition, our forebears could have had ‘no moral relations with or determinate obligations to one another’ [5, 6], and since natural man had neither any need for the company of other creatures like himself, nor any wish to hurt them, it was only with the birth of social institutions that his weakness became timidity or his strength a menace to his neighbours [10].

When this latter proposition of Rousseau is applied to Golding’s novel, it becomes clear that the children, after going on a vote to make up a sort of institution, the positions later bring about the quarrels and thus the timidity and menace for the others. As we see, certain characters are killed; some others are hurt, and all because of the desire to seek power over others.

3. *LORD OF THE FLIES*; A MICROCOSM OF THE ADULT WORLD

Apart from all those religious deciphering of *Lord of the Flies*, or so many symbols one looks forward to injecting meanings to the story, the present article in an overall analysis of the novel, to draw against the very belief that human is degenerated by nature. Human beings are individuals in

nature who have no practice of power over others. As soon as they get together to make a society, things start to fall apart and there start wars and corruption. Lord of the Flies represents a group of children whose nature corrupts from the scratch as they start to make a society, and order things. A brief overview of the society of the children's world as they try to make a microcosm is as follows.

The group of children, as it may be, is trying to act out a society with an adult-like-governing system, whose ups and downs are very much like a civilized society. In "Power and Authority: An Interpretation of Golding's Lord of the Flies", David Spitz [9] puts the major characters of the novel as certain historical idols of civilization, so to speak. Simon, as he puts it, is a symbol of Christ:

Simon, it is clear, is the Christ-figure, the voice of revelation. He is "queer" but "always about." He sees the bushes as candles, unlike Ralph who thinks "they just look like candles," or Jack the materialist who dismisses them because they can't be eaten. He was one of the original choirboys, like Peter a member of a group of believers (or apparent believers) and then a defector [8].

Simply put, Christ is the head of the so-called Christian civilization. Therefore, Simon, metaphorically, is acting out the figure of Christ and thus trumpeting the Christian civilization (for further studies on Simon as a Christ-figure, see Golding's own comments in [1]). On the other hand, there is Piggy, who is the wisest of all and carries the glasses, which bring wisdom and also fire for the children. "Piggy I take to be Socrates, the voice of reason. Like Socrates, he is ugly, fat, and—to men unappreciative of reason—a bore, with a disinclination for manual labor [...] He alone shows marks of intelligence; he can think; he has brains" [8]. Ralph represents a democratic man and an icon of consent. "There was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil" [8]. As an antagonist to Ralph, Jack acts out an authoritarian character who reminds one of "Hitler and Mussolini". When he is defeated in the election, he becomes head of the hunters.

It can be furthered on more characters of the group of children and symbolize them in the real world society, those of the so-called civilized. Golding makes the point that evil is innate in human beings; and even this very unarmed and innocent society does not have the capacity to overcome the greed, cruelty and selfishness rampant among the people. He thus tries to reach this point that the problem is innate and, simply put, natural [2]. Nature is not a state of political and moral playground, it is what Golding forgets to assert. In the island, the children are carefully chosen as representatives of a middle-class society. In fact, they represent a partial microcosm of the Western civilization:

They were socialized in, and were a partial microcosm of, twentieth century English (or Western) civilization; and they had brought that civilization, or what fragments of it they could remember, with them. Hence the values they possessed, the attitudes they displayed, the arrangements they established, and the practices in which they engaged, were all in some degree or other a reflection of the world into which they had been born and within which they had been educated and fashioned. [8].

As it was mentioned earlier, in nature, man is an individual who acts upon his primary needs. In this view, he is in line with individual concerns. But as soon as he tries to get away from that state and practice a group with hierarchy, the very degeneration and control over the others starts. Unlike natural phenomenon, the relations of power among the human societies are more based on the power the institutions give the individuals. What Jack and his choirboys are practicing is an authoritarian system; the order of which so to speak, is different from what Ralph is trying to deploy. Piggy with his spectacles is representing a sort of system whose values lie in Western democracies [8]. The groups of children, who are mostly representing the English society, are already corrupted as they are greasing the rail for establishing an-already-corrupted form of the society they have already lived in and grown up within, though not as adults.

4. CONCLUSION

The novel, so to speak, is in line with the ideas of Hobbes, where, as was mentioned above, he puts human nature as the origin of all degeneration. In Rousseau's view, however, this is this relation of power among the group members and the practice of civilization that brings about quarrels and upheavals. The children, in line with nature, will act as other creatures so as to keep alive. Therefore, they hunt and they eat and, in doing so, they try to have a head thus to lead them and then hunt as far as they are hungry, and when full, they rest. The novel, however, draws on the relations of power among a group of children, where, as discussed earlier, all the main characters represent those in the adult world. There is this tendency towards civilization that puts the whole community in a state of chaos. According to Rousseau, human nature cannot be degenerated, as far as he must be assumed as an individual. An individual, therefore, has no relations with other individuals by nature. In this way, there is no need to practice power or dominance, which, in case being done, would bring degeneration and defection for the people. Golding's novel tells a story that starts a society from scratch and this leads to the practice of relations of power and dominance of certain children over certain others through different do's and don'ts.

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