
The Concept of Power and Its Representation in Lord of Flies

Golding's exploration of the human condition continues to be read, year after year, because it challenges the reader to consider notions that are fundamental to the human condition. Through a simple premise, Golding creates an environment in which readers are forced to confront the issues of power and authority. By stripping out every unnecessary distraction and reducing humanity to its simplest form, Golding accomplishes his task of opening the reader's eyes to the flawed nature of humanity before they can put their guard up. We, as citizens of modern society, create defence mechanisms against the harsh and brutal nature of our species through our political ideologies, religious beliefs, and "justice" systems. When Golding takes away these defence mechanisms, the reader is confronted with the true nature of humanity, power, and authority. All of our current preconceptions and defences against human nature are replaced by symbols; democracy, and autocracy, the conch and the choir leader. As Golding utilises his array of literary devices to paint a picture of life without order, he effectively challenges the reader to enter the minds of the characters and consider how different we really are.

A world without authority and order is a world foreign to us. We live our lives with rules and guidelines. Police, military, the government; we know these entities exist to provide us protection from something. We all think we know what that something is; but Golding challenges us, as the reader, to consider the possibility that authority is in place to protect us from ourselves; to protect us from, as Golding metaphorically puts it; the "darkness of man's heart". The character of Ralph, and his associated symbolic object "the conch", are representative of authority and order; he is the personification of democracy. Golding highlights the distinction between unrestrained power which becomes autocracy, and power moderated by authority which manifests as democracy, by juxtaposing Jack and Ralph in their characterisation. Ralph is elected by the "toy of voting", while Jack, in contrast, gains leadership through sheer power. The effects of unrestrained power are foreshadowed by the flames that "crept as a jaguar creeps" down their "irresistible course" making the forest "savagely with smoke and flame"; a symbolic metaphor for Jack's rise to power and the effects it has on him and the other characters. This metaphor is further supported by the events that precede it; Piggy's glasses, the source of the power, are "snatched...off his face" by Jack, a character built on autocracy and abrasiveness, everything Ralph isn't. Golding represents each character's associated notion with a companion object, a symbol of their primary characteristics. Ralph, the personification of authority possesses "the conch", an object capable of assembling people by order. Jack, in contrast, carries a knife, an object that gives him the power to control life and death, and ultimately assemble people through power and fear. In furthering this pattern, other characters

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

follow suit. Golding expresses the conundrum of leadership and intelligence this way, saying “what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack”; an allusion to the idea that authority and power do not always come to those who are deserving or capable of handling it, to the contrary, Ralph realizes that “[he] can’t think...not like Piggy”. Ultimately, Golding explores the notion of authority, addressing the issues of a society without it, and effectively compares alternatives to authority as a power structure. In doing this, he challenges the respondent to consider the effect of power in their own society, and the necessity of authority in moderating power.

The notion of power is central to the human condition and has been throughout human history. The struggle for power has been the driving factor behind almost every war. Whether for power over land, wealth, or religion, power is recurrently at the centre of all the things we consider “savage” in a civilised society. Golding directly engages the reader in the power struggle by using symbolic characterisation to represent common structures of power. Jack is the originator of the chant, a key motif that becomes synonymous with the characters lust for power and their descent into savagery. As the story progresses, the chant changes form, but keeps the same pattern. The chant alludes to another theme; group-think and its relation to power. There’s a reason the term divide and conquer has become so common-place, it works all too often. The antithesis of divide and conquer is unite and conquer, and it could be argued this is what leads otherwise innocent boys to turn into savages. Group-think is a passage to dehumanization and loss of identity. Golding uses the imagery and symbolism of a “new face” to demonstrate this phenomenon. By the climax of the story, when all but Ralph have been “liberated from shame and self-consciousness” they are referred to, no longer by name or as boys, but now as “the savages”, effectively removing their identity. During the resolution, this changes to the “group of painted boys”, and “Percival Wemys Madison” is again referred to by name, as the illusion of power through anonymity is faded by the presence of civilised authority. In utilising this psychological phenomenon, Golding emphasises the point that power, un-moderated by authority and order, leads people to disregard the accountability of civilisation and become “savage”. The connection Golding makes between uncontrolled power, group-mentality, and moral devolution forces the reader to reflect upon the possibility that we are all capable of descending to the level of savages, given the right circumstances.

The question of power versus authority is one that has affected humanity for millennia. Golding asked the extended hypophoric question “Which is better--to have laws and agree, or to hunt and kill?” casting each side as a character in the story. As the story progresses, the answer to the question begins to align ever more obviously with that of the old adage “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. As absolute power gives way to impulsivity (letting the fire die out), then to savagery (staking a pig’s head for no reason, and murdering Simon); order and authority slip away in turn. This triggers a rapid decline in civility and leads the characters to kill each other, run rampage, and eventually burn down the island. Golding

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP

makes an effective argument that humans are not innocent by nature and ultimately achieves this through his use of a wide variety of literary devices, effectively highlighting the flawed nature of humanity, and ultimately shaping the audience's understanding not only of the notions explored in the text, but of themselves.

gradesfixer.com

Need help with the assignment?

Our professionals are ready to assist with any writing!

GET HELP